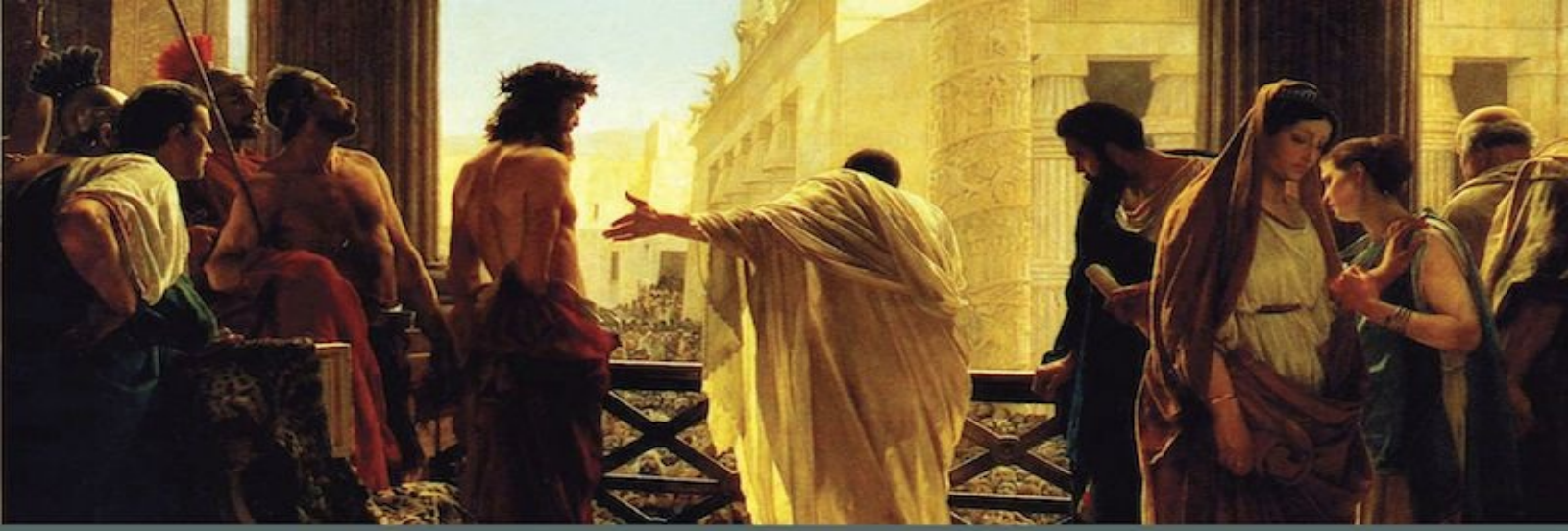


THE HOLMAN APOLOGETICS COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE

The Gospels and Acts

General Editor: JEREMY ROYAL HOWARD

MICHAEL WILKINS - *Matthew* • CRAIG EVANS - *Mark*

DARRELL BOCK - *Luke, Acts* • ANDREAS KÖSTENBERGER - *John*

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HOLMAN REFERENCE

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

The Holman Apologetics Commentary on the Bible: The Gospels and Acts
© Copyright 2013 • B & H Publishing Group
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ISBN 978-0-8054-9530-0
Dewey Decimal Classification: 225.7
Subject Heading: APOLOGETICS \ BIBLE. N.T. ACTS—COMMENTARIES \
BIBLE. N.T. GOSPELS—COMMENTARIES
Printed in the United States of America
16 15 14 13 • 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
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This project is dedicated to Bible readers who find themselves drawn to the difficult subjects, and who take hard questions and critical viewpoints seriously enough to engage them with honesty and integrity in a bid to offer faith-affirming answers. As Jesus said, “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32).

Acknowledgments

Darrell Bock thanks the staff at B&H Publishing, especially *Jeremy Howard* for his careful work on this Bible commentary.
Craig Evans would like to thank the staff editors at B&H, including *Jeremy Howard* for his work on this project.
Jeremy Howard would like to thank *Ray Clendenen* for his sage advice and editorial assistance on this project. *David Stabnow* also provided key assistance. Finally, thanks to my wife, *Simone*, and my children, *Isaac, Josie, Silas,* and *Peter*, for tolerating the extra hours of work this project required.
Andreas Köstenberger wishes to thank *Josh Chatraw* for his capable research assistance in preparing the manuscript on John's Gospel. Josh has a keen apologetic mind that will serve him well as he defends and enunciates the gospel in his future teaching and writing career.
Michael Wilkins wishes to acknowledge the faithful and diligent work of three research assistants who either worked directly with me on the Matthew commentary or on other projects to free me up: *Jeanette Hagen, Hayoung Kim,* and *Andrew Yee*. And special thanks to *Jeremy Howard* of B&H for his creative insights in conceiving the project and his masterful editorial work.

Abbreviations

AB Anchor Bible
ABD Anchor Bible Dictionary. Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1998.
ABRL Anchor Bible Reference Library
ACCS Ancient Commentary on the New Testament
ACNT Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament
AGJU Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des

Urchristentums
AJSR Association for Jewish Studies Review
AnBib Analecta Biblica
ANTC Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
BAA *Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur*, by W. Bauer, K. Aland, and B. Aland. 6th ed. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988.
BAGD *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
BAR Biblical Archaeology Review
BBR Bulletin for Biblical Research
BDAG *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
BDF *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and R. W. Funk. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.
BDR *Grammatik des newtestamentlichen Griechisch*. F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and F. Rehkopf. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984.
BECNT Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BETL Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
Bib Biblica
BNTC Black's New Testament Commentaries
BRev Bible Review
BSac Bibliotheca Sacra
BTB Biblical Theology Bulletin
BurH Buried History
Byz Byzantine (manuscripts)
BZ Biblische Zeitschrift
BZNW Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft

und die Kunde der älteren Kirche
c. circa
CBQ Catholic Biblical Quarterly
CC Continental Commentaries
CD Cairo Genizah copy of the *Damascus Document*
CIG Corpus inscriptionum graecarum. Edited by A. Boeckh. Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1828–77.
CIL Corpus inscriptionum latinarum
CGCT Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary
CGTSC Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges
ConBNT Coniectanea neotestamentica or Coniectanea biblica: New Testament Series
DBI Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation. Edited by J. Hayes. Nashville: Abingdon, 1998.
Did Didaskalia
DJBP Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period. Edited by J. Neusner and W. S. Green. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999.
DJG Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels. Edited by J. B. Green, S. McKnight, and I. H. Marshall. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992.
DLNT Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments. Edited by R. P. Martin and P. H. Davids. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012.
EBC The Expositor's Bible Commentary
EDBT Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology. Edited by W. A. Elwell. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996.
EDNT Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament. H. Balz and G. Schneider. 3 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978–80.
EJR Encyclopedia of Jewish Religion. Edited by R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder. New York: Adama, 1996.
EKKNT Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
EstBib Estudios Bíblicos
ESV English Standard Version

EvQ Evangelical Quarterly
ExpTim Expository Times
Gk Greek
GNS Good News Studies
Hb Hebrew
HNT Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
HTKNT Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
IBD Illustrated Bible Dictionary. Edited by J. D. Douglas. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980.
ICC International Critical Commentary
IEJ Israel Exploration Journal
IG Inscriptiones graecae. Editio minor. Berlin, 1924–.
ILS Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae. Edited by Hermann Dessau. Berolini: apud Weidmannos, 1906.
ISBE International Standard Bible Encyclopedia
JBL Journal of Biblical Literature
JETS Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society
JSNT Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JSNTSup Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
JSP Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha
JTS Journal of Theological Studies
KEK Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar *über* das Neue Testament
KJV King James Version
L.A.B. Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum
LCL Loeb Classical Library
lit literally
LXX Septuagint
m. Mishnah
MM Moulton and Milligan. *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*. London, 1930. Reprint, Peabody, Mass., 1997.
MS(S) Manuscript(s)
MT Masoretic (Hebrew) text

n note (footnote)
NAC New American Commentary
NASB New American Standard Bible (1995)
NBD New Bible Dictionary
NCB New Century Bible
Neot Neotestamentica
NETS A New English Translation of the Septuagint. Edited by Albert Pietersma and Benjamin Wright. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
NewDocs New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity. Edited by G. H. Horsely and S. Llewelyn. North Ryde, N.S.W., 1981–
NIB The New Interpreter's Bible
NIBCNT New International Biblical Commentary on the New Testament
NICNT New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDNTT New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology. Edited by C. Brown. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986.
NIGTC New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV New International Version
NIVAC The NIV Application Commentary
NKJV New King James Version
NLT New Living Translation
NovT Novum Testamentum
NovTSup Novum Testamentum Supplements
NRSV New Revised Standard Version
NT New Testament
NTL New Testament Library
NTS New Testament Studies
NTT Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift
OGIS Orientis graeci inscriptiones selectae. Edited by W. Dittenberger. 2 vols. Leipzig, 1903–1905.
OT Old Testament

ÖTK Ökumenischer Taschenbuch-Kommentar
pc a few manuscripts
PGM Papyri graecae magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri. Edited by K. Preisendanz. Berlin, 1928.
PNTC Pelican New Testament Commentaries
PNTC Pillar New Testament Commentary
Q *Quelle*, which means “source” in German. Traditions used by the Gospel writers.
RB Revue Biblique
RNT Regensburger Neues Testament
SB Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Aegypten. Edited by F. Preisigke et al. Vols. 1– , 1915–
SBLSP Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SE Studia evangelica
SecCent Second Century
SNTSMS Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP Sacra Pagina
Str-B *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, by H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck. 6 vols. Munich: Beck, 1922–61.
t. tractate of the Tosefta
TCGNT Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament. Edited by Bruce M. Metzger. 2nd ed. United Bible Societies, 1994.
TDNT Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. Edited by G. Kittle and G. Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76.
Tg. Targum
THKNT Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament
TNTC Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TR Textus Receptus
TynB Tyndale Bulletin
WBC Word Biblical Commentary
WJK Westminster John Knox
WUNT Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

ZNW Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
ZRGC Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte

Greek Manuscripts:

א Codex Sinaiticus, 4th century
A Codex Alexandrinus, 5th century
B Codex Vaticanus, 4th century
Byz The majority of Byzantine mss, 10th–16th centuries
C Ephraemi Rescriptus, 5th century
D Bezae Cantabrigiensis, 6th century
K Uncial ms in Paris, 9th century
L Regius, 8th century
P Papyrus
T Uncial ms in Rome, 5th century
W Freer Gospels, 5th century
Z Codex Dublinensis Rescriptus, 6th /5th century
Γ Uncial ms in Leningrad and Oxford, 10th century
Δ St. Gall, 9th century
Θ Koridethi, 9th century
Π Codex Petropolitanus, 9th century
Ψ Athos, 8th/9th century

Introduction to the Holman Apologetics Commentary on the Bible: Gospels and Acts

The primary purpose of the *Holman Apologetics Commentary on the Bible* is to equip readers to defend the reliability of Scripture and the historic evangelical understanding of its teachings. It is designed for use by general readers, though scholars will find it a probing and welcome resource as well. This commentary will show that much of the criticism lodged against Scripture is demonstrably incorrect. Our contributors are world-class biblical scholars whose publications have propelled them to the top of their field. In many cases they are able to answer challenges definitively, exposing error or bias in the approaches taken by Bible critics or cults. In other cases their suggested resolutions are tentative or even speculative. In all cases the contributors take the challenges seriously and seek to describe viable solutions that support faith and align with a high view of Scripture.

A secondary purpose of this commentary is to encourage awareness and discussion of Bible difficulties that are not commonly mentioned from the pulpit or even the seminary lectern. As an apologist and publisher, I am often struck by the lack of awareness about these issues. To unbelievers, this state of affairs is taken as evidence that we cling to faith uncritically or even against the evidence. But Christian ignorance about Bible difficulties is not altogether surprising, just as it is not surprising that non-believers are often ignorant of Bible-affirming solutions. Christians most often read their Bibles devotionally and vertically (from beginning to end of a book) rather than critically and horizontally (reading chronologically or by parallel accounts, such that one discovers how multiple authors treat the same event). Even the finest seminary education typically leaves graduates uninitiated in some of the most important challenges to the reliability of the Bible.

Some may say that it is best not to trouble tranquil waters. If so many disciples and ministers are happily unaware of Bible difficulties, why stir the waters? One answer is that there are others who are eager to do the stirring for us, and would do so in hopes of convincing us that the Bible is unreliable. It is far better to face the difficulties with the aid of reliable guides who intend to bolster faith.

Another answer is that we are called by God to be equipped. If what we evangelicals believe about the Bible is true, surely it can withstand unblinking examination. This does not mean we will sit in judgment over the Word of God. Rather, it means we will not shirk from engaging challenges to its accuracy and authority. Bible readers of all kinds—whether they be believers or unbelievers—deserve the best answers that can be offered in response to questions, doubts, and concerns about the Bible's reliability.

For all of the above reasons, this commentary provides a faith-affirming context for exploring Bible difficulties. It is our hope that by reading this volume, Christians will be better equipped to give a reason for their hope (1 Pet 3:15), and that skeptics will be struck by the extent to which we can defend the reliability of the biblical accounts.

Baseline Assumptions in this Commentary

The divine inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture are baseline convictions for this commentary. It is commonly said that the doctrine of biblical inerrancy must rest on biblical testimony rather than an inductive study of all the data points presently available to us, for (1) inerrancy applies to the original manuscripts, all of which are lost, and (2) inerrancy cannot be shown to be the necessary conclusion of inductive study of manuscript, literary, scientific, or historical evidences. For this reason, this commentary does not try to prove inerrancy, but instead operates within that conviction and makes a case for biblical reliability in light of evidences currently available.

Each author writes in accordance with what can be called the concursus model of inspiration. This model denies that God dictated the biblical writings (such that the authors were mere automatons whose mind and will were arrested and deployed robotically in the service of God), and instead affirms in fullness the genuine participation of God, the human author, and any editor who played a role in shaping the final form of the text, with the result that the Bible is God's infallible Word given through human authors. Given such origins for the biblical texts, it is no surprise that the Bible reflects literary forms and standards that were common to the ancient context. The Bible did not descend from heaven, a timeless text without historical and human contexts. Rather, Scripture originated through the work and will of both God and human authors (e.g., Luke 1:1–4), with God providentially and miraculously ensuring that the received text was his true and reliable word to humanity (e.g., 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20–21).

Each of our authors holds to Markan priority, the theory that says the Gospel

of Mark was written first, and that Matthew and Luke both made extensive use of Mark's text when composing their own accounts. Evidence for Markan priority is briefly discussed in the introductions to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but mostly our authors assume rather than argue for Markan priority. In this they stand with the clear and longstanding consensus in Gospels scholarship.

Another key conviction that informs each of our authors involves the distinction between *ipsissima vox* (the very voice) and *ipsissima verba* (the very words). This is the difference between approximate quotation (*vox*) and precise quotation (*verba*). Contributors to this commentary believe that the Bible often and properly reflects *vox* rather than *verba*. Elements of the case for *vox* include . . .

- translation from Aramaic or Hebrew (the languages Jesus and most Jews would have spoken) to Greek rules out genuine *verba*, for no two languages correspond exactly; if *verba* must be qualified, we have *vox* instead of *verba*,
- the authors significantly condensed the events they narrated (e.g., the Sermon on the Mount can be read in a few minutes, but Jesus' preaching session would have been much longer),
- parallel accounts show variance of quotation that cannot be accounted for simply by noting aspects of the translation process,
- the variance of quotation often falls into conformity with themes and emphases found elsewhere in the author's work(s), and which are to greater or lesser extents distinct from the themes and emphases of the other Gospel writers,
- *vox* was the standard, universally accepted approach taken in ancient history writing,
- *vox* best fits with the concursus model of biblical inspiration, meaning the human authors wrote in accordance with the regular approach to history writing, which allowed them to convey the meaning or essence of statements and teachings and not suffer under an obligation to convey such things without any condensing or editing.

Models for Inerrancy and Apologetics

The authors of this volume do not discuss the debate about inductive versus deductive approaches to biblical inerrancy, and neither do they involve themselves in points of dispute between presuppositional and evidentialist approaches to apologetics. Instead, using the tools that are common to NT

studies, they attempt to make a case for the truth and reliability of biblical texts that are seen as problematic. They also give attention to verses that offer positive evidence for the truth of the Bible, as for instance Luke's disclosure about his purpose and methodology in Luke 1:1–4.

Errors Commonly Made by Critics of the Biblical Text

Readers of the biblical text who do not hold to the inspiration and truthfulness of Scripture often state that they are at an advantage over believing readers. They see themselves as objective in the reading task, able to see the merely human origins and the fallibility of the biblical writings, whereas believers are thought to be hopelessly biased, like a mother who fails to note the shortcomings of her child. Surely evangelicals should admit that there is some truth to the charge that we may read in a biased way, and yet the unbelieving reader brings his or her own biases to the text, in many cases ruling out the best-supported conclusions.

A careful reading of this commentary reveals that critics commonly make the same mistakes over and over again when they argue that a given biblical text is errant or stands in contradiction to another biblical text. For example, critics often . . .

- fail properly to account for literary and/or historical contexts,
- miss hermeneutical (interpretational) signals about how the text should be read,
- assume that silence in one account equals contradiction to the non-silence in a parallel account,
- assume that variation in detail between two or more accounts necessarily entails contradiction,
- show unwarranted preference for non-biblical accounts,
- show an exaggerated suspicion of the biblical accounts,
- assume a Bible book's borrowing of ideas that pre-dated its composition,
- fail to distinguish *ipsissima vox* from *ipsissima verba*,
- operate as if only *ipsissima verba* is an appropriate authorial approach for texts inspired by God,
- read into the text concepts or meanings that are alien to the biblical worldview,
- assume that Scripture is obligated to speak from a God's-eye, omniscient perspective,
- fail to allow the biblical authors to telescope, condense, or reshape

events—approaches that are commonly accepted in ancient secular writers of history,

- disallow biblical authors to stay true to history and yet convey favored themes or tailor their accounts for their specific audiences,
- fail to acknowledge that throughout history eyewitness accounts have been deemed trustworthy even when variances are present (and variances are *always* present),
- fail to allow thematic rather than chronological approaches to ordering historical narratives,
- demand a level of precision that was foreign to ancient historiography,
- insist that the *sitz im leben* ("situation in life") of the author biases his reporting of past events,
- incorrectly expect that the Bible should be literarily distinct from non-biblical writings,
- fail to see that variations in parallel accounts actually commend the truthfulness of the accounts, for the variations indicate that the authors did not collude with one another to support a false story,
- overlook the fact that Jesus would certainly have duplicated significant teachings and acts in various towns, leading to accounts that are similar but genuinely distinct.

Harmonization

Throughout church history it has been popular to attempt harmonizations between parallel Bible accounts. To greater or lesser extents, this project aims to show that apparently disparate Bible accounts really are saying the same thing after all, or that their distinct claims are compatible rather than contradictory. In its extreme form, the harmonization project can lead to a sort of déjà vu, where some events or statements occur repeatedly and unnaturally, though with minor variation. For instance, some have said that there were four different placards hanging above Jesus' head during his crucifixion. The basis for this claim is that each of the four Gospels quotes the placard differently (Matt 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19). The contortions of this approach risk making a mockery of the biblical text as well as the interpretive task. Significantly, many extreme critics of the Bible have Christian fundamentalist backgrounds that led them to attempt airtight harmonizations of variant biblical accounts. Upon realizing the futility of the maximalist harmonization approach, they gave up on biblical reliability rather than giving up on the faulty approach that led to their

disillusionment.

This commentary seeks to avoid the extremes of unchecked harmonization, while exploring harmonization where it seems legitimate to do so. We presuppose the compatibility of accounts that do clearly purport to cover the same historical event, though we make provision for freedoms reasonably given to the narrators.

Finally, no attempt is made to harmonize the suggested solutions offered by the four authors of this commentary. You will find that they are in substantial agreement, but in some cases they favor different solutions—solutions that may not be compatible. We feel this is a sign of strength for this commentary, for it reflects the true conditions of evangelical engagement on the challenges to biblical reliability. We are not all convinced of the same solutions, but we stand in agreement on the conclusion that the Bible can be trusted.

The Gospels and Acts

The four canonical Gospels are noteworthy both for their agreement about Jesus' person, life, and works, but also for their variation of detail. Exemplifying the unity of their teachings is the fact that the early church embraced all four testimonies and did not seek to edit them into greater conformity, and that throughout church history leading Christian intellectuals have accepted as inspired and true all four Gospel accounts, seeing no cause to reject one or more of them for lack of agreement. Numerous examples could be cited to exemplify the variation in detail between the Gospels and Acts. For instance, only Matthew and Luke have anything to say about Jesus' birth and earliest years, and the differences between their accounts are striking and in some cases they are not obviously compatible. Jonathan Pennington, Associate Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, has accurately (and boldly) commented on the differences between the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke: "Despite our conflation of all these events at the annual church Christmas pageant, these stories do not in fact overlap at all. If Jesus did not appear as the named figure in both of these accounts, one would never suspect they were stories about the same person" (2012, 56).

John places a temple cleansing in the early portion of Jesus' ministry, whereas the other Gospels (the Synoptics: Matthew, Mark, and Luke) place a temple cleansing at the end. Are we to understand that Jesus performed essentially the same task twice or even three times, or are we to infer that John or the Synoptics felt free to shift this one-time event for purposes we can only guess at? Reading

Luke 24 in isolation from Acts 1, a reader would conclude that Jesus ascended to heaven within 24 hours of his resurrection. Conversely, reading Acts 1 in isolation from Luke 24 would invariably lead one to understand that 40 days intervened between these events. How are we to relate these two accounts, apparently written by the same author? These are the kinds of questions that arise when readers are presented with multiple accounts of the same events, and this commentary will offer suggestions for making sense of the differences.

The Textual Basis for this Commentary

The Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB) forms the textual basis of this commentary. The HCSB adopts a translation approach known as optimal equivalence. The intended outcome is that the translation is always true to the meaning of the biblical manuscripts (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek), and yet is expressed in accordance with modern speech patterns. The authors sometimes comment on translation decisions made by the HCSB and other Bible translations, and at a few points you will see how this has bearing on apologetics issues.

Format of this Commentary

This is not a verse-by-verse commentary. The authors were provided an index that identified verses known to be relevant to the topics of apologetics and biblical reliability. They restricted their comments to these verses, plus any others that they recognized as germane to the aims of this project.

Typically, each commentary note begins by stating the challenge or challenges regarding the text at hand. We attempt to state the case in all its potency, as a critic would state it. This approach takes seriously the critical viewpoint and helps ensure that the reader feels the full weight of the challenge. Stating the challenge in an attenuated form, or stating only the weakest elements of the challenge, would rig the outcome and fail truly to interact with those who lodge complaints against the believer’s viewpoint.

The Contributors

I want to thank our contributors for their boldness in taking on this project. There is inherent risk in offering solutions to serious challenges against the Bible’s reliability. Will you have inadvertently supported unbelief if your answers seem insufficient? What if some of the topics you engage are not exactly in line with your expertise? Is it really profitable to focus so much on the difficulties? These and other concerns could have kept them away, but Andreas

Köstenberger, Craig Evans, Darrell Bock, and Michael Wilkins accepted the challenge and provided world-class responses to some of the greatest challenges that can be lodged against the reliability of Scripture. If you read the material that follows, I believe you will agree with me when I say that they have done us all a tremendous service.

Jeremy Royal Howard, Ph.D.
General Editor, *Holman Apologetics Commentary on the Bible*
Bible and Reference Book Publisher
B&H Publishing Group

Apologetics Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew

The Gospel of Matthew tells the story of the arrival of Jesus of Nazareth. Judging from citations found in early Christian writers, Matthew was the most widely read and frequently used of the four Gospels in the formative years of the church. There are many reasons for its popularity, but one of the primary reasons why this Gospel is so important is because of its verification that Jesus is recognized as the long-awaited Messiah, the prophesied fulfillment of God's promise of true peace, deliverance, salvation, and new life in the kingdom of God for all of humanity, both Jew and Gentile.

Authorship

Widely recognized features of the first Gospel include its Jewish distinctives and Gentile interests. The person responsible for penning this Gospel apparently had both groups in view, which intimates that the author was acquainted with issues that were important to both Jews and Gentiles. This directs us to ascertain the identity of the author. As we open our modern translations we usually find the title, "Matthew," or "The Gospel According to Matthew," as a heading introducing the first chapter. But many longtime readers are surprised to learn that all four Gospels are technically anonymous. The titles now assigned to each one were most likely not headings to the original manuscript. Instead they were added later, to copies of the original manuscripts, in order to distinguish the four Gospels from one another. Moreover, none of the Evangelists (shorthand for authors of the Gospels) state his name explicitly within the text to identify himself as the author.

From this, many modern scholars deduce that the identities of the authors of the four Gospels were never known, that they circulated for decades as anonymous documents, and only much, much later were assigned authorial appellations by formal ecclesiastical councils in an attempt to give apostolic authority to these documents to counteract rival churches and their "Gospels."

Regarding the first Gospel in particular, many modern scholars suggest that the author was decades removed from the apostle Matthew. They concede that

Matthew may have been the original inspiration for the Gospel that now bears his name, but they go on to suggest that the final form of the Gospel was the work of a Jewish Christian who wrote much later and was not an eyewitness to the life of Jesus (e.g., Luz 2007, 58–60). Or some suggest that the author was a Gentile Christian well-versed in the Hebrew Scriptures, but whose mistakes about the Hebrew world (cf. 21:2 and 21:7) indicate an outsider's knowledge (e.g., Crosby 2002, 16–17).

However, the true identities of the authors of the four Gospels were never in question historically. From the very earliest witnesses we find the author's names associated with each Gospel. The anonymity of the Gospels themselves is not surprising since the Evangelists were not writing letters to far-off church communities. New Testament letters written by Paul, Peter, and John included identification of both the author and the addressees because it was necessary to identify all parties and the purpose of the letter since the two parties were not present to one another. Quite distinct from this, most likely the Evangelists were compiling Gospel stories for churches in which they were active participants and leaders. They may even have stood among the assembly and read their Gospel account aloud after completing it. To attach their names as authors would have been unnecessary because their audiences obviously knew their identity. Additionally, the Evangelists may have felt it was inappropriate to attach their names to their Gospel accounts since their primary intention was not to assert their own leadership or authority, but to record for their audiences the matchless story of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Earliest citations by church fathers: Given the anonymity of the Gospels, we must look to the records of church history to find evidence for their authorship. The earliest church tradition unanimously ascribes the first Gospel to Matthew, the tax collector whom Jesus called to be one his original 12 disciples.

While the attribution of a specific text to Matthew by name is not found until Apollinaris of Hierapolis (c. 175), the literary influence of the first Gospel upon Christian writings outside the NT is unmistakable from the earliest days of the church. And further, the attribution of the authorship of the first Gospel to Matthew the apostle goes back to the earliest surviving patristic testimonies, and there is no patristic evidence that anyone else was ever proposed as the author.

Probably written toward the end of the first century or the beginning of the second (Ehrman 2003, 411), scholars have traditionally understood the *Didache* to demonstrate direct knowledge of the first Gospel, especially the Sermon on the Mount and the Olivet Discourse (e.g., quoting the Lord's Prayer: cf. *Didache*

8.2; Matt 6:9–11). Indeed, the *Didache* appears to draw only upon Matthew, and perhaps Luke, among all of the NT writings (Holmes 2007, 338), although NT themes abound.

A few years later a letter of Pseudo-Barnabas cites the first Gospel as divinely inspired Scripture (*Barnabas* 4.14 [Matt 22:14]). The first explicit mention of this Gospel dates to the third decade of the second century, by Papias, bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor (c. 135), and then somewhat later in the second century by Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons in Gaul (c. 175).

Papias lived approximately from 60 to 130, and Irenaeus claimed that he was a hearer of the apostle John, and later was a companion of Polycarp (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.33.4). Papias was quoted and endorsed by the church historian Eusebius (c. 325) as saying, "Matthew for his part compiled/collected (*sunetaxato*) the oracles (*to logia*) in the Hebrew [Aramaic] dialect (*Hebraidi dialekto*) and every person translated/interpreted (*hermeneusen*) them as he was able" (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.16).

Although there have been skeptics, there seems to be little question that Ignatius (who died around 110) knew and used Matthew as his primary Gospel (Schoedel 1985, 9). While he does not quote extensively from the text, he uses it as a platform from which he launched his theological and ethical arguments (Jefford 2005, 44–47). For example, in his letter to the Ephesians, Ignatius writes, "Let no one be deceived. Anyone who is not inside the sanctuary lacks the bread of God. For if the prayer of one or two persons has 'such' (*tosautēn*) power, how much more will that of the bishop and the entire church?" (Ignatius, *Letter to the Ephesians* 5:2). Massaux (1990, 87) contends that since there is no mention in the preceding context of any "such" power, when Ignatius uses the demonstrative he assumed it was familiar to his readers. Yet it is stated only in Matthew 18:19–20 that the power of the prayer of two or three persons gathered together is efficacious, which makes it likely that Ignatius is arguing from the authority of Matthew's Gospel.

Irenaeus was born in Asia Minor in approximately 135, studied under Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, and according to tradition died as a martyr around 200. In one of his five monumental books against the Gnostic heresies (c. 175), Irenaeus states, "Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church" (*Against Heresies* 3.1.1).

These early church leaders either knew the apostolic community directly or were taught by those associated with the apostles, and so were directly aware of

the origins of the Gospels. While the full meaning of their statements is still open to discussion, no competing tradition assigning the first Gospel to any other author has survived, if any ever existed. Subsequent authors (e.g., Hippolytus, Tertullian, Cyprian, Novatian) cite the Gospel of Matthew regularly as inspired Scripture on the same level as the OT (Simonetti 2001, xxxvii).

We cannot overlook the significance of the testimony of the early church fathers to the apostolic authorship of the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. All of the evidence uniformly supports the belief that Matthew (the tax collector turned disciple), Mark (the companion of Peter and Paul), and Luke (Paul's "beloved physician") were the authors of the Gospels attributed to them. It is difficult to conceive why Christians as early as the second century would ascribe these otherwise anonymous Gospels to three such unlikely candidates unless they knew with certainty that they were indeed the authors. Mark and Luke were not among Jesus' 12 apostles, and so it is unlikely that they would be put forward as authors unless there was good evidence of their authorship. Worse still, Mark is best known for abandoning Paul during a mission (Acts 13:13; cf. 15:37–40), and Luke is particularly obscure, being mentioned by name only once in the NT (Col 4:14). Matthew, although an apostle, is also best known for a negative characteristic—his unconscionable past as a tax collector (Matt 9:9–13). Tax collectors were considered traitorous to their nation. If the early church was motivated to invent authorship for the Synoptic Gospels, it is clear that Matthew, Mark, and Luke are the last men they would have selected.

In contrast, the authors of the apocryphal Gospels consistently picked better-known and exemplary figures (such as Philip, Peter, James, Bartholomew, or Mary) and passed them off as the authors in a bid to have their writings taken more seriously. Even Thomas, despite his famous doubts about Jesus' resurrection (John 20:25), seems a more likely person to whom to attribute a Gospel than Matthew, Mark, or Luke because Thomas ultimately made such a profound declaration of faith in the risen Jesus (cf. John 20:28). This is consistent with the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas purporting to be written by the apostle Thomas. False ascription of the first Gospel to a relatively obscure apostle such as Matthew seems unlikely until a later date, when canonization of apostles was common.

Conclusion: Some modern scholars deny that Matthew was author of the Gospel of Matthew on the basis of their adoption of the theory that the Gospel of Mark was the first Gospel to be written and that the authors of the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke borrowed significantly from the Gospel of

Mark. They feel it is unlikely that as an apostle and eyewitness Matthew would choose to depend so heavily on a document written by a man who was not an apostle and who witnessed only a portion of Jesus' ministry (Mark). But if Matthew did have access to Mark's Gospel, he would have known that Peter's apostolic reminiscences lay behind Mark's text, ensuring that Mark's Gospel was reliable and a ready source for reinforcing his own reminiscences about the life and works of Jesus Christ. As the apostles came to recognize that authoritative written accounts of Jesus' life and ministry were needed to ensure the future accuracy of the church's beliefs about Jesus, it was natural of them to consult other known, trusted Gospels to supplement and complement their own Gospels. Consulting other authoritative accounts would give even greater apostolic weight to their accounts.

Another argument against Matthew as the author of the Gospel of Matthew comes from dating, which we will discuss more below. Many reconstructions of the first Gospel's life-setting (*Sitz im Leben*), often based on the rigid redaction criticism of the twentieth century, place it in the last decades of the first century (e.g., AD 80–100), with the temple destroyed, the church scattered, and the church estranged from Israel. Such a late date often then excludes Matthew as a possible author since he would not have lived this long (cf. Luz 2007, 45–60).

However, it is unnecessary to base the primary purposes, themes, and theology in a late reconstruction of Matthew's community. If Matthew can accurately recall and record events from Jesus' life and ministry, and good memory is a characteristic of oral cultures, then he is primarily concerned to record the life-setting of Jesus, not the life-setting of the church for which he writes. While few doubt that Matthew writes with an eye on the needs of his community, which is at least one of the Fourth Evangelist's purposes for writing (John 20:30–31), that is a secondary horizon for Matthew. Matthew writes primarily to give to his community an accurate record of Jesus' words and deeds, which is his first horizon. This is the stated and explicit purpose for Luke writing his Gospel (Luke 1:1–4), and reveals a significant purpose for the writing of each of the Gospels.

Therefore, with the unanimous testimony of the early church to the authorship of the first Gospel, and the above charges answered satisfactorily, it is the position of this commentary that Matthew, apostle and eyewitness to the life and works of Jesus, is the author of the Gospel that has borne his name throughout church history.

Date and Destination

Date: No precise date for the writing of Matthew is known, although scholars have used Matthew's record of Jesus' prophecy of the overthrow of Jerusalem (24:1–28) to indicate that the Gospel must have been written after Jerusalem's destruction in 70 (e.g., Saldarini 1994). However, such a conclusion is necessary only if one denies Jesus the ability to predict the future and Matthew the ability to record this prophecy. Since the early church father Irenaeus (c. 175) indicates that Matthew wrote his Gospel while Paul and Peter were still alive (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.1.1), the traditional dating has usually settled on the late 50s or early 60s. Matthew tells us that as of the time he writes the "Blood Field" in Jerusalem continued to be called by that name (27:8), showing his continual connection with conditions in Palestine and hinting that this is prior to the devastation in Jerusalem at 70 (cf. Blomberg 1992, 41–42; Carson 2010, 43–45; France 2007, 18–19; Gundry 1994, 599–609).

Provenance: The highly influential church at Antioch in Syria, with its large Jewish Christian and Gentile contingents (cf. Acts 11:19–26; 13:1–3), has often been recognized as the place from which Matthew wrote and the church to which he wrote. This is confirmed in part because of the first Gospel's influence upon Ignatius the bishop of Antioch and upon the *Didache*. But Matthew's message was equally relevant for the fledgling church throughout the ancient world, and appears to have been disseminated fairly quickly.

Sources (Oral and Written)

The four Gospels are complex documents that comprise a mixture of shared and unique stories and sayings of Jesus. Such is what we would expect of authors who write at different times and places and with similar and yet distinct purposes. As an eyewitness of the events of Jesus Messiah's life and ministry and as an apostle in the early church, Matthew was in a unique position and had significant concerns that impelled the writing of his Gospel account. At least three issues help us to understand the sources behind the writing of Matthew's Gospel.

Oral tradition: Matthew was a part of the apostolic community that was centered in Jerusalem for up to 20 years, from the establishment of the church at Pentecost (c. AD 30) until the Jerusalem council (c. AD 49). During this time the oral tradition of Jesus' life and ministry developed, which included the basic preaching, teaching, and interpretation of the gospel. We may refer to this as the standardized, fixed oral tradition. It was standardized, because it was told over and over again by the passionate new church. It became fixed because any errant

variation would quickly become corrected by the eyewitness apostles. On the other hand, there was freedom to vary the basic story line for the needs of a given audience any time the story was told. For example, if giving the story to Hellenistic Jews, the story would vary. It would vary if told to orthodox Jews. It would vary if told to a God-fearing Gentile. And it would vary if told to children, or to old people. This was an oral culture, where telling stories was the stock of daily life. As this developed over 10–20 years, each person telling the story, especially the apostles, would have been able to retell the entire account of Jesus' life.

Content: When we compare the content of Matthew's Gospel to the other Synoptics, we find the following statistics. Matthew has 18,293 words. Approximately 20 percent of those words (3,102) represent content that is found only in Matthew's Gospel, the so-called M tradition (M stands for Matthew). Approximately 10 percent relates to content found shared between Matthew and Mark. Approximately 45 percent relates to content found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which is the so-called "triple tradition." And approximately 25 percent of Matthew's verses relate to content that is shared between Matthew and Luke and not found in Mark, which is the so-called "Q" tradition (Q stands for the German word *Quelle*, "source").

Sources: The most widely held theory for understanding Matthew's sources is that they included Mark, Matthew's own special material (M), and traditions often designated as Q. The priority of Mark is advocated primarily because it seems easier to account for Matthew using and expanding upon Mark rather than Mark using and condensing Matthew. While some posit that Q was a written source tradition, increasingly scholars understand Q to be simply those places in the developing traditions of the church (oral and written) that Matthew and Luke drew upon and are not found in Mark. The differences in the placement, structure, and wording of this shared "Q" material does not suggest that Matthew or Luke used each other's Gospel, but rather that they shared a common tradition, one that was probably both oral and written.

However, the earliest church fathers concluded that Matthew was the source that Mark and/or Luke drew upon, and this view has seen a recent revival. In that light, we may urge caution when advocating one or the other theory of Matthew's sources.

Establishment in the Canon

We have seen above that the earliest church traditions that cite or allude to

Matthew's Gospel accepted it as an authentic and authoritative Gospel. It never had any of the debates surrounding it that some NT books had, such as Hebrews. Therefore, from the time of its origin the Gospel of Matthew was accepted as an inspired, authoritative writing, and regarded as Scripture. F. F. Bruce states categorically, "There can be no doubt . . . of the canonical form of the Gospel of Matthew, nor yet of its canonical position" (Bruce 1988, 289).

Genre

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are called "Gospels." In first-century Greek, the word "gospel" (*euangelion*) referred to a message from a king or a favorable report about a significant event. The Greek translation of the OT (LXX) uses various forms of the word with the sense of "to announce or bring good news" (*euangelizō*, Isa 40:9; cf. 52:7; 61:1) of a time of joy, peace, and salvation through the intervention of God.

Jesus identified his own activities and teachings as "good news" (e.g., Matt 11:5; Mark 1:14, 15) and called people to make sacrifices for his sake and for that of the good news (Mark 8:35; 10:29). The rest of the NT, outside the Evangelists, focuses its attention on the death and resurrection of Jesus as containing the "good news" (e.g., Rom 1:15–16; cf. 1:1–4). All of Jesus' life and ministry was seen in the context of his death and resurrection. The application of the term "good news" to the written records of the life and ministry of Jesus by both the original authors and by early Christians is an important clue toward understanding the genre of these writings. They are not biographies (*bioi*) in the formal sense of the word, but proclamations of the person and events that make up the good news that God has intervened in history in order to bring salvation to his people. As such, "Gospel" is a genre of writing that is similar to ancient biographies, but vastly different as well (cf. Alexander 2006, 13–33).

Matthew's Gospel has been a pivotal book throughout church history to help the church to understand the relationship between Old and New Testaments. Placed first in the earliest collections of the NT canon, Matthew's Gospel is a natural bridge between the OT and NT. Matthew demonstrates repeatedly that the person and ministry of Jesus fulfilled OT hopes and prophecies. Matthew begins with the "fulfillment" of the messianic genealogy in the birth of Jesus (1:1–17), and then goes on to demonstrate the fulfillment in Jesus' life and ministry of various OT prophecies and themes (e.g., 1:22–23; 2:4–5, 15, 17, 23, etc.) and the fulfillment of the OT Law (5:17–48). The early church quite likely placed Matthew first in the NT canon precisely because of its value as a bridge

between the testaments.

Matthew, the Person

The list of the 12 disciples in Matthew's Gospel refers to Matthew as "Matthew the tax collector," which harks back to the incident when Jesus called Matthew to be his disciple while Matthew was sitting in the tax office (cf. 9:9; 10:3). When recounting the call, the first Gospel refers to him as "Matthew" (9:9), while Mark's Gospel refers to him as "Levi the son of Alphaeus" (Mark 2:14), and Luke's Gospel refers to him as "Levi" (Luke 5:27). Speculation surrounds the reason for the variation. For example, Bauckham (2006, 108–12) argues that it is unlikely that one man had two common Jewish names and concludes that the unknown author of the first Gospel knew Matthew was a tax collector, as was Levi, and so collated the material regarding them. However, a more likely suggestion is that this tax collector had two names, Matthew and Levi, either from birth or from the time of his conversion. For example, Hagner (1993, 237–38) suggests that the name "Matthew" was given to Levi after his conversion. On the other hand, Carson (2010, 224, 262–63) leans toward "Matthew Levi" being a double name given to him from birth, since he does not see any evidence for "Matthew" being a Christian name. Some have attempted to show that Levi was not one of the Twelve, and therefore different from Matthew, but France argues that this is unwarranted speculation, since the circumstance of the calling is the same in Matthew and Mark-Luke (2007, 352).

The name Levi may be an indication that he was from the tribe of Levi, and therefore was familiar with Levitical practices (Albright and Mann 1971, clxxvii–clxxviii, clxxxiii–clxxxiv). Mark's record of the calling refers to him as "the son of Alphaeus" (Mark 2:14), which some have understood to mean that he was the brother of the apostle "James the son of Alphaeus" (cf. Mark 3:18). But since the other pairs of brothers are specified to be brothers and are linked as such, it is unlikely that Matthew-Levi and James were brothers.

Matthew Levi was called to follow Jesus while he was sitting in the tax collector's booth. This booth was probably located on one of the main trade highways near Capernaum, collecting tolls for Herod Antipas from the commercial traffic traveling through this area. Matthew immediately followed Jesus and arranged a banquet for Jesus at his home, to which were invited a large crowd of tax collectors and sinners (Matt 9:10–11; Luke 5:29–30). Since tax collectors generally were fairly wealthy and were despised by the local populace (cf. Zacchaeus, Luke 19:1–10), Matthew's calling and response were completely

out of the ordinary and required nothing short of a miraculous turn-around in this tax collector's life.

Little else is known of Matthew Levi, except for the widely attested tradition that he is the author of the Gospel that now bears his name. As a tax collector he would have been trained in secular scribal techniques, and as a Galilean Jewish Christian he would have been able to interpret the life of Jesus from the perspective of the OT expectations (cf. France 2007, 10–15). Eusebius said that Matthew first preached to "Hebrews" and then to "others," including places such as Persia, Parthia, and Syria (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3:24.6). The traditions are mixed regarding Matthew's death, with some saying that he died a martyr's death, while others saying that he died a natural death.

Apologetics Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew

The historical record of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:

2 Abraham fathered Isaac,
Isaac fathered Jacob,
Jacob fathered Judah and his brothers,
3 Judah fathered Perez and Zerah by Tamar,
Perez fathered Hezron,
Hezron fathered Aram,
4 Aram fathered Amminadab,
Amminadab fathered Nahshon,
Nahshon fathered Salmon,
5 Salmon fathered Boaz by Rahab,
Boaz fathered Obed by Ruth,
Obed fathered Jesse,
6 and Jesse fathered King David.
Then David fathered Solomon by Uriah's wife,
7 Solomon fathered Rehoboam,
Rehoboam fathered Abijah,
Abijah fathered Asa,
8 Asa fathered Jehoshaphat,
Jehoshaphat fathered Joram,
Joram fathered Uzziah,
9 Uzziah fathered Jotham,
Jotham fathered Ahaz,

Ahaz fathered Hezekiah,
10 Hezekiah fathered Manasseh,
Manasseh fathered Amon,
Amon fathered Josiah,
11 and Josiah fathered Jechoniah and his brothers
at the time of the exile to Babylon.
12 Then after the exile to Babylon
Jechoniah fathered Shealtiel,
Shealtiel fathered Zerubbabel,
13 Zerubbabel fathered Abiud,
Abiud fathered Eliakim,
Eliakim fathered Azor,
14 Azor fathered Zadok,
Zadok fathered Achim,
Achim fathered Eliud,
15 Eliud fathered Eleazar,
Eleazar fathered Matthan,
Matthan fathered Jacob,
16 and Jacob fathered Joseph the husband of Mary,
who gave birth to Jesus who is called the Messiah.

The historical record of Jesus Christ (1:1): To modern eyes, such a detailed genealogy as this, spanning many centuries, might seem contrived. Did the Jews really track their ancestry so carefully? Knowledge of genealogies was important in ancient times, and played an especially significant role in Israel. The OT reveals that the Jews kept extensive genealogies, which served generally as a record of a family's descendants, but their significance extended beyond simply knowing family ties. Genealogies established a person's heritage, inheritance, legitimacy, and rights, ensuring that property went to the right person (cf. Johnson 1988).

Matthew likely drew upon some OT genealogies (e.g., Gen 4:17–18; 5:3–32; 10:1–32; 46:8–27; 1 Chr 1:34; 2:1–15; 3:1–24; Ruth 4:12–22; Nolland 1996, 115–22, suggests that he studied the Genesis genealogies and patterned his own after them), and he uses similar wording (cf. Matt 1:2: *Abraam egennēsen ton Isaak* with 2 Chr 1:34 LXX: *egennēsen Abraam ton Isaak*). For the listing of individuals after Zerubbabel, when the OT ceases, Matthew probably used records that have since been lost. Historical sources such as Josephus indicate that extensive genealogical records were extant during the first century, and that records for some political and priestly families' were kept in the temple (e.g., Josephus, *Life* 6; *Against Apion* 1.28–56). Later rabbinic tradition tried to establish the descent from David of a near contemporary to Jesus, Rabbi Hillel,

through a genealogical scroll that was purportedly found in Jerusalem (*Genesis Rabbah* 98:8; *j. Ta'anit* 4:2). The official extrabiblical genealogies were lost with the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in AD 70, yet private genealogies were retained elsewhere.

Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham (1:1): Messiah's lineage was of particular importance. Matthew's Jewish audience would have caught the significance of the heading with Jesus' name and ancestry. The expressions "Son of David" and "Son of Abraham" stand in apposition to "Jesus Christ," indicating that both titles are a further explanation of Jesus' identity.

Commonly a person had a single personal name, which often carried religious or social significance. Matthew wrote about "Jesus" (Gk *Iēsous*), which is his historical, commonly used name. The name is *Yeshua* in Hebrew ("Yahweh saves"; cf. Neh 7:7), a shortened form of Joshua (*yehoshua*), "Yahweh is salvation" (Exod 24:13), and will come to have profound notions of salvation associated with it in Jesus (cf. 1:21; cf. also Gerhardsson 1999, 16–17).

"Christ" (Gk *Christos*) is a title derived from the Hebrew *mashiach* ("anointed"), which harks back to David as the anointed king of Israel. The term came to be associated with the promise of an "anointed one" who would be Israel's light of hope. God had promised David through the prophet Nathan that David's house and throne would be established forever (2 Sam 7:11b–16), a promise that is now seen as fulfilled in Jesus as the Anointed One, or Messiah.

Son of David is an important expression in Matthew's Gospel (9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30–31; 21:9, 15; 22:42, 45). Matthew uses the name of the great king 17 times, more than any other NT book. King David was the revered conquering warrior of Israel's history. "Son of David" expresses a promised figure who would perpetuate David's throne, thereby pointing to Messiah's lineage and royal expectation (see 2 Sam 7:11b–16). The title alludes to the messianic hope of a restored kingdom that was seen to be a fulfillment of the divine promise to David.

But Jesus is also the "son of Abraham." In tracing the ancestry not only to David, but also to Abraham, Matthew holds a light of hope to the entire world. The covenant God made with Abraham established Israel as a chosen people, but it also was a promise that his line would bless all nations (Gen 12:1–3; 22:18; see, e.g., Carroll 2000, 17–34; Erickson 2000, 35–51).

The pattern Matthew uses in detailing his genealogy gives clues to Jesus' identity and ministry. He establishes the basic pattern in the first listing: "Abraham fathered Isaac" (1:2). This is in line with the typical OT wording,

such as in the LXX rendering of 1 Chronicles 1:34: “Abraham fathered Isaac.” Throughout the rest of the genealogy the same pattern occurs 40 times, using the active voice of the verb *gennaō*, rendered “fathered” in the HCSB. This expression emphasizes the human descent of each generation, which paves the way for a dramatic change of construction in 1:16 where the passive voice occurs, by which Matthew will point to the divine origin of Jesus.

The ancestry of Jesus serves as an important key to interpreting Matthew’s writing. Matthew emphasizes the way in which Jesus’ ministry brought fulfillment of God’s covenant to the people of Israel (e.g., 10:6; 15:24), but also fulfillment of God’s promise to bring hope to all peoples (cf. 21:43; 28:19). This theme of promise to all nations becomes increasingly pronounced in Matthew’s Gospel, and will come to a climax in the concluding Great Commission (cf. 28:18–20).

King David (1:6): One of the most significant features of Matthew’s record is the emphasis on Jesus’ kingly lineage. David is not simply the son of Jesse as he is stated to be in Luke’s genealogy (Luke 3:31–32), but is David the king (Matt 1:6), an explicit emphasis upon royalty. From here Matthew maintains an emphasis upon kingship, using “king” 22 times, more than any other NT book (see 2:2; 27:11, 29, 37, 42). This is likewise emphasized by the contrast with King Herod and his son Archelaus (2:1–23), the mention of the king in the parable (22:1–13), and the Son of Man seated as King on the throne on judgment day (25:31–46).

Matthew traces Jesus’ genealogy through David’s son Solomon (1:6) who had succeeded his father as king of Israel, while Luke traces the line through David’s son Nathan (cf. 1:6; Luke 3:32; 2 Sam 5:14). Matthew demonstrates that the lineage that culminates in the birth of Jesus is the ruling royal pedigree. David’s greater Son will arrive with the birth of Jesus (cf. 22:41–46; 2 Sam 7:12–16; Pss 89:19–29, 35–37; 110:1–7; 132:11–12). We have here one of several basic differences between the genealogical record found in Matthew’s Gospel (1:2–17) and the one found in Luke’s Gospel (Luke 3:23–38). A list of differences includes:

First, Matthew gives a descending genealogy in the order of succession, with the earliest ancestor, Abraham, placed at the head and later generations placed in forward lines of descent, culminating in the birth of Jesus. This is the more common approach to genealogies in the OT (e.g., Gen 5:1–32). In contrast to Matthew, Luke gives an ascending form that reverses the order, starting with Jesus and tracing it backward to Adam (Luke 3:23–38; cf. Ezra 7:1–5). This

reverse order is more commonly found in Greco-Roman genealogies.

Second, Matthew places special emphasis on the covenants made with Israel by tracing Jesus' lineage to David (1:6) and Abraham (1:2). Luke places special emphasis upon Jesus' relation to all of humanity and to God himself by tracing his lineage to ". . . Adam, son of God" (Luke 3:38).

Third, the genealogies include several different names after the Babylonian deportation. For example, Matthew follows the line through Jeconiah, Shealtiel, and Zerubbabel, while Luke follows the line through Neri, Shealtiel, and Zerubbabel.

Fourth, Matthew lacks several names that are found in Luke, likely to achieve literary symmetry for the purpose of memorization (see on Matt 1:17). The verb "fathered" (*gennaō*) is used in each link of Matthew's record of the genealogy, and is often used to indicate a more remote ancestor (e.g., grandfather or great-grandfather), not simply an immediate father.

Fifth, as mentioned above, Matthew emphasizes Jesus' kingly lineage more than Luke does.

Scholars give two basic explanations for the differences between the genealogies, although the variations are numerous. The first view emphasizes that Matthew gives Jesus' line through his father Joseph, while Luke gives Jesus' line through Mary. The second basic view proposes that both genealogies focus on Joseph, but for different purposes.

We are unable fully to account for the differences between the genealogies with the information we now possess, but it seems clear that Matthew intends to demonstrate Jesus' legal claim to the throne of David. David's greater Son, the anticipated Davidic messianic king, has arrived with the birth of Jesus (cf. 22:41–46; 2 Sam 7:12–16; Pss 89:19–29, 35–37; 110:1–7; 132:11–12). (See further comments at Luke 3:23–38, especially 3:31.)

Joram fathered Uzziah (1:8): Did Joram father Uzziah (Matt 1:8) or Ahaziah (1 Chr 3:11)? Matthew moves directly from Joram to Uzziah, omitting reference to Ahaziah (2 Kgs 8:25–26), Joash (also called Jehoash, 2 Kgs 12:1–3), and Amaziah (2 Kgs 14:1–4), who was the immediate biological father of Uzziah or Azariah (2 Kgs 14:21–22). Matthew may have patterned this section (1:6–11) after 1 Chronicles 3:10–14, because the genealogies in both Chronicles and Matthew omit several kings found in the narrative of the books of Kings and Chronicles. As in the listing from Abraham to David, names were omitted to make it uniform for ease of memorization (see on 1:17).

And Josiah fathered Jechoniah and his brothers (1:11): Matthew notes that Jesus is a descendant of Jeconiah, or Coniah, who in 1 Chronicles 3:16 is stated to be a descendant of Jehoiakim. Jeremiah 36:30 says, "Therefore, this is what the LORD says concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah: He will have no one to sit on David's throne." Since Jeconiah was a descendent of Jehoiakim, how do we understand Matthew's account of Jesus' lineage through the one about whom it was declared that there would be no descendent on David's throne? With such a prophetic curse of Jeconiah and his offspring, we might assume this invalidates Jesus' claim to David's throne.

A way of resolving the difficulty is to recognize that the LXX at times uses the Greek name *Ioakim* for both Jehoiakim and his son Jehoiachin/Jeconiah (2 Kgs 24:6, 8, 12, 15; 25:27; Jer 52:31). Matthew's reference to "Jeconiah and his brothers" may be a double entendre intended to cause the readers to think of the end of the Davidic rule in Jerusalem with Jehoiakim, and the ongoing history of David's lineage with his son Jehoiachin. This would also help to establish the three-fold set of 14 generations that Matthew uses to structure the genealogy (see 1:17). If this is correct, then the expression "Jeconiah and his brothers" is an inclusive reference to the end of the Davidic rule with Jehoiakim, and the ongoing line of David with Jehoiachin. As with the expression Judah "and his brothers" (1:2), the reference to Jeconiah "and his brothers" is an inclusive reference to the entire covenant nation. But now the nation goes into exile and returns without a ruling king, and must await the arrival of the heir to the throne, Jesus Messiah.

In short, if Matthew followed Joseph's legal claim to the throne, and Luke followed Mary's biological claim to the throne, which includes Joseph's legal claim as the adoptive heir of Heli, it helps explain how Matthew recognizes that the curse against Jeconiah does not invalidate the legal line. The curse would have prevented a natural, biological son from ascending to the throne, while the legal claim to the throne could apparently still come through Jeconiah's line.

Matthan fathered Jacob, and Jacob fathered Joseph the husband of Mary (1:15–16): A comparison with Luke's account reveals a seeming discrepancy regarding Joseph's lineage. Matthew recounts that "Matthan fathered Jacob, and Jacob fathered Joseph" (Matt 1:16), while Luke refers to ". . . Joseph, son of Heli, son of Matthat" (Luke 3:23–24). Here we must determine what both Evangelists meant to communicate about the identity of Joseph's father—Jacob or Heli.

One plausible explanation may be found in understanding that Matthew traces

Joseph's biological line, which gives Jesus' legal claim to the royal throne through David, his son Solomon, and his descendants, while Luke emphasizes Mary's biological line, which also traces Jesus' biological lineage to David, but through his son Nathan, who did not actually rule over Israel. The *status* of a Jew is determined from the mother, while all other things—such as tribal affiliation, priestly status, or *royalty*—depends upon the father's lineage (see Ezra 10:1–44; Neh 10:28–30, which may stand behind the traditional expression, "If your mother is a Jew, you are a Jew; if your mother is a stranger, you are a stranger"; cf. "Jew," *EJR*, 211). Therefore, Matthew emphasizes Jesus' legal descent from David and Abraham, while Luke emphasizes Jesus' biological descent from David and Adam. However, when Luke states that Joseph is the son of Heli, it is possible that he indicates that Joseph is the legal heir of this side of the Davidic line also. If Mary had no brothers, then she was Heli's biological heir (cf. Num 27:1–11; 1 Chr 2:34–35), but it may be that Heli solidified the family inheritance by adopting Joseph as his son when Joseph married his daughter Mary (see Nolland 1989, 169–71; Bock 1994, 922–23). This practice occurred in other cases where a father had no physical sons as heirs (Ezra 2:61; Neh 7:63). If this is the case, then Heli is Mary's natural father and Joseph's adoptive father and father-in-law (often referred to as a father). (See further comments at Luke 3:23.)

Joseph the husband of Mary, who gave birth to Jesus (1:16): Matthew regularly displays intentional precision in his account of Jesus' earthly life and ministry in order to accentuate truths that are important for devotion and doctrine. When he comes to the listing of Jesus, Matthew says, ". . . and Jacob fathered Joseph the husband of Mary, who gave birth to Jesus" (1:16). The English obscures two important points that Matthew makes about Jesus in the Greek text.

First, behind the English word "who" stands a Greek feminine relative pronoun (*hēs*). The feminine gender of the relative pronoun points to Mary as the one from whom Jesus was born. The genealogy regularly emphasizes the male who fathers a child, but here Matthew shifts and delivers a precise statement about the relationship of Jesus to Joseph and Mary. Matthew establishes that Joseph is the legal father of Jesus, but emphasizes that Mary is the biological parent "who gave birth to Jesus," preparing the reader for the announcement of the virgin birth by shifting attention from Joseph to Mary.

Second, the expression "was born" translates a verb (*gennaō*) that is in the passive voice (*egennēthē*) and gives further clarification about the origin of

Jesus. As we noted earlier, from 1:2 through 1:16 there are 40 occurrences of the same verb. All the others are in the active voice (e.g., 1:2: "Abraham fathered" or "gave birth to" Israel), emphasizing the human action in fathering the child. But in 1:16 the verb is in the passive voice, where the subject, Mary, receives the action or is acted upon. By this Matthew specifies that it was not the sole action of Mary who gave birth, preparing the reader for the angelic announcement of divine action in Jesus' conception and birth (1:18–25). This is a fairly common construction in the NT, which many grammarians call a "divine passive," where God is the unstated but assumed agent of action (BDF, 72 [§130.1]; Wallace 1996, 437). By way of contrast, Matthew uses another verb (*tiktō*) in the active voice where Mary is the *subject* who gives birth to Jesus (1:25).

By the use of the feminine form of the relative pronoun "who," and by use of the passive form of the verb "was born," Matthew stresses that Mary is the mother of Jesus, but that she was "acted upon" to give birth to the child. We see here a hint that Jesus' conception and birth are God's work. Later Matthew clarifies that Jesus' conception was miraculous, brought about by the Spirit of God coming upon Mary (1:18–25). Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham (1:1), but he is also the Son of God, Immanuel, "God is with us" (1:23).

14 generations . . . 14 generations . . . 14 generations (1:17): Matthew builds his genealogy into three groups of 14. Does such intentional stylization (inspired most likely by the sum of consonants in David's name; more on this below) call into question his accuracy? And why does the third group of 14 actually only include 13 names?

Matthew reveals further that even the structure of the genealogy intends to culminate in Jesus. Genealogies were often organized for ease of memorization. Matthew structures the genealogy to count 14 generations from the covenant made with Abraham to the covenant made with David, 14 generations from the end of David's reign to the deportation to Babylon, and 14 generations from the Babylonian deportation down to Jesus.

There are 41 names in the genealogy, which creates a difficulty, because 14 generations multiplied by the three groups of generations equals 42 required names. This probably indicates that one name needs to be counted twice. On this reckoning, the 14 names in the first group begin with Abraham and end with David. The second group runs from David to the deportation to Babylon, and the 14 names to be counted in this group begin with Solomon and end with Jeconiah. The third group of 14 generations, from the deportation to Jesus,

begins by again counting Jeconiah and ends with Jesus' name. The name "Jeconiah" may serve as a double entendre to indicate both Jehoiakim and the end of the second group of generations, and also to indicate Jehoiachin and the beginning of the third group of generations after the deportation. On this supposition, the name "Jeconiah" is counted twice to indicate the two different rulers and eras in Matthew's genealogy. The breakdown of the three groups of 14 would be as follows: Abraham to David; Solomon to Jeconiah/Jehoiakim; Jeconiah/Jehoiachin to Jesus.

Some generations in the lineage were skipped so that the structure could be made uniform for memorization, while other members were given certain kinds of prominence to make a particular point. David is mentioned twice, although only counted once, to emphasize that Jesus is the Davidic Messiah. The number 14 appears to be a subtle reference to David because the numerical value of the Hebrew consonants of his name is 14 (*dwd* = 4 + 6 + 4). The Jewish practice of counting the numerical value for letters is called *gematria* ("Gematria," *EJR*, 154). In its most basic form the practice helped in memorization and for encoding theological meaning.

> 18 The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After His mother Mary had been engaged to
> Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit.
> 19 So her husband Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly,
> decided to divorce her secretly.

She was pregnant by the Holy Spirit (1:18): Matthew states simply that the child was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Some, including Mormons and Muslims, have taken this to imply sexual relations between Mary and God. Mormons take this as literally true, and Muslims take it to be absurd. This literal approach, however, misrepresents what the passage says about the miraculous nature of Jesus' conception. The Holy Spirit is the agency, or the source of Jesus' conception, but the Gospel narratives make it clear that Mary was a virgin who had never had sexual relations. It was on the basis of her virginity that Joseph was reassured to take Mary as his wife after being visited by an angel who proclaimed the miraculous conception (cf. Matt 1:20–25; Luke 1:26–35).

Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly (1:19): If the Law called for the stoning of adulteresses (Lev 20:10), how is it that Joseph was considered righteous for

wanting to protect Mary from public shame? In the first place, it is likely that stoning was reserved for repeat offenders who refused correction (see also comments on 5:18). Secondly, as a righteous man it was appropriate for Joseph to obtain a certificate of divorce. Divorce for adultery was not merely optional but mandatory among many Jewish groups (Bockmuehl 1989, 291–95). Joseph's concern for Mary compelled him to shield her from public disgrace. Therefore he did not regard public divorce as an option, for she would be subjected to disgrace and possibly stoning (Lev 20:10; 22:23–24; Deut 22:13–21). His one option was to divorce her privately. The Law did not require the deed to be made public, making allowance for a private divorce (two or three witnesses; Num 5:11–31; Deut 24:1; as interpreted in *m. Sotah* 1:1–5; *m. Gittin* 9:1–5, 10).

> 20 But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is by the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to name Him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins."
>
> 22 Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:
>
> 23 **See, the virgin will become pregnant**
> **and give birth to a son,**
> **and they will name Him Immanuel,**
>
> which is translated "God is with us."
>
> 24 When Joseph got up from sleeping, he did as the Lord's angel had commanded him. He married her 25 but did not know her intimately until she gave birth to a son. And he named Him Jesus.

The virgin will become pregnant (1:23): Several questions arise from this text. Of primary importance, is "virgin" an accurate translation of the Hebrew original, or is "young maiden," which does not necessitate virginity, more accurate? Matthew declares (v. 22) that the events surrounding the conception of Jesus fulfill Isaiah's prophecy (Isa 7:14) made during the days of national threat under the reign of Ahaz, king of Judah. In 734 BC Ahaz feared that his reign would be ended by an attack from the north. Pekah, king of Israel, and Rezin, king of Aram (Syria), had formed an alliance and were threatening to invade Judah and replace Ahaz with a puppet king, the son of Tabeel (Isa 7:6). Isaiah declared that God would not allow this to happen, reassuring Ahaz that God would maintain his promise that a descendent of David would sit on his throne forever (2 Sam 7:11–17). In order to confirm that the two northern kings would

not conquer Judah, Isaiah prophesied that the Lord would give to Ahaz a sign: a virgin would give birth.

There are two primary words for “virgin” in Hebrew. The term *almah*, which occurs in the prophecy of Isa 7:14, means “maiden” or “young girl,” and most scholars contend that it almost always refers to an unmarried, virgin woman (e.g., Gen 24:43; Exod 2:8; Ps 68:25; the debated passage is Prov 30:19; see Ross 1991, 5:1124). The other primary term is *betulah*, which can indicate a “virgin” (Gen 24:16; Lev 21:3), but also “old widow” (Joel 1:8). The Jewish translators of Isa 7:14 (LXX) rendered the Hebrew term *almah* with the Greek term *parthenos*, which almost without exception specified a sexually mature, unmarried woman who was a virgin (the exception is Gen 34:4).

The history of interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 and its relationship to Matthew 1:22–23 is extensive and varied, but three basic views emerge. First, some suggest that the original sign was intended solely for the historical circumstances of Ahaz and Judah, and that Matthew takes it typologically to refer to Jesus (e.g., Watts 1985, 98–104; Davies and Allison 1988, 213; Carter 2000, 503–20). In this view, Isaiah had in mind a young woman who was a virgin at the time, but who would later become married and have a child that she would name Immanuel as a sign of God’s presence. Isaiah was referring only to a child of his day, whether it was the royal son Hezekiah who was born heir to the throne of king Ahaz, or Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (cf. Isa 8:4, 8), or some anonymous child born to a woman Ahaz knew. At the time that this child was born and named Immanuel, Ahaz would know that Isaiah’s prophecies were correct and that deliverance was near. In this view Matthew’s use of the text goes beyond the original intentions of the prophecy. A variation on this view suggests that there was not even a reference to the virginity of this child’s mother in Isaiah’s text. It says Isaiah had in view a young woman, and that the Hebrew *almah* is not intended to mean “virgin.” The weakness of this view is that it does not do justice to the majority usage of *almah* to mean “virgin.”

Second, others suggest that there was no real fulfillment in the birth of any child at the time of Ahaz, but that the prophecy was intended strictly as a messianic prophecy that was only fulfilled once, in the birth of Jesus. The term *almah* must be taken as referring to a “virgin,” which means that the prophecy was not fulfilled by a birth at the time of Isaiah, but could only point ahead to the fulfillment in the miraculous conception and birth of Jesus (e.g., Carson 2010, 102–6, citing an earlier work by Motyer 1970, 118–25).

Third, a more satisfactory interpretation takes the best of these views and

recognizes that God was giving through Isaiah a sign that had historical significance and fulfillment in the days of Ahaz, but that God was also giving through Isaiah a prophecy of a future messianic deliverer that was fulfilled in the conception and birth of Jesus (e.g., Grogan 1986, 6:62–65; Hagner, 1993, 20–21; Blomberg 1992, 58–59; Sailhamer 2001, 5–23). The Jewish translators of the LXX, hundreds of years before Christ's birth, seem to indicate by the use of *parthenos* that something deeper was meant by the prophet than was completely fulfilled in the events of Isaiah's day. And later Jewish scribes saw a deeper meaning in the context, when they interpreted Immanuel, "God with us," to be a promise of the golden age (cf. Isa 2:2–4; 9:2–7; 11:1–16) when the messianic son of David would bring judgment on the wicked and blessing on the righteous.

And give birth to a son (1:23): When was this prophecy fulfilled? Isaiah prophesied that a woman who was a virgin at the time of Ahaz (734 BC) would bear a son named Immanuel. Since neither the queen nor Isaiah's wife was a virgin, and since we have argued above that Isaiah meant to signify a virgin specifically and not just a young woman, Isaiah most likely signified an unmarried young woman within the royal house, one known to Ahaz. She would soon marry and conceive a child, and name it Immanuel as a symbolic hope of God's presence in times of national difficulty. Before the child was old enough to know the difference between right and wrong, Judah would be delivered from the threat of invasion from the two northern kings (Isa 7:14–17). The northern alliance was broken in 732 BC when Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria destroyed Damascus, conquered Aram, and put Rezin to death. All this was within the time-frame predicted as the sign to Ahaz, plenty of time for the virgin to marry, carry a child, and raise the child for the approximately two years it would take for the boy to learn moral discernment. Thus there was an immediate fulfillment of Isaiah's prediction in the time of Ahaz.

Matthew declares that the birth of Jesus fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14. Thus the sign given to Ahaz and the house of Judah ("you" in Isa 7:14 is plural) was God's prediction of military salvation, but it was also a prediction of a future messianic figure who would provide spiritual salvation. Isaiah's sign functioned both as an indication of the way that a boy named Immanuel would signify to Ahaz and the house of David God's promised deliverance from invasion, but also a future messianic deliverer named Immanuel, truly God with us.

This double-fulfillment reading takes seriously both the immediate context of the prediction to Ahaz in 7:14, but also the broader context of Isaiah's prophecy,

in which a future messianic age would honor Galilee of the Gentiles (9:1–2) with a child born who would be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa 9:6).

And they will name Him Immanuel, which is translated "God is with us" (1:23): Earlier the angel instructed Joseph to name the child Jesus (1:21), which is what we find him called through his earthly life in Scripture as well as in the writings of the early church. We have no record of Jesus ever being called "Immanuel" by his family or followers. This does not indicate that Matthew was in error or that Isaiah's prophecy does not apply to Jesus. Instead, as Matthew translates the name for us, we see that "Immanuel" is intended not as a personal name but as a title that signifies Jesus' Messianic identity: "God with us." Both Jesus' common name and his titular name indicate profound truths: *Jesus* specifies what he does ("God saves"), and *Immanuel* specifies who he is ("God with us").

Joseph . . . did not know her intimately until she gave birth to a son (1:24–25): Some traditions hold that Mary remained a lifelong virgin. What bearing does this verse have on this matter? When Joseph awoke from the dream, he obeyed the angel's command and carried out the second phase of the marital process by undertaking a formal wedding ceremony. At the conclusion of the rites, Joseph took Mary home to live with him (and perhaps with his extended family) as his wife. They were a fully married couple, except that Joseph "did not know her intimately until she gave birth to a son" (1:25). Matthew's expression (lit. "he was not knowing her") was a common way of referring to sexual intercourse. Sexual abstinence during pregnancy was widely observed in Judaism. The early Jewish pseudepigraphic wisdom poem *Pseudo-Phocylides* 186 (c. 100 BC–AD 100) declares, "Do not lay your hand upon your wife when she is pregnant." Josephus struck a similar note: "For the same reason none who has intercourse with a woman who is with child can be considered pure" (*Against Apion* 2.202–203).

Matthew's note about Joseph abstaining is not a hint of continued celibacy between him and Mary after Jesus' birth. In fact the expression "until" (*heos hou*) most naturally indicates that Mary and Joseph had normal marital sexual relations after Jesus' birth, from which other children were born (see 12:46 and 13:55; Allison 1993, 6n16). For more, see comments on 12:46–50 and 13:55.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east
arrived unexpectedly in Jerusalem, 2 saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the
Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.”
3 When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 So he
assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Messiah
would be born.
5 “In Bethlehem of Judea,” they told him, “because this is what was written by the prophet:

6 **And you, Bethlehem**, in the land of Judah,
are by no means **least among the leaders of Judah:**
because out of you will come a leader
who will shepherd My people Israel.”

7 Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star
appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. When
you find Him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship Him.”
9 After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was—the star they had seen in
the east! It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. 10 When
they saw the star, they were overjoyed beyond measure. 11 Entering the house, they saw the
child with Mary His mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped Him. Then they opened
their treasures and presented Him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And being
warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.

In the days of King Herod (2:1): Is it proper to call Herod “King”? Palestine, the region comprising the biblical Israel and Judah, was one of many regions that fell to the ever-expanding Roman Empire. In 63 BC, Pompey captured Jerusalem and the rest of Palestine. The Romans installed local figures to rule the Jews in their place, and eventually Herod gained prominence and ruled under Rome from 37–4 BC. Herod was born of noble stock from Idumean (father, Antipater II) and Nabatean (mother, Cypros) heritage. His grandfather on his father’s side, Antipas (or Antipater I), converted to Judaism during the reign of Hyrcanus I in the Hasmonean reign (Richardson 1999, 52–55). His father, Antipater II, was appointed adviser to Hyrcanus II. After Pompey invaded Judea and deposed the Hasmonaean dynasty (63 BC), Antipater II was made *epitropos*, procurator of Judea by Julius Caesar (47 BC) (Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.127–55).

Antipater appointed Herod governor of Galilee as a young man (25 years old; c. 47 BC), and later Herod was given a supervisory role in Coele-Syria by the Romans. Antipater II was poisoned at a dinner party in the royal palace in 42 BC (Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.281; Richardson, *Herod*, 116–17). The Hasmonean aristocracy attempted to keep Herod from gaining more power, but after traveling to Rome, Herod was appointed king of Judea by the Roman Senate (39 BC). He was able to secure the throne after a two-year struggle. Herod’s

kingship was a political office under the rule of Rome, and could be withdrawn if he disappointed the Roman government. Herod ruled firmly, and at times ruthlessly, for 33 years. He most likely died in March, 4 BC (see discussion below). Since Herod was still alive when the magi arrived in Jerusalem as much as two years after Jesus was born, the dating of Jesus' birth is placed by most scholars at between 6–4 BC (see on 2:16).

Wise men from the east arrived unexpectedly in Jerusalem (2:1): Who were the wise men, and how would they know about Jewish messianic expectation? Matthew tells us only that they came from "the east," and that they were looking for the one "born King of the Jews" (2:2). They apparently had been exposed to OT prophecies from Jewish colonies in the east. Many Jews returned to Palestine after the Babylonian deportation, but many others remained in the east, especially in Babylon. Pagan leaders, both political and religious, were well aware of Jewish religious distinctives, such as Sabbath observance and marital restrictions (Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.318–19, 340, 449–52). Hillel the Elder is said to have studied the whole body of Jewish learning in Babylon before he traveled to Israel (*b. Pesaḥim* 6:1; cf. *j. Pesaḥim* 6:1, 33a), which informs us that there were significant Jewish centers of learning in Babylon at the time of the wise men. Many Jewish settlements were also located in Arabia, with regular contact between Jews and Arabs, such as the Nabateans. Gentile religious leaders in the east were regularly exposed to Hebrew Scriptures, prophecy, and teachers. In light of these factors, it is no surprise that the wise men had knowledge of the Jewish expectation for a coming Messiah.

We saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him (2:2): It is sometimes said that the reason the wise men knew to look for a star heralding Messiah's birth was a prophecy (Num 24:17) about a star rising from Jacob. Being non-Hebrews, their knowledge of this prophecy suggests that the Hebrews themselves were well aware of the prophecy and had managed to spread the word in postexilic communities. Otherwise one would have to assume that the eastern men somehow accessed the Hebrew Scriptures and came to understand them better than the Hebrews themselves. But in any case, the wise men got the jump on the Hebrews in recognizing the star's appearance and its portents. How can this be? Did Matthew hunt through the OT, looking for a prophecy and fulfillment in order to support the turn to the Gentiles (Matt 28:19)?

Matthew says the wise men went to Jerusalem to find the one "who has been born King of the Jews" (2:2). The people of Israel had long waited for the

rightful heir to the throne (e.g., Num 24:17; 1 Sam 7:12–16), but God chose to announce Messiah's arrival first through these Gentile wise men. An expectation circulated in the world of the first century that a ruler would arise from Judea. Suetonius writes, "Throughout the whole of the East there had spread an old and persistent belief: destiny had decreed that at that time men coming forth from Judea would seize power [and rule the world]" (Suetonius, *Vespasian* 5). Israel's prophets had long spoken of a period of world peace and prosperity that was to be instituted by a future Davidic deliverer (e.g., Ezek 34:23–31). This belief had penetrated beyond the borders of Israel so that others, such as these Gentile wise men, also looked for a ruler(s) who would arise from the land of Judea (Josephus, *Jewish War* 3.399–408; 6.310–15; Tacitus, *History* 5.13). Josephus (*Jewish War* 3.399–408; 6.310–15) and Tacitus (*History* 5.13) make similar mention of this widespread expectation (the debate includes whether these Roman historians read Josephus). They contend that the Jews were wrong, and that the expectation was actually fulfilled with the ascension of Vespasian to the throne after his victories in Palestine. Their own political agendas are obviously involved, so their caveat cannot diminish the well-known expectation that a ruler(s) would arise in Palestine. Thus it is safe to say that the appearance of the star was not the sole cause of the wise men being interested in Israel's Messiah, and the statement in Numbers 24:17 ("A star will come from Jacob") may not have been taken to indicate the sign of a star would accompany the coming of Messiah.

Several suggestions have been proposed as to the nature of the star that the wise men saw (see Brown 1993, 170–74). First, many suggest that it was a natural phenomenon that can be traced back to some known periodically occurring astronomical event, whether a comet (e.g., Halley's Comet, which was visible in 12 and 11 BC), a supernova, or a conjunction of planets. One widely discussed possibility is that the attention of the wise men was attracted by an unusual conjunction of planets that occurred on May 27, 7 BC (Hughes 1979). In ancient Babylonian astrology, Jupiter represented the primary deity. When Jupiter came close to Saturn (which represented the Jews), in the constellation Pisces (which represented Palestine), this theory says the wise men referred to Jupiter as the star of the king they were seeking, and the association with Saturn and Pisces showed them in which nation (the Jews) and where (Palestine) to look for him. Jupiter rose on March 11, 7 BC, so this would have been the date referred to by the wise men as when his star rose. A related suggestion draws upon this conjunction, but links the specific star to a supernova that Chinese and

Korean astronomers recorded in March–April 5 BC. One astronomer concludes that the conjunction alerted the wise men to some supernatural appearance, but the supernova triggered their journey to Jerusalem (Kidger 1999). While these views provide external corroboration of astral activity at that time, they do not account for the way in which the "star" moved through the sky, providing guidance for the wise men, and pinpointing not just the tiny village of Bethlehem, but the very house "where the child was" (2:9).

Second, others suggest that the "star" was a supernatural astral phenomenon that God used to herald Jesus' birth. This is suggested by the behavior of the star. That it was able to appear and reappear, plus move and direct the wise men on their journey, certainly does not describe an ordinary star or stellar phenomenon. So the event was a miracle, and some even suggest that only the wise men were able to see this star-like phenomenon.

Third, a helpful suggestion from the Matthean context is that the supernatural phenomenon was an angel taking the resemblance of a star. The angel was sent to the wise men to announce the birth of Messiah and to guide them to him so that they would be a witness to his birth through their worship. Good angels are commonly referred to as stars (e.g., Job 38:7; Dan 8:10; Rev 1:16, 20; 2:1; 3:1; Jesus is referred to as the "Morning Star" in Rev 22:16; cf. 2:28; 2 Pet 1:9; for extrabiblical sources, see *1 Enoch* 43:1–4; 90:20–27; *2 Enoch* 29; *3 Enoch* 46; Pseudo Philo 32.13–15; *Joseph and Aseneth* 14.1–14; Testament of Solomon 20.14–17; *b. Avodah Zarah* 43a-b). And fallen angels are likewise referred to as stars (Rev 8:10, 11; 9:1; *1 Enoch* 86:1–6; 90:20–27; *2 Enoch* 29; Satan is called a fallen morning star in Isa 14:12–13). Angels were used to guide and protect Israel on their way to the Promised Land (Exod 14:19; 23:20), and often appear in Jewish and Christian literature as guides (e.g., *1 Enoch* 1:2 and throughout; Testament of Levi 2–5; *History of the Rechabites* 1:3 and throughout). Dale Allison cites the apocryphal Arabic *Gospel of the Infancy*, which relates Matthew's account of the wise men, but expands it to say, "In the same hour there appeared to them an angel in the form of that star which had before guided them on their journey." Allison concludes, "This, I believe, only makes explicit what is implicit in Matthew, namely, that the guiding star was a guiding angel" (Allison 1993, 24).

This latter view is consistent with the prominent place of an angel of the Lord in the overall infancy narrative: announcing to Joseph the virginal conception of Jesus (1:20), the warning given to the wise men in a dream not to return to Herod (2:12), warning Joseph to flee with the family to Egypt (2:13), telling

them to go back to Israel (2:19), and most likely it was an angel through a dream guiding them to Nazareth (2:22). This view resolves the difficulties of squaring the behavior of stars with the actions ascribed to the star of Bethlehem.

And have come to worship Him (2:2): Did the wise men understand that Jesus was divine? If so, they captured a doctrinal truth that even many religious Jews had a hard time grasping or accepting. With their likely mixture of influence from paganism, astrology, and Jewish Scriptures, it is doubtful that the wise men knowingly came to worship Jesus in recognition of his incarnate nature as the God-man. The Greek behind "worship Him" is literally, "pay Him homage." The wise men probably desired to worship the "King of the Jews" in a way similar to how leading figures from a subservient country paid homage to the king of a ruling country. Suetonius describes the homage that the princely magos Tiridates of Armenia paid to Emperor Nero: "As Tiridates approached along a sloping platform, the emperor first let him fall at his feet, but raised him with his right hand and kissed him" (Suetonius, *Nero* 13; cf. Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 63.1.7). Tiridates even addressed Nero as "god," which indicates the kind of homage he paid to the emperor. The wise men were giving rightful homage to Jesus as the promised ruler to arise in Israel, but in light of the fullness of revelation, their worship is far more meaningful than they intended (see Peterson 1992, 85; Albright and Mann 1971, 13–14).

King Herod . . . was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him (2:3): Herod's reaction to the quest of the wise men at first seems surprising. Is news of Messiah's birth so disturbing? The Magi probably traveled with a fairly sizeable company. It was a long journey, which required extensive supplies and attendants. The gifts they brought would have attracted roving thieves, which more than likely required the wise men to enlist the protection of guards and/or a military escort. This fairly large group, arriving as it did from the east, was likely one thing that prompted Herod to be disturbed when they arrived in Jerusalem. Further, Herod was not the rightful heir to the Davidic kingdom; he had usurped the throne by aligning himself with Rome. So with the wise men's announcement that they were seeking the one born King of the Jews, Herod probably perceived that the wise men and their entourage indicated that invading forces from the east were joining forces within Israel to oust him and place a king on the throne who was from the true line of the expected Messiah.

"In Bethlehem of Judea," they told him, "because this is what was written by the prophet: And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means

least among the leaders of Judah: because out of you will come a leader who will shepherd My people Israel" (2:5–6): A number of questions arise about Matthew's handling of Micah 5:1–2. When Herod asked the religious leaders where the Messiah was to be born, they readily cited the prophet Micah and included an important Davidic shepherding theme from 2 Samuel 5:2 as a direct prediction of the birthplace. While the LXX form of Micah 5:2 is an accurate translation of the Hebrew text, Matthew's rendering differs from both the MT and LXX in at least four ways.

First, Matthew has "Bethlehem, in the land of Judah" while the MT has "Bethlehem Ephrathah" and the LXX has "Bethlehem house of Ephrathah." Matthew matches more closely the LXX reading "house of Judah" as perhaps in line with other places where "Bethlehem of Judah" (Judg 17:7–9; 19:1–2, 18; Ruth 1:1–2; 1 Sam 17:12) differentiates it from Bethlehem of Zebulon in Galilee (Josh 19:15). Second, Matthew uses the word "leaders" or "rulers" to render the MT and LXX reference to the "clans" (lit. "thousands"), which may anticipate the appearance of the cognate participial form of the verb "lead" that Matthew uses in the next line. Third, Matthew also includes the conjunction "because" in the third line of the quotation as an explanation of the reason why Bethlehem's significance has been transformed. Fourth, a more significant difference is that the MT/LXX asserts that Bethlehem is insignificant among the clans of Judah, while Matthew asserts the opposite with the expression "by no means" so that it reads "you are by no means least among the leaders of Judah." We can account for the difference by understanding that Micah foresees that Messiah will rise from a geographically insignificant town, whereas Matthew looks back to Micah's prophecy from the vantage point of its fulfillment and notes that the birth of Jesus transformed the significance of Bethlehem (Turner 2008, 83–84).

Neither the religious leaders nor Matthew alter the meaning of the OT prophecies, but emphasize certain features that had relevance for their situation. This is typical of OT exegesis in Second Temple Judaism. Apparently the religious leaders conflated the prophecy of Micah with an allusion in 2 Samuel to a famous shepherding theme cited at David's installation as king over Israel, "You will shepherd My people Israel and be ruler over Israel" (2 Sam 5:2). This conflation of prophetic passages in understanding the coming of the Davidic Messiah is found also in the *Psalms of Solomon* 17, and Matthew builds upon their understanding of the role of Bethlehem in the birth of the Messiah.

Matthew lays a significant Davidic emphasis on Jesus' identity and role, and the shepherd motif is associated with Jesus throughout the NT: Jesus will later

refer to himself as “the good shepherd” (John 10:11); the writer of the book of Hebrews calls Jesus “that great Shepherd of the sheep” (Heb 13:20); the apostle Peter emphasizes that leaders in the church are to “shepherd” the flock (1 Pet 5:2; cf. John 21:16) for Jesus, “the chief Shepherd” (1 Pet 5:4); and concerning the martyrs who come out of the great tribulation, “. . . the Lamb who is at the center of the throne will shepherd them” (Rev 7:17).

The prophetic expectation of the Davidic Messiah being born in Bethlehem had become fairly widespread in Israel (cf. John 7:42). This raises an interesting question: If Micah 5:2 was widely understood to prophesy Bethlehem as Messiah’s birthplace, would not all Israel have kept close watch over this tiny hamlet in anticipation of the fulfillment of their greatest hope? It may seem difficult to have it both ways—that the prophecy was widely understood and yet that its fulfillment (Jesus’ birth) caught the village by surprise and went mostly unnoticed by the nation. Further, since Herod was forever paranoid about the security of his throne, and since the priests and teachers of the law were readily able to tell him where the Christ would be born, why had he not asked them previously and set up watch over Bethlehem?

The expectation that Herod and Israel’s religious leaders would have set up vigil around Bethlehem to watch for Messiah’s birth seems reasonable enough. No one can be sure why this did not happen. Perhaps it was just impractical, since there was no assurance about the timing of the fulfillment. Also, it was one thing for the religious leaders to have a thorough knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures’ prophetic designations, and another thing for them to recognize its fulfillment in the arrival of Jesus as Messiah. Their religious, political, and militaristic expectations of the coming Messiah often caused them to completely overlook the One for whom they were waiting.

The star . . . led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was (2:9): The star that led the wise men to Palestine apparently reappeared and led them six miles to the child in Bethlehem. The activity of the star implies a supernatural phenomenon rather than a literal star, since it is difficult to reconstruct how any form of star could go ahead of them and stop or remain over the place where the child was. Since the wise men had already been informed that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, the star did not guide them to the city generally, but to the *exact* place in the city where the child and family now were located. This would be consistent with what we suggested above: that this is some kind of supernatural angelic guidance (see on 2:2).

They saw the child . . . and falling to their knees, they worshiped Him (2:11): How old was Jesus here? Does Herod's move to kill all boys aged two years and younger indicate that Jesus was around two years old at this time? Jesus, with Mary and Joseph, are now in a house in Bethlehem. Whether this is the same house as the one connected to the stable in which Jesus was born is unknown (cf. Luke 2:7), but since the young family stayed in Bethlehem instead of returning to Nazareth to raise their son, it implies that Joseph had arranged for permanent living quarters. The term used to refer to Jesus (*paidion*, "child") normally designates a young toddler or infant (2:8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 20, 21; BDAG, 749). The same term is used by Luke to refer to Jesus at his birth and presentation in the temple when he was a few days old (Luke 2:17, 27). Since Herod will later attempt to have all boys under two years old killed, the child is now probably near two years of age (Matt 2:11).

***How many wise men were there? Were they kings?* (2:11)**: In spite of popular reference to "three wise men," there is little historical certainty about how many wise men were present. As early as the third century, the wise men were considered to be kings, interpreted as the fulfillment of the prophecy in Psalm 72:11, "All kings bow down to him." But the wise men were probably more like religious advisers to the court in their homeland. The actual number of wise men is uncertain. Eastern tradition sets their number at 12, but Western tradition sets their number at three, based on the three gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh (2:11). The traditional names of the Magi—Balthasar, Melchior, and Gaspar (or Caspar)—first appear in a mosaic in a sixth-century church in Ravenna, Italy, but there is no known historical support for these designations. Quite likely the wise men, whatever their number, traveled with attendants and guards for the long journey.

13 After they were gone, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying,
"Get up! Take the child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. For Herod
is about to search for the child to destroy Him." 14 So he got up, took the child and His mother
during the night, and escaped to Egypt. 15 He stayed there until Herod's death, so that what was
spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled: **Out of Egypt I called My Son**.
16 Then Herod, when he saw that he had been outwitted by the wise men, flew into a rage. He
gave orders to massacre all the male children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old
and under, in keeping with the time he had learned from the wise men. 17 Then what was
spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:

18 **A voice was heard in Ramah,**
weeping, and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children;
and she refused to be consoled,
because they were no more.

19 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,
20 saying, "Get up! Take the child and His mother and go to the land of Israel, because those
who sought the child's life are dead." 21 So he got up, took the child and His mother, and
entered the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place
of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned in a dream, he withdrew to the
region of Galilee. 23 Then he went and settled in a town called Nazareth to fulfill what was
spoken through the prophets, that He will be called a Nazarene.

So that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled: Out of Egypt I called My Son (2:15): Did Hosea 11:1–3 have Messiah in mind? In the original context Hosea is speaking about errant Israel. Do critics have a good argument when they say Matthew first saw Hosea 11:1, took it to be a messianic prophecy, and then *invented* the story of the holy family's Egyptian sojourn?

It is difficult to see how Hosea's reference back to the Exodus can imply for Matthew that Jesus' life fulfills what the prophet had said. This allows us to see that Matthew has a multifaceted perspective on the different ways that Jesus "fulfills" the OT Scriptures. First, "fulfill" in Matthew can indicate the way in which the events of Jesus' earthly life and ministry fulfill predictive prophecy. This present case may be one particular prediction, as in Matthew 1:22–23, where Jesus fulfills the prediction of a virgin-born messianic deliverer, or it may be a collective predictive theme, as in 3:15, where Jesus' ministry brings to actualization the collective OT prophecy of salvation-historical righteousness. Second, Matthew can use "fulfill" to indicate that Jesus brings to its intended full meaning the entire OT, as he declares in the Sermon on the Mount, "Don't assume that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill" (5:17). Third, Matthew's use of "fulfill" can indicate that Jesus' earthly life and ministry corresponded analogically or typologically (recapitulated or repeated) to key aspects of Israel's national history. This is apparently what Matthew has in view presently (2:15; cf. 2:17–18; see Howard 1986, 314–28). In the context of his prophecy, Hosea recounts how God faithfully brought Israel out of Egypt in the Exodus. Matthew's point of comparison is the corporate solidarity between Israel as God's son being rescued and delivered by God, and Jesus as the One who is revealed to be God's "Son"

par excellence (Kaiser 1995, 35; on public revelations from heaven that Jesus is God's Son, see 3:17; 17:5).

Further, OT authors often reminded the Hebrews to look back to their redemption when God brought them out of Egypt (e.g., Psalms 78; 81; 105; 106; Jer 2:6; 7:22–25; Ezek 20:1–20; Mic 6:1–4; etc.). The annual Passover was a reminder and a promise that God had provided a sacrificial lamb for his people. By pointing to Hosea's recounting of God's deliverance in the exodus (Hos 11:1), Matthew notes that Jesus' infancy corresponds analogically to Israel's history. The life of Jesus is the historical completion of the process of redemption. No threat from a public official can thwart God's plan. Jesus' coming out of Egypt is the recapitulation of the promise to Israel that redemption is at hand.

Some critics charge Matthew with composing an account of Jesus' life that is a fanciful manipulation of facts to fit what the prophets had predicted. They claim that Matthew fabricated details or manipulated true facts of Jesus' life in order to make it appear that Jesus fulfilled OT prophecies about the coming Messiah. For example, some suggest that Matthew, who wrote to a Jewish audience, made up a life story about Jesus that fulfilled prophecies such as being born of a virgin in Bethlehem, or going to Egypt, or being raised in Nazareth (e.g., Crossan 1994, 15–21). Did Matthew write an accurate account of what happened in history that fulfilled ancient prophecies, or did he create stories about Jesus to make it appear that he fulfilled those prophecies? Our claim is the former: Matthew recorded accurately what happened in the historical life and ministry of Jesus, and those events were the miraculous fulfillment of messianic prophecies. Evangelical scholars have satisfactorily answered charges of critics along four basic lines.

In the first place, the creation of falsified historical accounts to substantiate a claim to prophetic fulfillment is not a staple of Jewish interpretive history. As a Jewish author, Matthew would not have had a precedent for such a blatant disregard for Jewish interpretation of OT prophecies. And he would have been subject to criticism from the Jewish interpretive community for falsifying predictive prophecy. Second, the apostles, including Matthew, were so gripped by the reality of Jesus as the Messiah that they suffered persecution at the hands of the Jews, and most of them later experienced martyrdom. They would not have been willing to die for a lie they themselves helped to invent. Third, when the Gospels were written and circulated, there were many people still living who had been alive when the events of Jesus' life had occurred. They would have confronted Matthew with his fabrication. But no such record of this kind of

accusation against Matthew surfaces from the ancient records. Fourth, the Jewish people would have used these kinds of fabrications as a way of discrediting the claims that Jesus was the Messiah. If Jesus had not been born in Bethlehem, or if his claim to being Messiah were not in line with OT prophecies, they would have been readily denied by Jews who were familiar with the details. However, we do not hear of any such accusations, not even from the Talmud, which at points speaks derogatorily about Jesus but never accuses his followers of falsification of Jesus' life to fit messianic prophecies. (For a rebuttal of the scholarly charge that Matthew was a creative midrashic interpreter, see France 1981, 239–66; Quarles 1996, 457–64; idem 1998, 139–49; Blomberg 2007, 76–87. For an overview of OT prophecies and their fulfillment in Jesus, see Kaiser 1995, 13–35; 231–35, passim. For a popular overview, see the interview in Strobel 1998, 171–87.)

Herod's order to massacre the male children **(2:16)**: No extrabiblical sources mention the massacre of all male children two years old and younger in Bethlehem and the surrounding area. Not even Josephus, who commented at length on the evils of Herod, says anything about it. Does this silence suggest that Matthew's account is fictional?

When Herod built the fortress/palace/tomb known as the "Herodium" around 23 BC, life became more oppressive for the people of Bethlehem. The Herodium was a steep, conical, artificial mountain into which was integrated a palatial villa for Herod's summer visits and a fortress for his security. Since Bethlehem is situated only three to four miles northwest of the Herodium, local residents would have been forced to supply labor for its construction. There was no natural source of water for the fortress, so Herod had built a water channel from a spring south of Bethlehem. The military detachment stationed at the fortress was charged to guard the primary trade route from Jerusalem to Hebron. Bethlehem lay on that route, which would have caused a constant oppressive military presence in the village (Netzer, *ABD* 3:176–80). Only 123 men returned to Bethlehem from the Babylonian deportation (Ezra 2:21), and it appears not to have grown beyond a small village of perhaps 1,000 people by the time of Jesus' birth. Herod's heavy hand had exacted a toll on Bethlehem for decades, but it now came down with unthinkable horror.

Herod's paranoia and revenge over threats to his throne are well documented. He realized that the wise men somehow had gotten wind of his true intentions and had fled, so he decided to take the situation into his own hands by putting to death any potential challenger to his throne. His earlier query of the wise men

about the time of the appearing of the star gave him a fairly good estimate of the birth of the child (2:7). Herod ordered the execution of all boys in the Bethlehem vicinity who might have been born within the two-year time period. This would reckon to approximately 10–30 slain boys, given the size of the town (Cazelles, *ABD* 1:712; Hagner 1993, 37). Although this is a heart-rending loss for the village, the magnitude of the incident would perhaps not stand out significantly on a national scale when seen in the light of other horrific events in Herod's infamous career. Herod murdered his own sons and his wife Mariamne and ordered that 2,000 Jewish leaders be executed after his death so that the nation would mourn him, although this order was not carried out. The Bethlehem tragedy was another in a long line of atrocities carried out by Herod, and thus it is understandable that it either by-passed the attention of historians (Osborne 2010, 99) or that extrabiblical mention of it has passed out of existence.

What was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled (2:17–18): Has Matthew misrepresented Jeremiah's meaning by applying it to the Bethlehem massacre (Matt 2:18; cf. Jer 31:15)? Matthew is looking back to centuries earlier when Nebuchadnezzar's army had gathered into Ramah all the captives from Judah before they were driven into exile in Babylon (Jer 40:1–2). Jeremiah depicted Rachel, the personification of the mothers of Israel, mourning for her children as they were carried away. There was no comfort for her because they were "no more"—i.e., no longer a nation and considered as dead. But even as Jeremiah pictured this mourning for exiled Israel, he offered a word of comfort. There was hope for their future because God would restore Rachel's children to their land (Jer 31:16–17), and messianic joy would come in the future establishment of the new covenant with Israel (Jer 31:31–34).

Matthew's use of Jeremiah is similar to his earlier citation of Micah (cf. Matt 2:15). He is not pointing to fulfillment in the sense of prediction-accomplishment, but to fulfillment in the sense of analogical correspondence. Herod's attempt to eliminate the newborn king of the Jews corresponded to an earlier attempt by a foreign power to wipe out God's chosen people.

Now again, in the atrocities of Herod, Israel experiences suffering and anguish in Bethlehem, but the earlier promise will now be actualized. Rachel had died and was buried in Zelzah near Ramah, while traveling to Bethlehem (Gen 35:19; 48:7; cf. 1 Sam 10:2. Later tradition confused these references to imply that Bethlehem was the actual site of Rachel's tomb; see Wenham 1994, 327). Matthew links the site of the deportation and the site of the massacre, where in both cases enemy forces attempt to thwart God's plan of salvation.

Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod (2:22): Is Matthew correct about the ruler's name and region of rulership? And did Archelaus have a reputation for violence that would justify Joseph's assessment? Herod was famously indecisive about the succession of his power, remaking his will at least seven times (Richardson 1999, 33–38). He settled on dividing the kingdom between three of his sons: Archelaus, Herod Antipas, and Herod Philip (cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 17:188–89).

Archelaus, a 19-year-old son by Malthace, was appointed successor to Herod's throne, with power over Judea, including Samaria and Idumaea (Matt 2:22). Herod wanted Archelaus to be called king, as he himself had been, but Augustus Caesar made him content with being called ethnarch. He reigned from 4 BC–AD 6. Archelaus continued his father's cruelty. He overreacted to an uprising in the temple at Passover after his father's death in 4 BC, sending in troops and cavalry, with the result that about 3,000 pilgrims were killed (Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.9.3 §§213–18; *Jewish War* 2.6.2 §§88–90). He was notorious for his treatment of Jews and Samaritans (Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.7.3 §111), using oppressive measures to quell uprisings. Joseph's fear of Archelaus fits the historical context, for there was widespread fear and hatred of him among the Jews, so much so that Augustus feared a revolution. For this reason he deposed Archelaus from office and banished him to Gaul in AD 6. The rule over Judea was thereafter passed to Roman rulers called prefects, one of whom was Pontius Pilate, infamous for Jesus' trial (AD 26–36; Luke 3:1; 23:1).

Then he went and settled in a town called Nazareth (2:23): Matthew has not previously mentioned Nazareth, and his bringing it up here may seem to imply that Nazareth has played no prior role in the lives of Joseph and Mary, and yet Luke (1:26 and 2:4) has Mary and Joseph living in Nazareth prior to Jesus' birth. Does Matthew's treatment of Nazareth indicate that he was unaware of the previous residence in Nazareth, and that he and Luke conflict on this point?

Each of the Evangelists dwells on details not found in the others, but together they provide a more complete record. Here, Matthew focuses only on the *fact* of Mary's miraculous conception, whereas Luke goes into great detail regarding the *particulars* of Jesus' birth and early years. Luke goes further back, recounting more historical events than any of the Evangelists, including the announcement and conception of John the Baptist to Elizabeth and Zechariah (Luke 1:5–25), the announcement by the angel Gabriel to Mary of her forthcoming miraculous conception (1:26–38), her journey to visit her relative Elizabeth in the hill country of Judah (1:39–45), her famous *Magnificat* in which she gives praise to

God for her privilege to carry the child Jesus (1:46–55), her stay with Elizabeth for three months (1:56), and then the birth of John the Baptist to Elizabeth and Zechariah (1:57–80). Luke likewise is the only Evangelist to record the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem for the census, the actual events of the birth of Jesus, the heavenly choir of angels and the visit of the shepherds (2:1–20), the presentation of the infant Jesus in the temple (2:21–38), and the visit to Jerusalem when Jesus was 12 years of age (2:41–52). On the other hand, only Matthew records the visit of the Magi some two years after Jesus' birth, the journey to Egypt, and the subsequent settling in Nazareth. For Matthew not to mention the place of Jesus' conception in Nazareth is simply an omitted detail—another example of the way that the Evangelists focus on details that fit their overall purposes—that does not entail conflict. (See further comments at Luke 2:39.)

What was spoken through the prophets, that He will be called a Nazarene (2:23): Two questions arise from this text. First, what prophets does Matthew have in mind? No prophecy in the OT predicted that Messiah would be called a Nazarene. Second, what would it even mean that Jesus was to be called a Nazarene? The most straightforward observation is that by "Nazarene" Matthew is identifying Jesus as one who came from Nazareth. This does not capture the fullness of Matthew's intention, but it is likely part of his meaning. People did not have last names in ancient times, so they were identified in other ways, such as their vocation, family relations, or residence. "Nazarene" (Gk *Nazōraios*) derives from "Nazareth" (Gk *Nazaret*) to indicate a person from that town. Other NT authors used the terms interchangeably as well: "Jesus from Nazareth" using *Nazarene* (Luke 4:34; cf. Mark 1:24; 10:47) is equivalent to "Jesus the Nazarene" using *Nazōraios* (Luke 18:37). See also the occurrence of *Nazōraios* to specify Jesus as being from the town of Nazareth (John 18:5, 7; 19:19; Acts 2:22; 3:6; 4:10; 6:14; 22:8; 26:9). Jesus' followers were later identified as the "sect of the Nazarenes" using *Nazōraios* (Acts 24:5) to specify them as followers of the Jesus.

The fact that we cannot find any direct OT prophecy that predicts that Messiah will be called a Nazarene suggests that Matthew intends the expression "what was spoken through the prophets" to be a form of indirect discourse. He makes no pretense of quoting any particular prophet, but instead gives the substance of several OT prophecies that relate to the wordplay conjured up by "Nazareth/Nazarene." Quite likely, returnees from the Babylonian captivity founded the town and gave it a name that derived from a vernacular Aramaic or

Hebrew word. Scholars have offered several suggestions to explain the origin of the name "Nazareth" and its relation to Matthew's usage here.

First, "Watch place." Some suggest that the location of the village lies behind the origin of the name Nazareth. Since the town is situated in a high valley above the plain of Esdraelon and overlooking major trade routes, the name "Nazareth" may have derived from the Hebrew root *nsr*, meaning "to watch" or "to guard" or from the Aramaic for "watch-tower" (*naserat*) (Rousseau and Arav 1995, 214; Strange, *ABD* 4:1050–51). But more significance seems to be attached to the name than simply a location.

Second, "Those taking a vow." Others suggest that "Nazareth" comes from an Aramaic word for "vow" (*nzr*), indicating that the founders of the village were members of a religious sect whose vows formed the focus of their practices, such as the Nazarite vows of ascetic separation found in Numbers 6:1–21: abstaining from strong drink, not cutting their hair, and avoiding contact with the dead. This view suggests further that, since the expression "Nazarite of God" was used interchangeably with "holy one of God" in the LXX (cf. Judg 13:7; 16:17), "Nazarene" is linked with "Nazarite" (*nazir*) to indicate that Jesus was a Nazarite, a sort of second Sampson (cf. Num 6:1–21 with Judg 13:5, 7; 16:17). In this case, Matthew may be emphasizing that Jesus took on certain vows as "the holy one of God" (cf. Mark 1:24): he was intent upon purity and holiness. Those who understand Jesus to be an observant Jew have recently adapted this view (e.g., Brown 1993, 210–13; Davies and Allison 1988, 276–77). However, the portrait of Jesus from the Gospels does not square with his being a "Nazarite." For instance, he would have violated the vow when he drank wine (and was falsely accused of being a drunkard in 11:19) and when he touched the dead as he raised them to life (9:23–26; See Hagner 1993, 41, for a refutation of this view).

Third, "Those hoping for 'the Branch.'" A more likely suggestion is that the original settlers may have been from the line of David, and gave the settlement a consciously messianic name, connecting the establishment of the town with the hope of the coming *nezer* "Branch" of Isaiah 11:1: "Then a shoot will grow from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit." The prophecy of Isaiah 11:1–5 was one of the most popular texts of Davidic Messianism in early Judaism (Bauckham 1995, 202–16) so it is not unlikely that a group returning from the exile and establishing a new village would give their town a name that reflects that hope. The believing remnant of Israel also are called "the branch" in Isaiah 60:21, demonstrating the solidarity of the remnant with the promised

Branch of Isaiah 11:1.

Although *nezer* only occurs in Isaiah 11:1 and 60:21 in a messianic sense, the concept of the Branch became an important designation of the Messiah in rabbinic literature (e.g., Eighteen Benedictions 15 [14]) and Targums, and the Qumran community, where "Branch of David" became a favorite appellation for the expected Messiah (e.g., 4QWar Scroll^{g} 5:3–4; 4QIsaiah Pesher^{a} 3:18 (4Q161 [4QpIsa^{a}]). The theme of a messianic "Branch" or "Shoot" surfaces strikingly in other OT contexts and prophets, using synonyms for *nezer*, especially *tsemach*, "sprout, branch, horn" (e.g., Isa 4:2; Jer 23:5; 33:15; Zech 3:8; 6:12), but also *choter*, "shoot" (Isa 11:1), *yoneq*, "young plant" (Isa 53:2), and *shoresh*, "root" (53:2). Allusions to a shoot or branch describing a messianic age are found in the DSS in 1QH^{a} 14:15; 15:19; 16:5–10 [=1QH^{a} 6:15; 7:19; 8:5–10] and 4QIsaiah Pesher^{a} 3:15–26 (4Q161 [4QpIsa^{a}]).

Together, these strands point to a significant, recognizable OT theme of a messianic branch of the line of David who would bring deliverance to Israel. The indirect discourse of Matthew's allusion to "the prophets" allows him to draw on both the Isaiah 11:1 *nezer* prophecy as well as the substance of several OT prophecies that relate to the wordplay conjured up by the "Branch" motif. The founders of Nazareth apparently were members of a movement who identified with this prophetic tradition. They were waiting for the messianic "Branch" (Isa 11:1) and living out the role of the faithful of Israel as the "branch [God] planted" (Isa 60:21). Therefore, Matthew calls upon a wordplay between Nazareth, the hope of Isaiah's well-known prophecy, and the broader OT "branch" theme, and states that Jesus' identity and ministry fulfills this grand prophetic hope. The messianic content of the Isaiah passage should, in turn, be related to the announcement of Jesus' conception: the messianic figure of Isaiah 11:1 is the Immanuel of Isaiah 7:14 (see discussion in Brown 1993, 211–13, 217–19; Hagner 1993, 41; Davies and Allison 1988, 277–79).

Matthew also uses "Nazarene" as an idiomatic expression for an individual from a remote, despised area. He draws a connection between the divinely arranged association of Jesus with Nazareth and various OT prophets who foretold that the Messiah would be despised (Pss 22:6–8, 13; 69:8, 20–21; Isa 11:1; 49:7; 53:2–3, 8; Dan 9:26; especially Isaiah 53). This Messiah has not come with fanfare or glory, but has been born in relative obscurity in Bethlehem. He and his family fled to Egypt with powerless humility in the night, and his arrival in history is surrounded with grief and sorrow due to the Bethlehem

massacre. The child will not be raised even in Bethlehem with its Davidic overtones, but rather is divinely directed to be raised in the even more obscure town of Nazareth. Nathaniel displays popular opinion when he asks, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:45–46; cf. John 7:42, 52). Matthew consistently returns to the theme of Jesus as an unpretentious figure (8:20; 11:16–19; 15:7–8), and therefore as the one who fulfills the OT prophecies that the Messiah would be despised (e.g., Isa 53:3). The consistent reference to Jesus the Nazarene presumed some kind of negative overtone as an expression of sneering scorn. This scorn was also attached to Jesus’ followers when they were ridiculed as “the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5).

Finally, Matthew’s reflection upon Jesus’ early life intends for his readers to see a double meaning in the expression “Jesus the Nazarene,” bringing together the use of “Nazarene” as messianic “Branch” or “Shoot” and the slang usage discussed in the previous paragraph. On the one hand, Jesus is the fulfillment of the hope for a messianic *nezer*—the “branch” out of the line of David. On the other hand, Jesus’ association with lowly Nazareth gives notice that his coming is not in glory. He has come as the promised Branch of David, but his coming is in lowly surroundings, not in the grandeur and glory of kings such as Herod. As the Branch from the royal line, Jesus would be “hacked down to a stump and reared in surroundings guaranteed to win him scorn” (Carson 2010, 125–26). Used by his followers, the expression “Jesus the Nazarene” was an expression of faith in him as the messianic deliverer (Acts 2:22; 3:6; 10:38). But used by his enemies it was a title of scorn utilized to deny his messianic identity (Matt 26:71; Mark 14:67).

> In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Wilderness of Judea [2] and saying, “Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!” [3] For he is the one spoken of through the prophet Isaiah, who said:
>
> **A voice of one crying out in the wilderness:**
> **Prepare the way for the Lord;**
> **make His paths straight!**
>
> [4] John himself had a camel-hair garment with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. [5] Then people from Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the vicinity of the Jordan were flocking to him, [6] and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins.

For he is the one spoken of through the prophet Isaiah (3:3): Has Matthew

altered the original quote from Isaiah 40:3, and does Isaiah's context allow for the application Matthew makes? Just as Matthew finds OT support for Jesus' beginnings in Bethlehem and Nazareth, so he finds OT support for John the Baptist's background of obscurity in the wilderness. Matthew quotes Isaiah 40:3 to explain that John is the one foretold to prepare the way for the Lord (cf. Isa 40:3). In its immediate context, Isaiah 40:3 comforts the exiles in Babylon with hope that the Lord will bring them back across the wilderness from Babylon (Oswalt 1998, 51). But the larger context of Isaiah 40–66 describes the prophecy of eschatological restoration of Israel with the result that all of humanity will see the glory of the Lord (Isa 40:5). The broad portrait that Isaiah paints in chapters 40–66 includes the Spirit-filled Messiah (Isa 42:1–4/Matt 8:17) and the Suffering Servant (Isa 65:17; 66:22; Matt 19:28) with the consummation of the kingdom in the new heavens and a new earth (Isa 65:17; 66:22/Matt 19:28).

Francis Beare criticizes Matthew for mishandling the original quotation of Isaiah (1981, 89–90). Upon closer examination, we find that the text of Matthew is quite similar with the MT and LXX, but Matthew agrees more with the LXX. Three minor differences are noted. First, the phrase "in the wilderness" modifies the "voice" in the LXX and Matthew while it modifies the verb "prepare" in the MT. Secondly, the LXX and Matthew refer to the wilderness only once while the MT refers to it twice. On the third point, Matthew diverges from both the LXX and MT, quoting "his paths" instead of citing from the MT and LXX the straight paths "for our God" (Turner 2008, 108). As we noted in 2:5–6, Matthew's interpretive method does not always follow a strictly word-for-word citation. However, these minor variants do not suggest any disharmony between Isaiah's original quotation and Matthew's rendering here.

Furthermore, Beare seems to suggest that Isaiah's original context does not allow for the application Matthew makes here (1981, 90). Blomberg explains, however, that the ministry of John was to proclaim the beginning of the eschatological vision of which Isaiah foretells (1992, 72–75). We understand this to mean that the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy began with John and Jesus. In recounting the proclamation that "the kingdom of heaven has come near" (3:2), Matthew uses the perfect tense (*engizō*), pointing to the present as the moment of the kingdom's arrival (Blomberg 1992, 73). John the Baptist proclaims that Jesus has *already* inaugurated the kingdom, but it has *not yet* reached its final form. The kingdom is now present with the arrival of the messianic king of the line of David, and its arrival will confront a variety of expectations among those who experience its impact. But some of what others expected to occur immediately—

especially full judgment and restoration—awaits future final fulfillment (cf. Mark Saucy 1997). Jesus will indeed fulfill the prophetic hope. But he will bring this hope to complete fulfillment only when he returns as the Son of man in glory (cf. 24:29–31).

Where Beare sees slight differences in wording in Matthew's quotation of Isaiah, Turner points out the specificity Matthew provides in the light of his broader purpose in depicting the fulfillment of OT Law and Prophets in Jesus Messiah, and in this case even in the forerunner to Jesus, John the Baptist: "For Matthew, Isaiah's 'way of our God' is the 'way of the Lord' Jesus. If Jesus is Immanuel, 'God with us' (Matt. 1:23), then his way is 'the way of our God'" (Turner 2008, 108–9). (See further comments at Mark 1:2–3).

> 7 When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to the place of his baptism, he
> said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Therefore
> produce fruit consistent with repentance. 9 And don't presume to say to yourselves, 'We have
> Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from
> these stones! 10 Even now the ax is ready to strike the root of the trees! Therefore, every tree
> that doesn't produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.
>
> 11"I baptize you with water for repentance, but the One who is coming after me is more
> powerful than I. I am not worthy to remove His sandals. He Himself will baptize you with the
> Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing shovel is in His hand, and He will clear His threshing
> floor and gather His wheat into the barn. But the chaff He will burn up with fire that never goes
> out."
>
> 13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. 14 But John
> tried to stop Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and yet You come to me?"
>
> 15 Jesus answered him, "Allow it for now, because this is the way for us to fulfill all
> righteousness." Then he allowed Him to be baptized.
>
> 16 After Jesus was baptized, He went up immediately from the water. The heavens suddenly
> opened for Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on
> Him. 17 And there came a voice from heaven:
>
> This is My beloved Son.
> I take delight in Him!

***Why did Jesus undergo baptism?* (3:13–17)**: If Jesus was the sinless Son of God, why would he undertake John's baptism, which was a call for repentance in the light of Messiah's arrival. John was surprised at Jesus' request, and even tried to stop Jesus from being baptized (v. 14). In response to John's objection, Jesus said: "Allow it for now, because this is the way for us to fulfill all righteousness" (3:15).

The term “fulfill” (*pleroō*) continues the theme of fulfillment that has been so prominent in the beginning narrative of Matthew’s Gospel. Jesus’ conception, birth, and infancy fulfilled both specific and general prophecies (Matthew 1–2), the appearance of John fulfills OT expectations of the forerunner (3:3), and now Jesus’ baptism will “fulfill all righteousness.” Righteousness (*dikaiosune*) is an important concept in Matthew’s Gospel (cf. 3:15; 5:6, 10, 20; 6:1, 33; 21:32). Some suggest that Jesus means this in an ethical sense, that the baptism will fulfill all of the righteous expectations of the Law, similar to what Jesus will declare in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. 5:17; see Przybylski 1980), but the context does not imply an ethical submission to God’s commands. Nowhere in the OT is there a divine command to submit to John’s baptism. Therefore, we can hardly think of submission to his baptism as an act of righteousness, and certainly not a fulfillment of *all* righteousness.

More likely Jesus means “fulfill all righteousness” in a salvation-historical sense. God’s saving activity prophesied throughout the OT is now being fulfilled with the inauguration of Jesus’ ministry and will culminate in his death on the cross. This is supported by the similar salvation-historical reference to John the Baptist in 21:31–32 (Hagner 1992, 116–17). Jesus is expressing his obedience to God’s plan of salvation that has been revealed in the Scriptures (Keener 2009, 132).

The public baptism illustrated salvation-historical continuity between John the Baptist’s and Jesus’ ministries. By identifying himself with John through baptism, Jesus endorsed John’s ministry and message, and linked his own cause to John’s (“this is the way for *us* to fulfill all righteousness” 3:15; emphasis added). Further, by entering the waters of baptism, Jesus identified with his people in their need (i.e., he identified with the sinful humanity he came to save, and especially at this historical time, to identify with the believing remnant of Israel who came to be baptized; Beasley-Murray 1962, 45–67). Jesus is *Immanuel*, “God is with us,” and *Jesus*, the one who will “save His people from their sins” (1:21–23). (See further comments at Mark 1:9 and Luke 3:21.)

He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on Him. And there came a voice from heaven: This is My beloved Son. I take delight in Him! (3:16–17): With God the Father (speaking), God the Son (being baptized), and God the Holy Spirit (descending in the form of a dove) all present and distinguishable at once, does this event suggest that Christianity is a tri-theistic rather than a Trinitarian religion? Tritheism asserts that Father, Son, and Spirit are three separate gods, while Trinitarianism asserts that they are three

personal distinctions within the essence of one God.

At this early date of Jesus' ministry, Matthew is only hinting at what will later be made clearer in his Gospel and in the rest of the NT—that there is one God, but within that oneness of essence there are three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Tritheism is certainly not a biblical option. The OT repeatedly affirms that there is but one God: "Listen, Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is One" (Deut 6:4), and both Jesus and the apostles repeat this truth (Mark 12:29; 1 Cor 8:4, 6). Likewise, Jesus will emphasize the divine nature of Father, Son, and Spirit, and Matthew will begin pointing to this stupendous truth. As Morris states, "Matthew has certain trinitarian interest" (Morris 1992, 68). Matthew concludes his Gospel with another trinitarian allusion in Jesus' instruction that new disciples are to be baptized in the singular name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (28:19). This is the oneness of God in three personal distinctions.

Matthew lays out a clear picture of Jesus' deity by drawing upon OT prophecies. Prior to the incarnation, the strong divine language of some of the prophecies could not be adequately understood, leading to diverse views concerning the nature of the Messiah (see Kaiser 1995). But for Matthew, the reality of the incarnation now makes clear God's revelation through the prophets: Jesus is God the Son, who is in vital relationship with his Father God, in the power of the Spirit of God. That all three members of the godhead share the same essence does not lead to an expectation that they cannot be present and active in the same scene. If they could not simultaneously participate in a scene such as this, they would in fact not be three persons. (See further comments at Mark 1:10–11.)

> Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. 2 After He had fasted 40 days and 40 nights, He was hungry. 3 Then the tempter approached Him and said, "If You are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."
>
> 4 But He answered, "It is written:
>
> **Man must not live on bread alone**
> **but on every word that comes**
> **from the mouth of God.**"
>
> 5 Then the Devil took Him to the holy city, had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written:
>
> **He will give His angels orders concerning you,**
> **and they will support you with their hands**
> **so that you will not strike**

your foot against a stone."

7 Jesus told him, "It is also written: **Do not test the Lord your God.**"

8 Again, the Devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 And he said to Him, "I will give You all these things if You will fall down and worship me."

10 Then Jesus told him, "Go away, Satan! For it is written:

Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only Him."

11 Then the Devil left Him, and immediately angels came and began to serve Him.

The order of the temptations (4:1–11): Matthew and Luke have similar temptation narratives (cf. Luke 4:3–12), but they reverse the order of the second and third temptations. Critics charge this represents a contradiction, but that is an unnecessarily skeptical conclusion. The differences instead illustrate how each Evangelist chose to narrate the incidents for his particular purpose. There is no reason to suppose they did not have this sort of freedom; no two historians recount the same event without variation of emphasis or perspective. In this case Matthew is intent on narrating chronological sequence, while Luke has a more theological purpose in placing the temple temptation last (cf. Marshall 1978, 166–67; Nolland 1989, 180–81). To connect the first and second temptations, Matthew uses the sequential adverb "then" (4:5), which he elsewhere uses regularly to note chronological progression (e.g., 3:13; 41). To connect the second and third temptations, he uses the adverb "again" (4:8), which continues the thought of chronological progression. On the other hand, Luke uses simple connectors, "and" (*kai* 4:5; *de*, 4:9), which do not imply chronological progression. Luke was committed to preserving accurately the historical account of Jesus' life and ministry (Luke 1:1–4), but chronology was not his concern here, and that does not mean that he is in formal conflict with Matthew or that he has altered the historical record of the temptations, as is implied in some scholars (e.g., Taylor 2001, 27–49). (See further comments at Luke 4:1–13.)

Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil (4:1): James 1:13 says "God is not tempted by evil, and He Himself doesn't tempt anyone." In this light, does Scripture contradict Scripture when Matthew says Jesus was driven into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted by the Devil? The word "tempted" is the verb *peirazo,* which can mean either "I tempt" or "I test" (BAGD, 646). A *temptation* is an enticement to get a person to violate God's will. A *test* tries to get a person to prove himself or herself faithful to the will of God, with the good intention that the person will pass the test. Scripture

says God never *tempts* anyone to do evil (Jas 1:13), but God does use circumstances to *test* a person's character or resolve with the intended purpose of promoting good ends (e.g., Heb 11:17).

Temptation and testing are flip sides of the same coin. Satan intends to get Jesus to go contrary to the Father's will. But in the middle of those circumstances, the Father uses Satan's evil intention to a good purpose of strengthening Jesus for his messianic role. Scripture is clear that Satan does not act independently of God. For instance, Satan tried to get Job to curse God and act contrary to God's will, but God was always in control of the situation (Job 1). Temptation must be seen in the context of testing, because God is in control of both the tempter and the circumstances, and he will never allow anyone to be tempted beyond what they are enabled to endure (1 Cor 10:13).

Jehovah's Witnesses believe this passage indicates that Jesus could not have been God. After all, they argue, Jesus was tempted, whereas God cannot be tempted with evil (Jas 1:13). It is important to realize that although Jesus' temptations were unique to his mission as the messianic inaugurator of the kingdom, his temptations also are common to human experience, and give us an example of what we can do in our own spiritual warfare. In his deity Jesus could not be tempted, but in his humanity he was tempted at all points like we are, yet without sin (Heb 2:18; 4:15–16). The temptations were directed to his human nature, and he experienced the maximum level of temptation that the demonic world could throw at him. The garden of Gethsemane scene indicates quite clearly that temptation was a very real, agonizing experience (see Luke 22:44).

The Devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world (4:8): How could Jesus and Satan see "all the kingdoms of the world" from a high place? It is not possible to see all locations at once on a spherical earth. Some have taken this verse as evidence that the whole temptation scene is a fiction and that the biblical authors believed in a flat earth. Less critical readers ask if aspects of the temptation were visionary instead of literal, or perhaps a mixture of both.

The detail about seeing all the kingdoms may indicate that at least this temptation came through some type of visionary experience. As to whether biblical authors believed in a flat earth, it is likely that they did. Pythagoras postulated the sphericity of earth in the sixth century BC and Aristotle adopted it two centuries later, but this knowledge was the privilege of the educated elite. If the masses in Jesus' day assumed a flat earth model, it is fitting that Jesus' temptation is described in accordance with that model.

It is likewise difficult to imagine how the Devil literally whisked Jesus away from the wilderness to the pinnacle of the temple for the second temptation. However, since the range of the Devil's powers is immense, we may safely assume that Satan used whatever forces were at his disposal for very real temptations. Some supernatural powers were surely at work here to tempt the Son of God (cf. Carson 2010, 142–43). (See further comments at Luke 4:5.)

> 12 When He heard that John had been arrested, He withdrew into Galilee. 13 He left Nazareth
> behind and went to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.
> 14 This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:
>
> 15 **Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,**
> **along the sea road, beyond the Jordan,**
> **Galilee of the Gentiles!**
> 16 **The people who live in darkness**
> **have seen a great light,**
> **and for those living in the shadowland of death,**
> **light has dawned.**
>
> 17 From then on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come
> near!"
> 18 As He was walking along the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon, who was called
> Peter, and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the sea, since they were fishermen.
> 19 "Follow Me," He told them, "and I will make you fish for people!" 20 Immediately they left
> their nets and followed Him.
> 21 Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and his brother
> John. They were in a boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and He called them.
> 22 Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed Him.
> 23 Jesus was going all over Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of
> the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. 24 Then the news about
> Him spread throughout Syria. So they brought to Him all those who were afflicted, those
> suffering from various diseases and intense pains, the demon-possessed, the epileptics, and the
> paralytics. And He healed them. 25 Large crowds followed Him from Galilee, Decapolis,
> Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.

He withdrew into Galilee. He left Nazareth behind and went to live in Capernaum by the sea (4:12–13): Nazareth and Capernaum are both in Galilee. If so, in what sense did Jesus withdraw "into Galilee" in his journey from Nazareth to Capernaum? Critics have said Matthew makes a geographic blunder here. This charge is a misreading of what Matthew is doing. Matthew's statement does not mean that Jesus "withdrew into Galilee" by leaving Nazareth

behind and traveling to Capernaum. Rather, Matthew is saying that Jesus withdrew into Galilee, stopping first in Nazareth, and then going on to Capernaum. So, after his baptism and temptation, and the arrest of John the Baptist, Jesus returned to the region of Galilee. He went first to his hometown of Nazareth, a fact that Matthew barely mentions. Luke supplies more details about the visit to Nazareth. Jesus attended the synagogue, and as a returning successful preacher, read from Scripture. However, he offended the townspeople's ethnic sensitivities when he revealed that his ministry would include Gentiles, so they attempted to kill him (cf. Luke 4:16–31). Thus leaving hostile Nazareth, Jesus made Capernaum his base of operations and his new hometown for the length of his ministry in Galilee (4:13).

This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah (4:14–16): In verses 15–16 Matthew quotes from Isaiah 9:1–2 (part of the Isa 9:1–7 passage) for his sixth OT prophecy citation in the narrative, and the fifth using his distinctive fulfillment formula. Has he misused the Isaiah passage by applying it to Jesus' withdrawal into Galilee? Isaiah 9:1–7 clearly has messianic overtones (see especially verse 6), justifying Matthew's usage. Zebulun and Naphtali were tribes of Israel that settled in the northernmost region near the Sea of Galilee. Nazareth was in the territory of Zebulun in the lower Galilee region, while Capernaum was in Naphtali in the upper Galilee region. The "sea road" (4:15) was the trade route that ran through this region to the Mediterranean Sea (the Roman "Via Maris"). Matthew recognizes that Jesus' ministry will extend far beyond the confines of Galilee. It will influence those traveling through the region, people from beyond the Jordan, and ultimately the Gentiles.

Ever since falling under Assyrian control in 732 BC (2 Kgs 15:29), this region experienced turmoil and forced infiltration of Gentile influence. The inhabitants are called "the people who live in darkness" (4:16), a description of Jews who await deliverance while living among the hopelessness of the Gentiles. Here, where the darkness is most dense, these Jews are the first to see the great light of God's deliverance in Jesus. This light presages the universal message of hope, because from this same region of "Galilee of the Gentiles" Jesus will send the disciples to carry out the commission to make disciples of all the Gentiles (28:18).

Calling of the first disciples **(4:18–22)**: At first glance we might assume that this is Jesus' first encounter with these two brothers, and that he is calling them to respond to his message to repent and enter the kingdom (4:17). Seen this way,

the call and response has been perceived to give an indication of Jesus' evangelistic influence; he is calling these four to salvation, and as they respond, they become believers. But the Fourth Gospel indicates that the two sets of brothers, Peter and Andrew, James and John, had extensive prior acquaintance with Jesus, and even believed in him as Messiah (cf. John 1:41; 2:11). It is difficult to determine when it is that these individuals were "saved" according to our current post-resurrection categories. Perhaps we should emphasize most that the true nature of Jesus' identity was so mind-boggling that it is difficult to determine how much these four understood about Jesus at this time. But we should likewise emphasize that they were responding as much as they could, to as much as they understood.

Luke 5:1–11 gives a fuller account of the calling of the first disciples. Does Matthew's briefer version leave room for the details in Luke's account? In Luke's account, when Peter saw the miraculous catch of fish produced by Jesus, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, because I'm a sinful man" (Luke 5:8). It is difficult to reconcile the chronology of these incidents, but it is likely that they are similar but had different intended effects on the brothers. Throughout Jesus' ministry there is an increasing understanding of who he was, and that increasing understanding required a corresponding adjustment of their commitment to him. Comparing incidents in the later ministry, we see Peter making a confession about Jesus' identity that had only at a later point been revealed to him (16:16), and the Fourth Gospel tells of an incident some time later when Peter makes a statement of commitment to Jesus for eternal life (John 6:66–68). As we watch various persons encounter Jesus, we must always recognize that this was a unique time, where the full significance of the entrance of the God-man into history was only slowly comprehended. Indeed, it would take the resurrection to finally break through and bring full comprehension. Although the explicit intention of the call is to join Jesus in fishing for men, these brothers are first and foremost being called to commit themselves to Jesus. (See further comments at Luke 5:1–11.)

The news about Him spread throughout Syria (4:24): "Throughout Syria" seems to imply the Roman region of Syria. Critics have argued that it seems implausible that word about Jesus reached this far and that people were brought from there to see Jesus. A misidentification lies behind this challenge. In addition to being understood politically as the Roman province which included Palestine (cf. Luke 2:2–5; Acts 15:23), "Syria" can also be understood geographically as the region north of Galilee. It is in this region that the word

about Jesus spread, and there is nothing infeasible about that happening.

So they brought to Him . . . the demon-possessed, the epileptics . . . (4:24): The line between physical and spiritual illness was not always clearly demarcated in the ancient world, and critics have said that the Bible incorrectly attributes diseases such as epilepsy to demonic activity. While this blurring of lines can in part be attributed to ancient limits in medical science, it also indicates a more holistic understanding of the human condition. Sin is not necessarily the immediate cause of a specific illness, but the Genesis story of the fall informs us that sin lies at the base of the entrance of death and disease to the human condition. Matthew's recurring emphasis upon healing will highlight throughout the narrative that the arrival of the kingdom is confirmed by Jesus' power over all realms of human existence, whether it is spiritual, physical, or emotional.

As news of Jesus' ministry spreads outside the borders of Galilee, people began bringing to Jesus those beset with all kinds of afflictions. Matthew emphasizes the impact of Jesus' comprehensive healing ministry by stacking up a list of illnesses. Of particular interest for the present question, Matthew distinguishes between people who were "demon-possessed" (*daimonizomai*) and "epileptics" (*selēniazomai*, lit. "moonstruck"), an illness that will be associated with demon possession in 17:14–21. Thus it is clear that the NT sometimes sees epilepsy as caused by demons, and sometimes by natural causes. (See also comments on 17:18.)

> When He saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain, and after He sat down, His disciples
> came to Him. 2 Then He began to teach them.

***The Sermon on the Mount* (5:1–7:27)**: A message with striking similarity occurs in Luke's Gospel (Luke 6:17–49), and a comparison of the two versions leads some to question whether they are the same event and if they are contradictory. Similarities include:

- both sermons come in the context of Jesus' widespread speaking and healing ministry among the crowds (4:23–25; Luke 6:17–19)
- both begin with beatitudes
- both give significant ethical teaching on love and judging
- both emphasize the necessity of bearing fruit
- both conclude with the parable of the wise builder

There are significant differences between the two accounts as well:

- Matthew does not include the “woes” of Luke’s beatitudes (Luke 6:24–26)
- Luke does not include the majority of the antitheses found in Matthew (5:21–48)
- Luke’s version of the “Lord’s prayer” does not occur in his sermon but elsewhere (Luke 11:1–4)
- Luke 6:17 puts the setting in a “level place,” whereas Matthew describes a “mountain” setting (5:1)

These similarities and differences have led to different conclusions about how the accounts are related. First, the similarities lead some to assert that Matthew and Luke present two distinct summaries of the same sermon (e.g., Bock 1994, 553; Carson 2010, 154; Osborne 2010, 160–61). Second, the differences lead others to suggest that Matthew and Luke record two different sermons, which Jesus gave on separate occasions but included similar content (e.g., Blomberg 1992, 96; Morris 1992, 93). Any good preacher will repeat effective illustrations and preaching points, a fact that lends support to this view. Third, still others propose that either Matthew or Luke (or both) gathered together teachings that Jesus gave on separate occasions and presented them as if they were given in one sermon (e.g., Betz 1995, 44–45; France 2008, 154–155; Guelich 1982, 35; Hagner 1993, 69). The latter is usually suggested because there are parallels to Matthew’s sermon scattered throughout Luke’s Gospel (e.g., cf. 5:13 in Luke 14:34–35; 5:14 in Luke 11:33, etc.; see Hagner 1993, 83, for a complete listing).

Since Matthew and Luke both imply that their sermons were given on one occasion, the third view is least likely. The first view is strengthened by observing the same general context, the general order, and the similar geographical setting (a mountainous area can feature flat spots) of both sermons. The second view is strengthened by recalling that Jesus went about teaching and preaching all through the countryside of Galilee for nearly two years, and he almost certainly repeated much of the same content on numerous occasions. Since nothing of great importance relies on the solution to this question, it may be best to say that until further insight is gained either the first or second view is preferable. (See further comments at Luke 6:17–49.)

3 “The poor in spirit are blessed,

for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

4 Those who mourn are blessed,
for they will be comforted.

5 The gentle are blessed,
for they will inherit the earth.

6 Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are blessed,
for they will be filled.

7 The merciful are blessed,
for they will be shown mercy.

8 The pure in heart are blessed,
for they will see God.

9 The peacemakers are blessed,
for they will be called sons of God.

10 Those who are persecuted for righteousness are blessed,
for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

11 "You are blessed when they insult and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of Me. 12 Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It's no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled on by men.

14 "You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

You are the light of the world (5:14): Does Jesus' statement contradict other passages in which he identifies himself as "the light of the world" (John 8:12; 9:5), who has come as the light which enlightens all people (John 1:4–14), so that those believing in him would no longer be in darkness (John 12:46)? Rather than a contradiction, Jesus is saying that in the same way that his life and message of salvation brings light to those in darkness (Matt 4:15–16), his disciples are a living demonstration of the arrival of the kingdom of heaven. The light of revelation from God that accompanies Jesus' announcement of the kingdom is not just carried by his disciples; they *are* that light as they represent him and convey his message of hope (Matt 5:14–16; cf. Eph 5:8; Phil 2:15).

Let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works (5:16): Critics allege that Jesus' statement contradicts what he says a short time later in Matthew 6:1, where he warns his followers, "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of people, to be seen by them. Otherwise, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven." Are they correct to see

contradiction here? Motivation is the key differentiator in these two teachings. In 5:16, Jesus speaks to the purpose of discipleship. Jesus calls his followers to be the light of the world, and when acting in accordance with God's purposes they do this for God's glory rather than their own. He later contrasts this motivation with the motive of religious leaders and religious hypocrites who display their piety before men not for God's glory, but for their own (6:1, 5).

> 17 "Don't assume that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but
> to fulfill. 18 For I assure you: Until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one
> stroke of a letter will pass from the law until all things are accomplished. 19 Therefore, whoever
> breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches people to do so will be called least in the
> kingdom of heaven. But whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in
> the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes
> and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

I did not come to destroy but to fulfill (5:17): Some interpret Jesus' "You have heard that it was said . . . But I tell you" statements to indicate that he set himself in opposition to the Law and the OT Scriptures (for more on this issue, see comments on 5:21–48). But Jesus categorically declares, "Don't assume that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets" (5:17). The expression "Don't assume" (*Mē nomisēte*) reflects a contrary to fact supposition, indicating that Jesus is countering a suspicion that was circulating in response to his teachings. An attempt to set aside God's former revelation would have been seen as the ultimate mark of a heretic (Keener 2009, 176n46). So Jesus makes clear from the very beginning of his ministry that the arrival of the kingdom (4:17) does not do away with God's prior revelation through the Law and the Prophets. The "Law" or "Torah" refers to the first five books of the OT, also known as the books of Moses or the Pentateuch. The "Prophets" includes the major and minor prophets of the OT. The expression "the Law or the Prophets" (cf. 7:12; 11:13; 22:40; Rom 3:21) is a shorthand way of referring to the entire Hebrew Bible, which Christians call the OT. Instead of doing away with what God had previously revealed about his will for his people, Jesus' purpose for his earthly ministry is wrapped up in the formula, "I have come to fulfill them" (Carter 1998, 44–62).

Not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass from the law (5:18): If not a single letter nor even a stroke of a letter will pass from the law until heaven and earth pass away, should Christians adhere to all of the OT, even the portions that call for the death penalty for offenses such as Sabbath breaking and

adultery? Jesus affirms that “the Law” (here a reference to the entire OT) endures forever as a revelation of God’s will for humans throughout history, until all is “accomplished” (*genētai*). This does not mean all aspects of the OT have permanent application after the coming of Christ. Some specifics have been accomplished in Jesus’ ministry. For example, the teaching of death and the shedding of blood to atone for sin is no longer expressed through temple sacrifices, but rather has been accomplished once for all in Christ’s atonement on the cross (cf. Heb 9:11–14). There is no further need to carry out the OT guidelines for sacrifices. Nevertheless the OT principle of penalty and payment for sin remains valid and needs to be taught and understood as God’s will (Dorsey 1991, 321–34). This is true also of Israel’s responsibility to exercise judgment for sin, such as the stoning of an adulterer and adulteress (Lev 20:10). Today the church does not carry out such laws. There is no verse instructing the cessation of such punishment. We understand that the principle of punishment for sin is still in place, but may be carried out by God in other ways in this life or in eternity. Also, God uses governments in this age to carry out the punishment of evildoers (cf. Rom 13:1–5).

> 21 “You have heard that it was said to our ancestors, Do not murder, and whoever murders will
> be subject to judgment. 22 But I tell you, everyone who is angry with his brother will be subject
> to judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Fool!’ will be subject to the Sanhedrin. But
> whoever says, ‘You moron!’ will be subject to hellfire. 23 So if you are offering your gift on the
> altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift
> there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer
> your gift. 25 Reach a settlement quickly with your adversary while you’re on the way with him,
> or your adversary will hand you over to the judge, the judge to the officer, and you will be
> thrown into prison. 26 I assure you: You will never get out of there until you have paid the last
> penny!
>
> 27 “You have heard that it was said, Do not commit adultery. 28 But I tell you, everyone who
> looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your
> right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of
> the parts of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right
> hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts
> of your body than for your whole body to go into hell!
>
> 31 “It was also said, Whoever divorces his wife must give her a written notice of divorce.
> 32 But I tell you, everyone who divorces his wife, except in a case of sexual immorality, causes
> her to commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.
>
> 33 “Again, you have heard that it was said to our ancestors, You must not break your oath, but

you must keep your oaths to the Lord. 34 But I tell you, don't take an oath at all: either by heaven, because it is God's throne; 35 or by the earth, because it is His footstool; or by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great King. 36 Neither should you swear by your head, because you cannot make a single hair white or black. 37 But let your word 'yes' be 'yes,' and your 'no' be 'no.' Anything more than this is from the evil one.

38 "You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. 39 But I tell you, don't resist an evildoer. On the contrary, if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40 As for the one who wants to sue you and take away your shirt, let him have your coat as well. 41 And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 Give to the one who asks you, and don't turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

43 "You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. For He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don't even the Gentiles do the same? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

You have heard that it was said . . . But I tell you (5:21–48): This section of the Sermon on the Mount is commonly called "the antitheses" because six times Jesus says a variation of, "You have heard that it was said . . . but I tell you." This has been mistakenly interpreted to mean that Jesus makes his teaching the antithesis of the OT itself (e.g., Luz 2007, 277–79), as if he were overturning and declaring incorrect the testimonies of the OT. But in reality Jesus is contrasting his interpretation of the OT with faulty *interpretations* and/or *applications* of the OT. In each of the antitheses, Jesus demonstrates how the OT is to be properly interpreted and applied, and thus, how the Law and the Prophets are fulfilled (cf. 5:17). This elevates Jesus above all interpreters, making his pronouncements equivalent with Scripture itself. The scribes and Pharisees held sway over the common people, mapping out a course for attaining righteousness through their interpretation and application of the OT. They emphasized legalistic, external obedience to the Law without calling attention to an inner heart-obedience. They were therefore "hypocrites" in their practice of the Law (see on 6:1–18), and were responsible for leading the people into hypocritical practices. Jesus looks at several examples of how they had done this, and demonstrates how correct interpretation and application of the Law must be based upon proper *intent* and *motive*. Jesus does not say, "Hear what the OT says," but rather, "You have heard it said." He is not negating the OT, but the people's incorrect understanding and application of it.

Whoever says to his brother, "Fool!" will be subject to the Sanhedrin (5:22): As Jesus begins expounding on the Law, he condemns not only outward actions, but the state of the heart. For example, he condemns anyone who calls another disciple a "fool." The Greek term behind "fool" is *raca*, a transliteration of an Aramaic term implying "empty headed." Critics have suggested that Jesus violated his own rule in Luke 11:40, where he says "Fools!" of the Pharisees. But a different Greek term (*afrōn*) underlies "fools" in that case. Jesus used *afrōn* to describe religious leaders who perverted religious activities to make themselves appear righteous. They are truly religious fools, for God sees their false righteousness for what it is. Jesus' prohibition against empty name calling in Matthew 5:22 has no bearing on his use of *afrōn* in Luke 11.

Whoever says, "You moron!" will be subject to hellfire (5:22): The term *moreh* is either a transliteration of an Aramaic word meaning "rebel," indicating a person who was a persistent rebel against God (Tasker 1961, 68–69), or, more likely, it is from the Greek term *mōros* (the origin of the English term "moron"), indicating a person who consistently acted like an idiot. Can it really be that calling someone a "moron" earns a sentence in hell, and is Jesus' himself in danger of hellfire in light of his use of *mōros* elsewhere?

"Moron" is not simple name-calling, but an attempt to slander or defame a person. To treat one's brother with such contempt strips away his personal identity. To do this to your brother suggests that you have wrong standing with God. Further, we must understand Jesus' pronouncement in the light of his statements elsewhere. In the conclusion to the Sermon he applies the adjective *mōros* to the man who built his house on the sand (7:26), and later he applies it to the five girls who forgot to take a supply of oil to keep their torches alight (25:2–3). Jesus here prohibits using the epithet against a "brother" (i.e., a fellow disciple), while the latter cases where Jesus uses the term are directed against those outside the kingdom and who have been foolish in rejecting the kingdom (Gundry 1994, 463). Thus Jesus is not inconsistent with his own teachings. For additional commentary on this topic, see comments on 23:17. (See further comments at Luke 11:40.)

Will be subject to hellfire (5:22): What role did a trash dump near Jerusalem play in popular imagery for hell? If the imagery for hell was drawn from the dump in the Hinnom Valley, does it make the origin of this doctrine seem ill-founded, a manmade idea rather than a revelation of God? "Hellfire" comes from the term *geennan,* where we get the English transliteration, "Gehenna." It

is a transliteration of the Aramaic form of the Hebrew *gebenhinnom* (“valley of the son of Hinnom”), a valley west and southwest of Jerusalem. Here Ahaz and Manasseh sacrificed their sons to Molech (2 Kgs 16:3; 21:6; Jer 32:35; cf. 7:31–32; 19:1–13), which caused Josiah to defile the place so that it would be unacceptable as a holy place (2 Kgs 23:10). The valley was an appropriate image of hell because it was the place of mass burial for those slain in battle by God’s judgment (Jer 7:30–34). Later the valley was used to burn refuse from Jerusalem, so the constant burning made the valley an appropriate reference to fires of punishment. Jewish apocalyptic writers began to call the Valley of Hinnom the entrance to hell, later hell itself (*4 Ezra* 7:36), and by the time of Jesus the term was used to indicate the state of final punishment (cf. Matt 18:9). Burning by fire evokes images of judgment that satisfies God’s holiness, but also the suffering of those undergoing punishment. Jesus is clear that the imagery provides an apt illustration for what it would be like to burn for all of eternity (e.g., 7:15–23). That authors drew on the well-known conditions of the nearby dump in their portrayals of hell does not suggest that the dump was itself the inspiration for the doctrine of hell. Naturally, authors must point to analogous conditions on earth in order to portray eternal states. See also comments at 8:12 and 13:42.

You will never get out of there until you have paid the last penny! (5:26): Does this verse support of the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory? Ludwig Ott, for instance, understands this passage to be a parable teaching a “time-limited condition of punishment in the other world” expressed through the “time-limited punishment of the prison” (1962, 484). The trouble with Ott’s view is that this passage gives no indication that it is a parable. Rather, Jesus is offering practical teaching about reconciliation. The context is a litigant taking a disciple to court, apparently over a dispute about money (5:26). This probably assumes a Gentile legal setting, since there is no record in Jewish law of imprisonment for debt. Before the legal process is put into action, Jesus’ disciples are to “settle matters quickly” (5:25; *isthi eunoōn*), which means literally “to make friends” quickly with one’s adversary (BDAG, 409).

If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away (5:29): Critics have said this and related statements in this section of the Sermon illustrate Jesus’ extremism plus the failure of Christians to live by his teachings. In this second antithesis (Matt 5:27–30), Jesus quotes the seventh commandment (Exod 20:14; Deut 5:17), and alludes to the tenth (Exod 20:17; Deut 5:21). He

illustrates the seriousness of lust destroying marriage through two graphic examples, gouging out the eye and cutting off the hand (v. 30). Some early church figures took the sayings here and in 19:12 literally. Origin of Alexandria made himself a eunuch, an extreme act forbade by the Council of Nicea (AD 325). Jesus is not advocating physical self-mutilation, but through dramatic figures of speech he indicates that rigorous self-discipline marks the committed disciple.

Don't take an oath at all: either by heaven, because it is God's throne (5:34): Does this verse forbid Christians to take oaths, including oaths in a court of law? In the fourth antithesis, Jesus continues to focus on the inward purity of disciples, stressing that they do not need to give an oath as an additional confirmation of their trustworthiness, because their faithful lives should confirm the reliability of their word. A dependable disciple will utter dependable words, without need of an oath. But Jesus is not suggesting that all oaths are wrong. He himself testified under oath in his trial before the Sanhedrin (26:63–64). Paul also made oaths where he invokes God as witness to try to convince his readers that his word is true (2 Cor 1:18; Gal 1:20). In a court of law a person is operating under the jurisdiction of governing authorities who are trying to establish human norms. To submit to oath taking in that context is to obey God (Rom 13:1–7; cf. Heb 6:16–18).

Don't resist an evildoer . . . (5:39–42): Should Christians adopt absolute pacifism based on this passage? "Turn the other cheek" has become a proverbial saying used to promote pacifism, stereotype Christians as wimps, or even excuse cowardice. But Jesus is not countering the OT law of retribution. Justice is as much a theme of Jesus as it was in the OT. Sin must not go unpunished, lest it ruin lives. Jesus upholds the need for justice, ultimately paying for it on the cross.

The law of retaliation was to be imposed by the civil authorities and civil courts to protect the public, to punish offenders, and to deter crime (cf. Exod 21:23–25; Lev 24:18–20; Deut 19:20–21). Individuals were not to administer it because the person offended was liable to overreact (cf. Prov 20:22; 24:29; Hartley 1992, 412; Kalland 1992, 126). However, in the turbulent world of Jesus' day it became easy to use the law of retaliation to justify personal revenge. Under Roman rule, Jewish leaders had little power to execute justice for their people. Those who were hurt wanted to strike back, especially when there was no apparent justice to protect them, so personal retaliation through violent

resistance was a burning issue among the Jews.

What Jesus counteracts is the way that the law of retaliation had been used to excuse *personal* retribution. It is right to want to see justice prevail, but it is wrong when we retaliate to prove that we are strong, superior, or that we are righteous police for God. There may be times that God will use us to bring justice, but for the most part that is left to governing authorities. Paul tells believers in the church at Rome not to repay evil for evil, to be at peace with all people, and not to take revenge (Rom 12:17–19). He is telling them not to advance *personal retaliation*. Why? Because God's wrath is the avenger (12:19–20), and he has established governing authorities for the task of executing judgment on evil-doers (Rom 13:1–7). The individual Christian's responsibility is to do good to our enemies (12:20–21). None of this requires pacifism by Christians.

You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy (5:43): Who is Jesus quoting here? Love for one's neighbor was commanded by God through Moses (Lev 19:18), but the phrase "hate your enemy" is not found explicitly in the OT. Moses instructed the people to *assist* an enemy in need (Exod 23:4–5). Love of neighbors was at the heart of OT teaching, but God's hatred of evil was also a central theme. For instance, the psalmist states, "You are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil cannot dwell with you" (Ps 5:4; cf. 45:7; Deut 7:2; 30:7). He takes it a step further in the next verse by stating, "The boastful cannot stand in Your presence; You hate all evildoers" (Ps 4:5). Those who desire to be righteous learn to adopt God's hatred of evil, so that the psalmist could say in another place, "Lord, don't I hate those who hate You, and detest those who rebel against You? I hate them with extreme hatred; I consider them my enemies" (Ps 139:21–22; cf. 26:4–5). Because God hates evil, those who embody evil were understood to be God's enemies. It is popular misuse of this attitude that Jesus is quoting and seeking to correct.

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (5:48): Mormons take this verse to mean that humans can become gods. Some Christians take it to mean that we can be wholly sanctified in this lifetime. Did Jesus mean either of these things? The Mormon reading ignores the dominance of monotheism in Scripture. In the context of another commonly cited passage in support of this Latter-day Saints teaching, we find that Paul adamantly asserts: "there is no God but one" (1 Cor 8:4–6). As for the question of total sanctification, the theological distinction between positional and experiential perfection helps resolve the

difficulty. Positional perfection is the “imputed righteousness” of Christ, which is the basis of the Christian’s justification in a forensic or legal manner. Experiential righteousness is the “imparted righteousness” of Christ experienced by the Christian in the process of sanctification through the work of the Spirit. The latter is in view in 5:48, but it assumes and builds upon the former. This implies an imperfect process that goes on throughout this life, and accepts it as a goal that will be fully realized only in the future. Guthrie writes: “The pursuit of the ideal will never be understood unless some element of the impossible is recognized in Jesus’ demands. No man who considers himself to have attained perfection already has a right understanding of perfection” (1981, 663).

“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of people, to be seen by them. Otherwise, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. 2 So whenever you give to the poor, don’t sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be applauded by people. I assure you: They’ve got their reward! 3 But when you give to the poor, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

5 “Whenever you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, because they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by people. I assure you: They’ve got their reward! 6 But when you pray, go into your private room, shut your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. 7 When you pray, don’t babble like the idolaters, since they imagine they’ll be heard for their many words. 8 Don’t be like them, because your Father knows the things you need before you ask Him.

9 “Therefore, you should pray like this:

Our Father in heaven,
Your name be honored as holy.
10 Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
11 Give us today our daily bread.
12 And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
13 And do not bring us into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.
[For Yours is the kingdom and the power
and the glory forever. Amen.]

14 “For if you forgive people their wrongdoing, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well.
15 But if you don’t forgive people, your Father will not forgive your wrongdoing.

16 “Whenever you fast, don’t be sad-faced like the hypocrites. For they make their faces
unattractive so their fasting is obvious to people. I assure you: They’ve got their reward! 17 But
when you fast, put oil on your head, and wash your face, 18 so that you don’t show your fasting
to people but to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward
you.
19 “Don’t collect for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where
thieves break in and steal. 20 But collect for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth
nor rust destroys, and where thieves don’t break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is,
there your heart will be also.
22 “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light.
23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. So if the light within you is
darkness—how deep is that darkness!
24 “No one can be a slave of two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or be
devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot be slaves of God and of money.
25 “This is why I tell you: Don’t worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will
drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn’t life more than food and the body more than
clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the sky: They don’t sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your
heavenly Father feeds them. Aren’t you worth more than they? 27 Can any of you add a single
cubit to his height by worrying? 28 And why do you worry about clothes? Learn how the
wildflowers of the field grow: they don’t labor or spin thread. 29 Yet I tell you that not even
Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these! 30 If that’s how God clothes the
grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won’t He do much
more for you—you of little faith? 31 So don’t worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will
we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ 32 For the idolaters eagerly seek all these things, and your
heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His
righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. 34 Therefore don’t worry about
tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of people, to be seen by them (6:1): Does this conflict with Jesus’ saying in 5:16 (“let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works”)? On the surface it seems to, but there is a difference in the disciples’ *motive* in performing public acts of piety in these two cases. In the former case the public display of good works is not for the disciples’ personal attention, but so that people will “give glory to your Father in heaven” (5:16). In 6:1, Jesus addresses religious vanity, in which case disciples face the temptation to perform public acts of piety and good works to gain the admiration of other people. As John Stott notes, “Our good works must be public so that our light shines; our religious devotion must be secret lest we boast about them.” Bruce suggests a way of balancing the temptation from both personal cowardice and religious vanity: “Show when tempted to *hide*, hide

when tempted to *show*" (1976, 116).

When you pray, go into your private room, shut your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret (6:6): Does this verse rule out public prayer, as some have concluded? As with practicing your righteousness publicly (6:1) or giving to the needy (6:2), people can pervert prayer from an act of true piety to an act of hypocrisy when the external act masks corrupt motives. As a set time of prayer arrived, pious Jews in NT times would stop what they were doing and pray. This could be done discreetly even in public, or it could be done with pretentious public display, a motivation Jesus counsels against in this verse. Jesus directs his disciples to go to their "private room" (*tameion*), a term that comes from a verb meaning "to cut, to distribute," with related nouns such as distributor, treasurer, treasury room, storeroom (BDAG, 988). It was a secluded place where precious objects were kept. Since common people did not often have such quarters, the meaning is intended metaphorically to emphasize privacy. That Jesus does not prohibit or condemn any and all public prayer is indicated by his own public prayers, such as when giving thanks before the disciples and the multitudes for the bread and fish he multiplied miraculously (14:19; 15:36). And in the model prayer to follow, the disciples are to address God as "our Father" (6:9), which indicates a corporate type of prayer.

And do not bring us into temptation (6:13): Does Matthew suppose, contrary to James 1:13, that God can tempt someone to sin? Since God does not tempt his people to do evil (Jas 1:13), and the word rendered "temptation" (*peirasmos*) can be used for either temptation or test (cf. Matt 4:1–11; Jas 1:12, 13), the petition indicates that the disciples should pray either that God removes tests of their faith or else they should pray that their testing would not become an occasion for temptation. This is similar to a standardized Jewish morning and evening prayer: "Bring me not into the power of sin, and not into the power of guilt, and not into the power of temptation, and not into the power of anything shameful" (*b. Berakoth 60b*, cited in Jeremias 1971, 202). Jesus directed the disciples to pray this way in the garden of Gethsemane, "Stay awake and pray, so that you won't enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (26:41).

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen (6:13): This doxological ending of the Lord's Prayer is not original to the text. The best and oldest manuscripts lack it (א B D Z 0170 f^{1} 205 *pc* lat mae b^{pt}), as do the earliest commentaries on the Lord's Prayer (Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian). Luke's parallel prayer omits it (Luke 11:2–4). The ending does occur in various forms in

later manuscripts (K L W Δ Θ Π f^{13} al 33. 892. 1006. 1342. 1506. M f g^{1} k q sy sa bo^{pt}). Although it was not originally included in Matthew, it is in line with other scriptural concepts, and probably reflects early Christian practice of adapting the prayer for liturgical use in the church, perhaps on the basis of 1 Chronicles 29:11 (see *TCGNT*, 13–14; Betz 1995, 414–15).

If you forgive people their wrongdoing, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well. But if you don't forgive people, your Father will not forgive your wrongdoing (6:14–15): Does Jesus teach works salvation here? After all, if a person's sin of unforgiveness keeps them from heaven, whereas their forgiveness of others (a good work) gets them in, is it not salvation by works? Once disciples have received salvation they are to forgive with the same forgiveness with which they have been forgiven. This is not a matter of works salvation but rather evidence that they are forgiven by God. A person who has truly experienced the mercy and grace of God will experience a transformed heart that gives the same mercy and grace to others (cf. Isa 40:2). That transformation will be evident in their words and actions (12:33–37; 13:8, 23; 15:17–20). A person who has not truly experienced and appropriated the grace and mercy of God will not experience his forgiveness, nor show it to others.

> "Do not judge, so that you won't be judged. 2 For with the judgment you use, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. 3 Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye but don't notice the log in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and look, there's a log in your eye? 5 Hypocrite! First take the log out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. 6 Don't give what is holy to dogs or toss your pearls before pigs, or they will trample them with their feet, turn, and tear you to pieces.
>
> 7 "Keep asking, and it will be given to you. Keep searching, and you will find. Keep knocking, and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who searches finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. 9 What man among you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! 12 Therefore, whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them—this is the Law and the Prophets.
>
> 13 "Enter through the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the road is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who go through it. 14 How narrow is the gate and difficult the

road that leads to life, and few find it.

15 “Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravaging
wolves. 16 You’ll recognize them by their fruit. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes or figs
from thistles? 17 In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces
bad fruit. 18 A good tree can’t produce bad fruit; neither can a bad tree produce good fruit.
19 Every tree that doesn’t produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 So you’ll
recognize them by their fruit.

21 “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord!’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the
one who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to Me, ‘Lord,
Lord, didn’t we prophesy in Your name, drive out demons in Your name, and do many miracles
in Your name?’ 23 Then I will announce to them, ‘I never knew you! **Depart from Me, you
lawbreakers!**’

24 “Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them will be like a
sensible man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain fell, the rivers rose, and the winds
blew and pounded that house. Yet it didn’t collapse, because its foundation was on the rock.
26 But everyone who hears these words of Mine and doesn’t act on them will be like a foolish
man who built his house on the sand. 27 The rain fell, the rivers rose, the winds blew and
pounded that house, and it collapsed. And its collapse was great!”

28 When Jesus had finished this sermon, the crowds were astonished at His teaching,
29 because He was teaching them like one who had authority, and not like their scribes.

Do not judge, so that you won’t be judged (7:1): Does this verse prohibit Christians from making moral judgments about the actions of others? Jesus does not identify the specific issue being judged, allowing for broad application. The verb “judge” (*krinō*) has several nuances, ranging from ordinary discernment or evaluation (cf. Luke 7:43) to judicial litigation (Matt 5:40), bestowal of reward (Matt 19:28), pronouncement of guilt (John 7:51), and absolute determination of a person’s fate (John 5:22; 8:16). The latter two senses are in view here. Jesus warns his disciples against setting themselves over others and making a pronouncement of their guilt before God.

The warning about judging is the reverse of the positive blessing Jesus advocated in the fifth beatitude: “The merciful are blessed, for they will be shown mercy” (5:7). The warning also recapitulates the point of the fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer: “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (6:12). True disciples exhibit mercy toward one another, not judgment. To fall into a pattern of life in which we judge others is to show that we are not true members of the kingdom of heaven. The divine passive in verse 2, “you will be judged,” points to God as the judge, who alone can judge absolutely. The warning continues with a parallel admonition, “And with the measure you use, it

will be measured to you." The "measure" (*metron*) could be a scale, vessel, or a rod used for calculating weight or distance, but was often used figuratively, as here to designate God's uniform justice (cf. 23:32).

Keep asking, and it will be given to you. Keep searching, and you will find. Keep knocking, and the door will be opened to you (7:7): Some appeal to this verse as support for the name-it-claim-it teaching, but the context does not support this. What Jesus means is this: for personal application of the principles he has just shared (not to judge unrighteously, but to instead evaluate others wisely and appropriately), disciples should approach the Father with the confidence that God will grant their request for transformation. Through the divine enablement that is supplied by God, the praying disciple will be able to avoid the extremes of 7:1–5 and 7:6.

Whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them (7:12): This maxim is a commonly accepted basis of human civilization, and has been expressed in other contexts throughout history in both positive and negative forms. Roman philosopher and statesman Seneca (4 BC–AD 65) expressed the principle positively, "Let us show our generosity in the same manner that we would wish to have it bestowed on us" (*De Beneficiis* 2.1.1), while Chinese philosopher Confucius (551–479 BC) stated it negatively, "Do not do unto others what you would not want others to do unto you!" (*Analects* 15:23; for other examples, see Betz 1995, 509–16). The precept appears to have been a common theme in Judaism at the time of Jesus. Tobit gives a negative form of the principle, "Watch yourself, my son, in everything you do, and discipline yourself in all your conduct. And what you hate, do not do to anyone" (Tobit 4:14b-15 NRSV). Hillel the Elder, an authority on Jewish Law (c. 70 BC–AD 10), supposedly held this motto, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor." In the only text in the whole of rabbinic literature that attributes the saying to Hillel, the Elder goes on to say, "That is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary. Go and learn!" (*b. Šabb.* 31a; see Alexander 1997, 363–88).

Critics have denied the uniqueness of Jesus' teaching because this Golden Rule has been expressed in other contexts throughout history. Although the basic idea can be found elsewhere, Jesus' expression of the Golden Rule represents a more demanding interpretation of love of one's neighbor than was normal among other teachers of the time (France 2007, 284). Jesus' teachings were significant because of the authority with which he taught as the Son of God who has come to fulfill the Law (5:17–20; 7:28). Whereas other expressions of this

saying indicate *ethical aspiration*, Jesus declares that the Golden Rule is the *normative manifestation* of his followers' discipleship.

When He came down from the mountain, large crowds followed Him. 2 Right away a man
with a serious skin disease came up and knelt before Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing,
You can make me clean."
3 Reaching out His hand He touched him, saying, "I am willing; be made clean." Immediately
his disease was healed. 4 Then Jesus told him, "See that you don't tell anyone; but go, show
yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses prescribed, as a testimony to them."
5 When He entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, 6"Lord, my
servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible agony!"
7"I will come and heal him," He told him.
8"Lord," the centurion replied, "I am not worthy to have You come under my roof. But only
say the word, and my servant will be cured. 9 For I too am a man under authority, having
soldiers under my command. I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes; and to another, 'Come!' and
he comes; and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it."
10 Hearing this, Jesus was amazed and said to those following Him, "I assure you: I have not
found anyone in Israel with so great a faith! 11 I tell you that many will come from east and
west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But
the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be
weeping and gnashing of teeth." 13 Then Jesus told the centurion, "Go. As you have believed,
let it be done for you." And his servant was cured that very moment.
14 When Jesus went into Peter's house, He saw his mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever.
15 So He touched her hand, and the fever left her. Then she got up and began to serve Him.
16 When evening came, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. He drove out
the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick, 17 so that what was spoken through the
prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

He Himself took our weaknesses
and carried our diseases.

18 When Jesus saw large crowds around Him, He gave the order to go to the other side of the
sea. 19 A scribe approached Him and said, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go!"
20 Jesus told him, "Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has
no place to lay His head."
21"Lord," another of His disciples said, "first let me go bury my father."
22 But Jesus told him, "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead."
23 As He got into the boat, His disciples followed Him. 24 Suddenly, a violent storm arose on
the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves. But He was sleeping. 25 So the
disciples came and woke Him up, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to die!"

26 But He said to them, “Why are you fearful, you of little faith?” Then He got up and rebuked
the winds and the sea. And there was a great calm.
27 The men were amazed and asked, “What kind of man is this?—even the winds and the sea
obey Him!”
28 When He had come to the other side, to the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed
men met Him as they came out of the tombs. They were so violent that no one could pass that
way. 29 Suddenly they shouted, “What do You have to do with us, Son of God? Have You come
here to torment us before the time?”
30 Now a long way off from them, a large herd of pigs was feeding. 31 “If You drive us out,”
the demons begged Him, “send us into the herd of pigs.”
32 “Go!” He told them. So when they had come out, they entered the pigs. And suddenly the
whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and perished in the water. 33 Then the men
who tended them fled. They went into the city and reported everything—especially what had
happened to those who were demon-possessed. 34 At that, the whole town went out to meet
Jesus. When they saw Him, they begged Him to leave their region.
9:1 So He got into a boat, crossed over, and came to His own town. 2 Just then some men
brought to Him a paralytic lying on a mat. Seeing their faith, Jesus told the paralytic, “Have
courage, son, your sins are forgiven.”
3 At this, some of the scribes said among themselves, “He’s blaspheming!”
4 But perceiving their thoughts, Jesus said, “Why are you thinking evil things in your hearts?
5 For which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? 6 But so you
may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—then He told the
paralytic, “Get up, pick up your mat, and go home.” 7 And he got up and went home. 8 When
the crowds saw this, they were awestruck and gave glory to God who had given such authority
to men.

The man with the skin disease **(8:1–4)**: The order of these events is inconsistent among the Synoptics (cp. Mark 1:40–44; Luke 5:12–14). Does this indicate that contradictions exist between the accounts? The Sermon on the Mount and the two subsequent chapters are sandwiched between two almost identical summaries of Jesus’ ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing (cf. 4:23–25 and 9:35–36). Those summaries are a literary *inclusio*. Like bookends, they set off the material between them. This leads many to conclude that the Sermon on the Mount and the chapters of Jesus’ miracles form a literary diptych, or double panel, of the ministry of Jesus (cf. Clement, *Paedagogos* 1.2.6; Twelftree 1999, 102–24). Matthew brings together several miracle stories to show that Jesus not only has a great messianic message, but also a great messianic mission. Jesus is not only Messiah in Word (Matthew 5–7) but Messiah at Work in his miraculous deeds (Matthew 8–9).

The miracles as they are found in chapters 8–9 are not in the chronological order followed by standard harmonies of Jesus’ life (see, for example, the

placement of the miracles in Thomas and Gundry 1988, 22–26). This indicates that Matthew had theological purposes in mind as he gathered and ordered these miracle stories, placing them as collections of three groups of miracle stories, each followed by sayings of Jesus. As is typical of Matthew's emphasis, this arrangement highlights both authoritative Christology and discipleship. Each miracle highlights particular aspects of Jesus' person and mission, and then the sayings clarify how discipleship to Jesus demands an allegiance to him that is strikingly different than other forms of discipleship in the ancient world (cf. Blomberg 1992, 136–37). (See further comments at Mark 1:29–34, 40–45.)

When He entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him (8:5): Was it the centurion (Matt 8:5) or his servant (Luke 7:1–11) who came to Jesus? Also, is John 4:46ff a parallel, or is it instead a distinct event? In each of the miracle scenes in chapters 8–9, Matthew abbreviates the narrative to get at the primary figure or action of the incident. Luke's account has the centurion send Jewish elders of the synagogue to make the request on his behalf, but Matthew focuses on the centurion himself, even though others actually brought his request. This is similar to the way in which Mark (10:35) narrates that James and John present to Jesus their ambitious request, without any mention of their mother, whom Matthew (20:20) says came with them and acted as spokesperson (Broadus 1886, 177). It is also similar to the way that the flogging of Jesus by Pilate was recorded. Matthew states that he flogged Jesus (27:26), although obviously Pilate did not himself perform the flogging, but had it carried out by his soldiers. Rather than a contradiction between Matthew and Luke, we see different approaches in how they choose to narrate the event. (See further comments at Luke 7:2–10.)

A similar incident in John's Gospel (John 4:46–54) is likely a separate healing. The person who approaches Jesus is not a military centurion, but a "royal official" (*basilikos*), which probably refers to his service of a king (*basileus*), most likely referring to Herod Antipas. Antipas was not properly a king, but he was popularly considered one (cf. Mark 6:14). Unlike the Gentile centurion in Matthew's story, there is no evidence that the royal official in John's story was a Gentile. And in John's story it is the royal official's son, not his servant, who is at the point of death (Carson 1991, 238). (See further comments at Luke 7:2–10 and John 4:43–54.)

But the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (8:12): Previously Jesus

spoke of the place of punishment as “hellfire” (5:22), but here he refers to it as a place of “outer darkness.” Are these descriptions compatible? Jesus’ intention in these descriptions is to use imagery that conveys the dread of hell. A place of darkness indicates chaos and fear, a place where one is shut out of God’s presence. Burning by fire evokes images of agony and judgment for offenses against God. Together, the images of fire and darkness point to a reality of hell more horrific than either image can convey by itself. How exactly these images come together is unknown, but we must not think of hell as fictional or nonliteral for that reason. (See also comments at 5:22 and 13:42.)

So that what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled (8:17): Matthew again says Jesus’ life and ministry is the fulfillment of the OT (cf. 1:23; 25, 15, 23; 4:14), specifying that his healing ministry fulfills Isaiah 53:4. Has Matthew correctly identified the meaning and application of Isaiah? This is another allusion to the Servant of Isaiah’s prophecy (see 2:23, the “Branch” of Isa 53:2; cf. 12:15–21; 26:28; 27:12; 27:38), now focusing on the Servant’s role as the one who will bring healing. Matthew’s quotation gets at the heart of the prophecy’s meaning, which has both sin and sickness in view. The quotation is from the “Servant Song” of Isaiah 52:13–53:12, where substitutionary atonement is a central theme. The Servant bears the sicknesses of others through his own suffering and death. Matthew links Jesus’ healing ministry with the substitutionary theme. Jesus does not himself become ill, but takes and removes illness by his healing power. This does not explicitly introduce Jesus’ vicarious suffering and death for sin, but prepares the way for it (Erickson 1998, 836–41). Jesus came to save his people from their sins (1:21); his healings point to the cross and his initiation of the New Covenant in his blood that is poured out for the forgiveness of sin (26:27–28). Sickness and death are rooted in sin’s entrance into human existence, so Jesus’ ministry begins to reverse the cycle of death and suffering. “Healing and forgiveness are tied together, not only in a pericope like 9:1–8, but by the fact that the consummated kingdom, in which there is no sickness, is made possible by Jesus’ death and the new covenant that his death enacted (26:27–29)” (Carson 2010, 244).

Critical scholars doubt that first-century Jews would have interpreted Isaiah 53:4 messianically (e.g., Hooker 1998, 88–103), but later rabbinic texts knew a messianic interpretation of the passage—e.g., *b. San.* 98a-b: “Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sins, yet we did esteem him stricken with leprosy, and smitten of God and afflicted” (Hill 1972, 161). More than likely some Jews of Jesus’ day saw the messianic significance of the Suffering Servant

of Isaiah 53, as Matthew indicates.

The Son of Man (8:20): Is Jesus' use of "Son of Man" proof that he did not claim to be divine? After all, the phrase is commonly used in the OT to designate mere men, and would have struck a relatively ambiguous chord with the scribe, who would have remembered that in Ezekiel God refers to the prophet as "son of man" over 90 times (e.g., Ezek 2:1, 3, 6, 8, etc.; cf. Dan 8:17), pointing to Ezekiel's frailty as a human (Allen 1994, 38). But the scribe would also have recalled how "Son of Man" was used in Daniel's prophecy to refer to a glorified Sovereign, the apocalyptic messianic figure who rules forever with the Ancient of Days (Dan 7:13–14). This latter sense of the expression was known in Judaism and occurs in the pseudepigraphal writings *1 Enoch* and 2 Esdras 13 (or *4 Ezra* 13). The reference in *1 Enoch* probably precedes the time of Jesus, and clearly has divine tones: ". . . pain shall seize them when they see that Son of Man sitting on the throne of his glory. (These) kings, governors, and all the landlords shall (try to) bless, glorify, extol him who rules over everything, him who has been concealed. For the Son of Man was concealed from the beginning, and the Most High One preserved him in the presence of his power; then he revealed him to the holy and the elect ones" (62:5–7).

But even so the title was not widely used. Given the ambiguity, it was for Jesus a convenient vehicle to convey his messianic identity without stirring up extreme, premature opposition to his ministry. It did not have the popular associations of titles like "Messiah," or "Son of David," or even "Son of God." Instead, Jesus taught his true identity by referring to himself as "Son of Man," his favorite self-designation. No one else used the expression to refer to Jesus, and in the rest of the NT the title is used of him only once (Acts 7:56), except for three OT references or quotations (Heb 2:6 = Ps 8:5; Rev 1:13 and 14:14 = Dan 7:13). In every instance except two the title is found only on the lips of Jesus, but even in these it should be noted that the audience used this title because he had previously used it as a self-designation (John 12:23), and the angel is simply repeating Jesus' own words (Luke 24:7). Jesus used the expression to teach three things about his identity and ministry. First, the Son of Man is the humble Servant who has come to forgive sins (8:20; 9:6; 11:19; 12:8, 32, 40). Second, the Son of Man is the suffering Servant, whose atoning death and resurrection will redeem his people (16:13, 27–28; 17:9, 12, 22; 20:18, 28; 26:2, 24, 45). Third, the Son of Man is the glorious King and Judge who will return to bring the kingdom of heaven to earth (10:23; 13:37, 41; 19:28; 24:27, 30, 37, 39, 44; 25:31; 26:64).

Jesus' mission was not always understood because of popular misperceptions and faulty expectations. But at the end, after he has used the sufficiently ambiguous title "Son of Man" to clarify his identity and ministry, he uses it for the last time at his trial and makes it perfectly clear that he is claiming to be divine (cf. 26:63–68; e.g., Gerhardsson 1999, 20–21).

The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this?" (8:27): This is the first of two storms that Jesus stills. Matthew, Mark, and Luke record the first storm-stilling (Matt 8:23–27; Mark 4:35–41; Luke 8:22–25), and Matthew, Mark, and John record the second storm-stilling (Matt 14:22–33; Mark 6:45–51; John 6:16–21). There are similarities and differences between these records, but the disciples are uniformly perplexed at Jesus' identity (cf. Matt 8:27; Mark 4:41; Luke 8:25). The reaction to Jesus stilling the second storm finds the disciples in Matthew's Gospel worshiping Jesus as Son of God (14:33), while in Mark the disciples were astonished and had hard hearts (Mark 6:51–52), and in John the disciples receive Jesus into the boat after he identifies himself as "It is I" (John 6:20–21). The important note in the accounts of the first stilling is that it was difficult for the disciples to understand Jesus' identity. This may surprise the reader, for previous events, such as John the Baptist's preparatory ministry (3:1–12), Jesus' baptism (3:13–17), Jesus' healings of many (4:24; 8:5–17), and Jesus' authoritative teachings (chaps. 5–7) would seem to have been indications of his divine identity. However, in these and other things Jesus exceeded any conception that the disciples might have had about what Messiah was to be. But even so, does the question, "What kind of man is this?" indicate they have not yet come to believe that Jesus is something more than a mere man?

Most of the disciples were professional fishermen, so this storm must have been impressive to strike such fear in their hearts. They cried out, "Lord (*kurie*), save us!" (8:25; Mark has "teacher" *didaskale* and Luke has "Master" *epistata*). Their plea indicates that they understood Jesus to be powerful enough to trust in a hopeless situation. If he were a mere mortal, what could he do for experienced seamen that they could not do for themselves? Further, far from indicating they had not started to understand Jesus' true identity, their reaction after Jesus stilled the storm ("The men were amazed and asked, 'What kind of man is this?—even the winds and the sea obey Him!'"), shows they are already on the path toward comprehension. The term "amazed" (*thaumazo*) shows that they have something yet to learn about Jesus, however. The verb indicates being extraordinarily impressed or disturbed, and so to "wonder, marvel, be astonished." It is still too much for them to grasp fully, because Jesus had done what only God can do.

When Jonah tried running from his calling, God caused the calming of the storm, which produced a similar reaction from the men (Jonah 1:16). In the Psalms Yahweh is celebrated as the master of storm and sea (Pss 65:7; 89:9; 104:6–7; 107:23–32). The disciples had turned to Jesus when they were afraid, but to see him actually calm the raging storm is mind-boggling.

When He had come to the other side, to the region of the Gadarenes (8:28): Is there a contradiction between "Gadarenes" (Matthew) and "Gerasenes" (Mark 5:1; Luke 8:26)? The expression "other side" (*eis to peran*) recurs, continuing the movement begun in 8:18. The expression often marks the movement from a Jewish to a Gentile territory and vice versa (cf. 9:1). Jesus is now in the predominantly Gentile region of the Decapolis, which accounts for the reason why pigs were being raised, an animal that was unclean to Jews (Lev 11:7; Deut 14:8). "Gadarenes" refers to the village of Gadara, five miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee, as well as the surrounding region (Josephus, *Life* 9 §42), which probably included a little village called Gerasa (modern Khersa or Kursi), the traditional site of the exorcism. This is the best accounting for the variant readings in the Synoptics. For a helpful summary of the textual readings, see *TCGNT*, 18–19. The committee preferred *Gadarenon* (Gadara/Gadarenes) on the basis of its superior external attestation and the probability that *Gergesenon* (Gergesa) is a correction and that *Gerasenon* (Gerasa) is a scribal assimilation to the prevailing text of Mark 5:1 and/or Luke 8:26, 37. (See further comments at Mark 5:1–2 and Luke 8:26.)

Two demon-possessed men (8:28): All three synoptic accounts record this exorcism, but Mark (5:1–20) and Luke (8:26–39) specify only one demoniac. Rather than assuming that Matthew has invented an additional demoniac for a theological purpose or for substantiating a legally acceptable minimum of two witnesses (Hagner 1993, 225), we can infer that Matthew had independent knowledge of the second man (Carson 2010, 256). Matthew is often concerned only with giving general details of the narrative, so he merely mentions there being two demoniacs, whereas Mark and Luke, giving a more detailed account, single out the spokesman of the two and describe him in more detail. He was possibly the more conspicuous of the two. This is similar to the incident where Matthew describes the healing of the two blind men (Matt 20:29–34), whereas Mark (10:46–52) and Luke (18:35–43) mention only one. Again, they go into more detail in the incident, with Mark even explicitly identifying the blind man as Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus (Mark 10:46). (See further comments at Mark

5:8 and Luke 8:27.)

Send us into the herd of pigs (8:31): The demons' plea to be sent into a nearby herd of swine would not have disturbed the Jews, who considered swine detestable, nor is the presence of the swine problematic for the accuracy of Matthew's account, for the east shore of the Sea of Galilee was a Gentile region and was thus not under Jewish restrictions regarding swine. The Gentile swine owners, however, would have been upset at the loss of about 2,000 animals (Mark 5:13). Why did Jesus grant the request of the demons if he knew it would destroy so many swine? Why did the demons make the request in the first place? Matthew tackles none of these questions, leaving us to make educated guesses.

Although demons apparently prefer to inhabit a living body (cf. 12:43–45), their request to inhabit the pigs may not indicate they felt swine would be a permanent habitation. That the pigs went berserk and immediately drowned may have been the aim of the demons, who cause injury and pain to God's creatures (e.g., 17:14–20) and do whatever they can to oppose Jesus. In this case, Jesus' witness to the Gentiles of the region is so disrupted by the incident that they ask him to leave (8:34). Instead of rejoicing at the victory over Satan's demons, the people "begged Him to leave their region" (8:34). One commentator states, "All down the ages the world has been refusing Jesus because it prefers the pigs" (Paul P. Levertoff, cited in Tasker 1961, 94). Jesus was not showing disregard for animal life; he was only allowing evil to run its course in this world until "that day" when all will be rectified. (See further comments at Mark 5:12–13.)

But perceiving their thoughts, Jesus said, "Why are you thinking evil things in your hearts?" (9:4): Today we speak of thoughts as coming from the mind, but Matthew notes that the source of the evil thoughts of these religious leaders was their hearts. This does not imply some kind of primitive conception of the role of the mind, because Scripture differentiates the mind from the heart, and elsewhere connects thought processes with the mind (Matt 22:37; Luke 1:51; Eph 4:18; Col 1:21). The point here is that the heart is the source of the evil or good of a person. Later Jesus will specify to the religious leaders that evil thoughts come from evil hearts (15:19). (See further comments at Luke 5:22.)

9 As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office, and He said to him, "Follow Me!" So he got up and followed Him.

10 While He was reclining at the table in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came as

guests to eat with Jesus and His disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw this, they asked His disciples, “Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

12 But when He heard this, He said, “Those who are well don’t need a doctor, but the sick do. 13 Go and learn what this means: **I desire mercy and not sacrifice**. For I didn’t come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

14 Then John’s disciples came to Him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?”

15 Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests be sad while the groom is with them? The time will come when the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. 16 No one patches an old garment with unshrunk cloth, because the patch pulls away from the garment and makes the tear worse. 17 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the skins burst, the wine spills out, and the skins are ruined. But they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.”

18 As He was telling them these things, suddenly one of the leaders came and knelt down before Him, saying, “My daughter is near death, but come and lay Your hand on her, and she will live.” 19 So Jesus and His disciples got up and followed him.

20 Just then, a woman who had suffered from bleeding for 12 years approached from behind and touched the tassel on His robe, 21 for she said to herself, “If I can just touch His robe, I’ll be made well!”

22 But Jesus turned and saw her. “Have courage, daughter,” He said. “Your faith has made you well.” And the woman was made well from that moment.

23 When Jesus came to the leader’s house, He saw the flute players and a crowd lamenting loudly. 24“Leave,” He said, “because the girl isn’t dead, but sleeping.” And they started laughing at Him. 25 But when the crowd had been put outside, He went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. 26 And this news spread throughout that whole area.

27 As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed Him, shouting, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!”

28 When He entered the house, the blind men approached Him, and Jesus said to them, “Do you believe that I can do this?”

“Yes, Lord,” they answered Him.

29 Then He touched their eyes, saying, “Let it be done for you according to your faith!” 30 And their eyes were opened. Then Jesus warned them sternly, “Be sure that no one finds out!” 31 But they went out and spread the news about Him throughout that whole area.

32 Just as they were going out, a demon-possessed man who was unable to speak was brought to Him. 33 When the demon had been driven out, the man spoke. And the crowds were amazed, saying, “Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel!”

34 But the Pharisees said, “He drives out demons by the ruler of the demons!”

35 Then Jesus went to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness. 36 When He saw the crowds, He felt compassion for them, because they were weary and worn out, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is abundant, but the workers

are few. [38] Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."

***Order of events before or after the exorcism at Gadara?* (9:9)**: Matthew places the calling of Matthew, the dinner at his house, and the healing of the paralytic *after* the exorcism at Gadara, whereas Mark and Luke depict these events as falling *before* the exorcism. Is this a contradiction? As noted above (see on 8:1), in chapters 8–9 Matthew has collected a number of miracle stories that are not in chronological order. It is widely recognized that Matthew had theological purposes in mind as he gathered these stories together in one place. We would expect to find narrative connectors if Matthew was giving a chronological account, but these are lacking. Rather, we find a collection of three groups of miracle stories, each one followed by sayings of Jesus. This arrangement highlights both authoritative Christology and discipleship. Each miracle highlights particular aspects of Jesus' person and mission as the central figure of the narrative, and then the sayings clarify how discipleship to Jesus demands an allegiance to him and his calling that is strikingly different from other forms of discipleship in the ancient world. Matthew communicates that Jesus is Messiah in word in the Sermon on the Mount that clarifies the nature of discipleship (chaps. 5–7), and that Jesus is Messiah in miraculous deeds in miracle stories that highlight Jesus' identity and indicate what discipleship to him entails (chaps. 8–9).

A man named Matthew (9:9): The first Gospel refers to the tax collector as "Matthew" (9:9), while Mark refers to him as "Levi the son of Alphaeus" (Mark 2:14) and Luke refers to him as "Levi" (Luke 5:27). Some scholars argue that Levi was not one of the Twelve, and is therefore distinct from Matthew, but this is unwarranted since the circumstances of the calling are the same in Matthew and Mark-Luke (France 1989, 66–70). Why the variation in name? Most scholars suggest that this tax collector had two names, Matthew and Levi. That would not have been unusual in the ancient world. Some speculate that "Levi" was his Jewish birth name, and that "Matthew" was given to him after his conversion, similar to Saul-Paul (Hagner 1993, 237–38). Others suggest that "Matthew Levi" was a double name given to him from birth, since there is little evidence for "Matthew" being a Christian name (Carson 2010, 263). The name Levi may be an indication that he was from the tribe of Levi, and therefore was familiar with Levitical practices (Albright and Mann 1971, clxxvii–clxxviii, clxxxiii–clxxxiv). (See further comments at Mark 2:14 and Luke 5:27.)

***Matthew as author of the account of his own calling* (9:9)**: Does the fact that

the author speaks of Matthew in the third person disprove Matthean authorship of this Gospel? Anonymity is typical of the Gospel authors. Thus, the fact that Matthew does not refer to himself as the author and does not refer to himself in the first person ("I") is no argument against his authorship. Most likely he referred to himself in the third person ("he") so that the full focus would be on Jesus. As a tax collector he would have been trained in secular scribal techniques, and as a Galilean Jewish Christian he would have been able to interpret the life of Jesus from the perspective of the OT expectations (cf. France 2007, 15–19; Gundry 1994, 609–22; Osborne 2010, 33–35).

He said to him, "Follow Me!" So he got up and followed Him (9:9): Matthew's response to Jesus' command, "Follow Me," is stunning in its immediacy and has been criticized as unrealistic (9:9). While it is possible that this was the first encounter between Jesus and Matthew, and that the forcefulness of Jesus' person demanded immediate obedience (Long 1997, 103–4), it is more likely that this is the culmination of a prior relationship, similar to the call of the two sets of brothers—Peter and Andrew, James and John (McKnight 2002, 40–43). The brothers had a prior relationship with Jesus that lasted perhaps a year before their call to become fishers of men (4:18–22; John 1:35–51). The wording of Matthew's call is different than that used of the four ("Follow me" [*akolouthei moi]* [9:9]; "Come after me" [*deute opiso mou]* [4:19]), but carries the same connotation, and the wording used to describe his response is identical—he "followed him" (*ekolouthesen auto*). This suggests that Matthew had been under the influence of Jesus' authoritative mission prior to this calling. The public healings, exorcisms, preaching, and teaching had been going on in Galilee for some time now, and were primarily taking place in the Capernaum region. Matthew quite likely had witnessed them and is now ready to join Jesus.

My daughter is near death, but come and lay Your hand on her, and she will live (9:18): Matthew does not mention a number of the details shared by the other Synoptics (Mark 5:21–43; Luke 8:40–56). An example of missing information is that Mark and Luke give the father's name as Jairus (Mark 5:22; Luke 8:41), whereas Matthew simply refers to him as a "ruler" (*archon*), likely a community leader or a head of a synagogue board. Another example is that Mark tells the reader that Jesus allowed the girl's parents to be present when he raised her (5:40). Luke adds that Peter, John, and James were allowed to attend (8:51), while Matthew gives the impression that Jesus cleared everyone out of the room (vv. 24–25). Rather than contradicting the other Synoptics, Matthew has

condensed the narrative and telescoped the facts. He was not obligated to report all that he knew or all that was known in the tradition, and his silence about some details does not represent a refutation of facts shared by Mark or Luke.

Let it be done for you according to your faith! (9:29): Does this verse justify the modern health-wealth gospel teachings that say God will remove all sickness and poverty if only we have enough faith? As always, the context of a Bible verse determines its appropriate meaning. The blind men had just hailed Jesus as "Son of David." This called to mind the promised Davidic deliverer and the messianic age that promised to bring healing to the blind (Isa 29:18; 35:5; 42:7). Jesus told John the Baptist that this was one of the signs that he indeed was the expected Coming One (11:2–6). The OT records no healing of blindness, nor does the NT report any of Jesus' followers healing the blind. By contrast, healing of the blind is one of the most frequent of Jesus' miracles, and therefore it serves as an unduplicated sign of his messianic identity (9:27–31; 12:22–23; 15:30–31; 20:30–34; 21:14–15). Any idea that Jesus is in this verse making a blanket promise that believers can obtain healing or wealth simply by asking with faith violates its contextual meaning. Jesus emphasizes to the blind men that their faith in his ability and desire to heal them prompted them to come to where they could receive his miraculous gift. Faith is simply believing what God can do, but not whatever we want him to do. It is not so much the size of the faith in a person, but the alignment of our faith with God's will (cf. on 17:14–20).

A demon-possessed man who was unable to speak was brought to Him (9:32): In this story, Jesus cures a man of muteness by exorcising a demon from him. Does this indicate that Matthew believed that demons caused ailments? Demon possession can cause a variety of symptoms. In the case of the two demoniacs near Gadarenes, the manifestation produced violent behavior (8:28). Here the phenomenon in some way prohibited the man from speaking (see also 12:22). The term for "unable to speak" is *kophos*, "dull," which can be used of dull of hearing (i.e., deaf; 11:1), or dull of speech (i.e., mute), as the context indicates here (BDAG, 580). While other forms of speech impediments are simply physical limitations, here the cause was demonic. Unlike today, where many people in the Western world expect to find only physiological explanations for various illnesses, the ancient world saw a more holistic connection between physical and spiritual realities. The exorcism of the demon and the concurrent healing of muteness is one of the most powerful demonstrations that the kingdom of heaven has arrived. The crowd recognizes it as unique in the history

of Israel. “The crowds were amazed, saying, ‘Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel’” (9:33). For more on the relation between demon possession and illness, see comments on 4:24.

Summoning His 12 disciples, He gave them authority over unclean spirits, to drive them out and to heal every disease and sickness. 2 These are the names of the 12 apostles:

First, Simon, who is called Peter,
and Andrew his brother;
James the son of Zebedee,
and John his brother;
3 Philip and Bartholomew;
Thomas and Matthew the tax collector;
James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus;
4 Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot,
who also betrayed Him.

5 Jesus sent out these 12 after giving them instructions: “Don’t take the road leading to other nations, and don’t enter any Samaritan town. 6 Instead, go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 As you go, announce this: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with skin diseases, drive out demons. You have received free of charge; give free of charge. 9 Don’t take along gold, silver, or copper for your money-belts. 10 Don’t take a traveling bag for the road, or an extra shirt, sandals, or a walking stick, for the worker is worthy of his food.

11 “When you enter any town or village, find out who is worthy, and stay there until you leave. 12 Greet a household when you enter it, 13 and if the household is worthy, let your peace be on it. But if it is unworthy, let your peace return to you. 14 If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that house or town. 15 I assure you: It will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.

16 “Look, I’m sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as serpents and as harmless as doves. 17 Because people will hand you over to sanhedrins and flog you in their synagogues, beware of them. 18 You will even be brought before governors and kings because of Me, to bear witness to them and to the nations. 19 But when they hand you over, don’t worry about how or what you should speak. For you will be given what to say at that hour, 20 because you are not speaking, but the Spirit of your Father is speaking through you.

21 “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will even rise up against their parents and have them put to death. 22 You will be hated by everyone because of My name. But the one who endures to the end will be delivered. 23 When they persecute you in one town, escape to another. For I assure you: You will not have covered the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. 24 A disciple is not above his teacher, or a slave above his

master. 25 It is enough for a disciple to become like his teacher and a slave like his master. If they called the head of the house ‘Beelzebul,’ how much more the members of his household!

26 “Therefore, don’t be afraid of them, since there is nothing covered that won’t be uncovered and nothing hidden that won’t be made known. 27 What I tell you in the dark, speak in the light. What you hear in a whisper, proclaim on the housetops. 28 Don’t fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. 29 Aren’t two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father’s consent. 30 But even the hairs of your head have all been counted. 31 So don’t be afraid therefore; you are worth more than many sparrows.

32 “Therefore, everyone who will acknowledge Me before men, I will also acknowledge him before My Father in heaven. 33 But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father in heaven. 34 Don’t assume that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I came to turn

a man against his father,
a daughter against her mother,
a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;
36 **and a man’s enemies will be**
the members of his household.

37 The person who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; the person who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38 And whoever doesn’t take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. 39 Anyone finding his life will lose it, and anyone losing his life because of Me will find it.

40 “The one who welcomes you welcomes Me, and the one who welcomes Me welcomes Him who sent Me. 41 Anyone who welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward. And anyone who welcomes a righteous person because he’s righteous will receive a righteous person’s reward. 42 And whoever gives just a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple—I assure you: He will never lose his reward!”

These are the names of the 12 apostles (10:2): Not only are the “12 disciples” (10:1), they are also “apostles” (10:2). *Disciple* designates all those who have believed in Jesus, while the *apostle* designates those whom he has commissioned to be his representatives. “Apostle” has narrow and wide meanings in the NT. The narrow sense, as here, is the usual meaning, signifying the special authoritative representatives chosen by Jesus to play a foundational role in the establishment of the church (cf. Gal 1:17, 19; 1 Cor 9:1–5; 15:7; Eph 2:19–22). Matthew uses the word “apostle” only here, and he is the only Gospel writer to use the expression “the 12 apostles” (cf. Rev 21:14).

There are four separate lists of the Twelve in the NT, and there are notable similarities as well as differences between them. An overview of the lists is as follows:

LISTS OF THE TWELVE (CONTINUED)			
Matthew 10:2–4	**Mark 3:16–19**	**Luke 6:14–16**	**Acts 1:13**
Second Group of Four (cont'd)			
LISTS OF THE TWELVE			
Matthew 10:2–4	**Mark 3:16–19**	**Luke 6:14–16**	**Acts 1:13**
First Group of Four			
1. First, Simon, who is called Peter, and	To Simon, He gave the name Peter; and to	Simon, whom He also named Peter, and	Peter,
2. Andrew his brother;	James the son of Zebedee, and to his brother	Andrew his brother;	John,
3. James the son of Zebedee, and	John, He gave the name 'Boanerges' (that is, 'Sons of Thunder');	James and	James,
4. John his brother;	Andrew;	John;	Andrew,
Second Group of Four			
5. Philip and	Philip and	Philip and	Philip,
6. Bartholomew;	Bartholomew;	Bartholomew;	Thomas,
7. Thomas and	Matthew and	Matthew and	Bartholomew,
8. Matthew the tax collector;	Thomas;	Thomas;	Matthew,
Third Group of Four			
9. James the son of Alphaeus, and	James the son of Alphaeus, and	James the son of Alphaeus, and	James the son of Alphaeus,
10. Thaddaeus;	Thaddaeus;	Simon called the Zealot;	Simon the Zealot, and
11. Simon the Zealot, and	Simon the Zealot, and	Judas the son of James, and	Judas the son of James
12. Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.	Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.	Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.	

Matthew organizes the names in pairs, corresponding to Mark's statement that Jesus sent the Twelve out two by two (Mark 6:7; see Carson 2010, 277; Guelich 1989, 321). All four lists have three divisions. The first, fifth, and ninth names of all four lists are the same (Peter, Philip, and James of Alphaeus, respectively). The order of the names within the groups varies, except for the first name. The sequence of the groups is the same in each list. Carson notes that this grouping suggests that the Twelve were organized into smaller units, each with a leader (2010, 277; see also Meier 2001, 130–31).

The first group is composed of two pairs of brothers who were the first called —Peter, Andrew, James, and John (Matt 4:18–22). Peter occurs first in all of the lists, and Matthew refers to him as "first," indicating his place of leadership. Judas Iscariot always occurs last, except in the list in Acts, where he is omitted.

Thaddaeus is mentioned in the third group of disciples by Matthew (10:3) and Mark (3:18), while Luke refers to "Judas the son of James" (lit. Judas of James) in his two lists (Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13). The uniformity of the rest of the names from list to list suggests that these two names, Thaddaeus and Judas, refer to the same person. "Judas" is probably the given name, and "Thaddaeus" is a nickname or place name. Carson suggests that Thaddaeus is a nickname, meaning roughly "beloved" (1994, 239), while Mann suggests an Aramaic etymology indicates a place name (1986, 250). Several suggest that after the name Judas became stigmatized because of the traitorous Judas Iscariot, Judas the son of James changed his name to Thaddaeus (e.g., Mounce, 1990, 90). In that case, Matthew and Mark provided the safer and alternative name, while Luke stuck with the controversial name in Luke 6:16. (See further comments at Mark 3:13–19 and Luke 6:12–16.)

Textual issue: Some texts have Lebbaeus or conflations. Metzger recounts the difficulty of the textual variants, but the agreement of early representatives of Alexandian, Western Caesarean, and Egyptian witnesses suggests that Thaddaeus (*Thaddaios*) was the original reading (cf. *TCGNT*, 21).

Don't take the road leading to other nations, and don't enter any Samaritan town. Instead, go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (10:5–6): Jesus sent his disciples first exclusively to the Jews, as this passage makes clear. Did the mission eventually turn to the Gentiles only because Jesus' original plan (to evangelize the Jews) failed, as some critics have claimed? This charge misses the fact that Jesus went first to Israel (cf. 15:21–28) to fulfill the salvation-historical order that God established, with Israel being the tool that God would use to bless the world (e.g., Gen 12:2–3; 22:18). The world cannot be blessed if the Jewish messengers always kept the message of salvation to themselves, however, and so the plan always entailed an eventual turn to the Gentiles.

Why was it necessary for Jesus to state the prohibition in the first place (Matt 10:5–6)? The Twelve would not likely have chosen of their own accord to go the Gentiles and Samaritans anyway, given their antipathy for these groups (e.g., John 4:27; Luke 9:51–54; Matt 15:23). Even the early church was slow to accept a universal gospel mission (cf. Acts 10; 11:1–4; 15). Perhaps Jesus stated the prohibition as a way to dispel any doubt that he truly was the Messiah coming in fulfillment of the promises given to Israel. But there is also a warning in the prohibition. This is Israel's opportunity to embrace the fulfillment of God's salvation plan, and from here on it will be fully responsible for its own decision. In Jesus' commission to the Twelve to go to Israel alone is an apologetic to the

disciples and crowds of his faithfulness to God's program, but also an oblique warning to Israel (Kingsbury 1989, 22–23; Broadus 1886, 219).

Don't take a traveling bag for the road, or an extra shirt, sandals, or a walking stick, for the worker is worthy of his food (10:10): Mark's account of this scene differs from Matthew's, leading critics to say the accounts are incompatible. In Matthew's account, the disciples are prohibited from taking basic necessities of life and travel, including a walking stick, while Mark's account allows them to take a walking stick (Mark 6:8–9). A possible solution is that Mark's account assumes that they already have basic necessities, such as a walking staff and sandals. Matthew's account also assumes that they already have these items, but stresses that the Twelve are not to spend time procuring extra supplies. The negative particle *me* plus the subjunctive (*me ktesesthe*) is the prohibitive subjunctive, which bears a strong relationship to an imperative, but the emphasis is upon forbidding in advance the occurrence of an action that may be contemplated. It is not, "do not possess," but "do not acquire or procure" for yourselves what you don't now have (cf. Wallace 1996, 469). (See further comments at Mark 6:8–9 and Luke 9:3.)

***Jesus' prediction of persecution for his followers* (10:16–22)**: These predictions resemble those given in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24). Did Jesus repeat himself, or did Matthew clip some material from the Olivet Discourse and place it here? The theme of judgment upon Israel for rejecting the mission of the Twelve leads Jesus to reverse the sheep metaphor. Those whom Jesus formerly construed as sheep are now said to be wolves: "I'm sending you out like sheep among wolves" (10:16). Prior to this, the disciples were to go to the sheep, the lost people of Israel (9:36: 10:6). In the first part of the commissioning (10:5–15), Jesus gave instructions to the disciples about their short-term mission to Israel during his earthly ministry. In the second part (10:16–23), he instructs them about their long-term mission throughout the world until his return. That is why the predictions here resemble his sayings in the Olivet Discourse, which was his discourse about events that will transpire until his return. There is no reason to think that Jesus did not give several of these sayings on multiple occasions during his three years of teaching the disciples.

Jesus' statement in Matthew 10:16–22 fits well the situation of the early church. Critics believe that this indicates that Matthew created sayings that were applicable to the church era in which he wrote, but this assumes that Jesus was unable to foresee future events. Foreknowing the future persecutions, Jesus

prepares the disciples for hardships to come. There is no evidence that the Twelve experienced this kind of persecution during Jesus' earthly ministry, and so the focus is indeed on the future, the early years of the church. Jesus' sending of the Twelve to the people of Israel provided an occasion for him also to lay down instruction for the future Christian mission to all the nations.

You will not have covered the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes (10:23): By this statement, did Jesus predict that his second coming would occur in the lifetimes of the disciples? This is one of the most difficult verses in the Bible to interpret. The difficulty is identifying the temporal context. Interpreters defend a number of different options, including that Jesus was promising that the disciples would witness the eschatological coming of the Son of Man while they were on their mission, at his resurrection, at Pentecost, or at the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (see discussion in Carson 2010, 290–93). Others argue that Jesus was pointing to his second coming at the end of the age. The latter seems to fit the larger context best. As Jesus offers comfort to the mission-disciples about their ultimate salvation unto the end (10:22), he warns them not to abandon Israel. When persecuted in one city, they should flee to the next, because the mission to Israel will not conclude before the Son of Man returns. There will be a continuing mission to Israel alongside of the mission to the Gentiles until the parousia (Blomberg 1992, 176; Davies and Allison 1991, 189–90. So also Gundry 1994, 194, who doubts the authenticity of the saying). In conclusion, Jesus' promise does seem to reference his second coming, but he was not saying that the Twelve would personally see this. Rather, he means to instill a sense of urgency in the mission to Israel by stating that it will not be complete by the time of his return. This reading makes sense of matters as they now stand, but admittedly the early believers may have taken Jesus to mean that his return would be within their lifetimes.

Don't fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (10:28): Jesus' statement that God is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna has been used by many to support the doctrine of annihilationism or conditional immortality (the view that unbelievers cease to exist at the final judgment). Annihilationists conclude that the verb *apolesai* ("to destroy") refers to a final judgment of unbelievers where they are "annihilated." However, most interpreters throughout church history have recognized that the "destruction" of which Jesus speaks here is a state of punishment for the whole person, body and

soul; the “destroying”—it does not say “killing”—is that God turns over the soul to eternal torture (Luz 2001, 103; Osborne 2010, 397). Eternal punishment is a fearful doctrine, but that is the motivation given by Jesus for faithful discipleship in the face of persecution (10:22, 28, 33). As Turner states, “To put it bluntly, if there is no hell to avoid, there would be one less reason to be faithful to Jesus and one more reason to deny him” (2008, 279).

Everyone who will acknowledge Me before men, I will also acknowledge him before My Father in heaven (10:32): Does Jesus contradict what he says in 7:23, where he told a story about turning away people who acknowledged him and his lordship at the time of judgment? Jesus’ point in the Sermon on the Mount was that simple oral confession of him as Lord can mask an unrepentant heart. That is not the way of salvation, and so Jesus made clear that entrance to the kingdom of heaven is reserved for “the one who does the will of My Father in heaven” (7:21). The same basic phrase occurs later to indicate the qualification for entrance to Jesus’ discipleship family community (12:50; cf. 6:10; 21:31; 26:42).

The present context has persecution in view. This represents a test of a disciple’s commitment to Jesus. Those whose commitment to Jesus is merely superficial will deny Jesus in order to avoid suffering. True disciples do not fear death (10:28), thus they will publicly acknowledge or confess (*homologeō*) Jesus as their Master (10:24–25) and God, the Son of the heavenly Father (10:32).

Don’t assume that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword (10:34): Is Jesus inconsistent about whether he came for peace or for strife (cp. John 14:27; Matt 26:52)? Jesus’ ultimate purpose is to bring reconciliation between God and humans, but the gospel itself causes division. On the one hand the gospel brings peace between true believers and God (John 14:27), and between true believers (Eph 2:14–18). But on the other hand, the gospel divides those who believe from those who are hostile to the gospel. One either believes in Jesus, or rejects him. There is no middle ground. Belief in the gospel can even divide family members (10:21, 34–36). Even Jesus’ own family opposed him for a time (13:53–58; Mark 3:21; John 7:3–5). Jesus’ mention of a sword is not a prediction of violence, though undoubtedly this has occurred. This is a metaphorical sword, as is indicated by Jesus’ rebuke of those who took up the sword to defend him in the garden of Gethsemane (26:52).

Jesus must have unqualified supremacy in the lives of his disciples (10:37–39). “The person who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me;

the person who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (10:37). Disciples must give Jesus ultimate supremacy beyond parents or children, something that not even the most esteemed rabbis demanded. Therefore, this is an implicit declaration of Jesus' deity, because only God deserves higher place of honor than one's father and mother.

The one who welcomes you welcomes Me, and the one who welcomes Me welcomes Him who sent Me (10:40): Can Jesus be fully divine and yet be "sent" by the Father, which seems to depict the Father as superior (in some way) to the Son? Language stating Jesus was sent will recur in Matthew 15:24 and 21:37. This gets at what theologians refer to as the "economic relationship" in the Godhead, or functional subordinationism. The three persons of the Godhead —Father, Son, and Spirit—are revealed to be one of essence ontologically (see on 28:19), yet they each have roles in carrying out the work of God. In eternity past the three persons of the Godhead formulated the work of God. In the carrying out of that plan the three persons perform different functions, but it does not imply a different degree of importance within the Godhead. Classically these functions understood that the Father is the "source" or "originator" of God's work, the Son is the "mediator" of God's work, and the Spirit is the "consummator" or the one who energizes God's work. While Jesus was on earth this could most clearly be seen, as the Father initiated and called the plans, the Son carried them out, and the Spirit provided the power. It should be seen that these relationships are eternal and unceasing activities, necessary to the Godhead, and imply no greater or lesser persons.

> When Jesus had finished giving orders to His 12 disciples, He moved on from there to teach
> and preach in their towns. 2 When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent a
> message by his disciples 3 and asked Him, "Are You the One who is to come, or should we
> expect someone else?"
>
> 4 Jesus replied to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: 5 the blind see, the
> lame walk, those with skin diseases are healed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor
> are told the good news. 6 And if anyone is not offended because of Me, he is blessed."

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing . . . (11:2): The arrest of John the Baptist was the impulse for Jesus to begin his Galilean ministry (4:12). Herod Antipas had imprisoned John at the fortress Machaerus, where ultimately he was put to death (see 14:1–14). Important historical corroboration of Matthew's account comes from Josephus. Machaerus was an

important fortress east of the Dead Sea, near the southern frontier of the region of Perea (Bruce, *IBD* 2:928–29; Loffreda, *ABD* 4:457–58). It was originally built by the Hasmonean ruler Alexander Jannaeus (Josephus, *Jewish War* 7.171) around 90 BC, destroyed by the Roman commander Gabinius in 57 BC, and then rebuilt by Herod the Great (Josephus, *Jewish War* 7.172) around 30 BC as one of the series of fortresses guarding the eastern frontier of Palestine (Masada, Herodium, etc.). Pliny the Elder called Machaerus "the most important Jewish stone fortress immediately after Jerusalem" (Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 5.15.72). The name of the fortress probably derives from *machaira*, "dagger," and it sits perched atop a rocky mountain with steep sides rising to an elevation approximately 2,300 feet (700 meters) above sea level, protected by deep ravines on three sides (cf. Josephus, *Jewish War* 7.163–70). After the death of Herod the Great the fortress was assigned to the tetrarchy of his son Herod Antipas. Here, according to Josephus, Herod Antipas imprisoned John the Baptist and later had him put to death (see comments on 14:1–12; cf. Josephus, *Jewish War* 7.163–70). (See also comments on 14:9–10.)

Are You the One who is to come, or should we expect someone else? (11:3): John's disciples had gathered around him to assist him as the prophet who was preparing the way for the Messiah (John 1:35–42; 3:22–4:3; Matt 9:14). Along with John they were increasingly alarmed as to the course of the messianic program. Earlier they had questioned Jesus about the incongruity of their own practice of fasting with Jesus' disciples' lack of participation in that activity (Matt 9:14–17). There is a growing disconnect between their understanding of the prophet's message about the coming Messiah's ministry and Jesus' display of the messianic ministry.

John's question seems out of character with his earlier bold declaration of Jesus as the Coming One (cf. 3:1–14). How John could doubt now when, at the outset of Jesus' public life, he seems to have understood that Jesus' Messiahship would entail suffering? After all, he had called Jesus the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Most likely, John's present experience does not match the message that he had given about the Coming One's arrival, which promised blessing on those who repent, and judgment on those who do not. It would be quite natural for John to experience perplexity as he languishes in prison, much as had earlier prophets such as Elijah (e.g., 1 Kgs 19:1–18), when their experience did not fully correspond with God's message through them. The divine judgment and time of messianic blessing do not seem to have arrived in the way that John had projected. He had foreknown that

Messiah would suffer, and likely guessed that his followers would as well, but due to his circumstances John needed to have his understanding of the messianic program reconfirmed (Witherington 1990, 43). (See further comments at John 1:29.)

> 7 As these men went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go
> out into the wilderness to see? A reed swaying in the wind? 8 What then did you go out to see?
> A man dressed in soft clothes? Look, those who wear soft clothes are in kings’ palaces. 9 But
> what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and far more than a prophet. 10 This is
> the one it is written about:
> **Look, I am sending My messenger ahead of You;**
> **he will prepare Your way before You.**

This is the one it is written about: “Look, I am sending My messenger ahead of You; he will prepare Your way before You” (11:10): Has Jesus quoted Malachi 3:1 properly, and is he justified in applying it to John the Baptist? John was like the prophets of the OT because he was God’s spokesperson who called the nation to repentance and declared God’s program of salvation. But he was more than any prophet of the OT. Jesus says John was the prophet who was to announce the arrival of the Messiah and the inbreaking of the kingdom of heaven. Because the prophecy of Malachi 3:1 refers to preparing God’s way, Jesus dramatically implies his own divine status, although it is doubtful that the crowds or even Jesus’ disciples would have understood that distinction at this point in his ministry (Gundry 1994, 214; Keener 1999, 338). The form of the quotation may reflect influence from Exodus 23:20 (Gundry 1994, 214), but the primary citation comes from Malachi 3:1. By adding “Your” to the second clause, “he will prepare *Your* way before You,” Jesus makes his own coming the coming of Yahweh and the eschatological day of Yahweh.

> 11 “I assure you: Among those born of women no one greater than John the Baptist has
> appeared, but the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12 From the days of John
> the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been suffering violence, and the violent have
> been seizing it by force. 13 For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John; 14 if you’re
> willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who is to come. 15 Anyone who has ears should listen!

Among those born of women no one greater than John the Baptist has appeared (11:11): Jesus was “born of a woman.” Is he therefore saying John the

Baptist was greater than him? We must understand that Jesus is making a contrast between two eras, not between human accomplishments. Certainly Jesus is not saying John was greater than himself. “Among those born of women” was a Jewish idiom contrasting ordinary human birth (Job 14:1; 15:14; 25:4) with the birth of those who are born anew into the kingdom of heaven. The arrival of the kingdom initiates an incomparably greater era. John is a transitional figure who prepared the way for the Coming One, but he did not live to see and experience the full arrival of the kingdom. Hence Jesus’ statement: “but the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (v. 11). Jesus’ institution of the new covenant in his blood, which is poured out for the forgiveness of sin, is a dividing line. The complex of events including the cross, resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Spirit at Pentecost brings the arrival of the kingdom’s redemptive life, by which time John had been executed. John is the greatest of those born during the OT era because of his crucial role in preparing the way for the Messiah and his kingdom. John’s mission was great because of the greatness of the one he introduced. Those in the kingdom of heaven are greater because of their privilege to have actually entered the kingdom of heaven. Even the least in the kingdom of heaven can point to Jesus as the messianic deliverer more clearly than John. Further, the least in the kingdom have experienced firsthand the forgiveness of their sins and the transformation of regeneration by the Spirit that characterizes this age. Greatness according to Jesus is not related to accomplishment, but one’s acquisition of his redemptive work and one’s service to others in advancing the cause of the kingdom (cf. 18:1–4; 20:20–28).

If you’re willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who is to come (11:14): Does Jesus affirm reincarnation here? And does he contradict John the Baptist, who said in John 1:21 that he was *not* Elijah? Jesus testifies to the vital role John had played as the culmination of prophecy throughout the OT period that looked forward to the arrival of the messianic kingdom. That prophetic hope has been realized in John’s preparation for Jesus’ inauguration of the kingdom of heaven. Thus, Jesus tells the crowd, “If you’re willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who is to come” (11:14). Malachi had prophesied that Elijah would prepare the way for Messiah (Mal 3:1; 4:5). This did not imply a literal reincarnation of Elijah, for reincarnation is not a biblical idea, but perhaps some people misunderstood this point, necessitating John’s denial in John 1:21. John fulfilled Malachi’s prophecy, being designated as the one who would minister in the “spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17). Jesus’ call for the people to recognize John as the fulfillment of Malachi’s prophecy is especially dramatic when we recall that

Elijah was to prepare for the coming of the Lord himself in the great and terrible day of the Lord (cf. Mal 3:1; 4:5–6). Jesus equates his ministry as Messiah with God's own arrival, another disclosure of his divinity (cf. 11:10; France 2007, 431–33; France 1971, 91–92, 155). (See further comments at John 1:21.)

> 16 "To what should I compare this generation? It's like children sitting in the marketplaces who
> call out to each other:
>
> 17 We played the flute for you,
> but you didn't dance;
> we sang a lament,
> but you didn't mourn!
>
> 18 For John did not come eating or drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon!' 19 The Son of
> Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax
> collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."
>
> 20 Then He proceeded to denounce the towns where most of His miracles were done, because
> they did not repent: 21 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that
> were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented in sackcloth and
> ashes long ago! 22 But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of
> judgment than for you. 23 And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will go
> down to Hades. For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would
> have remained until today. 24 But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on
> the day of judgment than for you."

Woe to you, Chorazin! (11:21): In the middle of the nineteenth century, C. W. M. Van de Velde identified the site of ancient Chorazin (Yeivin 1987, 22–39; esp. 24). Chorazin (Khirbet Kerazeh) is two and a half miles (four kilometers) north of Capernaum. Little evidence for the town from the time of Jesus remains, but by the third to fourth centuries it was described in rabbinic literature as a "medium-size town" (*t. Makkoth* 3.8; *b. Menahoth* 85a, 85b). The black basalt ruins of a large synagogue from that later era have been excavated, with the famous "seat of Moses" (cf. 23:2) discovered in the ruins. The city was destroyed by earthquake and rebuilt in the fifth century, only to be destroyed again in the seventh or eighth century (Neusner and Green 1999, 118–19; Rousseau 1995, 52–54).

Skeptics claim that Chorazin did not exist in Jesus' day and that its mention in Matthew proves that Matthew was written later than evangelicals commonly claim. Although much of the ruins that archaeologists have uncovered date to the third or fourth century, we have good reason to affirm a first-century existence of

Chorazin. The Talmud refers to the existence of Chorazin in the first century with reference to the laws of the Omer offering. Rabbi Yose said that they would have brought the wheat from Chorazin to the temple for the Omer offering if it had been closer to Jerusalem (*b. Menahoth* 85a). Since the temple was still standing, this saying points to an established town early in the first century. Also, excavations in Chorazin suggest that there was no marketplace. In the first centuries BC and AD market forces had not yet led to the creation of the marketplace where people bought and sold goods, as was typical of later Hellenistic and Roman towns. This leads many scholars to conclude that Chorazin, and the towns of Cana, Capernaum, and Bethsaida, were established prior to the beginning of Jesus' ministry (Charlesworth, 2006, 127–28). Zeev Yeivin, who participated in a twentieth-century excavation of Chorazin, explains that the city had its early beginnings prior to Jesus' ministry in the northern part of the hill and later developed south and west. By the late third or early fourth century AD, it extended over most of the hill (Yeivin 1987, 22–39). Contrary to skeptical opinion, the evidence suggests that Chorazin was a city that had rejected the miraculous ministry of Jesus and would reap judgment for rejecting Jesus' announcement of the arrival of the kingdom of heaven. It is sobering to note that these three cities of Galilee condemned by Jesus—Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum—often called the "evangelical triangle" (Pixner 1992, 33–35) because of their privilege to experience so much of Jesus' ministry of preaching and miracles, are uninhabited today (Evans 2012, 242–43).

> 25 At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have
> hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to infants. 26 Yes, Father,
> because this was Your good pleasure. 27 All things have been entrusted to Me by My Father.
> No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and
> anyone to whom the Son desires to reveal Him.
> 28"Come to Me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 All of
> you, take up My yoke and learn from Me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you
> will find rest for yourselves. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to infants" (11:25): Does Jesus mean that being "wise and learned" is spiritually dangerous and innately bad? In the context of question, rejection, and judgment ("at that time"; 11:1–24), Jesus praises the Father for his

wise plan of redemption. “These things” (*tauta*) that are both hidden and revealed are the activities of the good news of the presence of the kingdom of heaven that required humble eyes of faith to see God’s hand in them. Jesus is not here condemning wisdom, nor is he suggesting that ignorance is a spiritual virtue. The “wise and learned” to whom Jesus refers are not academic specialists, but those who stubbornly refuse to repent and learn from Jesus the true way to God. Jesus condemned the current generation of people in Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida—as well as the religious leaders—for these attitudes (cf. 23:25–28). “Infants” are those who innocently (not naively) receive Jesus’ revelation from the Father (cf. 18:1–5). The Father’s divine sovereignty and the respondents’ responsibility are thus held in perfect balance.

All things have been entrusted to Me by My Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son desires to reveal Him (11:27): This statement has been called “the most important passage for the study of Synoptic Christology” (Ladd 1993, 164). It reveals Jesus’ profound divine self-consciousness. In Matthew, Jesus is validated at the baptism as the Son (3:17), tested as the Son of God (4:2–10), worshiped as the Son of God (14:33), confessed as the Son of the living God (16:16), validated at the Transfiguration as the Son (17:5), alludes to himself as the Son in the parables of the landowner and wedding banquet (21:23–46; 22:1–14), refers to himself as the Son of the Father (24:36), emphasized as Son of God strongly in the trial and crucifixion (cf. 26:39, 63; 27:43, 54), and associated with the Father and Holy Spirit as the Son in the baptism of new disciples.

Jesus is the sole mediator to whom “all things have been entrusted” (11:27), which refers to the revelation of the knowledge of the Father, to which Jesus referred in the preceding prayer (11:25–26). In both his incarnate and eternal state as Son, Jesus and the Father know each other in an exclusive way. For Jesus as Son, the Father is “my Father,” not “the Father.” They enjoy a direct, intuitive, and immediate knowledge that is grounded in their relationship as Father and Son. As such, what the Father and Son share stands apart from all human relationships and all human knowledge (Ladd 1993, 165–66).

Some, such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses, read into this verse an ontological subordination of Christ. Scripture does account for a *functional* subordination of the Son to the Father. The act of the Son taking on flesh is one example of this subordination. However, this subordination is not a matter of essence, but function. Jesus, as God in the flesh, is not ontologically inferior to the Father. They are equally divine in their nature. In his incarnate state, Jesus has received

from the Father the exclusive authority to reveal the Father, which does not imply the Son's inferiority to the Father, but the process of revelation (Guthrie 1981, 307). Humans can know the Father only through the sovereign will of the Son's revelation. Therefore, a crucial element of Jesus' messianic mission is to impart to people a mediated knowledge of God, which indicates that Sonship and Messiahship are not the same. Sonship precedes Messiahship, and is the basis for the entire messianic mission.

> At that time Jesus passed through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick and eat some heads of grain. 2 But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!"
> 3 He said to them, "Haven't you read what David did when he and those who were with him were hungry—4 how he entered the house of God, and they ate the sacred bread, which is not lawful for him or for those with him to eat, but only for the priests? 5 Or haven't you read in the Law that on Sabbath days the priests in the temple violate the Sabbath and are innocent? 6 But I tell you that something greater than the temple is here! 7 If you had known what this means: **I desire mercy and not sacrifice**, you would not have condemned the innocent. 8 For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath (12:8): How does Jesus' teaching here fit with his claim that not one jot of the law will pass away until heaven and earth pass away (5:18)? The present controversy arose because the Pharisees saw Jesus' disciples "working" on the Sabbath. Jesus cites two OT examples that render ineffective the Pharisees' charge (11:4; 11:5–6), and then gives a third response that clarifies his use of these examples (11:7–8). Jesus' point is that his authoritative arrival and teaching has fulfilled the Law by bringing it to its intended result. Jesus is not abrogating the Law, but declaring how its correct interpretation frees his disciples from Pharisaic legalism.

The first example Jesus cites is the incident when David was fleeing from King Saul (cf. 1 Sam 21:1–7 [21:2–8 MT]; 22:9–23). The "consecrated bread" was only to be eaten by the priests (Lev 24:5–9). Jesus indicates that technically David and his men did what was unlawful (*exestin*), but what is important to note is that Scripture does not condemn them for eating the bread, nor does it condemn the priest Ahimelech for allowing them to do so. Jesus does not condone the breaking of the Law by pointing to David's precedent. David and his men technically broke the Law, but apparently Ahimelech understood that as God's anointed David was serving God, and he was entitled to the bread at this

time of need. Ahimelech served God's purposes by feeding the fleeing David (Klein 1983, 212–14). The intent of the Law is to serve God's people, not for God's people to serve the Law.

The second OT incident to which Jesus refers is not found in either Mark's or Luke's narrative (cf. Mark 2:27; Luke 6:5): "Or haven't you read in the Law that on Sabbath days the priests in the temple violate the Sabbath and are innocent?" (Matt 12:5). Here Jesus alludes to the directive in the Pentateuch that required priests to make sacrificial offerings on the Sabbath (e.g., Num 28:9–10). These OT figures regularly violated the Sabbath when they performed their duties on the Sabbath, yet they were considered guiltless. Since the Law required them to work on the Sabbath, God made allowance within the Law. Like the incident of David and his men, the Law made allowance for violations when God called people to a task that would put them into conflict with the Law.

Jesus' third response takes the argument one step further by quoting a second time from Hosea 6:6 (cf. 9:13), "If you had known what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the innocent" (12:7). Jesus' disciples are the innocent ones who deserved mercy from the Pharisees, not their condemnation. God in his great mercy had given the Sabbath to give his creatures relief from daily burdens, not so that people would perform weekly sacrifice. The disciples were not guilty according to the OT Law, but only according to the Pharisaic interpretation of the Law. If the Pharisees would have not just read the prophet, but understood him, they would have known that in their adjudication of the Sabbath they should have extended mercy, not demanded more sacrifice. Jesus attacks the very core of the Pharisaic tendency to add burden to the daily lives of people by their accumulation of oral traditions.

16 He warned them not to make Him known, 17 so that what was spoken through the prophet
Isaiah might be fulfilled:

18 **Here is My Servant whom I have chosen,**
My beloved in whom My soul delights;
I will put My Spirit on Him,
and He will proclaim justice to the nations.
19 **He will not argue or shout,**
and no one will hear His voice in the streets.
20 **He will not break a bruised reed,**
and He will not put out a smoldering wick,

until He has led justice to victory.
21 **The nations will put their hope in His name.**

So that what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled (12:17): Critics question whether Matthew is correct to identify Jesus as the messianic Servant of Isaiah 42:1–4. As he does with other OT prophecies, Matthew shows how Jesus is the fulfillment of prophecy in ways that affirm the original context and take it to what even the prophet might not have fully perceived. The identity of the Servant in Isaiah's Servant Songs (Isaiah 40–52) is perplexing because it vacillates between Israel as the Servant (41:8–10; 44:1–3, 21; 45:4 [49:3?]), and an individual who leads the nation as the Servant (42:1–4; 49:5–7). That individual emerges as the Servant Messiah who has a ministry to Israel and the nations. Matthew harks back to Isaiah's prophecy to give one of the clearest declarations of Jesus' intent as Messiah: he is the gentle, Spirit-endowed, Suffering Servant, who advances a mission of justice to the nations (Beaton 1999, 5–23). The age that Jesus inaugurated with the arrival of the kingdom of heaven is the age of the Spirit. The "justice" (*krisis*) that Jesus brings to the "nations" (*ta ethnē*) combines the sense of grace and judgment that has characterized the theme of inward righteousness that accompanies the arrival of the kingdom of heaven (e.g., 5:20). The Servant will pronounce the arrival of the kingdom that is an invitation to kingdom life, but which is also a sentence of judgment upon the rulers of this world.

22 Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and unable to speak was brought to Him. He healed him, so that the man could both speak and see. 23 And all the crowds were astounded and said, "Perhaps this is the Son of David!"

24 When the Pharisees heard this, they said, "The man drives out demons only by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons."

25 Knowing their thoughts, He told them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is headed for destruction, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. 26 If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? 27 And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, who is it your sons drive them out by? For this reason they will be your judges. 28 If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you. 29 How can someone enter a strong man's house and steal his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house. 30 Anyone who is not with Me is against Me, and anyone who does not gather with Me scatters. 31 Because of this, I tell you, people will be forgiven every sin and blasphemy, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. 32 Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him. But whoever speaks

against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the one to come.

Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and unable to speak was brought to Him. He healed him, so that the man could both speak and see (12:22): If the man's blindness and muteness were caused by a demon, why did Jesus heal him rather than exorcise the demon? Is Matthew mixing categories (exorcism of demons and healing of physical illness)? In this situation the demon possession of the man resulted in blindness and inability to speak, so though unstated, the healing must have involved an exorcism. There is no record in the OT of any miraculous healing of the blind, yet it is one of the most common of Jesus' miracles and a signature of his messianic identity (cf. 9:27–31; 12:22–23; 15:30–31; 20:30–34; 21:14–15). For additional commentary on the relation between healing and exorcism, see comments on 4:24 and 9:32.

Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him. But whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the one to come (12:32): Does Jesus here indicate that he is not God but that the Holy Spirit is? If not, why does he seem to take more seriously those who blaspheme the Spirit? The OT teaches that deliberate, defiant sin against God and his ordinances is blasphemy, and that the guilt shall cause them to be cut off from the people (Num 15:30–31). Judaism considered such defiant sin unforgivable: "And there is therefore for them no forgiveness or pardon so that they might be pardoned and forgiven from all of the sins of this eternal error" (*Jubilees* 15:34). Jesus' meaning in the present passage is that rejection of his ministry, as validated by the Spirit, is the same sort of defiant, deliberate sin. Listeners who attributed Jesus' work and power to Satan were displaying the highest dishonor to God. Since the reality of the presence of the kingdom of God is evidenced through exorcisms and healings and miracles, all of which are produced through the Spirit with which Jesus has been anointed, to reject this evidence is to reject the kingdom's offer of the forgiveness of sins (9:1–8). As long as the Pharisees continue to reject that evidence, and attribute the working of the Spirit to Satan, they cannot enter the kingdom and receive forgiveness.

Jesus does not dismiss the importance of blasphemy against himself, but he recognizes that to speak against him implies that a person does not know his full identity. Through greater revelation and understanding, that deficiency can be overcome: the person can repent, and the person can then find forgiveness of sin. By yielding to the Spirit's evidential and convicting work, a person can be led to that point. The only true "unpardonable sin" is when a person consciously, willfully rejects the operation of the Spirit bearing witness to the reality of Jesus

as the Savior, and rejects the convicting power of the Spirit in his or her life. (See further comments at Mark 3:28–29.)

> 33 "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a
> tree is known by its fruit. 34 Brood of vipers! How can you speak good things when you are
> evil? For the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart. 35 A good man produces good things
> from his storeroom of good, and an evil man produces evil things from his storeroom of evil.
> 36 I tell you that on the day of judgment people will have to account for every careless word
> they speak. 37 For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be
> condemned."
> 38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from
> You."
> 39 But He answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation demands a sign, but no sign will
> be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For as Jonah was in the belly of the huge
> fish three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth three days
> and three nights. 41 The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and
> condemn it, because they repented at Jonah's proclamation; and look—something greater than
> Jonah is here! 42 The queen of the south will rise up at the judgment with this generation and
> condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and
> look—something greater than Solomon is here!
> 43 "When an unclean spirit comes out of a man, it roams through waterless places looking for
> rest but doesn't find any. 44 Then it says, 'I'll go back to my house that I came from.' And
> returning, it finds the house vacant, swept, and put in order. 45 Then off it goes and brings with
> it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and settle down there. As a result, that
> man's last condition is worse than the first. That's how it will also be with this evil generation."

For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned (12:37): Does our eternal destiny come down to the words we use? This verse might seem to say so, which implies that our salvation is by works (choosing our words carefully). Jesus' statement does not suggest that our eternal destiny is based on the works of good words, but rather that our speech indicates the state of our heart. Jesus said to the Pharisees, "Brood of vipers! How can you speak good things when you are evil? For the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart. A good man produces good things from his storeroom of good, and an evil man produces evil things from his storeroom of evil" (12:34–35). Vipers are known for their subtle approach and attack, as was the original serpent (Genesis 3). In a similar fashion, the Pharisees attempted to hide their own blasphemy by calling Jesus a blasphemer. But Jesus revealed the crux of the problem of the Pharisees—they blasphemed the Spirit because their hearts were evil. The words

of accusation with which they slandered Jesus revealed their evil heart.

An evil and adulterous generation demands a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah (12:39): Does this contradict Mark 8:12, where Jesus says no sign would be given? The context is Jesus' response to the attempt of the Pharisees to entrap him. He confronts them about their duplicitous motivation and impending condemnation. In response to their request for a sign, Jesus says "no sign will be given . . . except the sign of the prophet Jonah." Mark's account is abbreviated and simply has Jesus stating: "No sign will be given to this generation!" (Mark 8:11). Scholars have offered a variety of explanations for this difference. Many conclude that Jesus did not utter the reference to Jonah, but that Matthew added it (Luke also; Luke 11:29). Others suggest that Mark abbreviated Jesus' original statement that included mention of Jonah. The theory says that Mark would have done this to keep true to his messianic secret theme, where Jesus keeps his identity a closely guarded secret except for among the Twelve. That both Matthew and Luke mention Jonah is strong evidence that they had access to sources that went back to Jesus' original statement.

Carson suggests that the difference between Mark and the other Synoptics is more subtle: "Rightly understood the sign, which is the exception in Matthew and Luke, is not a sign at all as Jesus' opponents understood the word. It becomes a sign only for those with eyes to see" (2010, 340). Jonah is not some kind of sign that Jonah brings. Rather he was the sign to the people of Nineveh that his message was from the God who had rescued him from death (Jonah 3:1–5). Likewise, the generation that heard Jesus' message and saw his ministry had enough validating proof in his miracles that he was the Messiah. Instead of repenting when seeing his miracles, they attempted to use them as the basis of the charge that he was in league with Satan (12:24). Because of their evil intention, the only other "sign" that Jesus would give to them was a "sign" of God's coming judgment upon them, as Jonah was to the people of Nineveh. The Synoptic authors agree that Jesus will not produce a sign on demand to satisfy the duplicitous.

For as Jonah was in the belly of the huge fish three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights (12:40): Critics charge that Jesus' burial was not analogous to Jonah's, for Jonah was "three days and three nights" in the belly of the fish, while Jesus was buried late Friday afternoon and arose on Sunday morning. Jesus said that he would be

raised “on the third day.” If it was a literal three days and three nights in the tomb, he would have been raised on the fourth day. Rather than seeing an incompatibility here, we must account for the Jewish reckoning of time, which was looser than ours. The OT reckoned a part of a day as a whole day (cf. Gen 42:17–18; 1 Sam 30:12–13; 1 Kgs 20:29; 2 Chr 10:5, 12; Esth 4:16; 5:1). In rabbinic thought, a part of a day was considered to be a whole day (cf. *y. Šab.*, 12a, 15, 17; cf. *b. Naz.* 5b; *b. Pesahd.* 4.2; cited in Delling, *TDNT*, 2:949–50). In conclusion, three days and three nights is almost a proverbial expression that means no more than three days or the combination of any part of three separate days.

When an unclean spirit comes out of a man, it roams through waterless places looking for rest but doesn’t find any (12:43): What is an unclean spirit, and do they literally need rest? Reference is made to “unclean spirit” at 10:1 (cf. 8:16) as well, and is synonymous with “evil spirit” and “demon.” Demons are often associated with desert (waterless) places as their home (Isa 13:21; 34:14; Tobit 8:3; *1 Enoch* 10:4). The “rest” implies that although a demon can exist in a disembodied state, it best performs its evil purpose in an embodied state. The exorcised demon thus seeks re-ownership of the person, both their material and immaterial aspects. Note the statement in verse 44: “I’ll go back to my house that I came from.” That is why it is called demon *possession*. The demon takes possession of the person and controls him. The demon uses both spiritual and physical manifestations to work its evil intentions.

> 46 He was still speaking to the crowds when suddenly His mother and brothers were standing outside wanting to speak to Him. 47 Someone told Him, “Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to You.”
>
> 48 But He replied to the one who told Him, “Who is My mother and who are My brothers?” 49 And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, “Here are My mother and My brothers! 50 For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven, that person is My brother and sister and mother.”

His mother and brothers were standing outside (12:46): Those who believe that Mary remained a virgin throughout her life (known as “perpetual virginity”) argue that “brothers” (*adelphoi*) refers either to Joseph’s sons by an earlier marriage or cousins of Jesus. There is no historical evidence that Joseph was previously married, much less that he had children. If Joseph had sons from a

prior marriage, the firstborn son of that group, not Jesus, would have been the legal heir to the throne of David through Joseph (Carson 2010, 345). This obviously would not fit Matthew's approach, which emphasizes Jesus as David's heir. Although "brother" can have a broader meaning to include cousin, there is no contextual warrant for reading that meaning into its usage here. Leading Roman Catholic Matthean scholars acknowledge the difficulty of reading "brothers" as anything other than Mary's children. For example, Harrington comments, "It is doubtful that Matthew knew the tradition about the perpetual virginity of Mary" (1991, 191). The most natural reading of this passage, especially in the light of the infancy narrative (see comments on 1:24–25) and the later mention of Jesus' brothers and sisters (13:55–56), is that once Jesus was born, Joseph and Mary had sexual relations and had other children who were Jesus' half brothers and sisters. See also comments on 1:24–25 and 13:55.

Who is My mother and who are My brothers? (12:48): Is Jesus disrespectful toward his family here? Rather than showing disrespect, Jesus shows that he will not be deterred from his messianic mission, even if it means disruption of familial loyalties. Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are My mother and My brothers" (12:49). Jesus has already mentioned that separation can occur between family members due to following him (10:34–39; cf. 8:21–22). Jesus did not come to abolish the family; he upholds the law that demands children honor their father and mother and rebukes those who develop traditions that allow them to circumvent family obligations (15:3–9). After the discourse in parables Jesus returns to Nazareth to where his family was still living to preach in the synagogue (13:54–58). Instead of rejecting his family, Jesus is demonstrating the preeminence of a person's commitment to him and the kingdom of heaven. This forms a new spiritual family in relationship to him and to the Father in which the central feature is doing the Father's will (12:50).

10 Then the disciples came up and asked Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"

11 He answered them, "Because the secrets of the kingdom of heaven have been given for you to know, but it has not been given to them. 12 For whoever has, more will be given to him, and he will have more than enough. But whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. 13 For this reason I speak to them in parables, because looking they do not see, and hearing they do not listen or understand. 14 Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in them, which says:

You will listen and listen,

yet never understand;
and you will look and look,
yet never perceive.
15 **For this people's heart has grown callous;**
their ears are hard of hearing,
and they have shut their eyes;
otherwise they might see with their eyes
and hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts
and turn back—and I would cure them.

16 "But your eyes are blessed because they do see, and your ears because they do hear! 17 For I assure you: Many prophets and righteous people longed to see the things you see yet didn't see them; to hear the things you hear yet didn't hear them.

The secrets of the kingdom of heaven have been given for you to know, but it has not been given to them (13:11): People often say that Jesus taught in parables so he could be readily understood. After all, parables simplify concepts and exemplify them in everyday terms. But Jesus says he speaks to the crowd in parables because God has given the secrets of the kingdom of heaven to the disciples, not to the crowd. The distinction between the disciples and crowd is crucial to recognize in order to understand Jesus' purpose for speaking in parables. Jesus uses the parables to cause the listener to make a decision about the kingdom of God.

Skeptics question the ethics of Jesus' reason for using parables. Others comment that his tactic resembles the Gnostic emphasis on secret knowledge that leads to salvation. To properly understand how Jesus employs parables, we must unpack the significance of his language here. The word "secrets" is the Greek *musteria* ("mysteries"), which draws upon a Semitic background that speaks of an eschatological secret passed on in veiled speech to God's chosen. We find the term in Daniel: "The mystery was then revealed to Daniel in a vision at night" (2:19; cf. 2:27–30, 47; 4:9). The idea of God revealing his secret is also found elsewhere as a powerful theme in the OT (e.g., Job 15:8; Ps 25:14; Prov 3:32; Amos 3:7). Jesus' message from the beginning of his ministry declared that the kingdom of heaven had arrived, but it hadn't always been apparent to those observing. Jesus gives to his disciples an understanding of the kingdom as it is now, and will be, existing and operating in the world. The kingdom is present, but not in its fully manifested power. George Ladd notes,

> The mystery is a new disclosure of God's purpose for the establishment of his Kingdom. The new truth, now given to men and women by revelation in the person and mission of Jesus, is that the Kingdom that is to come

> finally in apocalyptic power, as foreseen in Daniel, has in fact entered into the world in advance in a hidden form to work secretly within and among humans. (1993, 92)

The mysteries are not that God would establish his kingdom, which was a well-known prophetic hope within Israel, but that it had arrived in a form different than what had been anticipated. Jesus revealed this secret in veiled speech to God's chosen. So on the one hand the parables reveal to the disciples how the kingdom of God will operate in this world before its final, powerful manifestation, which he will reveal further in the final discourse in Matthew (chaps. 24–25). On the other hand, the truth that is revealed to the disciples is concealed from the crowd because of their spiritual unresponsiveness. The clause rendered "because looking they do not see. . . ." (13:13) is introduced by the subordinating conjunction *hoti*, which normally is causal. This indicates that the blinding force of parables is a result of the crowd's own spiritual hard-heartedness. God knows those who will harden their heart against Jesus' message, so the parables are used to harden their hearts to the point where eventually he or she will be unable to respond (13:15). God also knows those who will respond to the message of the gospel, so the parables elicit a positive response to come to Jesus, become his disciple, and ask for explanation (cf. 13:10).

In conclusion, Jesus accomplished two goals by use of parables. First, he tested the hearts of listeners. Parables act as a spiritual examination, prompting a response that indicates whether the listener's heart is open to Jesus' message, or whether it is hardened. If the listener is hardened to Jesus' message, the parable stimulates confusion or outright rejection and prompts him to turn from Jesus and the truth (13:11–15). If the person's heart is instead open, he will come to Jesus for further clarification about the parable's meaning—as the disciples do (13:10)—and eventually understand the truth embedded in the parables (13:51).

Second, the parables give instruction to those who are responsive. The parables reveal and instruct Jesus' disciples on the nature of the kingdom of heaven, showing how it operates in this world in a way very different from what the religious leaders and the crowds expected. By use of parables Jesus gives indications of the development of the kingdom (sower: 13:18–23, 36–43; tares: 13:24–30; mustard seed: 13:31–32; leaven: 13:33), the incomparable value of the kingdom (treasure: 13:44; pearl: 13:45–46), membership in the kingdom (net: 13:47–50; cf. vineyard: 21:43; two sons: 21:28–32), and service in the kingdom (teacher of the law: 13:51–52). The positive response of the disciples is

seen in their asking for further explanation (13:10, 36), the reward of which is Jesus' explanation of the parables (13:18–23, 37–43) and parabolic teaching directed to them that reveals additional truth about the mysteries of the kingdom (13:44–52). While the disciples are not perfect in understanding, they possess the potential and desire to progress. Ultimately they *will* understand because they have been obedient to listen and hear (13:51).

Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in them, which says . . . (13:14–15): Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9–10 to indicate that even as Israel had a long background of unbelief and rejection of God's prophets, so the crowd is now hardened against him (Matt 13:14–15). Jesus is not implying that Isaiah prophesied this exact situation. Rather, he means that the crowd mirrors the people of Israel to whom the prophet Isaiah ministered. As in Isaiah's day, the people rejected God's message because they were spiritually deadened. The subordinating conjunction *mepote*, "lest" or "otherwise" (13:15) denotes the purpose of the divine hardening and parallels the thought in Mark's account (Mark 4:12). As noted in the comments on 13:11, the parables stimulate a hardening in those who have rejected Jesus, which prohibits them from turning for God to heal them. God does not force anyone to accept the message of the kingdom, so the crowd's response to the parables is dictated by the nature of their heart. (See further comments at Mark 4:11–12 and Luke 8:10.)

> 31 He presented another parable to them: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. 32 It's the smallest of all the seeds, but when grown, it's taller than the vegetables and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the sky come and nest in its branches."
>
> 33 He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into 50 pounds of flour until it spread through all of it."
>
> 34 Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables, and He would not speak anything to them without a parable, 35 so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled:
>
> **I will open My mouth in parables;**
> **I will declare things kept secret**
> **from the foundation of the world.**

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed . . . the smallest of all the seeds (13:31–32): Is Jesus guilty of error here? After all, the mustard seed is not the smallest of all seeds. If Jesus was divine, surely he would have known that. First, note that Jesus is not teaching science or agriculture here. Rather, he is

citing a familiar activity (sowing seed) to illustrate the activity of the kingdom of heaven. Rabbinic literature gives similar contrasting metaphors involving mustard seeds. On the one hand, the mustard seed exemplifies the smallest quantity of blood (*j. Ber.* 5.8d; *b. Ber.* 31a), while on the other hand, the Galilean Rabbi Simeon ben Halafta (late second century AD) asserts that he climbed a mustard bush that was as tall as a fig tree (*j. Pe'ah* 7.20b).

Second, Jesus was speaking within a specific context and to a specific audience. The mustard seed was the smallest seed known in Palestine at that time and thus Jesus appealed to their understanding to illustrate the contrast of the small beginnings of the mustard seed with its final results. Apparently the remarkable contrast of the small beginnings of the seed with its final results took on proverbial status in Judaism (cf. 17:20). The parable emphasizes that the kingdom of heaven is present in the world, but it is in a tiny, seemingly insignificant form. But the surety remains that it will grow to its prophesied greatness. "What may not look like much to the world will in fact fulfill all God's promises" (Blomberg 1992, 220). (See further comments at Mark 4:31–32.)

He would not speak anything to them without a parable (13:34): Matthew's statement is not intended to imply that Jesus' whole teaching ministry was done by parables, but rather it speaks to the fact that Jesus primarily taught the crowds by use of parables. His disciples had noted this previously, and Jesus explained his reasoning (see 13:10–17). The parables are one of the means by which Jesus tests the heart of those in the crowd, prompting them either to be with him, or against him (12:30).

I will open My mouth in parables; I will declare things kept secret from the foundation of the world (13:35): Does Matthew mean to say that Asaph (in Ps 78:2–3) prophesied about Messiah? The psalm says nothing of things kept secret. Is Matthew adding to its meaning? Rather than stating that Asaph made a predictive prophecy, Matthew draws upon an OT precedent for describing Jesus' relationship to the crowd. Asaph reflected on Israel's history and clarified through parables the meaning of God's past salvation-historical events so that the people would learn from their history and would not also be a stubborn and rebellious people with hearts hard to God's saving work (Ps 78:2, 8). Matthew's standard fulfillment formula says that Jesus has done a similar service to Israel in his day, revealing in his parables the secrets of the kingdom of heaven that have been hidden since the beginning (Morris 1992, 354–55). All of the OT has

looked forward to the arrival of Jesus with the inauguration of the kingdom of heaven, and in his ministry he has drawn together the many strands of prophetic hope that seemed disparate to some (Ito 1992, 29–30).

> 36 Then He dismissed the crowds and went into the house. His disciples approached Him and said, “Explain the parable of the weeds in the field to us.”
> 37 He replied: “The One who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; 38 the field is the world; and the good seed—these are the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the Devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. 40 Therefore, just as the weeds are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather from His kingdom everything that causes sin and those guilty of lawlessness. 42 They will throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father’s kingdom. Anyone who has ears should listen!

They will throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (13:42): Jesus regularly indicates that the consequence of sin in this life is eternal punishment in the afterlife. In the Sermon on the Mount he spoke of it as a place of “hellfire” (5:22), and elsewhere referred to as a place of “outer darkness” (8:12). In both places Jesus indicates that “weeping and gnashing of teeth” point to personal mourning and conscious desperation as the individual recognizes his or her eternal destiny. The images of fire and darkness can appear contradictory, since fire produces light, while fire dispels darkness. But together these images point to the awful reality of hell. Scripture uses light to refer to what is associated with God, and darkness refers to the opposing realm of Satan. The psalmist extols the Lord who “wraps Himself in light as if it were a robe” (Ps 104:2) and the exhortation in Proverbs is to walk the path of the righteous in contrast to those who “walk in ways of darkness” (Prov 2:13). In the NT, the human plight of sin and judgment is likened to a state of darkness (e.g., Rom 1:21; Matt 22:13; John 3:19). Satan pretends to be an angel of light, but in actuality he is a minister of darkness (2 Cor 11:14), and evil is vividly understood as a realm of dark powers (Eph 6:12) from which those in bondage need deliverance (Col 1:13). The world is in darkness until the light of the gospel breaks in, transforming the children of darkness into children of light (1 Thess 5:4–5). Hell implies the darkness of banishment from God’s glorious presence and light and will involve intense personal suffering. For further

commentary on the imagery for hell, see comments on 5:22 and 8:12. (See further comments at Mark 9:44,48 and Luke 12:5.)

44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure, buried in a field, that a man found and reburied.
Then in his joy he goes and sells everything he has and buys that field.
45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. 46 When he
found one priceless pearl, he went and sold everything he had, and bought it.
47 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a large net thrown into the sea. It collected every kind
of fish, 48 and when it was full, they dragged it ashore, sat down, and gathered the good fish
into containers, but threw out the worthless ones. 49 So it will be at the end of the age. The
angels will go out, separate the evil people from the righteous, 50 and throw them into the
blazing furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
51 "Have you understood all these things?"
"Yes," they told Him.
52 "Therefore," He said to them, "every student of Scripture instructed in the kingdom of
heaven is like a landowner who brings out of his storeroom what is new and what is old."

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure, buried in a field, that a man found and reburied (13:44): Finding treasure on someone else's property, hiding it elsewhere on that property, and then arranging to purchase the property without disclosing to the seller the presence of treasure seems unethical by today's standards. Is Jesus condoning unethical behavior by telling this parable? Treasures were often hidden in fields in ancient times since there were no formal banks as we know them today. This is what the lazy servant did in the parable of the talents (25:25). Also, it was not uncommon for people to hide valuables when a marauding army approached. If the homeowner did not survive the invasion, the treasure would be forgotten and unclaimed. The land could change hands several times without anyone being aware of hidden treasure. Thus the principle was "finders, keepers." This is not unlike modern laws governing shipwrecks. For wrecks of a certain age, the owner loses rights to the cargo and goods, while treasure hunters can file claims and recover the goods.

53 When Jesus had finished these parables, He left there.
54 He went to His hometown and began to teach them in their synagogue, so that they were
astonished and said, "How did this wisdom and these miracles come to Him? 55 Isn't this the
carpenter's son? Isn't His mother called Mary, and His brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and
Judas? 56 And His sisters, aren't they all with us? So where does He get all these things?"

57 And they were offended by Him.
But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his household.” 58 And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief.

Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t His mother called Mary, and His brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? (13:55): Critics have seized upon Jesus being called “the carpenter’s son” in this verse, as if it were a proof that the NT itself denies Jesus’ miraculous conception. There is no merit to this. In the first place, Matthew himself is clear about Jesus’ miraculous, divine origins (Matthew 1–2). Secondly, it is understandable that the townspeople would refer to Jesus as the carpenter’s son.

Critics have also said that if Jesus were really God in the flesh, the townspeople should have known this about him. After all, they watched him grow up night and day for many years. Assuming Jesus did no miracles as a child (the NT records none and says Jesus performed his first sign at the wedding at Cana; John 2:1–11), the townspeople would have seen him as a hometown son who was trying to make himself out to be more than he really was. If word had filtered back to Nazareth about the events surrounding Jesus’ birth at Bethlehem and reception there and at the temple, the townspeople might have expected big things of Jesus. Apparently, his thoroughly normal childhood had dulled all such expectations.

Scholars have advanced various hypotheses about the relation of Jesus to these who are called his brothers and sisters. Some have suggested that they were stepbrothers and sisters of Jesus (Origen, among others), or cousins (Jerome). But as discussed earlier (cf. 1:24–25; 12:46–50), the most natural reading of the narratives of the family is that once Jesus was born through the miraculous conception of Mary by the Holy Spirit, Joseph and Mary had sexual relations and had other children who are Jesus’ younger half brothers and sisters (Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria). (See further comments at Mark 6:2–3.)

And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief (13:58): Did Jesus *choose* not to do many miracles here (possible implication of Matthew’s text) or was he “not able” to perform miracles (Mark 6:5)? Because of the hardness of their heart, the people at Nazareth were not open to Jesus’ ministry. Mark’s “not able” is not actually exclusive, for he adds: “except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them” (Mark 6:5). So Matthew and Mark are not in tension on whether Jesus performed miracles. As to whether the number of miracles he performed was limited by his choice or his power, note that Jesus healed people elsewhere whose faith was not a significant factor

in the miracle (e.g., the Gadarene demoniacs [8:28–34] and the lame man in John 5). In Nazareth, hard-heartedness and rejection did not invite the ministry of the Spirit's healing, even as it prevents the forgiveness of sin (Matt 12:31–32). (See also comments on Matt 24:36 and Mark 6:5.)

> At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the report about Jesus. 2"This is John the Baptist!" he told his servants. "He has been raised from the dead, and that's why supernatural powers are at work in him."
>
> 3 For Herod had arrested John, chained him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, 4 since John had been telling him, "It's not lawful for you to have her!" 5 Though he wanted to kill him, he feared the crowd, since they regarded him as a prophet.
>
> 6 But when Herod's birthday celebration came, Herodias's daughter danced before them and pleased Herod. 7 So he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. 8 And prompted by her mother, she answered, "Give me John the Baptist's head here on a platter!" 9 Although the king regretted it, he commanded that it be granted because of his oaths and his guests. 10 So he sent orders and had John beheaded in the prison. 11 His head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother. 12 Then his disciples came, removed the corpse, buried it, and went and reported to Jesus.

The king . . . sent orders and had John beheaded in the prison (14:9–10): The ancient Jewish historian Josephus corroborates Matthew's account of the execution of John the Baptist. When Antipas married Herodias, the highly popular John publicly condemned him for marrying his half-brother's wife, who was also his half-niece. Such a marriage was considered an incestuous affront to the Law (Lev 18:16; 20:21). Both Josephus and the Evangelists agree that Herod Antipas had John arrested and executed because of his influence with the people. Beyond that, they give helpful, different perspectives on the underlying motivation for arresting John. Josephus took a soldier's and politician's perspective, while the Evangelists took a moral and spiritual perspective. Josephus's account follows his description of Herod Antipas's defeat at the hands of Aretas IV, his former father-in-law, who had waged war in part to seek revenge for the repudiation of his daughter by Antipas. Josephus surmises that God judged Herod for his treatment of John. For more on Herod's execution of John, see comments on 11:2.

> 15 When evening came, the disciples approached Him and said, "This place is a wilderness,

and it is already late. Send the crowds away so they can go into the villages and buy food for themselves."

16 "They don't need to go away," Jesus told them. "You give them something to eat."

17 "But we only have five loaves and two fish here," they said to Him.

18 "Bring them here to Me," He said. 19 Then He commanded the crowds to sit down on the grass. He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them. He broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. 20 Everyone ate and was filled. Then they picked up 12 baskets full of leftover pieces! 21 Now those who ate were about 5,000 men, besides women and children.

This place is a wilderness (14:15): This isolated place where the crowd gathered for Jesus to heal their sick became the scene of the climactic feeding of the 5,000, the only miracle from Jesus' earthly ministry that is recorded in all four Gospels (see Mark 6:32–44; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1–15). Matthew's record is the barest account. The traditional site of the miracle is west of Capernaum, above the Heptapegon ("Seven Springs") at present-day Tabgha, just a mile or so beyond the "Cove of Parables" (cf. 13:1–3). This area was a favorite hideaway for Jesus. An ancient report from the pilgrim Egeria (c. 383–395) supports the authenticity of the site:

> Above the Lake there is also a field of grass with much hay and several palms. By it are the Seven Springs, each of which supplies a huge quantity of water. In the field the Lord fed the people with the seven loaves of bread . . . The Stone on which the Lord placed the bread has been made into an altar. Visitors take small pieces of rock from this stone for their welfare and it brings benefit to everyone. (cited in Pixner 1996, 36)

This tradition is further supported by Mark's geographical comment that after the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus told the disciples to go across to the other side to Bethsaida (Mark 6:45).

A geographical difficulty surfaces when we note that Luke places the feeding at Bethsaida (Luke 9:10), which is located northeast of Capernaum on the east side of the Jordan River. By following this lead, some advance the view that the miraculous healings and the feeding took place across the Sea of Galilee from Capernaum. If so, Jesus apparently went east by boat and crowds gathered along the way and met him when he landed across the Jordan in the region of Bethsaida-Julias. To account for Mark's reference about traveling to Bethsaida after the feeding (Mark 6:45), a second Bethsaida has been postulated west of Capernaum, perhaps located near Tabgha (e.g., Thomas and Gundry 2003, 103

n.z). Others theorize that if the Jordan river followed a more easterly course at that time, then the ancient fishing anchorage of Bethsaida-Julias located at el-Araj may have been on the west bank in the province of Galilee (e.g., Rasmussen 2010, 208–10). Either of these theories about Mark's travel notation would explain the Fourth Gospel's reference to "Bethsaida in Galilee" (John 12:21), since Bethsaida-Julias technically belonged in the political division of Gaulanitis or Trachonitis, and the political division of Galilee did not extend east of the Jordan (Strange, *ABD* 1:692). However, the Fourth Gospel's reference may have been a general allusion to the geographical region of Galilee, not intended in the technical sense. In either case, this view contends that the feeding took place in the isolated region east of the city of Bethsaida-Julias (Luke 9:10), then the disciples went west toward the fishing anchorage of Bethsaida or else to Bethsaida-Tabgha (Mark 6:45), and after the storm they landed at Gennesaret (Matt 14:34; Mark 6:53). The weakness of this view is accounting for Mark's statement that after the feeding the disciples traveled toward Bethsaida (Mark 6:45). If the feeding took place in Bethsaida, then another city or suburb must be postulated, but there is no historical or archaeological evidence for a Bethsaida west of the Jordan.

Others argue that since there is no historical or archaeological support for a site named Bethsaida on the west side of the Jordan, both Luke's and Mark's geographical references imply Bethsaida-Julias, the well-known hometown of Peter, Andrew, and Philip east of the Jordan (John 1:44; 12:21). Backed by the strong traditional and archaeological support (for discussion see Pixner 1985, 196–206), this view suggests that after the feeding took place at Tabgha the disciples traveled east across the sea toward Bethsaida-Julias (Mark 6:45). Since the prevailing winds blow from east to west, the furious storm that they battled through the night beat them back closer to the west shore, and they decided to land at Gennesaret (Matt 14:34; Mark 6:53). The weakness of this view is its accounting for Luke's statement that the feeding took place at Bethsaida, not simply that they were traveling toward Bethsaida (Luke 9:10).

Until we discover further evidence to help solve the riddle, it is difficult to determine how to weigh the evidence, although the traditional site of Tabgha seems more plausible. Either way, however, crowds could easily have followed Jesus from Capernaum west to Tabgha (about two miles) or east to Bethsaida (about four miles), although such a large crowd carrying the sick and trying to ford the Jordan would have been more difficult in the latter case. (See further comments at Mark 6:32–44 and Luke 9:10–20.)

Everyone ate and was filled (14:20): Skeptics say that Jesus' "miracle" here was that he encouraged more sharing and forthrightness about how much food was actually on hand. This is not a plausible explanation, for it reads into the account details that contradict the text. If all Jesus did was inspire the people to share, the text would say that. Those wishing to reject the miraculous should simply say so rather than violate the clear meaning of the text. Furthermore, if the crowd did in fact begin offering food that had otherwise been concealed, it is dubious that there would have been 12 baskets full left over. Where were they hiding such a quantity of food? A straightforward reading of the text reveals that Jesus miraculously multiplied the five loaves and two fish to abundantly provide for the crowds. Matthew writes that Jesus took the loaves and the fish and looked up to heaven, a typical posture for prayer (cf. John 17:1). He gave thanks, or offered a blessing (*eulogeo*), and broke the loaves (14:19). Jesus does not bless the bread, but blesses God for what will be the miraculous supply of bread.

Then they picked up 12 baskets full of leftover pieces! (14:20): Do the 12 baskets of verse 20 indicate that Matthew has stylized this story to fit with imagery of Israel's 12 tribes or the 12 disciples? Twelve is obviously significant for Israel for both the reasons stated, but its exact significance in this account is uncertain. That it is perhaps another indication of the fulfillment of Jesus' messianic ministry to Israel (cf. 10:1–6; 19:28) does not mean that it is a detail invented by Matthew for theological purposes. It is Jesus who created the miracle, and so the amount of leftover food may have been yet another intentional sign on his part. See also comments on 15:33. (See further comments at Mark 6:32–44.)

22 Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side,
while He dismissed the crowds. 23 After dismissing the crowds, He went up on the mountain by
Himself to pray. When evening came, He was there alone. 24 But the boat was already over a
mile from land, battered by the waves, because the wind was against them. 25 Around three in
the morning, He came toward them walking on the sea. 26 When the disciples saw Him walking
on the sea, they were terrified. "It's a ghost!" they said, and cried out in fear.

27 Immediately Jesus spoke to them. "Have courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

28 "Lord, if it's You," Peter answered Him, "command me to come to You on the water."

29 "Come!" He said.

And climbing out of the boat, Peter started walking on the water and came toward Jesus.
30 But when he saw the strength of the wind, he was afraid. And beginning to sink he cried out,

"Lord, save me!"

31 Immediately Jesus reached out His hand, caught hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 Then those in the boat worshiped Him and said, "Truly You are the Son of God!"

34 Once they crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. 35 When the men of that place recognized Him, they alerted the whole vicinity and brought to Him all who were sick. 36 They were begging Him that they might only touch the tassel on His robe. And as many as touched it were made perfectly well.

He came toward them walking on the sea (14:25): Some have argued that the disciples saw Jesus walking on the shore and mistakenly thought he was walking on the water. Their distance from shore makes this unlikely. Matthew narrates portentously that they were "battered by the waves, because the wind was against them" (14:24). For over nine hours they had been sailing and battling the storm, from before sundown until "around three in the morning" (14:25). The HCSB reads that they were "already over a mile from land" (14:24). Literally, the Greek text reads "many stadia." A *stadion* ("stadium," "racecourse") is 185 meters (approximately 600 feet), which would have put the disciples from a mile to even two to three miles out on the lake, which today is seven miles at its widest point (Freyne, *ABD* 2:901).

Jesus' walk on the water was intended to elicit faith in his true identity as the Son of God. The disciples had been afraid of dying in the previous storm (8:25), but this time their fear was compounded by the sighting of Jesus doing the impossible, so impossible in fact that they thought he was a ghost (*phantasma*; 14:26). In Greek literature the term is used for dream appearances or spirit appearances or apparitions, but in the OT it means a "deception" (Isa 28:7; Job 20:8 LXX; cf. Wisdom 17:14). The term occurs in the NT only here and in the parallel in Mark 6:49. The disciples may have thought that some evil spirit was attempting to deceive them. This reaction makes sense only if the disciples knew they were far from shore and that there was no chance Jesus was merely walking along the edge of the lake. (See further comments at Mark 6:48–52.)

Peter started walking on the water and came toward Jesus (14:29): The parallel accounts (Mark 6:45–52; John 6:15–21) do not mention Peter's venture into the water. This would be a remarkable thing to omit, if in fact both Mark and John knew it to be a fact. Does their silence call Matthew's truthfulness into question? The key to explaining their silence is to recognize each narrator's freedom to pursue different emphases. Matthew has repeatedly emphasized Peter and continues to do so throughout this section (e.g., 15:15–20; 16:16–23; 17:24–

27). It is common for different narrators to draw out different details from the same or similar events. The different details often highlight each narrator's specific purposes in writing. In this case, we see Matthew's unique emphasis on Peter's leading role and his sometimes impetuous behavior. Peter is rebuked in this story for having "little faith," which is a common Matthean complaint about Jesus' disciples (6:30; 8:26; 16:8; 17:20; France 2007, 567). Jesus will later teach his disciples about the faith that moves mountains (17:20), a faith that would have kept Peter safe on the water had he not let fear get the better of him. Matthew's inclusion of this incident provides an "illustration of the vulnerability of the disciple who allows doubt, the natural human perspective, to displace the faith which relies on the supernatural power of God" (France 2007, 567).

Another likely reason Matthew included this interaction with Peter is that Matthew reveals Jesus as divinely powerful and as the sustainer of his people (Morris 1992, 382–83). Peter calls out to Jesus as "Lord" (*kurios*), the same title used elsewhere to address Jesus with respect (e.g., 8:21) or as a false declaration of faith (e.g., 7:21). But here it means far more. Jesus is walking upon the water in the middle of a furious storm, something that elevates him above any other figure that Peter has ever known.

Those in the boat worshiped Him and said, "Truly You are the Son of God!" (14:33): This confession of Jesus' deity is not present in the parallel accounts (Mark 6:45–52; John 6:15–21). If the confession really occurred, how could Mark and John choose not to include such an important saying? This is the first time that the disciples use the title "Son of God" to address Jesus, and it is uncertain just how much they truly understand, for it was only at the resurrection that they became fully gripped with the radical truth of Jesus' divine identity and ontology. The three accounts in the Gospels are witness to their growing, yet imperfect understanding of Jesus' identity. Mark's account shows that the disciples still had only rudimentary understanding of who Jesus was as Messiah. Mark narrates, "They were completely astounded, because they had not understood about the loaves. Instead, their hearts were hardened" (Mark 6:51–52). John's parallel account says simply, "Then they were willing to take Him on board, and at once the boat was at the shore where they were heading" (John 6:21). Matthew's eyewitness account focuses on both their growing yet imperfect understanding. The three parallel accounts are historical testimony that allows us to see that, at the time of this event, it was still too much for the disciples fully to understand Jesus as the incarnate God. But their understanding is certainly increasing, because Matthew tells us that they worship him in

response to his calming the sea. Recognizing Jesus to be God's Son will be part of the continuing divine revelation that is expressed later in Peter's climactic confession: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!" (16:16). They are understanding more clearly that Jesus is uniquely related to God the Father, as those at Jesus' baptism heard, and they will hear themselves at the transfiguration (3:17; 17:5).

Then Pharisees and scribes came from Jerusalem to Jesus and asked, 2"Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they don't wash their hands when they eat!"

3 He answered them, "And why do you break God's commandment because of your tradition? 4 For God said:

Honor your father and your mother; and,
The one who speaks evil of father or mother
must be put to death.

5 But you say, 'Whoever tells his father or mother, "Whatever benefit you might have received from me is a gift committed to the temple"—6 he does not have to honor his father.' In this way, you have revoked God's word because of your tradition. 7 Hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied correctly about you when he said:

8 **These people honor Me with their lips,**
but their heart is far from Me.
9 **They worship Me in vain,**
teaching as doctrines the commands of men."

10 Summoning the crowd, He told them, "Listen and understand: 11 It's not what goes into the mouth that defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man."

12 Then the disciples came up and told Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard this statement?"

13 He replied, "Every plant that My heavenly Father didn't plant will be uprooted. 14 Leave them alone! They are blind guides. And if the blind guide the blind, both will fall into a pit."

15 Then Peter replied to Him, "Explain this parable to us."

16"Are even you still lacking in understanding?" He asked. 17"Don't you realize that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is eliminated? 18 But what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart, and this defiles a man. 19 For from the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual immoralities, thefts, false testimonies, blasphemies. 20 These are the things that defile a man, but eating with unwashed hands does not defile a man."

Eating with unwashed hands does not defile a man (15:20): Jesus did not condone poor hygiene here. Rather, he followed up on his earlier statement

contrasting physical and spiritual purity (15:10–11), explaining to the disciples the central role that the spiritual heart plays in spiritual purity. Food or ceremonial purification rites attendant to eating do not affect a person's spiritual purity. So the Pharisees' traditions were ineffectual. Clean or unclean is ultimately God's judgment. Pharisaic preoccupation with dietary purity laws has nothing to do with true spiritual cleanness, because purity laws only focus on the external physical activities. These could never make a person unclean before God. God's evaluative judgment concerns the behavior that originates in a person's heart. The implication is that the spiritual heart is naturally evil (cf. 7:11) and needs the righteousness that Jesus initiated with the arrival of the kingdom of God. The sinful activity in the world around them, and in their own lives, could not be cleansed through the religious traditions of the elders.

21 When Jesus left there, He withdrew to the area of Tyre and Sidon. 22 Just then a Canaanite
woman from that region came and kept crying out, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David!
My daughter is cruelly tormented by a demon."
23 Yet He did not say a word to her. So His disciples approached Him and urged Him, "Send
her away because she cries out after us."
24 He replied, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."
25 But she came, knelt before Him, and said, "Lord, help me!"
26 He answered, "It isn't right to take the children's bread and throw it to their dogs."
27 "Yes, Lord," she said, "yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table!"
28 Then Jesus replied to her, "Woman, your faith is great. Let it be done for you as you want."
And from that moment her daughter was cured.

When Jesus left there, He withdrew to the area of Tyre and Sidon (15:21): Ezekiel 26–28 says Tyre would be utterly destroyed and that people looking for it would not find it. Does Matthew 15:21 indicate that Ezekiel's prophecy failed? A brief look at the history of Tyre will lead us to some possible solutions. Tyre, approximately 600 yards off the coast of Phoenicia and 25 miles south of Sidon, was the island capital of Phoenicia, which is present-day Lebanon. Herodotus traces the history of Tyre back to 2700 BC (*Histories* 2.44) but the significant history of the city in relationship to Israel began under the united monarchy (Block 1998, 29). The commercial empire of Tyre was founded by King Hiram I, who obtained a monopoly of the sea transport in the tenth century BC. Tyre has been credited with having founded Sabarth in Africa, Lesser Leptis, and Hadrumentum. Strabo recorded that Tyre had 300 cities on the Mouritanian

(West African) coast (*Geographica* 17.826). While it is likely that Strabo's account is an embellishment, it probably stemmed from the unusual commercial activity in that region. At the beginning of the seventh century BC, however, the kingdom consisted only of the island city and its suburbs on the mainland.

By the latter part of the seventh century BC, Babylon attained hegemony in the ancient Near East. Nebuchadnezzar forced Tyre to submit to his rule. Tyre and Sidon soon plotted together against Babylon, yet Babylon's domination seems to have been maintained (Block 1998, 31). Josephus records that under King Ethbaal III (c. 591/590–573/572), Nebuchadnezzar besieged Tyre for 13 years (*Against Apion* 1.21, §156; *Antiquities* 10.11.1, §228). Though the outcome of this siege is not detailed, Nebuchadnezzar's "Court Register" lists "the king of Tyre" and thus we can infer that he forced the city to submit again. Josephus indicates that Ethbaal III was deported to Babylon and in the years following the siege there was a continuing alteration of rulership over Tyre (*Against Apion* 1.21, § 157). Alexander the Great finally conquered Tyre in 332 BC (Block 1998, 32).

So what exactly happened with Ezekiel's prophecy? The prophecies of Ezekiel 26–28 indicate that Babylon comes hard against Tyre. Yet, the prophecy about Tyre's destruction does not suggest conclusively that Babylon will be the source of Tyre's final demise. In fact, the prophecy indicates that the Lord will bring up many nations against Tyre (Ezek 26:3–6). Based on the historical information above, Babylon's role in God's judgment against Tyre was fulfilled. Ezekiel 29:17–18 indicates that though Babylon will plunder Tyre, she will ultimately fail to conquer the island city.

Prophecy often has more than one fulfillment. Tyre was rebuilt and reconquered several times after Alexander the Great, so the complete fulfillment of this prophecy did not come immediately, as is witnessed by Jesus' reference to its existence in his day. A modern Tyre now exists near the ancient site. Archaeologists have discovered that the ruins from ancient Tyre are scattered over many acres. No city has been rebuilt over these ruins, thus fulfilling Ezekiel's prophecy that Tyre would disappear from the earth. (See further comments at Mark 3:8.)

It isn't right to take the children's bread and throw it to their dogs (15:26): Readers commonly question why Jesus initially ignored the woman's cry for help, and why he would compare her to a dog in verse 26. Was he being rude or even racist since she was Canaanite? Some commentators have been scathing in their criticism of Jesus for his lack of ethnic sensitivity (e.g., Beare 1981, 341–

42). Perhaps taking their cue from Jesus' initial inaction, the disciples urged Jesus to "Send her away because she cries out after us" (15:23). Rather than ethnic bias, what likely drives the disciples is memory of Jesus' earlier charge that directed them not to go to Gentiles, but only to the lost sheep of Israel (cf. 10:5–6). Given that prior directive, the disciples attempted to turn the woman away, and felt Jesus had signaled this as the appropriate response by his unresponsiveness to the woman. Rather than ethnic bias, Jesus was maintaining his commitment to fulfill the mission for which he was sent. As he said: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15:24). This was in fulfillment of promises made to the nation (cf. Isa 53:6–8).

Jesus' mention of the "children's bread" may allude to the messianic banquet (Hagner 1995, 442), but more likely emphasizes the care that God promised to provide for his covenant children, Israel (cf. Deut 14:1–2; Hos 11:1). "Dogs" is a humiliating label for those outside of or hostile to Israel's covenant community (1 Sam 17:43; Ps 22:16; Prov 26:11). Jesus used this metaphor similarly in the Sermon on the Mount to indicate that the message of the gospel must not be defiled by those who are unreceptive to, or have rejected, Jesus' invitation (7:6). Jesus uses a common metaphor to indicate the contrast between God's care for his family and those outside his family. Dogs were usually non-domesticated and scavenged for food (Ps 59:14–15). Some were trained for guarding flocks (Job 30:1) and humans (Isa 56:10; Tobit 6:2; 11:4), but were not normally brought into the home. However, some were domesticated and trained as household watchdogs that were fed in the house (cf. *Joseph and Aseneth* 10:13). The perceptive Canaanite woman, who had already confessed Jesus as the messianic son of David (v. 22), pressed Jesus by calling upon the extended blessings promised to the Gentiles (this is the meaning of her statement in v. 27: "even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table!"). Although Israel receives the primary blessings of the covenant, Gentiles also were to be blessed through them, a promise central to the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:3; see comment on Matt 1:1; 8:5–13).

The vocative expression "Woman" (*O gunai*) in verse 28 expresses Jesus' deep emotion at the woman's humble and insightful interaction. Even though God has a program, he responds to true faith in any case. In summary, Jesus does not demonstrate ethnic bigotry against Gentiles generally or the Canaanite woman specifically, but salvation-historical privilege for Israel. His mission is initially to Israel, but salvation-historically the whole world eventually will be blessed through Israel. (See further comments at Mark 7:24–30.)

29 Moving on from there, Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee. He went up on a mountain
and sat there, 30 and large crowds came to Him, having with them the lame, the blind, the
deformed, those unable to speak, and many others. They put them at His feet, and He healed
them. 31 So the crowd was amazed when they saw those unable to speak talking, the deformed
restored, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they gave glory to the God of Israel.
32 Now Jesus summoned His disciples and said, "I have compassion on the crowd, because
they've already stayed with Me three days and have nothing to eat. I don't want to send them
away hungry; otherwise they might collapse on the way."
33 The disciples said to Him, "Where could we get enough bread in this desolate place to fill
such a crowd?"
34 "How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked them.
"Seven," they said, "and a few small fish."
35 After commanding the crowd to sit down on the ground, 36 He took the seven loaves and
the fish, and He gave thanks, broke them, and kept on giving them to the disciples, and the
disciples gave them to the crowds. 37 They all ate and were filled. Then they collected the
leftover pieces—seven large baskets full. 38 Now those who ate were 4,000 men, besides
women and children. 39 After dismissing the crowds, He got into the boat and went to the
region of Magadan.

The disciples said to Him, "Where could we get enough bread in this desolate place to feed such a crowd?" (15:33): This is the second time that Jesus miraculously fed a crowd of thousands after spending time healing those brought to him. The earlier incident was recorded in all four Gospels, while only Matthew and Mark (8:1–10) record this second feeding. An obvious question arises: why do the disciples pose in verse 33 a question that seems to indicate they have no notion that Jesus might feed the crowds miraculously, just as he did previously? They have seen Jesus in this situation before.

Some find the situation so unlikely that they suggest this second feeding is a Matthean doublet of the earlier feeding, but this is unlikely since the next chapter recounts these events as two separate incidents (16:9–10). Furthermore, there are significant differences that point to two separate incidents. The locales of the two incidents are different, the earlier being in a Jewish region, while this is in the predominantly Gentile area of Decapolis. The numbers of people are different, the quantities of food and leftovers are different, as are the words for "basket." The crowd in the second feeding was with Jesus for three days (15:32), whereas in the first feeding the crowd experienced Jesus' healing ministry for one day. In the first feeding the grass is green (Mark 6:39), indicating spring, while in this incident the ground appears to be hard (Matt 15:35), perhaps indicating late

summer (Morris 1992, 406–7).

The failure of the disciples to anticipate Jesus' response to the crowd's needs does not indicate that there was no second feeding, nor does it indicate lack of intelligence. Rather, Matthew, as part of the group, is pointing out that the Twelve still lacked spiritual astuteness. The issue with the disciples is more a matter of spiritual stupor than intellectual defect, and it may be that at the heart of their failure here is a mistaken belief that Jesus would not do for a predominantly Gentile crowd the same miracle he had done for the earlier Jewish crowd.

In this second feeding Jesus uses seven small bread cakes, and when it was time to collect leftovers there were seven basketsful (15:37). Earlier we discussed the possibility that the 12 baskets left over in the first feeding was a true fact that is symbolic of Israel (14:20). Here the number is seven, which is normally symbolic of perfection or completion. It could symbolize the completion or fullness of God meeting the needs of all peoples, now including Gentiles (cf. Hagner 1995, 451–52). As in the feeding of the 5,000, Matthew alone specifies that the 4,000 who were fed were men, besides the women and children. Again, this indicates a number most likely near 10,000.

He got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan (15:39): Jesus once again traverses the Sea of Galilee by boat. If Jesus was on the east shore for the feeding of the 4,000, then he may have returned to Jewish territory on the northwestern shore. The name Magadan occurs only here in the NT, while the parallel in Mark 8:10 has Dalmanutha, likewise mentioned only there in the NT. The identity of the town or region is puzzling because there are no historical or archaeological records to confirm the identity. One suggestion is that it is an ancient Canaanite name, "ma-gadan" or "may-gad," which may have meant "the waters of [the Canannite god of springs] Gad," or perhaps "Waters of Good Luck" (Riesner, *DJG*, 38). This identification links it with the place called in Greek, *Heptapegon*, "the Seven Springs," later shortened into the Arabic, *Tabgah*. This identification would fit with Jesus' preference for the place, which was most likely near the sites of the Sermon on the Mount (cf. 5:1ff.), the feeding of the 5,000 (cf. 14:13–21), and the post-resurrection appearance to the apostles (cf. John 21:1ff.).

On the other hand, a number of manuscripts substitute "Magdala" in Matthew 15:39, which has led to the proposal that Magadan is a variant spelling for Magdala, the home of Mary Magdalene (27:55; cf. Luke 8:2; Keener 1999, 420; Rousseau and Arav 1995, 189–90). Magdala is generally identified with Migdal

Nunya (“Tower of Fish”) of Talmudic times (*b. Pesahim* 46b), located about three miles north of Tiberius on the Gennesaret plain. Some conjecture that removing the first syllable of *Migdal Nunya* could give rise to a form Dalnunya, similar to Dalmanutha, the name of the town in Mark’s account (Mark 8:10; cf. Edwards 2002, 234–35; Gundry 1994, 322; Blomberg 1992, 247n87). The Hebrew consonants of Dalmanutha, *dylm’*, are found in the Talmud (*y. Kil.* 32d) with the meaning of “wall.” This could provide a further clue for identifying Dalmanutha with Magadan/Magdala, since the latter lies directly below the massive wall or cliff of Arbel, overlooking the western shore of the Sea of Galilee (Edwards 2002, 234).

This site is usually connected with the town Josephus specifies in Greek to be Taricheae, roughly translated “the place where fish were salted” (Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.21.8–10 §634–641; 3.9.7–3.10.5 §§443–503). The name suggests that during Jesus’ day and up to Talmudic times, this town was the center of Galilee’s fish-processing industry, making it one of the most important fishing centers on the Sea of Galilee and the administrative seat of the surrounding region (Strange, *ABD* 4:463–64).

Archaeologists uncovered here a decorative mosaic depicting a boat with a mast for sailing and oars for rowing in the ruins of a first-century AD home (Shenhav 1984, 22–31), and discovered about a mile north of the town the remains of the famous first-century “Kinneret boat.” These discoveries have been invaluable for recreating life in Galilee during the first century. Magdala-Taricheae was the location of the town harbor in which Josephus collected 230 boats, then sailed them empty of soldiers, pretending to be attacking the city of Tiberius that had revolted against him (Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.21.8–10 §634–641).

If we are correct about the identification of Magadan/Dalmanutha with Magdala, it was an important city bordering the Sea of Galilee, and is the hometown of one of the most important women disciples who followed Jesus during his earthly ministry (see comments on 27:55–56, 61). (See further comments at Mark 8:10.)

13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, “Who do
people say that the Son of Man is?”

14 And they said, “Some say John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, Jeremiah or one of
the prophets.”

15 “But you,” He asked them, “who do you say that I am?”

16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!”

17 And Jesus responded, “Simon son of Jonah, you are blessed because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father in heaven. 18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the forces of Hades will not overpower it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth is already bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth is already loosed in heaven.”

20 And He gave the disciples orders to tell no one that He was the Messiah.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God! (16:16): Peter makes a dramatic declaration concerning Jesus’ identity, but which version, if any, is accurate? Mark 8:29 has Peter answer: “You are the Messiah!” Luke 9:20 has him answering: “God’s Messiah!” Both Mark and Luke lack reference to the phrase, “the Son of the living God,” something that is a key theme in Matthew. This variation leads some scholars to doubt the Evangelists’ accuracy (e.g., Ehrman 2004, 275–84). However, note that each Evangelist sustains the core declaration, that Jesus is the Messiah/Christ who has come in fulfillment of Israel’s hopes. Further, Matthew’s additional quote of Peter fits with Peter’s growing understanding of Jesus’ identity, which Matthew emphasizes was not his own insight, but a revelation from the Father (16:17). Matthew will emphasize this again for Peter at Jesus’ transfiguration, where the Father once again affirms Jesus to be his beloved Son (Matt 17:5).

Peter’s expression “the Son of the living God,” had special significance in the area of Caesarea Philippi, which was host to worship of Baal, Pan, and Caesar. Jesus is the Son of the God who is living, unlike mythical gods etched in stone. The expression also references the relationship that has characterized Jesus and God throughout Matthew’s narrative. Jesus is uniquely God’s Son by way of conception (1:21–23), as was fulfilled in Jesus’ return from Egypt (2:15), reiterated by the Father at Jesus’ baptism (3:17), challenged by the Devil at the temptations (4:2, 5), and acknowledged by demons who were about to be exorcised (8:29). Throughout Matthew’s narrative Jesus lays claim to a unique relationship to his heavenly Father (7:21; 10:32–33; 11:25–27; 12:50; 15:13; 18:35; 20:23; 24:36; 25:34; 26:39, 42, 53; 28:19). Peter’s expression also points back to the prophecy of David’s line, “I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to Me” (2 Sam 7:14), which referenced Solomon first, but ultimately the future Messiah. Psalm 2, a royal psalm that speaks of the anointing and coronation of the Lord’s Anointed, the Davidic King, declares, “I will declare the LORD’s decree: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son; today I have become Your

Father’” (Ps. 2:7; cf. 89:27).

Rather than detracting from the Evangelists’ accuracy, the variation in their records of Peter’s confession gives us an appreciation for their unique perspectives. The Evangelists are careful historians who are committed to passing on accurate records, and their unique perspectives give us a multifaceted picture of Jesus’ ministry. The historicity of this incident is further affirmed by noting both the caution with which Jesus accepts Peter’s declaration (why would the Evangelists make up a story in which Jesus cautiously receives such testimony?), and also the embarrassing rebuke that Peter receives when he tries to redirect Jesus’ ministry (Matt 16:23).

You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church (16:18): By this statement, did Jesus institute the papacy and install Peter as the first pope? This verse contains a wordplay in Greek: “You are Peter (*Petros*), and on this rock (*petra*) I will build my church.” In Aramaic, likely the language Jesus spoke here, the word *kepha* would have been used for both “Peter” and “rock.” Translating it into Greek, Matthew used the feminine noun *petra* for “rock,” the closest equivalent to *kepha*. He had to use the less common masculine noun *petros* in the first half of the wordplay, for he would not refer to Peter with a feminine noun. The masculine form lends itself as a designation of the *person* Peter, and the feminine form for a *feature* of him suggested by the sense of the Aramaic *kepha*. This helps understand the meaning of the wordplay, which has been interpreted in three primary ways.

First, drawing upon the close relationship of the terms in Aramaic and Greek and the syntactical prominence of the person confessing, one view stresses that the wordplay refers to Peter: that he will play a foundational role in the establishment of Jesus’ church. This was the interpretation of most church fathers and later the Roman Catholic Church, although very early many fought against its use for establishing any kind of papacy (e.g., Ignatius, Justin, Origen, Tertullian, Cyprian, Firmilian; see Cullmann 1962, 159–62). It is also the dominant view held by those of a broader confessional background (cf. Carson 2010, 418–19; France 2007, 620–22; Morris 1992, 422–24).

A second view rejects any notion of the church being built upon a human person and argues that the Greek wordplay makes a distinction between *Petros* and *petra*, and that the demonstrative pronoun “this” points away from Peter as a person and specifies an *aspect* of him. In this view it is the truth of Peter’s confession (Matt 16:16) that is the rock upon which the church will be built (e.g., Caragounis 1990).

A third view likewise claims that Jesus intends a contrast between *Petros* and *petra*, noting that other NT passages refer to Christ as the "rock" (e.g., 21:42, but the term used is *lithos*; cf. 1 Cor 10:4, where the term used is *petra*) and the "foundation" (e.g., 1 Cor 3:11; 1 Pet 2:4–8). This view says the demonstrative pronoun "this" points to Jesus rather than Peter. Jesus refers to *himself* as the rock upon which the church will be built (this view was held as early as Origen and Augustine; cf. Cullmann 1962, 162).

Several considerations point to the first view, that Jesus intended Peter as the antecedent to "this rock." First, Jesus directs his pronouncement toward Peter personally, both before and after the wordplay, and it is unlikely that a change of reference would have been made without some explicit indication. Second, "Peter" is the nearest explicit antecedent to "rock," and the nearest explicit antecedent is preferred over an implied or more distant antecedent unless something in the context specifies otherwise. Third, the Aramaic substratum almost certainly identifies Peter as the intended antecedent (as does the interchangeability of the terms *petros* and *petra*). The likelihood of Jesus speaking Aramaic on this occasion is more probable than positing that Jesus was speaking Greek.

In summary, the most natural reading is that Jesus indicated Peter as one who will play a foundational role in the establishment of his church. This is consistent with Peter's role as spokesman and leader of the Twelve. Jesus appeared to Peter after the resurrection and gave him special encouragement to feed Jesus' sheep (John 21). Peter held a leadership position among the disciples prior to Pentecost (Acts 1:15ff) and was the leading figure/preacher at Pentecost and beyond (cf. Acts 2:14, 37–38; 3:4, 6, 12; 4:8; 5:3ff.; 8:14, 18ff.; 9:32ff.; 10:9ff.; 11:2ff.; 12:3ff.; 15:6ff.). Peter is given a unique function and position in the foundation of the church. This does not mean that *Peter* builds the church (Jesus says "I will build my church"), but that he is important in the first days of its foundation. Actually he disappears from the narrative of Acts after the foundation is laid (Acts 16 and on).

The Roman Catholic Church later took Peter's foundational role to an extreme to invest Peter with an authority and a succession of leadership. However, we should not react and go to the opposite extreme and deny the natural reading of the wordplay. As D. A. Carson notes, ". . . if it were not for Protestant reactions against extremes of Roman Catholic interpretation, it is doubtful whether many would have taken 'rock' to be anything or anyone other than Peter" (Carson 2010, 418).

I will build My church (16:18): Critics charge that Jesus' use of "church" is anachronistic and suggest that Matthew has falsely placed this word in Jesus' mouth in order to establish relevance with the early church setting. But this is best read as a prediction by Jesus of the church that is to come. He does not give a full-blown description of what it will look like or how it will function. That remains for the early church to bear out as they receive guidance from God. For a more complete discussion of Jesus' use of "church," see comments on 18:17–18.

He gave the disciples orders to tell no one that He was the Messiah (16:20): Jesus' order for secrecy about his identity and mission may seem contradictory with the Great Commission, and yet he commonly asked for secrecy (see 8:4; cf. 9:30; 12:16; 16:20; 17:9). One purpose was to avoid stirring up in the crowds a misunderstanding of his messianic identity. The populace looked for Messiah to be a military figure who would liberate them from Roman rule, and Jesus wished to minimize this misunderstanding. Even his own disciples were prone to misunderstanding, as Peter soon displays (16:22).

Jesus accepted Peter's declaration, but did so with two qualifications. First, Jesus expressed caution in the public declaration of the title Messiah because of the possible misconception that Jesus was establishing a militaristic kingship. Jesus also expressed caution because some of religious and political leaders would have prematurely heightened their opposition to him. The second qualification was related to content. Peter's declaration was accurate to a degree, but it needed amplification to include the unique nature of Jesus' messianic identity as one who will suffer. Jesus is not a political or militaristic conquering Messiah, but a suffering and crucified and dying Messiah, as he will now reveal (v. 21).

> 21 From then on Jesus began to point out to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and
> suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third
> day. 22 Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, "Oh no, Lord! This will never
> happen to You!"
> 23 But He turned and told Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me because
> you're not thinking about God's concerns, but man's."

From then on Jesus began to point out to His disciples that He must . . . suffer many things . . . be killed, and be raised the third day (16:21): If Jesus was so clear in his predictions about these things, why did the disciples fail to

understand and accept his arrest and execution? Why were they so despondent after his execution if he had already told them that he would be raised? Critics have said it was because Jesus never made these predictions in the first place. This is the first of four times that Jesus predicts his arrest and crucifixion (16:21; 17:22–23; 20:17–19; 26:2), but the disciples continually misapprehended its significance. While others throughout Jewish history had experienced martyrdom, it was for them a *consequence* of their convictions; for Jesus it is the *purpose* of his entrance into history (cf. 20:28). The disciples expected a conquering Messiah and were not prepared for the paradigm-transforming truths of Jesus as the Messiah who would suffer, die, and rise again. After Jesus' first prediction of his crucifixion, Peter tries to dissuade him (16:22–23). After the second prediction they were distressed (17:23). After the third prediction James and John asked to sit at his right and left sides when he comes in his kingdom (20:20–24). After the fourth prediction the disciples were indignant when the woman anointed Jesus' feet with expensive oil, which Jesus declared was in preparation for his burial. And they still did not understand.

The OT prophecies of Messiah as a Suffering Servant (e.g., Isaiah 53) were not widely recognized in Second Temple Judaism. No one, especially his followers, expected Messiah to be rejected and killed. It was only with the resurrection that their eyes were opened to understand.

Oh no, Lord! This will never happen to You! (16:22): Within Jewish master-disciple relationships it was unthinkable that a disciple would correct his master, let alone "rebuke" him, as Peter did here. Would Peter really dare to rebuke the man whom he had just identified as God-in-flesh (Matt 16:16)? If Peter really did confess that Jesus is divine, would he not be apt to accept *anything* Jesus said, no matter how absurd it seemed? The juxtaposition of the confession and the rebuke lead some critics to charge that the whole sequence of events is a fiction.

The best answer to this criticism is to grant that Peter was irrational and point out the cause. The source of Peter's bad thinking is demonic. Jesus says to him, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me because you're not thinking about God's concerns, but man's" (16:23). Satan had tried to tempt Jesus away from carrying out the Father's will at the start of his earthly ministry (see on 4:1–11), and now he uses a different strategy. He tries to hinder Jesus' mission through Peter, one of Jesus' very own disciples, the one who had just prior to this been privy to a revelation from God the Father (16:17).

In addition to this factor, we again note that none of the disciples expected

Messiah to suffer and die. They had placed their whole hope in Jesus as Messiah, incurring rejection by many fellow Hebrews, and now he tells them he is going to be executed? It is understandable that Peter found it incredible. (See further comments at Mark 8:31–33.)

> 24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself,
> take up his cross, and follow Me. 25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever
> loses his life because of Me will find it. 26 What will it benefit a man if he gains the whole
> world yet loses his life? Or what will a man give in exchange for his life? 27 For the Son of
> Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will reward each
> according to what he has done. 28 I assure you: There are some standing here who will not taste
> death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”

There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom (16:28): Critics see a failed prediction of Jesus’ second coming here. Is this accurate? Although the Son of Man will die (16:21), he will also come in glory, an allusion to the prophecy of Daniel 7:13–14, a theme that Jesus took up more fully as he drew nearer to the cross (cf. 19:28; 24:30–31; 25:31). The juxtaposition of dying and coming in glory provoked misunderstanding in at least some of his first disciples (cf. 20:17–22), and provokes discussion of Jesus’ intended meaning today. Behind the expression “is going to come” (16:27) is the verb *mello*, meaning “I am about to,” which is ambiguous regarding timing. It can indicate something that is going to be undertaken soon. For example, it is used in the predictions of Jesus’ forthcoming crucifixion (17:12, 22; 20:22), and it was earlier used to refer to Herod’s impending search for the baby Jesus (2:13) and to announce the arrival of John the Baptist as the prophesied Elijah (11:14). But the verb can also refer to an indeterminate time, such as the time of judgment that John the Baptist said was “about to come” (3:7), the age to come (12:32), or the wars and rumors of wars that the disciples were about to hear throughout this age until the end (24:6).

As a general principle, the arrival of the Son of Man in glory with his angels will mean judgment for those who have not followed the Messiah, and reward for those who have. On the other hand, Jesus gives a specific application to the Twelve standing there with him: “I assure you: There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom” (16:28). The expression “taste death” was an idiom for “die.” Some of those Twelve standing with Jesus there in Caesarea Philippi would remain alive until

they saw the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. So Jesus narrows the time-frame of judgment and reward to a near-future event for the Twelve; but that is also debated. Does Jesus refer to his transfiguration that immediately follows (17:1–8), his resurrection, the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, the spread of the kingdom in the preaching of the early church, the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in AD 70, or the second coming and judgment and final establishment of the kingdom?

The immediate context suggests that the event Jesus has in mind is the transfiguration, which follows Jesus' statement in each of the Synoptic Gospels (cf. Mark 9:2–10; Luke 9:28–36). Many think it odd that Jesus would say "some standing here . . . will not taste death" if he was pointing to an event that would occur a mere six days later. But recall the urgency with which Jesus is calling for response to his mission. Even his closest followers have tried to hinder him under the influence of Satan (16:23), and Judas will betray him under the possession of Satan (26:21–25, 47–50; cf. John 13:27). Taking up the cross in discipleship is not something that a person can put off, because death or the coming of the Son of Man will bring with it certain accountability and judgment. Jesus is saying, now to the Twelve, that they must weigh carefully whether or not they have truly taken up their cross, because judgment is sooner than they think. Peter later connects the transfiguration with Jesus' coming in power.

> For we did not follow cleverly contrived myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; instead, we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, a voice came to Him from the Majestic Glory: "This is My beloved Son. I take delight in Him!" And we heard this voice when it came from heaven while we were with Him on the holy mountain. (2 Peter 1:16–18)

Jesus' saying points to the urgency of his disciples taking up their crosses. As they will see, Jesus will be transfigured in kingdom glory in just a few days hence. They must not delay, because in some sense, every day brings with it the possibility of impending reward or judgment. Peter's comment also brings congruency between Jesus' prediction in Matthew and that in Mark, who records Jesus as saying, "There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God *come in power*" (Mark 9:1 emphasis added). Jesus' transfiguration is a display of the authoritative establishment of the kingdom with God's full power, which demands immediate obedience to his calling upon

their lives (cf. France 2007, 640–41).

> After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and his brother John and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. 2 He was transformed in front of them, and His face shone like the sun. Even His clothes became as white as the light. 3 Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.
>
> 4 Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it's good for us to be here! If You want, I will make three tabernacles here: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."
>
> 5 While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said:
>
> This is My beloved Son.
> I take delight in Him.
> Listen to Him!
>
> 6 When the disciples heard it, they fell facedown and were terrified.
>
> 7 Then Jesus came up, touched them, and said, "Get up; don't be afraid." 8 When they looked up they saw no one except Him—Jesus alone. 9 As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Don't tell anyone about the vision until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."

After six days (17:1): Matthew and Mark both indicate that the transfiguration occurred "after six days" from the climactic events of Peter's declaration and Jesus' first prediction of his suffering and death (Mark 9:2ff), whereas Luke says more generally, "about eight days after these words" (Luke 9:28), which reflects a Greek way of saying "about a week later" (Carson 2010, 436). Critics see an inconsistency here, but precise time indicators are rare in the Synoptics, with the exception of the Passion Narrative. The expression "six days" links the transfiguration to Peter's confession and Jesus' saying regarding the coming of the Son of Man (16:16–28). The sequence of Jesus' pronouncement of his coming followed by the transfiguration is consistent in each of the Synoptic Gospels (cf. Mark 9:2–10; Luke 9:28–36). (See further comments at Mark 9:2 and Luke 9:28.)

Jesus took Peter, James, and his brother John and led them up on a high mountain by themselves (17:1): Luke provides details not found in either Matthew or Mark: Jesus went up the mountain to pray, and during the time on the mountain Peter, James, and John had fallen into a deep sleep (Luke 9:32). While critics see tension and contradiction here, a regular feature of the Gospel narratives is that each Evangelist supplies details not found in the other accounts. One author emphasizes certain aspects of the story for his own purposes. As is

demonstrated here, Luke has a special interest in prayer. He records nine prayers of Jesus, of which the other Gospels record only two. These prayers are associated with important events, such as Jesus' baptism (Luke 3:21) and his choosing the disciples (6:12). Two of Luke's special parables deal with prayer (friend at midnight [11:5–7] and the unrighteous judge [18:1–8]). Luke alone records that Jesus prayed for Peter during his testing (22:31, 32), that he exhorted the disciples to pray in Gethsemane (22:40), that he prayed for his enemies (23:34), and that he prayed for himself (22:41). Here, Luke alone records that Jesus went up on the mountain to pray (9:28–29), and it is quite likely that his disciples joined him in prayer.

He was transformed in front of them (17:2): Was Jesus' transformation merely a vision, dreamed up by sleepy, superstitious disciples? The term *metemorphothe*, "was transformed," is the passive form of *metamorphoo*, indicating that God was behind the transformation. Paul uses the same term to describe the spiritual transformation believers experience as a result of regeneration (Rom 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18). Differently, those in the presence of God often experience a radiant countenance, like Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod 34:29–35; cf. Dan 12:3; 2 Esdras 7:97). And the angel at the resurrection had an appearance like lightning and garments that were white as snow (Matt 28:3), a picture of purity.

Jesus experienced an actual physical transformation that was visible to the disciples. It was a reminder of Jesus' preincarnate glory (John 1:14; 17:5; Phil 2:6–7) and a preview of his coming exaltation (2 Pet 1:16–18; Rev 1:16). The Father transfigured Jesus to reveal his divine nature and to radiate the glory that is his as God.

Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it's good for us to be here! If You want, I will make three tabernacles here: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" (17:4): How would Peter and his companions, just waking from deep sleep (Luke 9:32), recognize that the two men with Jesus were Moses and Elijah? Certainly they had not seen pictures or portraits. We are not told that Moses and Elijah identified themselves or that Jesus identified them. Matthew as omniscient narrator can know such details as their identity, whether writing fiction or fact, but just how did the sleeping men figure out the identity of Moses and Elijah?

While not stated in the text, it must be that the disciples listened to a conversation between Jesus and the men, and that the conversation revealed that

the men were Moses and Elijah. Their presence makes sense. They represent the Law and the Prophets witnessing to Jesus as the Messiah who fulfills the OT (cf. 5:17) and who has the eschatological role of initiating the kingdom of God (4:17). Moses was considered the model prophet (Deut 18:18) and Elijah the forerunner of Messiah (Mal 4:5–6; cf. Matt 3:1–3; 11:7–10). Both had visions of the glory of God on a mountain—Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod 24:15) and Elijah on Mount Horeb (1 Kgs 19:8). Both had unique endings—Elijah was taken directly to heaven (2 Kgs 2:11–12), while Moses, whose grave was never found (Deut 34:6), is said by rabbinic tradition also to have been taken directly to heaven (cf. *Assumption of Moses*; *b. Sota* 13b). (See further comments at Mark 9:2.)

> 10 So the disciples questioned Him, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"
> 11 "Elijah is coming and will restore everything," He replied. 12 "But I tell you: Elijah has already come, and they didn't recognize him. On the contrary, they did whatever they pleased to him. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." 13 Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them about John the Baptist.

Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first? (17:10–13): Malachi's prophecy (Mal 4:5–6) had drawn upon the memory of Elijah as a fiery prophetic voice to point ahead to the time when another prophetic voice, one that recalled Elijah's, would announce God's restoration and judgment through the arrival of the Messiah. Apparently some religious leaders and scribes misunderstood Malachi's prophecy to mean that Elijah would return personally. Their hope was focused primarily on a militaristic/political Elijah for a militaristic/political Messiah. But John the Baptist clarified that he was not a reincarnated Elijah (John 1:19–27). Reincarnation is a superstitious pagan belief, like Herod Antipas's (cf. Matt 14:1–2), which Malachi never intended to support. (See further comments at Mark 9:13 and Luke 9:19.)

The correct understanding of the prophecy is that John had come "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17). John was the fulfillment of the arrival of the anticipated Elijah, in that he was the prophet sent by God to prepare the way for Jesus as Messiah (Matt 3:1–3; 17:12–13). But he was not a reincarnated Elijah (John 1:21). If the people and religious leadership would have repented fully and accepted John's and Jesus' message of the gospel of the kingdom, John would have been the complete fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy (11:14). But neither John's nor Jesus' ministry were accepted fully. Instead, both were executed, and

so the complete fulfillment of Malachi's promise of restoration and judgment awaits the end of the age. Another Elijah-type figure will have to come in the future (17:11), again preparing the way, but then for the final consummation of the Day of the Lord prophesied in Malachi, preparing the way for the returning Son of Man who will at that time restore all things and bring God's wrath upon the unrepentant (Mal 4:5–6; possibly a reference to Rev 11:3–13). (See further comments at John 1:21.)

> 14 When they reached the crowd, a man approached and knelt down before Him. 15 "Lord," he said, "have mercy on my son, because he has seizures and suffers severely. He often falls into the fire and often into the water. 16 I brought him to Your disciples, but they couldn't heal him."
> 17 Jesus replied, "You unbelieving and rebellious generation! How long will I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring him here to Me." 18 Then Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and from that moment the boy was healed.
> 19 Then the disciples approached Jesus privately and said, "Why couldn't we drive it out?"
> 20 "Because of your little faith," He told them. "For I assure you: If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will tell this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you. [21 However, this kind does not come out except by prayer and fasting.]"

Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and from that moment the boy was healed (17:18): This is another incident in which the casting out of a demon produces healing of a physical infirmity (cf. 4:24; 9:32–33). This reveals a holistic understanding of the interplay of spiritual and natural forces in this world. While not all illness or disease is a direct result of demonic activity, the fallenness of this world impacts our entire being. True healing involves the whole person, physical, emotional, and spiritual. The tendency for modern people is to fragment people by not recognizing that the human condition is intertwined with a fallen human nature and active demonic forces. An example of this fragmentation is found in an editorial article on the causes of schizophrenia in the prestigious *The New England Journal of Medicine*. The author acknowledged the complexities surrounding the causation of schizophrenia, but she focused almost exclusively on finding neurological causes, without mention of other possible causes, including spiritual or emotional (Andreasen 1999, 645–47).

But we should not go too far and suggest that there is always a direct demonic source of every illness. A balanced understanding of the interplay of spiritual

forces has been the mark of Christianity from earliest days, even up to the modern missions movement, where medical and evangelistic missions brought physical and spiritual healing to millions.

Textual issue **(17:21):** Several ancient manuscripts (^{2}א C D L W TR etc.) add this sentence (v. 21). Many translations, including the HCSB, place the sentence in brackets, indicating that it was likely not original to Matthew's Gospel. An impressive, wide variety of ancient witnesses omit this sentence (א* B Θ 33 syr^{s,c} etc.). Since there is no satisfactory reason why it would have been omitted if original to Matthew's Gospel, it appears that those manuscripts in which it is found have been assimilated to the parallel in Mark 9:29. Later copyists sometimes inserted material derived from another Gospel for purposes of harmonization. Even in Mark the original reading most likely referred only to prayer and not to fasting (א, B, it^{k}, geo^{1}, and Clement; Osborne 2010, 657; Metzger 1994, 35; Blomberg 1992, 268).

> 22 As they were meeting in Galilee, Jesus told them, "The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men. 23 They will kill Him, and on the third day He will be raised up." And they were deeply distressed.

And they were deeply distressed (17:23): If the disciples were "deeply distressed" at Jesus' prediction of death, clearly they took it seriously. And yet during the Passion Week they seemingly forgot all about it, even arguing on the way into Jerusalem about who would get positions of honor. Can these disparate evidences be explained and harmonized? Actually, their distress is best explained by the fact that Jesus' predictions did not at all fit with their expectations about Messiah. The paradigm Jesus kept explaining to them, of a suffering and rising Messiah, distressed them because it made no sense and did not fit with the works of power they had seen him perform. For further discussion, see comments on 16:21–23; 20:17–19; and 26:2.

> 24 When they came to Capernaum, those who collected the double-drachma tax approached Peter and said, "Doesn't your Teacher pay the double-drachma tax?"
>
> 25"Yes," he said.
>
> When he went into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, "What do you think, Simon? Who do earthly kings collect tariffs or taxes from? From their sons or from strangers?"

26 “From strangers,” he said.

“Then the sons are free,” Jesus told him. 27 “But, so we won’t offend them, go to the sea, cast in a fishhook, and take the first fish that you catch. When you open its mouth you’ll find a coin. Take it and give it to them for Me and you.”

Go to the sea, cast in a fishhook, and take the first fish that you catch. When you open its mouth you’ll find a coin (17:27): Matthew is the only Evangelist to record this incident. To make a striking impression on his disciples that they would long remember, Jesus instructs Peter to throw out a fishing line and there he will find the coin for paying the tax. While fish will commonly swallow shiny objects such as coins, it was a miracle of foreknowledge (cf. 21:2) that Jesus knew such a fish was nearby, and a miracle of divine provision that exactly *that* fish was caught. It is a sign for the disciples, like the cursing of the fig tree (21:19), but here the sign is an indication of Jesus’ superiority to the temple.

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, “Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

2 Then He called a child to Him and had him stand among them. 3 “I assure you,” He said, “unless you are converted and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child—this one is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 And whoever welcomes one child like this in My name welcomes Me.

6 “But whoever causes the downfall of one of these little ones who believe in Me—it would be better for him if a heavy millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned in the depths of the sea! 7 Woe to the world because of offenses. For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes. 8 If your hand or your foot causes your downfall, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into the eternal fire. 9 And if your eye causes your downfall, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, rather than to have two eyes and be thrown into hellfire!

If your hand or your foot causes your downfall, cut it off and throw it away . . . And if your eye causes your downfall, gouge it out and throw it away (18:8–9): Similar to the hyperbole (intentional exaggeration) of the sayings in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus indicates that cutting off one’s hand or foot or plucking out one’s eye in this life (18:8–9) is no comparison to the judgment that will come eternally for allowing the passions of the flesh to lead a disciple into sin. For further discussion see comments on 5:29–30. This is another indication that Jesus gave many of his sayings on more than one occasion for different audiences or purposes.

10 “See that you don’t look down on one of these little ones, because I tell you that in heaven
their angels continually view the face of My Father in heaven. [11 For the Son of Man has come
to save the lost.] 12 What do you think? If a man has 100 sheep, and one of them goes astray,
won’t he leave the 99 on the hillside and go and search for the stray? 13 And if he finds it, I
assure you: He rejoices over that sheep more than over the 99 that did not go astray. 14 In the
same way, it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones perish.

***Textual issue* (18:11)**: Since the transition between Jesus’ statement about angelic care for the disciples and the parable of the sheep seems somewhat rough, several manuscripts have inserted an additional verse: “For the Son of Man has come to save the lost” (D L^{c} W TR lat $sy^{c,p,h}$ bo^{pt}). Later copyists apparently added this to connect the parable more closely with verse 13, or it was borrowed from Luke 19:10 to make a smoother transition between 18:10 and 18:12–14. The phrase is lacking in the best manuscripts (ℵ B L* Θ $f^{1,13}$ 33 sa mae bo^{pt}; Metzger 1994, 36).

If a man has 100 sheep, and one of them goes astray, won’t he leave the 99 on the hillside and go and search for the stray? (18:12): Luke 15:3–7 places this same parable in a different setting, and applies a different meaning (in Luke the lost sheep represent unsaved sinners, while in Matthew the sheep are wayward believers). Critics suggest this means one of the Evangelists invented a context for its telling, but this is an unwarranted conclusion. The image of God’s people as his sheep is replete throughout the OT, and it is not surprising that Jesus played off this imagery on multiple occasions.

It is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones perish (18:14): If it is not God’s will that any of the “little ones perish,” why do they in fact perish? This saying of Jesus illustrates a distinction between what is often called God’s revealed or expressed will and his declarative or decreed will. As Hendricksen notes: “That it is God’s revealed will that not a single one should perish but that all be saved, that this is his *delight*, is the doctrine of Scripture throughout (Deut 5:29; Ps 81:13; Isa 45:22; 48:18; Ezek 18:23, 32; 33:11; Matt 11:28, 29; John 7:37; 2 Pet 3:9; Rev 22:17)” (1973, 696–97). Nonetheless, the Father will not force anyone to repentance, as Judas will so grievously illustrate. The Father has commissioned the community of disciples to do all that is possible to retrieve their wayward brothers and sisters, because they must have the same heart as does their heavenly Father.

15 “If your brother sins against you, go and rebuke him in private. If he listens to you, you have
won your brother. 16 But if he won’t listen, take one or two more with you, so that **by the**
testimony of two or three witnesses every fact may be established. 17 If he pays no attention to
them, tell the church. But if he doesn’t pay attention even to the church, let him be like an
unbeliever and a tax collector to you. 18 I assure you: Whatever you bind on earth is already
bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth is already loosed in heaven. 19 Again, I
assure you: If two of you on earth agree about any matter that you pray for, it will be done for
you by My Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am
there among them.”

. . . tell the church . . . (18:17–18): This is the second time that the word “church” (*ekklesia*) occurs in Matthew’s Gospel (16:18; 18:17), both times used by Jesus, and the only times that the term occurs in the Gospels. The use here appears to some scholars to indicate that the passage is late in origin and that it reflects Matthew’s interest in the church rather than the actual teaching of Jesus. But Jesus’ use of the term is a natural extension of the use of the term in the OT. It occurs often in the LXX to render the Hebrew word *qahal* (e.g., Deut 23:3; 1 Kgs 8:55), where it is used for the people of God, assembled or not assembled. We should not be misled by later uses by the church. Jesus meant his followers to be a continuing group, and he used this ready term to designate it as such (Morris 1992, 468). This is a look ahead by Jesus to the future functioning of his family of disciples as the community of believers in this present age.

The authenticity of the use of the term is reinforced by noting that Jesus is giving only a partial glimpse of the operation of the church. The full functioning and organization of the church remains for later NT writers to reveal, once it was clear that Jesus’ disciples were to be distinct from Israel and the operation of synagogue and temple. In the selection of the Twelve disciples/apostles to go with his message of fulfillment to Israel (Matt 10:1–6), who will judge the tribes of Israel (19:28), Jesus first points ahead to the time when his disciples, his family of faith (12:48–50), will be called “My church” (16:18). This will be the fellowship of disciples who, unlike national Israel, will believe in Jesus’ identity as the Messiah, the Son of the living God (16:16), and leave all other allegiances behind as they receive mercy and forgiveness of sin, and likewise demonstrate toward each other mercy and forgiveness (18:21–22). Jesus will build his church through the foundational activity of the apostles and prophets (Eph 2:20). Peter will be the leader among the apostles who will play a foundational role in the early church, but once he has fulfilled that role, he will pass off the scene.

21 Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord, how many times could my brother sin against me
and I forgive him? As many as seven times?”
22“I tell you, not as many as seven,” Jesus said to him, “but 70 times seven. 23 For this
reason, the kingdom of heaven can be compared to a king who wanted to settle accounts with
his slaves. 24 When he began to settle accounts, one who owed 10,000 talents was brought
before him. 25 Since he had no way to pay it back, his master commanded that he, his wife, his
children, and everything he had be sold to pay the debt.
26“At this, the slave fell facedown before him and said, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay
you everything!’ 27 Then the master of that slave had compassion, released him, and forgave
him the loan.
28“But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him 100 denarii. He
grabbed him, started choking him, and said, ‘Pay what you owe!’
29“At this, his fellow slave fell down and began begging him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will
pay you back.’ 30 But he wasn’t willing. On the contrary, he went and threw him into prison
until he could pay what was owed. 31 When the other slaves saw what had taken place, they
were deeply distressed and went and reported to their master everything that had happened.
32“Then, after he had summoned him, his master said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave
you all that debt because you begged me. 33 Shouldn’t you also have had mercy on your fellow
slave, as I had mercy on you?’ 34 And his master got angry and handed him over to the jailers
to be tortured until he could pay everything that was owed. 35 So My heavenly Father will also
do to you if each of you does not forgive his brother from his heart.”

“I tell you, not as many as seven,” Jesus said to him, “but 70 times seven” (18:21–22): Is Peter being stingy or generous here? What about Jesus? Also, did Jesus answer 77 or 70 times seven? People can get caught up in a regular pattern of sinning and seeking restoration. Later Judaism recognized that repeat offenders may not really be repenting at all, and drew the line at how many times a person could seek restoration and forgiveness: “If a man commits a transgression, the first, second and third time he is forgiven, the fourth time he is not” (*b. Yoma* 86b, 87a). In another case the rabbinic literature is even less forgiving: “If a man said, ‘I will sin and repent, and sin again and repent,’ he will be given no chance to repent . . . for transgressions that are between a man and his fellow the Day of Atonement effects atonement only if he has appeased his fellow” (*m. Yoma* 8.9).

Peter’s question follows in that line, wondering how many times he should forgive a person who has repeatedly sinned against him. In light of the above, his offer to forgive an offender seven times is magnanimous, reflecting a desire for completeness that the number seven usually evokes. But he wonders where the

limit should be drawn on his generosity of spirit. Jesus' astonishing response is that Peter must forgive not the magnanimous number of seven, but to forgive without counting, even as God has fully forgiven those who have responded to the invitation to the kingdom of heaven.

The reason there is variation in translations (77 versus 70 times seven) is that there is ambiguity in the number Jesus uses (*hebdomekontakis hepta*). The MT and LXX of Genesis 4:24 render it as 77, while early translations of Matthew (BDF §248[2], 130) render it 70 times seven. It is possible that the LXX of Genesis 4:24 already intended to heighten the rhetoric by using the larger number (Nolland 2005, 755). Either way, Jesus seems to be saying that the number does not matter. Peter and the rest of the disciples are to continue to forgive without keeping count.

> When Jesus had finished this instruction, He departed from Galilee and went to the region of Judea across the Jordan. 2 Large crowds followed Him, and He healed them there. 3 Some Pharisees approached Him to test Him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife on any grounds?"
>
> 4 "Haven't you read," He replied, "that He who created them in the beginning **made them male and female**," 5 and He also said:
>
> **"For this reason a man will leave**
> **his father and mother**
> **and be joined to his wife,**
> **and the two will become one flesh**?
>
> 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, man must not separate."
>
> 7 "Why then," they asked Him, "did Moses command us to give divorce papers and to send her away?"
>
> 8 He told them, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because of the hardness of your hearts. But it was not like that from the beginning. 9 And I tell you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."

Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery (19:9): Matthew's account includes an exception clause ("except for sexual immorality"), whereas Mark 10:11 and Luke 16:18 do not. Did Matthew loosen Jesus' teachings by inventing this clause? In Jesus' day, leading Pharisees debated the grounds for divorce that Moses established, who allowed a man to divorce his wife if he found "something improper about her" (Deut 24:1). The debate focused on the meaning of "improper." The *Mishnah*

tractate *Gittin* (“Bills of Divorce”) reflects back on the debate and records the differing interpretations (*m. Giṭ.* 9:10). The more conservative school of Shammai said, “a man may not divorce his wife unless he has found unchastity in her.” The more liberal school of Hillel interpreted “improper” to mean that, “he may divorce her even if she spoiled a dish for him.” The esteemed Rabbi Akiba, who belonged to the school of Hillel, later added, “Even if he found another fairer than she,” demonstrating that divorce was being granted for superficial reasons.

As did Moses (cf. Deut 24:1–4), Jesus named an exception to protect the non-offending partner and to protect the institution of marriage from being an indecent sham. Such an occasion is when a person has committed *porneia*, rendered “sexual immorality” in the HCSB or, appropriately, “marital unfaithfulness” in the NIV. Since “adultery” is already specified by another word (*moicheuo*; 5:27–28; 19:9), *porneia* must be something less specific than sexual infidelity, but, following the Mosaic intention, more than a frivolous excuse. The semantic range of *porneia* includes whatever intentionally divides the marital relationship, possibly including, but not limited to, related sexual sins such as incest, homosexuality, prostitution, molestation, or indecent exposure (Blomberg 1992, 177; Janzen 2000, 66–80). Later rabbis declared that divorce was required when adultery was committed (putting the offending party to death as Moses had prescribed in Deut 24:1–4 was no longer practiced), because adultery produced a state of impurity that, as a matter of legal fact, dissolved the marriage (*m. Sotah* 5:1; *m. Yebam*. 2:8). Jesus did not require divorce, but allowed it in order to protect the person who had been violated.

Looking to Mark and Luke’s silence about the exception clause, some scholars hold that Jesus did not utter it and that Matthew inserted it because this was the custom in his church (or for some similar reason). Other scholars reason that it was so widely accepted that *porneia* was a sufficient cause for divorce that it did not need stating; it could simply be assumed, and Mark and Luke are doing just that (Blomberg 1992, 13; Morris 1992, 484). As we have seen above, among the Jews of the time divorce on the grounds of adultery was not simply permitted—it was required (cf. Matt 5:32). There are, therefore, good reasons for accepting the exception clause as an authentic part of Jesus’ teaching. (See further comments at Mark 10:11 and Luke 16:18.)

16 Just then someone came up and asked Him, “Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal

life?”

17 “Why do you ask Me about what is good?” He said to him. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.”

18 “Which ones?” he asked Him. Jesus answered:

Do not murder;
do not commit adultery;
do not steal;
do not bear false witness;
19 **honor your father and your mother;**
and love your neighbor as yourself.

20 “I have kept all these,” the young man told Him. “What do I still lack?”

21 “If you want to be perfect,” Jesus said to him, “go, sell your belongings and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me.”

22 When the young man heard that command, he went away grieving, because he had many possessions.

23 Then Jesus said to His disciples, “I assure you: It will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven! 24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

25 When the disciples heard this, they were utterly astonished and asked, “Then who can be saved?”

26 But Jesus looked at them and said, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

27 Then Peter responded to Him, “Look, we have left everything and followed You. So what will there be for us?”

28 Jesus said to them, “I assure you: In the Messianic Age, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, you who have followed Me will also sit on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel. 29 And everyone who has left houses, brothers or sisters, father or mother, children, or fields because of My name will receive 100 times more and will inherit eternal life. 30 But many who are first will be last, and the last first.

Story of the Rich Young Ruler **(19:16–22)**: The incident of the rich young man appears in all three Synoptic Gospels (19:16–22; Mark 10:17–22; Luke 18:23). There are intriguing similarities and variations. While each Gospel writer discloses that the person is rich, they reveal his further identity somewhat differently: Matthew calls him a “young man” (19:20), Mark simply states he is a “man” (10:17), and Luke alone calls him “a ruler” (18:18: *tis archon*). “Ruler” is found elsewhere in Luke for an administrator of a synagogue (8:41), a legal magistrate (12:58), a religious leader of the Pharisees (14:1), and several times to refer to religious leaders who participated in the trial and execution of Jesus (23:13, 35; 24:20; Acts 3:17; 5:26).

Rather than representing contradictions, these varied descriptions supplement

one another, giving a complete portrait. This young man (indicating 20–40 years of age) was some kind of religious lay-leader, possibly a Pharisee because of his scrupulous adherence to the Law, and was among the religious elite. These kinds of people often were well-off because they were among the retainer class, well above the common people. The political situation in first-century Palestine was such that the Roman occupiers allowed a form of self-rule, and within Judaism the religious leaders exercised much of that leadership (Saldarini 2001, 277–97). Finally, in addition to fleshing out the portrait of the man involved, the variations in the accounts indicate how three different authors rendered into Greek the gist of an interchange originally spoken in Aramaic.

There is only One who is good (19:17): Does Jesus deny his holiness and divinity by this statement? In Matthew the ruler asks about what good thing he must perform to obtain eternal life, whereas Mark and Luke emphasize Jesus as the "Good Teacher" who is queried about obtaining eternal life (Mark 10:17–22; Luke 18:18–23). The young man seems to believe that there is something deficient in obeying the Law to gain eternal life. Jesus gets him to focus on God alone as the Good, to whom he must come to gain eternal life. Jesus is not denying that he is good, or denying that he is equal with God the Father. Rather, he is trying to get the rich young man to see that only in understanding God as good can he discover that good deeds beyond the Law do not obtain eternal life. Mark and Luke shed more light on this as they emphasize that Jesus is trying to get the rich young man to see that he is only good if he is God. (See further comments at Mark 10:17–31.)

Love your neighbor as yourself (19:19): Which of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) says, "Love your neighbor as yourself"? Has Jesus invented a commandment? The young man responded to Jesus' directive to obey the commandments by asking, "Which ones?" Jesus then replied by giving a representative listing of the law, including five of the Ten Commandments that come primarily from the second table of the Decalogue (sixth, seventh, eight, ninth, then fifth; cf. Exod 20:1–17; Deut 5:7–21), and the second of the two greatest commandments (Lev 19:18; cf. Matt 22:36–40): "Do not murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother; and love your neighbor as yourself" (19:18–19). The last of this listing does not come directly from the Decalogue as recorded in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, but is quoted from Leviticus 19:18 amidst the Holiness Code. Early in Leviticus 19, God commands Moses to say to the congregations of

Israel: “Be holy because I, Yahweh your God, am holy” (Lev 19:2). This phrase recurs frequently throughout chapters 17–27, which detail prescriptions for holy living in a variety of contexts. The command to “love your neighbor as yourself” is a fundamental principle of Torah, which Jesus later explains is the second greatest commandment following the first, which is to: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (see comments on Matt 22:37–39).

“If you want to be perfect,” Jesus said to him, “go, sell your belongings and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven” (19:21): Critics and Christians alike have seen a command to poverty in Jesus’ statement, but this misjudges the context. Jesus called this young man to address the central lack in his life. His wealth had become his identity, his power, his purpose, and meaning. Jesus did not call him to perform works to obtain salvation, but instead called him to exchange the god of wealth for following the Messiah as the one true God. Jesus’ statement about being “perfect” mirrors his statement in the Sermon on the Mount, where entering the kingdom was only through “greater righteousness” than the scribes and Pharisees (5:20). In neither case is Jesus calling for personal works for salvation; rather, in both cases he is preparing for what Paul will call “justification,” a declared righteousness that comes only through the imputed righteousness of Christ (Rom 3:20–26).

With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible (19:26): Does this imply that God can do anything whatsoever, such as make a square circle? Critics have assumed so, and pointed to this verse as proof of the logical incoherence of biblical theism, but the context does not support their allegation. At issue here is the question of how can anyone be saved. The disciples were shocked to learn that it is hard for wealthy people to enter the kingdom of God, because wealth was often equated with the blessing of divine favor (Deut 28:1–14). If those who seemingly are the most blessed of God cannot be saved, then who can be? (Matt 19:25). Jesus knows that riches can keep people’s eyes off of God. But he also knows that God can do what is hard or even impossible for humans, namely save them from their sins (19:26).

Thus we see that this passage has nothing to do with philosophical questions about whether God can do anything whatsoever, such as make a square circle. The omnipotence of God does not mean that he can do something that is either a logical contradiction or counter to his character. A square circle is a logical contradiction; that God does not accomplish such a feat does not negate his

omnipotence.

St. Thomas Aquinas addressed this question in his clarification of God's omnipotence. Aquinas explains that something can be possible in two ways: "First in relation to some power, thus whatever is subject to human power is said to be possible to man. Secondly absolutely, on account of the relation in which the very terms stand to each other" (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica: Treatise on the One God*, Question 25, Article 3). To say that God is omnipotent on the first point above creates a "vicious circle" since this would be saying nothing else than, "God is omnipotent, because he can do all that he is able to do." The solution, according to Aquinas, is that God is omnipotent based on the second point above; God is omnipotent because, "He can do all things that are possible absolutely."

> For a thing is said to be possible or impossible absolutely, according to the relation in which the very terms stand to one another, possible if the predicate is not incompatible with the subject, as that Socrates sits; and absolutely impossible when the predicate is altogether incompatible with the subject, as, for instance, that a man is a donkey. Therefore, everything that does not imply a contradiction in terms is numbered amongst those possible things, in respect of which God is called omnipotent: whereas whatever implies contradiction does not come within the scope of divine omnipotence, because it cannot have the aspect of possibility. Hence it is better to say that such things cannot be done, than that God cannot do them. Nor is this contrary to the word of the angel, saying: "No word shall be impossible with God." For whatever implies a contradiction cannot be a word, because no intellect can possibly conceive such a thing. (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica: Treatise on the One God*, Question 25, Article 3)

That God can do all things which are possible without a logical contradiction might not appear to be enough to some, as if God should be able to do what is logically impossible. While being able to do what is logically impossible may sound impressive, it does not convey anything of meaning. We are incapable of conceiving a square circle because if it is square it is not a circle and vice versa. So there are limits, logical limits, to what an omnipotent being can do, and it is no mark against the biblical conception of God to say so.

Everyone who has left houses, brothers or sisters, father or mother, children, or fields because of My name . . . (19:29): Does Jesus advocate abandoning families and domestic responsibilities in order to serve the kingdom?

Jesus has previously mentioned the separation that will occur between some family members because of the decision to follow him (10:34–39; cf. 8:21–22). Jesus did not come to abolish the family, for he upheld the law that demands children to honor their parents and rebuked those who developed traditions allowing them to circumvent family obligations (15:3–9). Instead of abolishing or rejecting family, Jesus demonstrated the preeminence of a disciple's commitment to him and the kingdom of heaven. This forms a new spiritual family in relationship to him and to the Father in which the central feature is doing the Father's will (12:46–50).

. . . will receive 100 times more and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first (19:29–30): Critics say Jesus is giving a material incentive for following him, but in fact he shows that serving him for the primary purpose of receiving rewards and prominence is the least noble of motivations for a disciple. Those who serve for the purpose of gaining rewards will be last, but those who have served only for the motivation of responding in obedience to Jesus' summons will be first (cf. 20:1–16). Peter's response shows that he too is driven by a less than pure desire for treasure in heaven (19:23–30). The rich ruler had refused to exchange his wealth for following Jesus, and Jesus then warned his disciples about the danger that riches pose to a person's eternal salvation. Peter flaunted the sacrifice that he and the other disciples had made to follow Jesus ("Look, we have left everything and followed You"), and boldly asked, "So what will there be for us?" (19:27). His question revealed a wrong motive. Jesus acknowledges Peter's sacrifice, and does say that he will be rewarded, but this is the least noble of motivations for a disciple.

> "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. 2 After agreeing with the workers on one denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. 3 When he went out about nine in the morning, he saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. 4 To those men he said, 'You also go to my vineyard, and I'll give you whatever is right.' So off they went. 5 About noon and at three, he went out again and did the same thing. 6 Then about five he went and found others standing around, and said to them, 'Why have you been standing here all day doing nothing?'
>
> 7" 'Because no one hired us,' they said to him.
>
> " 'You also go to my vineyard,' he told them. 8 When evening came, the owner of the vineyard told his foreman, 'Call the workers and give them their pay, starting with the last and ending with the first.'

9 “When those who were hired about five came, they each received one denarius. 10 So when
the first ones came, they assumed they would get more, but they also received a denarius each.
11 When they received it, they began to complain to the landowner: 12 ‘These last men put in
one hour, and you made them equal to us who bore the burden of the day and the burning heat!’
13 “He replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I’m doing you no wrong. Didn’t you agree with me on
a denarius? 14 Take what’s yours and go. I want to give this last man the same as I gave you.
15 Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my business? Are you jealous because I’m
generous?’
16 “So the last will be first, and the first last.”

The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard (20:1–16): Critics (and some Christians) say this parable about the workers and the vineyard depicts God as unjust and despotic. Is this a correct reading of the parable? This parable grows out of the encounter between Jesus and the rich young man (19:16–22) and especially the reaction of Peter (19:23–30). Jesus demonstrates how serving him and the kingdom of heaven for the primary purpose of receiving rewards and gaining personal prominence is the least noble of motivations. There is an equality in the kingdom that makes foolish any attempt to gain wealth, position, or preeminence. Jesus powerfully drives this point home by telling a parable in which all workers are paid the same, no matter how long they had labored.

Commentators who are inclined toward issues of economic justice have used this parable as a story that unmasks the pretension of those who are unjust and who control the levers of power. And since this parable is instruction on the kingdom of God, they see a God who unjustly controls the levers of power. The landowner thwarted justice by treating those who have worked only one hour the same as those who have endured the burden and the heat of the day (Luz 2001, 532). Had the frame of reference been what is deserved or what was earned, then the resentment of the laborers would be justified. But the landowner has been pressing the claims of a different framework. With a measure of gentleness, he calls the first hired laborer “friend” or “companion” (*hetairos*). The laborer has been self-centered, thinking only about himself and not about the generosity and intervention of the landowner nor the fortune of the other laborers.

Jesus’ concluding statement—“So the last will be first, and the first last” (20:16)—reverses the order of the statement from 19:30 to emphasize the conclusion of the parable, that those who were hired last were first. Those hired last were unworthy of what they received, yet they were paid first and treated with equality to those who were hired first. And those who were hired first were

paid last, and from their point of view, treated unfairly as though they were equal to those who were last. The intended application to Peter (19:27) and his request for preferential treatment and reward is obvious. Although he and the Twelve were the first to give up all they had to follow Jesus, all true disciples are included by Jesus as having done the same thing (19:29).

This parable is a lesson about gratitude and motivation in service, not about salvation or gaining eternal life, because salvation is not earned by works (Eph 2:8–9; Titus 3:5–6). Nor is the parable about rewards for service, because God will indeed reward believers differently according to their service (1 Cor 3:8; John 4:36). Rather this is a parable about what should be the disciple's motivation for service. We should serve out of gratitude, because it is only through the intervention of Jesus that any disciples receive anything.

> 17 While going up to Jerusalem, Jesus took the 12 disciples aside privately and said to them on
> the way: 18"Listen! We are going up to Jerusalem. The Son of Man will be handed over to the
> chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death. 19 Then they will hand Him over
> to the Gentiles to be mocked, flogged, and crucified, and He will be resurrected on the third
> day."
> 20 Then the mother of Zebedee's sons approached Him with her sons. She knelt down to ask
> Him for something. 21"What do you want?" He asked her.
> "Promise," she said to Him, "that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right and the
> other on Your left, in Your kingdom."

Another death-and-resurrection prediction **(20:17–19)**: Once again Jesus plainly foretells his death, and yet the disciples still did not get it. Is Matthew merely going back and weaving death predictions into Jesus' teachings in order to portray him as being fully aware of his fate, a willing victim of injustice? This is the third of four times that Jesus predicted his arrest and crucifixion, but the drama is heightened by the first reference to Jerusalem, the first mention of the religious leaders' condemnation of Jesus to death, and the first mention of the Gentiles who will carry out the execution (see further details at comments on 16:21; cf. 17:22–23; 20:17–19; 26:2). As mentioned previously, the identity of Jesus as a crucified Messiah was not easily learned by the disciples. All along in Jesus' ministry, his activities declared him to be preparing to establish the kingdom, and the disciples expected this meant arriving in Jerusalem to take over power from the religious leaders and from Rome.

The request for favored position **(20:20–21):** The word "then" links Jesus' third

passion prediction with the request for favored position. If Jesus really gave the death prediction in verses 18–19, specifically naming the schemes intended by the scribes and priests, would not the disciples have entered Jerusalem on the alert, far too edgy to be selfishly asking about what privileges might be coming to them? From the vantage point of looking back over all the events that soon transpired in Jerusalem, the request is the height of folly. As to the situation at the time, the request is somewhat more understandable in light of two things: the ongoing inability of the disciples fully to comprehend Jesus' death predictions, and the relationship between Jesus and the sons of Zebedee (James and John). Their mother was a faithful follower of Jesus, but also evidently his relative. She was among the women who attended Jesus at the cross and later witnessed the empty tomb, which would identify her as Salome (cf. 27:56; Mark 15:40; 16:1). The best clarification of the listings of the women identify Salome as the sister of Mary, Jesus' mother (cf. John 19:25). So she is Jesus' aunt, and her sons, James and John, are his cousins on his mother's side. Apparently as Jesus traveled through Galilee, and now on the trip to Jerusalem, his mother and aunt traveled with the band of disciples, which would at least partly explain why there is no hint of scandal with the other women traveling with them (Cheney 1997, 13–21).

As she kneels before Jesus, the mother of James and John shows her deference to Jesus as her messianic master, but she also comes apparently to exercise her earthly kinship advantage to Jesus. Mark has the disciples asking the favor for themselves (Mark 10:35–36). This obviously differs from Matthew's account, but is resolved by the likelihood that Mark was speaking to the fact that the desire for favored positions came from the sons and not just their mother. The mother was the agency through which the request was made, but it is still accurate to say that the request was made by the sons. (See further comments at Mark 10:35–37.)

20 As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed Him. 30 There were two blind men
sitting by the road. When they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, "Lord, have
mercy on us, Son of David!" 31 The crowd told them to keep quiet, but they cried out all the
more, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!"

32 Jesus stopped, called them, and said, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

33"Lord," they said to Him, "open our eyes!" 34 Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their
eyes. Immediately they could see, and they followed Him.

As they were leaving Jericho (20:29): Whereas Matthew says this healing occurred as they were "leaving" Jericho, Luke states that it happened while they "drew near" Jericho (Luke 18:35). How this difference can be reconciled is a puzzle to this day. Some suggest that the difference can be reconciled by understanding that the miracle was apparently performed as Jesus left the city (20:29; Mark 10:46), though Jesus first encountered the men when he approached the city (Luke 18:35), or that the men were pleading with Jesus as he entered Jericho, but they were not actually healed until after he left. On the other hand, it may be understood most easily in the light of the fact that two Jerichos were inhabited at that time. It seems easiest to postulate that the healing took place after Jesus left old Jericho and was approaching new Jericho (e.g., Morris 1992, 513–14).

Jericho was an important place during the time of Jesus (Wilkins 2002, 125). The road from the Jordan River crossing to Jerusalem passed through it, so it became a stopping place for Galilean pilgrims to Jerusalem. They traveled south through Perea to avoid contact with Samaritans. Jesus likely passed through Jericho often. In NT times the city of Jericho most noted was not the ancient, declining city of OT fame (e.g., Josh 5:13ff.), but the developments that surrounded a huge, palace complex first built by the Hasmoneans on a three-acre site about a mile south of the ancient city mound. (See further comments at Mark 10:46 and Luke 18:35.)

There were two blind men sitting by the road (20:30): Matthew mentions two blind men, while Mark and Luke both speak of only one, whom Mark identifies as Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46; Luke 18:35). Rather than a contradiction with Matthew, Mark and Luke have placed their focus on the most prominent of the two men. That he is named indicates his prominence. It would not be unusual to find blind men in pairs, because they would commonly have sought companionship among others like themselves. But Matthew may include this notice more to highlight his theme about the testimony of two or three witnesses (Blomberg 1992, 309). (See further comments at Mark 10:46 and Luke 18:35.)

> When they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage at the Mount of Olives, Jesus then sent two disciples, 2 telling them, "Go into the village ahead of you. At once you will find a donkey tied there, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to Me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, you should say that the Lord needs them, and immediately he will send them."
>
> 4 This took place so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled:

5 **Tell Daughter Zion,**
“Look, your King is coming to you,
gentle, and mounted on a donkey,
even on a colt,
the foal of a beast of burden.”

6 The disciples went and did just as Jesus directed them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt; then they laid their robes on them, and He sat on them. 8 A very large crowd spread their robes on the road; others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them on the road. 9 Then the crowds who went ahead of Him and those who followed kept shouting:

Hosanna to the Son of David!
He who comes in the name
of the Lord is the blessed One!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!

10 When He entered Jerusalem, the whole city was shaken, saying, “Who is this?” 11 And the crowds kept saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee!”

You will find a donkey tied there, and a colt with her (21:2): Zechariah’s prophecy (Zech 9:9) specified that the peace-bringing king of Israel would enter Jerusalem “riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” Mark and Luke state that the animal Jesus rode upon was a donkey, “on which no one has ever sat” (Mark 11:2; Luke 19:30). Matthew alone mentions that two animals were present (cf. Mark 11:4, 7; Luke 19:33, 35), and he further says that as the disciples brought the animals and laid their garments upon them, Jesus sat on “them” (21:7). Rather than clumsily asserting that Jesus rode two animals, Matthew is picking up on the synonymous parallelism of Zechariah’s prophecy. Further, his account adds a touch of authentic historical reminiscence: an unbroken young colt would be best controlled by having its mother stay alongside to calm it in the midst of the tumult of the entrance to Jerusalem (cf. Gundry 1994, 409–10; Hagner 1995, 594–95). The disciples placed their outer cloaks (cf. 5:40) on both animals, since both were in the procession, but Jesus sat only upon the cloaks placed on the foal. (See further comments at Mark 11:2 and Luke 19:30.)

If anyone says anything to you, you should say that the Lord needs them (21:3): The term “Lord” (*kurios*) can be taken in a common way to mean one’s earthly master, or it can be taken to refer to deity. It is used to refer to the master of the slave (10:24), but also to God as the Lord of the harvest (9:38), Lord of the vineyard (20:8), Lord of heaven and earth (11:20; 11:25), and Jesus as the Messiah (Acts 10:36). It is difficult to say what the disciples or others understood the reference to mean in this context, but Jesus plainly intends it to

refer to himself as the one who sovereignly superintends these events. This is an intentional arrangement by Jesus to declare his identity to the nation.

He who comes in the name of the Lord is the blessed One! (21:8–11): When the crowds spread robes and palm branches over the roadway in verse 8 and shouted a citation of Psalm 118 in verse 9, were these signals that they received Jesus as Messiah, as king, or were these just things commonly done for all pilgrims who entered Jerusalem for festival week? The crowd attending the entrance was mixed, so not all meant to convey the same reception. Luke reports that "the whole crowd of the disciples" was present and that they "began to praise God joyfully" and hail Jesus by saying, "The King who comes in the name of the Lord is the blessed One" (Luke 19:37). The women disciples who followed Jesus from Galilee were likely part of the crowd (Matt 27:55–56), but also the contingent of believers in the Jerusalem region, among them possibly Lazarus, Martha, Mary, and others who had believed when Jesus raised Lazarus (cf. John 12:1–3). Within the crowd there were also others who were not Jesus' disciples, but who were part of the typical crowds that followed him throughout his ministry. Many of these probably expected that Jesus had come to liberate Jerusalem from Roman oppression. Others were there out of curiosity and were caught up in the excitement. Luke further reveals that within the crowd were some of the religious leaders, among them the usual Pharisaic contingent that opposed Jesus' claim to authority and were keeping watch on him (Luke 19:39).

That some in the crowd threw garments in Jesus' path surely symbolized their submission to him as king (2 Kgs 9:13). The spreading of palm fronds symbolized reception of Jesus as national liberator (cf. Morris 1992, 522n12; France 2007, 779). Palms symbolized Jewish nationalism and victory, such as when Judas Maccabeus and his followers recovered Jerusalem and the temple desecrated by Antiochus (2 Macc 10:7; cf. 1 Macc 13:51). The crowds also shout out, "Hosanna," which is the transliteration of the Hebrew expression that means "O save" (cf. 2 Sam 14:4; 2 Kgs 6:26). This draws some in the crowd to make a connection to the Hallel (Psalms 113–118) sung during the Passover season, expressing messianic hopes as voiced in Psalm 118:19–29 (esp. 118:25, "LORD, save us"). Though some hold that this scene depicts merely the common practice of pilgrims during festival week, the specific actions of laying their garments and palm fronds for Jesus to ride on reveal that, on balance, this crowd was not merely acting on ritual. The crowd, aided by Jesus' followers among them, identified Jesus as Messiah. They further cried out to Jesus as "Son of David" (21:9). Linked with Hosanna, the title "Son of David" is unmistakably

messianic.

The crowd's mixed conception of Jesus is revealed as he enters the city: "The whole city was shaken, saying 'Who is this?'" (21:10). This recalls Jerusalem's reaction when the magi came seeking the one born the king of the Jews—the whole city had been "disturbed" (2:3; *etarachthe*). Now as Jesus enters Jerusalem the city "was shaken" (*eseisthe*). The expression "all Jerusalem" in the infancy narrative (2:3) indicated the political and religious leadership that was threatened by the arrival of the one born king of the Jews. They had aligned themselves politically with Herod, and if his power base was threatened, so was theirs. Likewise here "the whole city" indicates that the religious establishment is again paranoid of this one they believe may attempt to usurp their power.

Matthew narrates that the crowds answered generally, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee" (21:11). The answer indicates the mixed nature of those attending Jesus' entrance. Some in the crowd call him a prophet, which many in his ministry saw him to be (16:14; 21:46). This does not seem to imply that they understood him to be *the* eschatological prophet of Moses' prophecy (Deut 18:15–18; cf. John 6:14; 7:40, 52; Acts 3:22; 7:37), but rather the prophet who has been creating such a stir in Galilee, whose hometown was Nazareth. Those who called out "Hosanna" seem to have expected Jesus to bring liberation, as had the kings of ancient Israel and the Maccabees of more recent times.

This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee! (21:11): Critics ask how the identification of Jesus as a prophet here fits with the claim that no prophet will arise in Galilee (John 7:52). The context of John 7 relays a long and heated debate over who Jesus is: a prophet, Messiah, or a deceiver. In conversation with Nicodemus, the Pharisees assert: "Investigate and you will see that no prophet arises from Galilee" (John 7:52). In their minds, they could expect no prophet from Galilee since no prophet had ever come from there before (Bruce 1983, 186). Inhabitants of Jerusalem looked down upon those from the Galilee region (cf. Acts 2:7), and thus it was generally felt in the south that pure religion could only be found in Judea (Bruce 1983, 186). The referents in this passage may not have known that Jesus was actually born in Judea. And yet, the Pharisees prove to be wrong in their assertion; prophets had come from Galilee, most specifically Jonah (2 Kgs 14:25).

What this passage reveals is not an error in the Gospel writers' conveyance of history, nor is it a proof text that Jesus could not be the fulfillment of messianic expectation because of his residence. Rather, it reveals once again the pietistic

attitudes of the Pharisees in contrast with the humble reign of the Servant King who makes his entrance not on a war horse, but on a young foal.

> 12 Jesus went into the temple complex and drove out all those buying and selling in the temple. He overturned the money changers' tables and the chairs of those selling doves. 13 And He said to them, "It is written, **My house will be called a house of prayer.** But you are making it **a den of thieves**!"

Cleansing the temple complex **(21:12–13)**: John narrates a temple cleansing at the beginning of Jesus' ministry (John 2:13–17). Most scholars hold that John narrated the same event as the Synoptics, but that he placed it at the beginning of Jesus' ministry rather than the end for thematic purposes (e.g., Beasley-Murray 1999, 38–42; Hagner 1995, 599–600). It is not unusual for the Gospel writers to break from chronology and arrange material thematically. Factors arguing against there being two separate temple cleansings include (a) the difficulty of seeing how the religious leaders would have let Jesus get away with this twice, (b) the fact that none of the Synoptics mention that the cleansing has been done once before, and (c) the very close similarity of the events.

However, there is much to commend the suggestion that Jesus did twice go to the temple with a message to Israel and its leadership (cf. Morris 1995, 166–69; Carson 1991, 176–78). We may posit that at the beginning of his ministry Jesus made a declaration about his messianic ministry, which could have included a warning to Israel's religious leaders at the temple. That this was not overlooked by the religious establishment is revealed in a statement by Jesus during the first temple incident that was later used against him falsely in his trial (Matt 26:61; Mark 14:58; John 2:19; cf. Acts 6:14). The first incident caught the leaders by surprise, while at the second the crowds were so aligned with Jesus that the temple authorities dared not act against him in public. In the light of the bustle of activity, Jesus' actions may also have been considered relatively minor. But now the religious leadership cannot overlook the obvious revolutionary nature of Jesus' rejection of their leadership. They attempt to entrap him in religious debate so that he would be denounced (21:23–27; 22:15–46). Failing, they plot to arrest and kill him (21:46; 26:3–5) to avoid the threat to them from both the populace and from the Roman governing body. (See further comments at Mark 11:15 and John 2:13–25.)

The blind and the lame came to Him in the temple complex, and He healed them. 15 When the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonders that He did and the children shouting in the temple complex, "***Hosanna*** to the Son of David!" they were indignant 16 and said to Him, "Do You hear what these children are saying?"

"Yes," Jesus told them. "Have you never read:

You have prepared praise
from the mouths of children and nursing infants?"

17 Then He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

Have you never read: "You have prepared praise from the mouths of children and nursing infants?" (21:16): Jesus' healing activities prompt the children in the temple to mimic the chant, "Hosanna to the Son of David," which they had heard earlier from the crowd during Jesus' dramatic entry to Jerusalem (21:9, 15). Jesus acknowledges the honor so unknowingly bestowed on him by the children, and links it to Psalm 8:2 (MT/LXX 8:3), chiding the religious leaders for something they should have known if they truly knew the biblical witness. The psalmist applies the praise of children to God, but here the children are ascribing the praise to Jesus as the Son of David. Jesus acknowledges his messiahship in receiving the praise, and goes beyond what even the children knew by receiving personally what was applicable in the psalm only to God (21:16).

Most scholars agree that Jesus here quotes from the Greek LXX rather than the Hebrew text of Psalm 8:3, because the Hebrew is often translated into English similar to the HCSB: "You have established a stronghold from the mouths of children and nursing infants to silence the enemy and the avenger" (Ps 8:2), whereas many English translations of the LXX give a slightly different rendering: "Out of mouths of infants and nurslings you furnished praise for yourself" (Ps 8:3 *NET*). The debate focuses on whether the children and nursing infants establish a "stronghold" from their mouths, or furnish "praise" for God. Some claim that Matthew has chosen the LXX rendering because he wanted to justify Jesus' actions in the temple through the fulfillment of Scripture, and it was only the LXX that suited that purpose (e.g., Buchanan 1996, 810). They charge that Matthew portrays Jesus quoting a passage from the LXX that differs from the original Hebrew, thus violating the intended meaning of the inspired text. While there are difficulties in understanding the Hebrew text of Psalm 8:2–3, many scholars contend that the LXX is an accurate rendering of the Hebrew, and that Jesus' use in 26:16 brings out more profoundly its initial meaning (e.g., Gundry 1967, 121; Craigie 1983, 109; Hagner 1995, 602; France 2007, 789).

The psalm declares how God silences his enemies by means of “strength” that comes from the mouths of children. France notes, “‘Strength’ is often ascribed to God in a formula of praise (e.g., Pss 29:1; 59:16–17; 68:34–35), and when that ‘strength’ issues from mouths it is not hard to see why LXX translated it as ‘praise’” (France 2007, 789). In that sense the LXX makes the relevance of the text to Jesus’ situation explicit, but the underlying Hebrew also is a vindication of what children say. It is that sense on which Jesus’ quotation depends.

> 18 Early in the morning, as He was returning to the city, He was hungry. 19 Seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He went up to it and found nothing on it except leaves. And He said to it, “May no fruit ever come from you again!” At once the fig tree withered.
>
> 20 When the disciples saw it, they were amazed and said, “How did the fig tree wither so quickly?”
>
> 21 Jesus answered them, “I assure you: If you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you tell this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ it will be done. 22 And if you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”

***Chronology for the cursing and withering of the fig tree* (21:18–20)**: When was the fig tree cursed—before the temple cleansing (Matt 21:18–20) or afterwards (Mark 11:11–19; Luke 19:45ff)? And when did it wither? “At once” (Matthew) or the next day (Mark 11:20)? And was it ill-tempered of Jesus to curse a fig tree for not producing fruit at this early date in the season (Mark 11:13)? In answer to the first two questions, Mark gives the more probable chronology of events—Jesus cursed the tree on Monday morning on the way into the city to enact the judgment on the temple leadership. They return to Bethany on Monday night (Mark 11:19), and on Tuesday morning the disciples react to the withering on the way back to Jerusalem (cf. 11:12–14, 20–26). Matthew has simply telescoped the two incidents for literary and theological impact.

Jesus and the disciples, traveling from Bethany to Jerusalem, would have passed through Bethphage, meaning “house of the early fig.” Known for its abundant produce of early figs, the appearance of leaves on a fig tree in this region was a promise of the especially sweet early fig, which also was a promise of later fruitfulness when the normal crop of figs were produced (cf. Mark 11:13, which states that at this time it was not the season for figs, meaning the normal crop). But the tree that should have been producing the sweetest figs was unproductive, with no figs at all.

This becomes an appropriate object for Jesus to use to indicate Israel’s

spiritual condition, providing a striking lesson for the disciples. The fruitfulness and shade of a fig tree make it a ready symbol for God in covenantal relationship with his people Israel. When God is portrayed as finding the potential productivity of Israel, ". . . like the first fruit of the fig tree" (Hos 9:10). Just as the fig tree's fruitfulness was a sign of its health, so fruitfulness was a sign of Israel's faithfulness to covenantal standards. Now that Israel, especially represented by its religious leadership, had perverted the temple practices and had not repented at the appearance of Jesus Messiah's proclaiming the arrival of the kingdom of heaven, Israel was being judged by God. Jesus had just demonstrated this in the temple, and it is now an astonishing object lesson for the disciples. "Jesus uses a barren but leafy fig tree to illustrate how Israel, typified in its leadership, had a showy religion that was of no value and was worthy of judgment because it bore no fruit in their lives" (*DBI*, 283).

Jesus' cursing the fig tree was not a fit of temper, but a symbolic act, demonstrating that God's creatures must produce that for which they were created. This is Jesus' only reported judgment miracle, an indication that this is a highly significant acted symbol (Keener 2009, 504). The fig tree was designed by God to supply figs to satisfy human hunger, and when it was unfruitful it served as an appropriate object lesson to show that God's judgment will fall on all who do not produce fruit in keeping with God's design for them. Even so, God has created humans to carry out his will. The fruit of obedience will be demonstrated in a life of faith empowered by prayer (21:21–22). And as Jesus has so graphically declared all along, he demands our inward allegiance to the will of the Father, so that humans who do not produce the fruit of a changed life through the life of the kingdom of God will suffer eternal judgment (cf. 7:21–23). (See further comments at Mark 11:11–20.)

They were amazed and said, "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" (21:20): Given all the wonders they have seen to this point, we may be surprised that the disciples are still "amazed" (*thaumazo*) at Jesus' miracles. However, this is not a Matthean invention, but an attempt to convey the mind-boggling impact of Jesus' ministry. Through a variety of different expression from a variety of different people, Matthew conveys that Jesus could never be placed in any kind of a box. The crowds were astonished (*ekplesso*) by his teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (7:28), because he taught with an authority far different than the religious leaders. The disciples were amazed (*thaumazo*) at his calming the storm because this was unlike any man they had known (8:27). And then later they fell down and worshiped him when he calmed the sea a second time,

because it gave them insight to his nature as the Son of God (14:33). When he ministered in his own hometown, the people "were astonished and said, 'How did this wisdom and these miracles come to Him?'" (13:54). When Jesus exorcised a demon publicly, the crowds were amazed (*thaumazo*) because "nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel!" (9:33). When Jesus healed multitudes in Galilee the crowds were amazed and "they gave glory to the God of Israel" (15:31). When Jesus confounds with his teaching the disciples of the Pharisees and the Herodians, "they were amazed [*thaumazo*]. So they left Him and went away" (22:22). And at his trial before Pilate, Jesus refused to play the political game, and so Matthew narrates, "But He didn't answer him on even one charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed [*thaumazo*]" (27:14).

The disciples are amazed at the judgment miracle against the fig tree because they are still being blown-away by the nature of Jesus' person and ministry. The question they ask adds to the authenticity of the incident, since it is a seemingly "irrelevant question" (Hagner 1995, 606), asked out of their own stupefaction. They are still trying to fully understand Jesus and his actions, because all that he does is unique.

If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer (21:22): This saying has been used to propagate a "prosperity gospel," which claims that God desires to prosper individuals materially and physically; if one has enough faith, he or she will receive whatever they ask for, including wealth and health. Although health and wealth can at times indicate God's blessing, it is not so in every case. We saw earlier in the case of the rich young ruler that wealth was his "god" that kept him away from eternal life (19:22–23). Jesus reaffirms to the disciples that true belief is confidence that they can do whatever God calls them to do—it is "taking God at his word" rather than "naming it and claiming it." Therefore, disciples should have confidence that if God calls them to do something they can do it in his strength. Moving a mountain is proverbial in Jewish literature for doing what is virtually impossible (Isa 40:4; 49:11; 54:10; *b. Sanh.* 24a; cf. Matt 21:21–22; Keener 2009, 442). We can accomplish even the most seemingly absurd things from the world's point of view if God calls us to do it.

> 23 When He entered the temple complex, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to Him as He was teaching and said, "By what authority are You doing these things? Who gave You this authority?"

24 Jesus answered them, “I will also ask you one question, and if you answer it for Me, then I
will tell you by what authority I do these things. 25 Where did John’s baptism come from?
From heaven or from men?”
They began to argue among themselves, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say to us, ‘Then
why didn’t you believe him?’ 26 But if we say, ‘From men,’ we’re afraid of the crowd, because
everyone thought John was a prophet.” 27 So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.”
And He said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things (21:27): Is Jesus’ evasiveness here a tactic to ensure the divine plan stayed on track, or is it instead a disclosure that he did not make grand claims about his authority? The previous day Jesus had symbolically judged the religious leaders, and so they responded by asking, “By what authority are You doing these things?” (21:23). Jesus was, after all, neither an official priestly or scribal authority according to their sectarian standards. To this Jesus replied: “I will also ask you one question, and if you answer it for Me, then I will tell you by what authority I do these things” (21:24). He was engaging the religious leaders in a rabbinic-type debate that followed a typical pattern: a hostile question followed by a counter-question, admission, and final rejoinder (Keener 2009, 506).

Jesus countered by asking, “Where did John’s baptism come from? From heaven or from men?” (21:25). He was asking them whether they thought John had divine or human authority to carry out his ministry. By shifting the questioning back to the religious leaders, Jesus laid a trap (21:25b-26). They knew they would alienate the people if they said John’s popular prophetic ministry was not from God. They feared that the people would turn against them and cause an uprising (21:26), which would jeopardize Roman support of their leadership. But neither could they endorse the very prophet who had condemned them for not repenting (cf. 3:7–10). The implication that Jesus wanted them to admit is that John’s authority was derived from God, and John had pointed to Jesus as the Messiah (cf. 3:11–17; 11:1–6; John 1:19, 26–27). This admission would validate Jesus’ authority to say and do what he wanted, even in the temple. Realizing their dilemma (21:25–26, 31–32), the religious leaders refused to answer Jesus. Therefore Jesus had no obligation to answer their question about his authority.

28 “But what do you think? A man had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘My son, go,
work in the vineyard today.’

29 “He answered, ‘I don’t want to!’ Yet later he changed his mind and went. 30 Then the man
went to the other and said the same thing.
“ ‘I will, sir,’ he answered. But he didn’t go.
31 “Which of the two did his father’s will?”
“The first,” they said.
Jesus said to them, “I assure you: Tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of
God before you! 32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you didn’t believe
him. Tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him, but you, when you saw it, didn’t even
change your minds then and believe him.

Tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you! (21:31): Some have said that Jesus’ claim contradicts 1 Corinthians 6:9, which says “No sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, or anyone practicing homosexuality, no thieves, greedy people, drunkards, verbally abusive people, or swindlers will inherit God’s kingdom.” While the apostle Paul was referring to unrepentant persons of these various descriptions, Jesus was referring to tax collectors and prostitutes who were obeying the summons to repent and enter the kingdom. They are now disciples of Jesus, and *former* tax collectors and prostitutes. “Tax collectors” here has the connotation of those who cheated, collecting more than was due or holding back a portion for themselves.

33 “Listen to another parable: There was a man, a landowner, who planted a vineyard, put a
fence around it, dug a winepress in it, and built a watchtower. He leased it to tenant farmers and
went away. 34 When the grape harvest drew near, he sent his slaves to the farmers to collect his
fruit. 35 But the farmers took his slaves, beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. 36 Again,
he sent other slaves, more than the first group, and they did the same to them. 37 Finally, he
sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said.
38 “But when the tenant farmers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir.
Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance!’ 39 So they seized him, threw him out of the
vineyard, and killed him. 40 Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do
to those farmers?”
41 “He will completely destroy those terrible men,” they told Him, “and lease his vineyard to
other farmers who will give him his produce at the harvest.”
42 Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.
This came from the Lord
and is wonderful in our eyes?

43 Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation

producing its fruit. [44 Whoever falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whoever it falls, it will grind him to powder!]”

45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they knew He was speaking about them. 46 Although they were looking for a way to arrest Him, they feared the crowds, because they regarded Him as a prophet.

***Textual issue* (21:44)**: Some important manuscripts omit this verse (D 33 it sy^{s} Or Eus^{syr}), leading many scholars to suggest that this is an early interpolation from Luke 20:18. However, it is found in many important manuscripts (א B C L W Z (Θ) 0102 $f^{1, 13}$ M lat sy^{c,p,h} co). Since the words are not identical to Luke, it is not conclusive that this is an interpolation. This led the UBS textual committee to retain it in brackets, positing that perhaps the copyist’s eye may have slipped from *autes* at the end of 21:43 to *auton* at the end of the disputed verse 44, omitting everything between (Metzger 1994, 47). As with virtually all textual issues, nothing of any doctrinal significance hinges on either the inclusion or exclusion of the verse.

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables: 2“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. 3 He sent out his slaves to summon those invited to the banquet, but they didn’t want to come. 4 Again, he sent out other slaves, and said, ‘Tell those who are invited: Look, I’ve prepared my dinner; my oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’

5“But they paid no attention and went away, one to his own farm, another to his business. 6 And the others seized his slaves, treated them outrageously and killed them. 7 The king was enraged, so he sent out his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned down their city.

8“Then he told his slaves, ‘The banquet is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. 9 Therefore go to where the roads exit the city and invite everyone you find to the banquet.’ 10 So those slaves went out on the roads and gathered everyone they found, both evil and good. The wedding banquet was filled with guests. 11 But when the king came in to view the guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed for a wedding. 12 So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless.

13“Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him up hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

14“For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

Throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (22:13): For discussion of the seeming inconsistent imagery for hell, see comments on 5:22 and 13:42.

23 The same day some Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came up to Him and
questioned Him: 24"Teacher, Moses said, **if a man dies, having no children, his brother is to
marry his wife and raise up offspring for his brother.** 25 Now there were seven brothers
among us. The first got married and died. Having no offspring, he left his wife to his brother.
26 The same happened to the second also, and the third, and so to all seven. 27 Then last of all
the woman died. 28 In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will she be of the seven? For they
all had married her."
29 Jesus answered them, "You are deceived, because you don't know the Scriptures or the
power of God. 30 For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are
like angels in heaven. 31 Now concerning the resurrection of the dead, haven't you read what
was spoken to you by God: 32 **I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God
of Jacob**? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living."
33 And when the crowds heard this, they were astonished at His teaching.

You are deceived, because you don't know the Scriptures or the power of God (22:29): Jesus' rebuke of the Sadducees is based on their unfamiliarity with the OT and their failure to comprehend the power of God, but how would familiarity with the OT and comprehension of God's power necessitate the conclusion that "in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels in heaven" (v. 30)?

The Sadducees tried to create a trap by appealing to levirate marriage (cf. Deut 25:5–10) to demonstrate that Jesus held to unbiblical doctrines. They assume the question will stump Jesus (22:28), demonstrating that he was not qualified as a theological leader.

The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection since they drew only upon the Pentateuch for doctrine. Resurrection is taught more clearly later in the OT, became a regular feature in Second Temple Jewish literature (e.g., 2 Macc 7; *1 En.* 102; *2 Bar.* 49–51), and was a central belief in later rabbinic thought (e.g., *m. Sanhedrin* 10:1; *b. Rosh Hashanah* 16b–17a). The Sadducees should recognize that the rest of the OT is also truly Scripture, where the doctrine of resurrection is clearer (e.g., Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2; cf. Job 19:25–27).

The OT does not explicitly state that marriage does not exist in heaven. However, later Jewish teaching concluded similarly to Jesus: "In the world to come there is no eating, or drinking, nor procreation" (*b. Berakhot* 17a). This and Jesus' statement come from the same reservoir of Jewish ideas, but scholars have different interpretations of Jesus' statement. Some contend that he meant that there will be no *new* marriages initiated in heaven, but that those who are

married going into resurrection life remain married (e.g., Witherington 2006, 415), while most hold that marriage does not continue into heaven, although a different form of loving relationship will remain (e.g, France 2007, 839; Carson 2010, 520; Osborne 2010, 817).

The most natural interpretation of Jesus' statement is that there are no marriages in heaven, just as angels are not married. Jesus does not suggest that humans become angels, but that the resurrected state ends the practice of marriage and issues in entirely new relationships. This does not imply that prior earthly relationships are eliminated or that resurrected relationships are without special attachment. The wife (or husband for that matter) of multiple spouses in this life will have an equally altered capacity and understanding of love, which will enable her (or him) to love all without measure, jealousy, or possessiveness (cf. Blomberg 1992, 333; Carson 2010, 520).

Haven't you read what was spoken to you by God: "I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (22:31–32): Jesus appeals to Exodus 3:6 as if this provided clear evidence for the resurrection of the dead, but does it? Has Jesus perhaps used a rhetorical tactic rather than historical-grammatical exegesis? Jesus' case rests upon the present tense "I am" (*ego eimi*) of God's identifying statement, the implication being that the present tense means that even though the patriarchs had long since died physically, they were still alive in some sense when God spoke to Moses. If they are still alive, even though they are physically dead, and if the rest of Scripture points to the reality of resurrection, then the Sadducees should believe the power of God to raise the dead.

The assumption that the patriarchs continue to enjoy the blessings of the covenant, even though they have been long deceased, is found in a number of OT references (cf. Gen 24:12, 27, 48; 26:24; 28:13; 32:9; 46:1, 3–4; 48:15–16; 49:25). Sources contemporary to Jesus corroborated this belief (e.g., Philo, *Abraham* 50–55; 4 Macc 7:18–19; 16:25). When debating the views of the Sadducees regarding resurrection, later rabbis based their arguments on the books of Moses, and concluded that "the righteous are called living even in their death" (*Qoheleth Rabbah* 9:5, §1; cf. *Exodus Rabbah* 1:8; *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 3:15). Fourth Maccabees, a Jewish writing most likely from the early first century, states, "Only those who with all their heart make piety their first concern are able to conquer the passions of the flesh, believing that to God they do not die, as our patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob died not, but live to God" (4 Macc 7:18–19). Thus, both Jesus' teaching and 4 Maccabees point to a

widespread Jewish belief that the patriarchs are not really dead (Keener 2009, 528–29; Charlesworth 1985, 78–79).

Jesus' use of Exodus 3:6 goes to the heart of Jewish thinking and practice, including that of the Sadducees, because Exodus 3 is the place where God introduces himself to Moses as "I AM who I AM" (Exod 3:6, 14–16). Jesus reminded the Sadducees that the rich ambiguity of this formula in Exodus 3:6 (employing the verbless nominative construction "I am the God of"), allows it to refer not merely to history, as in, "I was the God of," but also to the present. Moses would have understood God to be saying that at the present time he was still the God of the four persons named. They had not ceased to exist even though they were no longer among the living on earth. If Moses would have understood this, then rightly should the Sadducees (cf. Stuart 2006, 115).

> 34 When the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they came together. 35 And
> one of them, an expert in the law, asked a question to test Him: 36"Teacher, which command in
> the law is the greatest?"
> 37 He said to him, "**Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and
> with all your mind.** 38 This is the greatest and most important command. 39 The second is like
> it: **Love your neighbor as yourself.** 40 All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two
> commands."

Love your neighbor as yourself (22:39): This second part of Jesus' answer about the greatest commandment is not one of the Ten Commandments. Does this indicate that Jesus was unfamiliar with the Ten Commandments, or that he felt freedom to add to them? Proper understanding of the question Jesus was asked is key to answering this challenge: "Teacher, which command in the law is the greatest?" (22:36). The expression "the Law" is shorthand for the entire OT, not just for the Ten Commandments, thus permitting Jesus to draw from sources outside the Ten Commandments. His quote is from a portion of Leviticus 19:18, which reads: "Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against members of your community, but love your neighbor as yourself; I am Yahweh." The venerable Rabbi Akibah had declared Leviticus 19:18 to be a "great principle in the Torah" (*Genesis Rabbah* 24.7).

> 41 While the Pharisees were together, Jesus questioned them, 42"What do you think about the
> Messiah? Whose Son is He?"

"David's," they told Him.

43 He asked them, "How is it then that David, inspired by the Spirit, calls Him 'Lord':

44 **The Lord declared to my Lord,**
'Sit at My right hand
until I put Your enemies under Your feet'?

45 "If David calls Him 'Lord,' how then can the Messiah be his Son?" 46 No one was able to answer Him at all, and from that day no one dared to question Him anymore.

The Lord declared to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand until I put Your enemies under Your feet" (22:44): Does Jesus handle Psalm 110:1 correctly? In the original Hebrew, the second use of "Lord" is *adon* rather than YHWH. Does this indicate that the "Lord" in view is not divine, such that David is speaking to a lord rather than the Lord? The Pharisees, looked to as biblical experts, were outspoken in their criticism of Jesus since he declared himself to be the authoritative interpreter of the OT (cf. 5:17–48). In this passage, Jesus challenged their ability to interpret rightly one of the most important messianic texts in the OT. If they could not rightly interpret this text, they could not rightly understand his identity. Thus his question: "What do you think about the Messiah? Whose Son is He?" (22:41–42).

The Pharisees answered, "David's," (22:42) based on prophecies that Messiah would be from David's line (cf. 2 Sam 7:12–14; Ps 89:4; Isa 11:1, 10; Jer 23:5: cf. *Ps Sol.* 17:21). This fits with recurring declarations of Jesus' messianic identity as "Son of David" (1:1, 20; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30–31; 21:9, 15). Jesus' reply to the Pharisees is taken from Psalm 110:1, where David refers to the coming messianic ruler—his descendant, his "son"—as *kurion*, "lord." This is a Messianic psalm and not a coronation psalm, since David would not refer to his son Solomon as "lord." The LXX, which is almost verbatim to what Matthew records here, has *kurion* in both instances of the word "Lord." It is true that the underlying Hebrew has Yahweh for the first, and *adon* for the second occurrence of "Lord," but Jews would not read the term Yahweh, but instead would have substituted *adonai* when they read it aloud, thus making Psalm 110:1 read, "The *adonai* says to my *adon* . . ." Common knowledge of this is why Jesus' tactic had such force (Matt 22:46).

The Messiah is more than the Pharisees anticipated the "son of David" to be. He is no mere human descendant of David. They did not understand the identity of the Messiah in relationship to Yahweh. Messiah is Yahweh's "Adon," the "Son of Man" who is given authority by the Ancient of Days (Dan 7:13–14). The Jews did not generally believe that the Messiah would be divine, but here

Jesus confounded them by showing that as David called Messiah "son" and "Lord," Messiah is indeed his human descendant, but he sustains a divine relationship to Yahweh (see also Evans 2001, 272–75). (See further comments at Mark 12:35–37.)

> Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples: 2"The scribes and the Pharisees are seated in the chair of Moses. 3 Therefore do whatever they tell you, and observe it. But don't do what they do, because they don't practice what they teach. 4 They tie up heavy loads that are hard to carry and put them on people's shoulders, but they themselves aren't willing to lift a finger to move them. 5 They do everything to be observed by others: They enlarge their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels. 6 They love the place of honor at banquets, the front seats in the synagogues, 7 greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called 'Rabbi' by people.

Therefore do whatever they tell you, and observe it. But don't do what they do, because they don't practice what they teach (23:3): Jesus' declaration is surprising given the way he regularly criticized the scribes and Pharisees, especially throughout chapter 23. Is he inconsistent, or has Matthew carelessly invented this statement? It is possible that Jesus' statement here is sarcasm or bitter irony, but most likely he meant that any and all accurate interpretation of Scripture is to be obeyed. The Pharisees were not always wrong, and in fact their doctrine was closer to Jesus on many issues than to the Sadducees (e.g., resurrection, authority of all the OT as Scripture, etc.). Jesus did not deny that the Pharisees' teaching could at points be beneficial for spiritual life. What he condemned was their oral tradition when it incorrectly interpreted the intent of the OT, inappropriately supplanted it (cf. 15:1–9), and hypocritically applied it for self-righteous ends (e.g., 5:20; 6:1–18).

> "But as for you, do not be called 'Rabbi,' because you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. 9 Do not call anyone on earth your father, because you have one Father, who is in heaven. 10 And do not be called masters either, because you have one Master, the Messiah. 11 The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

Do not be called "Rabbi," . . . Do not call anyone on earth your father . . . do not be called masters either (23:8–10): Does Jesus here prohibit us from calling anyone "Rabbi," "master," or "father"? Rather than banning the use of

such titles, Jesus was addressing the use of honorific public titles to trumpet one's religious position. As he says in verse 7: "They love [to be greeted] in the marketplaces, and to be called 'Rabbi' by people." The rabbi, for example, was generally a master of the Torah, and the title was used most frequently to refer to the head of a rabbinical school. The association with these schools tended to set them apart from the populace. The school was a holy community, and the people regarded the members with great deference (*DJBP*, 516; Levine 2000, 440–70). These academic institutions were distinguished from the synagogue, with the academy a place to promote Torah study, and the synagogue a place to promote prayer (e.g., *b. Meg.* 27a; Levine 2000, 449–51). Such a heady position could lead to self-righteousness and a sense of entitlement.

The greatest among you will be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted (23:11–12): Some skeptics claim that the NT is the product of inventive priests who wanted to established themselves as the new religious elite. This charge is hard to reconcile to teachings such as Jesus' statement here. Jesus warns his disciples about trying to thwart his new servant-leader paradigm. If they follow the world's thirst for power and prestige and attempt to exalt themselves, they will be humbled. Those who, in the example of Jesus who came not to be served but to serve (20:28), live out the humble role of a servant, will be exalted as true sons and daughters of the kingdom of heaven. This does not indicate exaltation over each other, but the equal exaltation that all disciples of Jesus enjoy who are not above each other, but who are brothers and sisters of one another with Jesus as Master and his Father as their own.

13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You lock up the kingdom of heaven
from people. For you don't go in, and you don't allow those entering to go in.

[14 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You devour widows' houses and make long
prayers just for show. This is why you will receive a harsher punishment.]

15 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to make one
proselyte, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as fit for hell as you are!

16 "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever takes an oath by the sanctuary, it means
nothing. But whoever takes an oath by the gold of the sanctuary is bound by his oath.' 17 Blind
fools! For which is greater, the gold or the sanctuary that sanctified the gold? 18 Also,
'Whoever takes an oath by the altar, it means nothing. But whoever takes an oath by the gift
that is on it is bound by his oath.' 19 Blind people! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that

sanctifies the gift? 20 Therefore, the one who takes an oath by the altar takes an oath by it and by everything on it. 21 The one who takes an oath by the sanctuary takes an oath by it and by Him who dwells in it. 22 And the one who takes an oath by heaven takes an oath by God's throne and by Him who sits on it.

23"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You pay a tenth of mint, dill, and cumin, yet you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. These things should have been done without neglecting the others. 24 Blind guides! You strain out a gnat, yet gulp down a camel!

25"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence! 26 Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so the outside of it may also become clean.

27"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men's bones and every impurity. 28 In the same way, on the outside you seem righteous to people, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

29"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, 30 and you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we wouldn't have taken part with them in shedding the prophets' blood.' 31 You, therefore, testify against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. 32 Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' sins!

Textual support for verse 14 **(23:14)**: Some manuscripts include this verse, but it is missing from ℵ B D L Θ *f* 1. The UBS textual committee judged that it is an interpolation derived from the parallel in Mark 12:40 or Luke 20:47, based upon "(*a*) its absence in the earliest and best authorities of the Alexandrian and the Western types of text, and (*b*) from the fact that the witnesses that include the passage have it in different places, either after verse 13 (so the Textus Receptus) or before verse 13" (Metzger *TCGNT*, 50).

Blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the sanctuary that sanctified the gold? (23:17): Is it okay to call someone a fool (Matt 23:17), or is it not okay (Matt 5:22)? Throughout this chapter (the "woes") Jesus uses harsh epithets. Is this an example we should follow today when dealing with unbelievers? In Matthew 5:22, Jesus warns against calling a brother, "Fool!" Use of the term "fool" was highly insulting in Jewish culture because moral connotations were attached to the term. The proverb says, "As shameful conduct is pleasure for a fool, so wisdom is for a man of understanding" (Prov 10:23). The term *moreh* is from the Greek term *mōros* (the origin of the English term "moron"), indicating a person who consistently acted like an idiot. This is not simple name calling that we might hear in immature children, but rather this is a

real attempt at slandering or defaming a person. Either way, to treat one's brother with such contempt was to strip away his personal identity and make him into something he was not. For more on *mōros* see comments on 5:22.

Jesus is deploring the miserable condition of the Pharisees, but he also is pronouncing the fate that they have brought upon themselves. They are truly foolish in that they are least aware of the judgment that awaits them, living in a fool's paradise while thinking that they are the epitome of religious blessedness, all along they continue down the path of destruction with the people of Israel following close behind. Their woeful condition lies especially in their hypocrisy and blindness, in which they have disfigured the truth of God's revelation through their self-deception and inconsistency. But their woefulness also results from abusing their responsibility for leadership in the nation, for refusing the invitation to the kingdom of God, and for leading Israel to the doom that was likewise prophesied of Korazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum (11:20–24).

Jesus' stern words in chapter 23 do not give us license to call unbelievers names like "fool," but it does give us impetus to identify ways that lead people to destruction. These warnings and woes are directed to the faulty leadership of the scribes and the Pharisees. It is the most comprehensive collection of Jesus' warnings and woes, which informs us that Matthew has recorded them with the intention of providing guidance for church leaders throughout the ages.

> 33"Snakes! Brood of vipers! How can you escape being condemned to hell? 34 This is why I
> am sending you prophets, sages, and scribes. Some of them you will kill and crucify, and some
> of them you will flog in your synagogues and hound from town to town. 35 So all the righteous
> blood shed on the earth will be charged to you, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of
> Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. 36 I
> assure you: All these things will come on this generation!
>
> 37"Jerusalem, Jerusalem! She who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her.
> How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her
> wings, yet you were not willing! 38 See, your house is left to you desolate. 39 For I tell you,
> you will never see Me again until you say, **'He who comes in the name of the Lord is the
> blessed One'**!"

Some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will flog in your synagogues and hound from town to town (23:34): When did Jesus send these "prophets, sages, and scribes"? And when were they crucified, flogged, and driven from town to town? Is Matthew reading these statements back into Jesus' life from the early church setting in order to encourage his readers, who

were facing such persecutions? Or did Jesus actually make a prophecy about the ministry and sufferings what would come after his resurrection and ascension? These are best seen as prophetic statements by Jesus that point ahead to the Christian era, implying ongoing Jewish rejection of his message. Jewish leadership was not permitted to carry out capital punishment without Roman permission, but with their backing they were able to execute Stephen (Acts 7:54–60). Crucifixion of Christians would have been at the hands of the Romans, but likely instigated by Jewish officials. The language here echoes Jesus' prior prophetic statement of the Christian missionaries' fate (cf. 10:16–25), and adds that they will be rejected and persecuted (23:34–35). Flogging (23:34) was prescribed as a punishment for various sins, such as slandering a woman (Deut 22:13–19), incest (Lev 20:17–21), or entering the temple while unclean (Num 5:1–4) (see *m. Mak.* 3.1–2). The lifting of the ban upon eating certain meats (e.g., Acts 10:9–16) would make a Jewish convert to Christ unclean in the eyes of the synagogue officials, and subject to flogging (*m. Mak.* 3.2; Wilkins 2002, 69).

So all the righteous blood shed on the earth will be charged to you, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar (23:35): Did Jesus (or Matthew) mix together two different OT men named Zechariah? Luke 11:51 is not nearly so problematic because Luke simply says "Zechariah" (see comments there for fuller treatment). Jesus' statement is meant to reference the entire sweep of OT history. The first righteous person in history to be killed was Abel, slain by his brother Cain in an act of jealousy (cf. Gen 4:8–11). The last murder recorded in the OT in the canonical order of the Hebrew Bible (Law, Prophets, Writings) is the *priest* Zechariah, a son of the high priest (2 Chr 24:20–22). The language there fits Jesus' statement because Zechariah was murdered in the courtyard of the temple. The difficulty with this view is that the Chronicler names Zechariah's father Jehoiada, whereas Jesus calls him Berekiah, which better fits with the *prophet* Zechariah, who is called the son of Berekiah, the son of Iddo in Zechariah (1:1). This situation leads some to suggest that Jesus actually meant to refer to the prophet Zechariah, which would then make the time span of Jesus' reference from creation to the last recorded prophet (Blomberg 1992, 349). That would make sense, but nowhere in the OT is it reported that the prophet Zechariah was murdered. Thus some conclude that there is a mistake at Matthew 23:35, whether on the part of Matthew or Jesus.

As a proposed solution, some contend that the Zechariah whose murder

2 Chronicles records was identified by a developing tradition as the prophet Zechariah rather than the priest Zechariah (Hagner 1995, 677; Davies and Allison 1997, 3:319; Keener 2009, 556). Others suggest that the Chronicler gave the name of Zechariah's grandfather rather than his father, a common enough practice (Morris 1992, 589n45). In that case, both Zechariahs had fathers named Berekiah, and Jesus and/or Matthew have supplied biographical information about the priest Zechariah that was not stated in the OT. (See further comments at Luke 11:51.)

> As Jesus left and was going out of the temple complex, His disciples came up and called His attention to the temple buildings. 2 Then He replied to them, "Don't you see all these things? I assure you: Not one stone will be left here on another that will not be thrown down!"

Not one stone will be left here (24:2): Some have assessed Jesus' statement as a failed prophecy since a portion of the temple area known as the Western Wall was not destroyed and still remains today. However, Jesus had just exited the temple and the disciples were drawing his attention to the temple buildings (24:1). These were the objects of Jesus' prophecy, and that prophecy was fulfilled when the buildings were completely destroyed in AD 70. Josephus narrates the terrible events that occurred during the siege of Jerusalem leading up to the destruction of the temple and much of the city. He told of conflicts among the defenders, how some who suffered so horribly then committed suicide, and he tells a horrific story about a woman named Mary who killed her baby son, roasted the body, and ate him (Josephus, *Jewish War* 6.201–208). Josephus also records the final end of the temple and buildings: "The Romans, thinking it useless, now that the temple was on fire, to spare the surrounding buildings, set them all alight, both the remnants of the porticoes and the gates, excepting two, one on the east and the other on the south; these also they subsequently razed to the ground" (Josephus, *Jewish War* 6.281). The portion of the Western Wall that does remain is called the "Wailing Wall," becoming a site of mourning over the destruction of the temple buildings and Israel's exile.

> 32 "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: As soon as its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near. 33 In the same way, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near—at the door! 34 I assure you: This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things take place. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will

never pass away.

This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things take place (24:34): Does Jesus mean that all the signs preceding his second coming were fulfilled in the first century? If so, should his second coming have happened long ago? Interpreters are divided on the meaning of "this generation." Some take it as a reference to the generation of Jesus' disciples who were alive when he spoke, who would witness Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70 (e.g., Davies and Allison 1997, 365–66; France 2007, 929–30). Others conclude that it refers to the Jewish people, in particular those who will be alive at the time of the return of the Son of Man (e.g., Schweizer 1975, 458). Still others take it as a reference to wicked people, often referred to as "this generation" (e.g., Matt 11:16; 12:39). Such people opposed Jesus in his earthly ministry and will again oppose his disciples prior to his return (e.g., Gundry 1994, 491; Morris 1992, 612–13).

Since none of these options fully satisfy the context, it is perhaps easiest to see a two-fold reference in "this generation," as Jesus has done throughout the discourse. The disciples to whom Jesus spoke on the Mount of Olives will be "this generation" that sees the temple destroyed, which shows the applicability of the discourse to AD 70. Further, within the context of Jesus' statements about the coming of the Son of Man at the end of the age, "this generation" must apply to those at the end of the age who will see the events surrounding the abomination of desolation. Those waiting for Jesus' arrival are to recognize that their redemption is drawing near when they see the signs (Luke 21:28). Jesus' saying is a word of warning—to his contemporaries and to those in the future who are unrepentant—that the arrival of the Son of Man will bring judgment. His saying is also meant to encourage believers by making clear that tribulation will not go on forever.

36 "Now concerning that day and hour no one knows—neither the angels in heaven, nor the
Son—except the Father only. 37 As the days of Noah were, so the coming of the Son of Man
will be. 38 For in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and
giving in marriage, until the day Noah boarded the ark. 39 They didn't know until the flood
came and swept them all away. So this is the way the coming of the Son of Man will be:
40 Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and one left. 41 Two women will be
grinding at the mill: one will be taken and one left. 42 Therefore be alert, since you don't know
what day your Lord is coming. 43 But know this: If the homeowner had known what time the
thief was coming, he would have stayed alert and not let his house be broken into. 44 This is

why you also must be ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Now concerning that day and hour no one knows—neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son (24:36): Does this confession of ignorance indicate a lack of omniscience and proof against Jesus' deity? Rather than a sign that Jesus lacks the attributes of divinity, his ignorance here is an example of his voluntarily limiting his divine attributes. He is willingly uninformed about the exact timing of his return. The theological doctrine of the kenosis says that in Jesus' incarnation he voluntarily limited the use of his divine attributes so that he could experience authentic human life. He did not give up his deity or his divine attributes, but he did voluntarily limit their use.

Jesus' use of his supernatural knowledge was limited to whether it was the Father's will for him to use it. Jesus came to do his Father's will, and he acted primarily in his humanity and was empowered by the Spirit during his earthly ministry. It was not the Father's will for him to know the date of his return during his time here. In his human consciousness Jesus restricted himself to normal human knowledge, while he always retained the attribute of omniscience in his divine nature and could use it if it was the Father's will (Erickson 1984, 769–72; Grudem 1994, 547–53). On some occasions he demonstrates supernatural knowledge of the present and the future (e.g., John 2:4; 4:17–18; 6:70; 11:4, 11; 13:10–11, 38). Other examples of Jesus' limited or non-use of divine attributes include omnipresence and omnipotence (cf. 13:58; Mark 6:5). (See further comments at Mark 13:32.)

As the days of Noah were . . . They didn't know until the flood came and swept them all away (24:37–39): If the people of Noah's day "didn't know until the flood came" that destruction was near, in what sense was Noah a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet 2:5)? The people in the days of Noah did not heed the warnings of judgment that were given to them. Their ignorance about the flood was due to their neglect of Noah's message. Second Peter 2:5 tells us that Noah was "a preacher of righteousness," which captures our attention because the OT does not state that Noah preached to his contemporaries. However, the idea that Noah implored his generation to repent is common in Jewish tradition (Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.74; *Jub.* 7:20–29; *Sib. Or.* 1:128–29, 150–98; cf. *1 Clem.* 7:6; 9:4). Josephus stated, "But Noah, indignant at their conduct and viewing their counsels with displeasure, urged them to come to a better frame of mind and amend their ways" (*Antiquities* 1.74). The notion that Noah proclaimed God's righteousness to his generation is a fair deduction, since it is quite unlikely that he did not share with his contemporaries why he was building the ark. "The

ungodly refuse to hear God's word of judgment against them, insisting, as Noah's contemporaries did, that any notion of a future condemnation is laughable" (Schreiner 2003, 339).

> 45"Who then is a faithful and sensible slave, whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give them food at the proper time? 46 That slave whose master finds him working when he comes will be rewarded. 47 I assure you: He will put him in charge of all his possessions. 48 But if that wicked slave says in his heart, 'My master is delayed,' 49 and starts to beat his fellow slaves, and eats and drinks with drunkards, 50 that slave's master will come on a day he does not expect and at an hour he does not know. 51 He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Who then is a faithful and sensible slave . . . (24:45–51): Matthew and Luke seem to place this parable in difference contexts. Have they contradicted one another? As with many of Jesus' parables and teachings, he apparently gave this parable on more than one occasion. In Luke he gave the parable primarily to his disciples, but large crowds were also present (cf. Luke 12:1; 41–48) while journeying to Jerusalem for his Passion Week. In Matthew's Gospel it is given solely to his disciples (cf. Matt 24:1–3, 45) during the Passion Week while on the Mount of Olives. In both settings Jesus is giving eschatological warnings. As his impending crucifixion warrants, Jesus is urgent in pressing home the warning of what the intervening circumstances will be like until his return. Be prepared!

> 14"For it is just like a man going on a journey. He called his own slaves and turned over his possessions to them. 15 To one he gave five talents; to another, two; and to another, one—to each according to his own ability. Then he went on a journey. Immediately 16 the man who had received five talents went, put them to work, and earned five more. 17 In the same way the man with two earned two more. 18 But the man who had received one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master's money.
>
> 19"After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. 20 The man who had received five talents approached, presented five more talents, and said, 'Master, you gave me five talents. Look, I've earned five more talents.'
>
> 21"His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave! You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Share your master's joy!'
>
> 22"Then the man with two talents also approached. He said, 'Master, you gave me two talents. Look, I've earned two more talents.'

23 “His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave! You were faithful over a few
things; I will put you in charge of many things. Share your master’s joy!’
24 “Then the man who had received one talent also approached and said, ‘Master, I know you.
You’re a difficult man, reaping where you haven’t sown and gathering where you haven’t
scattered seed. 25 So I was afraid and went off and hid your talent in the ground. Look, you
have what is yours.’
26 “But his master replied to him, ‘You evil, lazy slave! If you knew that I reap where I haven’t
sown and gather where I haven’t scattered, 27 then you should have deposited my money with
the bankers. And when I returned I would have received my money back with interest.
28 “ ‘So take the talent from him and give it to the one who has 10 talents. 29 For to everyone
who has, more will be given, and he will have more than enough. But from the one who does
not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. 30 And throw this good-for-nothing
slave into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

For it is just like a man going on a journey. He called his own slaves and turned over his possessions to them (25:14): Luke presents a similar parable (Luke 19:11–27). These are two different, similar parables given on separate occasions with different emphases. In Matthew’s account, Jesus continues sharing parables with his disciples in Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives by pointing to the profitable character qualities of those who await his return. The preparedness of those who await the coming of the Son of Man, the theme from the preceding parable of the 10 virgins, will be fleshed out in productiveness and industriousness, where faithfulness in service must accompany watchfulness. In Luke, the parable stands alone and is given prior to Jesus’ entry to Jerusalem. He has been interacting with the crowds and had just called the tax collector Zacchaeus to salvation (Luke 19:1–10). Luke introduces the parable as Jesus’ correction to those who thought that “the kingdom of God was going to appear right away” (Luke 19:11). Once again, Jesus gives similar parables but with differing emphases in different contexts to prepare his followers for the delay of his second coming and the full arrival of the kingdom of God (cf. Garland 2011, 754–55).

For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have more than enough (25:29): Some say this parable contradicts the prohibition in Matthew 6:19 about laying up treasure on earth, but the point of this story is not about earthly gain. Rather, this maxim parallels the saying in 13:12, illustrating a similar point about spiritual responsiveness. Here it emphasizes that wise and conscientious use of one’s God-given abilities is a responsibility that accompanies a right relationship with God.

The punishment is not simply taking away the talent from the wicked slave.

The master instructs that he should be thrown “into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (25:30). The contrast is between salvation and damnation. The first two servants are true disciples; the third is not, as his destiny indicates. Similar to the other parables, a person’s faithfulness is the external evidence of whether or not he or she is truly one of Jesus’ own. As the disciples await Jesus’ return, they must teach that industriousness of discipleship is a testimony of one’s love and trust of Jesus as Lord. This industriousness should not come from a self-advancing motivation; it should be demonstrated in serving others as Jesus has served them (20:20–28).

31 “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on
the throne of His glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate
them one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the
sheep on His right and the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on His right,
‘Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the
foundation of the world.

35 For I was hungry
and you gave Me something to eat;
I was thirsty
and you gave Me something to drink;
I was a stranger and you took Me in;
36 I was naked and you clothed Me;
I was sick and you took care of Me;
I was in prison and you visited Me.’

37 “Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or
thirsty and give You something to drink? 38 When did we see You a stranger and take You in,
or without clothes and clothe You? 39 When did we see You sick, or in prison, and visit You?’
40 “And the King will answer them, ‘I assure you: Whatever you did for one of the least of
these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.’ 41 Then He will also say to those on the left, ‘Depart
from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels!

42 For I was hungry
and you gave Me nothing to eat;
I was thirsty
and you gave Me nothing to drink;
43 I was a stranger
and you didn’t take Me in;
I was naked
and you didn’t clothe Me,
sick and in prison

and you didn’t take care of Me.’

44“Then they too will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or without clothes, or sick, or in prison, and not help You?’

45“Then He will answer them, ‘I assure you: Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for Me either.’

46“And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

And they will go away into eternal punishment (25:46): Some see this reference to eternal punishment as contradictory to passages that seem to imply annihilation. For example, in Matthew 10:28 when Jesus prepares his disciples for their mission he tells them, “Don’t fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” The teaching of 25:46 speaks of continual punishment for the lost, which is contrasted with the eternal life given to the righteous. The confusion comes in consideration of the word “destroy” (*apollumi*) in Matthew 10:28 (see comments there). Orthodox Christian teaching understands this “destruction” to be as ongoing as the life of the righteous will be in heaven (cf. Turner 2008, 279; Morgan and Peterson 2007, 67–90). Daniel’s prophecy of a future great tribulation mentions eternal life and punishment: “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to eternal life, and some to shame and eternal contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the bright expanse of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever” (Dan 12:1–3; cf. *2 Bar.* 51:5–6). Daniel’s prophecy echoes here in the final words of Jesus’ concluding discourse in Matthew’s Gospel.

When Jesus had finished saying all this, He told His disciples, 2“You know that the Passover takes place after two days, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.”

3 Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, 4 and they conspired to arrest Jesus in a treacherous way and kill Him. 5“Not during the festival,” they said, “so there won’t be rioting among the people.”

You know that the Passover takes place after two days, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified (26:2): Jesus’ statement, “the Passover is two days away” (lit. “after two days”) in Jewish calculation could point to the next day (the present day counts as one; tomorrow counts as the second), but the HCSB rightfully follows the traditional order of the events, with the conclusion of the Olivet Discourse (26:1) and the plot to arrest Jesus (26:3–5) on late Tuesday afternoon, two days before the Passover. He is pointing ahead to

Thursday evening at sundown when he and the disciples would celebrate the Passover together, after which he initiates the “Lord’s Supper.”

This is now the fourth and last time that Jesus predicts his arrest and crucifixion (26:2; see earlier discussions at 16:21; 17:22–23; 20:17–19). Jesus has consistently pointed to his forthcoming suffering, but the events surrounding the disciples did not always seem to cohere with a threatening atmosphere. Just two days earlier the throngs had applauded Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem (21:1–11). And when Jesus protested the religious leadership and their perversion of the temple, no one stopped him (21:12–13). Add to this their expectation of a triumphant Messiah, and it is understandable that the disciples do not truly understand the meaning of Jesus’ predictions.

Although this is a briefer prediction than the others, Jesus connects his death with the celebration of Passover. Later, the apostle Paul will recognize the spiritual significance and will refer to Jesus as “our Passover” (1 Cor 5:7).

> 6 While Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon, a man who had a serious skin disease, 7 a
> woman approached Him with an alabaster jar of very expensive fragrant oil. She poured it on
> His head as He was reclining at the table. 8 When the disciples saw it, they were indignant.
> “Why this waste?” they asked. 9“This might have been sold for a great deal and given to the
> poor.”
> 10 But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a
> noble thing for Me. 11 You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me.
> 12 By pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she has prepared Me for burial. 13 I assure you:
> Wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be
> told in memory of her.”
> 14 Then one of the Twelve—the man called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests 15 and
> said, “What are you willing to give me if I hand Him over to you?” So they weighed out 30
> pieces of silver for him. 16 And from that time he started looking for a good opportunity to
> betray Him.

While Jesus was in Bethany . . . a woman approached Him with an alabaster jar of very expensive fragrant oil (26:6–13): A story of the anointing of Jesus by a woman occurs in each of the four Gospels, and many modern scholars consider them all to the same anointing. But Luke’s story (Luke 7:36–50) contains too many differences to regard it as the same incident as that recorded in the other Gospels: e.g., it comes earlier in Jesus’ ministry and is located in Galilee, it is performed by a “sinful” woman, and it occurs in the home of Simon the Pharisee. The other three accounts (Matt 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9; John 12:1–

9) all seem to refer to the same anointing: it occurs during Jesus' Passion Week in Bethany, near Jerusalem; it is performed by a woman (named Mary the sister of Lazarus and Martha in John's Gospel) in the period shortly before Jesus was arrested, and Matthew and Mark tell us that it occurs in the home of Simon the Leper. Since Simon is hosting a meal in his own home, he had probably been healed of leprosy by Jesus, because lepers were required to live away from the common population (Evans 2012, 425). Matthew's and Mark's accounts are quite similar, while John has additional unique details that the others do not mention (cf. Keener 2009, 617–20; Morris 1992, 646).

Matthew's unique contribution is that he recounts the story thematically, placing it in the context of the conspiracy to arrest Jesus, whereas John narrates it chronologically, showing that it occurred on the Saturday night before the triumphal entry to Jerusalem. This sort of thematic arrangement is typical of Matthew's style. Placed in this context, the anointing provides a link between the conspiracy of the religious leaders (26:3–5) and the betrayal by Judas (26:14–16). The woman's act of homage stands out against the plotting of the high priest Caiaphas and his cronies and the duplicity of Jesus' own disciple, Judas. (See further comments at Mark 14:3–9 and John 12:1–8.)

> 17 On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do
> You want us to prepare the Passover so You may eat it?"
> 18 "Go into the city to a certain man," He said, "and tell him, 'The Teacher says: My time is
> near; I am celebrating the Passover at your place with My disciples.' " 19 So the disciples did as
> Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover. 20 When evening came, He was reclining at
> the table with the Twelve. 21 While they were eating, He said, "I assure you: One of you will
> betray Me."
> 22 Deeply distressed, each one began to say to Him, "Surely not I, Lord?"
> 23 He replied, "The one who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl—he will betray Me. 24 The
> Son of Man will go just as it is written about Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of
> Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."
> 25 Then Judas, His betrayer, replied, "Surely not I, Rabbi?"
> "You have said it," He told him.

On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do You want us to prepare the Passover so You may eat it?" (26:17): The traditional view about what days of the week each of the events of Passion Week occurred derives from the statement in all four Gospels that Jesus was crucified on the "day of preparation." Mark gives an explicit clarification,

saying “it was preparation day (that is, the day before the Sabbath)” (Mark 15:42; cf. Matt 27:62; Luke 23:54; John 19:14, 31, 42). This points to Friday. When Sabbath began at sundown on Friday, all work was to cease. Therefore, this indicates that Jesus died on Friday afternoon.

However, several passages in John’s Gospel seem to indicate that the Passover meal had not yet been eaten by the Jews when Jesus was led away to trial and execution; this would imply that Jesus’ final meal with his disciples was not the official Passover meal (cf. John 13:1–2; 13:27–29; 18:28; 19:14, 31). Several points must be reconciled with that perspective. First, all four Gospels state that Jesus ate the Last Supper the day before his crucifixion (Matt 26:20; Mark 14:17; Luke 22:14; John 13:2; cf. 1 Cor 11:23). Second, the Synoptic Gospels place the preparations for the Passover on Thursday afternoon (Nisan 14), with Jesus eating the Passover meal with his disciples after sundown on Thursday evening (now Nisan 15) and then instituting the Last Supper later that evening. Jesus was then crucified the next day, Friday (still Nisan 15) (Matt 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7–8).

Some say that either the Synoptics or John is wrong, but there is a plausible explanation for the differences (for an overview of attempted explanations, see Donfried *ABD*, 1:1015–16). One suggestion says the Last Supper was not a Passover meal, but a meal the night before the Passover (John 13:1, 20). However, the Synoptics explicitly state that the Last Supper was a Passover meal (Matt 26:2, 17–19; Mark 14:1, 12, 14, 16; Luke 22:1, 7–8, 13, 15). Others suggest that Jesus and his disciples had a private Passover. However, the Passover lamb had to be slaughtered within the temple precincts, and the priests would not have allowed the slaughter of the paschal lamb for a private Passover. Others suggest that the Passover was celebrated on two consecutive days, because it would have been impossible to slay all the Passover lambs on one day, but there is no evidence that such a situation impacted Jesus’ celebration of Passover.

One compelling view suggests that Jesus and his disciples celebrated Passover according to a solar calendar known from *Jubilees* that was possibly used by the Qumran community (Jaubert 1965; Morris 1992, 654). This view rests on the supposition that the Synoptic Gospels followed the method of the Galileans and the Pharisees, by whose reckoning the day was measured from sunrise to sunrise, while John’s Gospel followed the method of the Judeans, especially the Jerusalem Sadducees, in reckoning the day from sunset to sunset. Thus for the Synoptics, Jesus and his disciples had their paschal lamb slaughtered in the late

afternoon of Thursday, Nisan 14, and ate the Passover later that evening, while for John the Judean Jews had the paschal lamb slaughtered in the late afternoon of the Friday Nisan 14, and ate the Passover with the unleavened bread that night, which by then had become Nisan 15. Thus, Jesus had eaten the Passover meal when his enemies, who had not yet celebrated the Passover, arrested him (Hoehner *DJG*, 121; Thomas and Gundry 1988, 312–13).

Another promising view suggests that the passages in John that seem to indicate that the Passover had not yet occurred when Jesus celebrated the Passover (e.g., John 18:28; 19:14, 31) all use the term "Passover" to point to the week-long series of events, not just the official Passover meal itself. In that case, Jesus and his disciples ate the Passover on Thursday, the beginning of Nisan 15 and the week-long feast, at the same time that the rest of those assembled in Jerusalem (this view is best presented by Carson 1991, 455–58; so also Blomberg 2007, 221–29). Mark's chronological marker concurs with Matthew's —"On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrifice the Passover lamb" (Mark 14:12). Since the Passover lamb was sacrificed on the afternoon of Nisan 14, just prior to the Passover meal after sundown, some suggest that this implies that the day of Unleavened Bread preceded the Passover. However, the best resolution is that although the lambs were slain on the afternoon of Nisan 14, and the Passover meal, initiating the Feast of Unleavened Bread, was eaten after sundown, initiating Nisan 15, popular usage viewed the slaughter of the lambs as officially initiating the Passover. This is in part attributable to the wording in Exodus 12:6, where the animals were to be slaughtered at twilight. Popular usage saw the beginning of Passover with the slaughtering of the animals, whereas technically the Passover itself was the meal, which began after sundown. Josephus uses this popular reckoning often, when he refers to the Passover beginning on Nisan 14 (Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.21; 17.213; 18.29; *Jewish War* 2.10; Stein 1996, 200–201). If modern calendrical calculations of Friday Nisan 15 are correct, Jesus' crucifixion occurred on Friday, April 7, AD 30.

The Son of Man will go just as it is written about Him (26:24): On "Son of Man," see comments on 8:20.

Then Judas, His betrayer, replied, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" (26:25): John's Gospel notes a semi-private interaction between Jesus and the beloved disciple that intimates Judas to be the betrayer (John 13:24–26), while Matthew points to an interaction that apparently was overheard by the rest of the Twelve. Are the

Gospels inconsistent on this issue? Possibly the beloved disciple sat at Jesus' right side, the place of highest honor, while Judas sat on Jesus' left, the second highest place of honor (cf. Beasley-Murray 1999, 237–38). In that case, while Jesus introduced the topic of his betrayal openly, in the hearing of all of the disciples (Matt 26:21), the exchange between Jesus and Judas (v. 25) could have been private.

> 26 As they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, gave it to the disciples, and
> said, "Take and eat it; this is My body." 27 Then He took a cup, and after giving thanks, He
> gave it to them and said, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 For this is My blood that establishes the
> covenant; it is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 But I tell you, from this moment I
> will not drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it in a new way in My Father's
> kingdom with you." 30 After singing psalms, they went out to the Mount of Olives.
> 31 Then Jesus said to them, "Tonight all of you will run away because of Me, for it is written:
>
> I will strike the shepherd,
> and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.
>
> 32 But after I have been resurrected, I will go ahead of you to Galilee."
> 33 Peter told Him, "Even if everyone runs away because of You, I will never run away!"
> 34 "I assure you," Jesus said to him, "tonight, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three
> times!"
> 35 "Even if I have to die with You," Peter told Him, "I will never deny You!" And all the
> disciples said the same thing.

"I assure you," Jesus said to him, "tonight, before the rooster crows . . ." (26:34): In Mark's account, Jesus tells Peter that he will deny him "before the rooster crows twice" (Mark 14:30), whereas Matthew and Luke seem to indicate that the rooster will only have crowed once (Matt. 26:34; cf. Luke 22:34; John 13:38). These accounts are not contradictory, but offer different levels of specificity. Jewish readers in the early church era would have understood this more readily than do modern Western readers. Duty for Roman military guards was organized around "watches" initiated at sunrise, midday, sunset, and midnight. The crowing of the rooster is proverbial for the arrival of the day. Thus, the denial was to take place before the end of the fourth watch, at dawn. Thomas and Gundry explain: "The third of the four 'watches' of a night (12:00 A.M. to 3:00 A.M.) was called 'cockcrowing' (cf. Mark 13:35). The cock would crow early in this period and again toward the period's end" (Thomas and Gundry 2003, 220 §225). Mark's account offers a more specific timing with his

reference to the second crowing while Matthew offers a more general prediction, referring only to one crowing. Both convey the idea that before dawn Peter was to deny Jesus three times. (See further comments at Mark 14:68, Luke 22:34, and John 13:38.)

You will deny Me three times! (26:34): Luke places Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial in the Upper Room during the Last Supper (Luke 22:34–39), while Mark and Matthew place the prediction of Peter's denial, along with a prediction of the disciples being scattered, after they had left the Upper Room and were on their way to the garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26:30–34; Mark 14:26–30). John also sets the prediction of Peter's denial in the Upper Room during the Last Supper (John 13:36–38), and while Jesus and the disciples were on the way to the garden Jesus gave general predictions of the disciples being scattered (John 16:32; cf. 14:31; 18:1). While some suggest that Jesus predicted Peter's denials twice, it is more likely that Matthew and Mark, who are quite similar in their descriptions, have displaced the prediction in order to keep intact the theological coherence of the initiation of the Lord's Supper in the preceding pericope. It seems likely that John's more expansive description gives us the historical sequence of these events (Carson 2012, 605). During the supper (John 13:2) Jesus predicted Peter's denials (John 13:36–38), called the disciples to depart the Upper Room (14:31), predicted the scattering of the disciples (16:32), then they went over the Kidron Valley and entered the garden (18:1). (See further comments on Mark 14:17–31.)

47 While He was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, suddenly arrived. A large mob, with
swords and clubs, was with him from the chief priests and elders of the people. 48 His betrayer
had given them a sign: "The One I kiss, He's the One; arrest Him!" 49 So he went right up to
Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed Him.

50 "Friend," Jesus asked him, "why have you come?"

Then they came up, took hold of Jesus, and arrested Him. 51 At that moment one of those with
Jesus reached out his hand and drew his sword. He struck the high priest's slave and cut off his
ear.

52 Then Jesus told him, "Put your sword back in its place because all who take up a sword will
perish by a sword. 53 Or do you think that I cannot call on My Father, and He will provide Me
at once with more than 12 legions of angels? 54 How, then, would the Scriptures be fulfilled
that say it must happen this way?"

55 At that time Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out with swords and clubs, as if I
were a criminal, to capture Me? Every day I used to sit, teaching in the temple complex, and

you didn't arrest Me. 56 But all this has happened so that the prophetic Scriptures would be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted Him and ran away.

Friend . . . why have you come? (26:50): Jesus' response here could be rendered as a question (HCSB: "Why have you come?"), which could make it seem that Jesus is ignorant of Judas' purposes. However, the majority of translations appropriately render it as a command, "Friend, do what you came to do," continuing the theme of divine inevitability that permeates the passion narrative (cf. John 13:27b). Judas manipulates friends and enemies to advance his goals, but within the deception Jesus maintains control of his own destiny to reconcile friends and enemies to God and to each other. Jesus has known all along that Judas will betray him, and tragically, that Judas has yielded to Satan's influence in doing so: "After Judas ate the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Therefore Jesus told him, 'What you're doing, do quickly'" (John 13:27).

Put your sword back . . . (26:52): Does this verse imply that capital punishment is wrong or that Christians should be pacifists? Jesus was preparing the disciples for the change of circumstances that would occur after his death and once they set out on their worldwide mission. Instead of relying on Jewish neighbors to supply their needs as they did on their short mission during Jesus' Galilean ministry (cf. Matt 10:5–15), they would be required to bring adequate provisions (cf. Luke 22:35–36). He also warned them that dangerous times may lie ahead, when responsibility may require a sword for self-defense (22:36). Peter's response shows that the disciples misunderstood Jesus to imply that they were to be ready to meet opposition with armed aggression (cf. Nolland 1993, 3:1075–78).

These verses (26:52–54) are mostly unique to Matthew's Gospel, and should be compared with Paul's thoughts where God uses governing authorities to punish evildoers (Rom 13:1–4). This would seem to justify capital punishment as a viable response to murder. The way of the world is to assert its will on others through human power, even violence; but likewise, the way of the world is for individuals to retaliate against violence with violence. Jesus is not giving a blanket endorsement of pacificism, which would require broader Scriptural support than this one saying (France 2007, 375–76). But he does reject the notion that God's will is advanced or should be imposed on others through violent means. A general principle to guide the use of force is that allegiance should be given to the goals of the kingdom of God (cf. 5:38–42). Peter's use of force is not guided by kingdom priorities, but by the human desire to retaliate.

How, then, would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen this way? (26:54): Jesus is not defenseless, nor is he resigned to fate. He has come for a purpose: to carry out God's plan of redemption that has been prophesied. Jesus does not point to a particular prophetic passage, but to "the Scriptures" as a whole that indicate the purpose of his earthly ministry, which "must" (*dei*) lead him to the cross. This is a divine necessity. There is no deviation or exception open to him. As was the point in the prayers at Gethsemane, obedience to the Father's will for his life is Jesus' ultimate desire.

Then all the disciples deserted Him and ran away (26:56): Now that Jesus' dire predictions had begun to come true, why were the disciples frightened instead of emboldened? Having seen him perform many miracles, having confessed his deity on several occasions, and having heard multiple death-and-resurrection predictions (16:21; 17:22–23; 20:17–19; 26:2), should they not be able now to realize, "Okay, the unthinkable things he foretold are starting to come true. We were not previously willing to accept it, but now the facts are clear. Let's keep it together. It's all going to turn out okay in the end, just like he said"?

Peter's attempt to retaliate by wielding the sword added complexity to the situation, making the disciples vulnerable to arrest along with Jesus. So they likely ran out of this fear as well as because of what was happening to Jesus. Jesus had predicted their cowardice (26:31–34), which they had rebuffed with false bravado, but Jesus' prophetic word begins to come true. Their behavior here coheres with the way in which they consistently misunderstood Jesus' predictions of his crucifixion. From our vantage point it seems that they should have finally pieced everything together here and reacted differently, but their preconceptions about Messiah's mission and fate did not allow it. The paradigm into which they fitted Jesus' predictions consistently led them to rebuff the plain sense of his words and assume he was talking about risk and opposition in his bid to force out the Romans and establish the kingdom.

57 Those who had arrested Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes
and the elders had convened. 58 Meanwhile, Peter was following Him at a distance right to the
high priest's courtyard. He went in and was sitting with the temple police to see the outcome.
59 The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false testimony against Jesus so
they could put Him to death. 60 But they could not find any, even though many false witnesses
came forward. Finally, two who came forward 61 stated, "This man said, 'I can demolish God's

sanctuary and rebuild it in three days.’ ”

62 The high priest then stood up and said to Him, “Don’t You have an answer to what these men are testifying against You?” 63 But Jesus kept silent. Then the high priest said to Him, “By the living God I place You under oath: tell us if You are the Messiah, the Son of God!”

64 “You have said it,” Jesus told him. “But I tell you, in the future you will see **the Son of Man seated at the right hand** of the Power and **coming on the clouds of heaven.**”

65 Then the high priest tore his robes and said, “He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? Look, now you’ve heard the blasphemy! 66 What is your decision?”

They answered, “He deserves death!” 67 Then they spit in His face and beat Him; others slapped Him 68 and said, “Prophesy to us, Messiah! Who hit You?”

Those who had arrested Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had convened (26:57): Scholars have long noted the irregularities of the Jewish legal proceedings against Jesus according to later Mishnaic procedures (especially *Sanhedrin 4–7*). Some critics see this as evidence that Matthew and the other Gospel writers have written bad fiction. Six commonly noted anomalies are:

- The trial was held at night (*m. Sanh.* 4:1)
- It was held in the high priest’s home, not the temple courts (*m. Sanh.* 11:2; *m. Mid.* 5:4)
- It was held on the eve of a festival day (*m. Sanh.* 4:1)
- It began with reasons for conviction instead of reasons for acquittal (*m. Sanh.* 4:1)
- The witnesses disagreed with one another and bore false witness (*m. Sanh.* 5:2)
- The verdict of conviction was confirmed on the same day instead of waiting until the next day after a night’s sleep (*m. Sanh.* 4:1).

A difficulty with placing stress on these deviations from Mishnaic standards is the fact that those standards were compiled nearly 200 years after these events, making it uncertain exactly what the Sanhedrin’s practices were at the time of Jesus’ trial. Likewise, the practices of the trial controlled by the Sadducean high priest were unlikely to follow Pharisaic practices, which were those later found in the Mishnah (for discussion, see Brown 1994, 357–63; Carson 2010, 618–19; Garland 1995, 291). Thus the anomalies of this trial therefore do not invalidate the historicity of the Gospel records, but nevertheless they do indicate the devious expediency by which the trial was conducted (for a classic, vigorous defense of the historicity of the Gospels’ account of Jesus’ trials, see Sherwin-White 1963, 24–47).

The trial was a sham, but given the urgency of the situation and the timing, this is little surprise. The unexpected and fortuitous betrayal of Jesus by Judas prompted the religious authorities to act quickly to take advantage of their chance to get rid of Jesus before he caused further trouble during the Festival. The Sabbath was approaching, and the Roman authorities apparently supported the chief priests' attempts to silence Jesus before he gained even more support from the crowds. Matthew highlights the fraudulence of the proceedings by noting that the scribes and the elders had already assembled with the high priest Caiaphas (26:57) in a bid to make a quick condemnation. None of the Evangelists gives a full account of the judicial process leading to Jesus' death, which gives rise to gaps and questions about compatibility, but the overall pattern that emerges is that the Jewish authorities first tried Jesus and convicted him of blasphemy. Matthew condenses the trial scenes to one, but apparently Jesus was taken first to appear to Annas the former high priest and Caiaphas' father-in-law (John 18:13–24), then the partially assembled Sanhedrin questioned him (26:57–68), and then after dawn Jesus appeared before the fully assembled quorum of the Sanhedrin, which pronounced their verdict (27:1–2). Then they took him to the Roman authorities and changed the accusation to treason in order to rouse Roman opposition against Jesus (Brown 1994, 357–63; Morris 1992, 678–80). (See further comments at Mark 14:53.)

Peter was following Him at a distance right to the high priest's courtyard. He went in and was sitting with the temple police to see the outcome (26:58): From John 18:10 we learn that it was Peter who struck the high priest's slave with a sword, and John 18:16 raises the problem that Peter had to pass a guard at the gate in order to enter the courtyard. Would the temple police really have allowed Peter such access after his earlier act? This apparent challenge is greatly lessened when we consider the commotion of comings and goings in this scene. The term the HCSB translates as "temple police" is the noun *huperetes*, which is a general term covering "servant," "attendant," "assistant," "helper," or "guard" (BDAG). It gains its specific sense from its context. What is signified here is not necessarily the same group that had arrested Jesus, but the retinue of "support staff" that had remained with the high priest, members of the Sanhedrin, and the priestly compound. Nolland comments: "Coming from different households, they will not all have known each other. This would make it reasonably possible for Peter to expect to be able to be there anonymously and blend in" (Nolland 2005, 1124). John also informs us that Peter had entered the courtyard with another disciple (traditionally understood to be the apostle John) whom the high

priest knew, and who vouched for Peter and helped him to blend in (Carson 1991, 581–82).

In the future you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven (26:64): When does Jesus mean to say Caiaphas will see him seated at the right hand of God? Is it an unfulfilled prediction since Caiaphas died before Jesus' second coming? By this statement Jesus declared that he is the divine Son of Man foretold by Daniel (Dan 7:13–14), and the divine figure who sits at the right hand of God (Ps 110:1–2; cf. Jesus' citation of this text in 22:41–46). The Jews did not generally believe that the Messiah would be divine, but here Jesus confounds them by showing that he sustains a divine relationship to Yahweh (for a full discussion of the imagery, see Bock 2000). The title that Jesus used throughout his ministry to clarify his identity, Son of Man, now unmistakably clarified for Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin that the next time they would see Jesus would be when he comes as the everlasting king who will be worshiped and who will reign forever. There is no necessary implication that Jesus meant this would happen in their lifetimes, and so the delayed fulfillment is not an issue. Both the living and the dead will behold the exalted Christ in judgment.

> 69 Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant approached him and she said,
> "You were with Jesus the Galilean too."
> 70 But he denied it in front of everyone: "I don't know what you're talking about!"
> 71 When he had gone out to the gateway, another woman saw him and told those who were
> there, "This man was with Jesus the Nazarene!"
> 72 And again he denied it with an oath, "I don't know the man!"
> 73 After a little while those standing there approached and said to Peter, "You certainly are one
> of them, since even your accent gives you away."
> 74 Then he started to curse and to swear with an oath, "I do not know the man!" Immediately a
> rooster crowed, 75 and Peter remembered the words Jesus had spoken, "Before the rooster
> crows, you will deny Me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

***Peter's denial of Jesus* (26:69–75)**: Jesus had predicted that Peter would deny him, and this passage narrates the fulfillment, but how do the prediction and fulfillment fit with Jesus' claim that he had prayed for Peter and that Peter's faith would not fail? "Simon, Simon, look out! Satan has asked to sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail" (Luke 22:31–32). Was Jesus' prayer ineffective?

This challenge is resolved by noting that in addition to predicting that Peter's faith would not fail, Jesus also said: "And you, when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31–32). Looking at the whole complex of events, we see that Jesus' prayer for Peter was not that he would avoid the temptation and the denials. Jesus' prayer for Peter was that once he repented of the denials, he would be restored. Insomuch as Peter repented and was restored, his faith did not ultimately fail. (See further comments at Luke 22:31.)

Another woman saw him and told those who were there, "This man was with Jesus the Nazarene!" (26:71): Matthew notes that Peter's second denial was prompted by the inquiry of a woman while Luke quotes Peter responding to a man (Luke 22:58). Rather than conclude that the accounts are contradictory, we may reasonably assume that the woman's question instigated others to question Peter as well. Mark's account explains that the first woman who questioned Peter also identified him to the bystanders (Mark 14:69–70). John tells us that the group asked Peter, "You aren't one of His disciples too, are you?" (John 18:25). Public pressure is heating up. The women stirred up the crowd, and Peter denied his association with Jesus to the crowd, of women and the men (cf. Bock 1996, 1784–85). (See further comments at Luke 22:58.)

Immediately a rooster crowed (26:74): For the question of how many times the rooster crowed, see comments on 26:34.

> 3 Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was full of remorse and returned the 30 pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders. 4"I have sinned by betraying innocent blood," he said.
>
> "What's that to us?" they said. "See to it yourself!"
>
> 5 So he threw the silver into the sanctuary and departed. Then he went and hanged himself.
>
> 6 The chief priests took the silver and said, "It's not lawful to put it into the temple treasury, since it is blood money." 7 So they conferred together and bought the potter's field with it as a burial place for foreigners. 8 Therefore that field has been called "Blood Field" to this day. 9 Then what was spoken through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:
>
> **They took the 30 pieces of silver, the price of Him whose price was set by the Israelites, 10 and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me.**

***The account of Judas' remorse and death* (27:3–5)**: Does this account conflict with Acts 1:18–19? Among the apparent discrepancies are the following: Who bought the field, Judas or the priests? Did Judas throw the money into the temple

and leave it, or did he keep it and use it to purchase the field? Did Judas die by a fall or by hanging? Was the field thereafter known as "Blood Field" because Judas died in the field or because the priests purchased it with blood money? Matthew and Luke (who is believed to have used Peter as his informant) seem to disagree on all the above questions.

The two accounts appear to be independent traditions. A point often overlooked is that the existence of two distinct traditions suggests that Judas' scandalous death was a widely known fact in the early church. Clearly we are not certain of all of the details given the differences between Luke and Matthew. The traditional reconciliation, going back to Augustine, goes like this: The priests purchased the field with the money they had given Judas. They either made the purchase in his name, or else knowledge that it was Judas' money led people to describe the purchase as having been conducted by Judas. Later Judas hanged himself out of remorse, either in this field or elsewhere. If Luke means to indicate that it was this same field, it may be that Judas' remorse drove him to commit suicide in the very field that had been purchased with his blood money. Part of the structure on which he hanged himself (perhaps a tree branch) must have broken, resulting in his rotting carcass falling headlong and bursting open (e.g., Leen and Ritmeyer, 1994, 22–35, 76–78, esp. 25).

Matthew tells us that at the time of his writing the field was still called "Blood Field" (27:8). However, the location of the field appears to have soon become unknown and remained so until later pilgrims traveled to Jerusalem. As early as the third and fourth centuries, Christians who visited Jerusalem identified the field with a parcel located about a half mile south of the Old City of Jerusalem—at the southeast end of the Hinnom Valley, near where it joins the Kidron Valley. This identification was based on the fact that the area contains about 80 burial caves, most of which date to the time of Jesus. Most scholars believe this field is a misidentification. It is indeed an ancient burial ground, with some tombs dating to the First Temple era, but restored in its second phase as a tomb complex for Jerusalem's wealthy aristocracy. The majority of scholars hold that the location of the Blood Field remains unknown to this day. (See further comments at Acts 1:18–20.)

Then what was spoken through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled (27:9): Has Matthew made a mistaken attribution of this prophecy? And does the prophecy legitimately foretell Judas' actions, or was it talking about something else? Matthew summarizes Judas' death and the actions of the chief priests by making his final fulfillment quotation: "They took the 30 pieces of silver, the

price of Him whose price was set by the Israelites, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me" (27:9–10). Matthew says he is quoting from Jeremiah, but the quotation is largely from Zechariah 11:13. We have seen this approach previously. Matthew earlier conflated messianic "branch" themes from several prophets (2:23), and Mark conflates quotations from Isaiah and Malachi but only cites Isaiah because Isaiah was the more prominent prophet (cf. Mark 1:2; Isa 40:3; Mal 3:1). A similar situation may explain Matthew's citation, for Jeremiah is the more prominent of the two prophets, especially in Matthew's Gospel (Matt 2:17; 16:14; 27:9).

From Jeremiah, Matthew draws upon the references to a clay jar and a potter (Jer 19:1, 11), the blood of the covenant (19:4), the renaming of the place in the Valley of Ben Hinnom the Valley of Slaughter (19:6), violence and slaughter (19:4, 7), and the judgment and burial by God of the Jewish leaders (19:11). From Zechariah, Matthew draws upon the price of betrayal being cast to the potter in the house of the Lord. The 30 pieces of silver were paid to get rid of God as Israel's Shepherd (Zech 11:11–12), which prefigures typologically the price paid to get rid of Jesus as Israel's Shepherd. So Matthew is not claiming that the OT set up a prior expectation that the Messiah would be betrayed at the price of 30 pieces of silver. It is instead a typological fulfillment.

> 11 Now Jesus stood before the governor. "Are You the King of the Jews?" the governor asked Him.
>
> Jesus answered, "You have said it." 12 And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He didn't answer.

"Are You the King of the Jews?" . . . Jesus answered, "You have said it" (27:11): Does Jesus deny his divinity or else pass on a chance clearly to assert it here? Pilate's question is similar to the one that Caiaphas asked, "Tell us if You are the Messiah, the Son of God!" (26:63). Jesus replies in the same indirect manner that he had responded to Judas (26:25) and to Caiaphas (26:64). His answer affirms the question, but places the responsibility back upon Pilate to discern properly what the question implies. Jesus' reply is a straightforward affirmation, which in John's Gospel is expanded to include Jesus' explanation that he is not the rival worldly king to Caesar that the high priest and the rest of the Sanhedrin have accused him of claiming to be (cf. John 18:34–37).

At the festival the governor's custom was to release to the crowd a prisoner they wanted. 16 At
that time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. 17 So when they had gathered together,
Pilate said to them, "Who is it you want me to release for you—Barabbas, or Jesus who is
called Messiah?" 18 For he knew they had handed Him over because of envy.
19 While he was sitting on the judge's bench, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do
with that righteous man, for today I've suffered terribly in a dream because of Him!"
20 The chief priests and the elders, however, persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to
execute Jesus. 21 The governor asked them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for
you?"
"Barabbas!" they answered.
22 Pilate asked them, "What should I do then with Jesus, who is called Messiah?"
They all answered, "Crucify Him!"
23 Then he said, "Why? What has He done wrong?"
But they kept shouting, "Crucify Him!" all the more.
24 When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that a riot was starting instead, he took
some water, washed his hands in front of the crowd, and said, "I am innocent of this man's
blood. See to it yourselves!"
25 All the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" 26 Then he released
Barabbas to them. But after having Jesus flogged, he handed Him over to be crucified.

At the festival the governor's custom was to release to the crowd a prisoner they wanted (27:15): There is little extrabiblical verification for this custom, known as the paschal pardon, leading some to conclude that the incident is an apologetic creation of the Evangelists (e.g., Rigg 1945; Maccoby 1970, 55–60). However, there is evidence that the release of select prisoners at festival times was a widespread practice in the ancient world (Merritt 1985, 53–68). The paschal pardon may fit with a rabbinic ruling on killing a paschal lamb for those in need, including an imprisoned person: "They may slaughter for one that mourns his near kindred, or for one that clears away a ruin; so, too, for one whom they have promised to bring out of prison, for a sick man, or for an aged man that is able to eat an olive's bulk" (*m. Pesahd.* 8.6; Corley, *DJG*, 849). Apparently the paschal pardon was a custom that originated in Judea with Pilate as a way of creating good will with the people. (See further comments at Mark 15:6, Luke 23:17, and John 18:39.)

His blood be on us and on our children! (27:25): Is this statement evidence of anti-Semitism in the Gospel of Matthew? The term "crowd" (*ochlos*) has been the normal word Matthew uses to designate the masses who have been witnessing the trial and who have asked for Jesus' crucifixion (27:20–24). The crowd has been the object of Jesus' gospel presentation in his earthly ministry (e.g., 4:25; 5:1), but they have not believed on him to become his disciples (cf.

13:2, 10ff.). The crowd is fickle: they shout Hosanna at his entry to Jerusalem (21:8–9), but shout for Jesus to be crucified once he failed to meet their expectations (27:15, 20–24).

As Matthew switches to a different word, "people" (*laos*), in the expression "All the people answered" (27:25), he emphasizes that the crowd and the religious leaders have had their opportunity—now they must bear responsibility for rejecting Jesus. "People" (*laos*) is the word Matthew normally uses to designate Israel (e.g., 1:21; 2:6; 4:16; 15:8). Used here, the implications are ominous. The Jewish leaders and the crowd claim responsibility for Jesus' death with their declaration, "His blood be on us and on our children!" This phrase "blood on us" is a common idiom indicating responsibility for someone's death (e.g., Lev 20:9; Josh 2:19; 2 Sam 1:16; Ezek 18:13; Acts 5:28; 18:6); the addition of "and on our children" indicates solidarity across generations (e.g., Gen 31:16). The people are so convinced that Jesus deserves death that they extend responsibility to their descendants.

It is not difficult to believe that the people, hyped up by the fervor of Festival Week and the events surrounding the polarizing figure of Jesus, would make so brash a statement. Thus there is no reason to charge that Matthew invented the statement. Nor is there any reason to charge him with anti-Semitism. The people present for this event shared responsibility with the Romans for Jesus' death. Pilate tried to escape responsibility, but by ordering Jesus' execution despite finding no guilt in him, Pilate is as guilty as anyone. The apostle Peter indicts the religious leaders, the Jewish crowd, and the Romans for Jesus' death (cf. Acts 2:23, 36; 3:17). It is important to note that the rash statement of the people at Jesus' trial did not mean the Jewish people were locked out from salvation. Thousands of Jews, including many priests, received salvation in the first days after Pentecost (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 6:7).

This statement in verse 25 has been called "the darkest and hardest verse in Matthew's gospel" (Smith 1990, 421). It has been used shamefully as a basis for persecuting Jews, but Matthew clearly is not invoking a self-curse by the Jews, nor is he insinuating that God has placed an eternal curse upon Israel. Matthew merely shows how the religious leaders and some of the Jewish people claimed responsibility for Jesus' death. They thought they were on the side of justice, executing one whom they felt was a blasphemer. Israel bears responsibility for rejecting her Messiah, but this does not mean that later Jews should be labeled with racist titles like "Christ-killer," or that Christians should abuse Jews in the name of seeking revenge for God. We must follow the apostle Paul's example.

He wept for his countrymen because he knew they had suffered the consequences of rejecting Christ, that they were not participating in the blessings that they would have enjoyed had they accepted him (e.g., Rom 9:1–5; 10:1–4). Israel is at this time experiencing a hardening because they have rejected Messiah, a hardening that will continue until the completion of God's timetable with regard to the Gentiles (Rom 11:25). But God's love for Israel continues; there still awaits a time when Israel will return to the one whom they have rejected and will experience a national awakening (Zech 12:10–13:1; Rom 11:26–32; Matt 23:39).

No one can support racial bigotry toward Jews by appealing to Matthew's record. As Jewish scholars themselves note, "Despite the Christian use of Matthew for anti-Semitic attacks, the harsh polemics in the gospel do not attack Jews as a group but the leaders of the Jews (scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, chief priest, elders) and those people who have been misled into hostility toward Jesus" (Neusner and Green *DJBP*, 416).

Then he released Barabbas to them. But after having Jesus flogged, he handed Him over to be crucified (27:26): Is it realistic that Pilate would bow to pressure from his subjects, as Matthew portrays here? Was he so weak a ruler? One key to answering this question is to note that the crowd was close to rioting, something that had happened during the Passover in the past. Archelaus overreacted to an uprising at Passover after the death of his father Herod the Great in 4 BC, sending in troops and cavalry who killed about 3,000 pilgrims (Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.9.3 §§213–218; idem *Jewish War* 2.6.2 §§88–90). A revolt would reflect poorly on Pilate's rule, and so he complied with their wishes. He washed his hands in front of the crowd and said, "I am innocent of this man's blood. See to it yourselves!" (27:24). There is abundant background from Jewish and Hellenistic sources for the practice of washing one's hands as a way of claiming innocence.

Philo presents Pilate as relentlessly heartless and cruel. Josephus also portrays Pilate negatively. Upon his arrival in Jerusalem as prefect, Pilate apparently instituted a number of religiously offensive military and government standards. Josephus writes that "Pilate . . . decided to overturn the laws of the Jews" (Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.55). His offensive actions included seizing money from the sacred treasury for the construction of an aqueduct in Jerusalem, introducing military standards bearing idolatrous symbols, and minting coins bearing the *lituus* and *patera*, which were instruments used by priests in Roman religion (Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.60–62). Worse still was the murder of Galileans

seeking to offer sacrifices (Luke 13:1–2).

Pilate's pompous and belligerent actions aroused suspicion among the people (Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* 299–305), which likely also accounts for the growing insurrections in Palestine. Eventually Emperor Tiberius began calling Pilate's heavy-handed administration into question after Pilate dispatched Roman military forces upon the Samaritans, who had gathered for religious ceremony on Mount Gerizim. Tiberius ordered Pilate to come to Rome to give an account of the severe treatment by his soldiers (Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.60–62). At this point, Philo gives insight that may explain the different disposition depicted of Pilate in the Gospels:

> [Pilate] feared exposure for his conduct as governor . . . [for] the briberies, the insults, the robberies, the outrages and wanton injuries; executions without trial constantly repeated, the ceaseless and supremely grievous cruelty . . . his vindictiveness and furious temper. (Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* 301–302)

By the time of Jesus' trial, Pilate's rule was likely vulnerable. When Pilate first took post as governor of Judea, L. Aelius Sejanus ruled in Rome as *de facto* emperor, while Tiberius, emperor in name only, lived on the Island of Capri (Barnett 1999, 146). Philo exposes the anti-Semitism of Sejanus, writing that he "wished to make away with [our] nation" (Philo, *In Flaccum* 1.1; *Legatio ad Gaiumm* 160). It follows that at the time Sejanus was ruling Rome, Pilate likewise was ruling over the Jews with severity. However, the political climate changed when Sejanus was executed in 31 and Tiberius regained control of his empire. Tiberius was sympathetic to the Jews and upon learning that his Jewish subjects had been suffering oppression, he wrote to his provincial governors demanding they treat the Jews with fairness (Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* 160–61). It becomes clear then that Pilate's vulnerable position under Emperor Tiberius explains why he would concede to the Jewish high priest regarding Jesus.

> 27 Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into headquarters and gathered the whole company
> around Him. 28 They stripped Him and dressed Him in a scarlet military robe. 29 They twisted
> together a crown of thorns, put it on His head, and placed a reed in His right hand. And they
> knelt down before Him and mocked Him: "Hail, King of the Jews!" 30 Then they spit on Him,
> took the reed, and kept hitting Him on the head. 31 When they had mocked Him, they stripped
> Him of the robe, put His clothes on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him.

***The mocking game and the scarlet military robe* (27:27–31)**: Evidence suggests that Roman soldiers in Jerusalem tended to play a cruel game with condemned prisoners, especially revolutionary brigands. Excavations under the Sisters of Zion Convent in the Old City of Jerusalem, in the general area where the Fortress Antonia once stood, have discovered etched designs of various games, including Roman era pavements or flagstones inscribed with a "B" (β) that may well be related to *basileus* ("king"), evidence of the *basilinda* game board, "the king's game" (Miller 1971, 309–13). The prisoner was dressed up like a burlesque king and used as a game piece. With each roll of "dice" the prisoner "king" moved around a game board etched in the floor. All for the entertainment of the troops, they hurled verbal and physical abuse at the mock king (for pictures of the pavement, see Wilkins 2002, 177; Page 1995, 149–51).

Although this "game" may have been used with other prisoners, the charges against Jesus made him especially fair sport. The soldiers dressed him up and mocked him as the "King of the Jews," which will be nailed above his head (27:37). One of the scarlet cloaks (*chlamuda kokkinen*) worn by the Roman soldiers became a mock royal robe. Mark and John emphasize the link to royalty by calling the robe "purple," the color of royalty. The Tyrian purple die obtained from shellfish was expensive, and beyond the means of ordinary soldiers. Sometimes the adjective "purple" could be used for the shade scarlet (e.g, Caesar's military cloak in Appian, *Bellum civile* 2.21; #150), hence accounting for the overlapping descriptions in Mark ("purple," *porfuran*; Mark 15:17, 20), John ("purple cloak" *porfuran periballo*; John 19:2), and Matthew ("scarlet"). (See further comments at Mark 15:17 and John 19:1–2.)

Plaited branches with thorns became a mimic crown, perhaps inflicting wounds to his head, but certainly becoming a malicious imitation of a Roman emperor's crown. A common wooden staff (*kalamos*, "reed," but here implying a wooden staff; *BDAG*) was a nasty hoax for a ruler's scepter. This staff is used to beat Jesus again and again on the head as they spit at him and mock him. Jesus had suffered similar cruel treatment in the house of Caiaphas after he was condemned. There the high priest's guards played a brutal game with Jesus in order to ridicule his claim to prophecy (26:68); here the Roman soldiers play an even more brutal game to ridicule his claim to be the messianic King of Israel (27:29; cf. Brown 1994, 862–77).

32 As they were going out, they found a Cyrenian man named Simon. They forced this man to

carry His cross. 33 When they came to a place called *Golgotha* (which means Skull Place),
34 they gave Him wine mixed with gall to drink. But when He tasted it, He would not drink it.
35 After crucifying Him they divided His clothes by casting lots. 36 Then they sat down and were guarding Him there. 37 Above His head they put up the charge against Him in writing:

THIS IS JESUS
THE KING OF THE JEWS.

38 Then two criminals were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left. 39 Those who passed by were yelling insults at Him, shaking their heads 40 and saying, "The One who would demolish the sanctuary and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross!" 41 In the same way the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked Him and said, 42"He saved others, but He cannot save Himself! He is the King of Israel! Let Him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in Him. 43 He has put His trust in God; let God rescue Him now—if He wants Him! For He said, 'I am God's Son.'" 44 In the same way even the criminals who were crucified with Him kept taunting Him.

***"A place called Golgotha"* (27:33)**: Luke 23:33 in the King James Version says Jesus was crucified at "Calvary," whereas the other three Gospels say it was at "Golgotha." Is this a discrepancy? And has the site been identified? "Golgotha" is a transliteration of the Aramaic word for "skull," which Matthew clarifies by providing a Greek translation, "(which means Skull Place)," which in Greek is *kraniou topos*. Mark (15:22), Luke (23:33), and John (19:17) likewise use the Greek term *kranion*, from which the English term "cranium" derives. The common designation "Calvary" comes from the Latin for skull, *calvaria*, so there is no discrepancy between Luke and the other Gospels. The term probably designates a round elevation, similar to the German practice of referring to a small hill as a "head" (Luz 2005, 530). The identity and location of Golgotha has received much attention throughout history, but has never been positively identified. Three primary reasons for the name have been proposed: (1) it was a place of execution; (2) it was an area known for having a number of tombs, or (3) the site in some way resembled a skull in appearance.

The most important clues to the identity of Golgotha are as follows. (1) The site had to be outside Jerusalem, because Roman law (and Jewish law, Lev 24:14) directed crucifixion to take place outside the city. (2) It must have been a fairly conspicuous spot, near a city gate or highway, because the Romans used crucifixion as a deterrent and wanted the gruesome scene to be witnessed by as many people as possible (see comments on 27:39). (3) A garden containing a tomb was nearby. The tomb belonged to Joseph of Arimathea, who claimed Jesus' body and interred it (John 19:41–42). The tradition that points to the

Church of the Holy Sepulchre as the site of Jesus' crucifixion and burial has been substantiated as the best candidate. (See further comments at Luke 23:33.)

They gave Him wine mixed with gall to drink. But when He tasted it, He would not drink it (27:34): Whereas Matthew describes the drink as wine mixed with "gall" (*chole*), Mark describes the additive as "myrrh" (Mark 15:23). Also, Matthew says Jesus tasted but rejected the drink, while Mark says more flatly, "He did not take it" (v. 23). Luke calls it "sour wine," and mentions neither an additive or Jesus' reaction (Luke 23:36). John 19:30 says Jesus "received the sour wine" and makes no mention of his rejecting it. In fact the most natural reading of John seems to be that, after announcing his thirst (v. 28), Jesus was satisfied with what was offered and announced, "It is finished!" (v. 30). Are the Gospels inconsistent on these details?

A rabbinic tradition indicates that when a prisoner was led to execution he was given a goblet of wine containing a grain of frankincense to numb his senses (*b. Sanh.* 43a, citing Prov 31:6). This was done out of mercy and was performed by Jewish sympathizers. Some scholars have suggested that if Jesus refused such sympathetic attention it was because he wanted to experience his atoning sacrifice without dulled senses (e.g., Morris 1992, 715; Keener 2009, 678).

The soldiers who brought Jesus to Golgotha were the ones who offered him the drink (Mark's account makes this clearest; see Mark 15:16–24), and so they were hardly making a sympathetic gesture. They had already flogged Jesus and mocked him. They presented the drink as another attempt at cruelty. Feigning that they were offering Jesus refreshment, the wine was instead mixed with gall, a bitter herb that could even be poisonous. That Mark says that the wine was mixed with myrrh (Mark 15:23) gets at the same point: the drink was made inconsumable with bitterness. Of course the Romans would not have reported exactly what they mixed in the wine, so bystanders were left to make inferences. By using the term "gall" to describe the bitterness of the drink, Matthew draws the reader to the context of Psalm 69:20–21, where King David also was mocked and treated cruelly by his enemies, who gave him gall and vinegar for food and drink.

The different descriptions of Jesus' reception of the drink are hardly contradictory. When Jesus tasted the bitter drink, he realized that the bitterness would only intensify his parched thirst, so he refused to drink (see Ps 69:20–21). For one author to say that Jesus tasted it and put it aside, another to say he received it, and another to say he refused it can easily be reconciled in a single event, for to say that one refused to drink is not the same as saying one refused

to receive the proffered drink and taste it. John's account admittedly seems to strike a different note, but his reading can be fitted within the events described by Matthew and Mark, keeping in mind that abbreviated accounts such as John offers can lead readers to over read the details. (See further comments at Mark 15:23–24.)

***Textual issue* (27:35)**: The Textus Receptus (following Δ Θ 0250 f^{1} f^{13} 1424 *al*) tacks on a fulfillment formula to the end of this verse which is rendered in the KJV: "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots." It could be argued that the additional fulfillment formula fell out when the eye of the copyist passed from the first occasion of "lots" (Gk *klēron*) to the last. However, this reading is absent from the early witnesses of the Alexandrian and Western text types (א A B D L W Γ Π 33 71 157 565 700 892^{c} $it^{ff2, l}$ vg^{mss} $syr^{s, p, hmg, pal}$ eth $pers^{p}$). A more likely explanation is that later copyists were influenced by the parallel passage in John 19:24, assimilating it to Matthew's usual quotation formula (Metzger 1994, 57).

THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS (27:37): The superscription varies in all of the Gospels (Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19), which is accounted for by John's observation that it was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek (19:20). (See further comments at Mark 15:26, Luke 23:38, and John 19:19.)

Even the criminals who were crucified with Him kept taunting Him (27:44): Are Matthew 27:44 and Luke 23:42 making contradictory claims about the criminals since Luke has one of them repent and Matthew does not? Rather than a contradiction, what we have here is one Evangelist choosing to share more information than the other. There would be a contradiction only if Matthew made a claim that opposed the information Luke shares. (See further comments at Mark 15:32 and Luke 23:32–43.)

45 From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over the whole land. 46 About three
in the afternoon Jesus cried out with a loud voice, ***"Elí, Elí, lemá sabachtháni?"*** that is, "**My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?**"

47 When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling for Elijah!"

48 Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, fixed it on a reed,

and offered Him a drink. 49 But the rest said, “Let’s see if Elijah comes to save Him!”

50 Jesus shouted again with a loud voice and gave up His spirit. 51 Suddenly, the curtain of the sanctuary was split in two from top to bottom; the earth quaked and the rocks were split. 52 The tombs were also opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. 53 And they came out of the tombs after His resurrection, entered the holy city, and appeared to many.

54 When the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they were terrified and said, “This man really was God’s Son!”

55 Many women who had followed Jesus from Galilee and ministered to Him were there, looking on from a distance. 56 Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons.

From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over the whole land (27:45): A number of questions can be asked of this fascinating text. First, is this seen as a fulfillment of Amos 8:9–10? Second, is there extrabiblical confirmation of this darkness? Third, was the event a miracle or a natural event whose timing was providentially guided?

Matthew is probably mindful of the darkness mentioned in Amos 8:9–10, and perhaps Exodus 10:21–22 as well. Amos mentions the sun going down at noon and the turning of feasts into mourning, and has a captivating statement that calls to mind Jesus, God’s only son: “I will make that grief like mourning for an only son and its outcome like a bitter day” (Amos 8:10). This is not a direct one-for-one type of prophetic fulfillment, but like the typological recapitulation of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15, Jesus is here the subject of aspects of the fulfillment. In Jesus’ desolation we see aspects of Israel’s judgment.

This phenomenon was not confined to Jerusalem, for all three Synoptic Gospels tell us that it was over all the land, possibly a reference to “all the earth” but more likely a reference to the entire land of Israel. Given that the phenomenon may not have involved parts of Earth other than Israel, it is questionable whether we should expect non-Hebrew confirmation of the event, though see the mention of possible Greek testimony in the comments on Luke 23:44.

This was not a solar eclipse, for the Passover falls during full moon. Scholars have suggested that the darkness was due to a sandstorm, but this is unlikely; nothing in the passage indicates sand or any other variety of natural cause. It is best to conclude that this was a supernatural act of God, indicating his judgment (Morris 1992, 719–20).

Whatever the exact details, the darkness is deeply symbolic. “Darkness” in both the OT (Hb *hashak*) and NT (Gk *skotos*) is evocative. Light symbolizes

God, and darkness evokes everything anti-God: the wicked (Prov 2:13–14; 1 Thess 5:4–7), judgment (Exod 10:21; Matt 25:30), and death (Ps 88:13). Salvation brings light to those in darkness (Isa 9:1; Matt 4:16). The time of God's ultimate judgment is portrayed as a day of darkness (Joel 2:2; Amos 5:18, 20; Zeph 1:15; Matt 24:29; Rev 6:12–17). While darkness often accompanies the conception of death in Scripture (cf. Job 10:21–22), darkness at the crucifixion scene displays a limitation on the power of Satan (cf. Luke 22:53), God's displeasure with humanity for crucifying his Son, and most importantly God's judgment on evil (Wilkins, *EDBT*, 142–43; Conzelmann, *TDNT* 7:423–45; Hahn, *NIDNTT* 1:420–25). (See further comments at Mark 15:33 and Luke 23:44.)

***"Elí, Elí, lemá sabachtháni?"* that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (27:46):** Do the slight differences between Matthew and Mark 15:34 on Jesus' cry of dereliction constitute a contradiction? And why would Jesus think God had betrayed him if he knew all along that his life would end in a willing self-sacrifice on the cross? The entire saying in Mark's Gospel is a transliteration of Aramaic, which is most likely the language Jesus spoke from the cross. The saying in Matthew's Gospel is a transliteration which appears partly to represent Hebrew and partly Aramaic (Metzger, *TCGNT*, 58–59, 99–100), although it is possible that the entire saying is a variation of Aramaic (Davies and Allison 1997, 3:624). This possible difference of approach would explain the variation in wording. In any event, the meaning is the same in both accounts.

Jesus' cry of dereliction does not indicate that his death caught him by surprise or that he felt things had gone off course. Jesus knew that he would be vindicated in his resurrection, but Matthew intends for his readers to grasp something of Jesus' sense of abandonment in the moment he was subjected to the separation from the Father that accompanied his bearing human sin (Matt 1:21; 20:28; 26:28). Jesus bore divine retribution and punishment for sin, and it must have cost him unspeakable agony. Jesus' forsakenness by the Father did not affect their ontological relationship. The Son was not separated in his essence or nature from the Father. They retained full ontological unity, so the separation did not affect the Trinitarian relationship of the members of the Godhead. Rather, Jesus' divinely sustained humanity experienced consciously the full penalty of death for the sins of humanity. Earlier Jesus had said that his life's mission was to be a "ransom for many" (Matt 20:28). Now the prediction is carried out. This lays the foundation for the theological doctrine of atonement in which Jesus'

sacrifice on the cross is one of “penal substitution” or “vicarious atonement”—Jesus suffers our punishment for our sin. The penalty for sin is death (Rom 6:23), and in Jesus’ separation from God he experienced deathly punishment for the sins of humanity.

The tombs were also opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. And they came out of the tombs after His resurrection (27:52–53): If the tombs of many saints opened at the time of Jesus’ death on Friday and the bodies were at that time raised from the dead, why did they wait until after Jesus’ Sunday resurrection to emerge from the tombs? What did they do in the meantime? Did they grow hungry? Did they receive glorified human bodies or simply revived human bodies? If they had been dead a year or more, their bones would likely have been transferred to an ossuary box, leaving them with no grave clothes. If so, what did they do for clothing when they emerged and went into Jerusalem? And why do no historical records mention the social upheaval that would have certainly occurred if many resurrected people arrived in Jerusalem? Jesus would have been just one among many returning from the dead. Surely it would have been one of the most noteworthy events in history. Given these difficult questions, are the elements of this account best understood as legend or a literary device Matthew used to portray the significance of Jesus’ death?

Given that it seems odd for the raised saints to remain idle in their opened tombs for a few days, peering out but staying put, interpreters have considered whether this detail is a misunderstanding of how best to render the Greek. Perhaps the best alternative explanation is that a full stop should be placed after the phrase “The tombs were also opened” (27:52a), with a new sentence beginning with the next phrase. In this approach, the text would read: “The tombs were also opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and they came out of the tombs after His resurrection, entered the holy city, and appeared to many” (cf. Wenham 1981, 150–52). With this rendering, Matthew indicates the following sequence: (1) the tombs were opened at Jesus’ crucifixion; (2) Jesus was raised three days later; (3) the bodies of the saints were raised following Jesus’ resurrection rather than immediately following his death.

If this sequence is accurate, the tombs that opened at Jesus’ death served as a prolepsis (flash-forward) of the resurrection of Jesus and the saints, and do not signify the time the saints were raised. Further, the appearance of the raised saints to people in Jerusalem served as a testimony to the efficaciousness of

Jesus' work on the cross and the declaration of his victory over death. This anticipates Paul's teaching on Jesus being the first-fruits of the dead (1 Cor 15:20–23).

Matthew does not address other questions we may have, such as whether the raised saints had been dead so long as to have no known relatives in Jerusalem, how they were received by those whom they greeted, how they assimilated back into society or whether they were instead taken to heaven soon after appearing in Jerusalem. That no surviving historical records aside from Matthew mention this event is perhaps explained by the fact that a bigger story was circulating: the Galilean who was crucified as a messianic pretender and blasphemer, Jesus of Nazareth, had risen from the dead in vindication of his predictions.

Some scholars conclude that the raising of the saints is legend, theological narrative (theology set forth as history), or poetic device rather than literal history. Skeptics move this direction for obvious reasons, but even believing scholars ask about Matthew's intentions due to questions about the historical plausibility of these events if read literally, and questions about how the language of Matthew's text may relate to biblical and nonbiblical texts that employ similar language figuratively. New Testament scholar and Christian apologist Michael Licona has dealt with this issue at length (Licona 2010) and is open to non-literal readings of Matthew 27:52–53. In particular Licona notes that historic authors of the NT era, such as Virgil and Josephus, showed a tendency to report cosmic phenomena and supernatural occurrences in attendance with the death of kings and other powerful men. These were seen as signs testifying to the greatness of the departed. Says Licona: "That the biblical writers were familiar with and employed this type of language seems clear" (Licona 2010, location 5666). He notes that the apostle Peter, in Acts 2:15–21, quotes from Joel 2:28–32 and indicates that Joel's prophecy, which depicts sweeping cosmic events such as the moon being turned into blood and the earth being visited by blood, fire, and columns of smoke, was fulfilled in the events at Pentecost even though there was no literal instance of the moon turning to blood, etc. So non-literal language has been employed to describe key events in salvation history. Licona concludes: "Given the presence of phenomenological language used in a symbolic manner in both Jewish and Roman literature related to a major event such as the death of an emperor . . . it seems to me that an understanding of the language in Matthew 27:52–53 as 'special effects' with eschatological Jewish texts and thought in mind is most plausible" (2010, location 5685). Matthew has used "poetic device" in order "to communicate that the Son of God had died and

that impending judgment awaited Israel" (Licona 2010, location 5699).

A concern with this approach is that little of anything in the events surrounding Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection make sense on the normal historical level. These are all unique events that uniformly testify to the most unique acts of God in human history—Jesus' vicarious death on the cross and his vindicating resurrection. The darkness of the crucifixion scene, the thirty-foot-high temple curtain being torn from top to bottom, an earthquake that opens tombs, and the resurrection of OT saints are all extraordinary, supernatural testimonies and "confirmation that Jesus is who he had claimed to be and that his ministry stands vindicated before the nation" (Bock 2002, 391).

Matthew's narration of the resurrection of the saints is congruent with the other scenes, and to contend for the historical plausibility of one is to argue for them all. Recalling the imagery of Ezekiel, who prophesied that the sovereign Lord would open graves and resurrect people to life in the valley of dry bones (Ezek 37:11–14), Matthew lets this event stand unadorned because its meaning is clear. Derek Tidball relates, "The raising of these holy ones is a foretaste of the resurrection to which all believers can look forward. Through the death of Jesus a new day has arrived, a day when death has been defeated by death, and resurrection to life eternal has been made possible" (2001, 133).

This man really was God's Son! (27:54): The centurion, an officer in charge of 100 soldiers, may have attended all of the events since Jesus' Roman trial and subsequent flogging and mocking by the soldiers. He had probably witnessed many crucifixions, but the cataclysmic events of the darkness, the earthquake and opened tombs, plus the manner of Jesus' death, combined to evoke the confession from him and those with him, "This man really was God's Son!" The underlying Greek of this confession is slightly different in Matthew and Mark, but the meaning is the same. The HCSB makes this explicit by translating them the same, "This man really was God's Son!" (Matt 27:54; cf. Mark 15:39). The only difference between the two texts is that Mark specifies it was the centurion who made the confession about Jesus' identity, whereas Matthew attributes the confession to both the centurion and the nearby soldiers.

Luke words the centurion's confession differently than Matthew and Mark: "When the centurion saw what happened, he began to glorify God, saying, 'This man really was righteous!'" (Luke 23:47). It is possible here to render the term *dikaios* "righteous" as does the HCSB, but it is also possible to render it as "innocent" (ESV; NASB). Luke's emphasis on Jesus' innocence is important to consider. The centurion's verdict affirms Jesus' character and the execution's

injustice. Jesus is an innocent sufferer, an additional, important theme that Luke develops both in his Gospel (cf. Luke 23:4, 14, 15 [twice], 22, 41) and in Acts (cf. 3:14; 7:52; 13:28; 22:14). This seventh confession of innocence recorded in Luke's Gospel is the ultimate commentary on these events: Jesus stands before God without blame (Bock 1996, 1864).

Several possible alternatives might explain the differences between Matthew/Mark and Luke, but the most likely choice, given Luke's preference for the term *dikaios*, is that he explicitly explains the force of the centurion's confession. If Jesus is confessed as Son of God, he is clearly innocent and has suffered unjustly. Therefore, the final note about Jesus' death is that he died as an innocent man. He suffered unjustly at the hands of humans. He was who he claimed to be—the King of the Jews, the Christ of God. For Gentiles in this setting, the statement has a functional, regal meaning instead of an ontological force. The soldiers accept Jesus' claims of sonship because of the signs accompanying his death. He is uniquely related to God and is his innocent representative to the people (Bock 1996, 1864; cf. Marshall 1978, 876). (See further comments at Mark 15:39 and Luke 23:47.)

Many women who had followed Jesus from Galilee and ministered to Him were there, looking on from a distance (27:55): All four Evangelists mention a group of women who followed and served Jesus in Galilee and on to Jerusalem, witnessing the events of the final week (27:55–56, 61; Mark 15:40–41, 47; Luke 23:49, 55; John 19:25). Their lists differ on who was present for Jesus' death and entombment. A listing of the women includes:

WOMEN WHO FOLLOWED JESUS (CONTINUED)				
The Crucifixion				**Galilee mission**
Matthew 27:55–56	**Mark 15:40–41**	**Luke 23:49**	**John 19:25**	**Luke 8:1-3**
WOMEN WHO FOLLOWED JESUS				
The Crucifixion				**Galilee mission**
Matthew 27:55–56	**Mark 15:40–41**	**Luke 23:49**	**John 19:25**	**Luke 8:1–3**
Many women… followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs	Some women… Many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem were also there.	The women who had followed him from Galilee	Near the cross of Jesus	Jesus traveled about…The Twelve were with him, and also some women:
(1) Mary Magdalene	(1) Mary Magdalene		(4) Jesus' mother	(1) Mary called Magdalene, out of whom seven demons were cast
(2) Mary the mother of James and Joses	(2) Mary the mother of James the younger and Joses		(3) Jesus' mother's sister	(5) Joanna, wife of Cuza
(3) Mother of Zebedee's sons	(3) Salome		(2) Mary the wife of	(6) Susanna

			Clopas	
			(1) Mary of Magdala	Many others
The Burial				
Matthew 27:61	**Mark 15:47**	**Luke 23:55**	**John**	
(1) Mary Magdalene	(1) Mary Magdalene	The women who came with Jesus from Galilee		
(2) The other Mary	(2) Mary the mother of Joses			

Many of these same women witnessed the empty tomb and Jesus' post-resurrection appearances (Matt 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1, 10–11; John 20:1–18). At least six are identified, but Matthew and Mark indicate that an even larger group of unnamed women watched the crucifixion. This is key to understanding why the lists have some differences. Each Evangelist was free to choose which women to name. Luke chose to name none of them (Luke 23:49). In the chart above we have listed a numeral with each woman's name; the numeral is her unique identification across all accounts and helps the reader locate her within the five different listings.

John indicates that at some point Jesus' mother, three other women, and one of Jesus' disciples were quite near the cross so that Jesus could speak to them and give directions for his mother's care (John 19:26). But for most of the time they stand off in the distance, possibly because there was still danger of their being accosted by the Roman guards. To be associated with one condemned for treason was a dangerous matter (Keener 2009, 691–94).

The various listings of the women at the cross suggests that they were all well acquainted with each other, especially the way that the three women in Matthew and Mark are essentially duplicated in John's list, along with Mary the mother of Jesus. This implies further that Jesus' mother and sister also traveled on occasion with Jesus and the Twelve and the group of women. Their presence would help explain the lack of scandal as the women traveled with Jesus and the Twelve (Cheney 1997, 13–21). Since the women were present for Jesus' death on the cross and his burial by Joseph of Arimathea (cf. 27:55–56, 61), they could verify that he was truly dead, not just unconscious. (See further comments at Mark 15:40,47 and John 18:25.)

57 When it was evening, a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph came, who himself had
also become a disciple of Jesus. 58 He approached Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Then Pilate

ordered that it be released. 59 So Joseph took the body, wrapped it in clean, fine linen, 60 and placed it in his new tomb, which he had cut into the rock. He left after rolling a great stone against the entrance of the tomb. 61 Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were seated there, facing the tomb.

***Pilate's release of Jesus' body* (27:57–58)**: Critics charge that Pilate would never release the body of a condemned criminal, but several considerations set this charge aside. First, Joseph's high standing within the Jewish community may have made him a known person to Pilate. Personal familiarity, or even awareness of Joseph's clout, could have been a decisive factor in Pilate's consideration. Joseph's intervention may have been crucial, for the Romans often refused burial for the crucified, leaving their bodies on the cross to decay and be eaten by birds, or simply piled up on the ground where dogs could feed on them (e.g., Suetonius, *Augustus* 13.1–2; Tacitus, *Annals* 6.29; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.1.61–62). This Roman practice is far from uniform, however, and this is the second point mitigating against the critic's charge. Since Jesus was not a Roman citizen, Pilate would have had considerable personal discretion as to how he treated Jesus' case. It was within his power to grant Joseph's request. Third, Roman concessions to Jewish sensibilities are not unlikely in Judea, and the context has shown that Pilate was not convinced that Jesus represented a threat or even deserved his sentence (Nolland 2005, 1230–31). (See further comments at Mark 15:45.)

***Matthew's silence about Nicodemus* (27:57–61):** The Gospel of John adds that Joseph was not the only secret disciple who assisted with care for Jesus' body. Nicodemus was there as well (John 19:39). He is the high-ranking Jewish religious figure who came secretly to Jesus (3:1–21). He also protested the fact that the religious leaders were not giving Jesus a hearing (7:50–52). Nicodemus plays a significant role in John's Gospel, but does not appear in the Synoptics, likely because Nicodemus appears in Judean scenes in John, while the Synoptics focus on Jesus' ministry in Galilee. Matthew's silence about Nicodemus's role in the burial fits with the fact that he was also silent about the other known facts about Nicodemus. His silence does not refute John's testimony.

62 The next day, which followed the preparation day, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate 63 and said, "Sir, we remember that while this deceiver was still alive He said, 'After three days I will rise again.' 64 Therefore give orders that the tomb be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, His disciples may come, steal Him, and tell the people, 'He has

been raised from the dead.' Then the last deception will be worse than the first."

65 "You have a guard of soldiers," Pilate told them. "Go and make it as secure as you know how." 66 Then they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting the guard.

***Did the Pharisees take Jesus' resurrection prediction more seriously than did his disciples?* (27:63–64)**: In response to their asking him for a sign, Jesus had earlier predicted his resurrection to the scribes and Pharisees (12:38ff). That the chief priests and Pharisees went to Pilate the day after Jesus' crucifixion shows that they had not forgotten Jesus' enigmatic prediction. There are at least two reasons they took the prediction seriously enough to request a guard.

First, they had heard about or witnessed Jesus' miraculous powers and they wanted to make certain that whatever power enabled Jesus was not liberated. They had previously charged Jesus with acting under Satanic influence (12:24) and may have anticipated more deceptive signs and wonders. Furthermore, the events at the crucifixion, including the darkness, the tearing of the temple curtain, and the earthquakes must have given them pause. It had impacted the Roman centurion and his men (causing them to give a striking confession about Jesus' identity in 27:54), as well as the crowds, who went away from the crucifixion "striking their chests" (Luke 23:48), expressing perhaps the beginnings of guilt and contrition that prepared the way for the thousands who repented at Pentecost (Acts 2:41; cf. Nolland 1993, 1159).

Second, Jesus' disciples remained free. The chief priests and Pharisees assumed that the disciples had heard Jesus' prediction and had taken it seriously, and that they might therefore fake a fulfillment by stealing his body. This was a sensible move by the religious leaders, but ironically they had misjudged the disciples, who seem not to have remembered Jesus' resurrection prediction in the midst of their fear, grief, and disillusionment.

They went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting the guard (27:66): Matthew is the only Evangelist to report the setting of the guard. This, plus the fact that the Gospels portray the women as going to the tomb expecting unhindered access except for the stone, leads some to doubt the historicity of the guarded tomb (e.g., Brown 1994, 1310–13; Davies and Allison 1997, 652–53). A likely explanation for the fact that Matthew alone mentions the guard is that he wrote for a Jewish Christian audience in particular. They would have been intimately familiar with the claim, circulated among the Jews by the chief priests and Pharisees in the decades after the resurrection, that Jesus' disciples stole his body (28:11–15). Thus Matthew had greater cause to mention the fact of the guard than did the other Evangelists, whose audiences may not

have been as familiar with such charges (Mark is commonly said to have written primarily for Roman Christians, Luke for a man named Theophilus, and John is seen as a broadly evangelistic work). Therefore, Matthew addressed a situation that was a pressing concern to his readers (cf. Keener 2009, 696–97; Carson 2010, 654).

***Were the guards Roman soldiers or Jewish temple guards?* (27:66)**: Since they had no authority to post guards around a burial site of a criminal executed by the Roman authorities, the religious officials had to ask Pilate for a contingent of guards. Pilate's seemingly vague answer, "You have a guard of soldiers. . . . Go and make it as secure as you know how," has led to debate about the identity of the guards placed at the tomb. However, a contingent of Roman soldiers had earlier been assigned to the temple authorities for security, which had been used in the arrest of Jesus (cf. 27:47). Most likely this is the same guard troop Pilate had in mind when he told the Jewish officials, "You have a guard of soldiers." Pilate's expression signified that the Jews were now authorized to use the troops for a security detail at the tomb. The Jewish officials were not allowed to use the troops except for the purposes the Roman governor authorized (Keener 2009, 696). This explains why the guards will later go to the temple authorities to report Jesus' resurrection rather than to Pilate himself (28:11).

Tomb entrances were commonly sealed shut by stone and clay. However, the "seal" here was probably an official security device, perhaps a cord attached to both the stone that blocked entrance and to the rock face of the tomb, with wax imprinted with the Roman seal anchoring both ends, so that any tampering could be detected (cf. Dan 6:17). The apocryphal Gospel of Peter expands on the guarded tomb theme, saying that the elders and scribes and soldiers ". . . rolled thither a great stone and laid it against the entrance to the sepulchre and put on it seven seals, pitched a tent and kept watch" (8:32–33). By taking measures to prevent theft of Jesus' body, the religious leaders and Pilate inadvertently provided evidence for the factuality of the empty tomb and the resurrection of Jesus. (See further comments at Mark 14:43.)

> After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to view the tomb. 2 Suddenly there was a violent earthquake, because an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and approached the tomb. He rolled back the stone and was sitting on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his robe was as white as snow. 4 The guards were so shaken from fear of him that they became like dead men.

> 5 But the angel told the women, “Don’t be afraid, because I know you are looking for Jesus
> who was crucified. 6 He is not here! For He has been resurrected, just as He said. Come and see
> the place where He lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell His disciples, ‘He has been raised from the
> dead. In fact, He is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see Him there.’ Listen, I have told
> you.”
> 8 So, departing quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, they ran to tell His disciples the
> news. 9 Just then Jesus met them and said, “Good morning!” They came up, took hold of His
> feet, and worshiped Him. 10 Then Jesus told them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brothers
> to leave for Galilee, and they will see Me there.”

***Overview of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus Christ* (chap. 28)**: The differences between the post-resurrection accounts in the Gospels and Paul (esp. 1 Cor 15:1–8) are well known and have been so throughout church history. We do not have enough information to resolve all differences, but it is reasonable to say that the variations indicate that the Evangelists are independent witnesses who did not attempt to reproduce a concocted deception (cf. Morris 1992, 733; Hagner 1995, 868). The variations have led skeptics to propose explanations for how a resurrection legend originated and spread, but, as N. T. Wright declares, “The proposal that Jesus was bodily raised from the dead possesses unrivalled power to explain the historical data at the heart of early Christianity” (Wright 2003, 718). Therefore, each writer should be allowed to present his unique perspective, which adds to the historical plausibility of the events narrated.

Much emphasis is placed on the variations between the accounts, but it is the similarities that are more impressive. All four Gospels are agreed (Morris 1992, 733; Hagner 1995, 868) on the following points:

a. The tomb of Jesus was found empty.
b. The resurrection was announced to the women.
c. The disciples met with the risen Jesus.

A plausible synchronization of the events surrounding Jesus’ resurrection and post-resurrection appearances as recounted in the Gospels and Paul is as follows (cf. also Wenham 1992, 139 and passim; Blomberg 2009, 413–18):

1. A group of women came to the tomb around dawn, with Mary Magdalene possibly arriving first (Matt 28:1; Mark 16:1–3; Luke 24:1; John 20:1).
2. Mary and the other women were met by two young men (angels), one of whom announced Jesus’ resurrection (Matt 28:2–7; Mark 16:4–7; Luke 24:2–7).
3. The women left feeling both fear and joy, and were initially unwilling to say anything but later resolving to report to the Twelve (Matt 28:8; Mark 16:8).

Mary Magdalene may have gone ahead, breaking the news to Peter and John before the other women arrived (John 20:2).

4. Peter and John ran to the tomb, having heard the report by Mary Magdalene, and discovered that it was indeed empty (Luke 24:12; John 20:3–5).
5. Mary returned to the tomb after Peter and John left and saw the angels. Jesus then appeared to her, and she supposed him to be a gardener initially (John 20:11–18).
6. Jesus met the remaining women and confirmed their commission to tell the disciples, with the reminder of his promise of meeting them in Galilee. The women obeyed (Matt 28:9–10; Luke 24:8–11).
7. Later in the day Jesus appeared to Cleopas and his unnamed companion on the road to Emmaus. They returned to Jerusalem to tell the Eleven (Mark 16:12–13; Luke 24:13–35).
8. During the Sunday afternoon of resurrection day Jesus appeared to Peter in or near Jerusalem (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor 15:5). By the time Cleopas and his companion returned, Jesus had already appeared to Peter (Luke 24:33–34).
9. On the evening of resurrection Sunday, Jesus appeared to the 10 disciples (the Twelve minus Judas and Thomas) and others behind locked doors in the Upper Room in Jerusalem (Luke 24:36–43; John 20:19–25).
10. Sunday evening a week later Jesus appeared to the 11 at the same place in Jerusalem, with Thomas now present (Mark 16:14; John 20:24–29; 1 Cor 15:5).
11. Perhaps three days later Jesus appeared to seven of the disciples beside the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1–14).
12. Jesus appeared to the apostles as well as about 500 brethren in the hills of Galilee (1 Cor 15:6). Further appearances took place over a 40-day period (Luke 24:44–47; Acts 1:3; 1 Cor 15:6).
13. Probably during this time in Galilee, Jesus appeared to James, his half-brother (1 Cor 15:7).
14. Jesus gave his Great Commission to the disciples on a mountain in Galilee, commanding them to make disciples in all nations (Mark 16:15–18; Matt 28:16–20).
15. Back in the Jerusalem area, Jesus gave his parting instructions to the disciples, then ascended into heaven near Bethany on the Mount of Olives, outside of Jerusalem (Mark 16:19–20; Luke 24:44–53; Acts 1:4–12).

As the first day of the week was dawning (28:1): Did the women go to the

tomb at dusk or at dawn? And does “as the first day of the week was dawning” contradict John’s claim that the women came to the tomb “while it was still dark” (John 20:1)? The adverb of time, *opse*, which begins 28:1, has a unique history of usage (cf. BDAG 746; Abbott-Smith 1937, 331–32). It often means “long after” or “late,” specifying a time after sundown and before full dark, which might specify “late in the day” or “evening” (Mark 11:11, 19; 13:35). In that sense, some interpret the adverb to mean “on the evening after the Sabbath,” which would indicate that the women came to the tomb just after sundown on the Sabbath (Gundry 1994, 585–86; Winger 1994, 284–88; Brown 1990, 161–62; Bin 1988, 3–4). In this approach, the subsequent phrase would be rendered “in the brightening of the first of the week,” pointing to the beginning not of daylight but of the new week at the end of Sabbath (proposed by Grintz 1960, 32–47). A common Jewish rendering of time has the beginning of the new week commence with sundown at the end of Sabbath, so this view would specify that the “brightening” of the first day of the new week is Saturday evening after sundown.

However, *opse* also often functions as an irregular preposition with the genitive to mean “after,” acting as a marker of a point of time subsequent to another point of time (cf. BDAG 746; Lohse, *TDNT*, 7:20–21). In connection with the phrase, “as the first day of the week was dawning,” it is best to understand Matthew as indicating that the women purchased the remaining anointing supplies just after the Sabbath ended (late Saturday) and the shops were reopened. With the darkness of night approaching, they returned to their homes and waited till Sunday morning to visit the tomb. Matthew presents the women as coming after the end of the Sabbath, and “dawn” means the first sunrise of the new week. This is in line with the other Gospel accounts, with the women coming early Sunday morning, which is the root of the later practice of Christians gathering on Sunday morning to worship the risen Jesus (e.g., 1 Cor 16:2). That John says “while it was still dark” is no conflict with Matthew, for the dawning of day is a gradation of increasing light. Certainly it was darker when the ladies set out, and it became increasingly light as time wore on. (See further comments at Mark 16:1–2 and John 20:1–2.)

Suddenly there was a violent earthquake (28:2): Matthew places earthquakes both at the death and the resurrection of Christ, while none of the other Gospels mentions earthquakes in either case. God’s supernatural intervention is a regular theme with Matthew, and this has been on display especially in the events surrounding the crucifixion (cf. 27:51–53). Matthew could not make it clearer

that God on his own initiative is intervening in the story (Luz 2005, 595–96). The quakes clearly fit with Matthew's approach, but since they are not mentioned in the other Gospels, are we to conclude that he created the quakes, perhaps to signify God's involvement and the cosmic significance of the Messiah's death and resurrection?

Palestine is prone to earthquakes, and the Jordan Rift Valley is part of a large fault zone that stretches northward from the entrance of the Gulf of Aqaba for over 683 miles to the foot of the Taurus range. This establishes initial plausibility that earthquakes occurred, as Matthew says. These particular earthquakes seem to have been supernatural, however. The conjunction "because" (*gar*) that begins the phrase, "because an angel of the Lord descended from heaven" (28:2), suggests that the earthquake accompanied the appearance of the angel, and may have been the means by which the angel rolled the stone away, though it is also possible that the angel moving the stone caused the earthquake (see Wright 2003, 636). In that case, the quake was violent but limited in scope.

The angel of the Lord superintended miraculous conception, birth, and infancy of Jesus (1:20–21; 2:13, 19), so it is not surprising that the angel of the Lord now superintends the resurrection events, thereby framing Matthew's story of the divine Son. Why the other Evangelists did not report the earthquakes is unknown, but we should not take their silence either as refutation of Matthew's account, or necessarily as evidence that Matthew has created these events as literary elements in order to convey the importance of Jesus' death and resurrection.

He has been resurrected, just as He said (28:6): Jesus said that he would be raised on "the third day" (Matt 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; 26:1–2), and yet by rising again on Sunday morning after a Friday afternoon crucifixion, he was not dead for a full three days. Does this represent an inaccuracy in Jesus' prediction? This criticism misses the fact that the OT regularly reckoned a part of a day as a whole day (cf. Gen 42:17–18; 1 Sam 30:12–13; 1 Kgs 20:29; 2 Chr 10:5, 12; Esth 4:16; 5:1). Further, rabbinic thought also regarded a part of a day as a whole day (*y. Šab.*, 12a, 15, 17; cf. *b. Naz.* 5b; *b. Pesaḥ* 4.2; cited in Delling, *TDNT*, 2:949–50). Jesus was in the tomb for part of three days, and so in Jewish thought this was considered three days. Dying at approximately 3:00 p.m. on Friday, he was placed in the tomb before sundown (one day). He remained in the tomb all day Saturday (second day), and from sundown Saturday until his resurrection on Sunday morning (third day). So he was raised on the third day, as he prophesied, and was in the tomb for parts of three days and three nights (see comments on

12:40; 26:16).

An angel of the Lord descended from heaven . . . [and] told the women . . . (28:2, 5–6): Matthew has "an angel of the Lord" announce Jesus' resurrection, whereas Mark 16:5–6 has the news coming from a "young man" inside the tomb. Luke includes a second angel at the scene (Luke 24:4), while Matthew and Mark apparently focus on the one who did the speaking. Thus Matthew has reversed his earlier practice, such as when he reported two demoniacs when Mark and Luke focused only on one (cf. Matt 8:28; Mark 5:1–20; Luke 8:26–39). That the angel is called a "young man" in Mark's narrative may signify that Mark reported this scene from the women's perspective: i.e., they saw what appeared to them at first to be simply a young man.

It is not easy to piece together how the women could (a) mistake the angel for merely a young man as portrayed in Mark's account, and yet also (b) see this same being descend from heaven, manifest an appearance like lightning, roll back the stone, and strike fear in the hearts of the guards as portrayed in Matthew's account. An answer to this problem may begin by noting that Matthew does not specifically state that the women witnessed these events. Granted, the most natural reading leads us to assume that the women saw all of these things, but it is possible that Matthew telescoped between verses 4 and 5, bringing the women immediately into the presence of the angel when in fact they had not been present for the events that so overwhelmed the guards. Verse 5 portrays the angel telling the women not to be afraid. While this may seem to imply that they were afraid of his appearance, it may be that he was only speaking to their fears about the fate of Jesus' body. In fact his full answer to them (vv. 5–6) fits this explanation. Also note that since angels are spirit-beings, they are able to take on various physical manifestations that communicate nuanced messages to those to whom they appear. It is possible that the angel manifested one appearance to the guards, and quite another to the women.

***Location from which the angel(s) made the resurrection announcement* (28:5–6):** In verse 2 Matthew tells us that the angel sat on the stone once he rolled it away from the tomb. Seemingly this is the same spot he occupied when, in verses 5–6, he announced Jesus' resurrection to the women. Mark 16:5–6 has the resurrection news coming from a "young man" who was seated inside the tomb and to the right. Finally, Luke 24:5–6 has the news coming from "two men" who were standing (not sitting, as in Matthew and Mark) inside the tomb.

These differences are impressive, and it may be that the details cannot be

harmonized into an account that gives us a literal rendering of the particulars of the announcement. But surely the purpose and major claim of each Evangelist is the same: the women received an angelic message stating that Jesus had risen. Details about the exact posture and position of the participants hardly matter, and may fall under the narrator's license to set the scene. (See further comments at Mark 16:5–6, Luke 24:4–6, and John 20:12.)

Departing quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, they ran to tell His disciples the news (28:8): A note of authenticity is sounded by Matthew as he says that the women departed to tell the disciples the news "with fear and great joy" (28:8). Matthew has emphasized all along the mind-boggling nature of Jesus and his mission of establishing the kingdom of God. Morris (1992, 738) states:

> That they went *with fear* indicates that they were in the grip of the awe that had been aroused in them by their contact with the visitant from another world. But they were not simply scared; they went with *great joy*. They had come to that place mourning the death of their great leader and dear friend; they went away knowing that he was dead no longer.

Did they fully understand all of these events? Probably not. It was simply too much for them to grasp fully. "Fear and great joy" is a realistic reaction.

Just then Jesus met them and said, "Good morning!" (28:9): Matthew has the women encounter the risen Jesus, but Luke 24:9 has the women return to speak to the disciples without ever seeing Jesus. Are these conflicting testimonies? Luke does not mention that the women saw Jesus at this point in the chronology, which heightens the drama of the following Emmaus road encounter with Cleopas and his companion. The Emmaus account is unique to Luke's Gospel, and in it he reserves the first appearance of Jesus as the confirming event of the resurrection. Luke may have assumed traditional knowledge of the earlier appearance to the women and saved the drama of the revelation of the risen Jesus for the Emmaus account (cf. Bock 1996, 1898). (See further comments at Luke 24:9–10.)

Go and tell My brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see Me there (28:10): Jesus tells the women to have the disciples leave for Galilee and that he would see them there. Matthew then has the disciples traveling to Galilee (v. 16) where indeed they see the risen Jesus, seemingly for the first time as Matthew tells it (v. 17). However, according to other Gospels (Luke 24:34ff; John

20:19ff), Jesus instead met his disciples in Jerusalem over the course of a day or so after the resurrection, which may seem to be at odds with Matthew. In fact Luke never narrates Jesus going to Galilee after his resurrection, and instead of having the angel tell the women to send the men ahead to Galilee, has the angel tell them, "Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee . . . ?" Can these differences be reconciled? Reconstructing many of the events of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances is difficult, but not insurmountable. As we laid out above in the plausible synchronization of the events surrounding Jesus' resurrection and post-resurrection appearances, each Evangelist recorded events that are central to his purposes. Matthew's record of Jesus' appearance to the disciples in Galilee does not imply that this was the first time that they saw him but rather emphasizes (1) their obedience to Jesus' command (28:10) and (2) their developing reaction to Jesus' resurrection status: some worshiped, while others doubted (28:16–17). This sets the stage for Jesus' declaration that all authority has been given to him, that his disciples were now to finish the task of making disciples of all nations, and that he would be with them always (28:18–20). Matthew has restricted his narration of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to focus on the authoritative, commissioning, resurrected Jesus in Galilee, but this does not mean that he was ignorant of the post-resurrection appearances to the disciples in Jerusalem. (See further comments at Luke 24:36.)

> 11 As they were on their way, some of the guards came into the city and reported to the chief
> priests everything that had happened. 12 After the priests had assembled with the elders and
> agreed on a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money 13 and told them, "Say this, 'His
> disciples came during the night and stole Him while we were sleeping.' 14 If this reaches the
> governor's ears, we will deal with him and keep you out of trouble." 15 So they took the money
> and did as they were instructed. And this story has been spread among Jewish people to this
> day.

The guards came into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened (28:11): None of the disciples were present to overhear and report the conversation between the unbelieving Jewish leaders and the Roman guards, so how did Matthew know what was said between them? Further, Matthew alone recounts this incident, which leads some to doubt its historicity.

First, as has been mentioned in numerous cases above, the silence of the other Gospels should not be counted as refutation. Each Evangelist had to decide which events to narrate and which events to leave unmentioned (cf. John 21:25).

Second, Matthew wrote for a Jewish-Christian audience that would have heard from fellow Jews (1) that the charges that were circulating among the Jews that Jesus' disciples had stolen his body, and (2) that the guards and religious leaders had colluded to spread the lie. Therefore Matthew addressed a situation that was of concern to his readers (Craig 1984, 273–81; Wright 2003, 638–40; Keener 2009, 713–15). Third, Acts 6:7 reports that "a large group of priests became obedient to the faith" in response to the preaching of the early church. It is likely that numerous of these newly converted priests had been privy to "insider" information about opposition to Jesus.

Say this, "His disciples came during the night and stole Him while we were sleeping" (28:13): The specific plan that the chief priests and elders concocted is extremely dubious. First, it is unlikely that all of the guards would have dared go to sleep while on guard duty because the penalty for sleeping while on duty could be execution (cf. Petronius, *Satyricon*, 112; Acts 12:19). Second, had the disciples managed to sneak past the sleeping men and reach the tomb, they would have wakened every one of them with the commotion of rolling the stone away. That would have been the end of their tomb raiding, of course. Third, if the guards were all asleep during the theft, how did they know what had happened to Jesus' body? Fourth, the disciples had fled in panic from Jesus' arrest, denied knowing Jesus, and did not attend the crucifixion. Nothing about their state of mind suggests they were willing or able to raid Jesus' well-guarded tomb.

Does the dubiousness of this plan suggest Matthew has made up a bad fiction? Actually, the poorly crafted plan is believable in light of the desperation the religious leaders and the guards were facing. If the guards accepted this plan, they would put themselves in jeopardy with their Roman superiors. But at the same time, they were already in jeopardy because they had failed to protect the tomb. Explaining the empty tomb by describing the angel surely would not help their case! So with the backing of the Jewish religious leaders, they felt they had at least a chance at escaping punishment.

If this reaches the governor's ears, we will deal with him and keep you out of trouble (28:14): Critics have said it is unrealistic to think that the Jewish leadership wielded enough influence to keep the guards out of trouble with Pilate, especially given the grievousness of their false confession about falling asleep. But this misses the fact that it would do Pilate no good to have rumors circulating that Jesus had been raised from the dead. The Jewish leaders

understood this, and thus they were confident that they could collaborate with Pilate to hide a truth that both parties wished to suppress.

And this story has been spread among Jewish people to this day (28:15): Matthew wrote his Gospel around 30 years after the events narrated in chapter 28. That the "stolen body" rumor was still being spread indicates that the guards, Pilate, and the Jewish religious leadership stuck to their story, and that there was ongoing need to spread it as belief in Jesus' resurrection continued to grow. Nearly a century later the rumor was still being spread among the Jews, as is evident in the writings of Justin Martyr (*Dialogue with Trypho,* 108.2).

> 16 The 11 disciples traveled to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them.
> 17 When they saw Him, they worshiped, but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came near and said
> to them, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go, therefore, and
> make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the
> Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I
> am with you always, to the end of the age."

When they saw Him, they worshiped, but some doubted (28:16–17): This marks the first post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to the male disciples in Matthew's Gospel, and not surprisingly, their response is to worship their Lord. What *is* surprising at first glance is that "some doubted." Wright says that the reference to doubt has "the strongest mark of authenticity in this paragraph" (Wright 2003, 643). If Matthew were creating fictions about Jesus' resurrection, it is almost unthinkable that he would introduce the topic of doubt. If he were reporting true history, however, he would feel obligated to convey accurately the first responses of the disciples to the risen Jesus, even when some of those responses were unflattering.

The cause of the doubt is unexplained, but reticence to believe that a dead man has come back to life is understandable. Presumably the doubts vanished once the disciples recalled and finally understood Jesus' resurrection predictions. The fact that they were active in spreading news of Jesus' resurrection and growing the early church proves that they all came to believe (Acts 1:12–14; 2:1–47).

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth (28:18): This statement has led some to question whether Jesus only just now gained divine authority, or whether he was here adopted by the Father. During his earthly ministry Jesus declared authority as the Son of man to forgive sin (9:6) and to

reveal the Father (11:27). Now as the risen Messiah he alludes to his fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy about the Son of Man being given all authority, glory, and power, who is worshiped by all peoples and nations, and whose dominion and kingdom last forever (Dan 7:13–14). During his earthly ministry he had absolute authority, but the *exercise* of it was restricted to his incarnate consciousness. In his risen state he exercises his absolute authority throughout the universe.

Make disciples of all nations (28:19): Critics say that if Jesus spoke so clearly at this time about the Gentile mission ("Make disciples of all nations"), the early church would not have struggled so much over the issue (e.g., Acts 15). Does this suggest that Matthew placed on Jesus' lips a statement that was helpful to the situation at the time Matthew wrote his Gospel? And is this statement evidence of anti-Semitism (i.e., is Jesus saying, "Go to the nations but not the Jews")?

Matthew's Gospel reflects the difficulty that Jews had in understanding their distinctiveness in God's program along with the inclusion of Gentiles. Jesus' ministry to Jews throughout his ministry was a fulfillment of the promises to Israel of messianic blessings (see comments on 10:5–15, 23). But throughout his ministry Jesus had increasingly revealed that now was the time to include Gentiles as well (see comments on 8:5–13; 10:16–22). This concluding commission of Jesus' earthly ministry coheres with Jesus' intention to include Gentiles, which is soon reemphasized in the book of Acts in his charge to the disciples before his ascension: "you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). During his earthly ministry Jesus' followers struggled to comprehend how Israel could retain its distinctiveness in God's program, yet include Gentiles in the kingdom that Jesus was establishing. And that difficulty remained in the early church. A significant breakthrough came with the vision from the Lord to Peter to go to the Gentile centurion Cornelius with the gospel (Acts 10:1–48). The early church continued to struggle with the inclusion of Gentiles (Acts 11:1–18; 15:1–6) until Peter and the other leaders of the church finally acknowledged that God's intention was that the church was to be made up of disciples of all the nations, Jews and Gentiles alike (Acts 15:7–29).

Some have suggested that "all the nations" means only "Gentiles," since Matthew normally refers to Gentiles as "the nations." They also see this view as fitting with Jesus' harsh statements about the rejection of the Jewish nation or Matthew's depiction of the crowd at Jesus' trial (e.g., 27:25). The result is a suspicion that Matthew is an anti-Semitic Gospel. However, we have dismissed

charges of anti-Semitism above, and most scholars recognize that Jesus intends to include Jews in his commission and that Matthew intends his readers to understand their inclusion (e.g., Davies and Allison, 1997, 3:684; Keener 2009, 719–20).

Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (28:19): This is the only baptismal formula in the NT that has converts being baptized in the name of the Trinity and not just the name of Jesus. Is Matthew's witness to the Trinity historically plausible, or does it reflect later tradition? While this is the clearest Trinitarian (note: not "tritheistic") language in the Gospels and is often accused of being a later theological "formula" inserted by Matthew, we must note that it is not the earliest such Trinitarian expression in the NT (cf. Gal 4:4–7; 1 Cor 12:4–6; 2 Cor 13:14; although the "Father" expression is not precisely parallel, the "Son" motif argues for Paul's early recognition; cf. Wright 2003, 644n38). Further, Jesus' earlier ministry and teaching offered hints of the plurality of the nature of the Godhead (e.g., Jesus' baptism in 3:16–17; the mutual disclosure of Father and Son in 11:27; Jesus' mention of the Spirit's role in exorcism in 12:28).

Apologetics Commentary on the Gospel of Mark

The Gospel of Mark, the shortest of the four canonical Gospels, tells the story of Jesus, from baptism to the empty tomb, in an impressive and compelling manner. Although neglected in the early centuries of the Church, this Gospel has enjoyed a great deal of recent scholarly attention throughout the twentieth century.

Authorship

The oldest testimony that we have concerning the authorship of the Gospel of Mark comes from Papias (AD 60–130), an early second-century church father who was bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor. Papias relates a tradition that he received from an elder ("presbyter") who had been acquainted with some of the apostles:

> And the elder used to say this: "Mark, having become Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately everything he remembered, though not in order, of the things either said or done by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, followed Peter, who adapted his teachings as needed but had no intention of giving an ordered account of the Lord's sayings. Consequently Mark did nothing wrong in writing down some things as he remembered them, for he made it his one concern not to omit anything that he heard or to make any false statement in them." Such, then, is the account given by Papias with respect to Mark (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.15).

Eusebius extracted this statement from Papias's five-volume *Exegesis of the Lord's Oracles* (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.1). Today all that remains of the work are several quotations, mostly cited in Eusebius. Papias wrote his work sometime between AD 110 and 120.

It is remarkable that the early church attributed authorship to Mark, who is thought to be John Mark, the cousin of Barnabas (Acts 12:12), rather than to Peter, the source of the material preserved in the Gospel of Mark. The tradition that Mark was the author must have been well known, for it is not easy to

explain assigning the Gospel to him if there was any uncertainty. If there was any doubt, surely it would have been better to assign authorship to Peter, the rock on which Jesus was building his Church (Matt 16:16–19), rather than to Mark, whose failure on the first missionary journey caused a rift between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36–39) and who, some believed, was the man who fled naked the night Jesus was arrested (Mark 14:51–52). The church's attribution of the Gospel of Mark to Mark and not to a famous figure like Peter contrasts sharply with the habit of the authors of late fictional Gospels and Gospel-like writings who regularly assigned their works to major figures, usually apostles and sometimes Jesus himself.

Date and Purpose

Careful study of Mark 13 (Hengel 1985, 14–28) and a few related passages suggests that the Gospel of Mark was published in the early stages of the Jewish war with Rome (AD 66–70). Mark 13 begins with Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the Herodian temple (v. 2). The disciples ask when this will happen (v. 4), and the long discourse that follows describes the signs that will precede the coming of the "Son of Man" (v. 26). Among these signs will be the appearance of false messiahs and false prophets (vv. 5–6, 21–22), as well as wars and rumors of war (vv. 7–8). But the major sign that will signify that the end is near will be the setting up of the "abomination that causes desolation" in the temple (v. 14).

The events of the 40s–60s correspond in many ways to these signs. But if Mark wrote sometime after 70, as many scholars believe, then the prediction of the abomination could not be thus fulfilled. Sensing this problem, some interpreters argue that the abomination was the occupation of the temple precincts by the rebels, or Titus' entry into the sanctuary as it burned. But these proposals do not work. Jesus tells his disciples to flee from Jerusalem when they see the abomination set up. But as it happened, it was too late to flee the city when the rebels occupied the temple precincts, and certainly too late to flee when the Roman army stormed the Temple Mount and General Titus entered the sanctuary. Moreover, verse 18 urges believers to pray that this would not happen in winter. But the taking of Jerusalem and the horrors that resulted occurred in the summer. On any fair reading of Mark 13, therefore, the events of AD 70 do not seem to lie behind the warnings.

It is more probable that Mark 13 reflects the very beginning of the war, possibly even a time shortly before the war began. It is a time of rumors of war,

perhaps the early stages of the revolt itself. It reflects a time when various would-be prophets and deliverers proffered signs of salvation. It was a time when Christians believed that the abomination of which Jesus spoke would be set up in the temple, thus making worship there impossible. It would be a time to flee the city, for judgment and the appearance of the Son of man would be quite near (vv. 14–27).

If the Gospel of Mark was indeed written in the middle 60s, then it was written at a time of severe Christian persecution at the hands of Nero (ruled AD 54–68). This emperor, increasingly hated and despised by his own people, promoted his deification. More than any emperor before him, he encouraged people to refer to him as "god," "Son of god," "lord," "savior," and "benefactor." Written in the last two or three years of Nero's life, when the Jewish rebellion was in its early stages, when persecution of Christians was severe, and when many prophets and deliverers were making themselves known, the author of Mark puts forward Jesus as the true Son of God.

Mark's opening verse makes the Gospel's purpose clear: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). Mark very carefully chose his language, deliberately echoing the language of the imperial ruler cult, as seen in an inscription in honor of Caesar Augustus: "the birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning for the world of the good news." Mark challenges this imperial myth, asserting that the good news for the world began with Jesus Christ, the true Son of God (see Mark 15:39, where the Roman centurion admits upon seeing the impressive death of Jesus: "This man really was God's Son!").

From this extraordinary claim at the beginning of his narrative, to the sudden and dramatic discovery of the empty tomb, Mark takes pains to show that Jesus is truly God's Son, despite rejection by the religious authorities of his time and his execution at the hands of the Roman governor. The Julian emperors, whose latest and most unfortunate manifestation at the time of the publication of Mark is the demented Nero, can provide no compelling candidates for recognition as the Son of God, whose life and death are truly of benefit to humankind. To the Roman world Mark proffers Jesus and his message of the kingdom of God and by doing so encourages the faithful to remain steadfast, and enjoins the critics and opponents of the Christian faith to reconsider.

Provenance

Scholars generally agree that the Gospel of Mark was probably written in Rome, or at least Italy. This is based primarily on fairly consistent patristic

testimony (France 2002, 37–38), the presence of Latinisms (Gundry 1993, 1044), and the connection between Mark and Peter's ministry in Rome (1 Pet 5:13; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.1.1). Patristic testimony includes Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 2.15–16), Epiphanius (*Against Heresies* 6.10), Clement of Alexandria (in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.6–7; *Adumbrationes* on 1 Pet 5:13; *Letter of Clement of Alexandria on Secret Mark*), and the Anti-Marcionite Prologue.

General Reliability of the Manuscripts Available to Us

The listing below identifies the earliest and most important Greek witnesses to the Gospel of Mark. With the exceptions of the eighth- and ninth-century MSS L and 33, which evidently are copies of early and reliable MSS, the witnesses that are listed date from the third–sixth centuries (π^{45} could date to the end of the second century).

MS CENTURY MARCAN CONTENTS

π^{45} III 4:36–40; 5:15–26; 5:38–6:3; 6:16–25, 36–50; 7:3–15; 7:25–8:1; 8:10–26; 8:34–9:9; 9:18–31; 11:27–12:1; 12:5–8, 13–19, 24–28

π^{84} VI 2:2–5, 8–9; 6:30–31, 33–34, 36–37, 39–41

π^{88} IV 2:1–26

א IV 1:1–16:8

A V 1:1–16:20

B IV 1:1–16:8

C V 1:17–6:31; 8:5–12:29; 13:19–16:20

D V 1:1–16:14 (16:15–20 added later)

L VIII 1:1–10:15; 10:30–15:1; 15:20–16:20

N VI 5:20–7:4; 7:20–8:32; 9:1–10:43; 11:7–12:19; 14:25–15:23, 33–42

P VI 1:2–11; 3:5–17; 14:13–24, 48–61; 15:12–37

W V 1:1–15:12; 15:39–16:20

S VI 1:1–16:13

F VI 1:1–14:62

059 + 0215 IV/V 15:20–21, 26–27, 29–38

064 + 074 VI 1:11–22; 1:34–2:12; 2:21–3:3; 3:27–4:4; 5:9–20

067 VI 9:14–22; 14:58–70

069 (= POxy 3) V 10:50–51; 11:11–12

072 V/VI 2:23–3:5

080 VI 9:14–18, 20–22; 10:23–24, 29

083 + 0112 VI/VII 13:12–14, 16–19, 21–24; 14:29–45; 15:27–16:8; short ending; 16:9–10
087 VI 12:32–37
0143 VI 8:17–18, 27–28
0184 VI 15:36–37, 40–41
0187 VI 6:30–41
0188 IV 11:11–17
0212 III 15:40, 42 (from the *Diatessaron*)
0213 V/VI 3:2–3, 5
0214 IV/V 8:33–37
0263 VI 5:26–27, 31
0274 V 6:56–7:4, 6–9, 13–17, 19–23, 28–29, 34–35; 8:3–4, 8–11; 9:20–22, 26–41; 9:43–10:1, 17–22
0292 VI 6:55–7:5
33 IX 1:1–9:30; 11:12–13:10; 14:60–16:20

Although not as well attested as the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John, the Ms attestation for Mark is early and substantial. It is still possible that additional witnesses to Mark will be found among the numerous unpublished Oxyrhynchus papyri. The era of manuscript discovery is not over. Finally, it should be stressed that the Gospel of Mark and other NT writings have not been found in Qumran's cave 7. (These small Greek fragments, some of which a few scholars at one time identified as belonging to Mark and other NT writings, are now recognized as Jewish and pre-Christian.) Several of the small Greek fragments have been identified as belonging to the book of *Enoch*.

Mark's Relation to Matthew and Luke

Most scholars today are rightly convinced that the Synoptic Gospels are the oldest Gospels. But which one of these three is the oldest? Augustine (d. c. AD 430) believed that Matthew was written first and that Mark is in essence an abridgment of it. Johann Jacob Griesbach in 1776 proposed that Matthew was composed first, that Luke was composed next making use of Matthew, and that Mark was composed last conflating and abridging both Matthew and Luke. The Griesbach hypothesis was influential for about a century, but began losing ground to Markan priority in the years following the publication of a work by Heinrich Julius Holtzmann in 1863. Holtzmann argued that an early version of Mark ("source A") was written first and that Matthew and Luke independently of one another made use of it and another source of sayings ("source B"). The

latter source eventually came to be called “Q,” which is an abbreviation for the German word *Quelle*, meaning source.

Following the influential study of B. H. Streeter in 1924, the basic principles of Holtzmann’s explanation of the relationships among the Synoptic Gospels became the dominant view. Although in the last thirty-five years or so William Farmer and a small number of like-minded colleagues have vigorously argued for a return to the Griesbach hypothesis, the majority of Gospel scholars still holds to Markan priority.

Markan priority appears to be the most prudent position for several reasons: (1) Mark’s literary style sometimes lacks the sophistication and polish often seen in Matthew and Luke. This phenomenon is more easily explained in terms of Matthean and Lukan improvement upon Mark, rather than Markan degradation of Matthean and Lukan style.

(2) In the Markan Gospel Jesus and the disciples are sometimes portrayed in a manner that appears undignified. More often than not these potentially embarrassing passages are touched up or omitted altogether by Matthew and Luke. Again, it is easier to explain the phenomena in terms of Matthean and Lukan improvements upon Mark, rather than the reverse.

(3) The phenomena of agreements and disagreements among the Synoptic Gospels are more easily explained in reference to Markan priority. Among other things, we observe that where there is no Mark to follow (e.g., no infancy narrative, no “Q” material) this is where Matthew and Luke diverge from one another. This observation is more easily explained in terms of Markan priority and Matthew’s and Luke’s independence from one another than in terms of Mark writing last and making use of Matthew and Luke. Markan priority also avoids the problem of trying to explain Luke’s inconsistent use of Matthew.

(4) The small amount of material that is unique to the Gospel of Mark also supports Markan priority. This material consists of 1:1; 2:27; 3:20–21; 4:26–29; 7:2–4, 32–37; 8:22–26; 9:29, 48–49; 13:33–37; 14:51–52. In reviewing this material we should ask which explanation seems most probable, that Mark added it or that Matthew and Luke found it in Mark and chose to omit it. The nature of the material supports the latter alternative, for it seems more likely that Matthew and Luke chose to omit the flight of the naked youth (14:51–52); the odd saying about being “salted with fire” (9:48–49); the strange miracle where Jesus effects healing in two stages (8:22–26); the even stranger miracle where Jesus puts his fingers in a man’s ears, spits, and touches his tongue (7:32–37); and the episode where Jesus is regarded as mad and his family attempts to restrain him (3:20–

22). If we accept the Griesbach-Farmer Hypothesis, we would then have to explain why Mark would choose to add these odd, potentially embarrassing materials, only to omit the Sermon on the Mount/Plain, the Lord's Prayer, and numerous other teachings and parables found in the larger Gospels.

(5) The final consideration that adds weight to the probability of Markan priority has to do with the results of the respective hypotheses. The true test of any hypothesis is its effectiveness. In biblical studies a theory should aid the exegetical task. The theory of Markan priority has provided just this kind of aid. Not only has Synoptic interpretation been materially advanced because of the conclusion, and now widespread assumption, of Markan priority, but the development of critical methods oriented to Gospel research, such as Form and Redaction Criticism, which have enjoyed success, has also presupposed Markan priority. In countless studies, whether dealing with this or that pericope, or treating one of the Synoptic Gospels in its entirety, it has been recognized over and over again that Matthew and Luke make the greatest sense as interpretations of Mark; but Mark makes little sense as a conflation and interpretation of Matthew and Luke.

The evidence is compelling that Mark represents the oldest surviving account of Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection. What sources the evangelist Mark made use of, if any, will in all probability remain a mystery. That he made use of some written material seems likely. That he made use of some eyewitness testimony is also probable; it cannot be ruled out. How early this Gospel was written will be considered shortly. But now we must ask what Mark is literarily.

What Kind of Literature Is Mark?

Mark is the only Gospel to call itself a "gospel" (see 1:1, "The beginning of the gospel," or "good news"). This word has its origins in Isaiah (see 40:9; 41:27; 52:7; 61:1) but also carried important connotations in the Greco-Roman world (see comments on 1:1–3 below). The genre of Mark is for the most part biography, similar to the biography of Elijah and Elisha in the Old Testament (1 Kings 17–2 Kings 9) or examples of popular biography found in the Pseudepigrapha (such as *Lives of the Prophets* or *Joseph and Aseneth*). The distinctive features of Mark's biography are the exclusive focus on Jesus and the emphasis on the proclamation of his message. The "good news" has been realized with the appearance of Jesus. Now the story must be told and the message must be proclaimed (Guelich 1989, xix–xxii).

Mark may be a somewhat novel form of biography, but one must not expect of

it what we moderns usually expect of biography. Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark tells us nothing about Jesus' birth and upbringing. The Evangelist says absolutely nothing about Jesus' appearance or personality. Apart from his teaching and one or two details, Mark tells nothing of Jesus' habits, likes, dislikes, or interests. The Evangelist is principally concerned with Jesus' public ministry, the impact he had on others, and his fate in Jerusalem. But this account is not in a strictly chronological, developmental order. The order is thematic. The stories and teachings are sometimes clustered around common themes. When and where these things happened or were spoken often cannot be determined. The Markan presentation is largely guided by literary and theological interests.

Earliest Citations

The Gospel of Mark is cited and quoted many times in such second- to early third-century church fathers as Tertullian, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus, Origen, and Cyprian.

Establishment in the Canon

From their beginnings in single locations in the ancient world, the individual Gospels spread until, according to F. F. Bruce, "probably quite early in the second century, the fourfold Gospel began to circulate among the churches in place of a single Gospel writing" (*DJG,* 1992, 94). According to Justin Martyr, by the middle of the second century two groups of writings were read in the church (of equal status or value): the Gospels (called "the memoirs of the apostles") and the OT Prophets (*First Apology* 67). Inspired by the heretical Marcionite canon, which appeared in 144, the church responded by identifying its own list. The Muratorian Canon, believed to be the oldest list of NT canonical books, which dates to about 170, lists four Gospels. Although Matthew and Mark are not mentioned (the document is fragmentary), the "third" Gospel is Luke and the "fourth" is John. Although other Gospels were known at the time (the Gospel of Peter and the Gospel of the Hebrews, for example), Tatian, in about 160, took the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and made a single Gospel harmony called the *Diatessaron*. Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 3.11.8) responded to the appearance of other Gospels with an argument that there were four and only four Gospels.

APOLOGETICS COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF

MARK

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 As it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

Look, I am sending My messenger ahead of You,
who will prepare Your way.
3 **A voice of one crying out in the wilderness:**
Prepare the way for the Lord;
make His paths straight!

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (1:1): Mark's opening words, "the beginning [*arche*] of the gospel [*euangelion*] of Jesus Christ the Son of God [*huios theou*]," serve more or less as the title of the work as a whole. This is the normal function of the opening words (the *incipit*, "it begins") of books in antiquity. The entire story of Jesus' ministry, including his crucifixion, is gospel or "good news" for the world. But Mark's opening words also recall the language of the Roman imperial cult, rooted especially in Caesar Augustus (30 BC—AD 14). The Priene inscription (9 BC) is in this instance very significant:

> Providence . . . has given us Augustus, whom she filled with virtue that he might benefit humanity, sending him as a savior [*soter*], both for us and for our descendants, that he might end war and put all things in order . . . Caesar, by his appearance [*epiphanein*] excelled our expectations and surpassed all previous benefactors, and not even leaving to posterity any hope of surpassing what he has done . . . the birthday of the god [*theos*] Augustus was the beginning [*archesthai*] for the world of the good news [*euangelia*] that came by reason of him.

Anyone acquainted with NT Christology will immediately recognize several important parallels, for NT writers speak of the *epiphany* of Jesus (2 Thess 2:8; 1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 1:10; 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13) the *savior* of the world (Luke 2:11; John 4:42; Acts 5:31; 13:23; Eph 5:23; Phil 3:20; 2 Tim 1:10; Titus 1:4; 2:13; 3:6; 2 Pet 1:1, 11; 2:20; 3:2, 18; 1 John 4:14).

Mark's language (esp. "beginning," "gospel," and "Son of God") deliberately echoes the Roman doctrine of the divine emperor. (On its OT antecedents, see comments on 1:14–15 below.) In effect, the Evangelist is saying to the Roman world: Caesar is neither the beginning of the gospel (or good news) for the

world, nor God's son; Messiah Jesus is. As such, Mark's opening words directly challenge the Roman emperor cult (see comments on Mark 15:39 below) and offer a powerful apologetic in support of the Christian movement and its faith in Jesus.

If Mark was composed and circulated in the late 60s, then the Evangelist's identification of Jesus as the true "Son of God" would be highlighted against the backdrop of the decline of the myth of the divine Roman emperor. After the Senate declared him a public menace, Nero committed suicide in 68. He was followed in rapid succession by Galba, Otho, and Vitellius. The first and last were murdered; the second committed suicide. Not one ruled for more than a few months. Vespasian, who ascended to the throne in late 69, was the fifth Roman emperor and "son of God" in two years. The dubiousness of the Roman imperial myth had become apparent to many. In this setting Mark presented to the Roman public a new model of divine leadership, the true "Son of God," with whom the good news for the world truly begins.

Mark's silence on Jesus' birth **(1:1):** By identifying Jesus' intersection with John the Baptist as "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ," does Mark indicate that the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke are irrelevant or legendary? Mark begins his Gospel with a quotation from Isaiah 40 in order to show that his focus will be on Jesus the divine warrior who will lead his people from their bondage and exile. It is commonly understood that in his prophecies of restoration from exile, Isaiah portrays the restoration as a new exodus. Rikki E. Watts has shown that "for Mark the long-awaited coming of Yahweh as King and Warrior has begun, and with it, the inauguration of Israel's eschatological comfort" (1997, 90). The Gospel's action begins in the wilderness, indicating that God's people are still in exile, outside the land of promise and blessing (cf. Evans 1997, 317–18).

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke, on the other hand, begin with birth narratives in part to emphasize the Davidic lineage of Jesus, who is coming to his people in fulfillment of the Davidic covenant. Mark also shows Jesus' Davidic lineage (Mark 10:47–48; 11:10; 12:35–37), but does not place the emphasis there as Matthew and Luke do. This is why Mark has no genealogy or birth narrative. For this situation and others that will arise during our examination of the Gospel of Mark, it is important to note that an author's silence about a given event or fact does not count as a denial of that event or fact.

Son of God (1:1): A few early manuscripts omit the words “Son of God.” Many others contain them. Some scholars think the words were added later, arguing that early Christian scribes were more likely to add these words than to omit them. However, some early scribes may have accidentally omitted these words because of the *ou* (genitive) endings for Jesus, Christ, Son, and God. It is not difficult to imagine such an omission due to the scribe’s eye returning to the wrong place, especially if these words were presented in abbreviated form (as *nomina sacra*, “sacred names”). Two factors strongly support the originality of the words. First, the parallel of Mark’s opening words with the language of the imperial cult of the divine emperor (with whom “begins” the “gospel” for the world) supports the original, intentional inclusion of “Son of God” in the text. Second, the Roman centurion’s climactic confession at the moment of Jesus’ death that Jesus “really was God’s Son!” (Mark 15:39) strongly supports the originality of “Son of God” in Mark 1:1. The evangelist Mark presses home the identity of Jesus (see 8:27 “Who do people say that I am?”) throughout his narrative. It makes sense that he would identify Jesus fully—as both Messiah and God’s Son—in his opening line (for arguments in support of the originality of the words “Son of God” in Mark 1:1, see Boring 2006, 30, 32, 250–51; Guelich 1989, 6).

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet (1:2): The evangelist Mark begins his narrative with an appeal to Scripture, in this case “Isaiah the prophet.” However, the quotation actually begins with words from Malachi: “Look, I am sending My messenger ahead of You, who will prepare Your way” (Mal 3:1). The part from Isaiah follows: “A voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way for the Lord; make His paths straight!” (Isa 40:3). If the quote is a conglomeration of several OT passages, why does Mark attribute it to Isaiah alone? Some critics assume that Mark has blundered, not knowing that the first part of his quotation really does not derive from Isaiah. They believe this is why Matthew and Luke omit the Malachi part of the quotation in their respective quotations (Matt 3:3; Luke 3:4–6). However, these charges are hardly fair. In late antiquity Jewish quotation and interpretation of Scripture often involved linking related passages of Scripture (a practice known as *gezera shawa*). Watts has found other examples of citing more than one text under the name of only one author in the church fathers. For example, Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 3.20.4) attributes quotations from Micah 7:19 and Amos 1:2 to Amos alone, and Justin (*First Apology* c. 32) attributes quotations from Numbers and Isaiah to Isaiah alone (Watts 1997, 88). Both Malachi 3 and Isaiah 40 contain the words “prepare . . .

way." This common language draws the two passages together. But because Malachi 3 refers to God's "messenger," it is perfectly suited to serve as an introduction to the quotation from Isaiah 40. The Evangelist has made it clear that John the Baptist, whose voice is heard in the wilderness, is in fact God's messenger, foretold in Scripture. Thus Mark's citation here is not an example of sloppy exegesis or carelessness with the facts. He applies the OT passages in accordance with their original sense and "prepares the way" for his readers to comprehend his Gospel account. (See further comments at Matt 3:3.)

> 4 John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the
> forgiveness of sins. 5 The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were
> flocking to him, and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins.
> 6 John wore a camel-hair garment with a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild
> honey. 7 He was preaching: "Someone more powerful than I will come after me. I am not
> worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of His sandals. 8 I have baptized you with water, but
> He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (1:4): Mark's description of John's baptism should not be taken to mean that baptism confers forgiveness. The meaning is rather that those who repent testify to their repentance publicly by undergoing baptism, which in Jewish thinking probably related to ritual purity. In describing John's baptism the first-century Jewish apologist and historian Josephus says essentially the same thing. He says that John's baptism was not employed "to gain pardon for whatever sins (one) committed, but as a consecration of the body implying that the soul was already thoroughly cleansed by right behavior" (*Antiquities* 18.117). Although it is possible that at one time in his life John had some connection with the Essenes (the sect whose scrolls were found at Qumran), the John we encounter in the Gospels, who calls on the Jewish people to come to him and repent, is not associated with this group.

The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem (1:5): Are we to take "the whole Judean countryside" and "all the people of Jerusalem" literally? These expressions are obvious exaggerations and would have been recognized as such by the original readers. Words like "all" in Greek, Hebrew, and most languages are commonly understood to have several nuances that we grow accustomed to recognizing according to context. Such expressions as, "all Americans know the Pledge of Allegiance," are understood to have many

exceptions. On the other hand, “all the marbles in this bag are black,” is understood to have no exceptions. Sometimes the Greek word for “all” (*pas*) was understood to mean “all kinds of.”

John wore a camel-hair garment with a leather belt (1:6): Elijah in 2 Kings 1:8 is dressed similarly. Did John consciously imitate Elijah, or did Mark simply invent this detail in order to support a John-as-Elijah theme? Mark 9:13 is the only verse in Mark that suggests an identity between Elijah and John the Baptist. There is no reason to suppose that an item of Mark’s agenda was to support a John-as-Elijah theme. Besides, if John the Baptist was as popular as Mark suggests (and Josephus confirms his popularity), such facts as John’s appearance would be widely known. Finally, the questionable ethics of making up facts to support a claim would not fit the teachings of the one Mark was writing about, who was noted as being truthful (cf. Mark 12:14).

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit (1:8): Is Mark putting words into John’s mouth here? After all, the baptism in the Holy Spirit did not occur until Pentecost. Would John the Baptist really foreknow this event? Speaking of the time of restoration, Ezekiel 36:27 depicts God as declaring: “I will place My Spirit within you and cause you to follow My statutes and carefully observe My ordinances.” At one point in his ministry Jesus expressed surprise that Nicodemus, a “teacher of Israel,” did not know about such a new birth experience (John 3:10). In this light, surely John the Baptist, a prophet, would know about such prophecies. Thus it is not at all implausible that John made reference to a coming baptism of the Holy Spirit.

> 9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John.
> 10 As soon as He came up out of the water, He saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending to Him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven:
> You are My beloved Son;
> I take delight in You!

Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John (1:9): If John’s baptism was “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (v. 4), why did Jesus, who “knew no sin” (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15), go to John to be baptized? The question is not easily answered. The evangelist Matthew expands the narrative (Matt 3:14–15) to show that John was reluctant to baptize Jesus and that Jesus insisted on being baptized. It was necessary for

Jesus to endorse John's ministry and establish continuity with it. John called on Israel to repent and "prepare the way for the Lord." By submitting to John's baptism Jesus exhibited humility, presuming nothing. This stands in sharp contrast to later apocryphal traditions that tend to deny Jesus' full humanity. For example, in an apocryphal Gospel from the second century we encounter a very presumptuous Jesus: When told by his brothers that John was baptizing people "for the forgiveness of sins," Jesus asks, "In what way have I sinned that I should go and be baptized by him?" (*Gospel of the Nazarenes* §2). (See further comments at Matt 3:15 and Luke 3:21.)

He saw . . . the Spirit descending to Him like a dove (1:10): The descent of the Spirit "like a dove" implies that the Spirit was visible to Jesus. But it is not clear why the Spirit is said to have appeared as a dove. In fact "like a dove" may only indicate the manner in which the Spirit came down, not its actual appearance (see comments on 1:12). Some suggest that the description is meant to recall the dove sent out by Noah after the flood waters had begun to abate (Gen 8:8–12), but this is not persuasive. The dove may contrast with the Roman eagle, which was a bird of prey. As God's anointed Son, Jesus will bring peace, not war.

You are My beloved Son; I take delight in You! (1:11): This declaration sets Jesus apart from all others and makes clear that he should be identified as John's expected "mighty one" who will baptize "with the Holy Spirit." The tearing open of the heavens may well have been the moment that Jesus is presented before God as the "one like a son of man," described in Daniel 7:13–14. This may account for Jesus' frequent self-reference as the "Son of God," who on earth has authority to forgive sins (see Mark 2:1–10 and commentary).

***To whom was the voice of the Lord addressed?* (1:10–11):** Did the voice from heaven address Jesus or the crowd? The parallels differ on this matter. According to Mark and Luke, Jesus was addressed by the voice: "You [singular] are My beloved Son." But in Matthew the voice declares, "This is My beloved Son," but with no indication of who heard it. In fact none of the Gospels indicate who heard the voice. It could have been only Jesus, or John the Baptist, or it could have been everyone present. The voice is quoting a combination of Psalm 2:7 ("You are My Son") and Isaiah 42:1 ("This is My Chosen One; I delight in Him"). What exactly the voice said or whether it was addressed to one or all is uncertain. Methods of quotation were not required to be exact in that culture, much as we use indirect quotation today. Pronouns could be changed to

contextualize a quotation, and no ancient reader would think to charge an author with inaccuracy for doing so.

***Does Jesus' baptism event support tritheism over Trinitarianism?* (1:10–11):** With Father (speaking), Son (being baptized), and Spirit (descending in the form of a dove) all present and distinguishable at the same time, does this event suggest that Christianity is a tri-theistic rather than a Trinitarian religion? We must recognize that the baptism took place during Jesus' incarnate state on earth. During that time, the distinctness of the three persons of the Trinity was most apparent. We still have to reckon with texts that highlight the oneness of God, such as those that identify Jesus with Yahweh in the OT (Mark 1:3), Jesus' instruction to baptize "in the *name* of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19), and Jesus' testimony, "The Father and I are one" (John 10:30). (See further comments at Matt 3:16–17.)

12 Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. 13 He was in the wilderness 40 days,
being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and the angels began to serve Him.

Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness (1:12): Did the Spirit drive Jesus into the wilderness while still donning the form of a dove, such that a bystander would have seen a dove harassing Jesus, driving him toward the desolation? And does "drove" imply that Jesus resisted and the Spirit had to insist that he go into the wilderness? In the first place, the biblical text does not say that the spirit took the form of a dove. It only says that the Spirit descended "like a dove." The meaning is uncertain, but it likely just means there was something dove-like about the sight of the Spirit descending on Jesus. Once the Spirit had descended, the dove-likeness was likely over.

In the second place, "drive out" (*ekballein*) is frequently used to describe the casting out of demons (cf. Mark 1:34, 39; 3:15, 22, 23; 6:13; 7:26; 9:18, 28, 38). It is not surprising therefore that both Matthew (4:1) and Luke (4:1) replace "drive out" with forms of "lead." Mark's usage does not indicate that Jesus resisted, however. Most likely Mark wished to emphasize the power of the Spirit. That is, when the Spirit moves, dramatic things happen. Mark's usage may also suggest that Jesus' experience in the wilderness will not be easy. Besides, the majority of the 18 uses of "drive out" (*ekballō*) in Mark speak of Jesus driving out demons (see 1:34). So the use of the verb in 1:12 may foreshadow Jesus' later demonstration of power over the demonic realm.

Being tempted (1:13): If the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted, does this contradict James 1:13? The text plainly indicates that God did not tempt Jesus in the wilderness, but that Satan did. God's purpose was to demonstrate that Jesus was qualified to be the messianic son. It was God's will that Jesus would be tested, but Jesus would succeed where Adam failed. (See further comments at Matt 6:13.)

Mark's spare details on the wilderness temptation **(1:12–13):** Since Mark gives few details of the wilderness temptation, where did Matthew and Luke, both of whom used Mark as a primary source, get their detailed data? Matthew and Luke had other sources besides Mark, as is clear from the many passages that are found in Matthew and Luke but not in Mark. These would include written sources such as "Q" (available to both Matthew and Luke) and also oral sources. Since Matthew was an eyewitness and Luke based his work on Paul's preaching, we may trust their testimony. (See further comments at Luke 4:1–13.)

Has Mark mimicked OT themes? **(1:12–13):** The reference to "forty days" recalls a common designation in biblical literature. Especially relevant is Elijah's 40-day fast (1 Kgs 19:4–8). The "wild animals" may be part of an Adam-paradise typology. But also they may be part of the wilderness backdrop, perhaps even as Satan's allies (Ezek 34:5, 8, 25; *Testament of Naphtali* 8:4 ["the devil will flee from you; wild animals will be afraid of you"]; *Testament of Benjamin* 5:2). Mark's point may have been to underscore the dangers Jesus faced during his stay in the wilderness. Jesus encountered dangers from the spiritual world and from the natural world (cf. Daniel in the lion's den; Dan 6:1–28).

The food that sustained Elijah was provided by an angel. This is probably the background against which we should understand Mark's statement that "angels began to serve" Jesus. Thus, with angelic assistance—whose presence adds further corroboration of his divine approval—Jesus survives his natural and supernatural temptations.

These parallels between Jesus and Elijah do not indicate that Mark has created fictional elements for Jesus' life. Elijah's experiences may have helped shape how Mark chose to narrate Jesus' temptation, drawing out similarities. By God's design, Jesus' life experiences show him to be the recapitulation and fulfillment of OT themes and events.

14 After John was arrested, Jesus went to Galilee, preaching the good news of God: 15 "The

time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe in the good news!
”

The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe in the good news! (1:15): Is the “good news” a concept borrowed from the Romans? If it is instead rooted in the OT, is Jesus inconsistent with its OT meaning? “Good news” (*euangelion*) in earliest Christianity likely derives from Isaiah (Hb *basar*) and not Greco-Roman usage (though Mark made use of the parallels; cf. comments on Mark 1:1 above). Isaiah 40, 52, and 61 contributed to the substance and manner of Jesus’ preaching and teaching (Matt 11:2–6 = Luke 4:16–30; 7:18–23). Isaiah had promised the good news of God’s reign (52:7), which Jesus now proclaims. The “good news,” or gospel, is that the promised and awaited kingdom of God is now here.

Mark’s use of *euangelion* is somewhat curious. It occurs only seven times; three times in chapter 1 (vv. 1, 14, 15), then four times in the second half of the Gospel (8:35; 10:29; 13:10; 14:9). An eighth occurrence is found at 16:15, in what is a later, secondary ending (see comments on 16:9–20 below). All of these occurrences appear to reflect early Christianity’s description of the essence of Jesus’ message and later the essence of its preaching about Jesus himself. But it would be unwarranted to infer from this that Jesus did not think of his proclamation as constituting the good news of God’s reign, as promised in Isaiah. Jesus’ use of Isaiah, especially 52:7 and 61:1–2, and the coherence with the Aramaic diction, as seen in the Isaiah Targum, are strong indications that from earliest times the proclamation of the kingdom (or reign) of God as “good news” originated with Jesus and became standard in the Christian community. We should understand the kingdom of God as a way of speaking of the presence and reign of God, as seen in Luke 11:20, where Jesus says, “If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.”

16 As He was passing along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, Simon’s brother. They were casting a net into the sea, since they were fishermen.
17 “Follow Me,” Jesus told them, “and I will make you fish for people! ” 18 Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. 19 Going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in their boat mending their nets. 20 Immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed Him.

Sea of Galilee (1:16): Mark’s “Sea of Galilee” is a colloquialism. This body of water is a lake, not a sea. Nevertheless, Mark is not mistaken, for the lake was

often referred to as the “Sea of Galilee.” Luke provides the technically correct name when he calls it Lake Gennesaret (Luke 5:1).

Fish for people (1:17): The expression, “fish for people,” or “fishers of people,” is a clever turn-of-phrase that unquestionably originated with Jesus, for it was not picked up and put to use by Christians in the early church. Prior to meeting Jesus, these men had been fishers. Jesus now called them to catch people, bringing into the kingdom of God people whose time has come. A parallel from the fictional work *Joseph and Aseneth* is apropos: “By his (Joseph’s) beauty he caught me, and by his wisdom he grasped me like a fish on a hook, and by his spirit, as by bait of life, he ensnared me” (21:21).

Immediately they left their nets and followed Him (1:18): One of Mark’s distinguishing features is his repeated use of “immediately, at once” (*euthus*). He uses it about 40 times as opposed to five times in Matthew, once in Luke, and three times in John. If personal preferences and literary styles so shape the Gospel accounts, should we conclude that the facts of Jesus’ life have been warped by the Evangelists who took the liberty to develop their preferred themes? Or even if the liberties taken were somewhat circumspect, is this compatible with divine inspiration?

Very early such church fathers as Irenaeus recognized that the four Gospels, though different in style and content, were also united in that they all contained the one gospel. They began speaking of “the Gospel *according to* Mark.” They also recognized that the story of Jesus was too great to be told from only one perspective, that it needed four different perspectives to properly convey the Person and message of Jesus. Even such mundane happenings as sporting or political events are best represented by more than one account. The traditional doctrine of divine inspiration takes account of the fact that God uses the personalities, character, experience, and knowledge of individual authors in such a way that the inspired biblical books vary in style and approach.

Mark may have wished to impress upon his readers the authority of Jesus by his use of “immediately.” When Jesus extends a summons, people jump. Little or no ceremony is required. Most impressive is the comment that James and John “left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed Him” (v. 20). The mention of the “hired men” may have been meant to imply that Zebedee had no more sons; only paid workers remained. Given the values of Jewish culture, where sons were expected to assist and even support their parents, the departure of James and John to follow Jesus would strike most as

bordering on irresponsibility, even disrespect. (Such criticism may be hinted at in the saying in 10:29–30.) But for Mark it once again shows Jesus' authority.

Verse 18 is a good example of how Mark's preference for the "immediacy" theme risks giving readers the wrong impression if they read him in isolation from the other Gospels. Mark's account reads as if Peter dropped everything and followed Jesus from the first moment he met him, but John 1:35–42 (and possibly Luke 5:1–11) indicates that a longer process was involved and that Peter and Jesus are not meeting for the first time in this episode. This does not call Mark's reliability into question. In Mark's Gospel, the Greek word *euthus* is an adverb ("quickly," "promptly," "as soon as," "at once," and sometimes "immediately"), but when preceded by *kai* ("and") it can be either an adverb or a conjunction ("so then") (Decker 1997, 90–120). According to R. T. France, its use in 1:18 "may be intended to underline the immediacy of the new disciples' response, but it would be unwise to base too much on this feature, since in v. 20 the same phrase introduces Jesus' call rather than the disciples' following; its role is more to keep the story going with vigor than to comment on the specific nature of their response" (2002, 97).

Nothing in Mark's account denies that Simon Peter and Andrew had met Jesus previously (John 1:42). He gives an impression of immediacy to emphasize Jesus' authority, and it is also possible that he has telescoped two events as one. As for Luke 5:1–11, many scholars consider it to be a parallel account, but there are enough variations for others to conclude that it records a separate event.

21 Then they went into Capernaum, and right away He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath
and began to teach. 22 They were astonished at His teaching because, unlike the scribes, He
was teaching them as one having authority.
23 Just then a man with an unclean spirit was in their synagogue. He cried out, 24 "What do
You have to do with us, Jesus — Nazarene? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are
— the Holy One of God! "
25 But Jesus rebuked him and said, "Be quiet, and come out of him! " 26 And the unclean
spirit convulsed him, shouted with a loud voice, and came out of him.
27 Then they were all amazed, so they began to argue with one another, saying, "What is this?
A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him."
28 News about Him then spread throughout the entire vicinity of Galilee.

They went into Capernaum, and right away He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and began to teach (1:21): It has been asserted that in the time of Jesus there were no synagogue buildings as such, and that these buildings did not

materialize until after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in AD 70. If this negative assertion was true, then the Gospels, book of Acts, and writings of Josephus are all anachronistic in speaking of synagogues prior to the year 70. As it turns out, there is archaeological evidence of several pre-70 synagogues in the land of Israel (see Evans 2012a, 38–62, 158–62).

This verse suggests that it was Jesus' custom to enter a town and teach in the synagogue (cf. Luke 4:15–16). The reference to the spread of his fame "throughout the entire vicinity of Galilee" (v. 28) and the absence of stated opposition, at least at this point in Mark's narrative, suggest that Jesus freely taught in the synagogue of Capernaum (whose basalt foundations are probably those now exposed beneath the grander ruins of the third- or fourth-century limestone synagogue that stands above) and perhaps in other synagogues of Galilee. On the possibility that the basalt foundations beneath the limestone synagogue belong to the synagogue in which Jesus ministered, see Shanks and Strange 1983, 24–31.

They were astonished at His teaching because, unlike the scribes, He was teaching them as one having authority (1:22): Powerful personalities often gather a crowd of followers. If the congregants at the Capernaum synagogue were amazed at Jesus' authoritative bearing, did his success come down to his having lots of personal charisma and confidence? Though Jesus likely had an influential personality with charisma and confidence, he also had much more than that. Unlike the scribes, he had authority and power over the spiritual realm and the realm of disease. He was able to support his teachings and claims with supernatural action.

The authority of the scribes did not even begin to compare to the authority of Jesus. By "teaching" Mark means deeds of power, as well as verbal teaching. The two facets went together, as we see in the story of exorcism. Jesus speaks the word and the deed is done. Not surprisingly, the crowd is astounded by Jesus' authority (*exousia*). Unlike other exorcists who cast out demons through incantations and rigmarole (e.g., Josephus, *Antiquities* 8.46–49), Jesus speaks and the evil spirit obeys. For Mark this is the main point of the story. Recognized by God and empowered by the Spirit, Jesus possesses authority on an order not before witnessed. He is authorized to proclaim the good news of the kingdom (1:14–15), to call followers (1:16–20), and to make war on Satan (1:21–28). Jesus' power is such that people begin to invoke his name (9:38–40).

I know who You are—the Holy One of God! (1:24): "I know who You are"

probably should be understood as the spirit's attempt to gain control over or fend off Jesus. The spirit knows that he is Jesus of Nazareth and knows that he is the "Holy One of God." This knowledge is not by omniscience, something Satan and the demons lack as created beings. Perhaps their apprehension of Jesus' holiness tipped them off to his identity. In antiquity it was believed that to possess someone's name was an advantage. In supernatural dealings, to know the name was necessary if one was to manipulate a spirit or god. Jesus, however, rebukes the spirit, commands it to be silent, and orders it to depart. An inscription in Egypt, dating as early as the sixth century BC, has a demon through his host speak to the exorcist: "You come in peace, great God, destroyer of the evil ones . . . I am your servant; I will depart to the land from which I came . . ." (Bentresch Stele).

Be quiet, and come out of him! (1:25): Jesus' command finds an exact parallel in the papyri concerned with exorcisms (e.g., *PGM* IV.3013; see Deissmann 1927, 256). Josephus (*Antiquities* 8.46–49) and other authors of antiquity describe the activities of various exorcists (e.g., Philostratus, *Vita Apollonius* 4.20). The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran describes Abram laying hands on Pharaoh's head with the result that an evil spirit is removed (1QapGen 20:28–29). Lucian of Samosata (second century AD) relates what he was told when the exorcist interrogates the possessed person: "The patient himself is silent, but the spirit answers in Greek or in the language of whatever foreign country he comes from, telling how and whence he entered into the man; whereupon, by adjuring the spirit and if he does not obey, threatening him, he drives him out. Indeed, I actually saw one coming out, black and smoky in color" (*The Lover of Lies* 16).

> 29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they went into Simon and Andrew's house with James
> and John. 30 Simon's mother-in-law was lying in bed with a fever, and they told Him about her
> at once. 31 So He went to her, took her by the hand, and raised her up. The fever left her, and
> she began to serve them.

Simon and Andrew's house (1:29): The house of Simon and Andrew at Capernaum may have been identified. The foundations and flooring of a first-century house, constructed of black volcanic basalt stone, have been uncovered. Excavation and study indicate that this private dwelling was converted into a public meeting house (with plastered interior walls and placement of several lamps, all intended to increase indoor lighting). Subsequently this public meeting

place was expanded into an octagonal church, complete with baptistery (see Shanks and Strange, 1982: 26–37).

The fever left her, and she began to serve them (1:31): Modern readers are likely to miss the significance of this healing. In one rabbinic tradition healing someone with a fever was considered a greater miracle (because it is heaven-sent) than the miracle of the three men who survived the ordeal of the furnace (because the fire was man-made): "who can extinguish" a fever? (*b. Nedarim* 41a). Luke's version, "He . . . rebuked the fever" (Luke 4:39), could imply that the fever was thought to have been of demonic origin. The healing of Simon's mother-in-law, then, may have been viewed as an exorcism as much as a healing.

Chronology of the healings **(1:29–34, 40–45):** Mark and Matthew present these events in different order. Can the Gospels be reliable if they present conflicting chronological data? Actually, the Gospels are not presenting a different *chronological* order, because there are no chronological markers. They are only presenting events in a different order because of their different themes and approaches. Chronology is seldom a genuine issue in the Gospels. When it is an issue, it is noted by references to time or by temporal adverbs such as "before" and "after." (See further comments at Matt 8:1–4.)

> 32 When evening came, after the sun had set, they began bringing to Him all those who were
> sick and those who were demon-possessed. 33 The whole town was assembled at the door,
> 34 and He healed many who were sick with various diseases and drove out many demons. But
> He would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew Him.

Those who were demon-possessed (1:32): Demon possession is reported throughout the Gospels. Was this condition more common in Jesus' day, or was it simply that people in a pre-scientific age over-diagnosed it? The Gospel of Mark gives special attention to the theme of Jesus as the divine warrior who has come to destroy the demonic realm and free his people in a new exodus. According to Longman and Reid, the key to the meaning of Jesus' exorcisms may be found in Jesus' saying in Matthew 12:28, "If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you" (1995, 107). Judaism recognized that behind Israel's physical enemies were evil spirits represented by the nations' idols (11QMelch 4–6; *1 Enoch* 54:4–5; TDan 5:10–13). In that case it should not be surprising if there was more demonic activity than normal during Jesus' life on earth. Much was at stake in the spiritual realm during Jesus'

earthly ministry, and so opposition to Jesus was at a frenetic pace. Lastly, it should be stated that demonic activity is likely more pervasive even today than is commonly realized. We have non-spiritual paradigms into which we fit many of our modern experiences, and perhaps one result is we misidentify key realities.

He would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew Him (1:34): Why was Jesus so concerned to silence demonic and human confessions of his identity (see also 1:25; 1:44)? We are not to suppose that Jesus is trying to keep his identity a secret; rather, we should understand that Jesus shows the evil spirits no quarter. He does not wrangle or bargain with them. In effect Jesus is commanding them: "Shut up and get out!" The command to "say nothing to anyone" (1:44) in context may mean that the healed man is not to claim that he has been cleansed until he has been officially declared clean by a priest. It may also be another attempt by Jesus to quell counterproductive publicity. His avoidance of such publicity is seen in his later refusal to perform a sign, in response to the demands of some Pharisees (see comments on 8:11–12). Perhaps John 2:4; 6:15; and 7:3–6 also help answer the question, suggesting that Jesus guarded against letting others decide his timing, methods, and message. Such injunctions to silence notwithstanding, Jesus' fame spreads everywhere, and according to 1:45, "with the result that Jesus could no longer enter a town openly." We may assume from our knowledge of Jesus that he foresaw the failure of his commands for silence.

> 40 Then a man with a serious skin disease came to Him and, on his knees, begged Him: "If
> You are willing, You can make me clean."
> 41 Moved with compassion, Jesus reached out His hand and touched him. "I am willing," He
> told him. "Be made clean." 42 Immediately the disease left him, and he was healed. 43 Then He
> sternly warned him and sent him away at once, 44 telling him, "See that you say nothing to
> anyone; but go and show yourself to the priest, and offer what Moses prescribed for your
> cleansing, as a testimony to them." 45 Yet he went out and began to proclaim it widely and to
> spread the news, with the result that Jesus could no longer enter a town openly. But He was out
> in deserted places, and they would come to Him from everywhere.

A serious skin disease (1:40): The stigma attached to leprosy is well known and was often viewed as a judgment from God (e.g., Num 12:10; 2 Kgs 5:27; 15:5; 2 Chr 26:19; but in non-biblical sources as well, e.g., Herodotus, *Histories* 1.138: "The citizen who has leprosy or the white sickness may not come into a town or consort with other Persians. They say that he is so afflicted because he

has sinned in some wise against the sun"). Many skin ailments were called "leprosy" in late antiquity. It has been claimed that true leprosy (Hansen's Disease) did not exist in Israel in Jesus' day, but recent archaeological evidence has shown otherwise (see Gibson 2009, 145–47; Evans 2012, 110).

Moved with compassion (1:41): Most manuscripts read "moved with compassion" (*splagchnistheis*), but a few read "becoming angry" (*orgistheis*). If the second reading is accepted (Guelich 1989, 72–72, among others, thinks it is the original reading), then we must ask what the anger means. Is Jesus angry because of the impertinence of the leper, a man who should keep his distance? Probably not, for this stands in tension to Jesus' willingness to touch the leper and heal him. A better explanation is that Jesus was moved to anger by yet one more instance of human suffering. Angered by the man's pitiful condition, and the estrangement from Israel's worship that this condition entailed, Jesus touches the man and heals him.

> When He entered Capernaum again after some days, it was reported that He was at home. 2 So many people gathered together that there was no more room, not even in the doorway, and He was speaking the message to them. 3 Then they came to Him bringing a paralytic, carried by four men. 4 Since they were not able to bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above where He was. And when they had broken through, they lowered the mat on which the paralytic was lying.
>
> 5 Seeing their faith, Jesus told the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."
>
> 6 But some of the scribes were sitting there, thinking to themselves: 7 "Why does He speak like this? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone? "
>
> 8 Right away Jesus understood in His spirit that they were thinking like this within themselves and said to them, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? 9 Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, pick up your mat, and walk'? 10 But so you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins," He told the paralytic, 11 "I tell you: get up, pick up your mat, and go home."
>
> 12 Immediately he got up, picked up the mat, and went out in front of everyone. As a result, they were all astounded and gave glory to God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this! "

When He entered Capernaum . . . it was reported that He was at home (2:1): Whose home was this? Jesus grew up in Nazareth, several miles to the southwest. But Nazareth seems not to have been his base of operations (see comments on 6:1–6a). Jesus' home (or headquarters) evidently was in Capernaum, but whether it was his home or the home of one of his followers

cannot be determined. Given Jesus' itinerant ministry, the house was probably not his.

Son, your sins are forgiven (2:5): Some scribes (Luke 5:21 adds "the Pharisees") regard Jesus' words as "blasphemy." They reason: "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (v. 7). Why do the scribes think this? To answer this question, we must ask in what sense Jesus has forgiven this man's sins. Is his pronouncement an instance of the divine passive? If so, Jesus is saying, "Your sins are forgiven (by God)." But in this case, the scribes should be accusing Jesus of presumption, for assuming priestly prerogatives (e.g., "Who does this man think he is—a priest?"). Or, is Jesus' pronouncement based on his own authority, in which case the scribes' thoughts of blasphemy make more sense. That this second option is the correct answer is suggested by verse 10, where Jesus says "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." The self-designation "Son of Man" and the qualifier "on earth" point to Daniel 7, where a human ("one like a son of man"), coming with the clouds of heaven, approaches God (the "Ancient of Days") and receives authority (Dan 7:9–14). The "clouds of heaven" are antithetical to "on earth," with the latter presupposing the former. That is to say, because the "Son of Man" receives authority from heaven, he possesses the authority on earth, among other things, to forgive sins.

Only twice in Mark is Jesus accused of blasphemy, and both times Jesus identifies himself as the "Son of Man." The other passage is found in the hearing before Caiaphas the High Priest. Jesus declares that he is the "Son of Man" who will be "seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven" (14:62). Caiaphas reacts in horror and calls the statement blasphemy (14:64; see comments on 14:53–65). As the human being described in Daniel 7, the human being to whom divine authority is granted, Jesus has authority to forgive sins, or, in the case of someone like Caiaphas, he has the authority to sit in judgment. Jesus has not explicitly claimed to be God here (if he had, the scribes would have reacted much more violently); he has claimed to be God's vice regent on earth, proclaiming God's rule and offering forgiveness to those who respond in faith to the proclamation.

He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone? (2:7): That the scribes believed only God could forgive sins is an indirect indication that they did not expect Messiah to be divine. This raises the issue of messianic expectations. Is there any evidence that Jews before Jesus' era expected Messiah to be divine? If not (or if the Jews were divided over this), was the OT not clear

about Messiah's divinity?

As R. T. France points out, "The Mishnah has a very tight definition of blasphemy, as the actual pronouncing of the divine name (*m. Sanh.* 7:5), and clearly Jesus has not done that, but it is clear that in the pre-70 period the term was used more broadly. . . . To claim to do what only God could do, and to constitute himself God's spokesman in declaring sins forgiven, was to infringe the divine prerogative" (cf. John 10:33) (France 2002, 126).

Regarding whether the Jews were expecting a divine messiah, the short answer is probably not. The Dead Sea Scrolls show evidence of two expected messiahs: a royal Davidic king who would drive out Israel's enemies and defeat them, and a righteous, anointed high priest who would cleanse the temple and institute cultic reforms in accordance with Scripture. Neither of those were expected to be divine. And the kind of messiah awaited at Qumran is not very different from that awaited by Jews elsewhere (Evans 2003b, 85–101). It is significant that one of the leading rabbis, Aqiba, called the revolutionary Bar Kokhba (revolt in AD 132–136) the messiah. Was OT teaching clear about the messiah being divine? No, it was not. The NT is clear (John 1:1; 8:58; 10:30), but there is no OT passage whose interpretation *requires* the messiah's deity (with the possible exception of Isa 9:6–7). Therefore, it is not surprising that Second Temple Judaism did not expect a divine messiah.

Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Get up, pick up your mat, and walk"? (2:9): To defend his claim that he truly does possess divine authority to forgive sins, Jesus poses an interesting question to his critics. The word of healing is harder, because it can be empirically verified; the word of forgiveness is easier, because it cannot be empirically verified. Therefore, to prove that he really can do the easier (forgive the man's sins), he does the harder (heal the man's paralysis). Jesus commands the paralyzed man to rise, take up his pallet, and go home (v. 11).

Son of Man (2:10): Although it is commonly assumed that "the son of man" was a technical term referring to some sort of messianic apocalyptic figure, this is not the case either in the Gospels or in early Jewish literature. The term was a generic for "man" or "mankind." Although in the Gospel of John the expression is used for the incarnation of the divine Logos, there is no evidence that "son of man" is used as a messianic or apocalyptic title for Jesus in Mark. "At most, 'son of man' is understood as a specific reference to Jesus" (Evans 2000, lxxv).

But what about Daniel 7:13–14? Does this warrant a divine referent for Son of

Man? Some of Jesus' "son of man" statements involve identification with the character in Daniel 7, though the term is still generic rather than being a title. There is some slight evidence that some Jewish circles (at least by the first century BC) considered the son of man in Daniel 7:13–14 to be the Messiah, though the evidence is far from certain. But as stated before, the son of man in Daniel 7 is not presented as God but as God's vice-regent.

> 13 Then Jesus went out again beside the sea. The whole crowd was coming to Him, and He taught them. 14 Then, moving on, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office, and He said to him, "Follow Me! " So he got up and followed Him.
>
> 15 While He was reclining at the table in Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were also guests with Jesus and His disciples, because there were many who were following Him. 16 When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that He was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they asked His disciples, "Why does He eat with tax collectors and sinners? "
>
> 17 When Jesus heard this, He told them, "Those who are well don't need a doctor, but the sick do need one. I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Levi the son of Alphaeus (2:14): While Mark and Luke (5:27ff) use the name "Levi," Matthew 9:9–13 and 10:3 use "Matthew." Which is it? Can it be both? Levi the son of Alphaeus is almost certainly the same person as "Matthew." It was not unusual for people to have two names. Simon Peter is the best-known example among the disciples. (See further comments at Matt 9:9 and Luke 5:27.)

Why does He eat with tax collectors and sinners? (2:16): Critics have said verses like Proverbs 13:20 justify the viewpoint of the Pharisees, and that Jesus was in the wrong. In later times 1 Corinthians 15:33 said: "Bad company corrupts good morals." Is Jesus living contrary to this? Tax collectors and sinners were regarded as non-Torah observant persons. They failed to live up to the written commands of Moses or observe many of the oral traditions that were important to the Pharisaic scribes. Mark's acknowledgment that Jesus associated with "tax collectors and sinners" testifies to the candor of the Gospel accounts. The temptation would have been to portray Jesus in the company of important, celebrated, recognized people. Even though critics of early Christianity complained that because Jesus associated with the lowly he should not be highly regarded, the Evangelists nevertheless recounted the story truthfully.

The scribes and Pharisees object to Jesus' eating with non-Torah observant Jews, because as a religious teacher Jesus would have been expected to avoid ritual impurity. By eating with non-observant people Jesus ran the risk of eating

food that failed to meet the requirements of the food laws (especially as understood by Pharisees) and of coming into contact with impure persons (e.g., improperly washed hands and other aspects of uncleanness). If Jesus really were the herald of the approaching kingdom of God, then one should expect his standards of purity to be exemplary. Why then does he eat with such people?

The Pharisees were concerned about food laws and other laws of purity, which Jesus did not honor. Immoral behavior was probably not the issue. Besides, the point of Proverbs 13:20 is that it is unwise to put oneself under the tutelage of fools. And the context of 1 Corinthians 15:33 is the denial of the resurrection. As Fee explains, the point is probably that "evil conversations such as those that deny the resurrection of the dead can only have a corrupting effect on your good character" (Fee 1987, 773). Jesus was not in the role of disciple but teacher of the gospel. Furthermore, Paul recognizes that association with "the immoral people of this world or the greedy and swindlers or idolaters" is inevitable for people who live in the world (1 Cor 5:10).

I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners (2:17): Who are "the righteous" here, for doesn't Scripture say that none are righteous (Mark 10:18; Rom 3:10)? It is important to note that Jesus regards these people as sinners. He does not take their sin lightly. He summons sinners to repentance and admonishes Torah-observant Jews to appreciate his mission. Several people in Scripture are referred to as "righteous" in one sense: Noah (Gen 6:9), Abraham (by faith; Gen 15:6), Job (having "perfect integrity, who feared God and turned away from evil"; Job 1:1), and Zechariah and his wife ("righteous in God's sight, living without blame according to all the commands and requirements of the Lord"; Luke 1:6). It meant that they were people of faith who followed God's commands, and when they failed they repented and brought the appropriate sacrifices. But they were not righteous in an absolute sense in that they were sinless. Only God is perfectly righteous.

> 18 Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. People came and asked Him, "Why do
> John's disciples and the Pharisees' disciples fast, but Your disciples do not fast? "
> 19 Jesus said to them, "The wedding guests cannot fast while the groom is with them, can
> they? As long as they have the groom with them, they cannot fast. 20 But the time will come
> when the groom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.

Why do John's disciples and the Pharisees' disciples fast, but Your disciples

do not fast? (2:18): People wonder why Jesus' disciples did not fast (a sign of religious fervor, spiritual humility, and preparation for religious work), when the disciples of John and the disciples of the Pharisees fasted. The question is not necessarily critical. The lack of fasting is viewed as exceptional and in need of explanation. After all, if Jesus regularly eats and drinks, sometimes with tax collectors and sinners, and apparently never fasts (at least not since the temptations in the wilderness), one might conclude that Jesus does not take humanity's sinful condition very seriously, that he sees no reason to mourn in the presence of God.

Jesus provides the explanation why in verse 19: "The wedding guests cannot fast while the groom is with them, can they?" His presence is a cause for celebration. Jesus' implied self-identification as the "bridegroom" coheres with his earlier and later self-identification as the "son of man" of Daniel 7. While he is present, announcing the good news of the kingdom of God and extending forgiveness and salvation to Israel, there can be no mourning. When he suffers and is taken from his disciples, then there will be mourning and fasting.

> 23 On the Sabbath He was going through the grainfields, and His disciples began to make their
> way picking some heads of grain. 24 The Pharisees said to Him, "Look, why are they doing
> what is not lawful on the Sabbath? "
> 25 He said to them, "Have you never read what David and those who were with him did when
> he was in need and hungry — 26 how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the
> high priest and ate the sacred bread — which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests
> — and also gave some to his companions? " 27 Then He told them, "The Sabbath was made for
> man and not man for the Sabbath. 28 Therefore, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath? (2:24): The charge that they are doing something not permitted on the Sabbath has nothing to do with theft, for this sort of gleaning was permitted in the Law (Deut 23:25). The charge has to do with "reaping," that is, working on the Sabbath (Exod 20:10; 34:21; Deut 5:14), at least according to oral tradition (e.g., *m. Shabbat* 7:2; CD 10:14–11:18). Jesus counters the criticism with an example from David (v. 25), at a time of disenfranchisement and hardship. David and his men entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence (1 Sam 21:1–6), which was reserved for the priests (Lev 24:5–9). The logic of Jesus' reply suggests that the Pharisees can no more criticize his disciples who gleaned and ate on the Sabbath than they can criticize David and his men who ate the consecrated bread of the

Presence.

In the time of Abiathar the high priest (2:26): Mentioning Abiathar, rather than Ahimelech, as the "high priest" when David and his men were given sacred bread is problematic. According to 1 Samuel 21:1–6, Ahimelech, not Abiathar, was priest when approached by David. This discrepancy has led some scholars to conclude that either Jesus himself was mistaken or that Mark (or his sources) was mistaken. Both Matthew and Luke omit the reference to Abiathar (see Matt 12:3–4; Luke 6:3–4). In all probability there were two traditions with regard to the priestly figures Ahimelech and Abiathar. The major tradition narrates Abiathar as the son of Ahimelech. Accordingly, the latter is the priest who gave the bread to David and his men. This is the tradition of 1 Samuel 21–22. But there is also a minor tradition, in which Ahimelech (or Abimelech in some manuscripts) is said to be the son of Abiathar, who survives and serves David alongside Zadok (2 Sam 8:17; 1 Chr 18:16; 24:3–31; compare 1 Kgs 4:4, where it is Abiathar who serves alongside Zadok; see also 4Q245 frag. 1, col. i, line 7). Mark 2:26 follows the minor tradition (see Bock 2005, 423–24, for an alternative explanation).

The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath (2:27): The Pharisees seemed to think the Sabbath law stood over them as a graceless restriction and not a means of giving them rest. Does OT revelation most naturally lead to Jesus' interpretation or that given by the Pharisees? Jesus counters his critics by an appeal to creation (Gen 2:1–3; Exod 31:12–17). The Sabbath was recognized in the OT as a day of rest and refreshment, not as a burden or time of denial. A remarkable parallel to Jesus' statement appears in an early rabbinic midrash: "The Sabbath is given over to you, not you to the Sabbath" (*Mekilta* on Exod 31:13). Jesus may have been alluding to a similar interpretation, or maybe the midrash echoes Jesus' words. (For other Jewish parallels, see 2 Maccabees 5:19: "The Lord did not choose the nation for the sake of the holy place, but the place for the sake of the nation"; *2 Bar.* 14:17: "Man . . . was not created for the world, but the world for him.")

7 Jesus departed with His disciples to the sea, and a large crowd followed from Galilee, Judea,
8 Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and around Tyre and Sidon. The large crowd came to
Him because they heard about everything He was doing. 9 Then He told His disciples to have a
small boat ready for Him, so the crowd would not crush Him. 10 Since He had healed many, all

who had diseases were pressing toward Him to touch Him. 11 Whenever the unclean spirits saw Him, those possessed fell down before Him and cried out, “You are the Son of God! ” 12 And He would strongly warn them not to make Him known.

***Is the existence of Tyre in Jesus’ day problematic?* (3:8):** Ezekiel 26–28 says Tyre would be utterly destroyed and that people looking for it would not find it. Does Mark 3:8 (and Matt 15:21) indicate Ezekiel’s prophecy failed? Ancient Tyre had two parts, one on the mainland and one on a rocky island half a mile offshore. It was a great center of commerce in the eastern Mediterranean. The Assyrians defeated mainland Tyre in 722 BC after a five-year siege. But even after another 13 years (587–572 BC) Nebuchadnezzar was still unable to conquer the offshore fortress. Alexander the Great finally conquered and destroyed the fortress in 332 BC by building a causeway to the island. Today it is nothing more than a fishing village, but the Romans had rebuilt it to something of its original size and influence. Very little archaeological work has been done there. (See further comments at Matt 15:21.)

He would strongly warn them not to make Him known (3:12): As before, Jesus orders the evil spirits “not to make Him known” (1:25, 34). Why these commands to silence? Given the context, where Jesus must make great effort to control the crowd and keep himself from being crushed, his silencing of the evil spirits should be understood as a further attempt to muzzle unwanted publicity (and not so much to keep his messianic and divine identity a secret until his resurrection). Jesus also silenced the shouting spirits because their recognition of him could have been threatening.

13 Then He went up the mountain and summoned those He wanted, and they came to Him.
14 He also appointed 12 — He also named them apostles — to be with Him, to send them out
to preach, 15 and to have authority to drive out demons.
16 He appointed the Twelve:
To Simon, He gave the name Peter;
17 and to James the son of Zebedee,
and to his brother John,
He gave the name “Boanerges”
(that is, “Sons of Thunder”);
18 Andrew;
Philip and Bartholomew;
Matthew and Thomas;
James the son of Alphaeus,

and Thaddaeus;
Simon the Zealot,
19 and Judas Iscariot,
who also betrayed Him.

The appointment of the Twelve **(3:16–19):** The appointment of "twelve" apostles is surely historical, for in every list the name "Judas Iscariot" appears, which is hardly the stuff that pious imagination would lead Mark or the other Evangelists to include. Judas' betrayal of Jesus was an embarrassment to the church and was often mentioned by early critics of the church. If the idea of "twelve" disciples/apostles was an invention, why include Judas in the list?

There are several notable differences between the lists of the Twelve. This is because some of the disciples had more than one name. It is also because one or two of the disciples may have dropped out during the ministry and were replaced by others. Verse 18 lists "Bartholomew" (from Aramaic, meaning "son of Tolmai"). Nothing is known about him, and his name appears in the Synoptic apostolic lists (Matt 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 14; Acts 1:13) but not in John's. Some have suggested that he is the Nathanael of John 1:45–46. Köstenberger argues that "since the name 'Nathanael' is not mentioned in the Synoptics, it is likely that this was the personal name of Bartholomew . . . who is linked with Philip in all three Synoptic apostolic lists . . . yet is not mentioned in John's Gospel. . . . Since 'Bartholomew' was a patronymic, it is very plausible that this man was also known by another name" (2004, 79–80).

"Matthew" is probably to be identified with Levi, whose call was recounted in Mark 2:14 (Matt 9:9). Apart from the call itself nothing is known of this person. The early church held that he authored the Gospel of Matthew, and must have had good cause for making this attribution since he was not a well-known figure. On "Thaddaeus" (v. 18), see commentary on Matthew 10:2. (See further comments at Matt 10:2–4 and Luke 6:12–16.)

20 Then He went home, and the crowd gathered again so that they were not even able to eat.
21 When His family heard this, they set out to restrain Him, because they said, "He's out of His mind."
22 The scribes who had come down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul in Him! " and, "He drives out demons by the ruler of the demons! "
23 So He summoned them and spoke to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan?
24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. 26 And if Satan rebels against himself and is divided, he

cannot stand but is finished!

27 “On the other hand, no one can enter a strong man’s house and rob his possessions unless
he first ties up the strong man. Then he will rob his house. 28 I assure you: People will be
forgiven for all sins and whatever blasphemies they may blaspheme. 29 But whoever
blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin” —
30 because they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.”

31 Then His mother and His brothers came, and standing outside, they sent word to Him and
called Him. 32 A crowd was sitting around Him and told Him, “Look, Your mother, Your
brothers, and Your sisters are outside asking for You.”

33 He replied to them, “Who are My mother and My brothers? ” 34 And looking about at
those who were sitting in a circle around Him, He said, “Here are My mother and My brothers!
35 Whoever does the will of God is My brother and sister and mother.”

He’s out of His mind (3:21): Why would Jesus’ own family say this of him? In particular, how could Mary doubt Jesus after experiencing all the revelations and events surrounding his conception, birth, and early years? Accusations of madness were sometimes made against prophets, exorcists, and healers. One of the Sibyls complains of being called a “crazy liar,” yet she knows that she will be vindicated when her words come to pass (*Sibylline Oracles* 3:811–818). Too much learning, it was thought, could lead to madness (Acts 26:24: “Too much study is driving you mad!”; Alciphron, *Letters of Courtesans*, “Thais to Euthydemus” 1.34.1–2: “ . . . ever since you took it into your head to study philosophy you have put on airs . . . You have gone mad . . .”).

Cranfield suggests that the supposition that Jesus was “out of His mind” (*exestē*) may have been an exaggeration. But he explains that the family’s intention of getting Jesus under their control “indicates at least deep misunderstanding of him on their part, and is striking evidence of that ‘hiddenness’ or ‘veiledness’ of the Messiah. . . . It is not necessary, of course, to assume that the dark suspicion reflected in the word [*exestē*] must have originated in Mary’s mind; but at least it is implied that her faith in Jesus was not strong enough to withstand the determination of her sons” (1959, 134–35). Despite the special revelations that Mary had been given regarding her son, Jesus’ life was not turning out as she expected and this caused her confusion and grief.

He has Beelzebul in Him . . . He drives out demons by the ruler of the demons! (3:22): Beelzebul refers to the Canaanite deity, whom Israelites derisively called “Lord of the Flies.” Early rabbinic literature (AD 70–200) reflects the same sort of charge regarding Jesus’ powers: “On the eve of Passover

Yeshu [Jesus] was hanged. And an announcer went out in front of him for fourteen days [saying], 'He is going to be stoned, because he practiced sorcery and led Israel astray!'" (*b. Sanhedrin* 43a, pc. 107b; *b. Sota* 47a; *t. Shabbat* 11:15; cp. Justin *Dialogue with Trypho* 69:7). The rabbinic source provides important confirmation from a hostile source that Jesus was remembered as a worker of miracles.

Some scribes were exorcists, or at least tried to be. As scribes they sometimes had in their possession charms and incantations designed to cast out evil spirits. This is why scribes "from Jerusalem" (the capital of Jewish learning and religious practice) came to Galilee to examine Jesus.

***The unpardonable sin* (3:28–29):** Does Jesus take more seriously those who blaspheme the Spirit? And does this passage teach that all people will be saved, so long as they do not blaspheme the Holy Spirit? According to the context, the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit amounted to ascribing to Satan what the Holy Spirit has done. The underlying assumption is that Jesus performs his miracles by the power of the Spirit. Therefore blasphemy against the Spirit involved rejection of Jesus as God's son/servant. Lane generalizes that "blasphemy is an expression of defiant hostility toward God" (1974, 145). Of Jesus' statement that "people will be forgiven for all sins and whatever blasphemies they may blaspheme," France says this "is not a free-standing saying with a validity of its own, but the foil to the negative statement which follows" (2002, 176). The point is that one type of sin/blasphemy is unforgivable, not that all will be saved who avoid this sin. (See further comments at Matt 12:32.)

Here are My mother and My brothers! (3:34): Was Jesus being rude to his family here? Earlier his family had tried to seize him, saying, "He's out of His mind" (v. 21). Unable to get to Jesus, on account of the tightly packed crowd surrounding him, they now send word. Jesus is told, "Your mother, Your brothers, and Your sisters are outside asking for You" (v. 32). Jesus asks rhetorically: "Who are My mother and My brothers?" (v. 33). The question is indicative of the estrangement that has developed between Jesus and his family. Answering his own question, Jesus looks upon those sitting about him and says, "Here are My mother and My brothers!" Jesus has thus defined his true family: "Whoever does the will of God is My brother and sister and mother" (v. 35). Jesus' use of hyperbole must be taken into account here. Has he literally rejected his family? Probably not, for his family will come to believe in him, and his brother James becomes an apostle and one of the "pillars" in the church (Gal

1:19; 2:9). But his language indicates the seriousness of his message and the need to commit to it. Jesus' mission was to create a new family that was not only bound by a force stronger than blood—the Spirit—but was also eternal.

> Again He began to teach by the sea, and a very large crowd gathered around Him. So He got into a boat on the sea and sat down, while the whole crowd was on the shore facing the sea. 2 He taught them many things in parables, and in His teaching He said to them: 3 "Listen! Consider the sower who went out to sow. 4 As he sowed, this occurred: Some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Other seed fell on rocky ground where it didn't have much soil, and it sprang up right away, since it didn't have deep soil. 6 When the sun came up, it was scorched, and since it didn't have a root, it withered. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it didn't produce a crop. 8 Still others fell on good ground and produced a crop that increased 30, 60, and 100 times what was sown." 9 Then He said, "Anyone who has ears to hear should listen! "

Produced a crop that increased 30, 60, and 100 times (4:8): Some critics have claimed that the yield of the good ground is too high. This is hardly a weighty objection. Many of Jesus' parables (and early rabbinic parables also) indulge in hyperbole in order to make the point. The "good ground," whose identity will be explained in vv. 19–20, will be exceedingly fruitful, beyond all normal expectation.

> 10 When He was alone with the Twelve, those who were around Him asked Him about the parables. 11 He answered them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to those outside, everything comes in parables 12 so that
>
> **they may look and look,**
> **yet not perceive;**
> **they may listen and listen,**
> **yet not understand;**
> **otherwise, they might turn back —**
> **and be forgiven.**"
>
> 13 Then He said to them: "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any of the parables?

Jesus' use of parables **(4:10–13):** It is often said that Jesus taught in parables so he could be readily understood. After all, parables simplify concepts and exemplify them in everyday terms. But Jesus might seem to name a different purpose for his choosing to teach in parables, which is to hide the meaning from

certain groups. Are parables compatible with Jesus' stated purposes in this passage? Is there an ethical problem with Jesus' reason for using parables? Does Jesus' tactic resemble the Gnostic emphasis on secret knowledge and salvation via initiation? And does Jesus change the meaning of Isaiah 6:9–10?

Many of the parables were easy to understand, but some were puzzling. Sometimes they are intentionally puzzling. Most of us think of parables as simple illustrations taken from everyday life. But the Hebrew understanding of parable (Hb *mashal*) is broad and applies to most forms of non-prosaic, non-literal speech. Songs, poems, riddles, parables, fables, allegories, and bywords all fall within the category. Therefore, whereas Jesus' parable of the Sower is simple enough on one level, on another level it is mysterious. If one has not embraced Jesus and his message, then the full meaning of the parable will not be apparent. In that case one risks falling under the judgment spoken by the prophet Isaiah long ago.

In explaining why "those outside" are not given the "secret of the kingdom of God" (as are the disciples) but only "parables," Jesus paraphrases (he does not pose it as a quote) Isaiah 6:9–10, a word of judgment spoken against an obdurate Israel in the days of king Ahaz (c. 734 BC). God instructs Isaiah to say to stubborn Israel, "Keep listening, but do not understand; keep looking, but do not perceive," because judgment is drawing near. Only a remnant will repent and be saved (Isa 6:13). This citation is appropriate because refusal to heed Jesus' preaching brings on spiritual blindness. In contrast, those who follow Jesus—a remnant, as it were—are more able to understand the parables; and, even if they do not understand them, they receive private explanation (4:34; 7:17–23). There is no ethical problem with Jesus' approach, and it does not resemble the "secret knowledge" of the Gnostic cults. Those who respond with faith to what little they know are given even more understanding. (See further comments at Matt 13:10–17 and Luke 8:10.)

> 14 The sower sows the word. 15 These are the ones along the path where the word is sown:
> when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word sown in them. 16 And these
> are the ones sown on rocky ground: when they hear the word, immediately they receive it with
> joy. 17 But they have no root in themselves; they are short-lived. When pressure or persecution
> comes because of the word, they immediately stumble. 18 Others are sown among thorns; these
> are the ones who hear the word, 19 but the worries of this age, the seduction of wealth, and the
> desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. 20 But the ones

sown on good ground are those who hear the word, welcome it, and produce a crop: 30, 60, and 100 times what was sown."

***Jesus' explanation of the parable of the Sower* (4:14):** Because Jesus gives an allegorical interpretation of the parable (i.e., the sower is the evangelist who proclaims the word of God; the four types of soil represent four types of human response to the proclamation), some critics claim that it is the interpretation of the early church, not of Jesus. This view overlooks the fact that most early Jewish parables contained allegorical elements. Some of the details of the parable itself are drawn from the OT. Some of these details already have allegorical values. One would think that if the explanation of the parable was generated by the church, the content of the "word" that is sown would have reflected the church's proclamation of Jesus, God's Son, risen on the third day. However, there is no hint of Christology or the Easter proclamation. The interpretation is best understood as deriving from Jesus himself.

21 He also said to them, "Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket or under a bed? Isn't it
to be put on a lampstand? 22 For nothing is concealed except to be revealed, and nothing hidden
except to come to light. 23 If anyone has ears to hear, he should listen! "

For nothing is concealed except to be revealed (4:22): To the parable of the Sower Mark appends three parables and two sayings (4:21–23, 24–25) that qualify the judgmental saying in 4:11–12. Lest one imagine that the purpose of Jesus' parables is to veil the truth (and the language of 4:11–12 could suggest this), the saying in 4:21–23 makes it clear that light is not to be hidden. Jesus' teaching is like a lamp, and like a lamp it should be "put on a lampstand" not "put under a basket or under a bed" (v. 21). The next verse (v. 22) explains that everything will be revealed. The point of this seems to be that whatever may at first seem obscure (to outsiders and even to the disciples) will become clear through spiritual insight and, as necessary, through private explanation (to the disciples). Anyone who is willing to hear Jesus' word will gain understanding.

30 And He said: "How can we illustrate the kingdom of God, or what parable can we use to
describe it? 31 It's like a mustard seed that, when sown in the soil, is smaller than all the seeds
on the ground. 32 And when sown, it comes up and grows taller than all the vegetables, and
produces large branches, so that the birds of the sky can nest in its shade."

It's like a mustard seed . . . smaller than all the seeds (4:31): Does Jesus make a false claim about the mustard seed being the smallest of all seeds? The point Jesus is making is that the kingdom of God begins in a small, seemingly insignificant way, yet grows to great proportions. This is analogous to the mustard seed, which starts out tiny and grows to be surprisingly large. Is the mustard seed literally "smaller than all the seeds" known to us? No, but it is the smallest in comparison to other seeds that typically were in use in Israel in Jesus' time. The point that Jesus makes is apt, especially for his original audience, but he has made no attempt to teach botany here and thus is not guilty of error.

> 33 He would speak the word to them with many parables like these, as they were able to understand. 34 And He did not speak to them without a parable. Privately, however, He would explain everything to His own disciples.

He did not speak to them without a parable (4:34): Mark seems to make an overstatement here, for Jesus often taught by methods other than parables (the Beatitudes, for example). And again, the private teaching to the disciples—does this resemble the Gnostic emphasis on secret knowledge and initiation? Rather than making an exaggerated claim, Mark is stressing that Jesus normally used parables, not that he only used parables. As for the need for private teaching, it has nothing to do with Gnosticism. Many of Jesus' parables required further explanation (4:11–13). His disciples, who included more than just the Twelve, were advantaged with further, private instruction because they desired it, having elected to follow him in faith. Some parables required explanation because they were not simply illustrations and nothing more. Jewish parables often contained allegorical, insider meaning. But becoming a disciple was a simple matter of faith, while non-disciples were blinded by their own unbelief.

> 35 On that day, when evening had come, He told them, "Let's cross over to the other side of the sea." 36 So they left the crowd and took Him along since He was already in the boat. And other boats were with Him. 37 A fierce windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking over the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. 38 But He was in the stern, sleeping on the cushion. So they woke Him up and said to Him, "Teacher! Don't You care that we're going to die? "
>
> 39 He got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Silence! Be still! " The wind ceased, and there was a great calm. 40 Then He said to them, "Why are you fearful? Do you still have no

faith? ”

41 And they were terrified and asked one another, “Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey Him! ”

Teacher! Don’t You care that we’re going to die? (4:38): The authenticity of this incident is strongly supported by the grittiness of the story, including and especially the apparent lack of respect the disciples show Jesus when they ask him if he cares that their lives are in danger. The same realism is seen when Jesus asks his disciples, “Do you still have no faith?” (v. 40). This is hardly the exchange one should expect to find in a post-Easter fiction that glorifies Jesus and his disciples.

Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey Him! (4:41): Given all that the disciples have seen and heard to date, why were they so astounded at Jesus’ power here? So many episodes in the Gospels portray the disciples as if they’ve seen Jesus perform a miracle for the first time. Is this because the Gospel writers made up the stories? Nothing makes one feel as powerless as a mighty storm at sea. The disciples had never seen Jesus (or anyone else) overpower the wind and were naturally terrified by such authority. Each time they saw Jesus perform a miracle they were more amazed, especially when it was more impressive than the last one. If the Gospel writers made up the stories, they would surely leave out their own expressions of unbelief. They repeatedly portray themselves as slow to comprehend, a sign that these accounts are authentic.

Then they came to the other side of the sea, to the region of the Gerasenes. 2 As soon as He got out of the boat, a man with an unclean spirit came out of the tombs and met Him. 3 He lived in the tombs. No one was able to restrain him anymore — even with chains — 4 because he often had been bound with shackles and chains, but had snapped off the chains and smashed the shackles. No one was strong enough to subdue him. 5 And always, night and day, he was crying out among the tombs and in the mountains and cutting himself with stones.

6 When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and knelt down before Him. 7 And he cried out with a loud voice, “What do You have to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You before God, don’t torment me! ” 8 For He had told him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit! ”

9 “What is your name? ” He asked him.

“My name is Legion,” he answered Him, “because we are many.” 10 And he kept begging Him not to send them out of the region.

11 Now a large herd of pigs was there, feeding on the hillside. 12 The demons begged Him, “Send us to the pigs, so we may enter them.” 13 And He gave them permission. Then the

unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs, and the herd of about 2,000 rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned there. 14 The men who tended them ran off and reported it in the town and the countryside, and people went to see what had happened. 15 They came to Jesus and saw the man who had been demon-possessed by the legion, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. 16 The eyewitnesses described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and told about the pigs. 17 Then they began to beg Him to leave their region.

18 As He was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed kept begging Him to be with Him. 19 But He would not let him; instead, He told him, "Go back home to your own people, and report to them how much the Lord has done for you and how He has had mercy on you." 20 So he went out and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and they were all amazed.

The region of the Gerasenes (5:1): There is uncertainty as to the precise location of this incident, which is why copyists introduced place names, such as Gadara, Gergesa, and the like. Gerasa is probably the original reading. Because the city was several miles east of the Sea of Galilee (and thus out of reach for the herd of swine), some copyists sought for other locations. Mark's text, however, says "region of the Gerasenes," much as we today would speak of a country or district. We should not imagine a herd of swine within the city limits. (See further comments at Matt 8:28–34 and Luke 8:26.)

A man with an unclean spirit came out of the tombs (5:2): Mark and Luke 8:27 say one demon-possessed man emerged from the tombs to meet Jesus, but Matthew puts the number at two (Matt 8:28). If Mark was the first Gospel, and Matthew and Luke used it as a source, what do we make of this discrepancy? Did Matthew use an alternative source that revealed the presence of two demon-possessed men, or did he simply invent a second man? Matthew and Luke are recognized to have had other sources besides Mark. It is hard to see what motivation Matthew would have for inventing a second demon-possessed man. Apparently he had a source that indicated the presence of two men. That Mark and Luke do not mention a second man is no refutation of Matthew's account. It counts as a difference, not a contradiction. (See further comments at Matt 8:28–34 and Luke 8:27.)

Come out of the man, you unclean spirit! (5:8): Jesus' authority over unclean spirits is unequaled. Whereas other ancient exorcists teased demons out by amulets, incantations, spells, herbs, and concoctions, Jesus simply commanded them to leave. Even at a distance his presence terrorizes and subdues evil. Jesus demands to know the possessed man's name (or that of the demon), and without

hesitation he identifies himself to Jesus. The alternation between the singular and the plural is interesting (cf. vv. 10–13). At one moment it is the possessed man who speaks; at another moment it is the demonic legion who speak. The name "Legion" is in itself of interest, for it would make first-century readers think of the Roman legions who enforce the will of the Emperor. It also puts their number at as many as 6,000. That Jesus could take on and defeat an entire legion of demons would be very impressive to his contemporaries. Casting the demons into the swine, which then plunge into the sea and perish (and the demons perish with the pigs; cf. *Testament of Solomon* 5:11, where a demon pleads: "Do not condemn me to water"), foreshadows the grim fate that awaits Satan and his evil allies. Satan's rout at the hands of Jesus continues.

He kept begging Him not to send them out of the region (5:10): Why would demons be concerned that Jesus might drive them to a different geographical region? This is an intriguing element in this event. The suggestion that demons are territorial is also raised by Matthew 12:43–44 and Luke 11:24. Why this is so is unexplained. Gundry explains that the demons "are portrayed as stupid in carrying out their purpose of destroying life . . . because the destruction robs them of their new hosts" (1993, 263).

A large herd of pigs (5:11): The presence of a herd of pigs, located on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, indicates that Jesus and his disciples have found themselves in a Gentile setting. The pigs, of course, were being raised as food. Their destruction was, therefore, inevitable and soon. As it turns out, however, their destruction came about sooner than expected. We must not interpret this event in the light of modern sensitivities about cruelty to animals, sensitivities that often presuppose little difference between humans and animals. In the ancient, agrarian context, the only sensitivities about the swine in this event are pragmatic: the loss of income and resources.

The man who had been demon-possessed kept begging Him to be with Him (5:18): The delivered man wants to be with Jesus, so complete is his cure. But Jesus wants him to stay behind as his witness. This he does, for he begins to "proclaim in the Decapolis" (lit. "ten cities"; Greek cities founded mostly in the land east of the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River) "how much Jesus had done for him, and they were all amazed" (v. 20). Jesus did not permit the man to join his band of disciples because at this stage of his ministry his proclamation was directed only to Israel (see Matt 10:5–6; Mark 7:27). However, he is commanded to share his experience through the land east of Israel.

21 When Jesus had crossed over again by boat to the other side, a large crowd gathered around
Him while He was by the sea. 22 One of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when
he saw Jesus, he fell at His feet 23 and kept begging Him, “My little daughter is at death’s door.
Come and lay Your hands on her so she can get well and live.”
24 So Jesus went with him, and a large crowd was following and pressing against Him. 25 A
woman suffering from bleeding for 12 years 26 had endured much under many doctors. She had
spent everything she had and was not helped at all. On the contrary, she became worse.
27 Having heard about Jesus, she came behind Him in the crowd and touched His robe. 28 For
she said, “If I can just touch His robes, I’ll be made well! ” 29 Instantly her flow of blood
ceased, and she sensed in her body that she was cured of her affliction.
30 At once Jesus realized in Himself that power had gone out from Him. He turned around in
the crowd and said, “Who touched My robes? ”
31 His disciples said to Him, “You see the crowd pressing against You, and You say, ‘Who
touched Me? ’ ”
32 So He was looking around to see who had done this. 33 Then the woman, knowing what
had happened to her, came with fear and trembling, fell down before Him, and told Him the
whole truth. 34 “Daughter,” He said to her, “your faith has made you well. Go in peace and be
free from your affliction.”
35 While He was still speaking, people came from the synagogue leader’s house and said,
“Your daughter is dead. Why bother the Teacher anymore? ”
36 But when Jesus overheard what was said, He told the synagogue leader, “Don’t be afraid.
Only believe.” 37 He did not let anyone accompany Him except Peter, James, and John, James’s
brother. 38 They came to the leader’s house, and He saw a commotion — people weeping and
wailing loudly. 39 He went in and said to them, “Why are you making a commotion and
weeping? The child is not dead but asleep.”
40 They started laughing at Him, but He put them all outside. He took the child’s father,
mother, and those who were with Him, and entered the place where the child was. 41 Then He
took the child by the hand and said to her, *“Talitha koum!”* (which is translated, “Little girl, I
say to you, get up! ”). 42 Immediately the girl got up and began to walk. (She was 12 years old.)
At this they were utterly astounded. 43 Then He gave them strict orders that no one should
know about this and said that she should be given something to eat.

She came behind Him in the crowd and touched His robe (5:27): Elsewhere in the Gospels people touch Jesus’ clothing hoping for healing (Matt 14:36; Mark 6:56; Luke 6:19). In Acts we are told that people laid the sick in the street hoping that Peter’s shadow might fall on them and restore them (Acts 5:15). Critics suggest these beliefs represent superstition, that the clothing and shadows of God’s messengers are charmed. However, we can see that the transaction was not mechanical or magical by the fact that others were touching Jesus without

anything happening (5:31). The healing was volitional. Also, Jesus assures us that it was not the touch that made her well but her faith (5:34) (see France 2002, 237). Acts 5:12 speaks of "signs and wonders . . . being done among the people through the hands of the apostles." Are we to conclude that the people held superstitious beliefs about the hands of God's messengers? Of course not. The people understood that God had chosen to grant healings, whether through his Son or through the apostles.

Who touched My robes? (5:30): If Jesus is God, why didn't he simply know who had touched him, much as he displayed divine knowledge elsewhere? Jesus did not ask who touched him because he had no idea. Rather, he asked because he wanted the woman to choose to make herself known. She was afraid due to the divine power she experienced and the fact that she had presumed to touch Jesus while she was in an unclean state. He assured her rather than rebuked her (v. 34), giving her more benefit than if he had allowed her to walk away with a healing but no personal word of assurance.

Your daughter is dead. Why bother the Teacher anymore? (5:35): While Jesus was still speaking to the healed woman, people come from the synagogue official's home to report that the girl has died (v. 35). Jesus is too late, or so they assumed. In Matthew's version of the story, Jairus tells Jesus right at the outset that his daughter has died (Matt 9:18–19). Does this version of the story contradict Mark's (and Luke's) version of the story? It does not, for the evangelist Matthew has condensed this story, as well as the story of the woman who suffered from bleeding. In condensing the stories some details and sequencing have been rearranged. In this case, the announcement of the girl's death (Mark 5:35) is merged with the father's initial plea for help (Mark 5:22–23).

The child is not dead but asleep (5:39): Jesus' comment that the girl is not dead but is sleeping strikes the grieving family as silly (vv. 39–40), and critics take it as evidence that the girl was never dead. However, it is clear that the girl had really died. The gathered mourners were "weeping and wailing loudly" (v. 38). Jesus' statement that she was "not dead but asleep" may be a hint that for God raising the dead is no more difficult than awaking a sleeper. Without any rigmarole or magical ritual, Jesus simply speaks in Aramaic, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!" (v. 41). "Immediately" the girl arises and is able to walk (v. 42), thus signifying the completeness of the resuscitation. Jesus commands the parents to feed her before those outside learn of her resuscitation (v. 43). Delay

in reporting her recovery would also make it easier for Jesus to slip out and continue on his way. This concern perhaps lies behind Jesus' command that "no one should know about this" (v. 43).

> He went away from there and came to His hometown, and His disciples followed Him. 2 When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard Him were astonished. "Where did this man get these things? " they said. "What is this wisdom given to Him, and how are these miracles performed by His hands? 3 Isn't this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And aren't His sisters here with us? " So they were offended by Him.
>
> 4 Then Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown, among his relatives, and in his household." 5 So He was not able to do any miracles there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. 6 And He was amazed at their unbelief.

They were offended by Him (6:3): Jesus' experience in his home town of Nazareth stands in sharp contrast to his experience elsewhere in Galilee. In the previous stories of Jairus and the woman with the hemorrhage, we witness astounding miracles facilitated by faith. In Nazareth there is little faith and therefore little working of miracles. Does the lack of faith and respect for Jesus by those who knew him well suggest he really was no one special?

The evangelist Mark tells us that when the people of Nazareth hear Jesus teach they were "astonished" (v. 2). But their amazement is not positive. They ask a series of questions, all of which imply that they question Jesus' mission. "Where did this man get these things?" That is, where did Jesus get these notions (probably of the kingdom of God and his right to proclaim it) as well as his ability to perform miracles? This question anticipates the next two: "What is the wisdom given to Him?" That is, what kind of education has Jesus acquired? Does it have any validity? What about "these miracles performed by His hands"? That is, where has Jesus acquired the ability to heal and exorcise? The fact that citizens of Jesus' hometown were so astounded at his wisdom and works is strong proof against his having wrought miracles as a boy, as is depicted in numerous non-canonical gospels. The residents of Nazareth ask these questions because in their view Jesus is nobody special. He is "the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon" (v. 3). His sisters still live in town. Jesus comes from an ordinary family. He is from Nazareth, how can he be special? Recall the earlier tension between Jesus and his family in 3:21, 31–35. If Jesus' own family thought him mad, why would others in Nazareth

think him special?

***Jesus' family* (6:2–3):** How can Jesus have siblings if he was virgin born? What about Mary's perpetual virginity, held by many in the Christian tradition? The idea that Mary remained a virgin was widely taught by the fourth century and was later affirmed by church councils. It is taught today by Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodoxy, but not by Protestants (although Martin Luther held to it). Matthew 1:25 declares that Joseph "did not know [Mary] intimately until she gave birth to a son." The "until" most naturally implies that Mary and Joseph were sexually intimate at some point after Jesus' birth, leading to the birth of children who would have been Jesus' half-siblings.

The carpenter (6:3): Matthew 13:55–56 has "the carpenter's son" rather than "the carpenter." Does the difference represent a contradiction between the accounts? This is a quote of what "they said," so some may have said one thing and others said another. But from the question, "Where did this man get these things?" we know that the point was that Jesus did not grow up in a rabbi's home but in the home of a carpenter and was trained as a carpenter. Some manuscripts of Mark 6:3 do have "carpenter's son," but most scholars consider the original was probably "the carpenter" (cf. Cranfield 1959, 194–95).

A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown (6:4): Despite his success abroad, when Jesus returns home he is met with disrespect and unbelief. His former neighbors are offended (v. 3). A parallel to Jesus' reply is found in the *Gospel of Thomas* (§31: "No prophet is accepted in his own village; no physician heals those who know him"). The saying in Thomas does not derive from independent tradition, but is better explained as a conflation of sayings taken from Luke's version of Jesus' experience in Nazareth (Luke 4:23: "Physician, heal yourself"; Luke 4:24: "No prophet is acceptable in his own country").

He was not able to do any miracles there (6:5): Did Jesus *choose* not to do miracles here (Matt 13:58), or was he *unable* to do so (Mark)? Being the Son of God, Jesus could do miracles when he chose to do so, but he would not heal anyone who did not believe in him. Therefore, it is appropriate to say that Jesus was "unable" (unwilling) to heal many because there were so few who believed. This is also clear in Mark 6:6: "And He was amazed at their unbelief." Matthew and Mark are making the same point.

Now He was going around the villages in a circuit, teaching. [7] He summoned the Twelve and began to send them out in pairs and gave them authority over unclean spirits. [8] He instructed them to take nothing for the road except a walking stick: no bread, no traveling bag, no money in their belts. [9] They were to wear sandals, but not put on an extra shirt. [10] Then He said to them, "Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that place. [11] If any place does not welcome you and people refuse to listen to you, when you leave there, shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them."

[12] So they went out and preached that people should repent. [13] And they were driving out many demons, anointing many sick people with olive oil, and healing them.

***Jesus' instructions for the road* (6:8–9):** According to Mark, Jesus' disciples were to take a walking stick and to wear sandals. According to Matthew and Luke, they were to take neither (Matt 10:10; Luke 10:4). No widely accepted solution to this discrepancy has been found, though many have been suggested (cf. Ahern 1943, 332–37). The point of all three passages is that the disciples were to travel light and to rely on those to whom they would go for nourishment. The differences seem incidental to this point. (See further comments at Matt 10:10.)

***Do Jesus' instructions mark Him as a Cynic?* (6:8–9):** Because of these instructions and because of teachings in which he criticizes materialism and vanity, a few scholars think Jesus was a Jewish Cynic. Are Jesus' instructions here in Mark 6 (and parallels in Matt 10 and Luke 9) in step with the Cynic dress code? No, these instructions in fact do not agree with Cynic dress and conduct; they contradict them. The very things Jesus tells his disciples not to take with them (no bag, no tunic—and no staff either, if we follow the version in Matthew and Luke) are the characteristic markers of the true Cynic, as one observer from late antiquity put it: "What makes a Cynic is his purse and his staff and his big mouth" (Epictetus 3.22.50; cf. Lucian, *Peregrinus* 15; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 6.13; Psuedo-Diogenes 30.3). There is nothing Cynic in Jesus' instructions to his disciples.

The only parallel with Jesus is simply in giving instructions with regard to what to wear and what to take on one's journey. The only specific agreement is taking the staff (if we follow Mark; if we do not, then there is no agreement at all). The staff, however, is hardly distinctive to Cynics. On the contrary, in the Jewish context the staff has a long and distinguished association with the patriarchs, such as Jacob and Judah (Gen 32:10; 38:18), and the great lawgiver Moses and his brother Aaron (Exod 4:4; 7:9). Moreover, the staff is also a symbol of royal authority, figuring in texts that in later interpretation take on

messianic and eschatological significance (e.g., Gen 49:10; Isa 11:4; Ezek 19:14).

***Textual problem* (6:11):** Some manuscripts add "I assure you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah on judgment day than for that town." This addition to some generally late manuscripts is from Matthew 10:15 and is widely understood to be the result of harmonization with the passage there.

And they were . . . anointing many sick people with olive oil (6:13): Did the ancient Jews anoint sick persons with olive oil because they thought the oil itself had a medicinal impact? Was it thought to make prayer more efficacious? According to R. T. France, "Oil was used medicinally in OT times (Isa. 1:6; Jer. 8:22; 51:8) as in other ancient societies, and the action of the Samaritan in pouring oil and wine on the wounds of the traveller in Jesus' parable (Luke. 10:34) was probably common practice. . . . But oil was also used in a more symbolic way, sometimes to express joy or honour (e.g., Ps. 45:7; Isa. 61:3) or to symbolise the blessing of God, as when a healed leper was restored to society (Lv. 14:15–18)" (France 2001, 250–51).

14 King Herod heard of this, because Jesus' name had become well known. Some said, "John
the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that's why supernatural powers are at work in
him." 15 But others said, "He's Elijah." Still others said, "He's a prophet — like one of the
prophets."
16 When Herod heard of it, he said, "John, the one I beheaded, has been raised! " 17 For
Herod himself had given orders to arrest John and to chain him in prison on account of
Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married. 18 John had been telling Herod, "It is
not lawful for you to have your brother's wife! " 19 So Herodias held a grudge against him and
wanted to kill him. But she could not, 20 because Herod was in awe of John and was protecting
him, knowing he was a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard him he would be very
disturbed, yet would hear him gladly.
21 Now an opportune time came on his birthday, when Herod gave a banquet for his nobles,
military commanders, and the leading men of Galilee. 22 When Herodias's own daughter came
in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests. The king said to the girl, "Ask me whatever
you want, and I'll give it to you." 23 So he swore oaths to her: "Whatever you ask me I will
give you, up to half my kingdom."
24 Then she went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for? "
"John the Baptist's head! " she said.
25 Immediately she hurried to the king and said, "I want you to give me John the Baptist's
head on a platter — right now! "

[26] Though the king was deeply distressed, because of his oaths and the guests he did not want to refuse her. [27] The king immediately sent for an executioner and commanded him to bring John's head. So he went and beheaded him in prison, [28] brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. [29] When his disciples heard about it, they came and removed his corpse and placed it in a tomb.

Kind Herod (6:14): Was Herod Antipas really a "King"? Was he not tetrarch instead? Does Mark display ignorance about regional politics? See comments on Matthew 2:1.

John, the one I beheaded, has been raised! (6:16): Jesus' fame has spread throughout Galilee. Even Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee (unofficially called "king"), has heard of Jesus. Herod's advisors pass on all sorts of identifications that people are making. Some say: "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead"; others: "He's Elijah"; still others: "He's a prophet—like one of the prophets" (vv. 14–15). Herod's opinion, that Jesus was John raised from the dead, was evidently shared by many. This is evidence that Jesus' ministry was similar to John's. But since John was not known as a healer or an exorcist, the similarity must lie in the content of their preaching. Both proclaimed repentance.

That the people identify Jesus as John resurrected speaks to the works of power Jesus performed. The people assumed that only someone who has brought back supernatural power from the "other side" could do the things that Jesus was doing. This extraordinary testimony is hardly the work of pious Christians hoping to embellish Jesus' credentials. Jesus' earliest followers regarded him as much greater than John (even John said this; Mark 1:7). Herod's confused and erroneous identification of Jesus offers a remarkable witness to the unparalleled power at work in Jesus.

He went and beheaded him in prison (6:27): Josephus confirms that Herod imprisoned and executed John the Baptist, but his details differ as to why exactly John was killed (*Antiquities* 18.116–119). At most points the two accounts can be reconciled, and where they cannot be reconciled there is no good reason to give Josephus preference. Although Josephus chooses to emphasize the political dangers that John posed to Herod, and Mark chose to emphasize the moral dimension, the two accounts are in essential agreement. Herod's disgraceful dismissal of his wife, the daughter of the king of the Nabateans, and his unlawful marriage to Herodias his sister-in-law prompted John's condemnation. John's condemnation focused on the immoral and unlawful aspects (which Mark mentions), while Herod's fears focused on the political dangers (which Josephus

narrates). Later, Josephus himself mentions the inappropriateness of Herod's divorce and remarriage (*Antiquities* 18.136).

30 The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to Him all that they had done and taught.
31 He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a remote place and rest for a while." For many people were coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat. 32 So they went away in the boat by themselves to a remote place, 33 but many saw them leaving and recognized them. People ran there by land from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. 34 So as He stepped ashore, He saw a huge crowd and had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Then He began to teach them many things.
35 When it was already late, His disciples approached Him and said, "This place is a wilderness, and it is already late! 36 Send them away, so they can go into the surrounding countryside and villages to buy themselves something to eat."
37 "You give them something to eat," He responded.
They said to Him, "Should we go and buy 200 denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat? "
38 And He asked them, "How many loaves do you have? Go look."
When they found out they said, "Five, and two fish."
39 Then He instructed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in ranks of hundreds and fifties. 41 Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke the loaves. He kept giving them to His disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. 42 Everyone ate and was filled. 43 Then they picked up 12 baskets full of pieces of bread and fish. 44 Now those who ate the loaves were 5,000 men.

Many people were coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat (6:31): The mention that Jesus and his disciples had been so busy that they had not the leisure even to eat prepares for the eventual need to feed the multitude. It also shows how desperate the situation is for some of the people who pursue Jesus, wherever he goes. The demands of ministry are such that Jesus and his disciples simply cannot stop and take the time to recline and eat some food. This bears witness to the power and effectiveness of Jesus' ministry, for if Jesus possessed no power and could not meet the needs of the people, there would have been no "coming and going"; there would have been plenty of time to stop and eat dinner.

***The location of this miracle feeding* (6:32–44):** Mark locates the feeding of the 5,000 simply in "a remote place" (6:31, 32). Then after the event he has his disciples go to "the other side [of the lake], to Bethsaida" (6:45). The difficulty

is that Luke 9:10 locates the miracle near "a town called Bethsaida" (though still in "a deserted place," v. 12). It may be that there were two towns named Bethsaida, the more widely known Bethsaida Julias east of the Jordan, and another one west of the Jordan, perhaps the one known in John as "Bethsaida of Galilee" (John 1:44; 12:21). This possibility is made more likely by the name's meaning, "fishing village." Another possibility is that "the other side" may refer to moving by boat to another location. "In this case the disciples left the location of the miracle and traveled northwestward, in the direction of both Bethsaida Julias and Capernaum, but ended up southwest of Capernaum (Gennesaret) because of the storm" (Hultberg 2007, 1478–79).

They were like sheep without a shepherd (6:34): Mark's language recalls Numbers 27:15–17, where Moses petitions God that a man be appointed to shepherd God's people, lest they be "like sheep without a shepherd" (see also 1 Kgs 22:17). One task of the shepherd is to find food for his flock (cf. Num 27:17). Moses did this in the wilderness through the provision of the manna (Exodus 16). Elisha did it when he multiplied the loaves for 100 men (2 Kgs 4:42–44). Now Jesus provides food for his flock.

Several factors support the authenticity of this miracle. First, because Jesus was well known as a powerful worker of miracles, crowds followed him. Second, the feeding appears in all four Gospels, and Matthew and Mark relate a second, similar story. If the miracle never took place, it is hard to account for such a well attested tradition. Third, the number and specificity of the details support its authenticity and suggest eyewitness testimony. For example, the disciples wonder if they should purchase "200 denarii worth of bread" (v. 37). The people are instructed to sit in groups of "hundreds and fifties" (v. 40). Jesus is given five loaves and two fish (vv. 38, 42). There were 12 baskets of leftover pieces (v. 43), and the size of the crowd was estimated to be 5,000 (v. 44). Some of these details echo OT precedents, but most do not. The details ultimately derive from the disciples and the people who witnessed the extraordinary event.

Everyone ate and was filled (6:42): Skeptics say that Jesus' only "miracle" here was that he encouraged more sharing and forthrightness about how much food was actually on hand. This reading is inspired by skepticism rather than any pointers in the text. Verse 41 clearly says that Jesus fed the crowd with five loaves and two fish. Thus the skeptic is not offering an alternative explanation; he is simply dismissing the text.

Then they picked up 12 baskets full of pieces of bread and fish (6:43): Do the

12 baskets of leftovers indicate that this story has been stylized by Mark to fit with imagery of Israel's 12 tribes? Jesus probably chose 12 disciples because of the 12 tribes of Israel, but the reason 12 baskets of leftovers were collected may be that there were 12 disciples to do the collecting, and that each carried a single basket with which to do the collecting. Perhaps even more leftovers could have been collected had there been more than 12 disciples and/or baskets available for collecting the scraps. Mitigating somewhat against this suggestion is that in the feeding of the 4,000 (Mark 8:1–10) there were of course 12 disciples to do the collecting, but they came up with only seven baskets of leftovers. Seven is also possibly a symbolic number. It is also possible that by divine providence, a symbolically significant number emerged in the collection of the leftovers. See comments on 8:8.

Now those who ate the loaves were 5,000 men (6:44): The nearby towns of Bethsaida and Capernaum had perhaps only 2,000 to 3,000 inhabitants each, so where did this vast crowd come from? If the men alone were 5,000 in number, there must have been as many as 15,000 to 25,000 people gathered to meet Jesus. How that many people from "all the towns" managed to gather and beat Jesus and his disciples to the other side of the lake suggests to R. T. France that "Mark has oversimplified the process" by which such a large crowd was formed (2002, 265). (See further comments at Matt 14:15–21 and Luke 9:10–20.)

> 45 Immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side,
> to Bethsaida, while He dismissed the crowd. 46 After He said good-bye to them, He went away
> to the mountain to pray. 47 When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and He
> was alone on the land. 48 He saw them being battered as they rowed, because the wind was
> against them. Around three in the morning He came toward them walking on the sea and
> wanted to pass by them. 49 When they saw Him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost
> and cried out; 50 for they all saw Him and were terrified. Immediately He spoke with them and
> said, "Have courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." 51 Then He got into the boat with them, and the
> wind ceased. They were completely astounded, 52 because they had not understood about the
> loaves. Instead, their hearts were hardened.

He came toward them walking on the sea and wanted to pass by them (6:48): What does it mean that Jesus "wanted to pass by them"? Was he going to ignore their plight? The Greek verb translated "wanted" can have several meanings, two of which are relevant to this passage. The first one listed in

BDAG is “to have a desire for someth., *wish to have, desire, want*.” The second meaning is similar: “to have someth. in mind for oneself, of purpose, resolve, *will, wish, want, be ready*.” According to one interpretation, Jesus had desired or intended to pass by them. But when they saw him, he could see that they were terrified, so he changed his plan. We might assume that when Jesus saw from the shore that they were having a difficult time, he would want to come to their aid.

Another, perhaps better interpretation, focuses on the meaning of the verb *parerchomai*, “pass by.” It occurs many times in the LXX, sometimes with the meaning to “go on past.” But it can also mean to “pass in front of” as the Lord passed in front of Moses and Elijah (cf. Exod 33:19, 22; 34:6; 1 Kgs 19:11). In this case the verb in Mark 6:48 means that Jesus wanted to pass in front of them so that his disciples could see him (Garland 1996, 262–64).

***Mark’s silence about Peter walking on the water* (6:48–52):** The significance of Mark’s silence is perhaps heightened by the fact that Matthew used Mark as a primary source. If Matthew did not get the Peter-on-water account from Mark, from where did he get it? Critics suggest Matthew simply invented it or adopted a legend that grew up after Mark’s account, but this assumes that Mark was Matthew’s only reliable source. Why assume this? Also, Mark may have known about Peter’s walk on the water, but chose not to narrate it because Peter’s preaching, commonly taken as a source for Mark’s Gospel, did not include it.

They saw Him walking on the sea (6:49): Some have argued that the disciples saw Jesus walking on the shore and mistakenly thought he was walking on the water. This suggestion is not feasible because Jesus was close enough to the boat to speak to them, even though the loud winds were blowing and the disciples were “in the middle of the sea” (v. 47).

They all saw Him and were terrified (6:50): Some scholars think Mark denigrates the disciples, perhaps to show that their understanding of Jesus was deficient and that people a generation later in Mark’s church who identify with the disciples are likewise deficient in their understanding of Jesus. This interpretation is implausible and highly subjective. Is it realistic to think that Mark would falsely portray Jesus’ disciples as uncomprehending? It seems most unlikely. Accordingly, the passage of Jesus walking on the sea and the terrified disciples, as unflattering as it would strike readers, likely reflects early, reliable tradition, not the creative imagination of Mark.

It is I (6:50): Is Jesus’ statement “It is I” equivalent to the divine disclosure of Exodus 3:14? The Greek phrase is the same as in the Exodus passage. If Jesus’

passing by (v. 48) is intended to allude to Yahweh's passing in front of Moses and Elijah, Jesus' words in verse 50 may be intended as an allusion to the divine name. However, the disciples seem to respond in a way that shows they failed to catch the allusion.

They had not understood about the loaves (6:52): Their astonishment (v. 51) and lack of comprehension was because (*gar*) "their hearts were hardened" (v. 52), meaning the disciples lacked the spiritual insight to understand Jesus fully during his earthly, pre-Easter ministry. His multiplication of the loaves, rightly understood, was a sign that Jesus truly was the Son of God who could walk on the sea and command the very wind and waves (see Mark 4:35–41). The incomprehension on the part of the disciples is certainly not a theologically-motivated literary invention of Mark, but is yet another sign of his willingness to convey truth even if it is not flattering.

Mark's silence about everyone in the boat confessing Jesus' deity **(6:52):** Matthew 14:33 reports that "those in the boat worshiped Him and said, 'Truly You are the Son of God!'" Mark lacks this, and instead says they were all "astounded" and that "their hearts were hardened." Other translations of Mark say, "their minds were closed," and the like. This seems entirely different from what Matthew reports. Are Matthew and Mark contradictory? According to Craig Blomberg, "Mark 6:52, while jarringly different from Matthew's conclusion and reflecting Mark's emphasis on the disciples' lack of understanding, is thus not contradictory. Followers of Jesus in fact regularly experience a combination of faith and doubt." Blomberg bases his conclusion on the misunderstanding of Peter in Matthew 16:16–23 and the fact that "thus far their Christology is based solely on Jesus' mighty acts, scarcely the ideal basis for faith" (1992, 236). So it is best to conclude that Matthew and Mark are both capturing authentic elements of how the disciples responded to Jesus.

> 53 When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and beached the boat. 54 As they got out of the boat, people immediately recognized Him. 55 They hurried throughout that vicinity and began to carry the sick on mats to wherever they heard He was. 56 Wherever He would go, into villages, towns, or the country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and begged Him that they might touch just the tassel of His robe. And everyone who touched it was made well.

Begged Him that they might touch just the tassel of His robe (6:56): Does

the talk about the people begging to touch “the tassel of His robe” and being healed from its touch recall magic themes that were common among some ancient peoples? As in Mark 5:30, it is the faith of the sick that leads to their healing, not the supposed magic in Jesus’ robe. Further, the healings were not automatic just by touch. All healings were by Jesus’ choice.

The Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Him.
2 They observed that some of His disciples were eating their bread with unclean — that is, unwashed — hands. 3 (For the Pharisees, in fact all the Jews, will not eat unless they wash their hands ritually, keeping the tradition of the elders. 4 When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they have washed. And there are many other customs they have received and keep, like the washing of cups, jugs, copper utensils, and dining couches.) 5 Then the Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, “Why don’t Your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders, instead of eating bread with ritually unclean hands? ”

6 He answered them, “Isaiah prophesied correctly about you hypocrites, as it is written:
These people honor Me
with their lips,
but their heart is far from Me.
7 **They worship Me in vain,**
teaching as doctrines the commands of men.

8 Disregarding the command of God, you keep the tradition of men.” 9 He also said to them, “You completely invalidate God’s command in order to maintain your tradition! 10 For Moses said:

Honor your father and your mother; and
Whoever speaks evil of father
or mother
must be put to death.

11 But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or mother: Whatever benefit you might have received from me is Corban’ ” (that is, a gift committed to the temple), 12 “you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. 13 You revoke God’s word by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many other similar things.” 14 Summoning the crowd again, He told them, “Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: 15 Nothing that goes into a person from outside can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him. [16 If anyone has ears to hear, he should listen!]”

17 When He went into the house away from the crowd, the disciples asked Him about the parable. 18 And He said to them, “Are you also as lacking in understanding? Don’t you realize that nothing going into a man from the outside can defile him? 19 For it doesn’t go into his heart but into the stomach and is eliminated.” (As a result, He made all foods clean.) 20 Then

> He said, “What comes out of a person — that defiles him. 21 For from within, out of people’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immoralities, thefts, murders, 22 adulteries, greed, evil actions, deceit, promiscuity, stinginess, blasphemy, pride, and foolishness. 23 All these evil things come from within and defile a person.”

Pharisees and some of the scribes (7:1): It is sometimes claimed that Mark has unfairly portrayed the Pharisees as hyper-legalistic, but other early sources viewed them in much the same way. According to Josephus, “The Pharisees have imposed on the people many laws from the tradition of the fathers not written in the Law of Moses” (*Antiquities* 13.297). Such a distinction is made by Jesus himself at the end of his heated reply (vv. 9–13).

Whatever benefit you might have received from me is Corban (7:11): Mark explains that Corban means “a gift committed to the temple.” He is quite correct. Josephus understands it similarly: “‘Corban’ to God—meaning what Greeks would call a ‘gift’” (*Antiquities* 4.73); “Now this oath (i.e., Corban) will be found in no other nation except the Jews, and, translated from the Hebrew, one may interpret it as meaning ‘God’s gift’” (*Against Apion* 1.167). A first-century ossuary inscription reads: “All that a man may find to his profit in this ossuary is an offering to God from him who is within it” (see Fitzmyer 1959, 60–65).

***Does Jesus contradict himself about the law not passing away?* (7:15):** It might seem that Jesus is setting aside the dietary laws of the OT with his statement in this verse. In fact Jesus *is* setting aside the food laws, as God does in Peter’s vision in Acts 10:9–15. The book of Hebrews also sets aside the laws of sacrifice as no longer valid. Jesus declares in Matthew 5:18, “Until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass from the law until all things are accomplished.” The final qualification in that verse is important. The coming of Christ and later his death on the cross (“all things are accomplished”) brought changes to the OT law.

***Textual issue* (7:16):** Metzger’s textual commentary explains, “This verse, though present in the majority of witnesses, is absent from important Alexandrian witnesses (א B L Δ* al). It appears to be a scribal gloss (derived perhaps from 4.9 or 4.23), introduced as an appropriate sequel to ver. 14” (*TCGNT*).

(As a result, He made all foods clean) (7:19): Was this parenthetical comment spoken by Jesus, or is it something Mark added as he wrote this account in light of later developments? Even granting that Jesus did not speak the parenthetical

comment, his teaching in this passage seems direct enough to clear up the matter about foods and cleanliness. Why then did the early church (including Peter) still struggle to understand this? Peter even needed a vision from God to finally grasp what Jesus had already said.

Jesus' statement in verse 15 implicitly declares all food "clean." But the parenthetical comment in verse 19 can be interpreted in at least two ways. It may be a comment written by Mark to let the reader know the significance of what Jesus said. On the other hand, it may be that Jesus actually said these words. Literally the statement is "making clean all food"; "as a result" is not in the Greek text. The point may be that food is made clean when it is eliminated, a judgment that harmonizes with the Mishnah (*m. Makhshirin* 6:7; *t. Miqwa'ot* 7:8). According to Garland (1996, 276), "Jesus argues that if food defiles a person, why is it not regarded as impure when it winds up in the latrine—at least according to the tradition of the Pharisees? Defilement must come from some other source than food." Garland suggests that this interpretation would explain why Jesus' words are not cited during the church debate about uncleanness. Jesus did not make his judgment explicit.

> 24 He got up and departed from there to the region of Tyre and Sidon. He entered a house and
> did not want anyone to know it, but He could not escape notice. 25 Instead, immediately after
> hearing about Him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit came and fell at His
> feet. 26 Now the woman was Greek, a Syrophoenician by birth, and she kept asking Him to
> drive the demon out of her daughter. 27 He said to her, "Allow the children to be satisfied first,
> because it isn't right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."
>
> 28 But she replied to Him, "Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."
>
> 29 Then He told her, "Because of this reply, you may go. The demon has gone out of your
> daughter." 30 When she went back to her home, she found her child lying on the bed, and the
> demon was gone.

It isn't right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs (7:27): A Greek-speaking woman whose young daughter was possessed by an "unclean spirit" fell at Jesus' feet and begged him to exorcise the demon (vv. 25–26). The story takes a surprising turn when Jesus rebuffs the woman (v. 27). The apparent harshness and insensitivity argue strongly against the post-Easter invention of this story in an increasingly Gentile church. On the contrary, Jesus' disposition reflects genuine tradition in which Israel enjoyed priority (see Matt 10:5–6; 15:24). It may strike us as rude, but Jesus' intent was not to insult the woman.

Rather, he uses the analogy familiar in his culture in which children of the household are fed first, then the leftovers are thrown to the dogs in the street (cf. Luke 16:20). Jesus is still feeding the people of Israel; Gentiles will have their turn.

According to France (2002, 296), the reader of this encounter "is left more vividly aware of the reality of the problem of Jew-Gentile relations, and of the importance of the step Jesus here takes to overcome it." Mark has already recorded the account of Jesus healing a Gentile who is severely demon possessed in 5:1–20. Now this woman is a "Greek, a Syrophoenician by birth," that is, clearly a Gentile pagan woman from a region that was a traditional enemy of Israel (Garland 1996, 288). Jesus is doing two things by his words. One is that he is portraying the attitude of the Jews toward Gentiles (considered "dogs"); the other is that he is testing (displaying?) this woman's faith. (See further comments at Matt 15:21–28.)

> 31 Again, leaving the region of Tyre, He went by way of Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, through
> the region of the Decapolis. 32 They brought to Him a deaf man who also had a speech
> difficulty, and begged Jesus to lay His hand on him. 33 So He took him away from the crowd
> privately. After putting His fingers in the man's ears and spitting, He touched his tongue.
> 34 Then, looking up to heaven, He sighed deeply and said to him, *"Ephphatha!"* (that is, "Be
> opened! "). 35 Immediately his ears were opened, his speech difficulty was removed, and he
> began to speak clearly. 36 Then He ordered them to tell no one, but the more He would order
> them, the more they would proclaim it.

He went by way of Sidon to the Sea of Galilee (7:31): Does this verse reveal that Mark was unfamiliar with Palestinian geography? No, it simply means that Jesus took a rather long northern detour before heading back to the Sea of Galilee. France explains, "Mark's terms may leave us geographically confused, but they convey clearly enough that Jesus, on his return to the lake from his journey into Phoenicia, remains outside properly Jewish territory rather than taking the more direct route to the Capernaum area" (2002, 302).

After putting His fingers in the man's ears and spitting, He touched his tongue (7:33): In late antiquity spitting was associated with healing (Suetonius, *Vespasian* 7; Tacitus, *Historiae* 4.81, where the Roman emperor restores the sight of a blind man by spitting into his eyes; see also John 9:1–7). Jesus looks heavenward and says to the man, "Ephphatha," an Aramaic word that means "be

opened" (v. 34). With that the man is able to hear and speak plainly (v. 35). The vividness of the details, including the recalling of the very Aramaic word that was spoken, argues in support of eyewitness testimony. Admittedly, Jesus' method here is surprising. We do not know why he healed the man as he did. But Jesus' other healings demonstrate that he could have healed him with just a touch or a word. There is no evidence of magical incantations in Jesus' actions here. The only thing he uttered was a simple Aramaic word.

Jesus' ineffectual order to remain silent **(6:36):** That Mark would report not only that Jesus' request for silence was unfulfilled, but that "the more He would order them, the more they would proclaim" news of his miracle, is strong evidence for the historicity of Mark's account, for this detail risks making it seem that Jesus was unable to persuade people. Here is another evidence that the Evangelists did not embellish their accounts or whitewash embarrassing or difficult elements. That the people refused to remain silent is not surprising. Jesus' motivation for asking for silence was probably a desire to avoid manic publicity that would hamper his purposes and freedom of movement.

> In those days there was again a large crowd, and they had nothing to eat. He summoned the disciples and said to them, 2 "I have compassion on the crowd, because they've already stayed with Me three days and have nothing to eat. 3 If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, and some of them have come a long distance."
>
> 4 His disciples answered Him, "Where can anyone get enough bread here in this desolate place to fill these people? "
>
> 5 "How many loaves do you have? " He asked them.
>
> "Seven," they said. 6 Then He commanded the crowd to sit down on the ground. Taking the seven loaves, He gave thanks, broke the loaves, and kept on giving them to His disciples to set before the people. So they served the loaves to the crowd. 7 They also had a few small fish, and when He had blessed them, He said these were to be served as well. 8 They ate and were filled. Then they collected seven large baskets of leftover pieces. 9 About 4,000 men were there. He dismissed them 10 and immediately got into the boat with His disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

In those days there was again a large crowd (8:1): Is this just a reworked version of the first miraculous feeding (Mark 6:30ff)? It is hard to understand why the disciples would show no comprehension about how the masses could be fed (8:4) if they had in fact experienced almost exactly the same situation previously. Verses 17–20 show that Mark clearly portrays the two feedings as

separate events. Matthew, who was an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry, agrees with Mark that there were two miraculous feedings (Matt 14:13–21; 15:32–39). The apostle John testifies that Jesus did many more things than he was able to include in his account (John 21:25), which suggests that Jesus did some miracles more than once (Bock 2002, 224). One of Mark's (and Matthew's) themes is that Jesus was rejected despite all the miracles he performed. Another is that even the disciples were slow to recognize exactly who Jesus was, despite how many times they saw him demonstrate it. In hindsight it is hard to understand how the disciples could demonstrate such failure of foresight in verse 4, but in their context, Jesus' life and ministry continually unfolded in unexpected ways.

They collected seven large baskets of leftover pieces (8:8): As with 6:43, there are leftovers. And once again the number of baskets seems symbolic. Does this indicate a literary device on Mark's part, indicating that he is not telling literal details? Again, Matthew repeats the fact that there were seven baskets of leftovers, so the Evangelists agree on the number. There are many places in the Bible where numbers like three, seven, and forty are used. If God is sovereign over events, could he not orchestrate events so that certain symbolic numbers often occur? The presence of symbolism may therefore signal divine providence, not a created detail.

Dalmanutha (8:10): Neither Dalmanutha (Mark) nor Magadan (Matt 15:39) are known outside NT references. Have Matthew and Mark made a mistake in identification? There is at present no clear resolution to this problem. According to Gundry, each term could be a variant name for the town of Magdala (Gundry 1993, 403). (See further comments at Matt 15:39.)

> 11 The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, demanding of Him a sign from heaven to test Him. 12 But sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, "Why does this generation demand a sign? I assure you: No sign will be given to this generation! " 13 Then He left them, got on board the boat again, and went to the other side.

No sign will be given to this generation! (8:12): In Matthew 12:39 and 16:4, as well as Luke 11:29, Jesus said no sign *except the sign of Jonah* would be given. Mark is more restrictive, saying nothing of the Jonah sign. Does Mark contradict Matthew and Luke? And why did Jesus sometimes refuse to work signs when asked? It seems that he would have won many more to faith if he had obliged the requests. Finally, how does Jesus' stance on signs here compare to the

proliferation of signs in the early church (e.g., Acts 4:29–30)?

The Pharisees' request for a sign implies that they disputed Jesus' call and authority. If the demand for a sign parallels Jesus' approximate contemporaries who proffered signs of national deliverance (such as Theudas and a Jewish man from Egypt, both mentioned by Josephus), then the Pharisees may have been demanding proof of Jesus' proclamation that the kingdom of God had come. The sign that they demand cannot have been simply another miracle; surely they knew of Jesus' ministry of miracles and had even seen them (e.g., Mark 2:1–12; 3:1–6, 22). The sign that they seek must have been of a greater magnitude. Again, if we accept them as an appropriate parallel, then we may think of Theudas who claimed that the Jordan River would divide and permit dry passage, or the Egyptian Jew who claimed that at his command the walls of Jerusalem would fall down. These were no mere miracles of exorcism or healing, which various holy men in Israel were apparently able to do (acknowledged by Jesus in Mark 9:38–41). These were to be signs, modeled after the miracles of the exodus, which would confirm the prophet's authenticity and his proclamation. For the sign to be "from heaven" (v. 11) means it was to be from God. Seeking divine proof of Jesus' credentials may have reflected the directives found in Deuteronomy 13:2–6; 18:18–22.

Jesus wonders aloud why his generation seeks a sign (which, according to Paul in 1 Cor 1:22, Jews insist upon), especially given the fact that his critics have already chosen to ignore the evidence thus far provided. Remember that when Jesus cast out demons, religious authorities accused him of being in league with Satan (Mark 3:22, 30). We should probably assume that the intention of the Pharisees was to embarrass Jesus, either because God would not perform the requested sign (indicating God does not endorse Jesus), or that the sign itself would fail to impress and persuade. Jesus, however, will not play their game. Mark's failure to include mention of the Jonah sign is no contradiction of Matthew and Luke. Rather, Mark has chosen to stress the main point of Jesus' statement: that he refused to cater to the unbelieving demands of the Pharisees. Jesus' refusal to petition God for a sign is remarkable and suggests a deliberate distancing from the various would-be deliverers who from time to time appeared on the scene and tried to court doubters.

Finally, Jesus' response surprises the reader. We might expect him to remove all doubt and win the Jewish religious elite to his side by performing an awe-inspiring miracle. His unexpected response is sure to be his and not an invention of the Evangelists. The contrast between Jesus' refusal to perform a sign and the

proliferation of signs in the early church (e.g., Acts 4:29–30) is explained on the basis of the different contexts. The context here is one of unbelief. Jesus did not oppose signs in general but performed many of them (healings, exorcisms; Matt 11:1–6; John 2:11). The signs performed in Acts were not in the face of unbelief and opposition (Heb 2:4). Further, the fact that Jesus came for the purpose of offering himself on the cross may be another aspect of his reason for not granting signs to overcome all unbelief. His mission was to reach the cross, not the embrace of the entire nation of Israel.

> 14 They had forgotten to take bread and had only one loaf with them in the boat. 15 Then He commanded them: "Watch out! Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod."
> 16 They were discussing among themselves that they did not have any bread. 17 Aware of this, He said to them, "Why are you discussing that you do not have any bread? Don't you understand or comprehend? Is your heart hardened? 18 **Do you have eyes, and not see, and do you have ears, and not hear?** And do you not remember? 19 When I broke the five loaves for the 5,000, how many baskets full of pieces of bread did you collect? "
> "Twelve," they told Him.
> 20 "When I broke the seven loaves for the 4,000, how many large baskets full of pieces of bread did you collect? "
> "Seven," they said.
> 21 And He said to them, "Don't you understand yet? "

The yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod (8:15): What Jesus meant by the "yeast" of the Pharisees and of Herod is not explained in Mark. Matthew understands it in reference to the teaching of the Pharisees (Matt 16:12). Luke says this "yeast" is hypocrisy (Luke 12:1), which would fit with the teaching of the Pharisees (see Matthew 23). What association Herod has with the Pharisees only makes the statement in Mark more puzzling. Several early Christian scribes, as seen in π^{45} W Θ 28, substitute the "Herodians" for Herod. Whether we are to think of the Herodians (the Jews who support the Herodian rulers) or of Herod Antipas himself, their "yeast" very probably has to do with their inability to see the power of God at work in Jesus. Yeast could be used figuratively for evil (probably because of the negative role it plays in the observance of Passover; see 1 Cor 5:6–7; Gal 5:9). In the Markan context the yeast is probably unbelief (as seen in Herod's rejection of John's preaching and in the Pharisees' lack of faith in Jesus).

22 Then they came to Bethsaida. They brought a blind man to Him and begged Him to touch
him. 23 He took the blind man by the hand and brought him out of the village. Spitting on his
eyes and laying His hands on him, He asked him, “Do you see anything? ”
24 He looked up and said, “I see people — they look to me like trees walking.”
25 Again Jesus placed His hands on the man’s eyes, and he saw distinctly. He was cured and
could see everything clearly. 26 Then He sent him home, saying, “Don’t even go into the
village.”

I see people—they look to me like trees walking (8:24): Neither Matthew nor Luke includes this unusual miracle report. As with the healing of the blind man (7:31–37), Jesus uses spittle. What makes this miracle so unusual is that it is effected in two stages. Jesus asks the man if he can see anything (v. 23), which is atypical of miracle accounts. The man reports that he can see, but apparently imperfectly. After Jesus again lays his hands upon the man’s eyes, the cure is completed (v. 25). The unusualness of the healing, especially seen in its two stages, strongly argues for authenticity. An invented story would have the cure take place in one immediate step, lest Jesus’ healing powers be questioned. It is commonly suggested that the first step of the healing was a complete healing of the man’s sight, and that the second step was a healing of his perception or comprehension. This is possible, though the text is silent on this suggested resolution.

27 Jesus went out with His disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the road He
asked His disciples, “Who do people say that I am? ”
28 They answered Him, “John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, one of the prophets.”
29 “But you,” He asked them again, “who do you say that I am? ”
Peter answered Him, “You are the Messiah! ”
30 And He strictly warned them to tell no one about Him.
31 Then He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected
by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, be killed, and rise after three days. 32 He was
openly talking about this. So Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.
33 But turning around and looking at His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind
Me, Satan, because you’re not thinking about God’s concerns, but man’s! ”

You are the Messiah! (8:29): When Peter confesses Jesus as the “Messiah,” the Greek is “Christ” (*christos*), a translation of the Hebrew *meshiach*, which means “anointed.” Because the word is used in reference to anointed kings (1 Sam 15:1; 16:13; Ps 2:2), anointed prophets (1 Kgs 19:15–16; 1 Chr 16:22 = Ps 105:15; Isa

61:1), and anointed priests (Exod 29:6–7; Lev 16:32; 1 Chr 29:22), the use of the word does not in and of itself determine what Peter meant. However, Jesus' crucifixion as "king of the Jews" (Mark 15:26, 32) provides strong support for the traditional view that Peter confessed Jesus to be Israel's messianic King. On the authenticity of Peter's confession, see Evans 2000, 9–15.

He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things (8:31): This is the first of Jesus' formal predictions of suffering and death. He will predict these things again in 9:31 and 10:33–34. Critics suggest that Jesus did not really predict his death, but that this was a creation of the early church. However, the mounting opposition to Jesus clearly signaled possible outcomes. Further, the probability that Jesus did in fact anticipate his death is seen in his prayer in the garden of Gethsemane: "*Abba*, Father! All things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me. Nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will" (Mark 14:36). This scene, in which Jesus expresses his dread (see 14:34), and in which his disciples fail to keep watch and pray with him, is so potentially embarrassing for the early church that its authenticity is virtually guaranteed (see comments on 14:32–42). Jesus' prayer implies that he anticipates his death and would like somehow to avoid it, though he was willing to undergo it. On the authenticity of the Passion predictions, see Evans 1999, 82–97; 2001, 16–18.

The Son of Man must . . . rise after three days (8:31): Jesus here says he'll rise "after three days," whereas in other places he says his resurrection will be "on the third day" (Matt 17:23). The different expressions are simply different ways of saying the same thing in that ancient culture, which was less precise with time designations than we tend to be today.

He was openly talking about this (8:32): If Jesus was speaking openly about his coming execution and resurrection, why did the disciples never catch on? After all, they've confessed their belief that Jesus is the Messiah and may have perceived his divinity. Why not listen and believe when he predicts his death and resurrection, even if it goes against all expectations? Perhaps Peter thought Jesus was just being pessimistic—predicting that he would be rejected. He thought he knew the messianic scenario so well that Jesus must be mistaken in his death prediction. Along with most Jews, Peter only knew of a triumphant, not a suffering, messiah. The blindness of the disciples is partly due to the natural effects of a preconceived idea—the thought that it could be wrong is inconceivable. The other source of the blindness is Satan himself, who is a cosmic obstacle to the Messiah's mission. The disciples never accepted Jesus'

predictions of suffering and death until after these things were accomplished. Finally, they never unambiguously affirmed that Jesus was God prior to his resurrection, but only the Son of God, which means "messianic king" and does not necessarily imply divinity.

Get behind Me, Satan (8:33): The parallel account in Matthew 16:21–23 makes it clear that after receiving Peter's confession, Jesus went on to speak of establishing his church on Peter (likely meaning Peter's confession). How can Jesus then turn around and call Peter Satan? Jesus does not mean that Peter is Satan, or that he has become possessed by Satan, but that he unwittingly stands opposed to God's will and so is on the side of Satan and men who fail to understand and obey God. Peter would have understood this, and would not have felt that Jesus was literally identifying him with Satan.

> 34 Summoning the crowd along with His disciples, He said to them, "If anyone wants to be
> My follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. 35 For whoever wants to
> save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of Me and the gospel will save it.
> 36 For what does it benefit a man to gain the whole world yet lose his life? 37 What can a man
> give in exchange for his life? 38 For whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words in this
> adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes
> in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."
>
> Then He said to them, "I assure you: There are some standing here who will not taste death
> until they see the kingdom of God come in power."

If anyone wants to be My follower, he must . . . take up his cross (8:34): Is Jesus' talk about taking up a cross and following him anachronistic? After all, Mark portrays Jesus as speaking of this well before any of the disciples had comprehended (much less accepted) that Messiah would die on a cross. Or was "take up your cross" a common metaphor for self-denial, such that Jesus could effectively use it even before his Passion?

Jesus' saying about taking up the cross finds an interesting parallel in Epictetus, who warns the nonconformist: "If you want to be crucified, just wait. The cross will come" (*Discourses* 2.2.20). Jesus' saying about saving and losing one's life also finds a parallel in a late first-century source: "Because of what have men lost their life and for what have those who were on the earth exchanged their soul?" (*2 Bar.* 51:15). As to the question of whether "take up your cross" was metaphorical for self denial, it is possible that Jesus originated the saying himself.

We do not know how much of this was understood by the pre-resurrection disciples. In none of the Gospel accounts of this teaching do the disciples or anyone else have anything to say in response. That could be an indication that they had trouble comprehending and/or accepting Jesus' statement. (See further comments at Luke 9:23.)

The gospel (8:35): Is Jesus' use of the term "gospel" anachronistic, stemming from the time of the early church rather than the pre-church era? See "What Kind of Literature Is Mark?" in the Introduction, plus comments on 1:1.

There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God come in power (9:1): The general impression one receives from the Gospels, especially the present verse, is that Jesus assumed that the kingdom of God would come in its fullness within one generation or so (see esp. Mark 13:30). This expectation, reinforced by the resurrection, is evident throughout early Christian literature (especially in Paul). In 9:1, is Jesus predicting his second coming or just his transfiguration?

Jesus' prediction in 9:1 coheres with the summary of his proclamation in 1:15: "The kingdom of God has come near." It also coheres with another saying: "If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you" (Luke 11:20). So Jesus understands the kingdom of God as having arrived and the exorcisms as evidence of its arrival. But why say that some of the disciples would still be alive, if, having already witnessed several exorcisms, they had already experienced the presence of the kingdom? The point of the saying in 9:1, that they will "see the kingdom of God come in power," seems to go beyond the saying in Luke 11:20. Given the close association of the saying in 8:28, it seems that the saying in 9:1 has to do with the *final consummation* of the kingdom, the time of Jesus' second coming. At the time of the writing of Mark this consummation had not yet taken place, and some of Jesus' followers were still living. However, the Evangelist's placement of the saying in 9:1 immediately preceding the transfiguration narrative (9:2–8) suggests that he understood this unusual event as a foreshadowing of the full power of the kingdom (so Gundry 1993, 469). The partial fulfillment of Jesus' prediction within just one week of being uttered, and the dramatic quality of this partial fulfillment, guarantee the eventual comprehensive fulfillment. In summary, what the disciples saw in the transfiguration was a partial fulfillment of Jesus' prediction in 9:1.

2 After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up on a high mountain by
themselves to be alone. He was transformed in front of them, 3 and His clothes became dazzling
— extremely white as no launderer on earth could whiten them. 4 Elijah appeared to them with
Moses, and they were talking with Jesus.
5 Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it’s good for us to be here! Let us make three tabernacles:
one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” — 6 because he did not know what he should
say, since they were terrified.
7 A cloud appeared, overshadowing them, and a voice came from the cloud:

This is My beloved Son;
listen to Him!

8 Then suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus alone.

After six days (9:2): Along with Matthew 17:1, Mark puts the transfiguration six days after Jesus prophesied the coming of the kingdom. Luke 9:28 says “about eight days after.” Can these be reconciled? The meaning of all three texts is that the event occurred about a week after Jesus’ teaching. By our standards the ancients were often imprecise with their time markers. Matthew and Mark’s “six days” may reflect Exodus 24:16. (See further comments at Matt 17:1 and Luke 9:28.)

He was transformed in front of them (9:2): Some argue that Mark’s account of Jesus’ transfiguration was originally a resurrection appearance story, but at many points the transfiguration account differs from the NT resurrection accounts. For instance, the canonical accounts of Jesus’ resurrection did not involve the kind of luminosity depicted in the transfiguration (Gundry 1993, 471–73). Furthermore, a stronger relationship may exist between the transfiguration account and passages in Exodus 24 and 33–34 describing Moses’ ascent up Mount Sinai where he meets God and then descends with a shining face. The following parallels are evident: (1) the reference to “six days” (Mark 9:2; Exod 24:16), (2) the cloud that covers the mountain (Mark 9:7; Exod 24:16), (3) God’s voice from the cloud (Mark 9:7; Exod 24:16), (4) three companions (Mark 9:2; Exod 24:1, 9), (5) a transformed appearance (Mark 9:3; Exod 34:30), and (6) the reaction of fear (Mark 9:6; Exod 34:30). Also, in Exodus 24:13 Joshua is singled out and taken up the mountain with Moses. Since “Joshua” in the Greek OT is frequently rendered “Jesus,” the early church may have seen in Exodus 24:13 a veiled prophecy or typology that came to fulfillment in the transfiguration, where once again Moses is up a mountain with a Jesus.

According to Mark, Jesus "was transformed" (*metemorphothe*) and his "clothes became dazzling—extremely white" (vv. 2–3). The closest parallel is probably to the shining face of Moses (Exod 34:30), but the faces of other saints are described as shining (see 2 Esdras 7:97, 125; *1 Enoch* 37:7; 51:5; compare Luke 9:29, which specifically mentions Jesus' face). The clothing of the saints will shine (see Dan 12:3; Rev 4:4; 7:9; *1 Enoch* 62:15; *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 1:7 §9: "he will renew their faces and will renew their garments"). In one tradition it is said that when Elijah was born "men of shining white appearance greeted him and wrapped him in fire" (*Lives of the Prophets* 21:2). There are stories of transfigurations of the Greco-Roman gods. One thinks of Demeter whose transfigured person filled a house with light (*Homeric Hymns* 2.275–280).

Mark's depiction of Jesus is also reminiscent of Daniel's vision of the "Ancient of Days," whose "clothing was white like snow, and the hair of his head like whitest wool" (Dan 7:9). The "One like a son of man" approaches the Ancient of Days (i.e., God) and receives authority and kingdom (Dan 7:13–14). Perhaps in his transformation we should understand that Jesus, as the son of man, has taken on some of the characteristics of the Ancient of Days when in his presence (much as Moses' face shined with God's glory). If this is correct, then the transfiguration should be understood as a visual verification of Jesus' claim to be the son of man who will come in the glory of his Father with the holy angels (see Mark 8:38; Dan 7:10).

One for Moses, and one for Elijah (9:5): How would Peter and his companions, just waking from deep sleep (Luke 9:32), recognize that the two men with Jesus were Moses and Elijah? Certainly they had not seen pictures or portraits that taught them what these long-dead men looked like. We are not told that Moses and Elijah identified themselves or that Jesus identified them. Mark as omniscient narrator can know (or create) such details as their identity, but if he is writing straight history, just how did the sleeping men figure out the identity of Moses and Elijah?

Moses and Elijah are often paired up in biblical and Jewish tradition. The two witnesses of Revelation 11:3–12 could very well be Moses and Elijah (on Moses compare v. 6 with Exod 7:17, 19; on Elijah compare vv. 5–6 with 2 Kgs 1:10). However, it should be noted that Elijah is sometimes paired up with Enoch instead; see 2 Esdras 6:26; *Apocalypse of Elijah* 4:7–19, which appears to be dependent on Revelation 11. According to one rabbinic interpretation, God promises in the future to bring Moses with Elijah (*Deuteronomy Rabbah* 3.17 [on Deut 10:1]). The rabbis compared Moses and Elijah at many points, as the

following demonstrates: “You find that two prophets rose up for Israel out of the tribe of Levi; one the first of all the prophets, and the other the last of all the prophets: Moses first and Elijah last, and both with a commission to redeem Israel. . . . You find that Moses and Elijah were alike in every respect. . . . Moses went up to heaven [Exod 19:3]; and Elijah went up to heaven [cf. 2 Kgs 2:1]. . . . Moses: ‘And the cloud covered him six days’ [Exod 24:16]; and Elijah went up in a whirlwind [cf. 2 Kgs 2:1]” (*Pesiqta Rabbati* 4.2). This rabbinic comparison is probably an elaboration of older traditions in which Moses and Elijah were believed to be involved in some way with the last days. This expectation may provide the grounding for the disciples deducing that it was Moses and Elijah who were visiting with Jesus, if in fact they were not explicitly told their identity. (See also comments on Matthew 17:4 and Luke 9:30.)

This is My beloved Son; listen to Him! (9:7): The voice from heaven differs between all three Synoptic accounts. Matthew 17:5 says, “This is My beloved Son. I take delight in Him. Listen to Him!” Luke 9:35 says, “This is My Son, the Chosen One; listen to Him!” Which of these three versions reflects what the heavenly voice actually said? We are not able to recover the exact spoken words from the textual data on hand, and it is apparent that the Evangelists felt their task was to convey the sense of sayings rather than exact quotations. This is made obvious by the fact that much that was said by Jesus and other Gospel figures was likely spoken in Aramaic rather than NT Greek. Hence the Evangelists have already done translation work in giving their accounts. Further, comparison of the Gospel accounts suggests that the inspired Evangelists had the freedom to use the wording that best suited their purposes and contexts.

> 9 As they were coming down from the mountain, He ordered them to tell no one what they had
> seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. 10 They kept this word to themselves,
> discussing what “rising from the dead” meant.
>
> 11 Then they began to question Him, “Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first? ”
>
> 12 “Elijah does come first and restores everything,” He replied. “How then is it written about
> the Son of Man that He must suffer many things and be treated with contempt? 13 But I tell you
> that Elijah really has come, and they did whatever they pleased to him, just as it is written about
> him.”

They kept this word to themselves, discussing what “rising from the dead” meant (9:10): The transfiguration occurred about a week after Peter’s confession at Caesarea Philippi and Jesus’ prediction of his death and

resurrection. Since Jesus' talk about death and resurrection made such a strong impression on Peter at Caesarea Philippi, why is it that Peter, James, and John needed to discuss what rising from the dead meant after Jesus' transfiguration? It seems Mark is portraying the disciples in a way that has them showing no awareness of previous events and discussions.

It is difficult to know what to make of the discussion about "rising from the dead." Were the disciples still unable to grasp that Jesus really did mean to say that he would die and rise again? It seems likely, given Peter's earlier resistance to the idea (8:31–33), plus their despondent reactions to Jesus' execution and their surprise at his resurrection. Or were they instead perplexed about chronology issues, as their question in verse 11 may seem to imply? They wonder when the general resurrection of the dead will take place—before the appearance of Elijah, or after? Either of these two issues may lie behind the disciples' discussion, or perhaps a combination of both.

Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first? (9:11): Why indeed did the scribes say Elijah was to come first? It is commonly thought that the basis is the prophecy in Malachi 4:5–6, which says, "Look, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet *before* the great and awesome Day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children" (emphasis added). Jesus agrees: "Elijah does come first and restores everything" (Mark 9:12a). Here Jesus not only alludes to Malachi, but his language is reminiscent of Sirach's praise of Elijah, who says Elijah is "ready at the appointed time . . . to restore the tribes of Jacob" (Sir 48:10).

Critics say Malachi 4:5–6 was itself generated by a mere legend that was inspired by the fact that Elijah left earth in a fiery chariot. Other than skepticism about the Bible's inspiration, there is no basis for supposing that Malachi 4:5–6 is mere guesswork based on Elijah's ascension in the fiery chariot. Several Jewish sources testify to belief that Elijah will come at the end of the age (e.g., Sirach 48:10). Yahweh declares that someone in the role of Elijah (as Messiah would be in the role of David) would come before a time of judgment and restoration of all things.

I tell you that Elijah really has come (9:13): Do Jesus and John the Baptist contradict one another, and is Jesus endorsing belief in reincarnation? After all, Jesus identifies John with Elijah, but John himself denies strongly that he is Elijah (John 1:21). John the Baptist apparently saw his mission in terms of Isaiah 40:1–5, but not Malachi 4:5–6. Jesus, however, corrected John's perception. The

story is a bit more complex in that in Matthew 11:14 Jesus declares to the crowds, “If you’re willing to accept it [the testimony of the Law and the Prophets to the kingdom], he is the Elijah who is to come.” So there is a sense in which John was Elijah, and there is a sense in which he was not (since the Jews did not accept the message of the kingdom).

John the Baptist was not literally Elijah any more than Jesus was literally David (Jer 30:9; Ezek 34:23–24; 37:24–25), and so there is no support for reincarnation in Jesus’ statement. (See further comments at Matt 17:11 and Luke 9:19.)

14 When they came to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and scribes disputing
with them. 15 All of a sudden, when the whole crowd saw Him, they were amazed and ran to
greet Him. 16 Then He asked them, “What are you arguing with them about? ”
17 Out of the crowd, one man answered Him, “Teacher, I brought my son to You. He has a
spirit that makes him unable to speak. 18 Wherever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he
foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I asked Your disciples to drive it
out, but they couldn’t.”
19 He replied to them, “You unbelieving generation! How long will I be with you? How long
must I put up with you? Bring him to Me.” 20 So they brought him to Him. When the spirit saw
Him, it immediately convulsed the boy. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the
mouth. 21 “How long has this been happening to him? ” Jesus asked his father.
“From childhood,” he said. 22 “And many times it has thrown him into fire or water to destroy
him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.”
23 Then Jesus said to him, “ ‘If You can’? Everything is possible to the one who believes.”
24 Immediately the father of the boy cried out, “I do believe! Help my unbelief.”
25 When Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly coming together, He rebuked the unclean spirit,
saying to it, “You mute and deaf spirit, I command you: come out of him and never enter him
again! ”
26 Then it came out, shrieking and convulsing him violently. The boy became like a corpse, so
that many said, “He’s dead.” 27 But Jesus, taking him by the hand, raised him, and he stood up.
28 After He went into a house, His disciples asked Him privately, “Why couldn’t we drive it
out? ”
29 And He told them, “This kind can come out by nothing but prayer [and fasting].”

When the whole crowd saw Him, they were amazed and ran to greet Him (9:15): Why was the crowd “amazed” when they saw Jesus? Gundry (1993, 487) suggests that the afterglow of the transformation was still in evidence in Jesus’ person. He may be correct, for “amaze” (*ekthambein*) is used in Mark 16:5–6,

where the women see the young man (probably an angel) at the empty tomb, and in Mark 14:33–34, where Jesus is awestruck and troubled at the prospect of death.

It throws him down, and he foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth, and becomes rigid (9:18): Many have commented that the description of the boy's ailment sounds more like epilepsy than demon possession, especially given the fact that the condition had persisted since childhood (v. 21). Does this verse reflect ignorance about medical diagnoses? Certainly it is true that the ancients did not understand the cause of epilepsy, and no doubt many would have attributed the condition to demon possession, but there is no reason to think that epilepsy and demon possession could not coincide, or that demon possession could manifest epilepsy-like conditions. That the boy convulsed as soon as he saw Jesus (v. 20) suggests something more than mere epilepsy is operating here.

Everything is possible to the one who believes (9:23): Some have believed that this statement justifies the name-it-and-claim-it gospel, also known as the prosperity gospel. Importantly, the context is not about acquiring possessions. At issue is the necessity of faith, which makes deliverance possible.

You mute and deaf spirit (9:25): Jesus' words here have given some readers the impression that he was describing the demon itself as being mute and deaf, but of course it heard Jesus command it to leave, and it shrieked as it left. Thus the spirit was not itself mute or deaf, but caused muteness and deafness in its host. Jesus has addressed the demon according to its infliction on the boy.

This kind can come out by nothing but prayer [and fasting] (9:29): Are there different classes of demons, with some being harder to drive out than others, as Jesus' statement here seems to imply? That may or may not be Jesus' meaning. Rather than different classes of demons, possibly some are stronger than others, and thus harder to exorcise.

[and fasting] (9:29): Bruce Metzger points out that because there was such a strong emphasis on fasting in the early church, "it is understandable that [*kai nēsteia*] is a gloss that found its way into most witnesses. Among the witnesses that resisted such an accretion are important representatives of the Alexandrian and the Western types of text" (*TCGNT*, 85). A similar addition was made in 1 Corinthians 7:5.

30 Then they left that place and made their way through Galilee, but He did not want anyone
to know it. 31 For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, “The Son of Man is being
betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill Him, and after He is killed, He will rise three
days later.” 32 But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him.

They will kill Him, and after He is killed, He will rise three days later (9:31): For the second time Jesus formally predicts his passion (on the first prediction, see comments on 8:31). Jesus could hardly speak more plainly about his coming death in 9:31 and previously, and yet we’re told the disciples still didn’t get it and that they were afraid to broach the topic (v. 32). Judging this unrealistic, some have suggested that Mark invented Jesus’ death-and-resurrection predictions and built them into his story sloppily, making the disciples appear daft. But rather than hypothesizing that the Evangelists invented these sayings in order to show that Jesus was in charge of his fate and that death by crucifixion did not indicate a failure of his movement, it is best to see that the disciples were so committed to a different expectation regarding the Messiah that they could not grasp Jesus’ predictions about his crucifixion and resurrection. The only things that could convince them of the truth of Jesus’ radical predictions were the events themselves—his crucifixion and resurrection.

33 Then they came to Capernaum. When He was in the house, He asked them, “What were
you arguing about on the way? ” 34 But they were silent, because on the way they had been
arguing with one another about who was the greatest. 35 Sitting down, He called the Twelve
and said to them, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” 36 Then
He took a child, had him stand among them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them,
37 “Whoever welcomes one little child such as this in My name welcomes Me. And whoever
welcomes Me does not welcome Me, but Him who sent Me.”

They had been arguing with one another about who was the greatest (9:34): The appearance of this unflattering story in the Gospel of Mark testifies to the Evangelist’s commitment to tell the truth, warts and all. If Jesus’ life, ministry, death, and resurrection are all just elements made up or greatly exaggerated by the disciples and Evangelists, why would they portray themselves in such a poor light?

38 John said to Him, “Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in Your name, and we
tried to stop him because he wasn’t following us.”

39 “Don’t stop him,” said Jesus, “because there is no one who will perform a miracle in My
name who can soon afterward speak evil of Me. 40 For whoever is not against us is for us.
41 And whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of My name, since you belong to the
Messiah — I assure you: He will never lose his reward.

We saw someone driving out demons in Your name (9:38): Jesus was not the only exorcist in first-century Palestine. According to Josephus (*Antiquities* 8.45–49), a man named Eleazar followed the incantations of Solomon and could draw out demons through a person’s nostrils, through use of the Baaras root. The church father Origen knew of exorcists who used these incantations (*Commentary on Matthew* 33 [on Matt 26:63]). Jesus responds to those who accuse him of casting out demons with the aid of Beelzebul by asking his critics: “who is it your sons drive them out by?” (Luke 11:19). Later rabbinic legends tell us that the holy man Hanina ben Dosa banned the “queen of the demons” from inhabited places (*b. Pesahim* 112b). In view of this material it comes as no surprise that there were other men casting out demons.

Whoever is not against us is for us (9:40): Does this saying contradict Matthew 12:30 and Luke 11:23, both of which say, “Anyone who is not with Me is against Me”? Which version did Jesus say? The context of the sayings is different, though both deal with exorcism. The point of Matthew 12:30 and Luke 11:23 is that those who criticize and oppose Jesus’ exorcisms are against him. The point in Mark 9:40 is that a man who uses Jesus’ name to fight Satan is on Jesus’ side. Thus Mark does not contradict Matthew and Luke.

42 “But whoever causes the downfall of one of these little ones who believe in Me — it would
be better for him if a heavy millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the
sea. 43 And if your hand causes your downfall, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life
maimed than to have two hands and go to hell — the unquenchable fire, [44 where

Their worm does not die,
and the fire is not quenched.]

45 And if your foot causes your downfall, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than to
have two feet and be thrown into hell — [the unquenchable fire, 46 where

Their worm does not die,
and the fire is not quenched.]

47 And if your eye causes your downfall, gouge it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom
of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, 48 where

Their worm does not die,
and the fire is not quenched.

49 For everyone will be salted with fire. 50 Salt is good, but if the salt should lose its flavor,
how can you make it salty? Have salt among yourselves and be at peace with one another."

If your hand causes your downfall, cut it off (9:43): Is Jesus speaking literally or hyperbolically in verses 43, 45, and 47 when he talks about the measures one should take to avoid hell? Is it really the hand or the eye that causes sins of theft, lust, etc? Jesus' language here is figurative rather than literal. He chooses these gruesome images to underscore the importance of what is at stake. To "cause the downfall" of anyone, including the small and marginalized, and so to cause them to sin (by which could mean to fall away) will result in judgment. Better to commit suicide or to maim oneself than to be guilty of such an offense. This sort of figurative language is also found outside of Jewish and Christian circles. According to Plato, "men are prepared to have their own feet and hands cut off if they feel these possessions to be harmful" (*Symposium* 204E). Similarly, Porphyry (late third century AD) said, "Often people amputate some limb to save their lives; you should be prepared to amputate the whole body to save your soul" (*Letter to Marcella* 34).

***Textual issue* (9:44, 46):** The insertions, marked by brackets, are not original, but were added by a scribe on the basis of the saying's appearance in verse 48, where it is original.

Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched (9:48): What does it mean that "their worm does not die"? If hell is a fire, would worms not die? If "worm" is non-literal, what else about Jesus' description of hell might be non-literal? Is this imagery proof that the descriptions for hell were significantly drawn from the rubbish pile in the Valley of Hinnom? And if so, what implication does this have for the doctrine of eternal punishment? Jesus' description of Gehenna is taken from Isaiah 66:24, which probably gets its imagery from the garbage dump in the Hinnom Valley (2 Kgs 23:10). The association of this Isaianic verse with Gehenna reflects the Aramaic tradition as seen in the Isaiah Targum, which adds, "the wicked shall be judged in Gehenna."

The idea is that hell is like a garbage dump where fires are always burning the trash, which is constantly decaying (hence reference to "their worm"). The use of figurative language should not be taken to imply that hell itself is figurative. Jesus is using vivid imagery to warn about an equally vivid reality. The punishment of the rebellious is constant and perpetual (Oswalt 1998, 693).

Everyone will be salted with fire (9:49): Some have felt that this verse teaches that everyone will experience hell for at least a little while, but Jesus means everyone will be purified with suffering (Mal 3:2–3).

If the salt should lose its flavor, how can you make it salty? (9:50): This saying is figurative and should not be forced to "walk on all fours." Salt here is a reference to friendship, as we see in several sayings in late antiquity: "Homer calls salt 'divine' . . . the most truly godlike seasoning at the dining table is the presence of a friend" (Plutarch *Moralia*, "Table Talk" 7; see also Plutarch, *Moralia*, "On Having Many Friends" 3). Philo speaks of the "salt of hospitality" (*On Dreams* 2.210). The "covenant of salt" in the Old Testament connotes the friendship between God and his people Israel (see Lev 2:13; Num 18:19; 2 Chr 13:5). Therefore, says Jesus to his disciples, you are to have "salt among yourselves and be at peace with one another" (v. 50b; see Ezek 43:24–27, where Israelites are commanded to put salt on their "peace" offerings).

> He set out from there and went to the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Then crowds converged on Him again and, as He usually did, He began teaching them once more. 2 Some Pharisees approached Him to test Him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife? "
>
> 3 He replied to them, "What did Moses command you? "
>
> 4 They said, "Moses permitted us to write divorce papers and send her away."
>
> 5 But Jesus told them, "He wrote this command for you because of the hardness of your hearts.
>
> 6 But from the beginning of creation God **made them male and female**.
>
> 7 **For this reason a man will leave**
> **his father and mother**
> **[and be joined to his wife],**
>
> 8 **and the two will become**
> **one flesh.**
>
> So they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 Therefore what God has joined together, man must not separate."
>
> 10 Now in the house the disciples questioned Him again about this matter. 11 And He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. 12 Also, if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

[and be joined to his wife] (10:7): The majority of manuscripts have this clause, whereas our two earliest manuscripts (א and B) and a few others do not. Either it was added by a scribe to harmonize with Genesis 2:24 and Matthew

19:5, or it was accidentally deleted by a scribe whose eye skipped from one *kai* (“and”) to another. The majority of the textual committee judged the former more probable (*TCGNT*, 88–89).

***Mark’s silence about the exception clause* (10:11):** Matthew 19:9 includes what has become known as the exception clause, for it says anyone who divorces his wife, “except for sexual immorality,” is guilty of adultery. Does Mark’s omission of this clause indicate that Matthew created it? Rather than suspecting this, it is best to assume that Mark chose to emphasize the permanency of marriage rather than entertain the exception. His failure to include the clause is no indication that Jesus did not in fact speak it. (See further comments at Matt 19:9 and Luke 16:18.)

13 Some people were bringing little children to Him so He might touch them, but His disciples
rebuked them. 14 When Jesus saw it, He was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children
come to Me. Don’t stop them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15 I assure you:
Whoever does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” 16 After
taking them in His arms, He laid His hands on them and blessed them.

17 As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before Him, and asked Him,
“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? ”

18 “Why do you call Me good? ” Jesus asked him. “No one is good but One — God. 19 You
know the commandments:

Do not murder;
do not commit adultery;
do not steal;
do not bear false witness;
do not defraud;
honor your father and mother.”

20 He said to Him, “Teacher, I have kept all these from my youth.”

21 Then, looking at him, Jesus loved him and said to him, “You lack one thing: Go, sell all you
have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me.”
22 But he was stunned at this demand, and he went away grieving, because he had many
possessions.

23 Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, “How hard it is for those who have wealth to
enter the kingdom of God! ” 24 But the disciples were astonished at His words. Again Jesus
said to them, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel
to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

26 So they were even more astonished, saying to one another, “Then who can be saved? ”

27 Looking at them, Jesus said, “With men it is impossible, but not with God, because all

things are possible with God."

28 Peter began to tell Him, "Look, we have left everything and followed You."

29 "I assure you," Jesus said, "there is no one who has left house, brothers or sisters, mother or father, children, or fields because of Me and the gospel, 30 who will not receive 100 times more, now at this time — houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions — and eternal life in the age to come. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

Whoever does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it (10:15): Children often accept the teachings of an authority figure without question. Does Jesus here teach that Christians should be naïve and embrace the faith without asking penetrating questions? Jesus' point is that children are entirely under the authority of their parents. However adults wrestle with the summons to the kingdom, they must come to the point where they relinquish their authority and accept fully God's summons to enter the kingdom. Entrance into the kingdom requires coming without attitudes of self-importance or self-empowerment.

Why do Mark and Matthew differ in their accounts? **(10:17–22):** Is Mark's briefer account a closer reflection of the actual event? Is Matthew's additional material something he made up to flesh out the story? The primary difference is that Matthew has added the parable of the landowner in 20:1–16. This material is unique to Matthew, which means that he derived it from written or oral sources. (See further comments at Matt 19:16–30.)

Why do you call Me good? . . . No one is good but One—God (10:18): Does Jesus deny his innate goodness or deity here? Jesus' answer has nonplussed interpreters from the first century to the present, but the context suggests Jesus is talking only about the impossibility of man attaining good standing before God by works, and is not making any sort of claims about his own nature. Jesus' counter-remark is essentially the same in all three Gospels: "No one is good but One—God," which tells us that the three accounts of the exchange mean essentially the same thing (Matt 19:17; Luke 18:19). In saying that only God is good, Jesus makes it impossible for the rich young man, or anyone else for that matter, to be good. Not even by keeping the commandments written in the Law can a human being attain to God's goodness.

Do not defraud (10:19): Does one of the Ten Commandments say "do not defraud"? The commandment not to defraud is a variation of the commandment not to steal and may be intended to substitute for the one on coveting (Evans

2000, 96). Nineham suggests that since the man is rich he probably has no trouble with coveting but may have defrauded the poor (1963, 274).

Go, sell all you have and give to the poor (10:21): Some have taken this to be a requirement for all who wish to follow Christ, but significantly no one else received this answer to the issue of how to find eternal life. See Luke 10:25; Acts 16:30. If, as the apostle Paul taught, salvation is by faith, there are many obstacles to faith that captivate the heart. Apparently, this man's wealth was his obstacle.

Textual variant **(10:24):** Most manuscripts add to the shorter, "How hard it is to enter the kingdom of God" a qualification that fits the context: "How hard it is for those trusting in riches to enter the kingdom of God." Such an addition is typical of scribal expansions. The earliest manuscripts (א B Δ Ψ) do not have the expansion.

The eye of a needle (10:25): Does "eye of a needle" mean a sewing needle? Some interpreters, perhaps trying to alleviate the restrictiveness of this verse, say "needle" refers to a narrow gate called the Needle Gate. The small gate in Jerusalem that guides show gullible tourists does not date before the middle ages. The needle to which Jesus refers is indeed a sewing needle. Similar extreme examples are found in rabbinic literature (*b. Berakhot* 55b: "a palm of gold or an elephant which goes through the eye of a needle").

The difficulty of a rich man entering heaven **(10:25):** Scripture elsewhere depicts worldly riches as one of the ways God blesses the faithful life. Does this verse contradict those? Jesus' teaching here is in line with his teaching in Matthew 6:24 (and Luke 16:13) that "You cannot be slaves of God and of money." Wealth in the OT was often considered a covenant blessing on someone who already had faith.

Jesus and family values **(10:29–30):** Many have felt that Jesus endorses abandoning one's domestic responsibilities in order to devote oneself to ministry. It is suggested that this may even have inspired Augustine to abandon his mistress (the mother of his child) rather than marry her when he became a Christian. But this is a misreading of Jesus' meaning here. He does not mention abandoning one's wife and children. He is speaking only of leaving one's parents and relatives to serve him. Whatever may have motivated Augustine in his choice, Jesus' teaching here does not apply.

32 They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. They were astonished, but those who followed Him were afraid. Taking the Twelve aside again, He began to tell them the things that would happen to Him.

33 “Listen! We are going up to Jerusalem. The Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn Him to death. Then they will hand Him over to the Gentiles, 34 and they will mock Him, spit on Him, flog Him, and kill Him, and He will rise after three days.”

Jesus’ detailed prediction **(10:33–34):** Jesus’ third passion prediction is remarkably detailed, forming an accurate summary of what is portrayed in later events (Mark 14:53–16:8). His condemnation to death as the “Son of Man” at the hands of the High Priest and ruling priests occurs in Mark 14:55–65. Jesus will be handed over to the Gentiles in Mark 15:1. The Gentiles will mock Jesus in Mark 15:20. They will spit upon him in Mark 15:19 (the ruling priests also will spit on him in 14:65), and they will flog him in Mark 15:15. As on the earlier occasions Jesus predicts that “He will rise after three days.”

Given this remarkable similarity, should we suppose that Mark put these details on Jesus’ lips in hindsight? There is no reason to suspect Mark of inventing this passage when much of what Jesus says here can be found in the prophecy of the suffering servant in Isaiah 50:6; 52:13–53:12; and Psalm 22:7, texts that Jesus knew and purposefully alluded to. However, it is reasonable to suggest that the exact wording Mark uses in verses 33–34 could reflect post-Easter awareness of exactly what Jesus underwent.

35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, approached Him and said, “Teacher, we want You to do something for us if we ask You.”

36 “What do you want Me to do for you? ” He asked them.

37 They answered Him, “Allow us to sit at Your right and at Your left in Your glory.”

38 But Jesus said to them, “You don’t know what you’re asking. Are you able to drink the cup I drink or to be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with? ”

39 “We are able,” they told Him.

Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink, and you will be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with. 40 But to sit at My right or left is not Mine to give; instead, it is for those it has been prepared for.” 41 When the other 10 disciples heard this, they began to be indignant with James and John.

42 Jesus called them over and said to them, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles dominate them, and their men of high positions exercise power over them.

> 43 But it must not be like that among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first among you must be a slave to all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life — a ransom for many."

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, approached Him (10:35): Mark presents James and John asking Jesus the question directly, whereas Matthew 20:20–21 has their mother doing it on their behalf. What are we to make of this difference? A possible solution is that James and John put her up to it, which Jesus recognizes since in Matthew 20:22 he says, "You [pl.] don't know what you're [pl.] asking." Jesus addresses James and John rather than their mother, and the other disciples became indignant with the brothers (20:24; see also Mark 10:41). Hence, most likely Matthew's account is closer to the literal event, while Mark has simply cut to the chase and posed the question by the brothers themselves since they were the ultimate source of the question. (See further comments at Matt 20:20–21.)

Allow us to sit at Your right and at Your left in Your glory (10:37): How is it possible that James and John would ask this self-serving question immediately after another of Jesus' death-and-resurrection predictions? Would they not be more apt to ask what would happen to them after he was killed, how they could help him avoid this fate, or if they should just avoid Jerusalem altogether? Once again we see that the disciples' worldview was so diametrically opposed to that of Jesus that even after three predictions, they failed to grasp the sense or significance of what he was saying. The embarrassing light this puts on the disciples is all the more reason to affirm the authenticity of this passage, since it is highly unlikely that the church would have created such an unflattering episode.

We are able (10:39): Here is another unflattering portrayal of the disciples that strongly suggests Mark's accuracy. The disciples do not hesitate to affirm that they have the fortitude to drink Jesus' cup and be baptized by his baptism (both referring to suffering), and yet these same men will abandon Jesus in the garden (Matt 26:56), deny him with oaths (vv. 69–75), and become scarce and presumably despondent when he is crucified.

Those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles dominate them (10:42): If the NT accounts were fictions created by the disciples and other early church figures, you would expect them to portray Jesus as teaching the greatness of the Twelve and placing them in positions of great authority and privilege. But this is

opposite from what we find. Jesus teaches that the style and philosophy of Christian leadership is to be substantially different from those who exercise power in the secular world. They seek power and aspire to lord it over others, but it is not to be this way with his disciples. The great among Jesus' followers are to be servants, and Jesus himself is the model for this servant leadership (v. 45).

> 46 They came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd,
> Bartimaeus (the son of Timaeus), a blind beggar, was sitting by the road. 47 When he heard that
> it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out, "Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me! "
> 48 Many people told him to keep quiet, but he was crying out all the more, "Have mercy on me,
> Son of David! "
> 49 Jesus stopped and said, "Call him."
> So they called the blind man and said to him, "Have courage! Get up; He's calling for you."
> 50 He threw off his coat, jumped up, and came to Jesus.
> 51 Then Jesus answered him, "What do you want Me to do for you? "
> *"Rabbouni,"* the blind man told Him, "I want to see! "
> 52 "Go your way," Jesus told him. "Your faith has healed you." Immediately he could see and
> began to follow Him on the road.

Differences between Matthew and Mark **(10:46–52):** Mark mentions only one blind beggar at Jericho, whereas Matthew mentions two (Matt 20:30). Did Matthew, who used Mark as a source, invent a second? Or did Mark know of a second but choose only to mention the most prominent one? Mark's account does not preclude there being an unmentioned second blind beggar. Possibly Mark himself knew the name of only one of them, or possibly only one of them continued to be a follower of Jesus in the years after this event, which may have inclined Mark to mention only Bartimaeus. Matthew may have shared such a concern, but decided to mention the presence of two because, being interested in the law, he wanted to show that there were two witnesses of the miracle (cf. Matt 18:16) (Kaiser, Davids, Bruce, and Brauch 1996, 371).

They came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho (10:46): Was Jesus leaving Jericho (Mark) or approaching it (Luke 18:35) when he met the blind beggar(s)? Most likely Luke has modified and simplified Mark's somewhat awkward account, which has Jesus arriving and immediately leaving. "The Lukan evangelist makes this change to accommodate Jesus' conversation with Zacchaeus in 19:1–10, which takes place *in* Jericho" (Evans 2000, 131).

According to Calvin, Bartimaeus began trying to attract Jesus' attention on Jesus' way into Jericho and finally succeeded as Jesus was leaving the city (Calvin 1972, 2:278). According to Blomberg, "Probably Luke has just abbreviated Mark, as he does consistently elsewhere, leaving out the reference to the departure from Jericho" (2007, 128–29). Stanley Porter argues that the verb in Luke 18:35 speaks not of motion but of location. The point is only that Jesus was not far from Jericho (1992, 91–104). (See further comments at Matt 20:29–34 and Luke 18:35.)

Son of David! (10:48): The Davidic descent of Jesus is traced in the respective genealogies in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Skeptics have argued that in Jesus' time the Davidic line had become lost and that therefore claims of Jesus' Davidic descent were only symbolic. However, the inscription of an ossuary discovered in 1971 reads, "belonging to the house of David." This find supports the Gospels, as well as other ancients that speak of surviving members of the family of David (see *m. Ta'anit* 4:5; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.12–13). For discussion of the house of David ossuary, see Evans 2003, 103–4.

> When they approached Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany near the Mount of Olives, He
> sent two of His disciples 2 and told them, "Go into the village ahead of you. As soon as you
> enter it, you will find a young donkey tied there, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and
> bring it here. 3 If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this? ' say, 'The Lord needs it and
> will send it back here right away.' "
>
> 4 So they went and found a young donkey outside in the street, tied by a door. They untied it,
> 5 and some of those standing there said to them, "What are you doing, untying the donkey? "
> 6 They answered them just as Jesus had said, so they let them go. 7 Then they brought the
> donkey to Jesus and threw their robes on it, and He sat on it.
>
> 8 Many people spread their robes on the road, and others spread leafy branches cut from the
> fields. 9 Then those who went ahead and those who followed kept shouting:
>
> ***Hosanna!***
> **He who comes in the name**
> **of the Lord is the blessed One!**
> 10 The coming kingdom
> of our father David is blessed!
> ***Hosanna*** in the highest heaven!
>
> 11 And He went into Jerusalem and into the temple complex. After looking around at
> everything, since it was already late, He went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

You will find a young donkey. . . . Untie it and bring it here (11:2): Readers

sometimes suppose that the basis of Jesus' instructions is omniscience rather than advance planning and arrangement. In that case, Jesus has basically sent the disciples to take the donkey without permission. However, Jesus' instructions and events that follow show that arrangements had been made. The Markan Evangelist is not privy to these arrangements (nor is he privy to the arrangements that were made to secure the Upper Room; see comments on 14:12–16). We should not assume that Jesus has demonstrated supernatural knowledge. What is demonstrated is Jesus' mastery of the situation. It may also hint at his assumption of political authority, at least on par with Roman authority.

Mark calls the animal a "colt" (*polos*), which may mean a young horse, not necessarily a young donkey (though that is possible of course). Mark's Roman readers would have had no reason to imagine anything other than a horse. (It is Matthew, who cites Zech 9:9 and speaks of a donkey; see Matt 21:1–7.) The actions of Jesus' followers (v. 8) are reminiscent of honors accorded Israel's past rulers. Throwing garments on the colt and on the road ahead of the procession reminds us of the royal anointing of Jehu and how Israelites placed their garments on the steps before him (2 Kgs 9:12–13). The placing of branches before Jesus recalls the reception that Judas Maccabeus, Israel's great intertestamental leader, received after purifying the temple (2 Macc 10:7). Riding the colt, which may or may not have called to mind Zechariah 9:9, would also have been reminiscent of Solomon, David's son, who rode his father's mule and was proclaimed king (1 Kgs 1:32–48).

***How many donkeys were involved?* (11:2–3):** Mark mentions only one donkey, but according to Matthew 21:2, Jesus told his disciples they would find "a donkey tied there, and a colt with her." Many have supposed that Matthew created the extra donkey in an attempt to portray fulfillment of the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9. But Gundry finds it difficult to believe that Matthew mistakenly thought the synonymous parallelism in Zechariah 9:9 implied two donkeys: "That the male colt had not been ridden (though he may have carried other kinds of burdens) opens the possibility of a historical reminiscence in the mention of two animals. For the sight of an unridden donkey colt accompanying its mother has remained common in Palestine up to modern times" (1982, 409). Hagner agrees: "It is almost impossible to argue that Matthew believed two animals were necessary, rather than the single animal of Mark for the prophecy of Zechariah to be regarded as fulfilled" (1995). It is best to conclude that Matthew correctly recalled the presence of two donkeys, and that Mark chose to mention only one since Jesus rode only one. (See further comments at Matt 21:2 and

Luke 19:30.)

Hosanna! He who comes in the name of the Lord is the blessed One! The coming kingdom of our father David is blessed! Hosanna in the highest heaven! (11:9–10): Does this chorus count as proof that the people were receiving Jesus as Messiah? After all, he was rejected by the people a short time later. Also, was this chorus commonly shouted as pilgrims entered Jerusalem for Passover? The shouts that meet Jesus allude to Psalm 118:26. The coherence with the interpretive tendencies preserved in the Psalms Targum is especially suggestive. In verse 22 it speaks of the rejected *boy* (instead of *stone*, as it is in the Hebrew) who was a son of Jesse and is worthy to be appointed king and ruler. Although initially rejected by the builders (that is, the religious authorities; see CD 4:19; 8:12; Acts 4:11), the builders will later bless David from the temple precincts: "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the word of the Lord" (*Targum Psalm* 118:26). The ruling priests then celebrate David's kingship by sacrificing a lamb (v. 27). How ancient this Aramaic tradition is cannot be determined with certainty, but the association of Psalm 118:26 with the kingdom of David suggests that elements of this interpretive tradition lie behind the words of the enthusiastic crowd. (For more on Psalm 118 in Jesus' thinking, see comments on Mark 12:1–12.) There can be no doubt that the people that make up Jesus' following anticipate the soon appearance of a Davidic kingdom. That Jesus only one week later would be crucified as "king of the Jews" (Mark 15:2, 26) is compelling evidence that a Davidic kingdom was indeed what the crowd hoped would come about under Jesus' leadership.

> 12 The next day when they came out from Bethany, He was hungry. 13 After seeing in the distance a fig tree with leaves, He went to find out if there was anything on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. 14 He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again! " And His disciples heard it.

May no one ever eat fruit from you again! (11:14): Was the fig tree cursed before the temple clearing (Matt 21:18–20) or afterwards (Luke 19:45ff; Mark 11:11–19)? Did the tree wither immediately (Matt) or the next day (Mark 11:20)? The tree was out of season for producing fruit (v. 13). In that light, is Jesus displaying irrational temper here? While it is true that it was not yet the season for fully developed figs, the fact that the tree had leaves (v. 13) set up a reasonable expectation that the tree would have edible buds, which can appear in

the spring. But there is nothing edible on the tree. This prompts Jesus to utter a curse, which the disciples overheard. The barren fig tree and Jesus' reaction to it foreshadow the demonstration in the temple that will take place later in the day. The barren fig tree does not, however, symbolize *Israel*. As the context makes clear, it is the *temple establishment* that is criticized and threatened, not the people of Israel as a whole.

People are sometimes troubled that Jesus performed a destructive miracle (and indeed the evangelist Luke omits the story). But the importance of the warning —for both the disciples as well as the temple authorities—far outweighs the value of a single fig tree. If the temple authorities do not repent and embrace Jesus and his proclamation, that nation faces judgment and the temple itself certain destruction.

What of the different chronology between the Synoptics? According to Blomberg, "In his desire to create a neater literary narrative, Matthew puts both parts of the fig tree story together, creating the illusion that it all took place on one day (Matt 21:18–22). Still, Matthew never says this in so many words, and the language of 'immediate' withering (v. 19) is still appropriate even if it took place over several hours. Trees normally take far longer to decay!" (2009, 368). (See further comments at Matt 21:18–20.)

> 15 They came to Jerusalem, and He went into the temple complex and began to throw out
> those buying and selling in the temple. He overturned the money changers' tables and the chairs
> of those selling doves, 16 and would not permit anyone to carry goods through the temple
> complex.
> 17 Then He began to teach them: "Is it not written, **My house will be called a house of**
> **prayer for all nations**? But you have made it **a den of thieves**! " 18 Then the chief priests and
> the scribes heard it and started looking for a way to destroy Him. For they were afraid of Him,
> because the whole crowd was astonished by His teaching.
> 19 And whenever evening came, they would go out of the city.

Timing of the temple cleansing **(11:15–19):** Was the temple cleansed at the end (the Synoptics) or near the beginning of Jesus' ministry (John 2:13–25)? Or did he do it twice? Whether John 2 recounts the same event at a different point in Jesus' life or a separate cleansing is very difficult to determine. When closely examined, the account in John is extremely similar to the Synoptic accounts. If it is the same event, it is likely John who has rearranged the chronology. (See further comments at Matt 21:12–13 and John 2:13–25.)

Is it not written, My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of thieves! (11:17): Did Jesus encounter policies or activities that he regarded as corrupt, and if so, what were they? From rabbinic tradition we hear of a first-century protest against a policy of overcharging for doves, the poor person's sacrifice (*m. Keritot* 1:7). Josephus tells us of shameful strong-armed actions of the ruling priests against the lower-ranking priests in the years before the great revolt of 66–70 AD, in an effort to steal the tithes (*Antiquities* 20.181; 20.206–207). Josephus relates stories of religious teachers inciting crowds to take action in the temple precincts over questions of purity (*Antiquities* 13.372–373; 17.149–167; *Jewish War* 1. 648–655). These incidents suggest a range of disputes and practices, any one or more of which may have been at issue the year that Jesus visited Jerusalem at Passover time (on the importance of purity, see Chilton 1996).

> 20 Early in the morning, as they were passing by, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots
> up. 21 Then Peter remembered and said to Him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that You cursed is
> withered."
> 22 Jesus replied to them, "Have faith in God. 23 I assure you: If anyone says to this mountain,
> 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he
> says will happen, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you, all the things you pray and ask
> for — believe that you have received them, and you will have them. 25 And whenever you
> stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven
> will also forgive you your wrongdoing. [26 But if you don't forgive, neither will your Father in
> heaven forgive your wrongdoing.]"

Rabbi, look! The fig tree that You cursed is withered (11:21): Though Mark's account of Peter's response makes it somewhat less obvious, Matthew makes clear that the disciples were "amazed" (Matt 21:20) that the fig tree withered so quickly in response to Jesus' curse. Why would they be amazed? By this point in their discipleship they had seen Jesus raise the dead, heal the blind, calm storms, miraculously multiply a few fishes and loaves of bread, and perform many other miracles. It might seem that Mark consistently has the disciples giving responses that betray no prior knowledge of Jesus' miracles (e.g., their amazement here; their inability to guess that Jesus would feed the 4,000 miraculously, etc.).

The fact that the Gospels regularly share the theme of the disciples' wonder at Jesus' miracles suggests the possibility, as unreasonable as it may seem, that they genuinely were amazed each time they saw Jesus perform a miracle. Should one

ever stop being amazed at such things? And it would probably be improper to think that their amazement is about Jesus' ability to do these things. They have accepted by now his ability to perform miracles. The amazement is probably directed toward the unnatural outcomes. Finally, although they had seen Jesus perform many miracles of renewal and blessing, they had never seen him perform a miracle of destruction, symbolizing judgment. So this particular miracle really did stand out as exceptional.

All the things you pray and ask for—believe that you have received them, and you will have them (11:24): We must not think that Jesus is giving believers a blanket promise to give them anything they ask in prayer. "The faith in God (v 22), the relationship to total commitment to God, that attunes one to God and allows God to accomplish God's redemptive mountain-removing tasks through the believer provides confidence that all that the believer asks shall happen (v 24). Rather than the power of positive thinking or the power of thinking positively, Jesus offers the power of God to accomplish God's redemptive will through those whose requests are based on and have grown out of a relationship with God, those who have faith in God" (Evans 2000, 195).

Textual problem **(11:26):** Metzger says that the verse's "absence from early witnesses that represent all text-types makes it highly probable that the words were inserted by copyists in imitation of Matt 6.15" (*TCGNT*, 93).

> 27 They came again to Jerusalem. As He was walking in the temple complex, the chief priests,
> the scribes, and the elders came 28 and asked Him, "By what authority are You doing these
> things? Who gave You this authority to do these things? "
> 29 Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question; then answer Me, and I will tell you by
> what authority I am doing these things. 30 Was John's baptism from heaven or from men?
> Answer Me."
> 31 They began to argue among themselves: "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Then why
> didn't you believe him? ' 32 But if we say, 'From men' " — they were afraid of the crowd,
> because everyone thought that John was a genuine prophet. 33 So they answered Jesus, "We
> don't know."
> And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

By what authority are You doing these things? (11:28): When Jesus returns to the temple precincts he is met by a delegation of ruling priests, scribes, and elders. They demand to know of Jesus "by what authority" he has done what he has done. They are referring, of course, to the actions and words of Jesus in the

temple precincts the previous day (11:15–19). This may lend support to the idea that Jesus cleared the temple only once, and that John moved it to an earlier time in Jesus' ministry, for it is difficult to imagine the religious leaders asking this question now if they had already been through this with Jesus a few years earlier.

Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things (11:33): Is Jesus being flippant or evasive here? Why not just come straight out and say his authority is from God? The reader of Mark knows, of course, that Jesus' authority is from God. As the human being (i.e., "Son of Man") of Daniel 7, Jesus has received royal authority from God (see commentary on Mark 2:10, 28). Possessed of this royal authority, he may rightly be hailed "Son of David" (10:47, 48), he may enter Jerusalem as a royal figure amidst shouts for deliverance and the coming kingdom of David (11:9–10), and he may review the activities of the temple precincts (11:11, 15–19; see 2 Kgs 12:1–16, where temple reforms are initiated by King Josiah). By his counter-question Jesus basically declared himself to be one with John the Baptist. Jesus characteristically made people decide for themselves who he was based on his works.

Then He began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it,
dug out a pit for a winepress, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenant farmers and
went away. 2 At harvest time he sent a slave to the farmers to collect some of the fruit of the
vineyard from the farmers. 3 But they took him, beat him, and sent him away empty-handed.
4 Again he sent another slave to them, and they hit him on the head and treated him shamefully.
5 Then he sent another, and they killed that one. He also sent many others; they beat some and
they killed some.
6 "He still had one to send, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, 'They will
respect my son.'
7 "But those tenant farmers said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and
the inheritance will be ours! ' 8 So they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the
vineyard.
9 "Therefore, what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the farmers
and give the vineyard to others. 10 Haven't you read this Scripture:

The stone that
the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.
11 **This came from the Lord**
and is wonderful in our eyes? "

12 Because they knew He had said this parable against them, they were looking for a way to arrest Him, but they were afraid of the crowd. So they left Him and went away.

They knew He had said this parable against them (12:12): The Evangelist comments that the ruling priests recognized that the parable had been directed against them. How did they know this? Would they have identified themselves, the affluent and powerful, as the tenant farmers? Was not Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard (Isa 5:1–7) in its original Hebrew form directed against the "men of Judah" and the "residents of Jerusalem"? Our questions are again answered by the Aramaic version. The Isaiah Targum interprets the tower as the sanctuary and the wine vat as the altar. When God judges his vineyard, he will destroy these items (see *Targum Isaiah* 5:1–7; in 4Q500 Isaiah 5 appears to be understood as a reference to the temple). This narrowing of the focus of judgment from the people in general to the temple establishment coheres with Jesus' parable and its understanding of Isaiah 5. The Isaiah Targum in this instance probably retains ancient interpretive tradition that developed in the synagogue, with which Jesus evidently was acquainted (see Chilton 1984, 111–14).

The stone that the builders rejected (12:10): There is a notable difference between the Hebrew and Greek texts and the Psalms Targum at Psalm 118:22–23. Jesus has just told a parable about the murder of a "beloved son" (v. 6), then cites the psalm. The Psalms Targum paraphrases Psalm 118:22 thus: "The boy which the builders abandoned was among the sons of Jesse and he is worthy to be appointed king and ruler." Mark supplies us with a verbatim quotation of the Greek version of Psalm 118:22–23, which speaks of the "stone" that the builders rejected. One suspects that the interpretive tradition underlying the Aramaic paraphrase was known to Jesus and was the reason why he appealed to this passage directly after the parable about the murdered son. The Aramaic's substitution of "boy" for "stone" probably comes from the similar sounding Hebrew words *haeben* ("the stone") and *habben* ("the son"). This wordplay seems to lie behind a detail related by Josephus who says that when a Roman siege stone was seen hurling toward the city, the lookouts would yell, "The son comes!" (*Jewish War* 5.272). Although the Greek words *lithos* ("stone") and *huios* ("son") bear no resemblance, the underlying Hebrew words do. The same wordplay is probably reflected in the Baptist's assertion that "God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham" (Matt 3:9 = Luke 3:8). There was probably wordplay originally, but in the Hebrew or Aramaic, not between the Greek words *lithoi* ("stones") and *tekna* ("children").

18 Some Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him and questioned Him:
19 “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that **if a man’s brother dies**, leaves his wife behind, and **leaves no child, his brother should take the wife and produce offspring for his brother.**
20 There were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and dying, left no offspring. 21 The second also took her, and he died, leaving no offspring. And the third likewise. 22 So the seven left no offspring. Last of all, the woman died too. 23 In the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be, since the seven had married her? ”
24 Jesus told them, “Are you not deceived because you don’t know the Scriptures or the power of God? 25 For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels in heaven. 26 Now concerning the dead being raised — haven’t you read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the burning bush, how God spoke to him: **I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob**? 27 He is not God of the dead but of the living. You are badly deceived.”

Are you not deceived because you don’t know the Scriptures or the power of God? (12:24): Jesus’ rebuke of the Sadducees asserts their unfamiliarity with the OT and their failure to comprehend the power of God. But how would proper familiarity with the OT and proper comprehension of God’s power necessitate the conclusion that “when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels in heaven” (v. 25)? OT testimony on bodily resurrection is rare, but even where present, it does not clearly necessitate the conclusion that resurrected bodies “neither marry nor are given in marriage.” Further, divine omnipotence does not logically entail that God will bodily resurrect humans or that they will not practice marriage in the resurrection. So in what way did the Sadducees doubt God’s power?

Jesus offers no Scriptural support for his point that resurrection life does not involve the continuation of conditions such as marriage, so it is difficult to know what he was thinking of here. He will quote Exodus 3:6 shortly, but that seems to have no bearing on the question of marriage in the resurrection. It is perhaps best to say that we are unsure of the reasoning behind Jesus’ reply here, though his assertion that they do not know the Scriptures may be a reference to the fact that the Sadducees did not accept as authoritative any of the OT books outside of the Pentateuch.

Now concerning the dead being raised (12:26): In answer to the Sadducees’ disbelief in resurrection (their whole point in posing the question in vv. 20–23 was to try to prove the absurdity of belief in resurrection), Jesus quotes Exodus 3:6, where God identifies himself to Moses at the burning bush by saying: “I am

the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." Some believe Jesus' handling of the Exodus text reflects a rhetorical tactic rather than historical-grammatical exegesis. Would Moses have understood God's statement to mean that the patriarchs were still alive and would someday be resurrected, or would he have taken it merely as meaning that the God who was speaking to him was the same God as his forefathers had worshiped? Surely the only question in Moses' mind as he stood before the bush was, "Who is speaking to me?" Thus God identified himself. It is often said that the present tense of God's statement ("I am" rather than "I was") proves that Jesus has identified the actual meaning of the text, but if God's purpose was to identify himself to Moses, does it make sense that he would refer to himself as "I was" rather than "I am"? Seemingly God's "I am" statement in Exodus 3:6 could mean nothing more than, "I am the same God your fathers worshiped." The God of Moses' fathers persists through time. That seems to be the point God has made. And if the grammar of Exodus 3:6 at best "allows" a resurrection-reading of Exodus 3:6, is it fair that Jesus portrays the Sadducees as being ignorant of Scripture?

Clearly Jesus considers that God's statement at the burning bush was sufficient to establish the resurrection. Apparently Jesus would have us infer from Exodus 3:6 that the patriarchs still live even though their bodies are dead, and perhaps this inference is made stronger or even inescapable in light of other OT testimony supporting resurrection (e.g., Dan 12:2). Jesus' appeal to a passage taken from one of the books of the Law is strategic, for only these books were recognized by the Sadducees as fully inspired and authoritative. To have appealed to Daniel 12, a passage from a book probably not recognized by the Sadducees, would have been ineffectual. That the Sadducees disregard a significant portion of OT Scripture certainly helps account for some of their ignorance of Scripture.

Jesus says God "is not God of the dead but of the living" (v. 27). That God is the God of the living is implied throughout Scripture. Many times in the creation account God creates and "living" things appear (see Gen 1:20, 21, 24, 28). God breathes into Adam and he becomes a "living" being (Gen 2:7). God is himself frequently referred to as the "living God" (Deut 5:26; Josh 3:10; 1 Sam 17:26, 36; Ps 42:2; Jer 10:10; 23:36; Dan 6:20, 26; Hos 1:10). From this close association of God and life one may infer that a similar association exists between God and the patriarchs, whose names so frequently serve to identify God (for "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel," see Exod 3:15, 16; 4:5; 1 Kgs 18:36; 1 Chr 29:18; 30:6; for "God of Abraham" and "Isaac," see Gen

28:13; 31:42, 53; for “God of Abraham,” see Gen 26:24; Ps 47:9).

Jesus’ reply to the Sadducees therefore is not simply clever, based on the present tense of Exodus 3:6 (i.e., “I *am* the God of . . .”), which could imply that the patriarchs are still alive (which is probably the idea underlying 4 Macc 7:19; see Luke 20:38, which alludes to this passage). Jesus has appealed to the life-giving and life-sustaining character of God. As the “living God” he would not identify himself as a God of the dead. For examples of exegetical ingenuity, in which many Scriptures are said to confirm the hope of resurrection, see *Sifre Deuteronomy* §306 (on Deut 32:1–3), where Rabbi Simai says: “There is no scriptural lesson lacking a reference to the resurrection.”

28 One of the scribes approached. When he heard them debating and saw that Jesus answered
them well, he asked Him, “Which command is the most important of all? ”
29 “This is the most important,” Jesus answered:

Listen, Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is One. 30 **Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.**

Did Jesus quote the Septuagint? **(12:29–30):** Jesus’ answer seems to depend in part on the LXX rendering of Deuteronomy 6:5. Why would Jesus or any faithful Jew cite the LXX over the Hebrew, given the fact that the Hebrew was the inspired text and that the LXX may seem to take occasional liberties when rendering the Hebrew original? Over half the citations of the OT in the NT are taken from the LXX, since that was the form of the Scriptures most Christians were familiar with at that time. It was translated by and for Jews during the last two centuries before Christ. Greek was widely spoken in Palestine during the time of Jesus, even among Jews. Besides, the Dead Sea Scrolls have shown us that there were Hebrew texts in the first century that were closer to the Septuagint than to the Masoretic Text, such suggests the LXX should be seen as a reliable translation of the Hebrew original. Also, there is almost no difference between the Hebrew and the Septuagint of Deuteronomy 6:4–5. But Jesus’ quotations and allusions to the OT are sometimes from what would become the Masoretic text (e.g., Mark 4:29), sometimes from the Hebrew underlying the Septuagint or from the Septuagint itself (e.g., 7:6–7), and sometimes from the Aramaic Targums (e.g., 4:12).

35 So Jesus asked this question as He taught in the temple complex, “How can the scribes say
that the Messiah is the Son of David? 36 David himself says by the Holy Spirit:

The Lord declared to my Lord,
“Sit at My right hand
until I put Your enemies under Your feet.’

37 David himself calls Him ‘Lord’; how then can the Messiah be his Son? ” And the large
crowd was listening to Him with delight.

Jesus’ handling of Psalm 110:1 and his relation to David **(12:35–37):** Is Jesus doing historical-grammatical exegesis of Psalm 110:1? In quoting the psalm, Jesus is construing the second use of “Lord” as if it were a reference to divinity. In the original context, the second use of “Lord” is *adon* rather than YHWH. Does this indicate that the “Lord” in view is not divine, a lord rather than the Lord? While *adon* typically has a human as its reference, there are cases where the divine is in view. Malachi 3:1 is an example, “‘See, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. Then the Lord [*adon*] you seek will suddenly come to His temple, the Messenger of the covenant you desire—see, He is coming,’ says the LORD of Hosts.”

There is some plausibility to the view that Psalm 110 is King David writing a coronation psalm for his son Solomon. In this scenario David was basically calling his newly enthroned son “sir,” showing respect for his office. But in light of Jesus’ interpretation of the text, this view should be set aside.

If the Messiah is to be more than David’s son, what then does Jesus expect him to be? Jesus evidently defined his messiahship in terms of the vision of Daniel 7. Jesus saw himself as that human being (or “son of man” in Aramaic idiom) who received from God authority and kingdom (Dan 7:13–14) and who would sit on one of the thrones set up in heaven (note the plural “thrones” in Dan 7:9), at God’s “right hand” (Ps 110:1). His authority has eclipsed that conferred upon David his ancestor, so that while it may be genetically true that Jesus is the “Son of David” (as hailed by blind Bartimaeus in Mark 10:47–48, and assumed by Paul in Rom 1:3), it is not true to think that the epithet “son of David” implies subordination or inferiority in any sense. The view was current at the time that the Messiah would be the son of David, but that he would be a man, not God. If we grant the assumption of Jesus and his audience that the psalm is by David (from the opening word *lĕdāvid*), then David clearly calls God’s vice regent “my Lord” (Adoni). Thus the Messiah is of greater stature than David the king. In view of other things Jesus says about himself, we may assume that we are to conclude that the Messiah is superhuman. (See further comments at Matt 22:44.)

As He was going out of the temple complex, one of His disciples said to Him, “Teacher, look! What massive stones! What impressive buildings! ”

2 Jesus said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here on another that will not be thrown down! ”

Not one stone will be left here on another that will not be thrown down! (13:2): Critics suggest this is a “prophecy after the fact” put onto Jesus’ lips by Mark sometime after the destruction of the temple in AD 70. Also, it is suggested that this prophecy is falsified by the fact that structures like the Wailing Wall have survived largely intact even unto this day. Impressed with the grandeur of the temple precincts, the disciples pointed out to Jesus in verse 1 the grandeur of the temple complex. Construction on the Temple Mount had been under way for half a century (“forty-six years” according to John 2:20) and would continue until AD 64. The disciples may have assumed that they would someday rule over Israel from some of these very buildings, as the promise in Matt 19:28 and Luke 22:28–30 could have led them to believe.

Jesus dashes their hopes with his prophecy of the Temple Mount’s complete destruction. Against the skeptical view that this prophecy is an example of *vaticinium ex eventu* (“prophecy from the event”), there are compelling arguments in favor of the authenticity of this prophecy. For instance, there is the prophecy’s difficult fit with actual events. True, the temple complex was eventually razed (and there are indications that it took some time; *Jewish War* 6.413: “And when, at a later period, he demolished the rest of the city and razed the walls . . .”; cf. *Jewish War* 7.1 “Caesar ordered the whole city and the Temple to be razed to the ground”; *Jewish War* 7.114–115: months later Titus revisits Jerusalem, which was still being dug by soldiers looking for buried wealth), but *fire* was the detail that was greatly emphasized (see Josephus, *Jewish War* 6.165–168, 177–185, 190–192, 228–235, 250–270, 271–284, 316, 346, 353–355, 407, 434; esp. 275: “the Temple Mount was boiling over from its base, being everywhere one mass of flame”). Jesus’ prediction in verse 2 says nothing of fire.

Further, the destruction of the city of Jerusalem itself was greatly emphasized in Josephus and other writers looking back, yet Jesus says nothing about that in Mark 13. Indeed, the details themselves in the discourse—the warnings about false messiahs, wars and rumors of war, the desolating abomination, the warning to flee to the mountains—do not fit neatly the events that transpired between 30 and 70 (see Gundry 1993, 754–56), though there are certainly significant

parallels. And finally, if the prophecies of Mark 13 were composed after the summer destruction of the temple, one wonders why the Evangelist would have Jesus urge his disciples to pray that these events not take place in *winter* (Mark 13:18). For these reasons and others a number of scholars defend Mark 13:2 as genuine prophecy (e.g., see Taylor 1935, 73; Lohmeyer 1951, 268; Hengel 1985, 16 [“in no way presupposes the catastrophe of 70”]; Evans 1992, 89–147).

> 3 While He was sitting on the Mount of Olives across from the temple complex, Peter, James,
> John, and Andrew asked Him privately, 4 “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what
> will be the sign when all these things are about to take place? ”
> 5 Then Jesus began by telling them: “Watch out that no one deceives you. 6 Many will come
> in My name, saying, ‘I am He,’ and they will deceive many. 7 When you hear of wars and
> rumors of wars, don’t be alarmed; these things must take place, but the end is not yet. 8 For
> nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in
> various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.
> 9 “But you, be on your guard! They will hand you over to sanhedrins, and you will be flogged
> in the synagogues. You will stand before governors and kings because of Me, as a witness to
> them. 10 And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations. 11 So when they arrest you
> and hand you over, don’t worry beforehand what you will say. On the contrary, whatever is
> given to you in that hour — say it. For it isn’t you speaking, but the Holy Spirit. 12 Then
> brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rise up against parents
> and put them to death. 13 And you will be hated by everyone because of My name. But the one
> who endures to the end will be delivered.

Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately (13:3): Do the other Gospels depict this as a private conversation between Jesus and the inner circle (Peter, James, John, and Andrew)? If so, do we have a contradiction? Luke 21:7 has the general statement, “they asked Him.” Matthew 24:3 has the slightly less general, “the disciples approached Him privately and said.” In both cases it appears that Jesus delivered his discourse to the whole company of disciples. It is difficult to imagine Jesus giving all these warnings to only the four who “asked Him privately” in Mark 13:3. What were the other disciples doing all this time? It is probably best to conclude that the question did come to Jesus privately from the four disciples, but that Jesus chose to deliver his message to the whole group.

Jesus’ prediction of persecution for his followers **(13:9–13):** Jesus’ warning about coming persecutions (vv. 9–13) fits the documented experiences of the early church so well that critics conclude that Mark has put these details into

Jesus' discourse after the fact. In Acts, the disciples are on occasion delivered up to the Jewish Council (or *synhedrion*) for intimidation (Acts 4:1–21; 5:17–21) and on other occasions were beaten in synagogues and elsewhere (5:40; 16:22, 37; 21:32; 22:19). The apostles also stand before governors (23:24, 33; 25:6–12) and kings (25:23–26:32) and are even sent to Caesar (25:12, 21; 26:32). While it may be the case that Mark's vantage point in the early church helps inform how he wrote this account, there is no reason to doubt that he has faithfully conveyed Jesus' warning, short of skepticism regarding Jesus' ability to foreknow the future. Besides, even a merely human leader would likely foresee with considerable accuracy the kinds of hardships his followers would meet in a situation where both religious and governmental leaders opposed his movement.

> 24 "But in those days, after that tribulation:
>
> The sun will be darkened,
> and the moon will not shed its light;
> 25 the stars will be falling from the sky,
> and the celestial powers will be shaken.
>
> 26 Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 He will send out the angels and gather His elect from the four winds, from the end of the earth to the end of the sky.

***The cosmic disturbances "after that tribulation"* (13:24–25):** Jesus says the "sun will be darkened, and the moon will not shed its light; the stars will be falling from the sky, and the celestial powers will be shaken" (vv. 24–25). He has paraphrased a portion of Isaiah 13:10, which was an oracle about the destruction of Babylon. The statement reflects scientific inaccuracies if read literally, but apocalyptic language is not often meant to be taken literally. Thus we should not take talk of stars falling from the sky and the moon shedding light as evidence of error. Jesus' language here, though apocalyptic, generally fits with what the ancients held to be literally true about cosmology (the structure and function of the heavenly bodies, in this case). The ancients commonly held that the sun, moon, and stars were small bodies affixed in a dome-like structure overhead, and that these could fall to earth (Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*), but Jesus is not endorsing the science of his day in this verse. A similar situation is present in verse 27, where Jesus says his angels will gather the elect "from the end of the earth to the end of the sky." This does not mean that Jesus teaches flat earth. He simply means "the farthest reaches of earth and heaven" (France 2002,

537).

> 28 “Learn this parable from the fig tree: As soon as its branch becomes tender and sprouts
> leaves, you know that summer is near. 29 In the same way, when you see these things
> happening, know that He is near — at the door! 30 I assure you: This generation will certainly
> not pass away until all these things take place. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My
> words will never pass away.
> 32 “Now concerning that day or hour no one knows — neither the angels in heaven nor the
> Son — except the Father.

This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things take place (13:30): This saying is consistent with the similar prediction in 9:1 (“There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God come in power”). It is apparent that Jesus’ generation expected to see the fulfillment of the things prophesied in the discourse. And indeed the predictions were partially fulfilled in the events of the first century. That generation saw the destruction of the temple and some of the signs, or at least events that paralleled the signs that will portend the second coming of the Son of Man. But Jesus’ generation did not see the second coming, nor did it see the consummation of the kingdom of God. Jesus spoke of the generation of the last time, not his disciples’ generation. Since “this generation” in Mark refers elsewhere to those who are rebellious and blind (8:12, 38; cf. Matt 11:16; 12:41, 42, 45), it could be used in that sense here, yielding the sense that wickedness will continue until the coming of the Son of Man. Another view is that “this generation” refers to the generation that sees the “abomination that causes desolation.” One further view is that “all these things” refers only to the “signs” of the end rather than to the end itself (Bock 2005, 523).

No one knows—neither the angels in heaven nor the Son—except the Father (13:32): Jesus’ statement is surprising, which suggests its authenticity. Certainly it is hard to imagine Mark or the early church creating such a saying since it risks conflicting with expectations about Jesus identity as the divine Son of Man. The idea that God the Father alone holds some knowledge may be paralleled in *4 Ezra* 4:44–52, where Ezra asks if he will be alive in the last days and the angel tells him, “I do not know.” An interesting parallel about knowledge of the end is found in *2 Baruch* 21:8, which in a prayer to God says: “You alone know the end of times before it has arrived.” We should not think Jesus’ statement here

indicates that he is not divine. His statement pertains to limits in knowledge he willingly experienced during his earthly life. Just as he was limited in space and time (he could not be in more than one place at a time), he was also limited in knowledge. (See further comments at Matt 24:36.)

> 3 While He was in Bethany at the house of Simon who had a serious skin disease, as He was
> reclining at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of pure and expensive fragrant oil of
> nard. She broke the jar and poured it on His head. 4 But some were expressing indignation to
> one another: "Why has this fragrant oil been wasted? 5 For this oil might have been sold for
> more than 300 denarii and given to the poor." And they began to scold her.
> 6 Then Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why are you bothering her? She has done a noble thing
> for Me. 7 You always have the poor with you, and you can do what is good for them whenever
> you want, but you do not always have Me. 8 She has done what she could; she has anointed My
> body in advance for burial. 9 I assure you: Wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole
> world, what this woman has done will also be told in memory of her."

***Parallel accounts* (14:3–9):** Though there are notable similarities between Mark 14:3–9 and Luke 7:36–50, there are clear differences as well, marking them as different incidents. For instance, the incident in Luke took place in the home of a Pharisee. That is a sharp difference from Mark, where it occurs in the home of Simon, a man with a skin disease. Mark's incident is genuinely parallel to the one in John 12:1–8. John places the event prior to the triumphal entry, whereas Mark places it afterwards. Mark may have moved the event to Jesus' final week because of its association with Judas's betrayal (Mark 14:10–11; John 12:4), which in some sense may have been set in motion by Jesus' answer to those (chiefly Judas?) who complained about the extravagance of the woman's action here. (See further comments at Matt 26:6–13 and John 12:1–8.)

Simon who had a serious skin disease (14:3): Would Simon be allowed to live in the city given his condition? Colonies were founded for the confinement of those with skin diseases. Bethany may have had a place for lepers (or those with a "serious skin disease"), as is suggested by 11QTemple[a] 46:16–18. Even so, Simon probably no longer had leprosy by the time of this occasion since he hosted a meal at his home. Jesus may have healed him.

You always have the poor with you (14:7): Some critics have felt that Jesus disparages the poor in this verse, showing more concern for his own honor. Jesus is alluding to Deuteronomy 15:11 and simply stating a fact. He does not mean

that the poor are unimportant and can be attended to when it is convenient. He means that worshiping him was the priority since he would soon be gone.

She has anointed My body in advance for burial (14:8): Jesus interprets the woman's action as an anointing for burial. It is hard to imagine that the woman viewed her actions in this light. If it was intended to be more than a festive anointing, in honor of Jesus, it was probably a messianic anointing. This perspective coheres with the context of Mark's narrative. Only days before, Jesus entered the city mounted on a colt, to shouts of "The coming kingdom of our father David is blessed!" (11:10). But Jesus has already foretold his death (8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34) and later in the evening will pray about it (14:36). In this light the people of the Roman world would have seen the anointing as an omen. Jesus tells his disciples (the "you" in v. 9 is plural) that wherever the gospel is proclaimed, what the woman did will be told in memory of her. This remarkable prophecy continues to be fulfilled down to our very day.

> 10 Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to hand Him over to them.
> 11 And when they heard this, they were glad and promised to give him silver. So he started looking for a good opportunity to betray Him.

Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve (14:10): It has been fashionable from time to time to suggest that Judas Iscariot was only trying to help Jesus in some way, perhaps to "force his hand," that is, force him to act against the Romans and the priestly rulers in Jerusalem. There is no evidence for these theories. Had the motives of Judas been noble, one would have expected a more sympathetic portrait of him in the Gospels and Acts. After all, Peter denied even knowing Jesus (Matt 26:73–75), which positions him to be vilified, and yet because of his repentance he was fully restored in the church community and became its leader. We would expect a somewhat similar treatment of Judas if, upon reflection in the early church, it came to light that he had good motives for his action.

> 12 On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrifice the Passover lamb, His disciples asked Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare the Passover so You may eat it? "
> 13 So He sent two of His disciples and told them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a water jug will meet you. Follow him. 14 Wherever he enters, tell the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is the guest room for Me to eat the Passover with My disciples? " ' 15 He

will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make the preparations for us there.”
16 So the disciples went out, entered the city, and found it just as He had told them, and they prepared the Passover.
17 When evening came, He arrived with the Twelve. 18 While they were reclining and eating, Jesus said, “I assure you: One of you will betray Me — one who is eating with Me! ”
19 They began to be distressed and to say to Him one by one, “Surely not I? ”
20 He said to them, “It is one of the Twelve — the one who is dipping bread with Me in the bowl. 21 For the Son of Man will go just as it is written about Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.”

Was the Last Supper the Passover meal? **(14:12–16):** As it turns out, the last meal that Jesus eats with his disciples may not have been the Passover meal (or Seder), for according to the Gospel of John, the Passover meal was eaten the evening following Jesus’ crucifixion (see John 18:28; 19:31, 42). Nevertheless, even if the Last Supper was not the Passover meal that Jesus had hoped to observe with his disciples, it is probable that the Passover would very much have been in the minds of Jesus and his disciples. (See further comments at Luke 22:14–23.)

One of you will betray Me (14:18): Mark and Matthew 26:21 have Jesus predict Judas’ betrayal during the supper, whereas Luke 22:20ff place the prediction after the supper. Which is it? Is this a contradiction? Luke may have edited the account of the Last Supper so that the institution of the new covenant comes first, giving the impression that Jesus did not announce the betrayal until after the supper was over. This results in an after-supper discourse on Judas’s betrayal, the disciples’ argument over who is the greatest, and Peter’s denial of Christ.

As it is written about Him (14:21): Jesus’ vague reference to what is written in Scripture of the Son of Man supports the authenticity of the utterance (see also 14:49). Early Christian scriptural apologetic supplied proof texts; none is provided here. Jesus may have had in mind Psalm 41:9, which is probably alluded to earlier in verse 18; and Isaiah 53, which is echoed here and there in the Gospels (see comments on Mark 10:45). It is also possible, given Jesus’ interest in Daniel, that Daniel 9:26 (“the Messiah will be cut off”) was in view.

If Jesus had known all along what Judas would do, that raises the question of whether prescience is the same as foreordination. That it could be is suggested by Acts 2:23, where Peter declared on the day of Pentecost that Jesus had been “delivered up according to God’s determined plan and foreknowledge,” and then

in that same verse indicated that at least the Jewish leaders were responsible for their action by saying, “You used lawless people to nail Him to a cross and kill Him.” The mechanism by which responsibility operates in such a situation is unknown, but the biblical teaching is that divine sovereignty and human responsibility are mutually true (e.g., Gen 45:5; Phil 2:12).

> 22 As they were eating, He took bread, blessed and broke it, gave it to them, and said, “Take it;
> this is My body.”
> 23 Then He took a cup, and after giving thanks, He gave it to them, and so they all drank from
> it. 24 He said to them, “This is My blood that establishes the covenant; it is shed for many. 25 I
> assure you: I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it in a new
> way in the kingdom of God.”

He took bread, blessed and broke it (14:22): During the meal Jesus takes bread (*artos*, but perhaps we should assume that this bread is *azumos*, i.e., unleavened bread) and says, “Take it; this is My body.” Given the context, in which Jesus has predicted his death and interpreted the woman’s kindness as preparation for burial (14:3–9), one should agree with Gundry (1993, 831) that *soma* (body) here is better translated corpse, i.e., “This is my corpse.” This metaphor coheres with Passover diction, as seen in *m. Pesahim* 10:3: “And in the holy city they used to bring before him the body [*gûph*] of the Passover offering” (see LXX 1 Chr 10:12, where *soma* translates *gûph*). Jesus offers his own body, or corpse, as the Passover offering. This tradition is witnessed in 1 Corinthians 5:7 and intensified in John 19:32–36, where even in the manner of his death (e.g., bloody death on Passover, legs not broken; see Exod 12:46) Jesus is the Passover lamb (see also John 1:29, 36: “the lamb of God”).

This is My body. . . . This is My blood (14:22–24): Jesus’ language here is striking and evokes strong emotion, but did he really mean for his followers to believe they are literally eating his flesh and blood when they partake of the supper? Some Christian traditions have believed so, but Protestants believe the language is metaphorical, as when we say “the Lord is my Shepherd” (or if Thomas Edison should say, “This invention is my key to success”). Jesus himself often spoke this way, as when he described himself as “the true vine” (John 15:1), and “I am the door of the sheep” (John 10:7). The supper is to be a symbolic reminder of the Lord’s sacrifice on our behalf.

26 After singing psalms, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

27 Then Jesus said to them, “All of you will run away, because it is written:

I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep will be scattered.

28 But after I have been resurrected, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.”

29 Peter told Him, “Even if everyone runs away, I will certainly not! ”

30 “I assure you,” Jesus said to him, “today, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times! ”

31 But he kept insisting, “If I have to die with You, I will never deny You! ” And they all said the same thing.

Timing of Jesus’ prediction of Peter’s denial **(14:27–31):** Mark and Matthew place the prediction of Peter’s denial on the journey to the garden, whereas Luke places it during the Last Supper. John splits the predictions between the two (Peter’s denial predicted at the supper; the scattering of the disciples on the way to the garden). Do these represent disagreements or contradictions? The best solution notes that Luke has collected several of Jesus’ sayings and placed them after the supper (Luke 22:20) and before the trip to the Mount of Olives (22:39), giving the impression that this is when they occurred. But this is not necessarily the case, since no explicit chronological markers are given. Part of the sayings may have occurred during the supper, and part on the way to the Mount of Olives or after arriving there. (See further comments at Matt 26:34.)

All of you will run away (14:27): After predicting that his disciples will desert him, Jesus quotes from Zechariah 13:7, saying, “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.” Zechariah refers to God’s judgment on Israel. By citing it, Jesus implies that divine judgment has fallen on him, which is consistent with the words of Institution (i.e., “This is My blood that establishes the covenant; it is shed for many,” v. 24). In being struck down, Jesus will no longer be able to protect his flock; the sheep will be scattered.

The citation of part of the oracle from Zechariah is important, for as a whole (see Zech 13:7–9), the oracle coheres with the context in which Jesus now finds himself. Jerusalem’s rejection of Jesus has aroused God’s wrath. The shepherd will be struck down, the sheep will be scattered, and the entire land will be judged. Only a remnant will be spared. When they call on the name of the Lord, they will be answered. The oracle summarizes the principal points of the eschatological discourse in Mark 13.

After I have been resurrected, I will go ahead of you to Galilee (14:28):

Jesus' word about going ahead of the disciples to Galilee after his resurrection marks an interesting difference between Matthew and Mark on the one hand, both of whom recount Jesus saying this, and Luke, who does not recount this saying, and who does not narrate any post-resurrection appearances of Jesus in Galilee. Furthermore, whereas Matthew has the angel at the tomb say to the women, "He is going ahead of you to Galilee," and then Jesus himself tell them, "tell My brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see Me there" (Matt 28:7,10), and whereas Mark has a "young man" tell the women while inside the tomb, "He is going ahead of you to Galilee," Luke has two angels in the tomb say to the women, "Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee" (Luke 24:6). That Luke then proceeds to recount post-resurrection appearances only in Jerusalem and nearby Emmaus, and none in Galilee, suggests that Luke has departed from Mark (unlike Matthew) and chosen to retain his focus on Jerusalem, which was his habit (Luke mentions Jerusalem by name 29 times; Matthew 12 times; Mark 11 times; and John 13 times).

Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times! (14:30): This event has been criticized as implausible due to a supposed prohibition against keeping chickens within Jerusalem. Rabbinic sources, dating after the first century, do indicate that this was disallowed, but it is not clear that this prohibition dated back to Jesus' day. Also, some have suggested that if the prohibition was in force, one could still hear from within Jerusalem a rooster crowing from the nearby hills outside the city. The call of a rooster carries far in the still of morning. Questions also surround how many times the rooster crowed. Was it once (Matt 26:34; Luke 22:34) or twice (Mark 14:30)? Matthew and Luke actually say "before the rooster crows" and do not specify that it will crow only once. Since roosters typically crow several times over a short period, it would be accurate to refer to the crowing as a single event or to break it down into the individual episodes. (See further comments at John 13:38.)

> 32 Then they came to a place named Gethsemane, and He told His disciples, "Sit here while I pray." 33 He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be deeply distressed and horrified. 34 Then He said to them, "My soul is swallowed up in sorrow — to the point of death. Remain here and stay awake." 35 Then He went a little farther, fell to the ground, and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. 36 And He said, "*Abba*, Father! All things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me. Nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will."

Take this cup away from Me (14:36): Jesus' prayer, "*Abba*, Father . . . Take this cup away from Me" (v. 35), reveals the human Jesus who recoils from the coming suffering. But it also paints an impressive picture. Jesus is fully aware of the severity of the trial that lies ahead. No aspect of it—the arrest, the abuse, the interrogations, the beatings, or the crucifixion itself—will take him by surprise. Mark's portrait is of one who is the master of the situation, not that of a fanatic who in bewilderment sees his plans go awry.

All things are possible for You (14:36): Jesus' prayer that God can do all things, even taking away the cup of suffering, underscores the idea that Jesus' suffering is God's will. It is not Jesus' wish, but it is God's; and Jesus accepts it. His abrupt announcement that the "time has come. Look, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners" (v. 41) again shows Jesus to be very much in control of the situation. Nothing has taken him by surprise. Ironically, it is Jesus who announces the arrival of the betrayer (v. 42), not his feckless disciples who were supposed to be keeping watch.

> 43 While He was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, suddenly arrived. With him was a
> mob, with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. 44 His betrayer
> had given them a signal. "The One I kiss," he said, "He's the One; arrest Him and take Him
> away under guard." 45 So when he came, he went right up to Him and said, "Rabbi! " — and
> kissed Him. 46 Then they took hold of Him and arrested Him. 47 And one of those who stood
> by drew his sword, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his ear.
> 48 But Jesus said to them, "Have you come out with swords and clubs, as though I were a
> criminal, to capture Me? 49 Every day I was among you, teaching in the temple complex, and
> you didn't arrest Me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled." 50 Then they all deserted Him and
> ran away.
> 51 Now a certain young man, having a linen cloth wrapped around his naked body, was
> following Him. They caught hold of him, 52 but he left the linen cloth behind and ran away
> naked.

With him was a mob (14:43): Several questions arise when one compares the different Gospel accounts of this scene. Was the arrest party composed of Roman soldiers, members from the Jewish temple police, or a mixture of both? Tradition has said that the arrest party was Roman, but many have felt that Pilate's words "You have a guard . . . Go and make it as secure as you know how" (Matt 27:65), seem most naturally to imply that he denied the use of his soldiers and made the Jews use their temple police to the best of their ability. But then again Matthew

28:14 seems to imply that the guard stood in danger of punishment from Pilate for their lapse in duty. Why would Pilate punish Jewish temple police for failing at a task given them by the priests? But then again, why would Roman soldiers run to Jewish priests for advice before reporting to their Roman commander? All told, do we have conflicting data on the identity of the guard?

Those who came to arrest Jesus are called by the Synoptics a "mob" (*ochlos*) who came from the chief priests, Scribes, and elders. But John refers to them more specifically as "a company [*speira*] of soldiers and some temple police [*hupēretēs*] from the chief priests and the Pharisees." The term *speira* refers to a Roman cohort, which was a tenth of a legion, or about 600 men, though the number could be quite a bit less. John 18:12 adds that the soldiers were under the authority of a *chiliarchos*, or military tribune. Bock explains, "In a festival setting, the Romans would have been highly sensitive to any potential for extended public violence. They would have quickly made support available if the Jewish leadership had signaled a potential for danger" (Bock 2002, 525). When the Jews approach Pilate after Jesus' death and Pilate told them, "You have a guard of soldiers" (Matt 27:65), he uses the term *koustōdia*, a Latin loanword, which is "a group of soldiers doing guard duty" (BDAG). The implication is that these are Jewish guards, but since the term *hupēretēs* is not used, it is impossible to know for sure. As France points out, it is possible to read the Greek as Pilate granting the request ("You have [i.e., I now grant you] the guard you asked for"), but that is "hardly the natural reading of the sentence" (France 2007, 1095). Besides, that the guards report back to the chief priests after the resurrection suggests that they are Jewish soldiers (Matt 28:11). But if that is the case, why the concern about what the governor might say about their story of the body being stolen while they slept (28:14)? France explains, "But the guard had been set up with the governor's knowledge, if not his direct approval, so that if he heard about it he might be expected to treat such failure, even by Jewish guards, as a matter for discipline. Since they were not Pilate's troops, the priests hope that it may be possible for him to be kept in the dark, but they know their man well enough to be confident that, if necessary, he can be kept happy with a further bribe" (France 2007, 1105). (See further comments at Matt 27:62–66.)

He went right up to Him and said, "Rabbi!"—and kissed Him (14:45): Since the mob was not familiar enough with Jesus to recognize him in a crowd in the darkness, it was necessary for Jesus to be identified quite specifically. This is why Judas approaches Jesus, his "Rabbi" (master or teacher), and as a rabbi's

haber (associate or disciple) kisses him. Thus identified, the priests' deputies seize Jesus. Seizure at night was intended to render Jesus' following leaderless and so discourage a coordinated attack (as those doing the priests' bidding may have feared).

The Scriptures must be fulfilled (14:49): Jesus is unflinching; he knows the Scriptures are being fulfilled even as he is seized. Mark's reader immediately thinks of 9:12: "How then is it written about the Son of Man that He must suffer many things"; or the more recent prediction of betrayal in 14:21: "For the Son of Man will go just as it is written about Him" (for OT passages that may have been in mind, see comments on 14:21).

He left the linen cloth behind and ran away naked (14:52): This has traditionally been deemed an autobiographical disclosure on Mark's part, but that may be mistaken. All of Jesus' disciples have taken flight (v. 50), just as Jesus had predicted earlier that night (14:27). Shortly Mark's readers will learn of Peter's denials. The complete collapse of Jesus' following is seen in the flight of the naked young man. Lane (1974, 527) suggests that what we may have here is an allusion to the picture portrayed in Amos 2:16, where in an oracle against Israel, the prophet foresees that even the "most courageous of the warriors will flee naked on that day" of judgment. Lane is probably correct, for this idea coheres with the earlier appeal to Zechariah 13:7, where the shepherd is struck down and the sheep are scattered (see commentary on 14:27). In rejecting its Messiah, Israel has brought upon itself judgments described in the prophets.

Several of the church fathers "conjectured" that the young man was Mark, who lived in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12) and whose house according to tradition was the location of the Last Supper. But Lane says that the author's "primary purpose for including this vignette . . . appears to have been to emphasize the fact that *all* fled, leaving Jesus alone in the custody of the police. No one remained with Jesus, not even a valiant young man [*neaniskos*] who intended to follow him" (Lane 1974, 527–28).

53 They led Jesus away to the high priest, and all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes
convened. 54 Peter followed Him at a distance, right into the high priest's courtyard. He was
sitting with the temple police, warming himself by the fire.

55 The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for testimony against Jesus to put
Him to death, but they could find none. 56 For many were giving false testimony against Him,

but the testimonies did not agree. 57 Some stood up and were giving false testimony against Him, stating, 58 “We heard Him say, ‘I will demolish this sanctuary made by human hands, and in three days I will build another not made by hands.’ ” 59 Yet their testimony did not agree even on this.

60 Then the high priest stood up before them all and questioned Jesus, “Don’t You have an answer to what these men are testifying against You? ” 61 But He kept silent and did not answer anything. Again the high priest questioned Him, “Are You the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One? ”

62 “I am,” said Jesus, “and all of you will see **the Son of Man seated at the right hand** of the Power and **coming with the clouds of heaven.**”

63 Then the high priest tore his robes and said, “Why do we still need witnesses? 64 You have heard the blasphemy! What is your decision? ”

And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death. 65 Then some began to spit on Him, to blindfold Him, and to beat Him, saying, “Prophesy! ” The temple police also took Him and slapped Him.

They led Jesus away to the high priest (14:53): Several questions arise about the legality of Jesus’ trial. For instance, was it legal to hold a capital trial at night? And were two consecutive days required to pass before a verdict was rendered? Critics say the apparent violations in proceedings call into doubt the accuracy of the Gospel accounts. It is unclear whether the proceedings were actually illegal at that time, but it seems clear that the meeting at the high priest’s home was unofficial and ad hoc. The religious leaders hoped to dispatch Jesus before the events of Passover could lend more momentum to his movement. “The whole Sanhedrin” in verse 55 does not mean it was a formal meeting. “What is probably meant is that several members of the Sanhedrin have convened at the home of Caiaphas and that most, perhaps all, of them were interested in seeking testimony against Jesus . . . If this gathering of priests and elders is recognized for what it is—an informal hearing designed to gain a consensus among Jewish authorities that Jesus should be handed over to the Romans with a capital recommendation—then objections that have been raised against its historicity on the grounds that the rules of capital trials have been violated (as laid down two centuries later in *m. Sanhedrin* 4–7) are quite beside the point” (Evans 2000, 444). (See further comments at Matt 26:57.)

Matthew informs us that the high priest is Caiaphas. Josephus tells us that his name was “Joseph called Caiaphas” (*Antiquities* 18.95; see also 18.53). An ornate ossuary was discovered in Jerusalem in 1990, bearing the name “Joseph son of Qayapha,” or, perhaps, Caiaphas (on the details of this discovery, see Evans 2003, 204–12; Gibson 2009, 82–83). The recent discovery of an ossuary

bearing an inscription that reads “Miriam, daughter of Yeshua, son of Qayapha, priest of Ma‘aziah, from Beth ‘Imri” supports the high priestly identification of the first ossuary (for details, see Zissu and Goren 2011, 74–95).

Peter followed Him at a distance, right into the high priest’s courtyard (14:54): Given Peter’s violent act in the garden (John 18:10), some have questioned whether the temple police would really allow him to enter the high priest’s courtyard and then sit in their midst while Jesus was interrogated. However, it was dark in the garden, which may have prevented the temple police from discerning who among the press of disciples had struck the servant. Recall that the guard relied on Judas to identify Jesus (Mark 14:45), and so it is apparent that Jesus and his disciples were not very familiar to the arrest party and/or were not easily recognized in the dark conditions of the garden. Furthermore, Jesus immediately healed the servant’s ear (Luke 22:51), a miracle that likely drew attention away from Peter’s assault.

The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for testimony against Jesus (14:55): Jesus is being accused by the ruling priests and by all who make up the Council (or Sanhedrin). They are apparently located inside the high priest’s house (see v. 66, which indicates that the trial took place above the courtyard where Peter was waiting). This leads to questions about how Mark, commonly said to have used Peter as a source, could have known details about what was being said and done during Jesus’ trial. Presumably Peter was not close enough to overhear everything (or anything at all), especially considering the distractions he faced in the courtyard and his eventual dramatic exit to weep bitterly outside (v. 72). However, Luke 22:61 indicates that Jesus was able to look at Peter after the rooster crowed, which may indicate that Peter was in a position that allowed him to overhear some of the proceedings. Aside from Peter, Mark’s information could have come from one of two sources. One was Jesus himself, who taught the disciples for 40 days after his resurrection (Acts 1:3). It is no stretch to assume that the disciples would have asked Jesus to fill them in on what happened during his trial. The other possible source for Mark was one or more of the Jewish leaders who became followers of Jesus after his resurrection (Acts 6:7).

The Son of the Blessed One (14:61): Would the high priest really identify Messiah as “Son of the Blessed One”? It seems to be an admission that Messiah will be divine, which few if any Jews expected. Certainly the religious leaders seemed dead set against identifying Messiah as divine. The phrase “Son of the

Blessed One" was a circumlocution for "Son of God," which did not carry divine connotations. It was a term used of the political and military leader whom the Jews were expecting, that is, the Messiah.

"I am," said Jesus (14:62): When the high priest directly asks for confirmation of Jesus' identity ("Are You the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"), Jesus replies by saying "I am." His words, "I am," have nothing to do with the divine name (i.e., Yahweh = "I AM"), but simply mean "yes." Many have felt that Mark has Jesus responding in a way that is much clearer ("I am") than Matthew 26:64 and Luke 23:3 ("You have said it"). Is this a correct perception? It may be that Matthew and Luke give a more literal translation of what Jesus said, whereas Mark gives a dynamic equivalent. At any rate, D. R. Catchpole demonstrated that Matthew's and Luke's statement is the semantic equivalent of Mark's, with the addition of being in a more Semitic style (1971, 213–26).

The rest of Jesus' answer qualifies in what sense he is the Messiah (or Christ), the Son of the Blessed One (God): "all of you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven" (v. 62; the "Power" is a circumlocution for God). Here Jesus again alludes to the figure of Daniel 7:13–14, as well as to the words of Psalm 110:1, which in Mark 12:35–37 he discussed in the temple precincts. On that occasion Jesus questioned the scribes' habit of referring to the Christ as the "son of David." Jesus queried this habit in light of David's calling him "Lord." The implication is that the Messiah is more than a mere "son of David" (see comments on 12:35–37). In his reply to Caiaphas the high priest, Jesus has identified himself as the Davidic Messiah who in fulfillment of Psalm 110 will sit at God's right hand, and as the figure of Daniel 7 who received from God authority and kingdom. As such, he is greater than David and greater than the high priest before whom he now stands.

In light of his earlier teaching in the temple precincts, especially as seen in the parable of the Vineyard Tenants (see commentary on 12:1–12) and prediction of the temple's destruction (see commentary on 13:1–2), we should probably assume that Jesus' reply carries with it an element of threat. When next Caiaphas and his colleagues see Jesus, he will be installed at God's right hand and will be coming with the clouds of heaven, in judgment upon the temple establishment. The temple "made by human hands" will be destroyed (and this probably means more than only the physical buildings themselves, but refers to the entire establishment) and will be replaced with one of heavenly construction (compare Rev 11:19, which speaks of "God's sanctuary in heaven"; and Rev 21:22, where God and the Lamb are themselves the temple).

All of you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven (14:62): How can the son of man *sit*, which implies being stationary, and yet *come with the clouds*, which entails movement? Do we have here two originally distinct traditions that have been clumsily juxtaposed? Not at all. According to Daniel 7:9, God's throne has burning wheels. The throne described there, on which the Son of Man will take his seat (according to Jesus' exegesis, which draws upon Psalm 110), is none other than God's chariot throne (see Ezekiel 1; 10). Seated on this throne, at God's right hand, will be Jesus the Son of Man, coming with the clouds.

The Son of Man (14:62): Does Jesus misquote and misrepresent Daniel 7:13 here, for Daniel said he saw one "like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven." This question assumes Jesus is meaning to quote Daniel 7:13, but his statement is most likely meant as an allusion to that verse and also to Psalm 110:1. In the second place, when Daniel used the phrase "One like a son of man," it simply meant one who appeared to be human. But then Daniel proceeded to make clear that this one was much more than a mere man. As a result of Daniel's vision, the phrase "the Son of Man" came to refer to that one whom Daniel described, who was given authority, glory, and a kingdom. The "night vision" that Daniel saw was a portrayal of a heavenly reality, but the implication is that the individual described there would appear on the earth and be served by all people.

The high priest tore his robes (14:63): The high priest deemed it blasphemy that Jesus would equate himself with the divine. Later rabbinic sources condemned anyone who connected Messiah to divinity. All told, is it safe to say that few if any Jews expected Messiah to be divine? And how does the widespread non-belief that Messiah would be divine fit with the ready acceptance of his divinity among his disciples (they seemingly equate Messiah with divinity from the very outset)?

It is true that few if any Jews expected the Messiah to be divine. But Caiaphas was prepared to declare Jesus guilty of treason if he claimed to be the Messiah. The Jewish leaders were opposed to Jesus' messiahship from the beginning because he was not one of them, submissive to their laws. As for the idea that the disciples accepted Jesus as divine from the outset of his ministry, this is debatable. A case can be made that they never understood Jesus' deity until his resurrection. After all, why were they despondent after his crucifixion, even though he had repeatedly foretold them of his resurrection? Even Peter's

confession at Caesarea Philippi only declared Jesus to be the Messiah. Most likely even the disciples did not anticipate that Messiah was to be divine.

> 66 While Peter was in the courtyard below, one of the high priest's servants came. 67 When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus."
>
> 68 But he denied it: "I don't know or understand what you're talking about! " Then he went out to the entryway, and a rooster crowed.
>
> 69 When the servant saw him again she began to tell those standing nearby, "This man is one of them! "
>
> 70 But again he denied it. After a little while those standing there said to Peter again, "You certainly are one of them, since you're also a Galilean! "
>
> 71 Then he started to curse and to swear with an oath, "I don't know this man you're talking about! "
>
> 72 Immediately a rooster crowed a second time, and Peter remembered when Jesus had spoken the word to him, "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times." When he thought about it, he began to weep.

Peter was in the courtyard below (14:66): In stark contrast to Jesus inside before the high priest, the most powerful Jew in Israel, stands Peter outside quailing before a female servant, a person of no power. Peter is recognized as having been with the Nazarene, Jesus (v. 67). But he denies it without qualification. He neither knows nor understands what she is talking about. The maid again sees Peter and says to the bystanders: "This man is one of them" (v. 69). But Peter again denies it (v. 70a). A little while later, the bystanders say to Peter that he surely must be one of the followers of Jesus, for he is a Galilean (v. 70b; in 26:73 Matthew explains that it was Peter's accent that gave him away). The maidservant's persistence has now led to several suspecting that Peter was a disciple. Perceiving the growing danger, the panicked disciple invokes a curse on himself (i.e., "damn me if I am not telling the truth") and says that he does not know the man they are talking about (v. 71). The Evangelist's willingness to record what had to have been an excruciatingly embarrassing story about Peter, the leader of the church, demonstrates his commitment to telling the truth.

But he denied it . . . and a rooster crowed (14:68): Wasn't the rooster supposed to crow only *after* Peter had denied Jesus three times (Matt 26:34; Luke 22:34; John 13:38)? Mark has the rooster crow before Peter has reached his third denial. But Mark has Jesus predicting the rooster will crow twice before Peter has completed his three denials. This allows the rooster to crow before

Peter's third denial, but this solves one problem only to create another: the discrepancy between Mark and the other three Gospels regarding the number of times Jesus said the rooster would crow. For suggested resolution, see comments on 14:30.

> As soon as it was morning, the chief priests had a meeting with the elders, scribes, and the whole Sanhedrin. After tying Jesus up, they led Him away and handed Him over to Pilate.
> 2 So Pilate asked Him, "Are You the King of the Jews? "
> He answered him, "You have said it."
> 3 And the chief priests began to accuse Him of many things. 4 Then Pilate questioned Him again, "Are You not answering anything? Look how many things they are accusing You of! " 5 But Jesus still did not answer anything, so Pilate was amazed.
> 6 At the festival it was Pilate's custom to release for the people a prisoner they requested. 7 There was one named Barabbas, who was in prison with rebels who had committed murder during the rebellion. 8 The crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do for them as was his custom. 9 So Pilate answered them, "Do you want me to release the King of the Jews for you? " 10 For he knew it was because of envy that the chief priests had handed Him over. 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd so that he would release Barabbas to them instead.
> 12 Pilate asked them again, "Then what do you want me to do with the One you call the King of the Jews? "
> 13 Again they shouted, "Crucify Him! "
> 14 Then Pilate said to them, "Why? What has He done wrong? "
> But they shouted, "Crucify Him! " all the more.
> 15 Then, willing to gratify the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. And after having Jesus flogged, he handed Him over to be crucified.

Apparent discrepancies regarding the stages of Jesus' trial **(15:1–15):** According to Mark and Matthew the trial(s) took place in three stages: (1) at night before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin (Mark 14:53–65), (2) as soon as it was morning a short "rubber stamp" trial before the Sanhedrin (15:1), (3) in the morning before Pilate and the Jews (15:2–5). Luke also had three stages, but he added one and subtracted one. He added a hearing before Herod Antipas that followed the one before Pilate (23:6–12), and he collapsed the two trials before the Sanhedrin into one at daybreak, including the events from the night before (22:66–71). John also had three stages. He added a hearing before Annas that preceded the one before Caiaphas (18:13, 19–24); he only mentioned a meeting before Caiaphas (18:24), leaving out all the details and leaving out the early morning meeting before the Sanhedrin. No single Gospel has all the events that

transpired, and Luke and John exhibit their freedom to recount them in their own way.

Did the Evangelists exaggerate Pilate's indecision? **(15:1–15):** The Gospels' portraits of Pilate as wavering, wishing to release Jesus, but finally acquiescing to the demands of Jerusalem's influential elite has often been questioned. Many assume that this portrait grew out of apologetic interests, hoping to put Jesus and early Christianity on the side of Rome. It was the Jewish leaders, after all, not the Roman governor, who desired Jesus' death—so goes the argument. That the Evangelists exploited the story of the wavering, uncertain Pilate is quite probable, but its wholesale invention is doubtful. When we remember the political and social setting of Jewish Palestine in the time of Pilate, we should not be surprised that Pilate was reluctant to execute in such a public and provocative manner a popular prophet from Galilee, whose many followers were present in Jerusalem. If Jesus had no military intentions, then he was little more than a pest. A beating and some jail time would suffice. But no, the ruling priests wanted him dead.

Are You the King of the Jews? (15:1): Pilate's question makes clear what charge the ruling priests have brought against Jesus. Jesus' affirmation of messiahship and divine sonship, understood in the Jewish context, amounts to an unambiguous claim to kingship. The Roman Senate made kings (such as Herod the Great). Self-proclaimed kings were viewed as treasonous rebels, and in recent years Israel had been plagued with several would-be kings. Thus the stage was set for Jesus' execution.

You have said it (15:2): In replying this way Jesus does not refuse the title "King of the Jews," but neither does he say, "I am," as he had when the high priest asked him if he was the Messiah, the Son of God (14:61). That Jesus' answer was not seen as rejection of the title is seen in his subsequent crucifixion and mockery as "King of the Jews" (15:18, 26). Jesus is indeed the King of Jews, but not in the sense understood by Rome, her Jewish collaborators, or various Jewish would-be kings. Jesus' kingship derives entirely from God, from whom he as the "Son of Man" of Daniel 7 received kingdom and authority.

Jesus still did not answer anything, so Pilate was amazed (15:5): Jesus refuses to discuss the matter with Pilate, and he refuses to reply to the various charges laid against him (vv. 3–5). Pilate is amazed (v. 5a), which casts Jesus once again in a favorable light. With calm and dignity Jesus stands before his accusers.

It was Pilate's custom to release for the people a prisoner (15:6): Because there is no specific corroboration of Pilate's Passover pardon outside the NT, some critics think it is nothing more than a literary and theological invention. But this is very doubtful. The tradition is attested in at least two independent streams, Mark (followed by Matthew and Luke) and John (which is independent of the Synoptics). Further, there is some indirect corroboration of Pilate's Passover pardon. The Mishnah says that "they may slaughter (the Passover lamb) for one . . . whom they have promised to bring out of prison" on the Passover (*m. Pesahim* 8:6). Who the "they" are is not made clear (Jewish authorities? Roman authorities?), but it is interesting that the promised release from prison is for the express purpose of taking part in the Passover observance. A papyrus (PFlor 61, c. AD 85) "containing a report of judicial proceedings, quotes these words of the governor of Egypt, G. Septimius Vegetus (to one Phibion): 'You were worthy of scourging . . . but I give you to the crowds" (ll. 59–60, 64; see Deissmann 1927, 269–70 + pl., slightly adapted). According to Pliny the Younger, "It was asserted, however, that these people were released upon their petition to the proconsuls, or their lieutenants; which seems likely enough, as it is improbable any person should have dared to set them at liberty without authority" (*Epistles* 10.31). An inscription from Ephesus relates the decision of the Proconsul of Asia to release prisoners because of the outcries of the people of the city (Deissmann 1927: 269–70). Livy (5.13.8) speaks of special dispensations whereby chains were removed from the limbs of prisoners. When Governor Albinus (AD 62–64) prepared to leave office he released all prisoners incarcerated for offenses other than murder (*Antiquities* 20.215). He did this hoping to gain a favorable review from the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And finally, years earlier Archelaus hoped to appease his countrymen, and so gain his late father's kingdom, by acquiescing to their demands that those imprisoned be released (*Antiquities* 17.204: "Some demanded the release of the prisoners who had been put in chains by Herod").

The evidence as a whole suggests that Roman rulers, as well as at least one Herodian prince, on occasion released prisoners (so apparently did other rulers in the eastern Mediterranean). This was done for purely political reasons, to satisfy the demands of the crowds and to curry their favor. Another factor that supports the historicity of the Markan narrative is the improbability of asserting such a custom if there had been none. If Pilate had not released prisoners on the Passover or on other holidays, or at least on one occasion, the Evangelist's claim that he did so could have quickly and easily been shown to be false and would

therefore have occasioned embarrassment for the early church. That all three of the later Evangelists take over the story (and the Fourth Evangelist probably did so independently of the Synoptic Gospels) argues that no such embarrassment clung to the story. H. K. Bond (1998, 199) suggests that "Pilate, and possibly other governors, may have occasionally released lesser criminals as a gesture of Roman goodwill, especially during such a potentially volatile festival as the Passover." A number of commentators have concluded that Mark's story of the Passover pardon rests on old, reliable tradition (see Taylor 1952, 577; Cranfield 1959, 448; Johnson 1972, 247–48; Evans 2000, 479–81).

One named Barabbas . . . the rebellion (15:7): This uprising is not known outside the NT. Uprisings of one scale or another were so common that it is no surprise that many of them have gone unnoted in the annals of Jewish and Roman history. Josephus mentions a later one in which some Jewish rebels attacked Roman sentries on the Mount of Olives (*Jewish War* 6.2.8). There was also some violence associated with the appropriation of temple funds (Evans 2000, 481).

Mark's silence about the Jews calling down a curse on their heads **(15:12–14):** Mark does not relay the account (given in Matthew 27:25) about the Jews inviting Jesus' blood on their own heads. Has Mark left out a vital part of the story, or does his silence indicate he disbelieved it? In the first place, the absence of an element of the story in Mark means nothing about what Mark believed. Like any author, he is not obligated to share all that he knows. Further, Matthew apparently had sources that Mark did not have. So it is possible that Matthew shares some things of which Mark was unaware. Third, Mark has Pilate saying "Why? What has He done wrong?" The crowd's reply, "Crucify Him!" is an acceptance of responsibility in itself not unlike Matthew 27:25.

> 16 Then the soldiers led Him away into the courtyard (that is, headquarters) and called the whole company together. 17 They dressed Him in a purple robe, twisted together a crown of thorns, and put it on Him. 18 And they began to salute Him, "Hail, King of the Jews! " 19 They kept hitting Him on the head with a reed and spitting on Him. Getting down on their knees, they were paying Him homage. 20 When they had mocked Him, they stripped Him of the purple robe, put His clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify Him.

The soldiers led Him away into the courtyard . . . and called the whole company together (15:16): The soldiers mock Jesus by placing on him a purple

robe and a woven crown of thorns (vv. 16–17). They then salute him ("Hail, King of the Jews!"), strike him on the head with a reed, and bow before him (vv. 17–19). What the Roman soldiers are acting out (and they are Roman, as indicated by their leading Jesus into the praetorium) is a mock salute of the Roman emperor, as is done during the celebration of a triumph. It is at such a time that the emperor would wear an ivy crown and a robe with a purple mantle. His soldiers would shout, "Hail, Caesar!"

They dressed Him in a purple robe (15:17–19): Was the robe scarlet (Matt 27:27ff) or purple (Mark 15:17)? When was the robe placed on Jesus? During the midst of his trial before Pilate (John 19:1–2, 15) or after Pilate had rendered his verdict and sent Jesus to be crucified (Matt 27:27–31 and Mark 15:17)? R. T. France says "Mark's 'purple' (*porphura*) alone could mean a real purple robe such as a king might wear, but quite apart from the unlikelihood of soldiers coming by such an expensive garment, its combination with a crown made of thorns makes it clear that this, too, was a mockery; Matthew's explanation that they used a red military cloak sounds very likely" (2002, 637). Thus the robe was probably literally scarlet, but was being used as if it were a purple robe of royalty, a meaning Mark has captured. It is impossible to know whether Matthew and Mark have the actual order of events or John. One or the other has moved the account for the sake of how he wished to present the narrative. Since John's account of Pilate's involvement seems to have the greater detail, his order may be the one closest to the events.

The mockery of Jesus as a Jewish king finds an approximate parallel in Philo (*In Flaccum* 36–39). It was on the occasion of King Agrippa's visit to Alexandria, where the people seized a lunatic named Carabas, a street person who was often made sport of. They "drove the poor fellow into the gymnasium and set him up high to be seen by all and put on his head a sheet of byblus spread out wide for a diadem, clothed the rest of his body with a rug for a royal robe, while someone who had noticed a piece of the native papyrus thrown away in the road gave it to him for his sceptre. And when as in some theatrical farce he had received the insignia of kingship and had been tricked out as a king, young men carrying rods on their shoulders as spearmen stood on either side of him in imitation of a bodyguard. Then others approached him, some pretending to salute him, others to sue for justice, others to consult him on state affairs. Then from the multitudes there rang out a tremendous shout hailing him as *Mari* [Aramaic: "My lord"], which is said to be the name for 'lord' with the Syrians." The mockery of Agrippa I is quite significant, well illustrating the mockery to

which Jesus was subjected. It does not, however, require us to conclude that Mark is dependent in some way on this incident or on Philo's work itself.

Other incidents approximate the mockery of Jesus. One thinks of harsh and humiliating treatment of deposed Vitellius (AD 69) at the hands of Roman soldiers, who mockingly made the former emperor revisit various stations where at one time he was held in honor (see Dio Cassius 64.20–21). We think too of savage and humiliating treatment of Eleazar who was stripped, scourged, tortured, and then in his dying breath prayed for the salvation of Israel (4 Macc 6:1–30). One is also reminded of the deposition recording the words of the new emperor Hadrian and a Jewish embassy, with reference to the Jewish revolt that occurred toward the end of Trajan's reign (115–117 AD). In this fragmentary document mention is made of the mockery of a would-be monarch: "Paulus (spoke) about the king, how they brought him forth and (mocked him?); and Theon read the edict of Lupus ordering them to lead him forth for Lupus to make fun of the king . . ." (PLouvre 68 1.1–7; for text, translation, and notes, see Tcherikover and Fuks 1957–60, 2.87–99). Plutarch (*Pompey* 24.7–8) relates a story in which Pirates mocked a prisoner who had claimed the rights of Roman citizenship. They dressed him up ("threw a toga on him"), extended to him various honors (including falling to their knees), then finally made him walk the plank (for a survey of examples of mockery in late antiquity, see Brown 1994, 873–77). (See further comments at John 19:1–2.)

21 They forced a man coming in from the country, who was passing by, to carry Jesus' cross.
He was Simon, a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus. 22 And they brought Jesus to the
place called *Golgotha* (which means Skull Place). 23 They tried to give Him wine mixed with
myrrh, but He did not take it. 24 Then they crucified Him and divided His clothes, casting lots
for them to decide what each would get. 25 Now it was nine in the morning when they crucified
Him. 26 The inscription of the charge written against Him was:

THE KING OF THE JEWS.

27 They crucified two criminals with Him, one on His right and one on His left. [28 So the
Scripture was fulfilled that says: **And He was counted among outlaws.**] 29 Those who passed
by were yelling insults at Him, shaking their heads, and saying, "Ha! The One who would
demolish the sanctuary and build it in three days, 30 save Yourself by coming down from the
cross! " 31 In the same way, the chief priests with the scribes were mocking Him to one another
and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself! 32 Let the Messiah, the King of Israel,
come down now from the cross, so that we may see and believe." Even those who were

crucified with Him were taunting Him.

33 When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 34 And
at three Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "***Eloi, Eloi, lemá sabachtháni?"*** which is translated,
"**My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?**"

35 When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "Look, He's calling for Elijah! "
36 Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, fixed it on a reed, offered Him a drink, and
said, "Let's see if Elijah comes to take Him down! "

37 But Jesus let out a loud cry and breathed His last. 38 Then the curtain of the sanctuary was
split in two from top to bottom. 39 When the centurion, who was standing opposite Him, saw
the way He breathed His last, he said, "This man really was God's Son! "

40 There were also women looking on from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene,
Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. 41 When He was in Galilee,
they would follow Him and help Him. Many other women had come up with Him to Jerusalem.

Simon, a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus (15:21): The ossuary of Simon's son Alexander may have been recovered. Found in Jerusalem in 1941, inscriptions on the ossuary read "Alexander (son) of Simon" (in Greek) and "Alexander (the) Cyreanite" (in Hebrew). The combination of father's Aramaic name Simon, his son's Greek name Alexander, the connection with Cyrene, and the burial in Jerusalem match all of the details and inferences we find in Mark 15:21 (for discussion of this ossuary, see Evans 2003, 94–96).

They brought Jesus to the place called *Golgotha* (which means Skull Place) (15:22): "Golgotha" is the Greek rendering of Aramaic *galgalta'*, which means "round stone," which could refer to a skull. In Luke 23:33 the name of the place is simply given as "The Skull" (Gk *kranion*). In the Latin Vulgate, the term used to translate *kranion* was *Calvaria*.

What about the geographical location of the crucifixion site? The Gospels (Matt 27:33; John 19:20) place it outside the city, but tradition locates it within the city limits of Jerusalem. Which is correct? According to R. T. France, "There are no firm grounds for disputing the traditional site [of the crucifixion], now enclosed within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, though there is unlikely ever to be convincing proof; its location just outside the line of the city walls at that time, and the presence of a number of Jewish tombs of the same period close by, are appropriate to a place of public execution, close to the city but outside it" (2002, 642). Key to France's position is that though the traditional site is located within modern boundaries of the city, this position was outside the boundaries in the first century.

They tried to give him wine mixed with myrrh, but He did not take it

(15:23): Matthew 27:34 says wine "mixed with gall" rather than "myrrh," as Mark has it. Is this a contradiction? Fine wine flavored with myrrh was considered a delicacy and was unlikely to be given to Jesus by the soldiers crucifying him. Most likely they said it was mixed with myrrh as part of their mockery, and Mark has relayed this. The wine was probably mixed with gall, which had a bitter taste. Luke says, "The soldiers also mocked Him. They came offering Him sour wine and said, 'If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!'" (23:36). On questions about whether the Gospels are incompatible on whether or not Jesus drank, see comments on Mark 15:36 and Matthew 27:34.

They crucified Him (15:24): Archaeological evidence found near Jerusalem, dating to the era of Christ, confirms that crucifixion involved nailing wrists and heels to wooden beams. "The discovery in 1968 of an ossuary . . . of one *Yĕhôhānān*, who had been crucified, provides archaeological evidence and illumination on how Jesus himself may have been crucified. The ossuary and its contents date to the late 20s C.E. The remains of an iron spike (11.5 centimeters in length) are plainly seen, piercing the right ankle bone. Those who took down the body of Yehohanan apparently were unable to remove the spike, with the result that a piece of wood (from an olive tree) remained affixed to the ankle. . . . Forensic examination of the rest of the skeletal remains support the view that Yehohanan was crucified with arms apart, hung from a horizontal beam or tree branch. However, there is no evidence that his arms or wrists were nailed to this cross beam (as claimed in early reports)." However, Evans quotes Hengel, who cites this third-century AD author: "Punished with limbs outstretched . . . they are fastened (and) nailed to the stake in the most bitter torment, evil food for birds of prey and grim picking for dogs" (2000, 501–2).

They . . . divided His clothes . . . to decide what each would get (15:24): Did the soldiers cast lots to divide all of Jesus' garments (Mark and Matt 27:35 might seem to imply this) or just his "tunic" (John 19:23–24)? What we see here are differing levels of detail. John says, "They took His clothes and divided them into four parts, a part for each soldier" (v. 23). It seems that the division of these did not involve casting lots, but just common consent, though John's account does not rule out that these too were parceled out through the casting of lots. What John is decisive about is that the tunic, a more expensive piece, was left to chance by the casting of lots.

Now it was nine in the morning when they crucified Him (15:25): John 19:14

has Jesus appearing before Pilate at the sixth hour. Mark has Jesus being crucified already by the third hour (HCSB renders this “nine in the morning”). Luke 23:43–44 has Jesus being crucified at about the sixth hour. Are these contradictions or just different ways of reckoning time? Several theories of harmonization have been offered. One is that the numbers 3 and 6 were confused in an early manuscript. Another is that John used Roman time, which had the day beginning at midnight, whereas the Synoptics followed Jewish time, which began the day at daybreak. Some have suggested that John intentionally moved the time of crucifixion to later in the day so that it would coincide with the time Passover lambs were being slaughtered all across the city. Luke 23:43–44 does not give the time of the crucifixion but of the darkness that engulfed “the whole land.” Jesus may have already been on the cross for three hours by then.

THE KING OF THE JEWS (15:26): All four Gospels state differently the wording of the sign identifying the capital charge against Jesus. Mark has “King of the Jews,” Matthew has “This is Jesus, the king of the Jews” (Matt 27:37), Luke has “This is the king of the Jews” (Luke 23:38), and John has “Jesus the Nazarene the king of the Jews” (John 19:20). It is possible that the sign was tri-lingual (Greek, Latin, and Hebrew), which would generate slightly different translations. Even if there was only one inscription, making it less simple to account for the different renderings in the Gospels, the traditional doctrine of inspiration recognizes that the Gospel writers sometimes quoted indirectly and sometimes conveyed their message without using the very words of the original source. (See further comments at Matt 27:37, Luke 23:38, and John 19:19.)

They crucified two criminals with Him (15:27): The word translated “criminals” is *lēstēs*, which can mean “robber” but also can mean “revolutionary” or “rebel” (BDAG). They may have been associates of Barabbas, “who was in prison with rebels who had committed murder during the rebellion” (Mark 15:7).

Textual problem **(15:28):** Metzger explains that the earliest and best manuscripts of both the Alexandrian and Western text types do not have this verse. “It is understandable that copyists could have added the sentence in the margin from Luke 22.37, whence it came into the text itself; there is no reason why, if the sentence were present originally, it should have been deleted. It is also significant that Mark very seldom expressly quotes the Old Testament” (*TCGNT*).

Even those who were crucified with Him were taunting Him (15:32): Are

Matthew 27:44 and Mark 15:32 incompatible with Luke 23:42, which has only one criminal hurl insults at Jesus, while the other one comes to faith? That neither Matthew nor Mark mentions the repentance and faith of one of the criminals does not mean they are claiming it did not happen, nor does Luke's failure to mention the fact that both criminals insulted Jesus entail that he would deny what Mark and Matthew have reported. Apparently the criminal who repented initially joined the other criminal in insulting Jesus, but then came under conviction. Certainly he had plenty of time to develop remorse and repent, for Jesus hung on the cross for six hours before he died. (See further comments at Matt 27:44 and Luke 23:32–43.)

It was noon (15:33): At the sixth hour (i.e., noon) darkness fell over the land. At the ninth hour (i.e., 3:00 p.m.) Jesus cries out in a loud voice, quoting the words of Psalm 22:1: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?" (v. 34). The darkness of the land signifies judgment; that Jesus cries out the way he does suggests that divine judgment has in part fallen on him. This is consistent with his earlier allusion to Zechariah 13:7 in Mark 14:27. Because they have rejected God's son (see the parable of the Vineyard Tenants in 12:1–12) God strikes his own people, beginning with Israel's shepherd.

Darkness came over the whole land (15:33): Interpreters through the centuries have tried to identify extrabiblical documentation for this event, as for instance the attempt to find evidence of a solar event that corresponded to the time of Jesus' crucifixion, but no such correspondence has been demonstrated. According to R. T. France, "a solar eclipse could not occur at the time of the Passover full moon, though a dust storm ('sirocco') or heavy cloud cover are possible" (2002, 651). Signs such as this darkness, sent as a judgment from God, are notoriously ambiguous, and there is no guarantee that the effect spread to regions outside Jerusalem. Some critics have asked if the darkness really happened, why didn't the Jews take it as a sign of their error and confess Jesus as Messiah as a result? The likely answer is that they mistook the darkness as a judgment not against them, but against a heretical messianic pretender and his followers, who had, in their estimation, corrupted Israel's religion. (See further comments at Matt 27:45.)

***Eloi, Eloi, lemá sabachtháni?* (15:34):** Bystanders think Jesus has called for Elijah (The word *eloi* ["my God"] in "Eloi, Eloi, lemá sabachtháni" approximates the sound of *elia* ["Elijah"]), an eschatological figure who was expected to come and rescue the righteous. Does Jesus' cry indicate that he

thought everything had gone horribly wrong? If Jesus died willingly, an intentional self-sacrifice for the world's sins, why did he cry out as if he didn't expect things to end this way? This question risks reading too much into the reason Jesus uttered these words. The important thing to recognize here is that he was quoting Psalm 22:1, a Davidic psalm expressing David's feelings of estrangement. Jesus was revealing that he was the fulfillment of the typology of the psalm, that he was experiencing forsakenness because of our sins. What exactly that forsakenness entailed is uncertain, but it likely stemmed from Jesus' taking on our sins so that sin would be judged. As the apostle Paul put it in 2 Corinthians 5:21, God the Father "made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, fixed it on a reed, offered Him a drink (15:36): Are the Gospels inconsistent about what drink(s) were offered to Jesus and whether he accepted them? The passages can be easily harmonized. The soldiers offered Jesus a taste of bitter wine, but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. For more on this issue, see comments on Matthew 27:34.

Let's see if Elijah comes to take Him down! (15:36): Whereas Mark has the one who fetched the sponge with sour wine say, "Let's see if Elijah comes to take Him down!" Matthew 27:48–49 has this same statement coming from bystanders, not the man who fetched the drink. These seem to be disparate claims. Can they be reconciled? Having heard Jesus' cry of *Eli*, it is likely that numerous bystanders began talking about Elijah coming. Once one of them said, "Let's see if Elijah comes to take Him down!" it is likely that others took up the same cry.

Jesus let out a loud cry and breathed His last (15:37): Disciples and critics alike often ask how it can be that Jesus, if he was really God, was forsaken by God and died, and what impact it would have had on the Trinity. In Jesus' cry of dereliction from the cross, and certainly in his death, the mystery of God incarnate becomes most vivid. The incarnation entails that God the Son became man without ceasing to be God. In his death, the Son cannot have died in his divinity. So we may say that he died only insofar as he is man. Beyond that we cannot go.

Then the curtain of the sanctuary was split in two from top to bottom (15:38): Is there any nonbiblical confirmation that the veil was rent? Also, Mark does not mention the earthquake or the resurrection of "many" saints, mentioned in Matthew 27:51–53. Does Mark's silence indicate he disbelieved what

Matthew recounts?

While there is no known extrabiblical confirmation of what happened to the sanctuary curtain, there is extrabiblical confirmation that such an event was conceivable. The *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, of uncertain date, reads, "And you shall act lawlessly in Israel, with the result that Jerusalem cannot bear the presence of your wickedness, but the veil of the Temple will be torn, so that it will no longer conceal your shame" (*Testament of Levi* 10:3). The *Lives of the Prophets* reads, "And concerning the end of the Temple he [Habakkuk] predicted, 'By a western nation it will happen.' 'At that time,' he said, 'the curtain of the Dabeir [the holy of holies] will be torn into small pieces'" (*Lives of the Prophets* 12:11–12).

Mark's silence on a pericope that Matthew and Luke include is no indication of what Mark thought about it. If Mark was aware of it, as he probably was, he did not include the account of the earthquake and resurrections because it would interfere with his purpose in writing his Gospel.

This man really was God's Son! (15:39): In calling Jesus God's Son, the centurion has switched his allegiance from Caesar, the official Roman "son of God," to Jesus, the real Son of God (on the range of meanings of this epithet, see Hengel 1976). A notable difference arises when we compare Matthew and Mark to Luke. In both Matthew (Matt 27:54) and Mark the centurion, who was standing opposite Jesus, saw the way he breathed his last, said, "This man really was God's Son [*huios theou*]!" Luke quotes the centurion differently, and the sentence in which it is embedded is different as well. Even a different word for "centurion" is used. "When the centurion saw what happened, he began to glorify God, saying, 'This man really was righteous [*dikaios*]!'" (Luke 23:47).

According to Marshall, Luke's saying means that "in the death of Jesus the centurion sees the sacrifice of a martyr who has perished innocently." He notes that Jesus' innocence is a Lukan theme. "It may well be that Luke's stress on innocence is sufficient to motivate this alteration" (1978, 876). Nolland (1993b, 1159) argues in favor of more recent studies, however, that elsewhere Luke does not use *dikaios* with the sense "innocent." Also, it does not make sense that the centurion would "glorify God" because an innocent man has just been executed. "Normally," he says, "in Luke people praise God when they recognize that God has been at work in and through Jesus." Nolland agrees with Matera that the sense of the centurion's statement is that "Jesus, and not the religious leaders, stands in the right relationship to God." Matera also believes the message is that "through his unwavering trust in God as Father to the end, Jesus has shown

himself to be the Son of God." Hence the sense of the sayings would be essentially the same in all three Gospel accounts of the centurion's confession (Matera 1985, 469–85). (See further comments at Matt 27:54 and Luke 23:47.)

***Variation in the accounts of the women witnesses to the crucifixion* (15:40, 47):** According to Matthew "many women" came with Jesus from Galilee. "Among them" were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were at the interment. Mark adds Salome and leaves out Zebedee's mother. He has the same women at the interment. Luke names no one but mentions women from Galilee at the crucifixion and interment. John only mentions Mary the mother of Jesus, her sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene at the cross. There were seven women in all, which qualifies as "many women." There may have been more. The accounts are not contradictory but complementary, differing in the level of detail shared.

Mary Magdalene (15:40): A synagogue at Magdala, near the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, was uncovered in 2009. Archaeologists believe it was built in the first century BC. Mary "Magdalene" means that Mary was from Magdala, just as Jesus the "Nazarene" means Jesus was from Nazareth. It is probable that Jesus on occasion preached in the synagogue at Magdala. Because Mary numbered among the disciples of Jesus, various groups that held to eccentric and heretical views exaggerated Mary's significance, crediting her with secret, exotic teaching (see, e.g., the Gnostic *Gospel of Mary*). The recent claim that a tomb in East Talpiot (a few miles south of Jerusalem), accidentally unearthed in 1980, contained the remains of Jesus, Mary, and a son named Judas lacks credibility, is based on a gross misreading of the relevant archaeological evidence, and is not followed by any reputable archaeologist (for further discussion, see Gibson 2009, 175–87, 203; Evans 2012, 144–47, 171–73). It should be noted that Gibson was one of the archaeologists who excavated the Talpiot tomb. He does not think this tomb had anything to do with Jesus or his following.

> 42 When it was already evening, because it was preparation day (that is, the day before the Sabbath), 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Sanhedrin who was himself looking forward to the kingdom of God, came and boldly went in to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. 44 Pilate was surprised that He was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him whether He had already died. 45 When he found out from the centurion, he gave the corpse

to Joseph. 46 After he bought some fine linen, he took Him down and wrapped Him in the linen. Then he placed Him in a tomb cut out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the entrance to the tomb. 47 Now Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses were watching where He was placed.

When it was already evening (15:42): If it was "already evening" when Joseph went to Pilate, was it not already Sabbath (on the view that Jews reckoned the new day to begin at 6:00 p.m.)? If so, how does Mark go on to say "it was preparation day (that is, the day before the Sabbath)"? If in fact it was already Sabbath, how was Joseph willing or able to purchase linen in light of the Sabbath restrictions? Or do the work of hauling and interring the body? The resolution to this problem is best found in recognizing that Mark's syntax is convoluted here. What he is actually saying is that it is the day of preparation and that the evening is quickly approaching. Jesus died about 3:00 p.m. It must be between 4:00 and 5:00 p.m. when Joseph approached Pilate, so there is very little time to prepare for Jesus' burial (Evans 2000, 518).

He gave the corpse to Joseph (15:45): It is often said that crucifixion victims were generally left to rot or heaped in a common grave, correct? Given the high profile of Jesus' execution, critics of the Gospel accounts say it seems unlikely that Pilate would give Jesus' body over to one of his followers. It is true that, given the charges brought against Jesus, the Roman governor might very well have refused permission (see *Digesta* 48.24.1–2; 48.16.15, 3). But Jewish custom was opposed to leaving bodies hanging on gibbets or crosses overnight (see Deut 21:23; *m. Sanhedrin* 6:6; *b. Sanhedrin* 46b), but regarded burial of the dead as an act of piety (see 2 Sam 21:12–14; Tob 1:17–19; 2:3–7). Pilate, moreover, was probably only too happy to have the corpse of Jesus removed from public view given his apparent doubts about Jesus' guilt (Mark 15:14).

The 1968 discovery of an ossuary that contained the skeletal remains of a man who had been crucified and then properly buried lends important support to the idea that during peacetime the Roman authorities did accommodate Jewish sensitivities with respect to burial, even of the executed, as Josephus and Philo state (Philo, *Flaccus* 83; *Embassy to Gaius* 300; Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.220; 4.317; *Against Apion* 2.73, 211, 205) and as Jewish law required (Deut 21:22–23; 11QTemple 64:7–13). For details relating to the crucified man, see Evans 2003, 98–103. For details relating to Jewish burial laws and customs, see Evans and Wright 2009, 39–73, esp. 59–64.

***Mark's silence about Nicodemus's involvement* (15:45–46):** Does Mark's

silence (Matthew's and Luke's as well) about Nicodemus suggest that he would dispute John's report involving Nicodemus (John 19:39)? This is another case of the silence being insignificant. Mark, Matthew, and Luke focused on the aspect of the story they felt was most important to convey. The Synoptics never mention Nicodemus anywhere, whereas John mentions him in several different settings (John 3:1–9; 7:50; 19:39). Perhaps John had access to traditions about Nicodemus that the other Evangelists lacked, or knew Nicodemus personally and thus included mention of him.

> When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so they could go and anoint Him. 2 Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they went to the tomb at sunrise. 3 They were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone from the entrance to the tomb for us? " 4 Looking up, they observed that the stone — which was very large — had been rolled away. 5 When they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; they were amazed and alarmed.
>
> 6 "Don't be alarmed," he told them. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has been resurrected! He is not here! See the place where they put Him. 7 But go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see Him there just as He told you.' "
>
> 8 So they went out and started running from the tomb, because trembling and astonishment overwhelmed them. And they said nothing to anyone, since they were afraid.

When the Sabbath was over (16:1): When did the Sabbath end? Was it 6:00 p.m. Saturday (as Mark 16:1 may seem to imply) or 6:00 a.m. Sunday (as Matt 28:1 seems to imply)? If the Sabbath ended at 6:00 p.m. on Saturday, did the women buy spices right at nightfall and then hunker back down, awaiting the chance to go to the tomb at dawn on Sunday? Would shops really open for that brief window of time between the end of the Sabbath (6:00 p.m.) and full dark (an hour or so later)?

Matthew's "after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning" does not say "as the first day of the week was *beginning*." He simply means "at dawn on the first day of the week." His readers would have known that the Sabbath had ended at sunset on Saturday. Verse 1 implies that the women bought the spices as soon as the Sabbath ended on Saturday evening. In that case, the shops were apparently open. In a culture used to working around Sabbath restrictions, this is not implausible.

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome (16:1): Which

women went to the tomb? The Gospel accounts do not give the same information. John 20:1 seems to say only Mary Magdalene went. The Synoptics agree that Magdalene went but also say others went, but they do not list the same women. John says nothing about the spices or the planned anointing. He only mentions Mary Magdalene, perhaps because she is the one who first saw Jesus. However, when Mary sees Peter in John's account, she says, "*we* don't know where they have put Him!" (John 20:2, emphasis added). Thus she has unmentioned companions, and John is not discordant with the Synoptics. Mark lists Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome as going to the tomb. Matthew only lists Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary," leaving out Salome for some unknown reason. Luke lists Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, "and the other women with them" (24:10). The Evangelists have shared different but not contradictory details.

Very early in the morning . . . they went to the tomb at sunrise (16:2): Was it dawn or still dark when the women went to the tomb? Whereas the Synoptics seem to have the women arriving at dawn (Matt 28:1; Luke 24:1), John says, "Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark" (John 20:1). Perhaps Mary was with a group of ladies who arrived before the others, or perhaps John's "came to the tomb" means to describe the time at which she left home rather than the time when she arrived at the tomb. The reality is that the Gospel accounts are not specific enough to merit the charge of being contradictory on this issue. "Went" and "came" are not as precise as "left" and "arrive," and so we should not press the evidence for specificity the authors did not likely intend. (See further comments at Matt 28:1 and John 20:1–2.)

Who will roll away the stone from the entrance to the tomb for us? (16:3): That the women went to further tend to Jesus' body, and that they fully expected the tomb to still be secured, demonstrates again that even Jesus' closest followers had no expectation that he would rise from the dead. Critics believe that this calls into question the claim made in all four Gospels that Jesus repeatedly foretold his death and resurrection. From our vantage point today, the lack of resurrection expectation is difficult to square with Jesus' numerous predictions. However, we must take into account the mental environment of the disciples at that time. They expected Messiah to be triumphant. That he came for the purpose of dying on the behalf of sinners was incomprehensible to them. Thus, each time Jesus predicted his death and resurrection the disciples showed an almost complete lack of comprehension, especially of a resurrection. When

judged in light of widespread pre-Easter expectations, it is no surprise that Jesus' followers were not looking for him to rise from the dead.

Interestingly, the lack of resurrection expectation demonstrates the futility of the "stolen body" theory put forth by the Jewish religious leaders and subsequent skeptics. If the disciples gave up all hope at Jesus' crucifixion and did not expect a resurrection, what motivation would they have for stealing Jesus' body after he had been given a nicer burial than could have been expected? Their lack of motivation is strong evidence against the theory that the disciples stole the body to make it look like a resurrection.

Archaeological discoveries show that the average adult woman was five feet tall and weighed 90 pounds in the first century. Mark explains that the stone was "very large" (v. 4), so the women understandably wonder how they will manage moving the stone. The disciples have fled and are in hiding because Jesus had been condemned as a criminal. That the women would wonder who would roll the stone away for them raises an important question: did they not know that the tomb was guarded? Had they known, surely they would not have expected the guards to permit them access. And instead of wondering who would roll away the stone, they would be wondering, "Will the guards permit us access?" Most likely, therefore, the women were unaware of the guard around the tomb. Upon close consideration, this is not entirely surprising. The male disciples had all fled and hidden themselves out of shame, disappointment, and possibly fear of retribution. The women attended Jesus' crucifixion and interment before retiring to observe the Sabbath. The guard was placed around the tomb at some time after the interment, presumably after the women had left the site. Thus it is likely that the women were in no position to receive news of the guard prior to leaving their homes early on Sunday.

They observed that the stone—which was very large—had been rolled away (16:4): Mark, Luke (24:2), and John (20:1) have the women come upon the tomb and find it already opened, whereas Matthew 28:2–7 seems to have the women present to watch an angel descend, roll back the stone, sit on it, and then address them, telling them not to fear and that Jesus had been raised. This is one of the most striking differences in the resurrection accounts. One harmonization attempt suggests that Matthew does not mean to portray the women as seeing the angel descend and roll away the stone, and that readers get the contrary impression because he has telescoped the events in his narrative. It is true that Matthew does not explicitly state that the women saw these things, but nevertheless this reading may be regarded as implausible because Matthew says

the guards were shaking with fear of the angel in verse 4, and then the angel immediately tells the women in verse 5 that they should not fear. This naturally leads to the assumption that the women had witnessed the very same things that stuck fear in the guards, namely the angel and his actions (see comments on Matt 28:2, 5–6 for a different view).

The difficulty of this issue calls to mind a quote by German classical historian H. E. Stier, who said "The sources for the resurrection of Jesus, with their relatively big [apparent] contradictions over details, present for the historian for this very reason a criterion of extraordinary credibility. For if that were the fabrication of a congregation or a similar group of people, then the tale would be consistently and obviously complete" (Staudinger 1981, 77). That such difficulties as the present topic were allowed to stand in Scripture indicates that the early church felt it was best to preserve unmodified the sacred writings rather than press them into greater conformity. For detailed discussion of how the respective narratives could be fitted together, see comments on Luke 24.

They saw a young man dressed in a long white robe sitting on the right side (16:5): Matthew 28:5–6 has an angel who is sitting outside the tomb atop the tombstone announce to the women Jesus' resurrection; Mark 16:5–6 has the news coming from one "young man" sitting inside the tomb; Luke 24:5–6 has the news coming from "two men . . . in dazzling clothes" who are suddenly standing beside the women after the women have ducked into the tomb and found it empty; and John 20:12–13 does not have men or angels announce the news, but does have Mary Magdalene meet two angels inside the tomb at a time after she had first come to the tomb, left to fetch Simon Peter, and returned to the tomb. It is Jesus himself who reveals the resurrection to Mary in John's account. The above differences are impressive. The common harmonization says that the women were met by two men (as Luke says) dressed in white and/or dazzling clothes (as both Luke and Mark say), who were actually angels (Matthew alone refers to an "angel"), one of whom was the spokesman (which accounts for why Matthew and Mark both mention only one of the two).

There is a sufficient body of consistent testimony about the resurrection to make the evidence for it compelling even in the face of challenges such as these. Certainly the early church recognized the challenges posed by the different resurrection accounts. That they believed despite these matters, and that they did not reject the Gospels or seek to amend them to bring about a greater harmony, is proof that they felt the Gospels were true accounts and should be allowed to stand unmodified and accepted as authoritative. Further, the fact that women

were the first witnesses is an important part of that, since no one at that time would have contrived such a story dependent on the testimony of women. (See further comments at Matt 28:5–6, Luke 24:4–6, and John 20:12.)

But go, tell His disciples and Peter, "He is going ahead of you to Galilee" (16:7): Matthew 28:10 has Jesus tell the women: "Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see Me there." Mark's account has not Jesus but the young man tell the women a similar message. After telling them that Jesus has been resurrected (Mark 16:6), the young man says: "But go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see Him there just as He told you'" (v. 7). So who really delivered this message, Jesus or the young man? The resolution is found in noting that Matthew 28:7 is in substantial agreement with Mark 16:7. Much like Mark, this verse in Matthew portrays the angel (young man in Mark) as saying: "Then go quickly and tell His disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead. In fact, He is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see Him there.' Listen, I have told you." Thus Matthew has the angel and Jesus both delivering a similar message to the women. Matthew has simply included a saying that Mark did not share. That Mark lacks the statement from Jesus fits with the fact that he chose not to narrate any post-resurrection appearances of Jesus (this assumes v. 8 is where the authentic Gospel of Mark ends; see comments below).

A harder question arises when we pull in Luke's account. Whereas Matthew and Mark have the angel (and Jesus in Matthew) tell the women to go ahead of Jesus to Galilee, Luke has the angel say, "He is not here, but He has been resurrected! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee" (Luke 24:6). Rather than directing the disciples to go to Galilee and meet Jesus there, the angel in Luke prompted them to recall what Jesus had said while in Galilee. Luke then proceeds to narrate resurrection appearances of Jesus in Jerusalem and nearby Emmaus, but mentions none in Galilee. This differs from Matthew, who narrates appearances of Jesus in Galilee. Given that Luke devotes much attention to Jerusalem in his Gospel, it is possible that he redirected the statement in Mark 16:7 in order to narrate only resurrection appearances in Jerusalem and Emmaus, leaving unmentioned any and all Galilee appearances. It is also possible that the angel said both statements, referring back to something Jesus said in Galilee in one statement, and directing the disciples to go there in the other. All the Gospel accounts select which events they will recount, in what order, and how. This results in four somewhat confusing accounts.

And they said nothing to anyone, since they were afraid (16:8): The earliest manuscripts (Sinaiticus and Vaticanus) end at verse 8, and this seems to be the last extant and authentic portion of Mark's Gospel. Although several interpreters think Mark's Gospel originally ended at 16:8, the original narrative probably continued with a description of the disciples meeting the risen Jesus in Galilee, as both Jesus (14:28) and the young man at the tomb (16:7) foretold. Fulfillment of Jesus' other prophecies (on finding a colt, on finding the prepared Upper Room, on the disciples' falling away, on Peter's denials) were narrated in Mark; this leads one to expect that fulfillment of his prophecy about appearing to his disciples was probably also narrated originally. Gundry (1993, 1010–11, 1021) thinks Matthew 28 incorporated some of Mark's original ending. How Mark's original ending came to be lost and why the Evangelist or a close associate did not restore it is not known.

If in fact Mark did originally end at verse 8, we are left with an abrupt ending that depicts the women fleeing in fear and holding their tongues. This clearly differs from the accounts given in Matthew 28:8, Luke 24:9; and John 20:18. A plausible reconciliation is that Mark has chosen to halt his account dramatically, at a point when the initial shock and fear still gripped the women. The good news of Jesus' resurrection has been delivered to the women (16:6), and so Mark is clearly in agreement with the other Gospels on the central point of the resurrection narratives. He leaves no doubt about Jesus' resurrection. That he does not portray the women as telling the news to others does not mean that he intends for his readers to think that the women were forever silent on the matter. Readers ancient and modern naturally suppose that the women soon calmed themselves and told the disciples what they had seen.

Two Endings of the Gospel of Mark: In the ancient manuscripts that contain the whole of Mark we find four endings: (1) at 16:8, "since they were afraid"; (2) at 16:20, the so-called Long Ending; (3) at 16:8, plus the so-called Short Ending; and (4) at 16:20, plus the Short Ending. Many of the older manuscripts have asterisks and obeli marking off the Long or Short Endings as doubtful.

> [9 Early on the first day of the week, after He had risen, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene,
> out of whom He had driven seven demons. 10 She went and reported to those who had been
> with Him, as they were mourning and weeping. 11 Yet, when they heard that He was alive and
> had been seen by her, they did not believe it. 12 Then after this, He appeared in a different form

to two of them walking on their way into the country. 13 And they went and reported it to the rest, who did not believe them either.

14 Later, He appeared to the Eleven themselves as they were reclining at the table. He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who saw Him after He had been resurrected. 15 Then He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. 16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. 17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: In My name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new languages; 18 they will pick up snakes; if they should drink anything deadly, it will never harm them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will get well.”

19 Then after speaking to them, the Lord Jesus was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. 20 And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the accompanying signs.]

The traditional ending of Mark, the so-called Long Ending, tells of Jesus’ appearance to Mary Magdalene, of her report to the unbelieving disciples, of a later appearance to the 11, and of the commission to evangelize. This commission contains some bizarre elements: picking up snakes and drinking poison, and not being injured by either (v. 18). The entire passage appears to have been composed from the resurrection accounts of Matthew, Luke, and John, and has even alluded to events described in the book of Acts. The most obvious parallels are as follows:

v. 11: lack of belief (Matt 28:17);
v. 12: the two on the road (Luke 24:13–35);
v. 14: reproach for unbelief (John 20:19, 26);
v. 15: the Great Commission (Matt 28:19);
v. 16: salvation and judgment (John 3:18, 36);
v. 17: speaking in tongues (Acts 2:4; 10:46);
v. 18: serpents and poison (Acts 28:3–5);
v. 18: laying hands on the sick (Acts 9:17; 28:8);
v. 19: ascension (Acts 1:2, 9);
v. 20: general summary of Acts.

Verse 14 appears in a somewhat expanded and different form in the fifth-century codex W. In this version the disciples excuse their lack of faith as due to the influence of Satan and his unclean allies. Jesus assures his disciples that Satan’s time is almost over and that a fearful judgment is near.

The parallels with Acts and the other Gospels, the high concentration of vocabulary found nowhere else in Mark, the absence of these verses in our oldest copies of Mark (Sinaiticus and Vaticanus) and in the earliest fathers (e.g.,

Clement of Alexandria and Origen), and the awkward connection between verses 8 and 9 have led most scholars to conclude that the Long Ending of Mark was not part of the original Gospel. Mark 16:19 (“Then after speaking to them, the Lord Jesus was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God”) is quoted in Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 3.10.5), but this is uncertain testimony. The original Greek text of this part of *Against Heresies* has not survived. It survives in a later Latin translation that may have incorporated this verse from much later manuscripts. Accordingly, it is far from certain that Irenaeus, writing c. AD 180, was acquainted with Mark’s so-called Longer Ending.

> But they reported briefly to Peter and those with him all that they had been told. And after this Jesus himself sent out by means of them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.

Some manuscripts preserve the so-called Short Ending to Mark (L Y 099 0112). Almost all of those that do also contain the Long Ending. The Short Ending has no compelling claim to authenticity, for it contains a high percentage of non-Markan vocabulary and exhibits a rhetorical tone found nowhere else in Mark.

Apologetics Commentary on the Gospel of Luke

The Gospel of Luke is tied to the book of Acts (see Acts 1:1) and explains how the Good News of Jesus Christ is intended for both Jews and Gentiles. Although the Christian faith was new, Luke shows that it was rooted in old promises and the long-awaited salvation program of God. In the ancient world people viewed new religions with suspicion. Luke legitimized the faith by showing how Jesus fulfilled promises God made to the patriarchs and prophets. The very first verse of the Gospel strikes this note, where Luke speaks of "the events that have been fulfilled among us."

Authorship

Features both internal and external to the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts have bearing on a decision about authorship of these companion volumes. Internally the books are anonymous, but two factors bear strongly on the questions of authorship and reliability. First, the author discloses immediately in the Gospel that he was not an eyewitness to most of the events he narrates about Jesus' life (Luke 1:2–4). This fits with what is known of Luke. But far from confessing unreliability, the author assures the reader that his exposition of Jesus' life is based on the testimonies of "eyewitnesses and servants of the word" (v. 2). He also claims to have "carefully investigated everything from the very first" (v. 3). This suggests the author enjoyed close access to Jesus' original followers. Second, the author further bolsters his credibility by showing himself to be a companion of Paul in the portions of Acts known as the "we" sections (Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–28:16). This too fits with known facts about Luke, for biblical testimony confirms that Luke was a traveling companion of Paul on his missionary journeys (Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11; Phlm 24).

Scholars debate whether the "we" sections reflect the perspective of an authentic eyewitness (Ellis 1974, 43–44; Hemer 1989, 312–34) or merely a literary device calculated to give the impression that the author was an eyewitness (Haenchen 1971, 85–90; Vielhauer 1966, 33–34, 47–48). A way of testing the authenticity of the "we" sections is to compare what the author says

about Paul with what Paul says of himself in the Pauline Epistles. If these portraits do not match, we would have strong indication that the “we” sections are inauthentic. Haenchen (1971) and Vielhauer (1966) argue that the portraits are indeed mismatched in historical detail and theological emphasis. F. F. Bruce (1975–76), to the contrary, finds the portraits compatible. Proponents of the skeptical view also note that the author of Luke-Acts fails to cite or allude to Paul’s writings when describing his work, though Goulder contests this (1989, 129–46).

In support of the traditional view, Fitzmyer (1989, 1–26) argues that the “we” sections arbitrarily come and go in the book of Acts. This is not what we would expect if they were merely a literary device created by an author to give a false impression of eyewitness testimony. Surely an author bent on such deception would take greater care to place the “we” sections consistently and strategically throughout his narrative. Fitzmyer further argues that several of the “sailing” narratives (Acts 13:4,13; 14:26; 17:14; 18:18,21; 20:1–2) lack the “we” element even though these would be convenient locales for literary insertion. Together the inconsistent placement of the “we” sections and their absence in ideal locations argue that the author was not attempting to use a literary device to build a false impression of being an eyewitness. In place of the skeptical view, Fitzmyer suggests that Luke was a “junior” companion of Paul, not an “inseparable” friend as Irenaeus had described (*Against Heresies* 3.14.1).

In conclusion, the internal evidence is consistent with the idea that the author was a second-generation Christian who had good access to the oral and written traditions of the community of faith and was acquainted with Paul. There is nothing about Luke that would preclude him from these stipulations.

The external testimony about the authorship of Luke-Acts is consistent that Luke is the author, despite the fact that many better-known candidates who were closely tied to Paul could have been put forward in place of the lesser-known Luke. These better-known candidates would include Mark, Timothy, Titus, Silas, Epaphras, and Barnabas. Even Aristarchus and Demas might seem better candidates than Luke (Col 4:14; Phlm 24). This field of candidates suggests that if the church had simply chosen to attribute the writings to an author in order to give the work a higher status, Luke would not have been the natural name to employ. And yet Luke and Luke alone was the name embraced in the early tradition.

Around ad 160 Justin Martyr cited a passage from the third Gospel and called it a “memoir of Jesus” (*Dialogue with Trypho* 103). A short time later the

Muratorian Canon (c. 170–180) named Luke, described as a doctor and a companion to Paul, as the author of the Gospel of Luke. The Anti-Marcionite Prologue to Luke (c. 175) names Antioch of Syria as Luke's home (Acts 11:19–30; 13:1–3; 15:30–35) and says he was a physician and a bachelor. Irenaeus (c. 175–195) named Luke as the author, basing his case in part on how the "we" sections tie Luke to Paul (*Against Heresies* 3.1.1; 3.14.1). In the early third century Tertullian called the Gospel of Luke a digest of Paul's gospel, a description that fits nicely with Luke's familiarity with Paul (*Against Marcion* 4.2.2; 4.5.3). Finally, Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339) affirmed that Luke was a companion of Paul and the author of Luke-Acts (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.4.2).

Date

The date of composition for this Gospel is tied to two other factors: Luke's literary relationship to the other Synoptic Gospels (Matthew and Mark) and the date of Acts. The last event narrated in Acts is Paul's imprisonment in Rome, which can be dated to the early 60s. The debate is whether Acts ends with Paul in prison because that is the last thing that happened before Luke finished writing Acts, or whether Luke simply stopped his narration at this event because Paul's imprisonment marked the arrival of the gospel message in Rome, which could be viewed as the theological goal of the book. In the first scenario the book of Acts was written in the early 60s, while in the second scenario it could have been written much later. Many place the composition of Acts in the 60s and then put the Gospel of Luke slightly earlier. This is a reasonable approach. The later in the 60s Acts is placed, the later the date for Luke is placed. Some even place Acts in the 70s or 80s, while a few move the work all the way into the second century.

Tied to this decision is whether Luke used the other Gospels as sources. The most common view is that Luke did use Mark; scholars debate whether he also used Matthew, which they have seen as less than likely given the differences between those Gospels (e.g., the infancy material). Scholars date Mark variously from the mid-50s to around AD 70. Mark assumes the church is suffering persecution or at least anticipates that possibility, making a 60s date plausible since this was the time Nero's persecution. The question then becomes how long after Mark would Luke have been written. With these key factors in place, let's take a closer look at the argument for Luke's date.

Though scholars dispute the date of Luke's writing, there are some upper and lower limits. The last event recorded in Acts defines the earliest possible origin,

which can be dated to around AD 62. Luke was not likely written much earlier than this since it was composed shortly before Acts. Indisputable citations of the Gospel of Luke by Irenaeus (died c. AD 202) define the latest possible date of composition at around AD 170 (*Against Heresies* 3.13.3; 3.15.1). Some scholars push the date as close to this *terminus ad quem* as possible, naming the early to mid-second century as the likely time of composition. They base their argument on a comparison of the Gospel of Luke to writings from Marcion, Josephus, Justin Martyr, and the Pseudo-Clementines (Knox 1942, 110, 120; O'Neill 1970, 19; Townsend 1984, 47–58). But careful analysis shows that the tone of Acts differs from that of writings from the late first century (e.g., *1 Clement* in ad 95) and the second century (e.g., Ignatius in AD 117). Another factor arguing against a late date for Luke-Acts is Acts not showing much awareness of Paul's letters, which by the second century were widely circulated and regarded as authoritative. Furthermore, apparent allusions in *1 Clement* 2.1 (to Acts 20:35), 5.6–7 (to Acts 26), and 18.1 (to Acts 13:22) argue that *1 Clement* was written well after Acts. These facts push the upper limit for composition from the mid-second century down to the mid-90s at the latest, making Acts (and therefore Luke as well) a first-century document.

But what date in the first century is most likely? It is popular to conclude that Luke was written sometime after the fall of Jerusalem, with suggested dates falling in the AD 80–90 range. Five reasons are given for this range: (1) Luke was written after Mark, a document of the 60s; (2) Luke-Acts cannot have been written until after Paul had emerged as a hero in popular church thought; (3) the depiction of churches like the one at Ephesus best describes the period prior to the Domitian persecution in the mid-90s; (4) the apocalyptic discourses in Luke describe the siege of Jerusalem and thus must have been written sometime after the city's fall in AD 70; and (5) the theology of Luke is "early catholic," a more developed state than would be expected for an earlier date.

How should we evaluate these arguments? Three of them can be set aside. First, why should we believe it would have taken a long time for Paul to emerge as a central figure in the church? The NT presents reasonable explanations (e.g., Acts 9:1–31) for how he quickly became a pivotal and controversial leader of the early church. Second, the portrait of the churches mentioned in Acts does not fit just the time of Domitian's rule (AD 81–96) but any earlier time except the time of Nero's persecution (64; Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44). Third, it is debatable whether Luke's theology really reflects a late theology (Marshall 1970, 81–83, 212–15).

The other two arguments for an AD 80–90 date range are more substantial and

bear close attention. First, whether one thinks Matthew or Mark was the first Gospel, most likely Luke was written after Mark. Mark is typically dated in the 60s or later, so this defines possible dates for Luke. How soon after Mark's composition could Luke have been written? Some say that the Gospel of Mark would have needed to circulate for a while before an author would have felt justified in making use of it. This is similar to the argument that Acts must be a late document because it would have taken a while for Paul to emerge as a hero in the church. But Mark was well placed given his ties to Peter, so his writings would have been quickly accepted by the church. Further, Luke tells us that many people had written about the life of Christ before him, and he implies that he consulted these documents carefully during research for his own writing (Luke 1:1–4). Presumably the majority of these documents were not books that were accepted into the canon of Scripture, so "quasi-canonical" status was not a prerequisite for a document to be worthy of Luke's usage. This means Luke would have felt free to use the Gospel of Mark even if that Gospel had not yet gained widespread recognition as Scripture. So there is nothing that prohibits us from concluding that Luke used Mark very soon after Mark's composition.

The second substantial argument for dating Luke in the AD 80–90 range is that the eschatological discourses (Luke 19:41–44; 21:20–24) that detail the siege and destruction of Jerusalem suggest a post-70 date. Esler (1987) has undertaken a vigorous defense of this view. Assuming supernatural prophecy is not possible, Esler argues that the details Luke shares cannot be the result of his predicting outcomes of a future war with Rome. Wars and sieges can take many unforeseen directions, so Esler sees details such as the building of a circumvallation, the total destruction of the city, and forced exile of captives as proof that Luke put these details onto the lips of Jesus *after* the fact. This is against Dodd's assertion (1947, 49) that the war language of the discourses is more general than specific, fitting with known conflicts in Israel's past such as the sacking of Solomon's temple in 586 BC as recounted in the LXX. Dodd makes a good case. Furthermore, Esler misses a key point about the connection of the OT judgments and the destruction that befell Jerusalem. The OT judgments against Jerusalem were exercised because her citizens had been unfaithful to the covenant. That the city would once again be punished for unfaithfulness, and be punished in a similar way as past judgments, is not unexpected and justifies the use of very similar language. Thus there is no need to assume Jerusalem's fall is a *fait accompli* in the perspective of the Lucan eschatological discourses.

In summary, even if one disbelieves in the possibility of predictive prophecy, Jesus would have been capable of accurately describing Jerusalem's future fall on the basis of his knowledge of how God had judged covenant unfaithfulness in the past. Thus, this argument for dating Luke in the 80s–90s is not compelling even if one has skeptical presuppositions. And of course if one is open to the possibility of supernatural prophecy, then *a priori* there is no objection to Jesus' foretelling the fall of Jerusalem.

This opens the way to a date in the 60s (Hemer 1989, 365–410; Moessner 1989, 308–15; Ellis 1974, 57; Marshall 1978, 35). In support of this date range, (1) the book of Acts depicts Rome as being largely ignorant of the Christian movement, a reality that fits with an earlier date but not a later date; (2) the failure of Acts to mention the deaths of James (AD 62) and Paul (c. late 60s) suggests it was written prior to these dates; (3) if Jerusalem had been destroyed at the time of writing, it is difficult to understand why Acts would be silent about it, especially in settings where it could have been mentioned editorially as punishment for covenant unfaithfulness (e.g., Acts 6–7; 21–23); and (4) the many unresolved questions and tensions about Gentile-Jewish relations within the church is the mark of the earliest days of the church and parallels the Pauline Letters where similar tensions are addressed (Romans, Galatians, 1 Corinthians 8–10, Ephesians). Tension points included the applicability of the law to Gentiles, table fellowship, and Christian liberties (Acts 6:1–6; 10–11; 15). That the Gentile mission was still in need of defense in Acts also argues for an early date, for by the 80s the Christian movement was very much Gentile, hence Gentile participation was no longer a matter of debate. All of these points are strong indicators for a date in the 60s.

Determining an exact time in the 60s is more difficult. Arguments for an origin in the late 60s hold that texts such as Luke 11:49–51 presuppose that tensions between Rome and the church had already arisen. That Paul's death goes unmentioned at the end of Acts is said by many to rule out the late 60s, suggesting instead a date in the early to mid-60s. However, it may be that Paul's death goes unmentioned because it is not relevant to the fact that the word of God had now reached Rome, something Acts seems to emphasize. Also tempering the argument somewhat for the early 60s is Luke's needing time to receive and incorporate the Gospel of Mark.

In conclusion, a date in the early to late-60s is likely, but exactly where is unclear. Luke may have left Paul's execution unmentioned because Paul was in fact still alive when Luke finished his narrative, although it is also possible he

wrote after Paul's execution but simply concluded the story with Paul's imprisonment because the focal point had been achieved: the entry of the gospel into the key city of the Gentile world.

Provenance

Luke's writings nowhere specify a place of authorship. For this reason, where one fixes the place of Luke's writing depends on the date one fixes for the works themselves. Candidates include Caesarea (ad 60s), Rome (60s or 80s), Antioch (any date), and Greece (any date). Fitzmyer (1981, 57) concludes that the place of authorship is "anyone's guess." This is perhaps our best answer at present.

General Reliability of the Manuscripts Available to Us

Of obvious apologetic concern is the question of the reliability of manuscripts for the Gospel of Luke. The following chart lists the major manuscripts by family. Dates (by century, ad) are indicated in parentheses:

Family	**Manuscripts**
Primary Alexandrian	P^{75} (early 3rd); ℵ and B (4th)
Secondary Alexandrian	C, T, and W (5th); Ξ (6th); L^{e} (8th); 33 and 892 (9th)
Western	Itala, $Syriac^{s}$, and $Syriac^{c}$ (4th); D^{e} (6th)
Primary Byzantine	Byz (4th); A and W (5th); N and P^{e} (6th); 0211 (7th); E^{e} and 047 (8th), F^{e}, G^{e}, H^{e}, Δ, and Θ (9th), Γ (10th), 055 (11th)
Secondary Byzantine	R and Φ (6th); K^{e}, M, U, V, Y, Λ, Π, Ω (9th); S and X (10th)

This chart reveals that the majority of the manuscripts for Luke are late and from the Byzantine family. But the question of the "majority text" depends on time frame. That which is the majority text today was not necessarily the majority text in the earlier history of the manuscript. The earlier manuscripts fall mostly in the Alexandrian family and versions reflecting the Western text. The situation today has reversed. How have the Byzantine manuscripts come to predominate? At least three factors are involved: (1) extensive Roman persecution during the first to fourth centuries included the destruction of many of the earliest manuscripts; (2) Muslim persecutions after the seventh century achieved the same destruction; and (3) whereas many Christians adopted Latin as their religious language after the fourth century and thus created Latin NT manuscripts, the Byzantine region of Christendom stayed with Greek.

What impact does this have on the reliability of our texts? The textual base for the Gospel of Luke is strong, but the Byzantine readings are frequently the most

harmonistic in the Gospels, likely reflecting efforts by copyists to ease some of the difficulties that arise when parallel Gospel texts are compared. For this reason the Byzantine manuscripts should be viewed with caution, though as a sub-theme to the overall reliability of the entire Gospel manuscript tradition.

Sources (Oral and Written)

Luke had access to key centers of Christian activity plus written and oral sources, as he tells us in 1:1–2. These sources likely included Mark's Gospel, special material (L), and traditions. The material we have called "traditions" is often referred to as Q (*Quelle*, which means "source" in German). The Q material is actually so varied that it may be appropriate to denote two varieties of Q: a Matthean version and a Lucan version. This variety suggests Q is not strictly a fixed, written tradition but is instead a group of traditions that in some cases are oral. Whereas others hold that Q is a *bona fide* document or set of documents, it is best to understand Q to be a fluid pool of traditions from which both Luke and Matthew drew. Furthermore, L and Q may have overlapped in topics covered since Matthew and Luke share a considerable amount of teachings and parables. Differences in these shared subjects could be accounted for by Matthew using Q and Luke using L. Why does one posit Q? There are about 225 verses that Matthew and Luke share. Many also think these Evangelists did not use each other because of differences between the Gospels, especially in their structure (e.g., compare infancy material or the way the Sermon on the Mount and Plain are handled). So if they did not use each other, from where did all this shared material come? Scholars propose a circulating tradition in the church, possibly a single source, or more likely a more complex stream of shared tradition, which has come to be known as Q. Although it is a hypothesized source, there are good reasons for thinking something like it existed, as scholars do not doubt the church had circulating Jesus traditions of which Q would be an example.

How does Luke compare to Mark and Matthew? And how much use did he make of Q and L? About 35 percent of Luke (406 verses) relates to content in Mark. About 21 percent of Luke (241 verses) represents Q material that is in Matthew but not in Mark, while 42 percent of Luke (485 verses) is composed of L, verses that are unique to Luke.

What Kind of Literature Is Luke?

Luke, like the other Gospels, is best seen as an ancient *bios*, a biography with a declarative goal of persuading people to embrace Jesus as God's promised one.

This came to be called a Gospel, or a work of good news. The ancient biography highlights peoples' acts and works to give a sense of what they accomplished (Burridge 1995).

Earliest Citations

Our earliest possible citation of Luke's Gospel is in 1 Timothy 5:18; the text is not noted as coming from Luke (10:7) but from the Lord. Thus it may be that Paul was quoting a tradition on which the Gospel of Luke also depends and not the Gospel itself. Allusions to Luke's Gospel are found as early as *1 Clement* 13.2; 48.4 (c. AD 95–96) and *2 Clement* 13.4 (c. 100). In the mid-second century Justin Martyr cited Luke when discussing the Last Supper in *Dialogue with Trypho*. Irenaeus (d. c. AD 202) provided a clear citation (*Against Heresies* 3.13.3; 3.15.1) at around AD 170.

Establishment in the Canon

Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 3.1.1; 3.14.1) and the Muratorian Canon date from the last few decades of the second century. They both refer to Luke as a recognized Gospel. Thus at least by the late second century the Gospel of Luke was accepted as an inspired, authoritative writing, and it is likely that widespread acceptance was achieved even earlier than this.

Apologetics Commentary on the Gospel of Luke

> Many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among
> us, 2 just as the original eyewitnesses and servants of the word handed them down to us. 3 It
> also seemed good to me, since I have carefully investigated everything from the very first, to
> write to you in an orderly sequence, most honorable Theophilus, 4 so that you may know the
> certainty of the things about which you have been instructed.

Many have undertaken (1:1): It is a mistake to think that comparatively few things were written about Christ in the decades after his death and resurrection. As the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls demonstrates, literacy and religious writing were sufficiently widespread in Jesus' era to allow the passing on of historical information. The sense is that literacy was between 5 and 10 percent in the region; it is debated whether Jewish literacy in specific was higher or lower

(Mournet 2005, 112–14).

Given that Luke wrote this Gospel sometime between ad 62 and 90, his comment in verse 1 shows that previous to this early date Jesus' life was already well documented. However, written texts are not all we should consider here. The Jews were an oral culture adept at preserving oral tradition. Luke made mention of this in verse 2. The church had set up an oversight situation on oral tradition, whereby people who knew Jesus well kept watch over what others said of him. This is why it was required that the man who replaced Judas as an apostle had been with Jesus' ministry from the beginning (Acts 1:21–22). As an eyewitness he was able to confirm or deny what was being said of Jesus, thus keeping the tradition pure.

In all probability these core oral traditions and writings began to appear just a few short years after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. First Corinthians 15:1–8 gives evidence of such traditions in relationship to the resurrection, for Paul cites a resurrection tradition he had received upon becoming a Christian.

The early origin of oral and written traditions for the life of Jesus provides evidence against three common claims among skeptics: (1) that vital biographical data about Jesus was lost before anyone managed to pen the Gospels, (2) that Jesus was an obscure figure until the canonical books were written, and (3) that Jesus never even existed, and that the biblical books represent whole-cloth fiction, the invention of a divine redeemer patterned after Greek mystery religions. If authors were actively documenting the life of Christ shortly after his resurrection, and if Luke knew (and consulted) their writings, the skeptic faces an uphill climb when he attempts to cast doubt on the accessibility of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Furthermore, early historians who were outside the Christian movement gave evidence of Jesus' existence (Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.63–64).

Interestingly, the Gospel of Mark was likely one of the documents Luke had in mind when he said that "many had undertaken to compile a narrative" about Jesus' life. The majority of NT scholars today hold that Mark was the first of the canonical Gospels to be written, and that both Matthew and Luke consulted Mark's Gospel, even quoting from it, as they composed their own narratives. In this case we have Luke, a careful researcher (v. 3), putting his stamp of approval on the reliability of Mark's Gospel.

Fulfilled among us (1:1): Two points stand out here. First, "fulfilled" alludes to Jesus' life and works being seen as a fulfillment of the OT. This is a common theme in Luke. Jesus did not drop onto the scene without context. As the

Evangelists made clear, he instead came as the fulfillment of messianic prophecies made throughout the OT. Such fulfillment is both direct (where OT texts that were only about the one to come are fulfilled in Christ) and pattern fulfillment (where OT texts admit an initial fulfillment in the time of the writer as well as a final fulfillment in which Christ escalates and fills out the pattern). There is far more pattern fulfillment in the New Testament than many people realize.

Second, that the fulfillments occurred "among us" means plenty of people were around to witness the key events in Christ's life. Unlike Mohammed, who claimed to have received his revelations privately in a cave, or Joseph Smith, who based his new religion on his supposed discovery of inscribed plates that conveniently went missing after he translated them, Jesus was a public figure whose life and works were lived out in the open. This openness means that the validity of Jesus' claims, as well as the claims made about him by others, are open to critical examination. Luke invited his readers to undertake such an examination themselves as they reviewed the evidences he had compiled.

Original eyewitnesses (1:2): This text highlights the oral and personal roots of the testimony about Jesus. Those who knew him shared what they knew through the network of the church. Though critics claim that the accounts of Jesus' life reflect a legend decades in the making—the result of religious hype and revisionist history—the NT authors commonly emphasized that their sources for information about Jesus were eyewitnesses (e.g., John 1:14; Acts 1:1–3; 1 Cor 15:1–8; Heb 2:3–4; 1 Pet 5:1–4; 1 John 1:1–4). Luke himself was not an eyewitness to Jesus' life, but due to his affiliation with the apostle Paul (see the "we" passages in Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–21:18; 27:1–28:16) he had easy access to those who were. For instance, Luke was with Paul in Caesarea for more than two years while they visited Philip the evangelist. As Leon Morris pointed out, "This period spent with such companions must have given opportunity for discovering much about Jesus and the early church" (Morris 1999, 18). Luke also knew Silas due to their mutual involvement in Paul's missionary journeys (see Acts 15:40 and the "we" of 16:10). Silas was a member of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:22) and would have had detailed knowledge of eyewitness testimonies to the life of Christ.

Handed them down to us (1:2): Luke was a recipient of oral and written accounts given by disciples who were eyewitnesses to the life and works of Jesus. "Handed down" is likely a technical term borrowed from the rabbinic

practice of carefully entrusting sacred traditions to students of religion who were in turn charged with preserving and passing them on for future generations. Great emphasis was laid on keeping the accounts accurate (Papias, as reported in Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.15; Clement, in the same source, 6.14.6; Irenaeus, in the same source, 5.20.7). Though what details were shared could vary in the retelling (a function of literary and editorial choices of what to include or omit, as well as from what angle to tell the account), the gist of the story remained constant. Thus recipients of the tradition could expect a range of variability within the tradition and yet trust in its accuracy. This point is important to keep in mind when examining the Gospels in particular, where variation between parallel accounts should not undermine the reader's confidence in the historicity of the accounts.

Investigated everything from the very first (1:3): Luke's investigations would have included personal interviews of eyewitnesses to the life of Christ as well as interviews of people who knew them. These interviews would naturally have taken place in Jerusalem and at various locales during the missionary journeys Luke undertook with Paul. Additionally, Luke would have investigated the oral and written accounts of the life of Christ. Having compiled all this data, Luke had a lot of material to work with when he set out to write his biography of Jesus.

Luke wrote his Gospel carefully and with a concern for accuracy because he sought to give assurance to the recipient, as verse 4 makes clear. It was written apparently in response to questions and issues raised by a man named Theophilus, and its composition involved Luke in the kind of work common to history writers, whose goal was to show the core character of their subject(s) (see Plutarch, *Life of Julius Caesar*, Introduction).

If Luke was seeking to answer the specific questions of a particular individual and otherwise educate him about Christianity, and if he conducted research in order to do so, what does this imply about the divine inspiration of Luke's writings? Second Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is inspired by God," but doesn't Luke's prologue (1:1–4) imply that his writing was engendered by more mundane factors such as oral traditions, written traditions, verbal reports, the specific interests of Theophilus, and his own desires to set out a coherent account? The problem with this line of questioning is that it assumes that the biblical writings should not bear the marks of typical human writings. It is more proper to emphasize that Scripture is a product of both human and divine involvement, resulting in books that share characteristics with other ancient

writings even as they convey without error the words and propositions God willed. Very rarely do biblical authors state any kind of awareness that they were authoring divinely-inspired Scripture, and yet the Bible affirms the reality of God's involvement—a testimony that the church has embraced from the outset.

Orderly sequence (1:3): Some critics and many Bible readers have latched onto this phrase and taken it to mean that Luke's merits as a historian should be judged on the basis of whether his account is true to the historical chronological sequence of events in Jesus' life. Finding inconsistencies internally or in comparison to the other Gospels, critics conclude that Luke is ultimately unreliable, while normal readers sometimes are troubled by the differences. But "orderly sequence" does not necessarily mean that the ordering principle was chronology. Norval Geldenhuys takes it to mean a "logical and artistic arrangement," forming "a connected whole" (Geldenhuys 1951, 53). "Orderly sequence" may also touch on the fact that, unlike Mark, who wrote his Gospel before Luke, Luke aimed to give an account of Jesus' entire history from conception to resurrection (Mark has no infancy material). More likely it represents the geographic progression from Galilee to Jerusalem that dominates the structure of Luke's Gospel. In all likelihood, the synagogue scene of Luke 4:16–30 is placed forward in sequence to typify what Jesus' Galilean ministry was like. We suspect this because in the scene there is a call for Jesus to reproduce what he had done in Capernaum at a time when, in Luke's sequence, he had not yet been in Capernaum.

Even if this synagogue scene is relocated, this kind of editorial move does not upset the orderliness of Luke's account since the Evangelist was giving a literary preview of what the entire period of ministry would be like, treating this scene as typical and thus appropriate as an opening. Judgments of the Bible's accuracy must take into account the freedom of an author to edit and arrange his material according to his chosen aims. Where this freedom leads to breaks in chronology or apparent inconsistencies with parallel accounts, it does not necessarily prove the author(s) erred. It merely reflects distinct editorial choices.

Most honorable Theophilus (1:3): We are uncertain about the exact identity of Theophilus. Some have speculated that Theophilus was not a person but rather a term symbolic of Christians generally since the name means "beloved of God." In this case Luke's Gospel was written not for a person but for the church. But most likely Theophilus signifies an actual person who was either interested in Christianity or a member of the faith who now had fresh questions about it. Luke

therefore wrote him for the purpose of encouraging him to come to faith or of increasing his faith.

Is the value or applicability of Luke's Gospel diminished if he wrote it for a specific person? Not at all. It was common for authors in ancient times to dedicate their works to specific people even when they had every intention of gaining a wider audience (e.g., Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.1 §§1–5). It may even be that Theophilus was a person of high station who helped underwrite the work, since Luke called him "most honorable."

Know the certainty (1:4): The word *asphaleian*, translated as "certainty" in the HCSB, can be misunderstood by modern readers. In our age, people often think "scientific proof" when they hear someone talk about a quest for certainty. Raise the temperature of tap water to 212º F on your stovetop, for instance, and if you are at sea level you can know with certainty that it will boil. We cannot demonstrate the Bible in so sure a fashion. Nevertheless, Bible readers can be assured when reading the NT accounts that the sources accurately describe Jesus, both his teachings and his actions. The term "certainty" refers to assurance, a kind of emotional confidence, not absolute proof. That assurance was rooted in the diligent way Luke pursued his sources for Jesus' life. This reassurance was Luke's purpose in writing.

Theophilus, likely the patron who financed Luke's research and the publication of Luke-Acts, was apparently an interested observer in the life of Christ or perhaps even a disciple. He may have come to fear that the persecution of the church described in Acts was God's judgment against the church for having taken an originally Jewish message out to Gentiles in too loose a manner. If this was his suspicion, Luke assured him that the Gentile mission was God's plan and not a compromise. In addition, in the ancient world a new religious movement was generally less well-received because it was not time tested. Innovation in religion was frowned upon. Luke showed that though the Christian faith seemed new, it was rooted in promises that went back deep into the ancient past. Luke's efforts were aimed at supplying Theophilus (and by extension you and me) with a true, reliable "narrative about the events" Jesus fulfilled among first-century observers in Israel.

Text critical notes on Luke 1:1–4: Metzger noted that a few copyists, apparently concerned that Luke made no mention of the Holy Spirit's role in the composition of this Gospel, altered verse 3 to read, "It also seemed good to me *and to the Holy Spirit . . .*" (Metzger 1994, 108). The evidence against this

addition is definitive. Readers should not grow concerned that Luke never says anything like, “God told me to write this Gospel.” See above the discussion on 1:3, “Investigated everything from the very first.”

> 5 In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest of Abijah’s division ᵎ named
> Zechariah. His wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 Both were
> righteous in God’s sight, living without blame according to all the commands and requirements
> of the Lord.

King Herod of Judea (1:5): Often dates were identified in the ancient world by reference to the length of reigns, kingdoms, or as is done here, specific kings. Herod is a much-discussed figure in Josephus. His slaying of his favorite wife and his many sons showed his political paranoia (Josephus, *Antiquities* 15.233–237; 16.185). Herod was declared a king of the Jews by the Romans in 40 bc, but he did not come to rule until 37 bc (Tacitus, *Histories* 5.9). His rule lasted until 4 bc. So the birth of Jesus and John fall into the end of this period, since Matthew 2:19 tells us Herod died not long after Jesus’ birth. For Luke there is no discussion of the well-known violence of Herod. He only seeks to give a general date for these events.

Zechariah . . . Elizabeth (1:5): We are not told about the sources of the account of John’s parents and their experiences. John the Baptist as well as his parents were long dead by the time Luke wrote his Gospel. It is possible that this account came from the extended family or from people allied to John the Baptist who knew his story. Certainly the events were noteworthy and would have been passed along by interested observers. Scholars estimate that there were thousands of priests during this time. It would make sense for many of them to pass down memory of the spectacular events experienced by Zechariah during his one and only chance to offer sacrifice for the nation, an act determined by the casting of lots (*m. Tamid* 5–7 discusses the sacrifice procedure).

Righteous in God’s sight, living without blame (1:6): The description of Zechariah and Elizabeth as being without blame uses common language to indicate they were responsive, pious people before God (Gen 6:8; 7:1; Deut 28:9; 1 Sam 8:3; 1 Kgs 3:14; Ezek 14:14). This does not mean they were sinless, but that they were responsive to all the means God had given for their spiritual growth. This would have included offering sacrifices in response to sin, something Zechariah was doing corporately in this scene.

7 But they had no children because Elizabeth could not conceive, and both of them were well along in years.

8 When his division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, 9 it happened that he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. 10 At the hour of incense the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. 11 An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. 12 When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and overcome with fear. 13 But the angel said to him:

Do not be afraid, Zechariah,
because your prayer has been heard.
Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son,
and you will name him John.
14 There will be joy and delight for you,
and many will rejoice at his birth.
15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord
and will never drink wine or beer.
He will be filled with the Holy Spirit
while still in his mother's womb.
16 He will turn many of the sons of Israel
to the Lord their God.
17 And he will go before Him
in the spirit and power of Elijah,
to turn the hearts of fathers
to their children,
and the disobedient
to the understanding of the righteous,
to make ready for the Lord a prepared people.

18 "How can I know this? " Zechariah asked the angel. "For I am an old man, and my wife is well along in years."

19 The angel answered him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and tell you this good news. 20 Now listen! You will become silent and unable to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time."

21 Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah, amazed that he stayed so long in the sanctuary. 22 When he did come out, he could not speak to them. Then they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept making signs to them and remained speechless.

They had no children because Elizabeth could not conceive (1:7): The text is clear in verse 6 that both Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous, so the lack of a child was not a sign of judgment, even though that was how barrenness was commonly viewed in that time (Lev 20:20–21; Jer 22:30). Elizabeth's bearing of

John was like the births of Isaac, Samson, and Samuel, great men of the OT who were born from formerly barren women. Their births were signs that God was doing something special in order to advance his purposes.

An angel of the Lord appeared to him (1:11): Skeptics immediately discount any text that involves supernatural beings, and they believe they have science on their side. But by definition supernatural beings are beings that are not bound by the natural world. Space and time do not confine them. Since science can deal only with realities confined to our space-time continuum, science can have nothing to say about the existence or nonexistence of supernatural beings such as angels. Thus readers are thrown back on their presuppositions and experiences. The biblical view is that angels exist and are sometimes used to impart knowledge of God's will (Luke 2:9; Matt 1:20; Acts 5:19; 1 Cor 4:9; Heb 1:4; 1 Pet 3:22; Jude 6; Rev 5:2), and any reader who accepts this testimony at face value is not guilty of being pre-scientific.

On another note, some skeptics like to suggest that NT events like the angel's visit with Zechariah were created to form an analogy with seminal OT events. The idea is that the NT authors sought to capitalize on OT events by recycling them. But what OT event has Luke recycled here? It was usually the mother who received news about an unexpected birth in the OT stories (Judg 13:3; 1 Sam 1:10, 17; 2 Kgs 4:15–17), but here it is the father. Abraham is hardly analogous to Zechariah, for the circumstances and outcomes are markedly different. Abraham was called to create a people group that would endure forever; Zechariah's line likely died with his son, John. Abraham had been singled out by God for covenant long before the birth announcement and was the dominant human figure in Genesis; Zechariah entered and exited the stage in the space of just one chapter. If Luke created the Zechariah account as an analogy to Abraham's experience, he failed to make the connection.

You will name him John (1:13): Much like Essenes did, as a prophet John called the nation of Israel to reform—to turn to God and live differently. There is some discussion whether he may have known the Essene community at Qumran or if he had been a Nazarite. With regard to Qumran, it is possible that he knew of the Essenes who lived there since he ministered in the region, but we have no solid evidence of any connections. Some of his teaching about righteousness and the use of baptism for cleansing run parallel to things we see at Qumran, but that is as close as we can get to tying John to the Essenes.

There is no instruction that John should not cut his hair. This kind of directive

clearly would have made him a Nazarite. Without it, any suggestion that John was a Nazarite is just speculation. What is clear is that he lived a very ascetic life, a style that was in contrast to Jesus (Luke 7:31–35).

He will go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah (1:17): An important question involving John is whether he was the coming Elijah and what was entailed by this. In Matthew 11:14 Jesus said of John, "he is the Elijah who is to come." But John himself said, "I am not," when directly asked if he was Elijah (John 1:21). Luke's contribution is to say that John acted in the "spirit and power" of Elijah.

How should we understand these diverse witnesses? We should immediately rule out that Jesus meant John the Baptist was literally Elijah, for this would involve a form of reincarnation, a view that contradicts biblical anthropology (e.g., Heb 9:27). Though Elijah never died (2 Kgs 2:11) and was prophesied to make a return appearance, John was born and lived as a distinct person. In Matthew 17:3 Elijah appeared alongside Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration. This brief appearance at a vital time in salvation history greatly differs from any suggestion that Elijah came back and lived an entire life as John the Baptist.

In this light, it seems best to see John as an Elijah-like prophet whose role was to announce the arrival of the new era. He was a type of Elijah, not Elijah himself. This similarity to Elijah is why Mark 1:2 and Luke 7:27 associate John with Malachi 3:1. Elijah will likely still come again in the end times, perhaps as one of the two witness-prophets of Revelation 11:3.

"How can I know this?" Zechariah asked the angel (1:18): Zechariah was surely aware that an angel was addressing, for he was "startled and overcome with fear" at the visitation (v. 12). While feeling awe and fear in the presence of the heavenly messenger, how could Zechariah dare express skepticism about Elizabeth's forthcoming pregnancy? Would we not rather expect Zechariah to give immediate assent to the angelic message? Finding Zechariah's response unrealistic, skeptics suggest it is evidence that Luke was writing fiction. The presumption is that anyone who knows he is standing in the presence of an angel would be quick to believe anything the angel tells him.

At least five considerations should be noted. First, angelic pronouncements typically involve the foretelling of something impossible under normal circumstances. The force of everyday human experience conditions us not to expect the miraculous, so even the most pious person would likely be slow to accept the pronouncement. Zechariah knew that old age normally precluded

having children. It can even be argued that Zechariah's skepticism here is the mark of authentic historical narrative, for one characteristic of legendary accounts is that miracles are accepted as everyday occurrences. Second, it is believable that someone who is "overcome with fear" (v. 12) would fail to be at his best when responding. Third, the typical biblical pattern is that people pose challenging questions, complain, or even argue in times of angelic or divine appearance (e.g., Exodus 3–4; 1 Kgs 19:10; Acts 14:10). This perhaps reflects an inborn rebellion in us all or even simply a natural skepticism about unusual events. Fourth, the Bible assigns culpability to Zechariah for his skepticism (Luke 1:20). This ironically supports the critic's contention that ideally Zechariah ought not to have doubted the angel's word. Fifth, Luke's portrayal of a biblical hero in this negative light argues for the accuracy of his account.

In conclusion, Zechariah is not a "bold skeptic" here but a normal person, trying to make sense of very unusual circumstances. Like all of us, he was slow to be responsive to the unusual things God sometimes does.

Unable to speak (1:20): Though some may think it harsh, this divine act of judgment actually provided an opportunity for Zechariah to reflect on the fact that God will do what God promises, something Zechariah learned by the time his tongue was freed up again later in the chapter. In fact, a key theme of Luke's infancy material is that God does what he promises, no matter how strange it may seem. Zechariah was given some quiet time to contemplate what God can do.

The silencing of Zechariah may also serve a second purpose: to keep the revelation under wraps until the "proper time" when God would fulfill all that the angel had said. God was moving into position the various persons who would play roles in the culmination of redemption history.

They realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary (1:22): Zechariah could not speak about the angelic visitation due to being struck mute, but nevertheless the people quickly concluded that he had "seen a vision." Does their quick grasp of the situation indicate that people commonly expected visions and angelic visits to be granted in the temple? Or, more skeptically, does it indicate that Luke was passing fiction off as truth but has inadvertently created a scenario in which those waiting outside the temple have a so-called narrator's omniscience—meaning they know the same information as the storyteller even though they have not been given access to that information (i.e., they did not observe what occurred inside the temple, nor did mute Zechariah tell them)?

Several considerations favor answering these questions in the negative. First, God encountered people in all sorts of places (e.g., Ezekiel “saw visions of God” by a riverside; Ezek 1:1), and it is unlikely that the Jews were preconditioned to expect visions to be granted to priests serving in the temple. Visions from God were rare, and priests entered the temple uneventfully on a daily basis. Second, priests carried out these sacrifices daily and their timing would be fairly consistent, so Zechariah’s delay suggested something unusual was taking place. Third, that Zechariah had been struck mute was itself a sign that something extraordinary had taken place. Fourth, Zechariah would have been able to communicate effectively through gestures.

26 In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,
27 to a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. 28 And the angel came to her and said, “Rejoice, favored woman! The Lord is with you.”
29 But she was deeply troubled by this statement, wondering what kind of greeting this could be. 30 Then the angel told her:

Do not be afraid, Mary,
for you have found favor with God.
31 Now listen:
You will conceive and give birth to a son,
and you will call His name Jesus.
32 He will be great
and will be called the Son of the Most High,
and the Lord God will give Him
the throne of His father David.
33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever,
and His kingdom will have no end.

34 Mary asked the angel, “How can this be, since I have not been intimate with a man? ”
35 The angel replied to her:

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you,
and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.
Therefore, the holy One to be born
will be called the Son of God.

36 And consider your relative Elizabeth — even she has conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called childless. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God.”
38 “I am the Lord’s slave,” said Mary. “May it be done to me according to your word.” Then the angel left her.

A town in Galilee called Nazareth (1:26): Some critics read Matthew and Luke in opposition to one another in terms of where Jesus' family lived before and during his birth (e.g., Erhman 2008, 127–29). They claim that Luke portrayed Nazareth as Jesus' home and Bethlehem merely as his birthplace, while Matthew had Bethlehem as both Jesus' birthplace and his permanent home. This view is motivated in part by the fact that Matthew never mentioned Nazareth until the time when the family returned from Egypt (Matt 2:23). He simply started Jesus' birth narrative in Bethlehem (Matt 2:1) and never hinted that the holy family had lived in Nazareth prior to their return from Egypt. Further, in Matthew 2:11 the wise men found young Jesus (perhaps two years of age, according to one popular view) in a Bethlehem house, which seems to suggest the family lived in Bethlehem and had done so for some time, whereas Luke had the family returning to Nazareth shortly after Jesus' birth (Luke 2:39). Next, Matthew portrayed Joseph as initially assuming he would return his family to Judea when they left Egypt (Matt 2:22), which seems to imply that Bethlehem rather than Nazareth (which was in Galilee) was their home. Finally, Matthew had Jesus' family moving to Nazareth to fulfill a prophecy and made no mention of them having family or a prior residence there (Matt 2:23).

Matthew's silence about the holy family's first stay in Nazareth catches our attention, but the skeptical conclusions some critics spin from it seem off target. Their reading of the situation seems to forget what all students of the Gospels affirm: the accounts of events in the Gospels are selective. One author may sometimes leave unmentioned events or details another author dwells on extensively. For example, the Gospel of Mark, assuming the shorter ending is the original, does not speak of any detailed resurrection appearances although Mark wrote at a time when these were well known and recited by Christians (see 1 Cor 15:3–8) and would later be narrated by the other Gospel authors (Matt 28:1–10; 16–20; Luke 24; John 20–21). Mark clearly taught the resurrection of Christ (Mark 16:1–8), so his silence about many of the details indicates his purposes as a narrator, not his supposed unbelief about those details.

Applying this lesson to the present debate, we should not treat either infancy account as an exhaustive look at events tied to Jesus' birth and early life. It may well be that with the census and the move south to register, Joseph's plan had been not only to register in Bethlehem but to live there. If so, Matthew would have felt justified in picking up the account at Bethlehem and leaving Nazareth unmentioned. Even if this were not Joseph's plan, the desire to wait until the time of purification after the birth of a firstborn would leave the family in the

region for at least several weeks, requiring them to find a place to stay until those days had passed. After all, it is unthinkable that they would remain in a manger.

In sum, one should not use the selective, summary nature of these two infancy accounts to treat Matthew or Luke as if either of them tells us everything, making the other account automatically suspect. Both Matthew and Luke were selective in what they conveyed, and they were perfectly within their rights to telescope and summarize events in order to achieve their narrative aims. In some cases this leads to details that are difficult to harmonize, but there are no outright contradictions between Matthew and Luke.

The angel Gabriel was sent . . . to a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph (1:26–27): Luke told the announcement of this unusual pregnancy from Mary's standpoint, never mentioning that the angel spoke to Joseph in a dream. This contrasts with Matthew who emphasized Joseph's perspective (Matt 1:18–25) and left unmentioned Gabriel's announcement to Mary. This is one of several differences in the approaches taken by Matthew and Luke. Another example includes Luke's making nothing of the connection to Isaiah 7:14 that Matthew emphasized (Matt 1:22–23). However, while Luke did not refer to Isaiah, he did make it clear that Mary was a virgin by how he had her describe herself in Luke 1:34 and the use of the term "virgin" (Gk *parthenon*) in 1:27. Luke simply told of the event and the announcement, making no point about a scriptural fulfillment.

Luke's real stress was on Jesus' bringing the promised rule of God back to his people in a person tied to the line of David. Joseph would be the means of establishing a legal tie to David's line as he was legally the father of the child—not biologically, but as a social reality. What man but Mary's husband would be regarded as Jesus' father? The genealogies of Jesus (Luke 3:23–38; Matt 1:1–17) are probably both tied to Joseph (although this is debated) and they run through David, establishing the familial-legal tie between Jesus and the king who was prophesied to produce an heir whose throne God would establish forever (2 Sam 7:12–14; Ps 132:11). As will be noted when I treat the genealogy in Luke 3, the curse of Coniah (Jer 22:30) may be partially responsible for the differences between the genealogies in Matthew and Luke. One is a biological listing (see mention of Jeconiah, also known as Coniah or Jehoiachin, in Matt 1:11), while the other is a legal listing that takes into account the exclusion of the curse.

A virgin (1:27): The virgin birth (or better, virginal conception) was of course

unprecedented and difficult to believe, and the text faces up to this fact by noting Mary's question about how such a thing could be possible (Luke 1:34). How could Mary have a child if she did not yet have a husband and the sexual intimacy that comes with marriage? The biblical response is that God caused the pregnancy and that nothing is impossible with God (v. 37). This simple phrase nicely summarizes the crux of the debate about the credibility of the virginal conception. A person's belief or unbelief in the virginal conception rests chiefly on whether they believe in God and his ability to create life in whatever manner he chooses. Accordingly, people often reject the virginal conception because of presuppositions that doubt or limit God's activity in the world. Machen (1930, esp. 126–34, 380–81) is somewhat dated but still helpful both in rejecting explanations that are grounded in a history-of-religions approach and in evaluating the arguments surrounding the rejection of this teaching. A comparative-religions approach was very popular in the early part of the twentieth century. Numerous parallels to the virginal conception have been noted among other religions, though none of them are exact. Ernst (1977, 76) and Marshall (1978, 72–75) list such parallels and argue that such outside accounts are not the basis of the biblical account (so also Nolland 1989, 47). This is the current consensus, whatever else is said about the material.

Among scholars, the debate about Jesus' conception is unresolved (Brown 1977, 517–33; Fitzmyer 1981, 341–42). But lack of consensus among scholars does not mean Bible readers must refrain from believing in Jesus' virginal conception. If rather than holding skeptical presuppositions one is open to the biblical testimony, then there are strong reasons for accepting the miracle as true. First, the virginal conception fits easily with the biblical doctrine of God's omnipotence, which says God is all-powerful. If one rejects the virginal conception at the outset due to doubts about God's power, this rejection is based on theological or philosophical presuppositions rather than anything concrete coming from textual evidence.

Second, Jesus' virginal conception is integral to his identity as God's Son, and Jesus' divine sonship is in turn fundamental to the entire NT message and the birth of the church. These facts commend the truthfulness of the miracle, for it is hard to explain belief in Jesus' divinity and the origin of the church apart from the virginal conception.

Third, though it is true that outside Matthew and Luke the NT does not explicitly address Jesus' miraculous conception, no one has posited an adequate explanation for the origin of the concept, outside the event itself. There are no

antecedents in Jewish history that would have led Matthew or Luke to create the concept. In fact just the opposite is true—Jewish theology emphasized the oneness of God (e.g., Deut 6:4; Isa 45:21; Hos 13:4). Any idea of God having a co-equal son would have been seen as blasphemous, and in fact this caused Jesus trouble in his ministry (e.g., John 5:18).

Fourth, the lack of emphasis on the virginal conception elsewhere in the NT is not evidence against its truthfulness. One should not forget that oral traditions about Jesus' origins were in circulation before the NT was written. Most scholars accept that Luke inherited oral material and used it in his writings, so teachings about Jesus' birth likely were in circulation prior to Luke's writing. The absence of details about Jesus' birth and origins elsewhere in the NT corresponds with the general absence of material about the life of Jesus prior to his ministry activity. The adult life of Christ commands most of the attention of his followers, so this was the focus of the Gospels and other NT writings. Neither Mark nor John narrate anything of Jesus' birth or childhood. Mark's omission of infancy material is somewhat surprising, but we may explain his omission simply as a literary choice to start with John the Baptist's activity; plus the omission fits with the overall brevity of his Gospel. John's omission of infancy material is less surprising, for he wished to present the highest imaginable Christology at the start of his Gospel: the identity of Christ as the preexistent Word. Thus his emphasis at the start of his Gospel was on Jesus' preexistence, not the details of his human birth.

Critics sometimes claim that parallels in Greco-Roman literature are the source of the NT teaching about Jesus' virginal conception. For instance, Alexander the Great and Caesar Augustus were said to have been born of gods (Plutarch, *Alexander* 7.2; Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Augustus, 94). These accounts of great rulers mirror each other and describe in very precise and crass terms how the conceptions supposedly took place. For Alexander, a serpent was said to have laid at Olympias's side, while in Augustus's case, the serpent was said to have glided up Atia's body, entered her, and glided away. These very literal descriptions have little resemblance to the kind of announcement we have in the NT. The Gospels do not pretend to tell us exactly how Jesus' conception took place. That God has promised a miraculous conception and the Holy Spirit has fulfilled it is all the detail we need (v. 35). Another point of distinction is that the Greek myths do not build anticipation for the births. In Jesus' case, he is the fulfillment of centuries of prophecy and national anticipation. No such expectations preceded the births of Alexander or Augustus. In sum there is no

precedent, Greek or otherwise, for the kind of conception story we have in Matthew and Luke.

New Testament passages that tie Jesus to Joseph (e.g., John 1:45) do not deny his virginal conception but are instead natural expressions of Joseph's responsibility for the household in which Jesus grew up. In fact, Mark may show evidence suggesting he assumed Jesus' virginal conception when he referred to Jesus as "the Son of Mary" rather than Joseph (Mark 6:3). Such a designation would be uncommon in a patriarchal society. Paul's mention in Galatians 4:4 of God's sending forth his Son at the right time may also allude to Jesus' miraculous origin, especially since Paul elsewhere seemed to describe Jesus as having left heaven to take on flesh (Phil 2:6–11). If Jesus left heaven to become a man, his conception cannot have been by the ordinary means.

Critics also ask, if the virgin conception is true, why did Mary join with her other sons in trying to stop Jesus from making some of his claims (Matt 12:46–50; Mark 3:20–35)? Would she not instead defend and even help propagate his grand claims if she knew he was miraculously conceived? Most likely Mary was reacting to the most exalted of Jesus' claims. She knew he was special, but as a faithful Jew who looked forward to the restoration of her nation, all she expected of Jesus was that he would be one who was promised by God to rule over a restored Israel. Along with many other observers she was surprised and troubled by any talk of Jesus being divine or of doing things, like forgiving sin, that only God was said to do.

In sum, the discussion on the historicity of the virginal conception boils down to worldview choices. What one thinks is possible in terms of God's action in the world impacts whether one accepts or rejects the virginal conception. The text clearly presents the virginal conception as lying at the root of the earthly generation of Jesus. Marshall (1978, 76) aptly said that belief in the virgin birth is not unreasonable, if one can accept the reality of the incarnation. This keen observation does not prove historicity, but it does make the point that what one thinks God is able to do impacts how one assesses the debate.

EXCURSUS: ARE THE NT STORIES SIMPLY RECAST OT STORIES?

Some critics teach that events in the Infancy Narratives are just recast OT scenes. Following are several examples of the claims they have made:

- Critics say that the story of the wise men (Matthew 2) is related to a version of the Balaam story (Numbers 22–24). But what is the connection, other than that in both cases men from outside Israel are called to serve as oracles of God? To take such bare similarities and turn them into causal connections is farfetched.
- The account of Herod the Great slaying the infants is said to be drawn from Pharaoh's killing the children

of Israel and seeking to kill Moses. But this claim ignores the differences between the two accounts. Whereas Herod is out to destroy Jesus alone, Pharaoh acts not just against Moses but against all Israel. It also ignores the fact that Herod was known to be ruthless in dealing with potential rivals; he even slew several sons and his favorite wife in a paranoid attempt to protect his interests. In this light, the NT account fits with what is known of Herod from extrabiblical sources, so there is no need to look anywhere other than to true events to find the inspiration for the story.

- Some say that Joseph's dream in which he was warned to flee Herod by going to Egypt (Matt 2:13), and then later the dream telling him to return from Egypt (Matt 2:19–20), are both inspired by the two dreams that were given to the OT patriarch Joseph (Gen 37:5–11), for whom Egypt played a central role. But this charge understates the role dreams play throughout the infancy material, including a dream given to the wise men (Luke 2:12) and a dream given to Joseph (1:20–21) that bears no similarity to any dream given to the patriarch.
- The description of Zechariah and Elizabeth as blameless and infertile is said to be drawn from the story of Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 15–21). But is it reasonable to think that a story of an infertile, pious old couple must be a fiction because it resembles a previous such story? Neither piety nor infertility is so uncommon that we should raise suspicions when two such stories are recorded in Scripture. Furthermore, it should not be surprising when nearly identical language is used to describe conditions or character traits such as infertility, old age, and piety. The links between these two couples are not sufficient or exclusive enough to justify suspicions that one inspired the other.

EXCURSUS: SOURCES AND ORIGIN FOR THE INFANCY NARRATIVES

What were Luke's sources for the Infancy Narratives? Chiefly the tradition must go back to Mary and her family. For John the Baptist's birth, sources from his circle are possible. Among Mary's children, Luke's source could particularly have been James the half-brother of Jesus (Gal 1:19), who as a leader of the early church would have had every chance to disseminate (even to Luke directly since Luke was associated with Paul) the accounts surrounding Jesus' virginal conception and early life.

To this the skeptic will reply that the Infancy Narratives arose not from Mary and her family, but from sheer invention in the early church. One version of this view says the church felt that preaching a sonship modeled on divinized Roman emperors would be attractive to Gentiles, thus increasing their chances of joining the Christian movement. There are numerous problems with this argument.

First, the criterion of embarrassment argues against it: the church would not invent an account that would only cause them embarrassment. To exalt Jesus' conception and birth falsely, making a miracle out of what had actually been mundane, would have been of no benefit to the message about Jesus. In fact such a claim would only bring derision and claims of illegitimacy, as proven by popular Jewish opinion about Jesus' origins (John 8:41). Why place another stumbling block in the already-difficult message of the gospel? So the church would not have taught Jesus' virginal conception unless it had strong cause to believe its truth.

Second, the lack of emphasis on Jesus' virginal conception in the kerygma (the gospel preached by the church, as seen in the NT) shows just how weak the skeptic's argument is. Jesus' miraculous conception was a fixed and important belief in the church, but if it was not emphasized in the preaching, how can it be sensible to say that it was invented to help make Jesus' biography more attractive to Gentiles who were familiar with emperor worship?

Third, when an emperor was raised to divine status, he was positioned toward the bottom of the pantheon of the gods. His divination was a way of proclaiming his greater-than-human skill in ruling but was not intended as a proclamation that he was Creator God. In contrast, the Christian faith places Jesus not merely in the heavens as a lesser god but as a fully divine figure who created heaven and earth (John 1:3, 10), who is equal to the highest and only God (John 1:1), and who is seated at the right hand on his throne (Luke 22:69). You see that the NT portrayal of Jesus is not at all parallel to precursors in the ancient world.

Fourth, a Greek, being familiar with divinized emperors, might be more open to a human being called divine than a Jew would be, but the exalted position of Jesus was stated so comprehensively and exclusively that the claim extended far beyond any kind of divine association and worship given to emperors. In fact, whereas a Greek or Roman might be willing to worship many divinized figures, in the new community that emerged from the Jesus event, Jesus was the *only* man to receive acclaim and honor as divine. This would be a stumbling block to Greeks.

A virgin engaged (1:27): Betrothal in the ancient world was part of a two-stage marriage process. The initial phase, the betrothal, involved a formal, witnessed agreement to marry and the giving of a bridal price (Mal 2:14; *m. Ketubot* 4:4–

5). At this point the bride legally became the groom's and could be called his wife although they had not yet come together. About a year later the actual marriage followed, and the husband took his wife home and consummated the marriage. In the first century betrothal could take place starting at the age of 12. Mary's age is left unstated, but an age such as this would be likely. Males generally married a few years later than females. It was during this betrothal stage, after engagement but prior to consummation, that Gabriel delivered the news to Mary.

Favored woman (1:28): Mary was a model believer, taking God at his word. She was favored of God (v. 30), thoughtful (v. 29; 2:19, 51), obedient (v. 38), believing (v. 45), worshipful (v. 46), and a faithful follower of God's law (2:22–51). It must be emphasized, however, that despite all these qualities, God's choice of Mary to bear this child sprang from his grace, not from any inherent merit that she possessed. Mary was the object of God's unmerited, graciously provided goodness. Her description as one who was "favored" made it clear that God had acted on her behalf and not *because* of her. In fact, Mary was totally perplexed by the sudden announcement. She did not ask for or seek this role in God's plan; God had simply stepped into her life and brought her into his service. Her asset was that she was faithful. She should be honored for her model of faithfulness and openness to serve God, as well as her readiness to believe God even when he made highly unusual promises, but that does not mean she is to be worshiped. Luke wanted us to identify with Mary's example, not to exalt unduly her person.

You will call His name Jesus (1:31): One of the most important messianic prophecies in the OT is Isaiah 7:14: "The virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel." Does the naming of the child in Luke 1:31 ("you will call His name Jesus") conflict with Isaiah 7:14 ("name him Immanuel")?

The name Immanuel means "God with us." Rather than a proper name, it is a title that describes Jesus' significance: that he is God walking among us as one of us. Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled insomuch as the church confesses Jesus as the incarnate Son of God—*God with us*. Jesus *is* our Immanuel. Matthew saw no conflict between calling the baby "Jesus" (Matt 1:21) and citing Isaiah's Immanuel prophecy (v. 23). In noting this, it is important to observe that Luke did not mention Isaiah 7:14. The difference reflects something we often see in the Gospels: each writer makes choices about what to mention. So Matthew noted the connection to Isaiah, but Luke simply told the story of the miraculous

birth. (See further comments at Matt 1:23.)

The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David (1:32): Though the angel promised Mary that Jesus would be given David's throne, Jesus never became king before his execution in the way kings normally do: by sitting on an earthly throne—but that is the point. Does this mean the angel's pronouncement failed?

What the angel went on to say in Luke 1:33 hints at the new reality. Of Jesus he said, "He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end." Clearly this points chiefly to an extramundane reality, for no mere earthly king or kingdom lasts forever. The promise that Jesus will take the throne of David alludes ultimately to Christ's eternal reign that God will usher in at the end times. But even now, in the time before the second coming, Jesus rules his people as the fulfillment of God's covenant promise to David and the nation of Israel to bless the world (Gen 12:1–3; 2 Sam 7:7–14). He casts out demons to show that the kingdom of God has come (Luke 11:20). He acts with messianic executive authority from God's side in Acts 2:30–36 by giving the Spirit to those who believe. His rule is of a different order and is shown in a way distinct from an earthly enthronement, although on his return that also will be evident. In part the answer parallels something Jesus said in the Gospel of John: "'My kingdom is not of this world,' said Jesus. 'If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I wouldn't be handed over to the Jews. As it is, My kingdom does not have its origin here'" (John 18:36). On the question of how Jeconiah's curse impacts Jesus' qualifications for kingship, see comments on 3:23–38.

The holy One to be born will be called Son of God (1:35): There is more ambiguity in this initial announcement about Jesus as Son of God than many people realize, for the phrase "son of God" and closely related phrases are used several ways in Scripture. There is the mysterious reference to "sons of God" in Genesis 6:1–4, which interpreters variously identify as humans or angels (see also Job 1:6; 38:7). The king of Israel or even the nation itself could also be seen as a son of God (Ps 89:26–28; Exod 4:22).

It is important to make note of this ambiguity because it helps explain why people seem not to have understood immediately that the baby was divine. Much of Gabriel's announcement could have been received as heralding a merely human king who sits over Israel and rules in the line of David. Yes, the miraculous origin of the child by the Holy Spirit signaled that something different was taking place, but the angel did not detail exactly what this meant to

Mary. Today we have the benefit of knowing how things unfolded in Jesus' life, but Mary did not have this advantage as she stood listening to the angel. She had to come to appreciate the full implications of Gabriel's message over the course of many years, and the same was true of those who walked with Jesus during his ministry. Judging from some of Mary's reactions to things Jesus said and did in his early years, she did not understand the angel's declaration to indicate Jesus' ontological deity (2:41–52; see also Mark 3:31–33). Her hymn of praise (Luke 1:46–55) and much else that she and others said in the Infancy Narratives all stressed Jesus' regal and delivering role, just as Gabriel's announcement did. Jesus is *the holy one*; he is *begotten of God*; but Mary and others did not realize the full implications of these statements for some time.

Luke chose to present Jesus from the "earth up"—that is, showing how, one step at a time, people came to see who Jesus really was. He started with Jesus as the promised king and teacher who revealed himself as Lord in the context of his ministry. Only slowly did people grasp all of what was promised in the events of the opening chapter of Luke. Luke's original readers, living at a later date and being exposed to all the church had come to know about Jesus, knew the fullness of Gabriel's meaning better than Mary did at this early stage of Jesus' life.

Nothing will be impossible with God (1:37): This statement does not teach, as some critics charge, that God can do even illogical things such as make square circles or create a stone too heavy for him to lift. God's inability to do pseudo-tasks (tasks that are not real) or violate logic does not diminish his power. This verse instead teaches that God will keep his promises. If he announces he will do something, like grant conception to a couple beyond childbearing age or even to a virgin girl from Galilee, he will do it even if it requires miraculous action.

May it be done to me according to your word (1:38): Mary's acceptance of God's will is what she is commended for. She believed God and was willing even to face certain rebuke for what she was about to have happen to her, for onlookers would assume she was guilty of adultery when she turned up pregnant before marriage. When Mary humbly agreed to let "it be to me according to your word" and presented herself as God's servant/slave, she was trusting God and putting herself in his service.

41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped inside her, and Elizabeth was filled
with the Holy Spirit. 42 Then she exclaimed with a loud cry:

“You are the most blessed of women,
and your child will be blessed!

43 How could this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For you see, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped for joy inside me! 45 She who has believed is blessed because what was spoken to her by the Lord will be fulfilled! ”

The baby leaped inside her (1:41, 44): Critics sometimes challenge the authenticity of this scene on the basis of two arguments. First, they say that John the Baptist’s statement in John 1:29–34 that he did not know the Messiah until the Spirit identified Jesus at his baptism, plus the Baptist’s bout with doubt in Luke 7:19 (see comments there), prove that he cannot have known Jesus and his significance from the womb. Second, that the Bible seems to indicate fetal John was able to recognize fetal Jesus reflects superstition and the ancient, pre-scientific view that the fetus is a preformed infant, a miniature human who already has advanced capacities such as cognition. Since we now know that superstition and the ancient view of fetal development are false, we should regard this passage as a fiction.

These criticisms read too much into the text. This scene is really about John’s mother interpreting an experience she had (the baby kicking at the time of Mary’s greeting) and not any claim on her part that her fetus had made a conscious act. The text says nothing about the physical state of the fetus in the womb, so nothing about such topics should be inferred from the passage. The event is to be seen as a fulfillment of the prophecy that John would be filled with the Spirit from the womb (Luke 1:15), but this need not indicate a conscious act by John from the womb. Furthermore, what is there to bar the possibility that the Holy Spirit filled fetal John with a joy so abundant that it caused him to give his mother a vigorous kick? Given the timing, and possibly the Spirit’s testimony in her own heart at that moment, Elizabeth interpreted the baby’s kick as a sign from God.

More difficult is the idea that adult John would not know of this story and the identification it represents. Still, John’s remarks about not knowing the Messiah in John 1 may reflect the awareness and confirmation that direct divine confirmation gave to him in terms of identification. He had not had personal confirmation of an identification of the Messiah until the Spirit confirmed it for him. This is likely what John’s Gospel means.

You are the most blessed of women . . . the mother of my Lord (1:42–43): How did Elizabeth know that Mary was carrying a baby, let alone a baby whom

she could legitimately call “my Lord,” when all that Mary had said to Elizabeth at this point is a greeting? Does this indicate that Luke is being anachronistic, putting onto the lips of Elizabeth a spontaneous confession that is insupportable given the limited information she has at this time?

This is one of those literary gaps that texts often give us. We have questions, but the text does not provide obvious answers. Since the text does not specifically say how Elizabeth knew about the child Mary bore, we are left to speculate. The stirring of the child in her womb is the only reason Elizabeth herself gave for sensing the importance of the moment (v. 44). Possibly the Holy Spirit testified to her about Mary and her pregnancy at the moment fetal John kicked (v. 41), enabling her to knowingly praise the infant Messiah. Perhaps she was made aware of this by another revelation to her or Zechariah. We do not know, and the text does not tell us. All we can do is fill in the gaps (and that is what the above suggestions do). The text does see these women as being very connected with God’s will and direction, so it is reasonable to speculate that somehow in some way God revealed this information to Elizabeth.

Another strong possibility is that Luke has condensed events and dialogue in order to convey the gist of the situation. Any chronicler of history is free to do this, and in fact must do it regularly if he is to accomplish his goals in a reasonable amount of space. Perhaps Luke has fast forwarded after the greeting and skipped over dialogue that may have occurred prior to Elizabeth’s exclamations in verses 42–45, dialogue that may have involved Mary’s explaining her condition and the infant’s special identity to Elizabeth. Again, the text does not ask or answer this question. So we can only make suggestions about what may have taken place.

What was spoken to her by the Lord (1:45): How did Elizabeth know “what was spoken to [Mary] by the Lord” at this point? A straightforward reading leads us to conclude that Mary had not yet disclosed to Elizabeth the story of Gabriel’s visit. As in our comments on 1:42–43, one suggested solution is that the Holy Spirit revealed this information to Elizabeth when he filled her (v. 41). Another suggestion is that this text contains a literary gap that skips over some of the exchange that occurred between Mary and Elizabeth. Luke is cutting to the chase. If the entire exchange were available to us, perhaps we would find that Mary disclosed to Elizabeth information about Gabriel’s pronouncements.

46 And Mary said:

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
47 and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior,
48 because He has looked with favor
on the humble condition of His slave.
Surely, from now on all generations
will call me blessed,
49 because the Mighty One
has done great things for me,
and His name is holy.
50 His mercy is from generation to generation
on those who fear Him.
51 He has done a mighty deed with His arm;
He has scattered the proud
because of the thoughts of their hearts;
52 He has toppled the mighty from their thrones
and exalted the lowly.
53 He has satisfied the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.
54 He has helped His servant Israel,
mindful of His mercy,
55 just as He spoke to our ancestors,
to Abraham and his descendants forever.

And Mary said . . . (1:46–55): Mary praised the Lord in a hymn traditionally called the *Magnificat*, a title drawn from the Latin translation of the Greek term *megalunei* (magnifies). Did Mary spontaneously create the words to this hymn? It might seem an extraordinary feat of artistry if she did, something we might not expect of a common Galilean girl. Critics take this as a sign that Luke's account is not authentic.

Close examination reveals that Mary's hymn has a number of phrases that recall wording found in OT and apocryphal hymns. The praise of God by women occurs often in the OT (e.g., Deborah in Judges 5). The strongest literary parallel to Mary's hymn is 1 Samuel 2:1–10, where Hannah offers a prayer of praise. This kind of resemblance to the OT leads some skeptics to suggest that NT authors simply created events such as Mary's hymn in order to line up with the OT. They theorize that the church created prophetic or scriptural links in order to connect Jesus to the OT and popular messianic expectations.

Three things need to be said in response. (1) It is possible that Mary's hymn as we have it reflects Luke's usage of literary reflection and stylization (via poetry), patterned after select OT hymns. By this method Luke would have sought to

summarize what Mary said and felt. This kind of dramatic rendering of history was common and acceptable in ancient historiography. For example, the *Aeneid* was a famous poem created for the purpose of exalting the Augustan dynasty in Rome, but its poetic character does not necessarily deny the historicity of a great ruler whose actions stand behind the account. Thus if Luke's rendering of Mary's hymn is not an exact representation of what Mary sang, we should not conclude that the whole event is fictional. (2) The suggestion that literary elements could be at play in Mary's hymn is not the same as suggesting the hymn is fabricated or that what is expressed there does not reflect poetically what took place in the historical event. History writers were afforded the right to such tools so long as they were not misrepresentative of truth. For instance, Matthew used literary collapse in the account of the death of Jairus's daughter (Matt 5:18–19, 23–26). He has news of the girl's death reaching Jesus before Jesus arrives at Jairus's house, whereas Luke (8:41–42, 49–56) has this news reaching Jesus only when he arrives at the house. Matthew's freedom to approach the same event differently did not alter the outcome on which both he and Luke agree: Jesus raised Jairus's dead daughter. (3) Suggesting that Luke may have stylized Mary's hymn does not mean Mary could not have expressed herself in much this way during her visit with Elizabeth. Being familiar with the OT, and perhaps especially the hymns of praise uttered by women, Mary may have drawn from her memory in order to create this hymn of praise. Further, Luke depicts both Mary and Elizabeth as being full of God's Spirit, so it is possible that Mary spontaneously praised God using essentially the language we have in Luke's account. What the hymn shows is a girl full of piety who knows her Scripture, and even more importantly, a person who appreciates that God can be trusted to do what he says.

One of the clues that Luke did not fabricate the hymn is that the associations are general and not indicative of a prophetic declaration of a specific event. If Luke had invented the hymn we might expect him to accomplish something more specific with it, such as detailed prophecies or proclamations about Jesus. But Mary is instead expressing admiration for how God acts regularly, and this is reflective of a theological appreciation for God and his salvific activity. This pattern of divine activity is especially the focus of verses 50–55. God's commitment to perform covenant works and to be faithful leads to Mary's declaration. These ideas are a part of what faithful Jewish people believed about God and do not require an "after-the-fact" revelation to Luke, much less outright literary invention by him, to be taken as elements in a hymn truly uttered by

Mary. Someone steeped in Scripture and the habits of praise would have been capable of expressing themselves in this way.

It is also possible that we do not have a tight chronology between verses 46–55 and the verses that preceded it. Perhaps Mary spent weeks or months composing her hymn following her arrival at Elizabeth's home since she stayed with Elizabeth for "about three months" according to verse 56.

A final question involves Luke's source. How did he gain access to the hymn Mary sang? He was not there to record it as she sang it, and any suggestion that God gave Luke (in the early or mid ad 60s) a verbatim recitation of Mary's words (uttered between 6 and 4 bc) would seemingly involve the discredited dictation view of biblical inspiration (see Introduction). Luke speaks of Mary pondering in her heart the fantastic events surrounding Jesus' early life (2:19, 51), so the source likely reaches back to Mary and her family.

67 Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

68 Praise the Lord, the God of Israel,
because He has visited
and provided redemption for His people.
69 He has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of His servant David,
70 just as He spoke by the mouth
of His holy prophets in ancient times;
71 salvation from our enemies
and from the clutches of those who hate us.
72 He has dealt mercifully with our fathers
and remembered His holy covenant —
73 the oath that He swore to our father Abraham.
He has given us the privilege,
74 since we have been rescued
from our enemies' clutches,
to serve Him without fear
75 in holiness and righteousness
in His presence all our days.
76 And child, you will be called
a prophet of the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord
to prepare His ways,
77 to give His people knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins.

78 Because of our God's merciful compassion,
the Dawn from on high will visit us
79 to shine on those who live in darkness
and the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied . . . (1:67–79): Zechariah's hymn (vv. 68–79) is known as the *Benedictus*. The name comes from the opening words of the hymn in its Latin translation. Much of what we said about the origin and source of Mary's hymn (vv. 46–55) applies to Zechariah's hymn as well. Some critics have charged that Luke invented the hymn himself, but overall this passage lacks the style and emphases commonly found in Luke, therefore the hymn does not strike us as something Luke would create. Zechariah's hymn being called a prophecy (v. 67) attributes the driving force of Zechariah's words to the inspiration of God's Spirit.

John's parents were long dead by the time Luke wrote his Gospel, and John himself was beheaded during Jesus' ministry. Thus Luke's source for this hymn would likely have been Jesus' family, a source previously tied to the Baptist, and/or oral tradition kept alive since the time of the remarkable events surrounding John's birth.

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus , that the whole empire should be registered. 2 This first registration took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. 3 So everyone went to be registered, each to his own town.

4 And Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David, 5 to be registered along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was pregnant. 6 While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 7 Then she gave birth to her firstborn Son, and she wrapped Him snugly in cloth and laid Him in a feeding trough — because there was no room for them at the lodging place.

That the whole empire should be registered (2:1): The census and related details (see comments on 2:2) easily represent the most complex challenge to the accuracy of Luke's Gospel. One problem is the lack of evidence for an *empire-wide* (the Gk literally reads "the whole inhabited world") census under Caesar Augustus. We know that Augustus instituted three regional censuses around the empire (Hayles 1973, 120; Fitzmyer 1981, 400). Other censuses during or near this period were instituted in Egypt, Syria, Gaul, and Spain (Hayles 1973, 127–9). In this light it is not unlikely that Augustus instituted a census for Palestine

(Schürmann 1969, 100).

From this evidence, Luke's talk of an empire-wide edict probably reflects the ongoing census process of this era (Plummer 1896, 48; Hoehner 1977, 15). In other words, the eventual effect of the periodic regional censuses could be the registration of essentially the entire Roman territory, which to Luke's eyes would seem like registration of "the whole inhabited world."

This first registration took place while Quirinius was governing Syria (2:2): The extrabiblical records we have place Quirinius's governorship in ad 6, nine years after Herod's death in 4 bc. Since biblical evidence suggests Jesus was born approximately two years before Herod died, and since Luke says it was the registration under Quirinius that prompted Joseph and Mary to travel to Bethlehem where Jesus was born, we have a chronology problem.

Josephus did not mention any census before the Quirinian census that occurred in ad 6. In fact, he described the Quirinian census of ad 6 as an innovation so unwelcomed that it caused a rebellion among the Jews (*Antiquities* 17.13.2 §§342–44; 17.13.5 §355; 18.1.1 §§1–10). This would seem to indicate that no census could have taken place before ad 6 without causing a stir and generating a note about it in Josephus or elsewhere (but see comments on Luke 2:3). In addition, it is argued that Quirinius was not governor at the time of Jesus' birth since the governors' records of this period do not mention him (Tacitus, *Annals* 3.48; Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.13.5 §355).

One option for solving the problem is to claim that Quirinius was governor twice, with his first governorship occurring prior to the well-known one that was initiated in ad 6 (Ramsay 1898, 174–96; 1920, 275–300). Ramsay argued that Quirinius served as governor of Syria from 11/10 bc to 8/7 bc, as well as in the later and firmly documented period that began in ad 6. Ramsay further argued that prior to the close of his first governorship Quirinius set in motion the census that Luke placed in Palestine in 6 bc.

The basis of Ramsay's argument for two governorships is his contention that an inscription known as the "Lapis Tiburtinus" refers to Quirinius. There is a noteworthy weakness to this approach: the Lapis Tiburtinus inscription is fragmentary and mentions no names. Thus Ramsay can suggest the inscription pertains to Quirinius only because the portion of the inscription that specifies who is being referenced has been lost. Based as it is on the anonymity of the inscription, Ramsay's theory is impossible to establish as fact. Possibly he is correct, but there is no way of proving it unless we discover the missing portions of Lapis Tiburtinus.

In an alternative theory, A. N. Sherwin-White suggested that Quirinius was a legate between Publius Quinctilius Varus and Gaius Caesar from 4 bc to 1 bc (Sherwin-White 1963, 162–71). He was able to postulate this because this time frame coincides with the only governorship gap we have in the historical records. Thus, though Sherwin-White denied that a census was undertaken in the period of Herod the Great (ended 4 bc), he saw it as possibly legitimate for Luke to make reference to Quirinius in this period. But what is gained by this? On this view Luke errs with regard to a census occurring at Jesus' birth, but is correct to say that Quirinius ruled in some capacity during this period. This approach lessens the severity of the problem somewhat, but does not absolve Luke of serious error.

Variants of Sherwin-White's proposal may offer the best explanation. Given that a Palestinian census under Herod is possible since it fits with Roman census-taking activities known to have occurred in this period, might it be that Varus was the one who began the census, with the full results and taxation emerging only later, under the governorship of Quirinius in the period Sherwin-White proposes (4–1 bc)? If so, Quirinius's name was understandably attached to the census since the census's impact was felt chiefly during his governorship. A variation of this theory is that Quirinius administered the census prior to being governor, later became governor, and thus in a kind of literary collapse of the event was referred to as the governor responsible for the census (Hayles 1974, 29).

In addition to the above historical arguments, lexical-syntactical scholars propose solutions. One lexical argument says that *prōtē* should be translated as "earlier" rather than "first." This meaning is found in John 1:15, 30, for instance. If this is a legitimate rendering of *prōtē,* Luke was saying that the census he has in mind occurred earlier than the Quirinius census known to have taken place in ad 6. This view is possibly correct, but the difficult syntax of Luke 2:2 leaves the matter unsettled.

A second lexical solution holds that we should translate *prōtē* as "before." In this case Luke is saying the census took place before Quirinius's governorship (Higgins 1969, 200–201; Nolland 1989, 101–2). It is questionable whether Luke used *prōtē* in this unusual sense, but possibly he did (Hoehner 1977, 21–22).

These alternative renderings of *prōtē* may not be necessary. If *prōtē* is best rendered "first," then Luke was calling this the "first" census that occurred during Quirinius's governorship. This could indicate that Luke knew of two governorships for Quirinius and two censuses associated with him. The fact that

in Acts 5:37 Luke referred to a census best identified as the one that occurred under Quirinius in ad 6 strengthens this possibility. Thus if Luke meant to differentiate between two separate censuses taken by Quirinius, it is best to assume that the census he discussed in chapter 2 of his Gospel is *not* to be confused with the better-known Quirinius census of ad 6.

None of these proposals is guaranteed to be correct. Uncertainty about the succession of governors in Syria prevents us from making anything more than suggestions. The best possibilities are (a) that Varus (during the time of Herod the Great) began the census, but the full effects were not felt until the governorship of Quirinius, (b) that Quirinius served as a high-raking administrator of the census prior to his governorship, and (c) that *prōtē* is best translated as "before."

Everyone went . . . to his own town (2:3): There is no evidence that the Romans required people living in Roman territory to return to their ancestral hometowns in order to be registered. Critics say this suggests Luke has invented this detail. But Joseph's return to Bethlehem may be explainable on the principle that the Romans sometimes allowed the Jews to adhere to their cultural distinctives. Since the Jews would have stressed the importance of being registered according to ancestral identifications, it is feasible to suggest that the Romans made this concession during the census. Other examples of the Romans allowing the Jews to practice some of their customs include the seventh-year tax exemption (Josephus, *Antiquities,* 14.10.6 §§202–10) and the observance of Sabbath (*Antiquities* 14.10.20 §§241–43).

Josephus's description of the ad 6 census as an innovation is a significant problem if we assume that the Jews revolted at that time because Roman census-taking was entirely new to their experience. But it is not clear that Rome was doing something entirely new. If a previous Roman census, occurring at the time of Jesus' birth, had been patterned after Jewish models (e.g., allowing the Jews to register in their ancestral towns), it would likely have produced no noteworthy reaction. In this case it would be understandable that Josephus left the earlier census unmentioned in his annals. There are examples of Jews submitting themselves to Roman actions they were not comfortable with provided they did not have an "in your face" quality about them. So Pilate marching shields (which bore engravings and were seen as idols) into Jerusalem provoked a reaction although in other locales they were not protested, since the shields were normally kept in Caesarea Maritima (Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.55–59).

Archelaus himself may have been part of the grounds for the revolt in ad 6.

Recall that Joseph was unwilling to settle in a region controlled by Archelaus (Matt 2:22). Such was the distrust of Archelaus among the Jews. Archelaus's involvement in a heavily Roman-themed census would only make him all the more disliked. The culmination of (1) a heavy Roman presence (2) in a Roman-like census (3) that was accepted by a Jewish figurehead (Archelaus) could have been enough to spark the rebellion. What the Jews had been willing to put up with previously (a Jewish-friendly census at the time of Jesus' birth) had now transformed into an objectionable expression of Roman sovereignty.

Finally, Josephus's silence about an earlier census is shaky grounds for arguing that no earlier census took place, for as Hayles points out (1974, 27–28), in his *Jewish War* Josephus left other historically verified censuses unmentioned.

The lodging place (2:7): Critics have argued that Luke incorrectly portrays tiny Bethlehem as being large enough to sustain a public inn. But *kataluma* can refer to a guest room or dining room (Luke 22:11; Mark 14:14), and in 10:34 Luke used another term (*pandocheion*) when he wished to make clear reference to a public inn. The HCSB translation "lodging place" (*kataluma*) rightly incorporates this data and indicates that Luke knew he was not dealing with a town large enough to have an inn. Bethlehem was a small village with only a few hundred people, so it is likely that Joseph and Mary sought not a formal inn but a small, spare room in a private home. Or possibly they sought a public shelter where people could gather for the night (see Exod 4:24 in the LXX). In any event, they had to seek shelter elsewhere since this was unavailable.

That Jesus was placed in a *phatēn* (likely a feed trough for livestock, *TDNT* 9:53–54) suggests that the birth occurred in a stable. The stable may have been located at a place of lodging or even inside a cave (Godet 1875, 1:130; Marshall 1978, 107). Ancient extrabiblical tradition supports the possibility of a cave as the birth site (Protevangelium of James 18; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 78.4; Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.51). In the fourth century a basilica was erected at a cave in Bethlehem; this site today is known as the Church of the Nativity. Luke does not specify that the birth site was a cave, but this could indeed mark the birthplace of Jesus. This lowly origin may be taken as another indication that the Gospel authors resisted the temptation to bend the truth in an attempt to make Jesus' biography more desirable. The birth among livestock would be most unexpected for the Messiah and would not be something the disciples invented.

12 This will be the sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in cloth and lying in a feeding trough."

13 Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying:

14 Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and peace on earth to people He favors! B,C,

15 When the angels had left them and returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go straight to Bethlehem and see what has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."

16 They hurried off and found both Mary and Joseph, and the baby who was lying in the feeding trough. 17 After seeing them, they reported the message they were told about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary was treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them.

Peace on earth to people He favors! (2:14): Does this phrase indicate that God favors all people, thus contradicting the biblical teaching that all humans are fallen and subject to the sentence of eternal judgment unless they become redeemed? The Greek behind the phrase "people He favors" is *anthrōpois eudokias*. Rather than designating all humankind without distinction, first-century Judaism used this phrase to designate God's elect (Marshall 1978, 112). So the idea that this verse contradicts biblical teaching about the universality of the human need for redemption (e.g., Rom 3:23) is incorrect.

In the present context the *Magnificat* especially defines the elect, where Mary says, "His mercy is from generation to generation on those who fear Him" (1:50). It is these God-fearers who will respond to Jesus' coming (Danker 1988, 60). Any argument that the phrase speaks of God favoring all of humanity misses its technical force and also misses the difference between those for whom Jesus comes ("all the people"; 2:10) and those who benefit from his coming ("people He favors"; 2:14). The people to whom God draws near through Jesus are the special objects of God's love, even in the midst of his loving all people in the world (John 3:16). This distinguishing love rests in God's sovereign character and will. The accountability God has given his creatures means that this love will not nullify their responsibility to respond to him and the consequences for a lack of response, including the reality of judgment.

Mary was treasuring up all these things in her heart (2:19): If Mary treasured these many astounding experiences and revelations in her heart, how can it be that later in life she misunderstood Jesus and even doubted his sanity (Mark 3:20–35)? Luke hinted at the answer in the present verse. Even as Mary was

being told extraordinary things about her miraculous son, she was “meditating” (Gk *sumballousa*) on it all, which connotes trying to combine parts into a whole. Mary was trying to put together all the incredible and unexpected information coming to her, and it is understandable if she did not fully succeed. It is true that the announcement of the special birth led her to expect Jesus was the promised one, but at this time she could not anticipate all that this would mean for Jesus’ future. Recall that throughout the Gospels, Jesus’ followers as well as his enemies were repeatedly surprised and even scandalized by his claims and his actions. This indicates that the Jews had not foreseen many key aspects of the Messiah’s identity and mission. So when Jesus began making claims to divine prerogatives like forgiving sin (Mark 2:1–12), this went beyond what Mary had anticipated. It is in this context that she became uncertain about how Jesus’ life and teachings were unfolding. Rather than suggesting she had not been given direct revelations about Jesus earlier in life, her later uncertainty highlights the unexpected directions Jesus’ Messiahship took.

25 There was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, looking forward to Israel’s consolation, ’ and the Holy Spirit was on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he saw the Lord’s Messiah. 27 Guided by the Spirit, he entered the temple complex. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform for Him what was customary under the law, 28 Simeon took Him up in his arms, praised God, and said:

29 Now, Master,
You can dismiss Your slave in peace,
as You promised.
30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation.
31 You have prepared it
in the presence of all peoples —
32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles ’
and glory to Your people Israel.

33 His father and mother were amazed at what was being said about Him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and told His mother Mary: “Indeed, this child is destined to cause the fall and rise of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed — 35 and a sword will pierce your own soul — that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

36 There was also a prophetess, Anna, a daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well along in years, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ’ 37 and was a widow for 84 years. She did not leave the temple complex, serving God night and day with

fasting and prayers. 38 At that very moment, she came up and began to thank God and to speak about Him to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. ’

39 When they had completed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit . . . (2:26): If God revealed to Simeon that the Messiah would come within his lifetime, would Simeon not have made this widely known (or at least known among his close associates), creating heightened expectation for the Messiah’s arrival? And if such heightened expectations were fostered, how could Jesus and his family have slipped back into anonymity after the events at the temple? Some critics point to this as evidence that Luke created the story about Simeon as a way of presenting baby Jesus as the heralded Messiah.

Here is another question the text does not answer directly, and speculation by skeptics or supporters simply seeks to fill in gaps. Nonetheless, this objection makes two questionable assumptions. First, the Holy Spirit testifying to Simeon that he would live to see the Messiah’s arrival did not mean Simeon felt free to disclose this to anyone else. After all, the Spirit’s revelation was to *him alone*, not to the nation of Israel. Simeon may have taken this as an indication that he was to keep the matter private until the time of the revelation’s fulfillment. Or alternatively, and more likely perhaps, he may not have felt comfortable sharing this until he actually saw its realization, as he does when Jesus came. Such a disclosure would have merely been a claim until the event had taken place. Second, people often ignored and even despised the prophets. Perhaps Simeon received the same neglect, especially since this was likely the one and only revelation he ever received and he apparently died shortly thereafter.

In light of these points, it should not surprise us that Jesus and his family were able to blend into the background after these events, especially since nothing happened with Jesus for more than 30 years. Such a remark may have simply gotten lost in the passing of time. But remember in all of this everyone is simply filling in gaps, and the text does not indicate either a problem or a solution.

Simeon took Him up in his arms, praised God, and said . . . (2:28–32): The issues here are similar to those commented on in 2:26. Would not the people present in the temple have latched onto Jesus and his family from the moment of Simeon’s announcement, never letting them slip back into anonymity? That the family *did* slip back into anonymity is taken by critics as evidence that Luke has either created this event or greatly exaggerated it. Why did Simeon’s grand pronouncement not create a bigger stir?

First, Simeon's declaration is so personal and so focused on what will happen to Mary that it was not likely made as a widely spread announcement. Since the message was for Mary and Joseph, it is possible that few others even heard what Simeon said. Second, hearing and believing are two different things. It is likely that bystanders who heard Simeon's message would have disbelieved him. After all, they would have found it difficult to believe that this unknown peasant girl had borne the Messiah. Adding to the likelihood that anyone who overheard Simeon's message to Mary would have ignored him is the fact that they probably saw Simeon as an intrusive stranger in this scene. He was not a temple priest. As Luke said, he simply was "a man in Jerusalem" (v. 25) who was "guided by the Spirit" (v. 27) into the temple complex to deliver a message. To the eyes of onlookers he must have seemed half mad. Finally, despite all the great things Simeon said, nothing spectacular emerged from Jesus' life until he began to minister at around the age of 30. Thus any public excitement that Simeon may have generated around Jesus died out during this long dormancy, but memory of Simeon's words lived on in the family.

His father (2:33): Why is Joseph called Jesus' father if Mary was a virgin when she conceived Jesus? Skeptics have suggested this is evidence of a mixed tradition—one that sees Jesus as natural-born and another that sees him as miraculously conceived. But since Luke clearly knew of the virgin conception (1:35), his calling Joseph Jesus' "father" in this account speaks to how Joseph functioned in terms of Jesus' earthly relationships and is not a contradiction of the virgin conception.

Many later manuscripts have "Joseph" here instead of mentioning the term father (e.g., the KJV has this rendering). This textual variant probably arose because the scribes sensed the tension of calling Joseph Jesus' "father" in light of Jesus' special conception and wanted to make the distinction clear. By making the alteration, the scribes felt they were bringing theological clarity rather than changing the meaning of the text. Though well intentioned, this change was both unnecessary and unwarranted.

His father and mother were amazed (2:33): Though Simeon's proclamations were astounding, they were no more so than those already made by Gabriel. So why would Joseph and Mary be "amazed" at what Simeon proclaimed? The realization that people who were perfect strangers to them had been given an indication by God about who Jesus was probably triggered their amazement. This showed them the truly grand scope of Jesus' identity and mission. Further,

that Jesus would be a blessing not just to Jews but also “a light for revelation to the Gentiles” (v. 32) showed that God was making salvation available to all people. This bit of information would have struck Mary and Joseph as profound and possibly even controversial. Just because they had heard such things before does not mean that such fantastic pronouncements would cease leaving them awestruck.

A sword will pierce your own soul (2:35): Simeon seemed to foreknow that, contrary to popular expectations, the Messiah would suffer and possibly even die. How did he know this? Is this a sign that Luke read back into this pre-passion context truths that no one could know until Jesus’ final days? Did Simeon perhaps understand the OT Suffering Servant messianic prophecies (Isa 52:13–53:12) better than anyone else, such that he understood from Scripture that the Messiah would suffer? Or had he received special revelation that the Messiah would suffer?

It is unlikely that Simeon recognized in Scripture themes that were widely if not entirely missed by Israel. Against the idea that Luke created this scene from a post-passion context, note that Simeon’s remarks are oblique. He stated nothing specifically. There is no mention of arrest, trial, or execution. He simply remarked that Jesus would lead to the rise and fall of many in Israel and that a sword would pierce Mary’s soul. If Luke or the early church had created Simeon’s remarks, they would not have been so indirect. Thus it is best to view Simeon as the recipient of divine revelation. By this means God imparted to Mary through a messenger an early hint of the suffering she would endure. This message would have been a comfort to her in years to come when she looked back and realized that God had foretold her difficulties. More than that, the idea that a messenger of God would divide the people would not surprise anyone who knew how prophets in the past had been accepted by some and rejected by others in the nation.

A widow for 84 years (2:37): Was Anna a widow for 84 years, or was she a widow who was 84 years old? If the text means Anna was an 84-year-old widow, she could have been a widow for as much as 65 years. If on the other hand she had been a widow for 84 years, some estimate that she would be about 105 years old (Marshall 1978, 123–4). Some interpreters favor this view because they see a parallelism with the deuterocanonical book of Judith, whose namesake was 105 years old. The presence of genuine parallelism is questionable, however, for the numbers in Judith are not laid out in a parallel way (Jdt 16:22–24; 8:4–8).

Further, Judith died at age 105, while Anna was still full of vigor at that age. Thus it is doubtful that any creative connection exists between Judith and Luke's portrayal of Anna. Judith is not responsible for the presence of the age here, but that does not preclude the possibility that Luke is noting a parallel with a previous pious figure known in Israel's history.

So which view about Anna's age is best? It is difficult to say since the Greek phrase, *heōs etōn ogdoēkonta tessarōn*, literally means "until 84 years." The most natural impression is that Anna's widowhood lasted 84 years since widowhood is the subject of the sentence (Stählin, *TDNT* 9:450–51). If so, Anna was active for age 105.

Anna's old age fits with Luke's recurring theme of elderly people receiving revelations (Zechariah, Simeon, Anna) or miracles (Elizabeth's pregnancy) in connection with Jesus. Luke's reason for mentioning the theme of elderly persons receiving revelations and miracles was to argue that Jesus' origins were rooted in piety and that God gave faithful people knowledge of his special identity. This set the context for the controversies surrounding Jesus later in life. God's involvement in the events surrounding Jesus' early life confirmed that his origins were not rooted in a rebellious background, as Jesus' enemies implied when they charged him with being an illegitimate child. In fact, he was raised in a context of faithfulness and had faithful people declare his unique identity as God gave them revelation.

She did not leave the temple complex (2:37): Did Luke claim that Anna lived at the temple complex? Critics say this indicates Luke's unfamiliarity with temple regulations that prohibited such things. But such criticism reads too much into what Luke is saying here. The descriptions of her not leaving the temple and of "serving God night and day with fasting and prayers" depict a woman who is deeply committed to God and should not be taken to mean she literally lived at the temple. There would have been no place for her to stay there, and Jewish scruples would not have allowed such a thing in the first place. Luke uses this language in a way similar to our modern phrase, "he worked night and day." Just as the English phrase does not mean someone worked without ever relenting for food and rest, Luke's language about Anna portrays her as uniquely dedicated but does not imply that her every moment consisted of fasting, prayer, and being present at the temple.

She . . . began . . . to speak about Him . . . (2:38): Much like Simeon had done, Anna made a public pronouncement about baby Jesus. Would not all Israel have

latched onto the baby and his family at this point, never letting them out of sight? One might expect so, but the family instead quietly returned to Nazareth. If messianic expectations were heightened and widespread in this era, how can baby Jesus have blended back into anonymity after such powerful public announcements?

The first step in answering this criticism is to note that Luke never said how many people were present to hear Anna's declarations. Perhaps there were only a few people nearby or within earshot. Further, he gave no indication that Anna's statements were widely accepted by those who heard her speaking. While readers may like to assume that Anna's words would have created a huge public stir, in reality without some kind of public display that verified her words, bystanders would probably have taken her message as the remarks of very pious old woman whose religious hope had gotten the best of her. After all, no one expected a peasant girl to bear the Messiah.

Second, beyond a few remarkable opening scenes, Jesus' early life was largely unremarkable (Isa 53:2). Thus, even for the few who might have taken Anna's words to heart, the subsequent uneventfulness of Jesus' life would have caused them to doubt or lose sight of these early happenings. Only the much later events of Jesus' adult life would have made it clear that people had underappreciated the things said by Simeon and Anna.

Third, Anna's praise is more general than specific. Verse 38 says, "she came up and began to thank God and to speak about Him to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem." The focus on Jerusalem would have resonated with the sort of nationalistic messianic hope current in this era. Wishful pronouncements in a similar vein were probably common at that time and place.

They returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth (2:39): The infancy discussion ends here in Luke. As noted already, Luke's account differs from that of Matthew in key ways. For example, Luke had Mary and Joseph living in Nazareth prior to the birth at Bethlehem, while Matthew never mentioned the previous residency in Nazareth. Matthew had wise men (magi) visiting Jesus, while Luke instead had lowly shepherds. Matthew noted Herod's massacre and an exile of Jesus' family to Egypt, while Luke had them go back to Nazareth directly after the temple visit and never mentioned the massacre in Bethlehem or exile to Egypt. The perspectives from which the events are told also differ, with Joseph being the key figure in Matthew and Mary in Luke. Are these differences evidence that Matthew and Luke had conflicting opinions on what occurred in

Jesus' early life?

Instead of supporting skeptical conclusions, the differences between Matthew and Luke are likely the product of literary choices and literary compression in those choices, especially since Luke and Matthew probably did not know about or have access to each other's account. They simply chose to narrate differing facets of a much larger set of events.

Although some eschew any attempts to harmonize these accounts and prefer to see them as hopelessly contradictory, a careful comparison indicates likely distinct time frames, allowing both accounts to be true. For example, most likely Matthew's magi and Luke's shepherds visited Jesus at different times. That Herod would slay children two years of age and younger (Matt 2:16–18) suggests the magi did not visit Jesus at the time of his birth, but rather sometime ranging from a few months later (to allow for the offering for the firstborn) to as late as the time when Jesus was a toddler (if Herod's action gives us a time frame). This runs counter to the common portrayal in art and film of manger scenes that include both wise men and shepherds. Since these visits were widely separated in time, there is no contradiction between Matthew and Luke regarding who visited Jesus and when.

Details about whether to mention the journey to Egypt or simply get Jesus back to Galilee are simple matters of authorial choice. Matthew, whose target audience was primarily Jewish, chose to highlight the trip to Egypt because to Jews the fact that Jesus recapitulated the history of Israel by going to and returning from Egypt is important. This fact was not so relevant to Luke's Gentile audience, so his narration focused on where Jesus ended up living for most of his childhood and left Egypt unmentioned. Thus readers may be reading too much into Luke if they take his narrative (Luke 2:39) to mean that Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus settled down in Nazareth immediately after they presented Jesus at the temple. Luke may have simply telescoped to a later event.

The desire to construct a tight timeline of all the events in Jesus' early life was not a concern of either Gospel writer. The differences indicate the independence of Matthew and Luke in choosing what details to share. Thus we are left with some unanswered questions about timing and harmonization. Lack of certainty here does not mean these events did not happen, but it is clear that neither author was trying to create an exhaustive, chronologically precise account of Jesus' early years. (See further comments at Matt 2:23.)

41 Every year His parents traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. 42 When He was 12
years old, they went up according to the custom of the festival. 43 After those days were over,
as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but His parents did not know
it. 44 Assuming He was in the traveling party, they went a day's journey. Then they began
looking for Him among their relatives and friends. 45 When they did not find Him, they
returned to Jerusalem to search for Him. 46 After three days, they found Him in the temple
complex sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all
those who heard Him were astounded at His understanding and His answers. 48 When His
parents saw Him, they were astonished, and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You
treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for You."
49 "Why were you searching for Me? " He asked them. "Didn't you know that I had to be in
My Father's house? " 50 But they did not understand what He said to them.
51 Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them. His mother
kept all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor
with God and with people.

Sitting among the teachers (2:46): Some critics have said that rabbis did not allow children to sit in their presence until the middle of the first century. Does this mean this verse is anachronistic or false? In answer to this, public engagement with rabbis was not unusual at this time, and Jesus' age (12 years old, v. 42) was advanced enough that there is no difficulty in believing he was allowed to sit among the teachers.

I had to be in My Father's house (2:49): The translation of this verse is a matter of dispute. The Greek expression here is odd. It literally reads, "I must be in the ___ of my Father." Translators must infer what word should be supplied here. One view holds that the phrase should be rendered, "I must be about my Father's business" (KJV; NKJV; Erasmus; see discussion in R. Brown 1977, 476). Parallel texts that are offered in support of this are Mark 8:33; 1 Corinthians 7:32–34; and 1 Timothy 4:15. If this is the correct rendering, the phrase means that Jesus' focus is on fulfilling the tasks the Father has given him, and by implication Jesus' parents must come to understand this. One weakness of this rendering is that it does not easily fit the context, for Mary had asked why Jesus had treated them this way (v. 48). In this light it is hard to see why Jesus would speak about needing to be engaged in the Father's assignments when all Mary wanted to know is why he had stayed behind at the temple. Further, Jesus carried out the Father's assignments in many places other than the temple (Creed 1930, 46). Additionally, Luke 2:49 used a construction (*en* and the neuter plural definite article) that was not used in the parallel texts cited for the view, thus

weakening the argument that these texts set precedent for the translation of Luke. In light of all these considerations, it is unlikely that Luke 2:49 should be rendered “I must be about my Father’s business.”

A more likely view holds that the phrase should be translated, “I must be in my Father’s house.” Luke presented the temple as a place of teaching (Luke 20–21). This rendering also fits the context, for Jesus was saying that his parents should have known to look here above all other places given Jesus’ unique identity and the identity of the temple as the place where God’s presence is found and where teachers gather to speak about God. Finally, the construction of *en,* the neuter plural definite article, and a genitive fits this view best, for it forms an idiom for being in one’s own house (Gen 41:51; Esth 7:9; Job 18:19).

They did not understand what He said to them (2:50): Having received revelations from angels; having discovered that, just as the angel foretold, Mary became pregnant while still a virgin; and having been granted several revelations during the course of Jesus’ earliest days, the reader might expect Jesus’ parents to be quicker to understand. Is their failure to understand an indication that they did not previously receive special revelations about Jesus?

A couple of considerations help set the context for their failure to understand. First, there is no biblical evidence that Jesus did anything to verify or demonstrate his special identity and calling up to this point in his life. By all appearances he lived an entirely normal childhood, performing no miracles that would signal his supernatural identity. Thus it is reasonable to see Mary and Joseph being caught off guard by Jesus’ actions and words in this event, for these would represent something like a debut for him. Second, the common Jewish preconception about the Messiah did not include his being divine. To speak of God as “Father” was considered too intimate for most Jews, so Jesus’ talk about the temple being his “Father’s house” would have confused and possibly alarmed Mary and Joseph—hence Luke’s statement about their not understanding.

Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people (2:52): How could Jesus have increased in favor with God if he was in fact God the Son? Does God the Father come to love God the Son more over time? Some point to this verse as evidence that Jesus is not divine, or that he became divine only after the Father adopted him once he had earned that right.

We must first understand that Jesus was fully human, and thus it is appropriate for NT authors to speak of him in ways that fit normal human experience. Luke

did this here, describing Jesus' growth as a genuine human. Second, by and large the Synoptic Gospels differ from the Gospel of John in their approach to announcing Jesus' divinity. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all reveal the depth of Jesus' person gradually. They do not announce that Jesus is God at the start as John's Gospel does (John 1:1–18). So we see the fullness of Jesus' person unfold over time as his words and actions reveal who he is, while his birth, as narrated in Matthew and Luke, gives a hint of where things are headed by pointing to his unique conception and by making it clear Jesus is sent by God and is the promised one. The more gradual unveiling in the Synoptic Gospels fits with the experience many people around Jesus would have had as they came to realize his full identity over the course of years.

> In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, while Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, 2 during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, God's word came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3 He went into all the vicinity of the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, 4 as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah:
>
> **A voice of one crying out in the wilderness:**
> **Prepare the way for the Lord;**
> **make His paths straight!**
> 5 **Every valley will be filled,**
> **and every mountain and hill will be made low;**
> **the crooked will become straight,**
> **the rough ways smooth,**
> 6 **and everyone will see the salvation of God.**

Lysanius tetrarch of Abilene (3:1): Critics have accused Luke of making a mistake when he referred to Lysanias as tetrarch of Abilene in this time period, for the most readily identifiable ruler by that name ruled this region at a much earlier date and was executed by Mark Antony in 36 bc (Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.13.3 §330 and 15.4.1 §92).

There is possible evidence from inscriptions (Böckh 1828–77, #4521, #4523) for a Lysanius who was active in the time of Tiberius. The inscriptions may even suggest that more than one ruler of this era bore this name (Creed 1930, 307–9; Godet 1875, 1:168–9; Plummer 1896, 84; Schürer 1973–87, 1:567–69). This may be confirmed by references in Josephus that possibly identify a Lysanius who hailed from the time before Herod Agrippa I, who ruled from ad 40 to 44

(*Antiquities* 19.5.1 §275; 20.7.1 §138). There is no proof that any of these can be identified with Luke's Lysanius, but the evidence does suggest that Luke should be given the benefit of the doubt.

High priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas (3:2): The Romans deposed Annas from his role as high priest in ad 15. In that case, was Luke mistaken to say this event, which fell between 11 and 14 years later, occurred during the high priesthood of Annas?

There is a surprising aspect to Luke's reference here: he used the singular form of "high priest" (*archiereōs*) and yet referred to two men, Annas and Caiaphas. We know that Annas was deposed in ad 15, that a few other men briefly held the high priest role in the time that followed, and that Annas's son-in-law, Caiaphas, then became high priest and retained that role until ad 36. Thus it seems best to conclude that Luke was speaking of Annas as exercising an honorific and yet very tangible role as high priest during the time of his son-in-law's tenure. Think of how U.S. presidents, even after they leave office, retain their title and much of their influence. Annas was the behind-the-scenes power, the elder whose advice carried great weight (Ellis 1974, 88; Marshall 1978, 134). The events narrated in John 18:13–14, 19–24 support this suggestion. John specifically said it was Caiaphas who was high priest "that year," and yet he also depicted Annas as high priest and had him conducting a preliminary inquisition of the arrested Jesus. Similar to Luke, Josephus used plural references with regard to the office of high priesthood (regarding Annas, see *Antiquities* 20.9.1 §§197–200; on the "college" of high priests, see *Antiquities* 20.10.4–5 §§244–51). Thus it is clear that Luke was not ignorant about the timing of Annas's tenure, but was instead aware of the influence Annas maintained many years after being officially removed from office.

A baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (3:3): If John the Baptist baptized people "for the forgiveness of sins," were they saved by participating in this rite? John's baptism for forgiveness of sins was a unique preparatory baptism that said the person was ready for God to come in fulfillment of promise. Forgiveness did not come because of participation in the baptism but because of a heart open to the redemption program of God to be enacted through the promised one to come—Jesus. This conclusion is confirmed by what Paul said when visiting Ephesus: "John baptized with a baptism of repentance, telling the people that they should believe in the One who would come after him, that is, in Jesus" (Acts 19:4). (See further comments at Mark 1:4.)

Everyone will see the salvation of God (3:6): Two difficulties arise in this verse. First, there is the question of Luke's choice to cite the LXX version of Isaiah 40:5. Specifically the reference to "salvation" (*sōtērion*) in Luke 3:6 reflects the LXX usage, which replaces the MT's reference to the "glory" of God. The LXX's rendering may have been motivated by a desire to speak in concrete terms of how God's glory is manifested; that is to say, the LXX spells out that God's glory is best seen in his salvation.

Why would Luke choose the LXX's rendering? God's public display of salvation is a theme in both of Luke's books, and something he has already noted (2:30–32). This means his emphasis fits with how the LXX renders Isaiah 40:5. Thus it is best to see Luke's choice as intentional, a conscious choice to flesh out the meaning of the "glory" of God. And his audience would not have regarded his use of the LXX as controversial. In the first century, the LXX was highly regarded as a translation of the Hebrew Scripture. This is seen by the rendering of the tradition about the Septuagint's beginning in the *Letter to Aristeas*, where the translation is lauded, as well as in Philo's account where the translation is also set forth as exemplary (*Life of Moses* 2.7.39–43).

A second challenge in this verse is the question of whether Luke was implying universal salvation. Some have answered yes, but this is simple to overturn. Luke's statement that "everyone will see the salvation of God" fits with his above-mentioned emphasis on the widespread public display of God's salvific acts and does not mean that all people will embrace the message behind the acts and thereby be saved.

7 He then said to the crowds who came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Therefore produce fruit consistent with repentance. And don't start saying to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones! 9 Even now the ax is ready to strike the root of the trees! Therefore, every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

10 "What then should we do? " the crowds were asking him.

11 He replied to them, "The one who has two shirts must share with someone who has none, and the one who has food must do the same."

12 Tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do? "

13 He told them, "Don't collect any more than what you have been authorized."

14 Some soldiers also questioned him: "What should we do? "

He said to them, “Don’t take money from anyone by force or false accusation; be satisfied with your wages.”

15 Now the people were waiting expectantly, and all of them were debating in their minds whether John might be the Messiah. 16 John answered them all, “I baptize you with water, but One is coming who is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to untie the strap of His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 His winnowing shovel ’ is in His hand to clear His threshing floor and gather the wheat into His barn, but the chaff He will burn up with a fire that never goes out.” 18 Then, along with many other exhortations, he proclaimed good news to the people. 19 But Herod the tetrarch, being rebuked by him about Herodias, his brother’s wife, and about all the evil things Herod had done, 20 added this to everything else — he locked John up in prison.

21 When all the people were baptized, Jesus also was baptized. As He was praying, heaven opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in a physical appearance like a dove. And a voice came from heaven:

You are My beloved Son.
I take delight in You!

He then said to the crowds (3:7): Whereas Luke had John addressing “the crowds,” Matthew had him specifically addressing “the Pharisees and Sadducees” with the biting epithet “brood of vipers” (Matt 3:7). Does this represent a disagreement between the Gospels?

Since Luke portrayed the target audience as broad and Matthew as specific, we must ask whether Matthew was aware of a larger group present for this event. Evidence in Matthew 3:5 is decisive: “Then people from Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the vicinity of the Jordan were flocking to him, and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins.” Thus Matthew’s Gospel agrees with Luke’s that crowds were present. Some suggest that John really did address the Pharisees and Sadducees specifically, in which case Luke has expanded the audience. This is possible since crowds are a common theme in Luke (e.g., Luke 3:10–14), and Luke emphasized that the gospel message is for all peoples (Fitzmyer 1981, 467). If Luke has done this, it is a thematic choice that fits the setting (crowds were present) and fits his desire to stress the universal scope of the gospel.

It is also possible that Matthew has adjusted the scope of John’s address, for Matthew tended to single out the Pharisees and Sadducees for criticism (Matt 16:1, 6, 11–12; also Schürmann 1969, 163). Since both Gospels agree that crowds were present, it seems likely that Matthew has narrowed the scope of John’s comments for the purpose of singling out the corrupt religious leaders. Whereas John’s message urged all to repent and be baptized, Matthew pointed

out that it was ironically the religious leaders in particular who needed to heed this message.

The sort of freedom demonstrated between Matthew and Luke in this event fits with the conventions of ancient historiography. Modern readers may wish for greater precision, but in reality even today report-writing reflects many of the same freedoms exemplified in ancient texts. Rather than charging Matthew or Luke with error, we should see them as writing truthfully and in step with the ancient standards.

What then should we do? (3:10): This question is repeated three times (vv. 10, 12, 14) by three different groups (the crowds, tax collectors, and soldiers) and looks back to verse 8 where John said, "Produce fruit [lit 'make fruit'] consistent with repentance." John's reply about the product of repentance was exceedingly practical. Against stereotypes that view Christian morality as austere and withdrawn, John did not call the crowd to his ascetic lifestyle, nor did he call for a commitment to a series of ritual religious acts, nor did he point to the sacrifices associated with the Jewish faith. Rather, he pointed to meeting the needs of others. We often think of repentance as related exclusively to God. To the contrary, Luke stipulated that when one repents it impacts one's relationship to others, as Luke 1:16–17 also shows. This is also why the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5) relate first to God (the first four commandments) and then to other humans (the final six). To reorient yourself to God means your relationships with other people will show more compassion and generosity.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit (3:16): This is a key apologetics text in Luke, for it establishes conditions for testing whether the new era and the Messiah have really come in the person of Jesus (see the context of verse 15, unique to Luke). Jesus, if he is the Messiah, will baptize with the Spirit that will divide humanity into those who come close to God and those who do not respond to him. Thus one can know the Messiah and God's promised deliverance have arrived when the Spirit comes and creates this division. Jesus made clear that he would send the Spirit to his followers (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4–5). Failure to deliver on that promise would disprove his messianic claims. But the Spirit did come as Jesus predicted (Acts 2; 10:44–47; 11:15–17; 13:16–24; 15:6–8), igniting the firestorm that was the early church.

Jesus also was baptized (3:21): Does the fact that Jesus underwent baptism indicate he was a sinner in need of repentance? Rather than indicating repentance from sins, Jesus' choice to partake in John's baptism seems to have

had a threefold purpose. First, it represented an endorsement of John's ministry and message (20:1–8). By accepting baptism, Jesus linked his cause to that of John, who was widely accepted as a messenger from God. Second, it showed how Jesus identified himself with people as he began his ministry. Jesus identified with John's message of repentance (1:76–77; 3:3) and so endorsed the need of people to repent. Third, the Spirit's descending (v. 22) verified Jesus as the Coming One to whom John pointed and who brought a greater baptism (Luke 3:15–18; Acts 10:37–38).

A possible anachronism also arises in this verse. Read chronologically, Luke seems to have Jesus undergoing baptism after John's arrest (3:20). Also, Luke never explicitly said that John baptized Jesus. Does this mean Luke's Gospel denies that John baptized Jesus, thus conflicting with the other Synoptics (Matt 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11)? Although Luke's text does not mention John baptizing Jesus, John clearly was the one performing the baptisms since the passage comes in a section where Luke is discussing John's ministry. What Luke has done in the present verse is flash back to a time before Herod arrested John. He mentioned John's imprisonment first as a way of finishing this section on John (Luke 3:1–20) before moving on to begin a large section on Jesus (3:21ff). We are reminded again that the Gospel writers were not obligated to present their materials in chronological sequence. (See further comments at Matt 3:15 and Mark 1:9.)

A voice came from heaven (3:22): To whom was the heavenly voice directed—Jesus or the bystanders? Matthew has the voice saying, "This is My beloved Son. I take delight in Him!" (Matt 3:17). This seems to have the bystanders in view. Mark and Luke have the voice address Jesus directly: "You are My beloved Son; I take delight in You!" (Mark 1:11). How can the differences be resolved? None of the Synoptics depicts the crowds reacting to either the voice or the dove that descended. This would seem to indicate that they were not privy to these revelations. John the Baptist appears to have been the only one besides Jesus who saw the descent of the Spirit like a dove (John 1:32–34). Thus, Matthew's "This is My beloved Son" simply interprets the historic significance of the event, and we should not take it to mean the crowd saw or heard anything. Rather than giving an exact rendering of the event, Matthew gave the significance of what the voice's declaration meant for history: God had pointed out to the world his chosen one. (See further comments at Mark 1:10–11.)

The allusions to the OT in the remark are to Psalm 2:7, a royal psalm about the Son pointing to his regal and thus messianic position, and Isaiah 42:1 about the Servant of God.

23 As He began His ministry, Jesus was about 30 years old and was thought to be the
son of Joseph, son of Heli,
24 son of Matthat, son of Levi,
son of Melchi, son of Jannai,
son of Joseph, 25 son of Mattathias,
son of Amos, son of Nahum,
son of Esli, son of Naggai,
26 son of Maath, son of Mattathias,
son of Semein, son of Josech,
son of Joda, 27 son of Joanan,
son of Rhesa, son of Zerubbabel,
son of Shealtiel, son of Neri,
28 son of Melchi, son of Addi,
son of Cosam, son of Elmadam,
son of Er, 29 son of Joshua,
son of Eliezer, son of Jorim,
son of Matthat, son of Levi,
30 son of Simeon, son of Judah,
son of Joseph, son of Jonam,
son of Eliakim, 31 son of Melea,
son of Menna, son of Mattatha,
son of Nathan, son of David,
32 son of Jesse, son of Obed,
son of Boaz, son of Salmon,
son of Nahshon, 33 son of Amminadab,
son of Ram, son of Hezron,
son of Perez, son of Judah,
34 son of Jacob, son of Isaac,
son of Abraham, son of Terah,
son of Nahor, 35 son of Serug,
son of Reu, son of Peleg,
son of Eber, son of Shelah,
36 son of Cainan, son of Arphaxad,
son of Shem, son of Noah,
son of Lamech,37 son of Methuselah,
son of Enoch, son of Jared,
son of Mahalaleel,son of Cainan,
38 son of Enos, son of Seth,
son of Adam, son of God.

As He began His ministry, Jesus was about 30 years old (3:23): The Gospels give few or no details on many of the “stats” we might wish to know about

Jesus. They tell us nothing about his height, weight, or general appearance, and his age (discussed in only this text) is given only as an approximation. Rather than indicating that Jesus' biographers did not know much about him, this scarcity of detail reflects the fact that ancient biographers were less concerned about these details than are modern readers. They focused on the person and his accomplishments, not trivial details such as physical appearance.

Critics who believe much of Jesus' biography is fictional often argue that the Gospel writers borrowed details and themes from biblical figures such as Moses, Elijah, and David in order to create a messianic image of Jesus. In this vein, they suggest that Luke's mention of Jesus being "about 30 years old" is an attempt to draw a parallel between Jesus and King David since David was aged 30 when he became king (2 Sam 5:4). But in response we may ask, if Luke sought to bolster Jesus' biography by linking him to David, why didn't he say Jesus was *exactly* 30 when he began his ministry? This would have made the link far clearer than does the approximation. It is more reasonable to conclude that Jesus did start his ministry at approximately 30 years of age, in keeping with an age at which Levites commonly began their ministries (1 Chr 23:3).

Due to higher infant and childhood mortality rates in the ancient world, the average life expectancy in Jesus' era was not much over 40 years, if one made it to the age of five. But we should not take this to mean that Jesus was "old" and died of natural causes or enacted a suicide wish as he saw his life ebbing toward an end, as some critics have argued. It is unthinkable that, had Jesus died of old age, the disciples would have created an alternate death that had him executed as a criminal and blasphemer. And it is no less absurd to conclude that Jesus orchestrated his own crucifixion in a suicide bid. Did he also orchestrate his resurrection, the supernatural removal of the grave stone, his appearance over 40 days to many disciples, and his ascension to heaven?

Jesus . . . was thought to be the son of . . . (3:23–38): The genealogies of Jesus in Matthew and Luke have been the subject of discussion for centuries because of their differences (Bock 1994, 918–23). Matthew and Luke proceeded in a differing order with Matthew going up from Abraham to Jesus and Luke going back from Jesus to Adam as son of God. Matthew sometimes explained his entry; Luke never did. Matthew's list involves three groups of 14, probably reflecting a tactic called *gematria* that assigns numeric value to letters. In this way, David's name was "spelled out" since the letter-number values for the consonant radicals are *D* (value of 4) + *W* (6) + *D* (4) = 14; in distinction from this, Luke had 11 groups of seven names in his genealogy of Jesus. Matthew

included women in his list; Luke did not. Matthew's list has 41 names from Abraham to Jesus; Luke's has 57. It is not unusual for genealogies to skip generations, which indicates the insignificance of this last difference.

These distinctions make it unlikely Luke and Matthew knew each other's list and has led to discussion at least since Julius Africanus (c. ad 225). Africanus, as cited by Eusebius in *Ecclesiastical History* 1.7, argued that Matthew provided the natural line, while Luke provided the royal line. He appealed to levirate marriage as the explanation for some of the differences. Africanus saw both lines as dealing with legal descent through Joseph, not biological descent. Other solutions argue that one genealogy is through Mary while the other is through Joseph. This view goes back to at least 1490 and Annius of Viterbo. However, the problem here is that no clear identification of either list points to Mary.

Another option is to argue that Luke gave the physical line and Matthew gave the royal line, the reverse of Africanus's view. This option requires levirate marriage to be present at a few points (at least Jacob in Matt 1:15 is childless, and likely one other marriage as well). A final option is that Mary is the heiress of Heli, who had no brothers but adopted Joseph as son upon their marriage (Nolland 1989, 170). On this view, Luke's line is legal rather than physical.

A reason for adopting the legal-versus-physical distinction may be the curse pronounced on Coniah (a.k.a. Jehoiachin or Jeconiah) through the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 22:24–30), which prohibited Coniah's line from being the true royal line of descent. However, one must consider that Coniah's grandson Zerubbabel received word from Haggai the prophet that the Lord had chosen him: "I will take you, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, My servant . . . and make you like My signet ring, for I have chosen you" (Hag 2:23). This may mean that Zerubbabel (and thus Coniah's line) was placed back in the mix for placing heirs on the throne, reversing the curse of Jeremiah 22:24–30 (see Matt 1:11 for inclusion of Jeconiah in Jesus' genealogy). However, what Luke's listing does is banish Coniah in line with the curse. Jesus' messianic position in Luke is affirmed by his being David's son, since the promise of the covenant in 2 Samuel 7 was that a son of David was the beneficiary of kingship. These names reflect Jewish roots and they are all Jews. Some of the names that seem to be foreign reflect the fact that Jews adopted common names of other cultures during their periods of exile.

None of the above-mentioned solutions is a clear winner. What the options show is that several possibilities exist and that it is premature to insist on error here, even though a definite solution does not emerge. The *Apologetics Study*

Bible note on this passage says, “Though all harmonizing solutions are conjectural, they demonstrate that the two genealogies are not inherently incompatible.” The above listing of options explains why this can be said. Regardless of the option taken, the genealogy’s point in Luke is obvious: Jesus has a claim to the throne through David and is related to all of humanity through Adam.

Joseph, son of Heli (3:23): Luke named “Heli” (sometimes rendered “Eli”) as the father of Joseph, whereas Matthew 1:16 had “Jacob.” One possible solution that would account for this difference is that Jacob was Joseph’s adoptive father. Or perhaps Levirate marriage was involved, where Heli died childless and his brother, Jacob, married Heli’s widow and produced offspring on behalf of his deceased brother (Bock 1994, 920; Stein 1992, 141n38). Another suggestion is that Matthew was tracing the legal line of descent from King David whereas Luke traced the line of physical descent (Bock 1994, 920; France 1985, 74). At this time it is unclear which solution is most feasible.

Son of Nathan (3:31): Critics say Jesus could not be the Messiah because Nathan is his ancestor. For example: “Nathan was excluded from any claim to the throne of David, because his brother Solomon was chosen instead” (McKinsey 2000, 377). Furthermore, Solomon rather than Nathan occupies this spot in Matthew’s genealogy (Matt 1:6–7). What possible explanations account for the different approaches? For explanations, see the above note on the entire genealogy in 3:23–28.

Son of Adam, son of God (3:38): Some critics have charged that Luke meant to say that God literally fathered Adam. This view fits with some nonbiblical religious conceptions, but it is absolutely foreign to the biblical worldview. The text calls Adam a son of God because God directly created him and breathed life into him (Gen 2:7). (See further comments at Matt 1:1–16.)

> Then Jesus returned from the Jordan, full of the Holy Spirit, and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness 2 for 40 days to be tempted by the Devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over, He was hungry. 3 The Devil said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”
>
> 4 But Jesus answered him, “It is written: **Man must not live on bread alone.”** ’ ,
>
> 5 So he took Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.
> 6 The Devil said to Him, “I will give You their splendor and all this authority, because it has

been given over to me, and I can give it to anyone I want. 7 If You, then, will worship me, all will be Yours."

8 And Jesus answered him, "It is written:

Worship the Lord your God,
and serve Him only."

9 So he took Him to Jerusalem, had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here. 10 For it is written:

He will give His angels orders concerning you,

to protect you, ' 11 and
they will support you with their hands,
so that you will not strike

your foot against a stone." '

12 And Jesus answered him, "It is said: **Do not test the Lord your God.**"

13 After the Devil had finished every temptation, he departed from Him for a time.

The order of the temptations and the source for this material: Anyone reading both Luke's and Matthew's versions of Christ's temptations will immediately notice that they present the second and third temptations in reverse order. Luke ended with the temptation for Jesus to leap from the temple, while Matthew had it second and the offer of the kingdoms last. Clearly someone rearranged the order of Satan's challenges. Tighter ties of sequence are found in Matthew with his use of the link "then" (Gk *tote*), while Luke has the looser "and" (Gk *kai*). Matthew also has Satan dismissed after the last temptation while Luke lacks such a clear ending to the sequence. So it looks as if it is Luke who has done the rearranging. This does not call Luke's reliability into question because the issue is not the order of the temptations but their content. (See further comments at Matt 4:1–11.)

What was the source for the temptation accounts? As usual, the Gospels do not say. The source has to be inferred, and the most likely candidate is Jesus himself (Carson 1984, 111; Nolland 1989, 177). He was of course alone with Satan, ruling out a third-party eyewitness as source, and it is safe to assume Jesus would have given the disciples a detailed account of the temptations. What was known about Jesus circulated orally among the apostles with their oversight and in some cases had been recorded in accounts prior to the Gospels (as Luke 1:1–4 tells us). It is doubtful that the early church created the story. If the Gospel authors wanted to invent a story of Jesus overcoming demonic forces, it is unlikely they would create a story that so forcefully depicted Jesus' human frailty and that has no parallels in either testament. In fact this dissimilarity to

any other biblical story indicates the event's authenticity.

The temptation of Jesus stresses his qualification as a faithful human who can represent humanity before God because he remains faithful to God despite unprecedented testing. These temptations are real; Jesus' faithfulness is no less so. Some, like the Jehovah's Witnesses, argue Jesus cannot really have been tempted because he is God and God cannot be tempted (Jas 1:13). This belief ignores the genuine human nature of Jesus entirely (Phil 2:5–7; Heb 2:17). Jesus in his incarnation took on human characteristics such as the frailty that comes with hunger and thirst. Luke highlights Jesus as a successful second Adam (see Luke 3:38).

Jesus . . . was led by the Spirit in the wilderness (4:1): Mark had Jesus being driven into the wilderness immediately after his baptism (Mark 1:9–13). Does Luke paint a different picture since he placed Jesus' genealogy between the baptism and temptation? Though Luke separated these events in his text, he did not separate them in time. After all, the genealogy is not an event but a list.

Mark said the Spirit "drove" Jesus into the wilderness (Mark 1:12), whereas Luke said Jesus was "led" by the Spirit (Luke 4:1). Are Mark and Luke contradictory here? After all, one who drives does so from behind whereas one who leads does so from in front. We should not read the texts in an over-literal way. Though Luke has simplified Mark's reading, both are getting at the same thing: it was God's will that the Son be tempted, and it was by the guidance of the Spirit that Jesus was taken into the wilderness. If it is asked whether the Spirit's actions here contradict James 1:13, which says, "God is not tempted by evil, and He Himself doesn't tempt anyone," we must answer that it is no contradiction to say that God, though He tempts no one, can lead someone into a situation that tests them (Job 1:8; Matt 6:13). (See further comments at Mark 1:12.)

For 40 days . . . He ate nothing (4:2): Does Luke mean to say that Jesus literally took no sustenance for 40 days? Humans normally die without water in a matter of days, especially if they are in an arid climate. Most likely the fasting Jesus underwent would have permitted drink (none of the accounts specify that he did not drink) and may simply mean he did not eat anything substantive, simply subsisting on the slim fare available in the desert.

A rhetorical use of the idea of eating and drinking nothing is seen in Jesus' description of John the Baptist in Matthew 11:18, where he said, "For John did not come eating or drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon!'" The same sort of

hyperbole may be present in the description of Jesus' wilderness fast. In any event, Jesus was reduced to a state of extreme hunger, which was the basis of the first temptation Luke recounts (Luke 4:3).

Showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time (4:5): It is not possible to see all the kingdoms of the world from any high place on earth. Does this impossibility suggest that Luke is in error, perhaps reflecting a flat-earth view?

We should consider two options when answering this challenge. First, commentators as far back as Calvin have recognized that no mountain offers a view of the whole earth, so some suggest that Satan gave Jesus some sort of a vision that displayed the nations of the world. Visions are often granted in the Bible (e.g., Acts 10:9–16), so this is a plausible suggestion. Second, Schürmann (1969, 210) argues that the descriptions given by Matthew and Luke are too spatial to have merely a vision as their subject. For this reason he suggests a "diabolical rapture" occurred in which Satan took Jesus aloft for a perspective from above. Whether by vision or by rapture, Jesus was given a perspective that allowed him to see the kingdoms of the world. (See further comments at Matt 4:8.)

Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only (4:8): Religious groups that reject the deity of Christ cite this verse as proof that only God the Father is to be worshipped, and that Jesus rejected worship and thus did not claim to be God. Yet Jesus clearly accepted worship elsewhere, which is a clear self-attestation to his divinity (see Matt 8:2; John 20:28; Heb 1:6; Rev 4–5). Jesus' admonition fits with his intention to submit to the Father and not betray his allegiance in this time of testing.

14 Then Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread
throughout the entire vicinity. 15 He was teaching in their synagogues, being acclaimed by
everyone.

16 He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. As usual, He entered the synagogue
on the Sabbath day and stood up to read. 17 The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to Him,
and unrolling the scroll, He found the place where it was written:

18 **The Spirit of the Lord is on Me,**
because He has anointed Me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent Me

to proclaim freedom to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to set free the oppressed,
19 **to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. „**

20 He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. And the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on Him. 21 He began by saying to them, "Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled."

22 They were all speaking well of Him and were amazed by the gracious words that came from His mouth, yet they said, "Isn't this Joseph's son? "

23 Then He said to them, "No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me: 'Doctor, heal yourself. So all we've heard that took place in Capernaum, do here in Your hometown also.' "

24 He also said, " I assure you: No prophet is accepted in his hometown. 25 But I say to you, there were certainly many widows in Israel in Elijah's days, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months while a great famine came over all the land. 26 Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them — but to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. 27 And in the prophet Elisha's time, there were many in Israel who had serious skin diseases, yet not one of them was healed — only Naaman the Syrian."

28 When they heard this, everyone in the synagogue was enraged. 29 They got up, drove Him out of town, and brought Him to the edge of the hill that their town was built on, intending to hurl Him over the cliff. 30 But He passed right through the crowd and went on His way.

He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath day (4:16): This scene is the same incident as recorded in Matthew 13:53–58 and Mark 6:1–6. Luke's account has more detail, and he moved it forward chronologically because it is so representative of what would happen to Jesus as he ministered. We know Luke moved it forward because the incident has the same basic location in Mark as it does in Matthew, plus there are allusions to miracles done in Capernaum (4:23) even though in Luke's account Jesus has yet to go to Capernaum to perform such works (4:31ff). Such literary movement in the Gospels is not an indication that they are unreliable, because history telling can be ordered around organizing principles other than chronology. For instance, it can be arranged topically or thematically without compromising historicity.

***Is Jesus' citation of Isaiah accurate and legitimate* (4:18–19)?** It is well known that the quotation is not taken verbatim from any one place in Isaiah, but is instead drawn from 61:1–2 and, most likely, 58:6. Why would Jesus pull together two different passages and treat them as one? We should first note the possibility that Luke summarized the material cited by Jesus. It would be atypical to mix different passages as Jesus is depicted as doing here (with one passage encased within the other), and of course Jesus' synagogue reading likely lasted longer than the brief summary Luke shared. So this may well reflect

literary compression of a longer event. Second, the passages do naturally hang together. Isaiah 58 is a prophetic rebuke of Israel because it did not provide justice for the needy, and its fasting was with "contention and strife" (Isa 58:4). God declared that the fast he wanted from the people is one in which they treat their neighbors properly. Isaiah 61, which describes the Messiah's Jubilee, proclaims a time like the one envisioned (but not carried out by the people) in Isaiah 58. Jesus properly linked chapters 58 and 61 because the release pictured in chapter 58 has Jubilee overtones and also describes release in Sabbath terms, an event thematically similar to the year of Jubilee. By applying the passage to himself, Jesus was stating that Isaiah's message of comfort was fulfilled in his person. In fact, the totality of the deliverance that Isaiah described was now put into motion with Jesus' coming. He is the Servant *par excellence*.

Some critics also charge that Jesus misrepresented Isaiah 61:1–2 because he left out the dramatic part about the coming day of vengeance. In answer to this charge, it seems likely that Jesus left out the part about judgment because the time when he will execute judgment is not tied to the phase of his ministry he was initiating, but will be a part of his later return (Heb 9:27). Jesus will eventually fulfill both aspects of Isaiah's message, but the stress at this time was Jesus' identity and the fact that the promise of God was fulfilled in Jesus' mission as the Servant.

Jesus is seen as liberating the spiritually and socially needy, bringing restoration to a world where people are held captive both spiritually and, as a result, socially. Yet Mormons take "captives" to refer to the dead who are damned. Thus they see Jesus preaching to the damned, giving them a second chance at salvation. This is not a legitimate reading of this passage. There is no notion of a preaching to the dead here. In fact Luke 16:19–31 precludes such a reading, since when the rich man died, he had no second chance. The ministry that followed in Capernaum (4:31–44; 7:1–10) illustrated the meaning of Jesus' quotes from Isaiah. Jesus placed word and deed together in his ministry to show what God had called him to do.

Everyone in the synagogue was enraged (4:28): What really got the crowd angry was not Jesus' extraordinary claims about himself. They merely puzzled over that, perhaps thinking he was not of sound mind. Their anger was provoked when Jesus suggested that God's blessing might go to the Gentiles rather than Israel, just as had happened in the past.

33 In the synagogue there was a man with an unclean demonic spirit who cried out with a loud
voice, 34 “Leave us alone! What do You have to do with us, Jesus — Nazarene? Have You
come to destroy us? I know who You are — the Holy One of God! ”
35 But Jesus rebuked him and said, “Be quiet and come out of him! ”
And throwing him down before them, the demon came out of him without hurting him at all.
36 Amazement came over them all, and they kept saying to one another, “What is this message?
For He commands the unclean spirits with authority and power, and they come out! ” 37 And
news about Him began to go out to every place in the vicinity.
38 After He left the synagogue, He entered Simon’s house. Simon’s mother-in-law was
suffering from a high fever, and they asked Him about her. 39 So He stood over her and rebuked
the fever, and it left her. She got up immediately and began to serve them.
40 When the sun was setting, all those who had anyone sick with various diseases brought
them to Him. As He laid His hands on each one of them, He would heal them. 41 Also, demons
were coming out of many, shouting and saying, “You are the Son of God! ” But He rebuked
them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew He was the Messiah.

A man with an unclean demonic spirit (4:33): The overcoming of demons is one way first-century Jews believed the kingdom of God would show itself to be present. One source for this expectation is the *Testament of Moses* 10:1, which speaks of Satan being defeated when God’s kingdom comes. Jesus said as much in Luke 11:20 when he noted that if he casts out demons then the kingdom of God has come. This was a tangible way for the people to judge that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

Amazement came over them all (4:36): The issue of Jesus’ authority as shown in such events as this exorcism is a key theme of the Gospels. We should note two things. First, with each such act Jesus was declaring publicly his authority over creation, including the spirit realm (see comments on 4:33). Second, rather than just prompting amazement, the proper outcome of Jesus’ works of power was to move the people to ask questions such as the one found here in verse 36: “What is this message?” This is a question we should all reflect on.

You are the Son of God! (4:41): The explanatory remark Luke gave for this scene (“He rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew He was the Messiah”) suggests this confession by the demons probably has Jesus’ identity as Messiah in view more so than Jesus’ identity as the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity.

He rebuked them and would not allow them to speak (4:41): Such a confession from such a source was not something Jesus wanted made public at this time, because people did not appreciate the kind of Messiah Jesus would be.

Had confessions about Jesus being "the Son of God" gotten around, it would only heighten Jesus' struggles to define for the people his true purposes as Messiah. For instance, even Jesus' disciples had a difficult time learning about and accepting the coming suffering of the Messiah (9:44–45; 24:44–47).

> As the crowd was pressing in on Jesus to hear God's word, He was standing by Lake Gennesaret. 2 He saw two boats at the edge of the lake; the fishermen had left them and were washing their nets. 3 He got into one of the boats, which belonged to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from the land. Then He sat down and was teaching the crowds from the boat.
>
> 4 When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch."
>
> 5 "Master," Simon replied, "we've worked hard all night long and caught nothing! But at Your word, I'll let down the nets."
>
> 6 When they did this, they caught a great number of fish, and their nets began to tear. 7 So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them; they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.
>
> 8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, because I'm a sinful man, Lord! " 9 For he and all those with him were amazed at the catch of fish they took,
>
> 10 and so were James and John, Zebedee's sons, who were Simon's partners.
>
> "Don't be afraid," Jesus told Simon. "From now on you will be catching people! " 11 Then they brought the boats to land, left everything, and followed Him.

The call of the disciples **(Luke 5:1–11; Matt 4:18–22; Mark 1:16–20):** In both Matthew 4 and Mark 1, Jesus called to discipleship several men who were working their fishing nets. Clearly both of these Gospels are narrating the same event. Both accounts are brief and emphasize the sudden response of the disciples to Jesus' call. But what is the relationship between these texts and Luke 5:1–11, where the details of the setting differ even though Jesus utters a similar call (about being fishers of men)?

Since Luke likely used Mark as a source, the discussion reduces to a focus on the relationship between Luke 5 and Mark 1. Supporting a conclusion that Luke was narrating a separate event, Fitzmyer (1981, 560) identified three differences between Mark and Luke. (1) Jesus was teaching in Luke 5:1–3 whereas in Mark 1:16 and Matthew 4:18 he was just passing by when he engaged the fishermen. (2) In Luke, Jesus extended the call to be fishers of men after the miracle catch had occurred (5:4–9); in Mark 1:16–17, 19–20 and Matthew 4:18–19, 21–22, the nets were merely being cast and mended when Jesus called them to be his followers. In other words, in Luke's Gospel Jesus caused the men to fish, but the

other Synoptics have them fishing already. (3) The call in Luke 5:10 was made exclusively to Simon but all follow, whereas in Mark and Matthew, all were called. In Mark 1:17 and Matthew 4:19, the call to be fishers of people was made to both Simon and Andrew. In light of these evidences, it seems most likely that Luke was narrating a distinct event from Mark and Matthew.

The difficulty with this conclusion is that Luke could simply have filled in details for the same event that Mark told in summary form. If Luke and Mark were narrating the same event after all, then Luke may have been seeking to give a rationale for why these disciples were so quick to drop everything and follow Jesus. Having seen the miraculous catch, they had plenty of evidence that Jesus was a man whose call they should obey.

However, seeing two events here between Luke and Mark may explain Jesus' previous contact with Peter in Luke 4:38–39 in that they also had previous contact according to the Mark 1 account, which Luke has omitted. Seeing two events also suggests that Jesus' teaching and activity, as noted in Luke 5:1–11, helped to solidify the association between Jesus and these men. In sum, it is likely that two events are in view between Mark and Luke, with Luke narrating the final event of the pair. (See further comments at Matt 4:18–22.)

12 While He was in one of the towns, a man was there who had a serious skin disease all over
him. He saw Jesus, fell facedown, and begged Him: "Lord, if You are willing, You can make
me clean."
13 Reaching out His hand, He touched him, saying, "I am willing; be made clean," and
immediately the disease left him. 14 Then He ordered him to tell no one: "But go and show
yourself to the priest, and offer what Moses prescribed for your cleansing as a testimony to
them."
15 But the news about Him spread even more, and large crowds would come together to hear
Him and to be healed of their sicknesses. 16 Yet He often withdrew to deserted places and
prayed.
17 On one of those days while He was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting
there who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea, and also from Jerusalem. And the
Lord's power to heal was in Him. 18 Just then some men came, carrying on a mat a man who
was paralyzed. They tried to bring him in and set him down before Him. 19 Since they could
not find a way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him
on the mat through the roof tiles into the middle of the crowd before Jesus.
20 Seeing their faith He said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven you."
21 Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to think: "Who is this man who speaks
blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone? "

22 But perceiving their thoughts, Jesus replied to them, “Why are you thinking this in your
hearts? 23 Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’?
24 But so you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” — He told
the paralyzed man, “I tell you: Get up, pick up your mat, and go home.”
25 Immediately he got up before them, picked up what he had been lying on, and went home
glorifying God. 26 Then everyone was astounded, and they were giving glory to God. And they
were filled with awe and said, “We have seen incredible things today! ”
27 After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the tax office, and
He said to him, “Follow Me! ”

The Lord’s power to heal was in Him (5:17): Does this statement imply that sometimes the Lord’s power to heal was *not* in Jesus? Did the power come and go, as if on loan to Jesus from God? If so, this would seem to imply that God used Jesus, but Jesus was not himself God.

This expression is simply Luke’s way of affirming that Jesus had healing power from God, not that such power came to him then left him. The remark sets up the theme of authority bound up in Jesus’ claim that he has the right to forgive sins (v. 20). When the scribes and Pharisees doubted his right to do this, Jesus displayed his ability to enact an unseen reality (forgiving a man of his sins) by enacting a reality no one could dispute (healing the man’s lameness). See comments on verses 22–26.

Through the roof tiles (5:19): Luke spoke of “roof tiles,” whereas Mark 2:4 spoke of the men breaking through the roof (lit “digging it out”), which seems to imply the roof was constructed of mud and thatch with crossbeams, an arrangement one would expect of Palestinian homes. Scholars have challenged Luke’s account on two counts.

First, it is said to be an impractical task, and one that the crowd gathered inside would not have allowed the men to complete. This criticism overstates the difficulty of breaking in (whether a tile roof or mud and thatch), plus it assumes debris would have rained down on the occupants. If the men were careful, however, they could have broken through the mud layer above the beams without letting much debris fall onto those gathered in the house (Plummer 1896, 153). And the crowd would have taken their cue from Jesus; as long as he did not move to stop the men, neither would the crowd.

Second, critics say Luke was wrong to speak of a house in Palestine as having a tile roof (Schürmann 1969, 282n17; Creed 1930, 79). Scholars sometimes suggest that Luke’s reference to tiles was merely an accommodation to his Greek audience since tile roofs were common to their experience; this suggestion is

possible, but not necessary. The term translated “tiles” (Gk *keramos*) can also mean “clay” (2 Sam 17:28; Shepherd of Hermas, *Vision* 4.1.6:22). Others suggest that this less natural reading is not necessary, for roof tiles, though uncommon, were sometimes used in ancient Palestine (Marshall 1978, 213; Kelso 1962, 544; van der Loos 1965, 441n3).

Why are you thinking this in your hearts? (5:22): Did Jesus mistakenly believe that the thinking faculties are in the heart rather than the head? It is questionable whether people in Jesus’ day really thought the heart was the instrument of thought. The Bible’s depiction of the heart as a key seat for the personality and thinking may be a recognition that there is more to thinking than “just the facts.” Thinking also involves the orientation of the person to the world and life. The heart pictures this extra dimension of the intellectual process. (See further comments at Matt 9:4.)

Son of Man (5:24): This title was Jesus’ favorite way to refer to himself. Son of Man simply means “a human being.” Just like Son of David means a descendant of David, so Son of Man means a descendant of a human. However, the “One like a son of man” in Daniel rides the clouds (Dan 7:9–14). In the OT, only deity is depicted as riding the clouds. So this term suggests a human-transcendent makeup. Furthermore, the issue in Luke 5:18–26 is Jesus exercising an authority only God possesses. Jesus was defending his claim that he (being a man) had the divine prerogative to forgive sins (indicating he is more than just a man). The mixed nature of the title “Son of Man” helps to explain how this is possible. In a sense we have a claim for incarnation here. Jesus was a human with divine authority, the exact combination “Son of Man” can suggest.

Everyone was astounded (5:26): Critics sometimes claim that we cannot trust the miracles recorded in the NT because the ancients were superstitious and believed miracles were common. Thus critics claim the audience uncritically accepted claims that miracles had occurred in Jesus’ life. But the reaction of the crowd (“everyone was astounded,” and “they were filled with awe”) proves that the Israelites, whose history included renowned miracles, were not of a mindset that expected miracles left and right.

A tax collector named Levi (5:27): Mark 2:14 and Luke 5:27 use the name “Levi,” but Matthew 9:9–13 and 10:3 use “Matthew.” Which is it? Can it be both? It was not unusual for Jewish people to have two names. Saul (Paul), Thomas (Didymus), and Cephas (Peter) are three examples. Thus Levi was probably an alternate name for Matthew. Possibly Levi changed his name to

Matthew (“gift of Yahweh”) after becoming a follower of Jesus. (See further comments at Matt 9:9.)

> On a Sabbath, He passed through the grainfields. His disciples were picking heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands, and eating them. 2 But some of the Pharisees said, “Why are you doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath? ”
>
> 3 Jesus answered them, “Haven’t you read what David and those who were with him did when he was hungry — 4 how he entered the house of God, and took and ate the sacred bread, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat? He even gave some to those who were with him.” 5 Then He told them, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”
>
> 6 On another Sabbath He entered the synagogue and was teaching. A man was there whose right hand was paralyzed. 7 The scribes and Pharisees were watching Him closely, to see if He would heal on the Sabbath, so that they could find a charge against Him. 8 But He knew their thoughts and told the man with the paralyzed hand, “Get up and stand here.” So he got up and stood there. 9 Then Jesus said to them, “I ask you: Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do what is good or to do what is evil, to save life or to destroy it? ” 10 After looking around at them all, He told him, “Stretch out your hand.” He did so, and his hand was restored. 11 They, however, were filled with rage and started discussing with one another what they might do to Jesus.

His disciples were picking heads of grain (6:1): Were the disciples stealing grain or breaking the Sabbath here? A Jewish text written about two centuries after the time of the disciples, *m. Shabbat* 7.2, says all threshing was prohibited on the Sabbath. The text of the Mishnah records Jewish oral tradition about the law, and many of its traditions likely extend back into the first century. But what the disciples were doing here is permitted in the law itself, where fields could be left open for harvesting by those who had a need and where select harvesting by passersby was not considered stealing. Deuteronomy 23:25 reads, “When you enter your neighbor’s standing grain, you may pluck heads of grain with your hand, but you must not put a sickle to your neighbor’s grain.” Thus the disciples were not stealing.

Jesus’ reply to the Pharisees took two paths: First, David and his men had their needs met on the Sabbath by bread that was technically not permitted to them. This spoke to the fact that the Pharisees had gotten mixed up on their priorities. Second, aside from all other considerations, Jesus noted that, as Son of Man, he is in charge of the Sabbath and he accepts what his disciples have done.

They, however, were filled with rage (6:11): Here and elsewhere the religious leaders who opposed Jesus did not dispute that he had performed miracles. They

acknowledged the works, attributing them to the Devil in the case of exorcisms (Matt 12:24; Mark 3:22), yet they were angered rather than humbled by what they saw. They were granting Jesus' status as miracle-worker but denying his identity because he conflicted with their traditions and did not fit their expectations for the Messiah.

12 During those days He went out to the mountain to pray and spent all night in prayer to God.
13 When daylight came, He summoned His disciples, and He chose 12 of them — He also named them apostles:

14 Simon, whom He also named Peter,
and Andrew his brother;
James and John;
Philip and Bartholomew;
15 Matthew and Thomas;
James the son of Alphaeus,
and Simon called the Zealot;
16 Judas the son of James,
and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

He summoned His disciples, and He chose 12 of them . . . (6:13–16): This passage provides one of four NT lists of the Twelve (Matt 10:2–4; Mark 3:16–19; Acts 1:13). Luke's second list (Acts 1:13) includes the same names as provided in Luke 6:13–16, though in a different order. In fact, there are differences in order in all the lists, and there are other differences over which interpreters have wrestled.

Before addressing the differences, we should note three points of agreement across all four lists: (1) Peter is listed first and Judas is listed last, except for Acts 1:13 where Judas is omitted because he is dead by this time. That Judas is listed in Matthew, Mark, and Luke exhibits the fact that the authors of the Gospels were unwilling to hide embarrassing facts such as Jesus being betrayed by one of his intimate followers. This speaks to the honesty and reliability of the canonical Gospels. (2) Peter, Andrew, James, and John are the first four to be listed, though not always in the same order. (3) There are three groups of four in each list, with Peter, Philip, and James son of Alphaeus always in the lead position in each group (Plummer 1896, 172; Carson 1984, 237).

Some names require additional comment.

- It is possible that Bartholomew is another name for the Nathaniel who is

mentioned prominently in John 1:45 and who seems to be included formally as a disciple in John 21:2. Bartholomew's association with the disciple Philip (John 1:43–51) and the proximity of Bartholomew to Philip in these lists commends this suggestion.

- Thomas, known also as Didymus, is the famous doubting Thomas of John 20:24–29. His inclusion in the lists is another indication that the Evangelists were unwilling to cover over the failures and embarrassments of the disciples.
- James, Son of Alphaeus, is not James the brother of Jesus but another James. At this point in his ministry, none of Jesus' brothers had come to believe in him (John 7:5).
- Luke-Acts lists Judas son of James but does not include Thaddaeus, while Matthew and Mark list Thaddaeus but not Judas son of James. Does this mean Luke is at odds with the other Synoptics about the roster of disciples? It is more likely that these are two names for the same person. The proximity of the two names together in the lists (Thaddaeus occupies the tenth position in Mark and Matthew while Judas son of James is listed eleventh in Luke and Acts) and the fact that several other disciples had two names (e.g., in this short list we likely have Matthew-Levi, Thomas-Didymus, and possibly Bartholomew-Nathaniel) suggest this as a real possibility. This attempted solution is speculative but possible. (See further comments at Matt 10:2–4 and Mark 3:13–19.)

17 After coming down with them, He stood on a level place with a large crowd of His
disciples and a great number of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and from the seacoast of
Tyre and Sidon. 18 They came to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases; and those
tormented by unclean spirits were made well. 19 The whole crowd was trying to touch Him,
because power was coming out from Him and healing them all.

20 Then looking up at His disciples, He said:

You who are poor are blessed,
because the kingdom of God is yours.
21 You who are now hungry are blessed,
because you will be filled.
You who now weep are blessed,
because you will laugh.
22 You are blessed when people hate you,
when they exclude you, insult you,
and slander your name as evil

because of the Son of Man.

23 “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! Take note — your reward is great in heaven, for this
is the way their ancestors used to treat the prophets.

24 But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your comfort.
25 Woe to you who are now full,
for you will be hungry.
Woe to you who are now laughing,
for you will mourn and weep.
26 Woe to you
when all people speak well of you,
for this is the way their ancestors
used to treat the false prophets.

27 “But I say to you who listen: Love your enemies, do what is good to those who hate you,
28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 If anyone hits you on the
cheek, offer the other also. And if anyone takes away your coat, don’t hold back your shirt
either. 30 Give to everyone who asks you, and from one who takes your things, don’t ask for
them back. 31 Just as you want others to do for you, do the same for them. 32 If you love those
who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. 33 If you do
what is good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that.
34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even
sinners lend to sinners to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do what is good, and lend,
expecting nothing in return. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most
High. For He is gracious to the ungrateful and evil. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father also is
merciful.

37 “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be
condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. 38 Give, and it will be given to you; a good
measure — pressed down, shaken together, and running over — will be poured into your lap.
For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.”

39 He also told them a parable: “Can the blind guide the blind? Won’t they both fall into a pit?
40 A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.

41 “Why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but don’t notice the log in your own
eye? 42 Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your
eye,’ when you yourself don’t see the log in your eye? Hypocrite! First take the log out of your
eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck in your brother’s eye.

43 “A good tree doesn’t produce bad fruit; on the other hand, a bad tree doesn’t produce good
fruit. 44 For each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs aren’t gathered from thornbushes, or
grapes picked from a bramble bush. 45 A good man produces good out of the good storeroom of
his heart. An evil man produces evil out of the evil storeroom, for his mouth speaks from the
overflow of the heart.

46 “Why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and don’t do the things I say? 47 I will show you what

someone is like who comes to Me, hears My words, and acts on them: 48 He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. When the flood came, the river crashed against that house and couldn't shake it, because it was well built. 49 But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The river crashed against it, and immediately it collapsed. And the destruction of that house was great! "

Level place or mountain? Comparing Luke 6:17 and Matthew 5:1: This speech is the Lucan version of the better known Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5. It occupies the same place in the flow of each Gospel. Critics cite the differences between Luke's account and Matthew's as evidence that the Evangelists present conflicting testimony, but are the differences so significant? The first thing to note is that Luke's version is abbreviated in part because Luke, writing primarily to Gentiles, typically chose not to include the parts that dealt with issues of Jewish law and custom. Thus his approach ensures that there will be notable differences from Matthew. Another discrepancy is whether Jesus delivered these sayings on a plain as Luke suggests (Luke 6:17) or on a mountain as Matthew presents (Matt 5:1). Though at first glance it may seem these descriptions are incompatible, a locale associated with the Sea of Galilee near Tabgha and Capernaum is on a small mount that is on a plain by the sea. We cannot be sure this is the right location, but if so the topography of this area fits both descriptions. Another option for explaining the different geographical descriptions is that Matthew may have placed together into a single speech an anthology of Jesus' teachings on discipleship as representative of the kind of speech Jesus gave on the topic, perhaps in many locales and on separate occasions. A reason for suggesting this option is that about 30 percent of Matthew's version of the speech shows up in a variety of settings in Luke. So either explanation might be correct. Even if both Matthew and Luke are recounting a single event, the material in each is surely a compression of much more that Jesus said and taught at that time. The speech itself is actually very short in the Gospels, so much so that it would seem disproportionate with the journey the people had undertaken to come hear Jesus. Chroniclers regularly present speeches in summary form. As for Jesus being portrayed as standing in Luke (6:17) and sitting in Matthew (5:1), this difference can be explained in either of the above scenarios. If the two accounts represent a single event, it is entirely reasonable that over the course of a long speech Jesus would alternatively sit and stand. If on the other hand one or both of the accounts represent a compression of several different events, the same conclusion obtains: Jesus would have alternatively sat or stood according to his desires and the

setting. (See further comments at Matt 5:1–7:27.)

You who are poor are blessed (6:20): Luke spoke of the "poor" while Matthew spoke of the "poor in spirit" (Matt 5:3). Is this an irresolvable discrepancy, with Luke thinking in socioeconomic terms and Matthew in spiritual terms? Determining what Luke meant by "poor" (Gk *ptōchos*) is key.

Luke previously mentioned (4:18) the poor in his citation of Isaiah 61:1 and was referring to those to whom Jesus proclaimed the good news. Luke used "poor" not merely as a socioeconomic term in that passage but as a term bearing spiritual content. The context of both Luke 4 and Luke 6 indicates the character of the "poor." The interpretive history of Isaiah 61 in Judaism supports this spiritual aspect to Luke's use of the term.

Guelich (1982, 67–72) summarized the OT background and NT context of this term by the following points. First, in Greek literature the term *ptōchos* is exclusively socioeconomic in force, but Luke associated it with the kingdom of God, bringing in an eschatological flavor that did not merely repeat the Greek sense (on Greek usage, see Hauck, *TDNT* 6:886–87). Second, in the LXX, *ptōchos* translates six Hebrew terms, the most common being *ʿanî* (poor), which has both socioeconomic and religious connotations, suggesting a reference to the pious poor, who look to and depend on God (Pss 14:6 [13:6 LXX]; 22:24 [21:25 LXX]; 25:16 [24:16 LXX]; 34:6 [33:7 LXX]; 40:17 [39:18 LXX]; 69:29 [68:30 LXX]; Bammel, *TDNT* 6:888). Third, the Torah, Psalms, and Prophets often speak of God's promise in terms of vindication or protection of the pious poor (Exod 22:25–27; Deut 15:7–11; 2 Sam 22:28; Ps 72:2,4,12; Isa 3:14–15; 10:2; Jer 22:16; Ezek 16:49; 18:12; Amos 8:4; Zech 7:10). This leads to the conclusion that one's compassion and love are measured by one's treatment of the poor. Fourth, in the LXX (Pss 24:9 [25:9 Engl.]; 33:2 [34:2 Engl.]) and in discoveries at Qumran (1QH 1.36; 2.34; 5.13–14), the poor are often associated with the meek or humble, motifs suggested in Luke 1:51–53.

Guelich's summary definition (1982, 69) captures the situation nicely: "*The poor* in Judaism referred to those in desperate need (socioeconomic element) whose helplessness drove them to a dependent relationship with God (religious element) for the supplying of their needs and vindication. Both elements are consistently present, although [poor] does place more stress on the latter." In this light it is clear that Matthew and Luke are compatible in their use of "poor" and "poor in spirit." For more on this topic, see the commentary immediately below.

Comparing the Beatitudes in Luke and Matthew: There are five notable

differences in how Matthew and Luke summarized Jesus' address. First, Luke recorded only four beatitudes whereas Matthew included eight. Rather than disagreement, this difference is attributable to differences in source and purpose. We have already noted above that Luke's version is condensed. Second, the order of the four beatitudes Matthew and Luke hold in common differs, with Luke placing Matthew's beatitudes in the following order: 1, 4, 2, and 8 (poor, hungry, grieving, persecuted). This is a matter of differing arrangement, not disagreement. Third, Luke used the second person while Matthew employed the third person (Ernst 1977, 214–5; Marshall 1978, 248; Guelich 1982, 66). Both approaches have precedent in the OT. Ernst noted that of 45 OT beatitudes three are in second-person singular (Deut 33:29; Ps 128:2; Eccl 10:17), one is second-person plural (Isa 32:20), and the rest are third-person (1 Kgs 10:8; 2 Chr 9:7; Job 5:17; Pss 1:1; 2:12; 32:1–2; 33:12; 34:8; 40:4; 41:1; 65:4; 84:4–5, 12; 89:15; 94:12; 106:3; 112:1; 119:1–2; 127:5; 128:1; 137:8–9; 144:15; 146:5; Prov 3:13; 8:32, 34; 14:21; 16:20; 20:7; 28:14; Isa 30:18; 56:2; Dan 12:12). Fourth, Luke alone has the four woes. Matthew's failure to include the woes is not equivalent to his claiming Jesus did not utter them. Fifth, Matthew used "poor in spirit" (Matt 5:3) whereas Luke used a less explicitly spiritual reference, "the poor" (Luke 6:20). The poor are often described in the OT as pious and persecuted (e.g., Ps 72:12–13), so the difference between Matthew and Luke is more superficial than real (see comments on 6:20). The spiritual orientation of the poor is made clear in Luke's comparison of the blessed to the OT prophets (6:23), while the group that suffers woe is compared to false prophets (6:26). Thus, Luke was referring to spiritual categories, even though the reference to "the poor" looks on the surface to be purely social and economic in character. Such abbreviated references to the blessedness of the poor are common in the NT (1 Cor 1:26–29; Jas 2:5). Perhaps Luke had Jesus' original wording or something close to it, while Matthew paraphrased the reference to make explicit the intended spiritual force of Jesus' teaching. The Matthean summary and expansion is appropriate in light of remarks like Luke 6:23, 26.

Love your enemies (6:27): If Jesus teaches us to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us, why cannot God do the same in the end-times judgment and just forgive everyone? One reply emphasizes that God allows people to keep the choice they make about rejecting him. In other words, God gives us genuine freedom and lets us go our own way if that is what we choose, and fittingly he holds us responsible for that choice and the moral consequences it represents (Rom 2:5–6; cp. Rom 3:26). Another factor that we should mention is that for

one human to love and forgive another represents a transaction between two sinners. Neither party sits over the other as morally superior. God, on the other hand, relates to us not as a fellow creaturely sinner, but as our holy Creator. For him to simply accept sinners without requiring satisfaction for their sins would be to declare that our sins did not really matter and that his holiness is a trifling thing that should not get in the way of humans doing whatever they please. This would invert the moral structure of the entire universe (Exod 23:7; Prov 17:15).

Another criticism one sometimes encounters is that Jesus' command to love one's enemies is not unique to him. It is true that the command is similar to some OT sayings (Exod 23:4–5; Job 31:29–34; Prov 17:5; 24:17; 25:21–22), but of course the merits of Jesus' teachings do not hang on his being unique in everything he teaches. Nevertheless Jesus' expression of this command is unparalleled in its emphatic tone (Fitzmyer 1981, 637–38).

Just as you want others to do for you, do the same for them (6:31): Since the eighteenth century this principle has been known as the Golden Rule. It is an old idea and is stated in many different moral sayings and systems outside of the Judeo-Christian tradition. For example, Rabbi Hillel said, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor; that is the whole Torah, while the rest is commentary" (*b. Shabbat* 31a). In this form, the wording is very close to Matthew 7:12. Sirach 31:15 instructs, "Judge a fellow guest's needs by your own." This statement is given in a positive form, though its scope is limited to the subject of hospitality. Tobit 4:15 says, "What you hate, do to no one." Herodotus 3.142 avows, "I will not myself do that which I account blameworthy in my neighbor." This statement is really a personal ethic and is not clearly directed at others. It is the Golden Rule stated in a rather self-focused way. Thus, in tone it is not quite the same as what Jesus taught. Seneca admonished, "Let us give in the manner that would have been acceptable if we had been receiving" (*On Benefits* 2.1.1). This idea is stated positively and is very close in tone to Jesus' remarks. Confucius, in *Analects* 15.23, stated in a negative form the Golden Rule: "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others" (Creed 1930, 94).

It is no discredit to Jesus that some of his teachings are universally recognized moral principles. Perhaps the most noteworthy aspects of Jesus' expression of the Golden Rule are that, in contrast to anyone else who has professed this rule, he lived in perfect accordance with it and he espoused it as one who had divine authority to teach it as a principle that is binding for all people.

Do not judge, and you will not be judged (6:37): Does Jesus prohibit us from making moral judgments about the actions of others? The kind of judgment Jesus prohibited here is not ethical evaluation, for numerous NT passages command this kind of discernment. In Matthew 7:1–6 we have the parallel to Luke's present account, and after saying "Do not judge, so that you won't be judged" in verse 1, in verse 6 Jesus said, "Don't give what is holy to dogs or toss your pearls before pigs." In the space of just a few sentences Jesus taught us not to judge and yet implored us to discern when we are dealing with immoral people. In Luke 20:46–47 Jesus warned his listeners against the immorality of the scribes, which of course implies we are to recognize (judge) their moral failures. Elsewhere in the NT we are instructed to discern immorality and act to correct it (1 Cor 5:5, 11–13; Phil 3:2); to recognize false teaching and resist it (Gal 1:8–9; 1 John 4:1); and yet to be careful not to slander in our judgments (Titus 3:2).

What Jesus prohibits in Luke 6:37 is not moral discernment but a judgmental and censorious perspective toward others, a graceless attitude that does not seek to lead the guilty to reconciliation with God and people. Rather than being quick to condemn and slow to forgive, Jesus asks us to be slow to condemn and quick to forgive. Again, what Jesus prohibits is an arrogance that reacts with hostility to worldly and morally lax persons, viewing them as beyond God's reach. Jesus censures an attitude like that of the Pharisee in Luke 18:11–14 (also 5:29–32; Ellis 1974, 116; Marshall 1978, 265–66). Büchsel defined Jesus' teaching on judgment well (*TDNT* 3:939):

> What is unconditionally demanded is that such evaluations should be subject to the certainty that God's judgment falls also on those who judge, so that superiority, hardness and blindness to one's own faults are excluded, and a readiness to forgive and to intercede is safeguarded. The emphatic way in which Jesus extended the law of love in this direction has far-reaching consequences. It means that the Church cannot practice discipline with merciless severity (2 Cor 11:24). It means that the Church cannot take up a hard, contemptuous and supercilious attitude towards those whom it regards as sinners.

Such an attitude is really self-righteousness and usurps God's role as the only infallible and final Judge (Rom 14:10–13; Jas 2:4; 4:11–12).

2 A centurion’s slave, who was highly valued by him, was sick and about to die. 3 When the
centurion heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to Him, requesting Him to come and
save the life of his slave. 4 When they reached Jesus, they pleaded with Him earnestly, saying,
“He is worthy for You to grant this, 5 because he loves our nation and has built us a
synagogue.” 6 Jesus went with them, and when He was not far from the house, the centurion
sent friends to tell Him, “Lord, don’t trouble Yourself, since I am not worthy to have You come
under my roof. 7 That is why I didn’t even consider myself worthy to come to You. But say the
word, and my servant will be cured. 8 For I too am a man placed under authority, having
soldiers under my command. I say to this one, ‘Go! ’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come! ’ and
he comes; and to my slave, ‘Do this! ’ and he does it.”
9 Jesus heard this and was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following Him, He said, “I
tell you, I have not found so great a faith even in Israel! ” 10 When those who had been sent
returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

Who spoke to Jesus—the elders or the centurion? **(Luke 7:1–10; Matt 8:5–13):** A comparison between Luke 7:1–10 and its parallel in Matthew 8:5–13 reveals a significant difference between the accounts. In Matthew the centurion and Jesus have a direct conversation, while Luke has the conversation taking place between Jesus and envoys who also endorse the centurion to Jesus. Virtually everything else in the miracle account is the same except for a longer conclusion that Matthew has with the additional saying about many coming from east and west to sit in the kingdom (Matt 8:11). Matthew is known for literary collapse and simplification in his stories. For example, in the raising of Jairus’s daughter, Matthew simplified the account by shortening it (Matt 9:18–26; cp Mark 5:21–43; Luke 8:40–56). He could do this because the point he wanted to get at was that the girl was dead when Jesus met up with her. He was less concerned about details in this sequence. In a similar way Matthew simplified the present account by having the centurion encounter Jesus directly. This is a legitimate tactic, for the Jewish elders serve as envoys who represent the centurion. A modern parallel is the White House press secretary speaking for the president, such that we can legitimately say “the president said” even though it was actually the press secretary who spoke. (See further comments at Matt 8:5–13.)

Is Luke 7:1–10 parallel to John 4:46–54? Another issue that arises in this account is the question of whether the narratives in Luke 7:1–10 and Matthew 8:5–13 are parallel to John 4:46–54. There are seven key differences that suggest John is not a parallel account. First, while John 4:46 has Jesus in Cana and the centurion hailing from Capernaum, Luke 7:1 and Matthew 8:5 place Jesus in Capernaum. Second, while Matthew 8:5 and John 4:46–47 both mention the

direct approach of the supplicant (“centurion” in Matt and “royal official” in John), Luke has the centurion sending emissaries to Jesus on his behalf (Luke 7:3, 6). While Matthew and John may seem to stand together on this matter, John’s term for the supplicant (Gk *basilikos*, John 4:46, 49) differs from the term used in Matthew 8:5, 8 and Luke 7:2 (Gk *hekatontarchēs*). Though the terms can be synonymous (Wegner 1985, 57–72), thus both having the centurion in view, the different choice may also suggest John and Matthew had different people in mind and were narrating different events. Third, Matthew 8:6, 8, 13 say that a *pais* (child or servant) is ill. Luke has *pais* in Luke 7:7 and *doulos* (slave) in Luke 7:2, 3, 10. Beside this potential Synoptic diversity stands John’s seemingly more divergent account, which speaks of a son: *huios* (John 4:46, 47, 50, 53) and *paidion* (John 4:49), but confines the use of the more ambiguous *pais* to John 4:51. Fourth, the key difference between the accounts is that in Matthew 8:7 and Luke 7:6a, Jesus promptly agreed to come in response to an initial request for help; but in John 4:48 Jesus initially issued a rebuke and then agreed to heal the boy but did not attend the boy personally. This is a noteworthy divergence between John and the Synoptics, suggesting different events are in view. Fifth, another key difference is Jesus’ later reaction. In Matthew 8:10 and Luke 7:9, he marveled at the centurion’s faith. John noted the healing but said nothing of Jesus marveling at anyone’s faith. Sixth, the notation of the healing differs in all accounts. Matthew 8:13 notes that the healing came the same hour that Jesus spoke (Matthew also contains an additional saying about the Gentiles at this point, similar to what Luke has at 13:28–29). Luke 7:10 merely mentions the healing. On the other hand, John 4:51–53 notes that the servants report the hour of the healing, so that we understand that the healing occurred at the very hour Jesus spoke. Seventh, only John mentioned that the whole household believed because of the healing (John 4:53).

Though a case can be made that John is narrating the same event as Matthew and Luke, the differences noted above make it likely that John is referring to a distinct situation. (See further comments at John 4:43–54.)

> 11 Soon afterward He was on His way to a town called Nain. His disciples and a large crowd
> were traveling with Him. 12 Just as He neared the gate of the town, a dead man was being
> carried out. He was his mother’s only son, and she was a widow. A large crowd from the city
> was also with her. 13 When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said, “Don’t cry.”
> 14 Then He came up and touched the open coffin, and the pallbearers stopped. And He said,

“Young man, I tell you, get up! ”

15 The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. 16 Then fear came over everyone, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has risen among us,” and “God has visited His people.” 17 This report about Him went throughout Judea and all the vicinity..

Young man, I tell you, get up! (7:14): Jesus’ speaking to the corpse does not indicate he believed the dead man was still capable of hearing. Rather, Jesus spoke to the corpse for the sake of the crowd. Hearing Jesus’ command and then seeing the results (v. 15), the crowd began drawing conclusions about Jesus’ unusual identity (v. 16).

18 Then John’s disciples told him about all these things. So John summoned two of his disciples 19 and sent them to the Lord, asking, “Are You the One who is to come, or should we look for someone else? ”

20 When the men reached Him, they said, “John the Baptist sent us to ask You, ‘Are You the One who is to come, or should we look for someone else? ’ ”

21 At that time Jesus healed many people of diseases, plagues, and evil spirits, and He granted sight to many blind people. 22 He replied to them, “Go and report to John the things you have seen and heard: The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with skin diseases are healed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are told the good news. 23 And anyone who is not offended because of Me is blessed.” 24 After John’s messengers left, He began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swaying in the wind? 25 What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft robes? Look, those who are splendidly dressed and live in luxury are in royal palaces. 26 What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and far more than a prophet. 27 This is the one it is written about:

Look, I am sending My messenger
ahead of You;
he will prepare Your way before You.

28 I tell you, among those born of women no one is greater than John, but the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

29 (And when all the people, including the tax collectors, heard this, they acknowledged God’s way of righteousness, because they had been baptized with John’s baptism. 30 But since the Pharisees and experts in the law had not been baptized by him, they rejected the plan of God for themselves.)

31 “To what then should I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? 32 They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to each other:

We played the flute for you,
but you didn’t dance;
we sang a lament,

but you didn’t weep!

33 For John the Baptist did not come eating bread or drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon! ’ 34 The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners! ’ 35 Yet wisdom is vindicated by all her children.”

Are You the One who is to come, or should we look for someone else? (7:19): John’s doubts about Jesus’ identity here have perplexed many, given his apparent recognition of Jesus while still in the womb (Luke 1:41) and the fact that as an adult he seemed to foreknow something about Jesus’ suffering (see John 1:29, where John the Baptist identified Jesus as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”). If John foreknew Jesus as Suffering Servant, seemingly he would have foreseen that Jesus’ followers would suffer also and that Jesus would not enjoy immediate triumph. So why did John doubt?

Some argue that by “Lamb of God” in John 1:29, the Baptist was looking forward in time to the triumphant Lion-Lamb depicted in Revelation (e.g., Rev 5:5; 22:1). In this case the Baptist was foretelling the Messiah’s power rather than his suffering. But it seems unlikely that this was the Baptist’s intention; his imagery of the Lamb who takes away human sins most easily fits the theme of substitutionary sacrifice.

So why did John come to struggle over Jesus’ identity if he knew Jesus would suffer? Most likely it was because Jesus was not exercising the kind of cosmic authority over others that John had anticipated. For instance, in Luke 3:17 John foretold that Jesus would separate wheat from chaff, which is clearly an act of judgment. So John’s doubts arose, despite his previous knowledge that the Messiah would suffer, because his expectation that the Messiah would bring judgment was as yet unfulfilled. It may be he saw Jesus’ suffering in terms of a struggle to get the world to respond. Thus Jesus would face intense opposition similar to what John himself had faced, and not in specific terms of a sacrifice.

Go and report to John the things you have seen and heard (7:22): An important distinctive that separates Jesus from the founders of other popular religious movements is that his claims were backed by public, miraculous works. This was a means of verifying his identity, his power, and the truthfulness of his teachings. In contrast to this, the claims of Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, hinged on an unverifiable discovery of ancient artifacts and the secretive translation of those artifacts. Secrecy veiled all of the foundational claims Smith made, making it impossible for outsiders to scrutinize the merits of those claims. In fact, part of what makes Jesus so distinct is that he showed who

he was through these actions as much as making claims about who he was.

Among those born of women no one is greater than John (7:28): Jesus' statement raises an interesting question. Jesus was born of a woman; was he therefore saying John the Baptist was greater than he? Jesus' remarks about John hinge on a key temporal demarcation that, if missed, creates confusion. Jesus was presenting John as the last of the divinely commissioned figures from the old era, the time that predated the arrival of the kingdom. As the last of that era and the first to herald the Messiah, John was the greatest "born of women" *from that era*. Rather than signifying John to be the greatest ever to be born of a woman, Jesus' statement was a rhetorical way of saying the old era came to an end with John. In fact, John's greatness was tied to the kingdom's arrival, since by pointing to Jesus, John pointed to the promised kingdom's coming.

The least in the kingdom of God is greater than he (7:28): Jesus was not saying that John was not in the kingdom of God or was not saved. He was simply noting that John's chronological life fell more in the era of anticipation and announcement than fulfillment and completion. John was the greatest of the old era, but the difference the new era brings means that the greatest of the old era is nothing compared to being in the new era and experiencing its promise, even in this life.

> 6 Then one of the Pharisees invited Him to eat with him. He entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. 37 And a woman in the town who was a sinner found out that Jesus was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house. She brought an alabaster jar of fragrant oil 38 and stood behind Him at His feet, weeping, and began to wash His feet with her tears. She wiped His feet with the hair of her head, kissing them and anointing them with the fragrant oil.
>
> 39 When the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "This man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what kind of woman this is who is touching Him — she's a sinner! "
>
> 40 Jesus replied to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you."
>
> "Teacher," he said, "say it."
>
> 41 "A creditor had two debtors. One owed 500 denarii, and the other 50. 42 Since they could not pay it back, he graciously forgave them both. So, which of them will love him more? "
>
> 43 Simon answered, "I suppose the one he forgave more."
>
> "You have judged correctly," He told him. 44 Turning to the woman, He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she, with her tears, has washed My feet and wiped them with her hair. 45 You gave Me no kiss, but she hasn't stopped kissing My feet since I came in. 46 You didn't anoint My head with olive oil, but she

has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. 47 Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; that's why she loved much. But the one who is forgiven little, loves little." 48 Then He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

49 Those who were at the table with Him began to say among themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins? "

50 And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

Which of them will love him more? (7:42): The main figure in this account is the unnamed woman who never speaks. All we are told is that she is a sinner (*hamartolos*). It is not spelled out how she had earned this label of infamy; possibilities include that she was a prostitute, an adulterer, a debtor, or even the wife of a dishonorable man. Whatever she had done to earn her stigma, it was obvious enough to cause the Pharisee to react against her presence. The OT prescribes execution for adulterers (Deut 22:22) and otherwise counsels that we not keep company with immoral and foolish people (Prov 1:10–19; 13:20; 14:7). Jesus did not react with the same disdain as the Pharisee in this episode. Is the Pharisee being godlier than Jesus?

In fact the Pharisee is guilty of self-righteousness in this account. Jesus exposed this and made a point about the impact and priority of offering forgiveness. In the Pharisee's opinion, acceptance of a sinner into fellowship had to be preceded by the sinner's repentance and adoption of a righteous lifestyle—no grace or forgiveness prior to repentance. For Jesus, on the other hand, the extension of grace to the sinner came first and encouraged in the sinner a change of heart motivated by love that accepts first, engages, and offers forgiveness. The sinful woman acted out of gratitude for being forgiven and showed her love by anointing Jesus. She appreciated the depth of debt (that is, her sin) that had been forgiven her, and thus she loved more deeply. The Pharisee believed he had been forgiven little so he loved little.

As for the OT prohibition against keeping company with immoral people, the NT repeats this admonition (1 Cor 15:33–34), but this is not a call to segregate ourselves from the world. In fact the apostle Paul warned against a mentality that would prohibit Christians from interaction with unbelievers (1 Cor 5:9–13). If we are to be salt and light, we must be in the world but not of the world (John 17:11, 16; Rom 12:2). The Pharisee mistook the righteous life to be a life segregated from sinners, rather than a life lived in a distinct way that does not practice what sinners do.

Soon afterward He was traveling from one town and village to another, preaching and telling the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with Him, 2 and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary, called Magdalene (seven demons had come out of her); 3 Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward; Susanna; and many others who were supporting them from their possessions.

Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward (8:3): This text shows that Jesus' message did reach into some corners of the upper levels of society. Persons such as Chuza's wife Joanna could have become sources for some of the inside information on how the rulers viewed Jesus and what was said by them behind closed doors.

4 As a large crowd was gathering, and people were flocking to Him from every town, He said in a parable: 5 "A sower went out to sow his seed. As he was sowing, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the sky ate it up. 6 Other seed fell on the rock; when it sprang up, it withered, since it lacked moisture. 7 Other seed fell among thorns; the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. 8 Still other seed fell on good ground; when it sprang up, it produced a crop: 100 times what was sown." As He said this, He called out, "Anyone who has ears to hear should listen! "

9 Then His disciples asked Him, "What does this parable mean? " 10 So He said, "The secrets of the kingdom of God have been given for you to know, but to the rest it is in parables, so that

Looking they may not see,
and hearing they may not understand.

11 "This is the meaning of the parable: , The seed is the word of God. 12 The seed along the path are those who have heard and then the Devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. 13 And the seed on the rock are those who, when they hear, welcome the word with joy. Having no root, these believe for a while and depart in a time of testing. 14 As for the seed that fell among thorns, these are the ones who, when they have heard, go on their way and are choked with worries, riches, and pleasures of life, and produce no mature fruit. 15 But the seed in the good ground — these are the ones who, having heard the word with an honest and good heart, hold on to it and by enduring, bear fruit.

16 "No one, after lighting a lamp, covers it with a basket or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a lampstand so that those who come in may see its light. 17 For nothing is concealed that won't be revealed, and nothing hidden that won't be made known and come to light. 18 Therefore take care how you listen. For whoever has, more will be given to him; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken away from him."

19 Then His mother and brothers came to Him, but they could not meet with Him because of the crowd. 20 He was told, "Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see You."

21 But He replied to them, "My mother and My brothers are those who hear and do the word

of God."

The secrets of the kingdom of God have been given for you to know (8:10): People often say that Jesus taught in parables so he could be readily understood. After all, parables simplify concepts and exemplify them in everyday terms. But in this text Jesus named a different purpose for his choosing to teach in parables, which was to hide the meaning from certain groups. Is there an ethical problem with Jesus' reason for using parables? Does his tactic resemble the Gnostic emphasis on secret knowledge and salvation via initiation into a select group?

The passage is clear that Jesus did give the disciples additional insight into what he meant at the time. However, at the risk of stating the obvious, if this were truly meant to be secret knowledge, Jesus' followers would not have published it for all to read and contemplate in the Gospels. So it cannot be that Jesus' purpose was to hide information from inquiring minds. Rather, he was giving his disciples additional teaching so they could fully appreciate his meaning. Those who responded favorably to him got access to and benefited from such explanations; those who showed no continuing interest or who actually opposed him did not get the benefit of this private instruction. Why should they be privy to deeper understanding of the teaching they were rejecting? Jesus' tactic was obviously very different from the kind of private and secret instruction central to some forms of Gnosticism and other Greco-Roman mystery religions, where public disclosure was less common. (See further comments at Matt 13:10–17 and Mark 4:11–12.)

His mother and brothers (8:19): Does Jesus being described as having "brothers" disprove his virgin birth? Jesus' family is described here as a matter of course in his social context. To the perception of anyone observing this family from the outside, Jesus was one sibling among several. But there is no need to read this as a denial of the virgin birth that Luke so clearly affirms in his early chapters (e.g., Luke 1:26–38). Nor is there cause for dismissing the "brothers" as being merely sons Joseph brought into his marriage to Mary, which is an argument used in defense of the extrabiblical belief that Mary remained a virgin throughout her life. It is best to conclude that the "brothers" were in fact Jesus' younger half-brothers, the biological sons of Mary and Joseph.

My mother and My brothers are those who hear and do the word of God (8:21): Was Jesus being rude to his family here? Though he was being forceful, he was not rude. In response to his family's attempt to take control of him (Mark 3:20–21), it was important for Jesus to clarify his priorities in the midst of his

call to bring the kingdom. It was not rude for him to speak of his followers as being his family; he simply, in a powerful rhetorical way, said that he was building a new spiritual family of those who embrace God's will and word. These family ties take precedence over all others.

> 22 One day He and His disciples got into a boat, and He told them, "Let's cross over to the other side of the lake." So they set out, 23 and as they were sailing He fell asleep. Then a fierce windstorm came down on the lake; they were being swamped and were in danger. 24 They came and woke Him up, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to die! " Then He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves. So they ceased, and there was a calm. 25 He said to them, "Where is your faith? "
>
> They were fearful and amazed, asking one another, "Who can this be? ' He commands even the winds and the waves, and they obey Him!

Who can this be? (8:25): This closing question at the stilling of the storm is a key question Luke wants us to ask in response to Jesus' action. Creation's testimony to Jesus' identity is a theme in Luke (e.g., 19:40). This emphasis corresponds to the OT repeatedly depicting control over nature as an attribute of Yahweh. Of particular relevance for this event is the fact that God is said to control the wind (Pss 104:3; 135:7) and sea (Gen 1:9; Job 38:8–11; Ps 104:6–9; Prov 8:29; Jer 5:22; Nah 1:4). The mention of the large waves expresses the nearness of calamity, calamity that only divine protection and power could overcome (Ps 18:16). In response to natural forces that threatened human life, Jesus spoke a command. The seas did not gradually settle down, but were calmed immediately, a sign pointing to supernatural agency. The OT passage that this event most resembles is Psalm 107:23–30. Only a couple of the psalm's terms are found in the Synoptic accounts—sea (Gk *thalassa*) and boat (Gk *ploion*)—so there is no argument for dependence on the OT text even though the conceptual parallel is clear (Goppelt, *TDNT* 8:323). God is the one who delivers from peril in the sea; by delivering the disciples from the perilous sea, Jesus displays his divine identity.

> 26 Then they sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, ' which is opposite Galilee. 27 When He got out on land, a demon-possessed man from the town met Him. For a long time he had worn no clothes and did not stay in a house but in the tombs. 28 When he saw Jesus, he cried out, fell down before Him, and said in a loud voice, "What do You have to do with me, ' Jesus, You Son

of the Most High God? I beg You, don't torment me! " 29 For He had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was guarded, bound by chains and shackles, he would snap the restraints and be driven by the demon into deserted places.

30 "What is your name? " Jesus asked him.

"Legion," he said — because many demons had entered him. 31 And they begged Him not to banish them to the abyss.

32 A large herd of pigs was there, feeding on the hillside. The demons begged Him to permit them to enter the pigs, and He gave them permission. 33 The demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned. 34 When the men who tended them saw what had happened, they ran off and reported it in the town and in the countryside. 35 Then people went out to see what had happened. They came to Jesus and found the man the demons had departed from, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. 36 Meanwhile, the eyewitnesses reported to them how the demon-possessed man was delivered. 37 Then all the people of the Gerasene region asked Him to leave them, because they were gripped by great fear. So getting into the boat, He returned.

38 The man from whom the demons had departed kept begging Him to be with Him. But He sent him away and said, 39 "Go back to your home, and tell all that God has done for you." And off he went, proclaiming throughout the town all that Jesus had done for him.

The region of the Gerasenes (8:26): There is a textual inconsistency between "region of the Gadarenes" (Matt 8:28) and "region of the Gerasenes" (Mark 5:1; Luke 8:26) that has been the subject of much study. The textual tradition witnesses to three locales. (1) The UBS–NA reading in Luke 8:26 is *Gerasēmōn* (Gerasa; usually identified with modern-day Jerash), a city in the Decapolis region located more than 20 miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee. Many interpreters believe this is too distant to be the locale from which the swine plunge into the water (8:33). Nonetheless, in Mark 5:1 and Luke 8:26, Gerasa seems to have the best support as the original reading. It is possible that the Gerasa referred to here is not to be identified with well-known Jerash in the Decapolis region, or that the reference is intended to indicate nothing more specific than the region at large. (2) *Gadarēmōn* (Gadara; modern Umm Qeis), the best-attested reading in Matthew 8:28, is another city of the Decapolis. It is located about five miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee, putting it closer to the water than Gerasa if Gerasa is to be identified with Jerash. (3) Another key variant, *Gergesēmōn* (Gergesa), may have been generated by a suggestion put forward by Origen in the third century (*Commentary on John* 6:24), since only manuscripts later than his time have this reading (so Metzger 1975, 24n1, but challenged by Fitzmyer 1981, 736–37). Appealing to local tradition and etymology for support, Bovon (1989, 434) opted for this reading. It is generally

identified as Kersa (Kursi), which is located just off the lake near some cliffs that slope down to the water (Marshall 1978, 337). This is possible, though its late attestation is very difficult to overcome. In summary, the best evidence indicates that “Gadara” is original to Matthew and “Gerasa” to Mark and Luke.

How should we explain these differences? Sherwin-White (1963, 128n3) suggested Matthew may have named the locale in terms of the region’s major administrative center, while Mark and Luke gave the specific locale of the event. Although this may help advance the discussion in new directions, it does not clearly resolve the problem, since it is Mark’s and Luke’s choice—Gerasa—that seems too far away for the herd of pigs to have dived into the waters in view of the crowd.

Perhaps we do not adequately understand local customs for referring to regions, so that the authors could refer to the location of the scene in a regional sense by naming a distant locale like Gerasa. In this case it may be that neither locale (Gerasa nor Gadara) was intended to pinpoint the scene of this event. This reminds me of situations where someone names as their hometown an obscure place (e.g., East McKeesport), and in response they are asked to name a better-known town nearby (e.g., Pittsburgh). It is also possible that those who reacted to the event were not all from the same place, but were spread far and wide over the area. Specifically, the demon-possessed man may have been from one locale but the event took place in another, given that he had abandoned his house (8:27). These kinds of factors could easily generate the differing traditions for naming the scene of the event. Or perhaps there was another Gerasa in the region, one about which we have lost all information (so Cranfield 1959, 176).

In summary, we do not know for sure why the difference emerged between Matthew’s Gadara and Mark and Luke’s Gerasa, nor are we certain where this event occurred. Perhaps the discrepancy is only apparent, an indicator of our incomplete knowledge. What is clear is that the event took place in Gentile territory opposite Galilee, a point made sure by the presence of the pigs. (See further comments at Matt 8:28–34 and Mark 5:1–2.)

A demon-possessed man (8:27): A second discussion about this passage concerns the number of demoniacs. Were there two demoniacs (Matt 8:28, 33) or only one (Mark 5:2 and Luke 5:27)? Again we have Mark and Luke to one side and Matthew to another. While many argue that Matthew has expanded the tradition (Bultmann 1963, 316), that would run against Matthew’s tendency to constrict details, so others suggest that Matthew had independent material that recalled a second figure (Carson 1984, 217). Apart from the two demoniacs

rather than one, Matthew's account here is briefer than the parallel accounts. Mark and Luke simply focused on one of the characters, which sufficed to make the essential point (Godet 1875, 1:381). Their failure to mention a second demoniac is not a denial of his presence. (See further comments at Matt 8:28–34 and Mark 5:8.)

The demons . . . entered the pigs (8:33): A few intriguing questions arise from this incident. Why would the demons request the right to enter the swine? Can animals really be demon possessed? Was it ethical for Jesus to allow the swine to be possessed?

The motive of the demons is unclear. Possibly they perceived the pigs as a means of escape. If Jesus would not permit them to indwell a man, an animal would have to do. Anything was preferable to consignment in the abyss.

The transfer of the demons to the swine is stated as a fact, and no attempt is made to explain how this is possible. The student of Scripture is justified in accepting this as an unexplained fact. It is unclear why the possession of animals should seem impossible. As to why Jesus allowed the swine to be possessed (and hence destroyed), possible answers include that their possession served as a visual demonstration that the man had been healed as well as a demonstration of Jesus' authority over the spirit world. Jesus acted directly, using only his spoken word. Unlike other exorcists of the era, he did not rely on incantations, amulets, or mystic formulas. Bystanders would not fail to notice that Jesus was a different kind of miracle worker.

As to the ethical question, first note that the man's well-being is more important than the fate of the swine. Lamentation over the pigs may be appropriate on some level, but not to the degree that we miss the joyful fact that Jesus liberated a suffering human being. We should also pause long enough to ask what fate the pigs would have faced had they not died on *this* day. Slaughter was in their future in any case. This highlights what is actually the bigger ethical question: why would Jesus allow the destruction of the people's livelihood? Maybe it was to highlight their spiritual condition. After all, their reaction suggests they were more concerned about their economic loss than their spiritual state, for en masse they asked Jesus to leave their region (v. 37).

In conclusion, this episode raises interesting questions, most of which have uncertain answers. One must be content to treat the account at the level it is offered and not insist on sure answers to questions it does not address (Hendriksen 1978, 447–48; Arndt 1956, 242).

40 When Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed Him, for they were all expecting Him. 41 Just
then, a man named Jairus came. He was a leader of the synagogue. He fell down at Jesus' feet
and pleaded with Him to come to his house, 42 because he had an only daughter about 12 years
old, and she was at death's door.

While He was going, the crowds were nearly crushing Him. 43 A woman suffering from
bleeding for 12 years, who had spent all she had on doctors yet could not be healed by any,
44 approached from behind and touched the tassel of His robe. Instantly her bleeding stopped.

45 "Who touched Me? " Jesus asked.

When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds are hemming You in and pressing
against You."

46 "Someone did touch Me," said Jesus. "I know that power has gone out from Me." 47 When
the woman saw that she was discovered, she came trembling and fell down before Him. In the
presence of all the people, she declared the reason she had touched Him and how she was
instantly cured. 48 "Daughter," He said to her, "your faith has made you well. Go in peace."

49 While He was still speaking, someone came from the synagogue leader's house, saying,
"Your daughter is dead. Don't bother the Teacher anymore."

50 When Jesus heard it, He answered him, "Don't be afraid. Only believe, and she will be
made well." 51 After He came to the house, He let no one enter with Him except Peter, John,
James, and the child's father and mother. 52 Everyone was crying and mourning for her. But He
said, "Stop crying, for she is not dead but asleep."

53 They started laughing at Him, because they knew she was dead. 54 So He took her by the
hand and called out, "Child, get up! " 55 Her spirit returned, and she got up at once. Then He
gave orders that she be given something to eat. 56 Her parents were astounded, but He
instructed them to tell no one what had happened.

Who touched Me? (8:45): If Jesus is God and God is omniscient, why did Jesus need to ask who touched him? Jesus' act here was designed to let the woman know he was aware of what took place and to bring out her weak but present faith. His question also had the effect of informing the crowd of what had occurred, setting the context so they could understand the important exchange that followed. So Jesus was not literally seeking information by his question; he was publicizing the woman and her.

Your daughter is dead (8:49): When Luke introduced the scene with Jairus coming to Jesus, he had Jairus reporting that his daughter was "at death's door" (lit "was dying," v. 42). Thus she was still alive but gravely ill. Jesus agreed to attend the girl, but allowed himself to be held up along the way as he gave aid to a woman whose medical condition was more a nuisance than a threat to her life. This delay surprises the reader of Luke's account, but less so in Matthew's

because Matthew seems to have Jairus report at the outset that his daughter is dead (the HCSB reads “My daughter is near death” at Matt 9:18, but the phrase literally can be rendered “My daughter has now come to the end,” which could indicate she had expired). Jairus’s admonition to Jesus in Matthew, “lay Your hand on her, and she will live,” also fits with her being already deceased (Matt 9:18).

Which account reflects the true chronology most closely? Was the girl dead from the outset (Matt 9:18), or did she die as Jesus was in transit to her (Luke 8:42)? We have another example of Matthean literary collapse in this account as the girl is dead from the start of his account and Jesus is responding to Jairus’s request not just to heal the girl but to raise her from the dead. Luke gave more detail here, noting that she died while the incident with the bleeding woman was taking place (Luke 8:49). The difference between these two accounts is not a conflict, but evidence of differing literary choices. As is often the case, Matthew was cutting to the chase (see comments on Luke 8:27). The difference in detail illustrates the need to be aware that some Gospel accounts are compact and summarizing. Only a check of the parallels can allow us to know the extent to which we have all available information.

The question remains, why would Jesus delay and allow the girl to die? Though this action increased the grief experienced by her family and friends, it was only temporary. The day ended in a more glorious way than would have been possible had Jesus merely cured the child’s sickness (Luke 8:55–56). This account reminds us of the death and resurrection of Lazarus (John 11:1–44). Interestingly, when Jesus was told of his dear friend’s death-bed sickness, he promptly decided to stall for two days before heading out to attend Lazarus (John 11:6). Lazarus was four-days dead when Jesus arrived, and Martha told Jesus this would not have happened had he been there on time (John 11:21). Neither text explains the motivation for Jesus’ delays in the cases of Jairus’s daughter and Lazarus, but one outcome is that Jesus had a chance in both cases to show mastery not just over sickness but over the greatest enemy of all: death itself.

They started laughing at Him (8:53): Reading Luke in isolation from the Matthean parallel can lead to the following impression: Jesus entered the house, barred entry to all but Peter, John, James, and the deceased girl’s parents (v. 51), and then told this select group of people that the girl was only asleep (v. 52), to which they responded by “laughing at Him, because they knew she was dead” (v. 53). In this case, attentive readers are left wondering who is it among this

group who would dare jump from “crying and mourning” (v. 52) to “laughing” (v. 53). It seems highly unlikely that any of them would do so.

Matthew’s account, though briefer than Luke’s, provides a possible alleviation of the difficulty. He has Jesus saying the girl is sleeping not just to her parents and his core disciples, but to the entire crowd that included “flute players” and an undisclosed number of lamenters (Matt 9:23). It is this crowd that “started laughing at Him” (Matt 9:24). Jesus then ordered these people to go outside, presumably leaving him alone with the parents and his core disciples (Luke 8:51).

If we do not consult Matthew’s parallel account, there is a danger of concluding that Luke is presenting an unrealistic scenario. But reading Luke in light of Matthew, we may reasonably conclude that Jesus was addressing the crowd that he dismissed from the house, not his disciples and the child’s parents. It is therefore likely that the debarred crowd laughed at Jesus (v. 53). Of course, it remains possible that the laughter in Luke is of derision and sarcasm produced by the pain of what is regarded as a death scene that cannot be reversed. So actually either scenario may be right.

This episode highlights the value of consulting the parallels. This practice can save readers from many unduly skeptical conclusions, for failure to consult parallels may cause the reader to overlook literary compression.

He instructed them to tell no one what had happened (8:56): This request to the parents seems unnatural. The mourners knew for certain the girl was dead, which is why they had come to join the mourning! And now they were equally certain that the girl was alive again thanks to Jesus. And in response to this, they are to keep quiet? Certainly Jesus’ instructions would have been hard to honor. In fact, Matthew tells us that in a similar situation, the crowd disobeyed Jesus’ instructions about keeping silent and “spread the news about Him throughout that whole area” (Matt 9:30–31; see also Mark 1:43–45). In the command to silence, Jesus was likely guarding against sensationalism. He was concerned that the crowds would be drawn to him as a healer (actually mobbing him, most likely) rather than coming to him to hear his message. Jesus’ miracles were signs and were never meant to be the main focus of his mission. The restriction had that goal.

> Summoning the Twelve, He gave them power and authority over all the demons, and power to heal diseases. 2 Then He sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

3 “Take nothing for the road,” He told them, “no walking stick, no traveling bag, no bread, no
money; and don’t take an extra shirt. 4 Whatever house you enter, stay there and leave from
there. 5 If they do not welcome you, when you leave that town, shake off the dust from your
feet as a testimony against them.” 6 So they went out and traveled from village to village,
proclaiming the good news and healing everywhere.
7 Herod the tetrarch heard about everything that was going on. He was perplexed, because
some said that John had been raised from the dead, 8 some that Elijah had appeared, and others
that one of the ancient prophets had risen. 9 “I beheaded John,” Herod said, “but who is this I
hear such things about? ” And he wanted to see Him.

Authority over all the demons, and power to heal diseases (9:1): The remark here makes it clear that Luke distinguished between demon possession that required exorcism and medical conditions that required healing. It is possible that in other places disease is attributed to Satan, as in the case where demon possession caused symptoms that are consistent with epilepsy (Mark 9:14–29), but some overlap of these categories does not mean the biblical authors made the mistake of assuming a complete identification between the two.

EXCURSUS:
CHRONOLOGY IN THE GOSPELS

Luke has the tribute to John the Baptist first (7:24–28) and then the commission of the disciples (9:1–5), which is the opposite order from Matthew 10:5–15 and 12:1–8. Are Luke and Matthew thus contradictory? As we saw in the comments on Luke 4:16–30, sometimes a writer moves the sequence of an event for thematic or literary reasons. The order of the temptations during Jesus’ wilderness trial also differs between Matthew and Luke. Papias, in describing how Mark presented his material that he received from Peter, noted that Mark did not always present the material in chronological order. Here is what Eusebius reported Papias to have said: “Mark having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things said or done by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, he followed Peter, who adapted his teaching to the needs of his hearers, but with no intention of giving a connected account of the Lord’s discourses, so that Mark committed no error while he thus wrote some things as he remembered them” (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.15). So we should be aware as we work in the Gospels that we are not necessarily given a chronological account. There is no contradiction in these kinds of variations, just a different choice in how to present the material.

He told them, “no walking stick” (9:3): A difficulty arises when one compares Luke 9:3 to Matthew 10:9–10 and Mark 6:8–9. Luke was very restrictive. Matthew was likewise restrictive and provided more detail: he had Jesus prohibiting the disciples from taking gold, silver, copper, bag, sandals, staff, or two tunics. Mark had Jesus instructing them to take nothing except a staff: no bread, bag, or money. The disciples could wear sandals, but not two tunics. Thus, Mark’s account allows for sandals, while Matthew’s prohibits them (Luke did not discuss sandals here, but mentioned their absence in 22:35). Mark’s account allows one staff, where the other Gospels exclude it. Suggested approaches to these differences (Liefeld 1984, 919–20; Ahern 1943) include the following:

First, the differences arise because Luke accepted the wording of his source, which most see as Q (Marshall 1978, 352). This approach explains why differences exist, but leaves the basic problem unaddressed.

Second, some suggest that the Gospel writers had two types of staff in mind: one a walking stick, the other a club to ward off robbers (E. Power 1923). If so, there is no disagreement since one tradition may be allowing a walking stick and the other prohibiting a defensive club. Although this solution is possible since *rhabdos* can have various meanings (Fitzmyer 1981, 754), the use of the same term in all three Gospels is evidence against it (C. Schneider, *TDNT* 6:966–70; 1 Cor 4:21; Heb 11:21).

Third, Mark adapted his wording in order to more closely match the instructions of the exodus (Exod 12:11) or to make a connection with Elisha's instructions to Gehazi in 2 Kings 4:29 (Marshall 1978, 352). As with the first proposal above, this approach explains why differences exist but leaves unaddressed the basic problem of reconciling the Gospels.

Fourth, the problem is seen as confusion in the tradition's pre-Gospels transmission since the Aramaic words for "except" (*'illa'*) and "and not" (*wela'*) are so similar. This is an attempt to get behind the Greek texts to the problem's origin, but it too fails by merely blaming the tradition for the problem.

Fifth, perhaps Jesus meant the disciples should not procure a staff for the journey if they lacked one, a suggestion made possible by Matthew's use of *ktaomai* (to acquire) in 10:9 (BAGD 455; BAA 923–24). However, Luke and Mark both used the verb *airō* (to take up). It is unlikely that both writers used the verb in this distinct sense. This solution would have stronger support if Mark had used *ktaomai*.

Sixth, some suggest that though the wording is different, the basic meaning is the same in each Gospel, so that there is agreement in sense but not in detail (Plummer 1896, 239). This approach is not satisfying because it also lets stand the discrepancy.

A seventh proposal is the most likely solution. Perhaps Jesus meant that the disciples should not take an *extra* staff (Arndt 1956, 250; Hendriksen 1978, 472–73; Godet 1875, 1:399). A weakness of this suggestion is that it is hard to see why any of the disciples would have traveled with two staffs anyway, but maybe Jesus used hyperbole (the unnecessary prohibition against taking a second staff) to emphasize the need to travel light. This may fit given the discussion of sandals. Though Matthew said no sandals were to be carried (Matt 10:10), most likely the idea is that the disciples were not to take an extra pair along with them.

After all, it is hard to believe the disciples would travel barefooted, given the nature of travel in ancient times and the reference to their being guests in the homes of other people (Matt 10:14; Mark 6:11; Luke 9:5). Incidental evidence in Luke 3:16 (John confessing to being unworthy "to untie the strap" of Jesus' sandals) and 15:22 (the father of the prodigal son ordering that his returning son's feet be shod with sandals) suggests that wearing sandals was the norm among Jews. If Jesus' instructions about the staff are analogous to his instructions about sandals, then he prohibited the disciples from carrying an extra staff and thus made the point that they could take no extra provisions on their missionary journey. The Twelve were to travel light and trust God for their well-being in this endeavor. (See further comments at Mark 6:8–9 and Matt 10:10.)

Who is this I hear such things about? (9:9): Critics say one line of evidence that the Bible contains fictional stories is that some key events that are mentioned in one passage go unmentioned in other passages. As an example, they ask why Herod's son, Herod Antipas, seemingly did not know (Matt 14:1–2) about the visit of the Magi that occurred during his father's reign (Matt 2:1–12). If he had known about the event, surely he would not have mistaken Jesus for a risen John the Baptist. To this we may respond by asking, Why would Herod the Great have emblazoned the story of the magi in the mind of his teenage son, Herod Antipas, if he thought that slaying the male children of Bethlehem had solved the problem raised by the magi? Most likely he would never have mentioned the matter to his son since he assumed the threat had been nullified. It was just one of many threats to his throne that the ruthless Herod had quashed, so the son in his ignorance understandably mistook Jesus' identity (Matt 14:1–2). Also significant is that the infancy materials are about events that were more than 30 years old. So the silence about any connection is understandable, given the delay in time.

> 10 When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus all that they had done. He took them
> along and withdrew privately to a town called Bethsaida. 11 When the crowds found out, they
> followed Him. He welcomed them, spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and cured those
> who needed healing.
>
> 12 Late in the day, ' the Twelve approached and said to Him, "Send the crowd away, so they
> can go into the surrounding villages and countryside to find food and lodging, because we are in
> a deserted place here."

13 “You give them something to eat,” He told them.
“We have no more than five loaves and two fish,” they said, “unless we go and buy food for all these people.” 14 (For about 5,000 men were there.)
Then He told His disciples, “Have them sit down in groups of about 50 each.” 15 They did so, and had them all sit down. 16 Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke them. He kept giving them to the disciples to set before the crowd. 17 Everyone ate and was filled. Then they picked up 12 baskets of leftover pieces.
18 While He was praying in private and His disciples were with Him, He asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am? ”
19 They answered, “John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, that one of the ancient prophets has come back.” ’
20 “But you,” He asked them, “who do you say that I am? ”
Peter answered, “God’s Messiah! ”

The location of this miracle **(cp. Matt 14:13–21; Mark 6:32–44; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1–15):** This miracle, which all four Gospels affirm involved 5,000 men, actually included many more people since the Evangelists did not count the women and children who were present (Matt 14:21). How many more? Some have suggested the number should at least be doubled if not tripled, but who knows?

A weightier question involves where this miracle took place. Luke has Jesus and the disciples arriving at Bethsaida before the crowds discover them (Luke 9:10). Upon finding Jesus, the crowds “followed Him,” which suggests Jesus was still traveling (v. 11), perhaps leaving Bethsaida behind prior to the miraculous feeding. In this case Luke places the miracle in the region of Bethsaida, but not in the city itself. The best-known Bethsaida was a city on the northeast corner of the Sea of Galilee, part of Philip’s tetrarchy. Luke says nothing about where the disciples went after the feeding.

Mark had the crowds waiting for Jesus rather than following him (Mark 6:33–34; cp. Matt 14:22), and he did not have Bethsaida coming into view until after the miracle. He reported that Jesus instructed the disciples to “get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He dismissed the crowd” (Mark 6:45). This would seem to place Bethsaida on the lake’s west side (rather than the common view that it was on the northeastern shore), and it suggests the miracle occurred on the opposite side of the lake from Bethsaida. In any event, the disciples missed Bethsaida (likely due to the storm) and made landfall at Gennesaret (Mark 6:53).

John never mentioned Bethsaida in this account, nor did he specify another locale for the miracle, but he had Jesus sending the disciples by boat to

Capernaum rather than Bethsaida after the miracle (John 6:16–17). Comparing these accounts, we are left asking whether the miraculous feeding occurred in or near Bethsaida (Luke) or if the disciples only went there *after* the feeding (Matthew, Mark). We are also left asking whether it was Capernaum (John) or Bethsaida (Mark) that was their intended post-miracle destination.

Faced with the differences in Mark and Luke, some interpreters argue that two different Bethsaidas are in view (Arndt 1956, 254). John 12:21, which says Philip was from "Bethsaida in Galilee," may confirm that more than one Bethsaida existed since John specified "in Galilee." The discussion is complicated by the popular description of this northeastern Bethsaida as part of Galilee, when in fact it was technically a part of Gaulanitis. If two Bethsaidas are in view, the Bethsaida of Luke could be Bethsaida Julius on the northern side of Galilee, just east of the Jordan. Mark would then have been referring to another Bethsaida, perhaps the more traditional city near Capernaum. Since Bethsaida is a generic name meaning "fishing village," there could have been several towns by this name along the lakeshore.

As for the different locations named as the post-miracle destination (Capernaum in John; Bethsaida in Mark and likely Matthew), a possible resolution is as follows: John named Capernaum as the destination because it was an approximation of where they landed (Gennesaret is on the shoreline southwest of Capernaum), while Mark named Bethsaida (which was near Capernaum). It may be that by "to the other side" (Mark 6:45) Mark meant that the disciples were to direct their craft along the shore to Bethsaida rather than all the way across the lake to the western shore. This becomes more feasible if we suppose that Jesus' continued traveling prior to the miracle (Luke 9:11) took him well southeast of Bethsaida. In this case the disciples were crossing from one side to the other of the northeastern corner of the lake.

Finally, where would such a large crowd have come from? Bethsaida and Capernaum had perhaps only two or three thousand inhabitants each (including women and children), not enough to account for the crowds that gathered around Jesus. This makes it likely that people were coming to hear Jesus not just from these cities but from the entire region. (See further comments at Matt 14:15–21 and Mark 6:32–44.)

Five loaves and two fish (9:13): A famous naturalistic explanation of this scene is that Jesus was so effective in urging people to love one another during his message that they ending up sharing freely the loaves and fishes they had brought with them, such that even those who brought no provisions were fed. In

this case it was a “miracle” of sharing rather than a miracle of multiplication. As appealing as this might sound to someone wanting to find a naturalistic explanation for Jesus’ miracle, it does not reflect the event, which the text portrays as a straightforward miracle. In Mark 8:4 the disciples asked about how they could make provision for the 4,000 men who were gathered on that occasion. If the people had a sufficient store of food on hand, the disciples would have asked how to encourage them to share rather than how they could find enough bread in such a desolate place. Similarly, in this feeding of the 5,000 the disciples were convinced there was not enough food on hand to feed the multitude, for they said to Jesus, “Send the crowd away, so they can go into the surrounding villages and countryside to find food and lodging, because we are in a deserted place here” (Luke 9:12). Again, the issue to be solved was lack of food, not lack of a sharing spirit. By the multiplication of loaves Jesus demonstrated his ability to provide in a scene that anticipates the messianic banquet celebrations in fellowship with God in the future. (See further comments at John 6:11.)

12 baskets of leftover pieces (9:17): Critics have suggested that the 12 baskets of leftovers is a non-literal, stylized number indicating that Mark has created this detail in order to draw a parallel to Israel’s 12 tribes. But there is no sure reason not to believe this number is literal. In Mark 8:19 Jesus reminded the disciples of this specific number. Perhaps each disciple carried a basket, accounting for there being literally 12 baskets on hand. It is hard to know if this number, which is conspicuously specific, should also be taken as symbolic. Symbolic meaning is also possible. Some connect it to the picture of restoring Israel and meeting the needs of the 12 tribes when, with the coming of the kingdom, Jesus calls for a restoration to faithfulness. This would fit with there being 12 disciples in the first place, a number Jesus likely intended to call to mind a restoration of the 12 tribes of Israel. In summary, nothing precludes the number from being both literally true and symbolically significant.

Elijah (9:19): If one of the popular beliefs about Jesus was that he was Elijah, does this indicate that the Jews believed in reincarnation? God took Elijah up to heaven in a fiery chariot while still alive, such that he never experienced death (2 Kgs 2:1–12). This remarkable event led to the idea of Elijah’s being preserved in heaven for a future task on earth during the end times (Sirach 48:10; cp. Mal 3:23–24). But since Elijah never died, the Jewish belief that Elijah would come back did not involve reincarnation or even resurrection. (See further comments

at Matt 17:11 and Mark 9:13.)

> 21 But He strictly warned and instructed them to tell this to no one, 22 saying, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day.”
>
> 23 Then He said to them all, “If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me. 24 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of Me will save it. 25 What is a man benefited if he gains the whole world, yet loses or forfeits himself? 26 For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory and that of the Father and the holy angels. 27 I tell you the truth: There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.”
>
> 28 About eight days after these words, He took along Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray. 29 As He was praying, the appearance of His face changed, and His clothes became dazzling white. 30 Suddenly, two men were talking with Him — Moses and Elijah. 31 They appeared in glory and were speaking of His death, which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem.
>
> 32 Peter and those with him were in a deep sleep, ’ and when they became fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men who were standing with Him. 33 As the two men were departing from Him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it’s good for us to be here! Let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” — not knowing what he said.
>
> 34 While he was saying this, a cloud appeared and overshadowed them. They became afraid as they entered the cloud. 35 Then a voice came from the cloud, saying:
>
> This is My Son, the Chosen One; ’
> listen to Him!
>
> 36 After the voice had spoken, only Jesus was found. They kept silent, and in those days told no one what they had seen.

He strictly warned and instructed them to tell this to no one (9:21): The historicity of Jesus’ commands to silence is a much-debated topic in NT studies. Wrede (1971; originally 1901) argues that Mark invented these commands, a theme dubbed the “messianic secret,” and said this explains how so many of the original traditions of Jesus’ ministry lacked messianic notes. Wrede argues that Jesus consistently deemphasized the messianic office, while the early church confessed it openly after Jesus’ resurrection. Adopting a position similar to Wrede, the Jesus Seminar (Funk and Hoover 1993, 312) rejects the sayings of 9:22 as being sourced in Mark, not Jesus. But in one of the fascinating and mostly unknown developments of NT studies, Wrede renounced his claims about

the messianic secret in a letter written before his untimely death. He came to see that the idea that the church created the messianic expectation of Jesus could not be sustained in light of how the tradition at many levels shows Jesus being crucified for claiming to be Israel's king (Hengel 1995, 17–18, esp. n16; Hengel/Schwemer 2001, ix; Wilkins in Bock/Webb 2009, 332–33, esp. n143). So the very scholar who created the idea that Mark invented this theme later denied it.

So why would Jesus warn the disciples "to tell this to no one" here and elsewhere? Jesus was likely hesitant to have the disciples speak of him as Messiah early on because they did not yet understand the suffering he would face as that figure. The Jewish expectation of the Messiah, which took on many forms, was consistently about a triumphant figure of power, whether an earthly king (*Pss. Sol.* 17–18), a transcendent being (*1 Enoch* 46), or a royal personage alongside a priestly Messiah as at Qumran (1QS 9:11–12). Contrary to this expectation, suffering was key to understanding Jesus and his mission. Widespread talk about Jesus' identity as Messiah would lead to confusion or even opposition to Jesus' true purposes, and for this reason he disallowed talk about his being the Messiah until the role of suffering was appreciated.

Luke's omission of Peter's challenge and Jesus' rebuke **(cp. Mark 8:32–33):** In Mark 8:32, shortly after his confession of Jesus as Messiah, Peter challenged Jesus' claim that the Son of Man would suffer and even be executed by Israel's religious leaders. This earned him a stern rebuke from Jesus: "Get behind Me, Satan, because you're not thinking about God's concerns, but man's!" (Mark 8:33). Luke included Peter's confession (Luke 9:20) and Jesus' passion prediction (vv. 21–22), but omitted Peter's challenge and Jesus' rebuke. Does this mean Luke disbelieved in the heated exchanges between Jesus and Peter?

Mark habitually presented the disciples struggling to grasp Jesus' teachings and actions. Most scholars hold that Luke knew of and even used Mark's Gospel in composing his own. It is interesting, therefore, that Luke consistently either omitted or toned down elements that revealed the foibles of the disciples. Obviously Luke found Mark reliable or else he would not have used his material. Thus rather than an indication that Luke disagreed with Mark, Luke's decision not to include all the elements found in Mark suggests he was simply making a different literary choice. Perhaps something about Luke's target audience (Theophilus; Luke 1:1–4) caused him to be more sensitive to the reputation of the disciples than was Mark, whose audience is commonly thought to have been Gentile believers in Rome. Each author was free to pursue his own themes

within the received tradition.

***Jesus' prediction of His own death* (9:22):** Critics say Jesus' death-and-resurrection prediction is unexpectedly detailed here and is evidence that Luke put more details onto Jesus' lips than he could really have spoken. But upon closer examination this particular prediction is pretty generic, stating that the Son of Man would be killed by his obvious enemies (the religious authorities) and be raised on the third day. What is often ignored about this death prediction is that the political-religious circumstances of Jesus' ministry could have led him to sense the life-threatening danger his work was generating. Jesus knew there was precedent for such an outcome, for Herod had executed John the Baptist for challenging his immoral actions. Along these lines Schürmann argues that Jesus' ministry brought serious opposition to the surface, which could well have tipped him off to his coming fate (Schürmann 1973). Thus even from a purely natural point of view it is not surprising that Jesus could predict his execution and even name his executioners.

We are left with the element of Jesus foreseeing his resurrection after three days. After analyzing Jesus' predictions of his vindication and resurrection, Bayer (1986, 242–43, 254–56) argues that we should accept Jesus as the originator of such sayings because he knew that God vindicates the just and because he knew that he himself would bear God's judgment as the Son of Man.

In addition to the above points that suggest Jesus could have read his circumstances and guessed what was coming, for those accepting Jesus as the incarnate Son of God, there is no difficulty in believing he foreknew the supernatural outcome of his messianic mission.

Take up his cross daily, and follow Me (9:23): Was "take up your cross" a recognized proverbial saying in the time of Jesus' early ministry, or has Luke read an early church saying, inspired by Jesus' execution, back into the ministry of Jesus? The expression was not so much a proverb as an idiom, appealing to a culturally well-known act. Jews and Gentiles alike knew that in the Roman manner of execution for non-citizen criminals, victims were made to carry their own cross to the site of their crucifixion. Cross-bearing was a visible, public act that demonstrated the criminal's humility before the state and his shame before the world. Thus Jesus' hearers would have understood his meaning—that they should humble themselves and submit to his authority—without explicit reference to his coming crucifixion. So Luke has not been anachronistic. Nevertheless, in the years after Jesus' resurrection the saying was seen to carry a

more direct reference to Jesus' crucifixion and became part of the early church's regular parlance for discipleship. (See further comments at Mark 8:34–35.)

See the kingdom of God (9:27): When Jesus promised his disciples that some of them would "not taste death until they see the kingdom of God," was he referring to his second coming at the end of the age or the transfiguration that followed several days after he spoke these words? Since Jesus said only some of the disciples would see the Son of Man before they died, he most likely directed this remark to the transfiguration, witnessed only by Peter, James, and John (vv. 28–36). Thus the subject of verse 26 is the second coming, and then verse 27 references the transfiguration, which served as a verification of Jesus' identity and eschatological message for his core disciples. The preview of Jesus' kingdom glory gave the disciples confidence that he would indeed someday come "in His glory and that of the Father and the holy angels" (v. 26).

About eight days after these words (9:28): Matthew 17:1 and Mark 9:2 put the transfiguration six days after Jesus prophesied the coming of the kingdom. Luke, however, placed it "about eight days" after Jesus' words about the kingdom. The difference is obvious, but any charge that this represents a factual contradiction between the Gospels loses sight of the fact that ancient writers were not always concerned to be precise with their time markers. They lived in an age before time-keeping was pinpoint accurate. Furthermore, even today we often use approximate time markers when describing how two events relate to one another chronologically. Luke was simply approximating. Further, if Luke was counting inclusively, which ancients often did, then the eight days may actually only have entailed a six-day difference. Regarding the transfiguration accounts, Matthew and Mark were apparently being more precise while Luke was only interested in giving the approximate time that separated the two events. This is no cause to doubt his reliability or construe him as being in opposition to Matthew and Mark. (See further comments at Matt 17:1 and Mark 9:2.)

Moses and Elijah (9:30): How would Peter and his companions, just waking from deep sleep (v. 32), have recognized that the two men with Jesus were Moses and Elijah (v. 33)? Certainly they had not seen pictures or portraits that taught them what these long-dead men looked like. We are not told that Moses and Elijah identified themselves or that Jesus identified them to his disciples. Luke as omniscient narrator could know (or create) such details as the identity of the visitors, but if he was writing straight history, just how did the sleeping men figure out the identity of Moses and Elijah?

At least two suggestions may solve this difficulty. First, the nature of the discussion between Jesus and his resplendent guests, part of which was overheard by the awakened disciples (Mark 9:4–5), may have made clear to the disciples the identity of those who were speaking to Jesus. Second, it is possible that Moses and Elijah did introduce themselves to the disciples, or that Jesus made the introductions, but that none of the Evangelists has bothered to include this information (cp. Matt 17:1–8; Mark 9:2–8). This would have been a mundane detail, the exclusion of which was natural and helped move the account along at a more rapid clip. We have already seen numerous examples of literary compression in the Gospels.

This is My Son, the Chosen One; listen to Him! (9:35): The voice from heaven differs among the three Synoptics. Matthew 17:5 has "This is My beloved Son. I take delight in Him. Listen to Him!" Mark 9:7 is shorter, saying simply, "This is My beloved Son; listen to Him!" Finally, Luke has "This is My Son, the Chosen One; listen to Him!" Which of these is original?

One possibility is that the voice from heaven included all these words: "This is My beloved Son, My chosen One; I delight in Him; listen to Him!" Matthew, Mark, and Luke simply chose different ways to abbreviate what was said. Alternatively, the voice from heaven may have spoken in Aramaic or Hebrew, since all those present were Jews, and the difference between Matthew and Luke could have to do with how they (or their sources) translated it into Greek.

This variation is not unlike what we saw with the heavenly voice at Jesus' baptism, which also had small differences among the Synoptics. In citations like this we often have the voice (*vox*) of the speaker and not the exact words (*verba*). Though critics may feel summarization, paraphrasing, or rewording of an original quote undermines the reliability of Scripture, authors can undertake these actions without altering the essence of what was said. Despite variation in wording in the present account, each Gospel is affirming the same thing: Jesus is the Son of God, the object of God's approval, and is to be heeded. (See further comments at Mark 9:7.)

What implication does this approach (*vox* rather than *verba*) have for biblical inspiration? Simply that God's inspiration of the biblical authors allowed for paraphrase, rewording, and summarization—techniques that are widely accepted in historiography and report writing. To demand otherwise is to lose sight of the biblical documents being genuinely human documents as well as the product of divine inspiration. The variations from one account to the next demonstrate that human authors were genuinely involved in the writing process, which means

they brought distinct perspectives to their works. This leads to unity amid diversity. Thus Luke has probably explained the meaning of God being pleased with Jesus in clearer, less pictorial terms than Matthew, while Mark has simply shortened what God originally said to its core point: listen to the Son!

37 The next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met Him. 38 Just
then a man from the crowd cried out, “Teacher, I beg You to look at my son, because he’s my
only child. 39 Often a spirit seizes him; suddenly he shrieks, and it throws him into convulsions
until he foams at the mouth; wounding him, it hardly ever leaves him. 40 I begged Your
disciples to drive it out, but they couldn’t.”
41 Jesus replied, “You unbelieving and rebellious generation! How long will I be with you and
put up with you? Bring your son here.”
42 As the boy was still approaching, the demon knocked him down and threw him into severe
convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, cured the boy, and gave him back to his
father. 43 And they were all astonished at the greatness of God.
While everyone was amazed at all the things He was doing, He told His disciples, 44 “Let
these words sink in: The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men.”
45 But they did not understand this statement; it was concealed from them so that they could
not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask Him about it.
46 Then an argument started among them about who would be the greatest of them. 47 But
Jesus, knowing the thoughts of their hearts, took a little child and had him stand next to Him.
48 He told them, “Whoever welcomes this little child in My name welcomes Me. And whoever
welcomes Me welcomes Him who sent Me. For whoever is least among you — this one is
great.”
49 John responded, “Master, we saw someone driving out demons in Your name, and we tried
to stop him because he does not follow us.”
50 “Don’t stop him,” Jesus told him, “because whoever is not against you is for you.” ,

When they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met Him (9:37): Each of the Synoptics sets the scene for this meeting between Jesus and the epileptic child somewhat differently. Matthew’s account (Matt 17:14–15) has the father approaching Jesus from the crowd just as soon as Jesus arrived back from the mountain with Peter, James, and John. Mark’s account (Mark 9:14ff) is more detailed, noting that Jesus and the three disciples stumbled onto a dispute between the scribes and the crowd. Seeing this, Jesus asked what the argument was about, which prompted the father to step forward and plead on his son’s behalf. Perhaps the dispute had been about the inability of the disciples to heal the boy (Mark 9:18). Luke’s approach essentially matches Matthew’s, with the father approaching Jesus straightaway. The notable difference between Matthew

and Luke is the content of the father's introductory comments to Jesus. In summary, it appears that both Matthew and Luke have shortened and simplified Mark's approach in this account.

Often a spirit seizes him (9:39): Was the young boy demon possessed, did he simply have epilepsy, or might it have been both? Matthew identified the child's condition as *selēniazetai* (lit "moonstruck"; BAGD 746), which is identifiable with epilepsy. Van der Loos (1965, 401–5) discussed Jewish attitudes toward epilepsy and noted that Balaam and Saul were thought to have suffered from this disorder (Num 24:4; 1 Sam 19:24). As for the role of the moon in this condition, later Judaism debated whether this heavenly body directly caused the disorder by acting on the victim or indirectly by causing evil spirits to roam the earth freely and inflict epilepsy (*Tg. Ps.* 121:6 suggests that one is safe during daylight hours, but not at night; van der Loos 1965, 403). The ancients viewed epilepsy as devastating and difficult to cure. Given its supernatural association, the disease caused terror, which explains the emotion in this account.

The Evangelists described the boy's symptoms in ways that closely match epilepsy. Matthew said the child "falls into the fire and often into the water" as a result of his seizures (Matt 17:15). Mark described the child being seized and thrown down, whereupon he foamed at the mouth, ground his teeth, and went rigid. He also mentioned that the boy was "unable to speak" during these episodes (Mark 9:17). Luke said the boy shrieked and collapsed, causing bodily harm (Luke 9:39). The convulsions and foaming at the mouth strongly suggest epilepsy or some other type of neurological condition (*aphros*, foam, a word occurring only once in the NT, was commonly used to describe epileptic seizures; BAGD 127; BAA 256; Josephus, *Antiquities* 6.12.2 §245; Fitzmyer 1981, 808).

We have classic signs of epilepsy in all three accounts, but it is also clear that a spirit was involved in the boy's affliction. In Matthew 17:18 Jesus healed the boy by rebuking the demon that had possessed him; Mark specified that it was the spirit that made the boy unable to speak (Mark 9:17); and Luke said the spirit "hardly ever leaves him," indicating the severity of the affliction (Luke 9:39).

Given that these descriptions repeatedly mention the role of a spirit in afflicting epilepsy on the boy, it appears that the child was possessed by a demon that afflicted him with a medical condition. This was perhaps one of the reasons the disciples were unable to heal him on their own. And recall from Luke 9:1 that the Evangelist knew that exorcism and healing could be and often were distinct. Thus it is false to say that Luke believed all diseases were identifiable

with demon possession. (See further comments at Mark 9:18.)

They did not understand this statement (9:45): This remark shows that Jesus' death-and-resurrection predictions never came together in a way that really made sense to the disciples until after Jesus was raised from the dead. Their being "afraid to ask Him about it" means they got the implication of Jesus' words, but they could not understand how such a thing could happen to the Messiah. This explains why Jesus' arrest and execution was a shock to the disciples, and why they showed no expectation that he would rise from the dead. Jesus had foretold these things, of course, but their paradigmatic expectations for the Messiah, which included his being triumphant and taking Israel's throne, disallowed any conception of the Messiah suffering and dying. The difficulty of escaping this paradigm is probably what is meant by the phrase, "it was concealed from them so that they could not grasp it." Their failure to comprehend is somewhat understandable, but then again we must note that Jesus rebuked their lack of understanding once he had risen from the dead (Luke 24:25–27). Between Jesus' pre-passion disclosures and the testimony of Scripture, they should have pieced together what was to befall Jesus.

Then an argument started among them (9:46): Some versions have "then" here, which seemingly links chronologically the argument about greatness to the previous scene (vv. 43–45) where Jesus predicted his betrayal. But if the two events are to be linked closely in time, how could the disciples follow on the heels of Jesus' passion prediction with a petty dispute about their greatness? Key to answering this is the fact that the Greek term rendered "then" (*de*) need not mean the events are tightly connected in time. It often implies a contrast, which in this case could be paraphrased, "They didn't understand about the humility of the Messiah. *On the contrary,* they began arguing about greatness." The short units here (vv. 43–45 and 46–48) are thus not related in a tight chronology.

Whoever is not against you is for you (9:50): In Luke 11:23 Jesus said, "Anyone who is not with Me is against Me, and anyone who does not gather with Me scatters." Jesus' statement in 9:50 seems the opposite: "Whoever is not against you is for you." Has Jesus contradicted himself?

Context is everything here. In Luke 9, Jesus was describing people who had embraced him and were ministering even though they were not among the Twelve. So he affirmed their work. He may not have directly commissioned them in the same way as the disciples, but clearly they were in alliance with him rather than opposition. The context in Luke 11 is altogether different (see vv. 14–

23). Jesus was speaking to people who had a choice to make and had not yet decided to follow Jesus. Rather than allowing them to think their indecision was neutral, Jesus highlighted their need to choose by stating that anyone not choosing him had in fact chosen against him. (See further comments at Mark 9:40.)

> 51 When the days were coming to a close for Him to be taken up, ' He determined ' to journey
> to Jerusalem. 52 He sent messengers ahead of Him, and on the way they entered a village of the
> Samaritans to make preparations for Him. 53 But they did not welcome Him, because He
> determined to journey to Jerusalem. 54 When the disciples James and John saw this, they said,
> "Lord, do You want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them? " '
> 55 But He turned and rebuked them, 56 and they went to another village.
> 57 As they were traveling on the road someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You
> go! "
> 58 Jesus told him, "Foxes have dens, and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has
> no place to lay His head." 59 Then He said to another, "Follow Me."
> "Lord," he said, "first let me go bury my father."
> 60 But He told him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and spread the news of the
> kingdom of God."
> 61 Another also said, "I will follow You, Lord, but first let me go and say good-bye to those at
> my house."
> 62 But Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the
> kingdom of God."

When the days were coming to a close for Him to be taken up (9:51): Though some suggest the primary reference here is to Jesus' crucifixion, it is likely that his resurrection-ascension is in view as well (Bock 1996, 968). If Mark 16:19 is inauthentic (see comments on Mark 16:9–20), Luke was the only Evangelist to report the ascension of Christ (see Acts 1:9–11; see also comments on Luke 24:50–51). In this verse he preluded the coming ascension. This was clearly an emphasis in Luke. Does his repeated mention of it, when compared to the silence of the other Gospels, indicate that Luke had created it or passed on a legend that was unknown or disbelieved by the other Evangelists?

While it is true that Luke alone among the Gospels directly mentioned the ascension, Jesus' future position at God's right hand is affirmed in Mark 12:35–37. This assumes a resurrection-ascension, for how else would Jesus come to be in heaven? The NT elsewhere affirms Jesus' status as exalted (1 Cor 15:25–27) and seated at the right hand of the Father (Heb 1:13).

***Textual variant* (9:56):** Several variant readings attempt to provide the content of Jesus' rebuke, but they appear in such diverse forms that they are almost certain to be later additions. One variant has Jesus asking the disciples, "Do you not know of what sort of spirit you are?" Another reads, "For the Son of Man came not to destroy souls, but to save them." This variant appears in different forms and could be influenced by 19:10. The early manuscripts do not contain either of these variants, nor do a variety of uncials. For this reason it is best to leave verse 56 as it is, rejecting the variants as later additions. As Fitzmyer (1981, 830) and Schürmann (1994, 29n55) have noted, the UBS–NA text omitting the verse is supported by P^{45}, P^{75}, א, A, B, C, L, W, Δ, Ξ, and Ψ.

I will follow You wherever You go (9:57): There are a couple of differences between Matthew and Luke in their retelling of this event. Matthew said the man who expressed desire to follow Jesus was a scribe (Matt 8:19) whereas Luke revealed nothing specific about his identity. Matthew had the scribe address Jesus as "teacher" (v. 19), while Luke included no such title. Finally, Matthew had Jesus and the crowds journeying from Capernaum toward the other side of the Sea of Galilee, while Luke had them heading toward Jerusalem. Do these differences call into question the reliability of the Gospels?

The first two differences noted above are simply differences in level of detail. Matthew included more; Luke included less. Regarding the location of the verbal exchange between Jesus and the scribe, this is another example of the evangelists' feeling the freedom to place Jesus' sayings in the context of distinct but related itineraries. (Luke had a longer time frame in view: when Jesus left Capernaum his ultimate destination was Jerusalem.) Rather than sloppiness, this is an indication of the priorities of the Gospel writers. They were far more concerned with the what and why of Jesus' sayings than the when and where. The question of where their conversation took place geographically in no way conditions the meaning and impact of Jesus' response to the scribe.

Let the dead bury their own dead (9:60): What did Jesus mean by this saying? And what about the commandment to honor father and mother (Exod 20:12)? It might seem that Jesus' instructions were calculated to entice the man to break the law.

The language of the scribe's request closely resembles 1 Kings 19:19–21, where Elisha asked Elijah for permission (and received it!) to go kiss his parents good-bye before leaving to follow the prophet (Schweizer 1984, 171). In his response to the scribe Jesus used an idiom. He meant the spiritually dead were to

bury the physically dead. This was a shocking statement given the priority the Jews placed on burying the dead, especially parents (Ellis 1974, 153; Ernst 1977, 321; Talbert 1982, 118). Jesus' point was that following him is so important that even so high a priority as burying one's father takes second place. He was not setting aside the importance of honoring father and mother, but was instead showing that all other priorities fall away in comparison to the call to follow him. Nothing is to block the pursuit of discipleship and nothing is to postpone its start. Those who do not have kingdom commitments and priorities can take care of burying the scribe's father. Jesus' saying is so harsh and unexpected for a Jewish setting that it is widely accepted as authentic (Fitzmyer 1981, 835).

First let me go and say good-bye to those at my house (9:61): Jesus' response to this seemingly understandable request was, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" (v. 62). Did Jesus really mean to advocate abandoning your family without explanation in order to follow him?

This is another vivid and purposefully shocking statement by Jesus. Rather than encouraging abandonment of our obligations, Jesus was again placing one priority (family obligations) in contrast to the highest of priorities (following Jesus at all costs, and with immediacy). Putting the world first or looking back to it after you've committed to Christ undercuts your ability to be a disciple.

Arndt was perhaps correct to say that Jesus' reply here is not so much a refusal as it is a warning **(Arndt 1956, 278)**. There were powerful OT precedents for people making the mistake of looking back. The nation of Israel looked back after the exodus (Exod 16:3), and Lot's wife looked back after departing Sodom (Gen 19:26). If one confesses Jesus but later renounces this permanently, then the apparent confession was false and one's position is as perilous after the "departure" as it was before the confession (Matt 7:21–23; 22:11–13; Luke 13:25–27; 1 Cor 15:2; Col 1:21–23; Heb 6:4–8). Perhaps in the desire to bid farewell, Jesus knew the man's heart would retain the attachment to its old values and its old way of life. It is this lack of a clean break that Jesus warned against here. And it may be that Jesus knew something we do not about this man's intentions or state of mind. Possibly the man was using his family as an excuse to put off a decision to follow Jesus, or perhaps his desire to commit to Jesus only scarcely outweighed his desire to remain as he was. We must answer the call of God immediately, not put it off for any other priorities.

After this, the Lord appointed 70 others, and He sent them ahead of Him in pairs to every town
and place where He Himself was about to go. 2 He told them: “The harvest is abundant, but the
workers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.
3 Now go; I’m sending you out like lambs among wolves. 4 Don’t carry a money-bag, traveling
bag, or sandals; don’t greet anyone along the road. 5 Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace
to this household.’ 6 If a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will
return to you. 7 Remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they offer, for the worker
is worthy of his wages. Don’t be moving from house to house. 8 When you enter any town, and
they welcome you, eat the things set before you. 9 Heal the sick who are there, and tell them,
‘The kingdom of God has come near you.’ 10 When you enter any town, and they don’t
welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 11 ‘We are wiping off as a witness against you
even the dust of your town that clings to our feet. Know this for certain: The kingdom of God
has come near.’ 12 I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.
13 “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were done in you
had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and
ashes! 14 But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. 15 And
you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will go down to Hades! 16 Whoever
listens to you listens to Me. Whoever rejects you rejects Me. And whoever rejects Me rejects
the One who sent Me.”
17 The Seventy ’ returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in Your
name.”
18 He said to them, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a lightning flash. 19 Look, I have
given you the authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy;
nothing will ever harm you. 20 However, don’t rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice
that your names are written in heaven.”
21 In that same hour He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I praise You, Father, Lord of
heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and the learned and have
revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, because this was Your good pleasure. , 22 All things have
been entrusted to Me by My Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who
the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son desires to reveal Him.”
23 Then turning to His disciples He said privately, “The eyes that see the things you see are
blessed! 24 For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see the things you see yet
didn’t see them; to hear the things you hear yet didn’t hear them.”

How many missions? **(10:1–12):** Did Luke duplicate the mission related in 9:3–5, or did Jesus send his followers out twice under similar circumstances? There is no reason to doubt that we are dealing with a second mission here. Luke 9:48–49 has already prepared the reader for this scene by noting that people other than the Twelve were ministering in Jesus’ name. As Jesus expanded his proclamation

and moved closer to his appointed death in Jerusalem (v. 51), it only made sense to draw others into the service of ministering for him. Luke used the repetition of the commissioning and instruction scene (9:3–5; 10:4–12) to give the reader a sense of the growth of Jesus' movement.

The Lord appointed 70 others (10:1, 17): Were 70 or 72 sent out on mission? A complex textual issue stands behind this question, with the same difference appearing in two verses, 10:1 and 17. The external evidence on verse 1 is almost evenly divided: 70 is found in ℵ, A, C, L, W, Δ, Θ, Ψ, family 1, family 13, Byz, some Itala, Coptic, and some Syriac; 72 is found in P^{75}, B, D, some Itala, Vulgate, and some Syriac. P^{45} is fragmentary at 10:1, although Metzger (1958–59, 299) held that it reads 70.

There has been much discussion about the possibility that the number is intended to bear symbolic meaning. If 70 is the original reading, it may trace its meaning to several antecedents, including Moses' 70 elders (Exod 24:1, 9; Num 11:16–17, 24–25); the 70 nations of the earth (Genesis 10–11; but note that the LXX lists 72 here); a rabbinic tradition holding that Moses' commandments were heard in 70 languages (*b. Shabbat* 88b, though this is late); and the Sanhedrin's 70 members, excluding the high priest (*m. Sanh.* 1.5–6).

If the original reading is instead 72, it may have been influenced by the local councils of 72 (*m. Zevahim* 1.3; *m. Yadayim* 3.5; 4.2); the 72 translators of the LXX (*Letter of Aristeas* 46–50); the LXX tradition of the 72 nations in Genesis 10–11 (Marshall 1978, 415; Ernst 1977, 331); or the 72 princes and kings in the world (*3 Enoch* 17.8; 18.2–3; 30.2).

These listings suggest 70 is of greater canonical significance than 72 (also Rengstorf, *TDNT* 2:634). Thus, a copyist looking for significance in the number would be more likely to change 72 to 70 than vice versa. However, if Luke genuinely intended to make an OT allusion, then 70 is more likely to have been original.

But does Luke intend his readers to interpret the number symbolically? The two OT events that scholars have most strongly suggested as conceptual background for a symbolic use are not compelling. First, against the suggestion that the LXX listing of 72 nations at Genesis 10–11 is background: the mission of Luke 10 does not reflect the universal context of Genesis 10–11. Though Jesus did not explicitly restrict the mission to Israel here (as he did in the Matthean mission with the Twelve; Matt 10:5–6), it is nevertheless clear in Luke's writings that an active Gentile mission developed only later, as recounted

in the book of Acts (Schmid 1960, 184; Fitzmyer 1985, 846). Thus it is hard to see a connection between Luke 10 and the Table of Nations in Genesis. Second, against the suggestion that Moses' selection of 70 elders is background, Luke does not pick up and develop Moses' selection of 70 anywhere in Acts, which would seem an ideal location for him to develop this theme given the church-planting focus of the early church. In light of the weakness of both of these suggested backgrounds for symbolism, it is unlikely that Luke attached symbolic meaning to the number of people sent on mission.

Though we cannot establish a definitive choice between the variants, the absence of a clear symbolic reference throws us back on the practice of looking for the more difficult reading. Given the more obvious canonical significance of 70, and given that copyists would be unlikely to convert the reading from the more obvious to the less obvious, the more difficult reading seems to be 72. For this reason, 72 is slightly more likely to be original.

I watched Satan fall from heaven (10:18): Though Jesus was clearly replying to the 72 about their successful ministry outing, it is commonly said that in this verse Jesus was also speaking of Satan's original fall from heaven, tying it in perhaps with Isaiah 14:12. Is that a feasible exegetical conclusion?

Ellis (1974, 157) translated *etheōroun* as "was observing," which suggests a current defeat is in view. Luke 11:20 also speaks of a current defeat when Jesus spoke of driving out demons by the finger of God. However, the defeat of Satan and the demons is more often associated with the cross or Christ's return (John 12:31–32; Col 2:14–15; Rev 12:10–12; 20:1–3). It is best to see Satan's defeat as part of a long series of events (Hendriksen 1978, 581). The work of those sent out on mission was part of an increasingly significant set of theological realities tied to the arrival and triumph of God's kingdom. In Judaism, there was an expectation that the kingdom would defeat Satan (*Testament of Moses* 10:1). In conclusion, this event does not look back to Satan's expulsion from heaven but rather celebrates the victory Jesus brings over Satan.

I have given you the authority to trample on snakes and scorpions (10:19): Does this verse justify the practice of snake-handling in church? Though answering that the verse is not to be taken literally would solve this issue straightaway, Jesus' promise here was probably intended literally given the experience of Paul in Acts 28:1–6. But what kind of expectation was Jesus really setting up? Almost certainly the passage only intended to picture, by appeal to a rare circumstance (God's protecting a believer from snakes and scorpions), the

protection God gives more widely (God's protecting believers from threats generally). Jesus did something similar in Luke 21:16–18 when he told his followers, "They will kill some of you. You will be hated by everyone because of My name, but not a hair of your head will be lost." The rare circumstance ("They will kill some of you") does not override the more general fact of God's protection ("Not a hair of your head will be lost"). The present text takes a similar illustrative approach, and we should not take it as a prescription for snake handling as an act of worship.

You have hidden these things from the wise and the learned (10:21): Did Jesus mean education is a liability and that God prefers that we be ignorant? This passage is rhetorical and points out that the worldly wise, who rely only on their own reason and do not depend on God, are often unresponsive to God and thus do not enjoy the benefit of knowledge of God. They are too proud to turn to God, and God chooses to give no enlightenment to a mind like this. The text does not decry education nor is it against learning. It is instead a commendation of the way of humility before God, which leads to the privilege of true knowledge of God.

Anyone to whom the Son desires to reveal Him (10:22): Does this saying resemble Gnosticism and its emphasis on secret knowledge to be revealed only to initiates who have been deemed worthy? God is seen as directing the process by which people come to faith. This is not about a secret mystery hidden from people, like Gnosticism, for the invitation to belong goes out to any who will listen. This has to do with a more mysterious process in which God works in people's hearts.

25 Just then an expert in the law stood up to test Him, saying, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? "

26 "What is written in the law? " He asked him. "How do you read it? "

27 He answered:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and **your neighbor as yourself.** '

28 "You've answered correctly," He told him. "Do this and you will live."

29 But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor? "

30 Jesus took up the question and said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him, beat him up, and fled, leaving him half dead.

31 A priest happened to be going down that road. When he saw him, he passed by on the other
side. 32 In the same way, a Levite, when he arrived at the place and saw him, passed by on the
other side. 33 But a Samaritan on his journey came up to him, and when he saw the man, he had
compassion. 34 He went over to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on olive oil and wine.
Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 The next
day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him. When I
come back I'll reimburse you for whatever extra you spend.'
36 "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the
hands of the robbers? "
37 "The one who showed mercy to him," he said.
Then Jesus told him, "Go and do the same."

Is Luke 10:25–37 parallel to Matthew 22:34–40 and Mark 12:28–34? Luke's scene is similar to accounts in Matthew 22 and Mark 12. All three accounts involve an inquisitive scribe, an answer by Jesus, and the citation of Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 as a summary of the law. But differences exist as well. Matthew and Mark had the scribe asking Jesus which is the greatest commandment, while in Luke the scribe instead asked what he must do to inherit eternal life. In Luke it was the scribe who cited the OT passages, while Matthew and Mark had Jesus doing this. Luke placed the account outside Jerusalem at a time when Jesus was just setting out for David's city and the Passion he would experience there, whereas the accounts in Matthew and Mark fall in Jerusalem during the run-up to Jesus' Passion. In Luke Jesus responded to the scribe by saying, "Do this and you will live," while the other Synoptics have Jesus responding to the question about the greatest commandment. In Luke the scribe wanted to justify himself (10:29). For this reason Talbert (1982, 120) spoke of a "controversy dialogue" (see also Bultmann 1963, 51). In contrast to this, in Mark 12:34 the scribe was praised at the end. Only Luke included the parable (vv. 30–37), which clearly relates to the "controversy dialogue" that neither Matthew nor Mark included. The inclusion of controversy and the parable makes Luke's emphasis different from Matthew's and Mark's.

Many scholars hold that Luke reworked the Marcan version of this account, but most likely, given the differences listed above, Luke was narrating a separate event. Manson (1949, 260) plausibly suggests that questions surrounding the commandments and eternal life are so basic that Jesus would have been drawn into this kind of discussion on many different occasions:

> The chief connecting link, the conjunction of the great commandments, is precisely the sort of thing that could appear over and over again. If a modern teacher of religion thought of such a thing as that, he would print

it and it would make its way into the minds of millions. But in the first century ad in Palestine the only way of publishing great thoughts was to go on repeating them in talks or sermons.

He was praying in a certain place, and when He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John also taught his disciples.”

2 He said to them, “Whenever you pray, say:

Father, ,
Your name be honored as holy.
Your kingdom come. ,
3 Give us each day our daily bread. ,
4 And forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves also forgive everyone
in debt to us. ,
And do not bring us into temptation.” ,

5 He also said to them: “Suppose one of you has a friend and goes to him at midnight and says to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, 6 because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I don’t have anything to offer him.’ 7 Then he will answer from inside and say, ‘Don’t bother me! The door is already locked, and my children and I have gone to bed. I can’t get up to give you anything.’ 8 I tell you, even though he won’t get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his friend’s persistence, he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

9 “So I say to you, keep asking, , and it will be given to you. Keep searching, , and you will find. Keep knocking, , and the door will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who searches finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. 11 What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead of a fish? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him? ”

***The placement of the prayer* (11:2–4):** This prayer is presented in two distinct locations: Matthew 6:9–13 and Luke 11:2–4. Matthew placed it in a public context (Sermon on the Mount), while Luke had it as a private teaching Jesus delivered to the disciples. These are separate events that we should see as such. The scene in Luke is a response to a request to be taught a prayer for this group. Matthew simply presented an example prayer shared with the public. Given the importance of praying properly, there is no reason to think Jesus would not have been willing to teach this model prayer in many different settings.

***Textual problem: the omission of* “Deliver us from the evil one” (11:4):** The

HCSB does not include the disputed phrase, “But deliver us from the evil one” at verse 4. The evidence supporting the exclusion is strong: early manuscripts with the shorter text include P^{75}, א*, B, L, Marcion, Tertullian, and Origen. Most likely copyists who sought to make Luke’s version agree with Matthew’s added the phrase to the Lucan version of the prayer. A similar problem arises in verse 2, where Luke did not include other elements found in Matthew (“in heaven” and “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”). It is hard to explain the omission of this longer phrase in the earliest manuscripts of Luke if it had been original.

Everyone who asks receives (11:10): Experience might seem not to bear out Jesus’ promise here. Is this so, or have people commonly misunderstood his promise about prayer? We should not take Jesus’ teaching here as a blank check that guarantees believers anything they ask in prayer. Rather, the promise is related to a request for the provision of spiritual direction from God’s Spirit (v. 13). This is what Jesus promises will be supplied to anyone who asks.

14 Now He was driving out a demon that was mute. ’ When the demon came out, the man who had been mute, spoke, and the crowds were amazed. 15 But some of them said, “He drives out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons! ” 16 And others, as a test, were demanding of Him a sign from heaven.

17 Knowing their thoughts, He told them: “Every kingdom divided against itself is headed for destruction, and a house divided against itself falls. 18 If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say I drive out demons by Beelzebul. 19 And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, who is it your sons , drive them out by? For this reason they will be your judges. 20 If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you. 21 When a strong man, fully armed, guards his estate, his possessions are secure. 22 But when one stronger than he attacks and overpowers him, he takes from him all his weapons , he trusted in, and divides up his plunder. 23 Anyone who is not with Me is against Me, and anyone who does not gather with Me scatters.

24 “When an unclean spirit comes out of a man, it roams through waterless places looking for rest, and not finding rest, it then says, ‘I’ll go back to my house where I came from.’ 25 And returning, it finds the house swept and put in order. 26 Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and settle down there. As a result, that man’s last condition is worse than the first.”

27 As He was saying these things, a woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, “The womb that bore You and the one who nursed You are blessed! ”

28 He said, “Even more, those who hear the word of God and keep it are blessed! ”

29 As the crowds were increasing, He began saying: “This generation is an evil generation. It
demands a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. , 30 For just as Jonah
became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation.

A demon that was mute (11:14): Luke did not literally believe this demon was mute. He was simply describing the demon according to the effect it had on its victim. This is made clear when the crowd responded with amazement that the man could speak after Jesus exorcised the demon.

Anyone who is not with Me is against Me (11:23): On the question about whether Jesus here contradicted what he said in Luke 9:50 (“Whoever is not against you is for you”), see comments on 9:50.

An unclean spirit . . . roams through waterless places looking for rest (11:24): Do unclean spirits really need rest? Most likely Jesus was speaking anthropomorphically, speaking of a non-human entity in terms that appeal to human experience. In this way Jesus successfully communicated the state of unease as the demon searches for a new habitation where existence can be more calm and peaceful.

No sign will be given . . . except the sign of Jonah (11:29): This saying is paralleled in Matthew 12:39; 16:4; and less directly in Mark 8:12. The emphases are slightly distinct, however, which helps to explain some differences in the texts. In Matthew the sign of Jonah is Jesus’ death and resurrection (Matt 12:40), while in Luke it is teaching that is highlighted as the sign of Jonah, for Jesus pointed out that the Queen of Sheba came to hear Solomon’s wisdom (Luke 11:31) and Jonah proclaimed repentance to Nineveh (v. 32). The Marcan parallel lacks any reference to a sign, for Jesus answered, “No sign will be given to this generation!” (Mark 8:12). Possibly the lack of reference to the sign of Jonah in Mark stems from the Pharisees asking specifically for a cosmic sign (“a sign from heaven,” Mark 8:11). The judgment at the end times, Jesus’ second coming, is to be accompanied by cosmic signs; Jesus’ first coming was to have no cosmic signs other than the star the wise men followed.

Mark and Matthew placed this remark before Peter’s confession at Caesarea Philippi (Matt 16:13–16; Mark 8:27–29), whereas Luke placed it afterwards (see Luke 9:18–20 for Peter’s confession). Luke’s placement appears to be thematic. In his ministry, Jesus gave the call to obey in the same context where he warned of the consequences of rejection. Luke’s placement fits this juxtaposition of obedience and warning, which was so basic to Jesus’ ministry. And in chapters 9–19 Luke stressed that rejection was a part of Jesus’ experience during the

entire journey to Jerusalem and that rejection was a key, consistent part of Jesus' ministry.

Another placement issue involves Luke positioning the saying about the return of the unclean spirit (Luke 11:24–26) before the sign-of-Jonah passage, whereas Matthew placed the Jonah passage first. Some believe Luke's order is original since Matthew's conclusion to the passage about the unclean spirit is viewed as an element he has added (Manson 1949, 87). Others conclude Matthew has the original order, with Luke doing some thematic rearranging. A definitive answer is unavailable, but the probability that Luke relocated the Jonah pericope (see above) makes it slightly more likely that Matthew has retained the original order.

Finally, some have questioned why Jesus refused to grant signs when asked to do so. Could he not have won many more people to faith if he had granted signs to anyone who asked? Jesus was careful about not emphasizing signs lest his miracles become the focus and not his teaching on the kingdom. Otherwise his movement would be more sensationalist than substantive. This reserved approach to signs differs from the context of the early church as seen in the book of Acts, where the apostles' message needed more often to come with miraculous confirmation that they really were the approved spokesmen and interpreters for Christ and the new era of fulfillment coming from him (e.g., Acts 4:29–30). Even so, recall that Jesus provided the greatest sign of all for his divinity and the truthfulness of his teachings: his resurrection on the third day after his execution. (See further comments at Mark 8:12.)

37 As He was speaking, a Pharisee asked Him to dine with him. So He went in and reclined at
the table. 38 When the Pharisee saw this, he was amazed that He did not first perform the ritual
washing ’ before dinner. 39 But the Lord said to him: “Now you Pharisees clean the outside of
the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and evil. 40 Fools! Didn’t He who made the
outside make the inside too? 41 But give from what is within to the poor, , and then everything
is clean for you.

42 “But woe to you Pharisees! You give a tenth , of mint, rue, and every kind of herb, and you
bypass justice and love for God. , These things you should have done without neglecting the
others.

43 “Woe to you Pharisees! You love the front seat in the synagogues and greetings in the
marketplaces.

44 “Woe to you! You are like unmarked graves; the people who walk over them don’t know
it.”

45 One of the experts in the law answered Him, “Teacher, when You say these things You

insult us too.”

46 Then He said: “Woe also to you experts in the law! You load people with burdens that are hard to carry, yet you yourselves don’t touch these burdens with one of your fingers.

47 “Woe to you! You build monuments to the prophets, and your fathers killed them. 48 Therefore, you are witnesses that you approve , the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their monuments. 49 Because of this, the wisdom of God said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute,’ 50 so that this generation may be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets shed since the foundation of the world , — 51 from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary.

“Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible.

52 “Woe to you experts in the law! You have taken away the key of knowledge! You didn’t go in yourselves, and you hindered those who were going in.”

53 When He left there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to oppose Him fiercely and to cross-examine Him about many things; 54 they were lying in wait for Him to trap Him in something He said. ’

Order of the woes: comparing Luke 11 and Matthew 23: How does Luke’s material here relate to Matthew 23? Similarities exist, but so do impressive differences. The same can be said of a comparison of Luke to Mark 7 and Matthew 15.

Consideration of four points suggests Luke should not be associated with Matthew 15 or Mark 7. First, in Mark 7:2 and more clearly in Matthew 15:2 the setting is a discussion about meal habits, while Luke 11:37 sets the discussion during an actual meal with a Pharisee. It seems unlikely that Luke has created a meal setting, for he elsewhere covered related topics without creating a meal setting (cp. Luke 5:33–39). Second, in Matthew and Mark the Pharisees and scribes were complaining about the disciples, while in Luke the Pharisee complained against Jesus himself (Luke 11:38). It can be argued that Luke has used literary heightening, but he could just as easily have had Jesus defend himself while answering a charge against his disciples. So the rationale for converting the charge from against the disciples to against Jesus is unclear (cp. 5:33–39; 6:1–5, where the charges are against the disciples). Third, whereas Matthew and Mark included a rebuke of the Pharisees for their failure to keep God’s commandments, no such rebuke is found in Luke. It is hard to understand why Luke would eliminate the rebuke, which fits his theme nicely, if he were narrating the same event as Matthew and Mark. Fourth, Luke did not include a citation of Isaiah 29:13, an allusion found in both of the purported parallels. Again, it is difficult to understand why Luke would omit this if his account is

truly parallel to Matthew and Mark. Schweizer (1984, 199) clearly overstates his claim that there are striking connections between Luke 11 and Mark 7:4. It is actually the glaring differences that are most striking.

Against a connection between Luke 11 and Matthew 23 are the following considerations: first, the setting in Matthew is a discourse in Jerusalem, while in Luke Jesus is at table with a Pharisee. Second, the wording of Luke does not match that of Matthew. Only one of the six woes has any overlapping phrases (Luke 11:42 with Matt 23:23). The agreement between Matthew and Luke is conceptual, not verbal. This argues for a distinct event and source for the two accounts. There is no difficulty in suggesting that Jesus would have repeated similar teachings numerous times as he engaged the religious hierarchy throughout his ministry. There being different audiences in view (Matthew is more public, whereas Luke is a private discussion) also supports the conclusion that the events are distinct. Third, the order of the woes is strikingly different. Following Luke's order of presenting the woes, Matthew's appear in this order: woe 4, remark 2 (where "remark" means a conceptual parallel not laid out as a woe), woe 6, remark 1, woe 7, woe 1. Or following Matthew's order, Luke goes like this: woe 6, no parallel, no parallel, woe 1, remark, woe 3, woe 5. The disagreement could hardly be greater. This makes it highly unlikely the two accounts trace their origins to the same event and tradition.

In summary, most likely Matthew 15 and Mark 7 are parallel to one another and stem from earlier in Jesus' ministry, while Luke 11 is distinct from them and is most likely traced to Luke's special source rather than Q. As for Matthew 23, it belongs to Jesus' final week and summarizes the repeated rejection he experienced from Israel's religious leaders. No conflations exist between these various accounts.

Fools! (11:40): Does Jesus' use of "fool" contradict his teaching in Matthew 5:22, where he said, "Whoever says to his brother, 'Fool!' will be subject to the Sanhedrin." The context of Matthew 5 is Jesus speaking about the dangers of being angry with one's brother. Here in Luke 11:30, as a prophetic figure, Jesus challenged the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. This is a prophetic challenge that speaks against a lack of wisdom, and is appropriate. It is a warning that may prompt a change in behavior, whereas the use of "fool" in Matthew 5 is simply a condemnatory label uttered in anger. (See further comments at Matt 5:22.)

The blood of Zechariah (11:51): It is often said that Matthew 23:35 confuses

two different OT men named Zechariah by naming Zechariah's father as Berechiah, by which he seemingly identified Zechariah as the writing prophet who authored the book of Zechariah (Zech 1:1, "Zechariah son of Berechiah") but who was not known to have been martyred, rather than the murdered priest of 2 Chronicles 24, who more obviously fits the context of Jesus' statement. Luke 11:51 is not nearly so problematic because Luke simply said, "Zechariah." So Luke is easy to reconcile with known facts about the murder of the priest (2 Chronicles 24) and gives us nothing to suggest any other Zechariah is in view. However, out of concern to clear Matthew of the charge that he has confused the Zechariahs, interpreters have sought to demonstrate that both Matthew and Luke have a single person in mind. How should we assess the situation?

One suggestion is that the Zechariah of both Matthew and Luke is to be identified neither as the martyred priest (2 Chronicles 24) nor the writing prophet (Zechariah 1), but rather as a man who was killed in the temple precincts in ad 68 (Josephus, *Jewish War* 4.5.3 §§334–44). By chance this man's father may have been named Berechiah, leading interpreters to mistakenly think of the writing prophet. But this identification would be anachronistic with Jesus' ministry and thus seems an unlikely move (Liefeld 1984, 957; Garland 1979, 182–83n69). In fact Matthew's source may have been too early to incorporate a reference to events as late as 68 (Gundry 1967, 87n1). Additionally, Josephus did not portray the slain man as a prophet or martyr. Further, there is no demonstrable connection between this man and the church. Given these facts, it is unlikely that either Matthew or Luke had this Zechariah in mind.

A more plausible suggestion is that Matthew's Zechariah is indeed to be identified with the slain Zechariah of 2 Chronicles 24:20–22 (Nolland 1993a, 668–69; Schürmann 1994, 325). This identification has several advantages: this Zechariah fits thematically with Abel as a righteous man who was martyred, he was a prophet, his position in Chronicles makes him the last OT prophet murdered according to the canonical order of the Hebrew Bible, and his story was repeated often among the Jews (Str-B 1:940–43; Beckwith 1985, 215–16). But a problem with this identification is that the Chronicler named Zechariah's father as Jehoiada (2 Chr 24:20), whereas Matthew identified Zechariah's father as "Berechiah" (Matt 23:35). Carson (1984, 485–86) attempted to relieve this difficulty by suggesting Jehoiada was actually the grandfather of Zechariah.

Other interpreters seek to harmonize Matthew and Luke by suggesting both have the writing prophet in view. This initially seems to be a strong possibility, for the prophet is identified as "son of Berechiah, son of Iddo" (Zech 1:1),

though some texts simply call him the son of Iddo (Ezra 5:1; 6:14; Neh 12:16). The textual reading in Zechariah 1:1 is well attested. The Septuagint reads Iddo as a grandfather, but the Hebrew reference to Berechiah is secure in the manuscript tradition. Two considerable problems attend this identification, however. First, there is no clear record that Zechariah the writing prophet was martyred. Second, it is not clear why he would be fitting as the terminal point for the thematic range to which the author is alluding.

Many interpreters conclude Matthew has simply confused the two Zechariahs (Plummer 1896, 314; Luce 1933, 224; Garland 1979, 183n69). This seems unlikely since the distinction between a priest and a prophet was clear in the OT, though we must acknowledge that other texts show evidence of a similar confusion. For instance, the Targum on Lamentations 2:20 reads, "Zechariah son of Iddo, the high priest." The Chronicles priest likely functioned as a prophet in 2 Chronicles 24:19–22, but his priestly function was paramount in his identification as the son of a great priest.

A final option worth consideration is given by Gundry (1982, 471), who argues for a theological-literary conflation to bring together the prophet Zechariah's predictions with the priest-martyr Zechariah's death. If this is so, Matthew is not guilty of mixing up the identities of two Zechariahs, but has instead purposefully brought them together. This option may seem overly subtle, but there is evidence that Jewish homiletics may have included such combinations (Beckwith, 1985, 217–21). (See further comments at Matt 23:35.)

> 4 "And I say to you, My friends, don't fear those who kill the body, and after that can do
> nothing more. 5 But I will show you the One to fear: Fear Him who has authority to throw
> people into hell after death. Yes, I say to you, this is the One to fear! 6 Aren't five sparrows sold
> for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight. 7 Indeed, the hairs of your
> head are all counted. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows!
>
> 8 "And I say to you, anyone who acknowledges Me before men, the Son of Man will also
> acknowledge him before the angels of God, 9 but whoever denies Me before men will be denied
> before the angels of God. 10 Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be
> forgiven, but the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. 11 Whenever
> they bring you before synagogues and rulers and authorities, don't worry about how you should
> defend yourselves or what you should say. 12 For the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very
> hour what must be said."

Fear Him who has authority to throw people into hell (12:5): This is the only

time Luke used the term *Gehenna* (hell), the place where the dead are consigned in the last judgment. Gehenna draws its name from a location in the Valley of the Sons of Hinnom, a ravine southwest of Jerusalem that served as a trash heap where, among other things, the bodies of dead criminals were discarded and burned. Additionally, wicked kings used this location earlier in Israel's history for the worship of Baal-Molech, which included the sacrifice of children in burnt offerings (2 Kgs 16:3; 23:10; 2 Chr 28:3; 33:6; Isa 66:24; Jer 7:31–32; 19:4–6; 32:34–35). Gehenna had a grisly and maximally dishonorable connotation (Arndt 1956, 312; Danker 1988, 245; Jeremias, *TDNT* 1:657–58; Str-B 4:1022–1118; Matt 5:22; 10:28; 18:9; 23:33; Mark 9:45, 47; BAGD 153; BAA 306).

But did Matthew paint a less dire picture for the fate of the damned when he spoke about God being "able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt 10:28)? This verse leads some to argue for a doctrine of annihilation, where the damned are destroyed rather than punished eternally. However, a broader look at the topic shows Gehenna is a place where the judged are cast not to be destroyed, but to be punished. For instance, Matthew himself elsewhere described Gehenna as being a place of enduring weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30). So Matthew and Luke are in agreement in describing Gehenna as a place of suffering with the soul unable to be renewed. This fits with Jewish expectation in 4 Maccabees 13:14–15: "Let us not fear him who thinks he is killing us, for great is the struggle of the soul and the danger of eternal torment lying before those who transgress the commandment of God" (NRSV; Manson 1949, 107).

Later Jewish texts do teach annihilation (*t. Sanhedrin* 13.3–4 [= Neusner 1977–86, 4:239]; Manson 1949, 107):

> The wicked of Israel in their bodies, and the wicked of the nations of the world in their bodies go down to hell and are punished in it for twelve months. After twelve months their souls become extinct, and their bodies are burned up, and they turn to ashes, and the wind scatters them and strews them beneath the soles of the feet of the righteous.

But the late date and character of such annihilation texts make them unlikely as the background for the canonical Gospels. (See further comments at Matt 13:42, 50 and Mark 9:44, 48.)

***Blasphemy of the Son of Man versus blasphemy of the Spirit* (Luke 12:10):** Why should blasphemy against the Spirit seemingly be taken so much more seriously than blasphemy against the Son? The Son is no less divine or

eschatologically significant than the Spirit, so we cannot attribute the difference to the blasphemy's object. The answer may instead lie in what is entailed by these varieties of blasphemy. While speaking against the Son of Man is something many believers have done prior to conversion (e.g., Saul of Tarsus), blasphemy against the Spirit is a persistent, decisive rejection of the Spirit's message about Jesus. Rejection of the Son is an outgrowth of the more deeply rooted problem. When a person fixedly refuses God's message as revealed by the intimate testimony of the Spirit, that person is not forgiven (Plummer 1896, 321; Manson 1949, 110). Marshall (1978, 518–19) saw Jesus warning his opponents not to deny the Spirit's work and argued that 12:8–9 deals with apostasy, while 12:10–12 deals with outsiders. Nolland (1993a, 679–80) said blasphemy against the Spirit is "the denial or rejection of the manifest saving intervention of God on behalf of his People. . . . The one who hardens himself or herself against what God is doing as he acts to save places himself or herself beyond the reach of God's present disposition of eschatological forgiveness."

Whenever they bring you before synagogues and rulers and authorities (12:11): Some believe Luke has transferred language and themes from the early church *Sitz im Leben* (setting and context) into Jesus' ministry, especially the talk about appearing "before synagogues and rulers and authorities" and being told what to say by the Holy Spirit. Against this skeptical conclusion, it is reasonable to conclude that Jesus was anticipating the coming opposition and how God would equip his followers to deal with it. He had the precedent of the execution of John the Baptist to inform him about the severity of the struggles to come, plus opposition continued to build against Jesus throughout his ministry. Evangelical readers grant Jesus' supernatural knowledge as the divine Son and factor it into this discussion as an explanation for his foreknowing what would befall his followers. That aside, an astute observer at this time could have drawn accurate conclusions about the future persecution of Jesus' followers based on the evidences of John the Baptist and the resistance of Israel's religious leaders to Jesus.

> 36 You must be like people waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet so that
> when he comes and knocks, they can open the door for him at once. 37 Those slaves the master
> will find alert when he comes will be blessed. I assure you: He will get ready, have them recline
> at the table, then come and serve them. 38 If he comes in the middle of the night, or even near
> dawn, and finds them alert, those slaves are blessed. 39 But know this: If the homeowner had

known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. 40 You also be ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect."

41 "Lord," Peter asked, "are You telling this parable to us or to everyone? "

42 The Lord said: "Who then is the faithful and sensible manager his master will put in charge of his household servants to give them their allotted food at the proper time? 43 That slave whose master finds him working when he comes will be rewarded. 44 I tell you the truth: He will put him in charge of all his possessions. 45 But if that slave says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and starts to beat the male and female slaves, and to eat and drink and get drunk, 46 that slave's master will come on a day he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers. 47 And that slave who knew his master's will and didn't prepare himself or do it will be severely beaten. 48 But the one who did not know and did things deserving of blows will be beaten lightly. Much will be required of everyone who has been given much. And even more will be expected of the one who has been entrusted with more. ,

Jesus' use of slave-themed parables: Does Jesus' repeated use of slaves in illustrations and parables count as an endorsement of the institution of slavery, especially since he never spoke out against it? Rather than signaling his endorsement of slavery, Jesus' habit of referencing elements in the practice of slavery illustrates his practice of effective communication. By illustrating his teachings with allusions to the institutions and practices of the ancient culture, he increased the chances his hearers would understand and remember the points he wanted to get across. The category of master and slave in particular was effective in emphasizing the accountability a creature has to the Creator, since in these parables the master or Lord is either God or Jesus and the slaves represent us. Jesus' use of slave-and-master imagery was not a political endorsement of slavery but simply a vivid way of picturing the accountability all humans owe to God.

As to why Jesus never specifically targeted slavery for elimination, one possible reason is that he did not wish to establish a social-reform movement that would distract him and his followers from his mission as the Messiah who came to die on behalf of the world. And historians have often noted that while Jesus did not personally campaign for the end of slavery, those who did so in later centuries did so in his name and were driven to do so by his teachings.

He will cut him to pieces (12:46): Was Jesus advocating that criminals should be hacked to death as punishment? This is a parable, not a historical narrative nor a teaching on crime and punishment. As in many of Jesus' parables, there is an "odd man out" here, someone who initially seemed to be in a privileged position but ended up being judged because he was negligent or even abusive

with the responsibilities assigned to him by the master (who stands for Jesus or God). This shows the slave never truly trusted or loved the master, but instead was self-willed and self-serving. His being “cut up” for his arrogant, abusive behavior is a figurative way of depicting his complete rejection by God, as opposed to the comparatively lenient severe beating inflicted on the slave who was knowingly disobedient (v. 47) and the light beating of the one who was disobedient out of ignorance (v. 48). The dismembered slave not only disobeyed the master; he did the exact opposite of what was asked, abusing the responsibilities that had been entrusted to him.

49 “I came to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already set ablaze! 50 But I have a
baptism to be baptized with, and how it consumes Me until it is finished! 51 Do you think that I
came here to give peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! 52 From now on, five in
one household will be divided: three against two, and two against three.

53 **They will be divided, father against son,**
son against father,
mother against daughter,
daughter against mother,
mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law,
and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”,

No, I tell you, but rather division! (12:51): Some texts say Jesus brings peace (Isa 9:6; Luke 2:14; Acts 10:36), while others speak of his bringing division (Luke 12:49–53; parallel at Matt 10:32–39). Rather than being contradictory, these diverse texts speak to the fact that what Jesus brings is determined by the responses he receives. He brings peace to all who respond favorably to God. To those who reject God’s peace, however, Jesus brings a message of judgment and division. Simeon predicted this dual reality when he said Jesus would be “salvation,” “light,” and “glory” (Luke 2:30–32) but also “a sign that will be opposed” (2:34).

At that time, some people came and reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate
had mixed with their sacrifices. 2 And He responded to them, “Do you think that these
Galileans were more sinful than all Galileans because they suffered these things? 3 No, I tell
you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as well! 4 Or those 18 that the tower in Siloam
fell on and killed — do you think they were more sinful than all the people who live in
Jerusalem? 5 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as well! ”

Historicity of Pilate's defiling the sacrifices and the fall of the tower of Siloam: Neither of these incidents is recorded outside the NT. Critics suggest this means their historicity is doubtful. But the atrocity attributed to Pilate easily fits with what is known about his character and actions throughout his reign, and at least five documented incidents have been proposed as lying behind Jesus' reference in verse 1 (see Bock 1996, 1205). They may not be this event, but they show it was the type of thing Pilate could do. And it is doubtful that we should expect historical annals to record a construction accident or structural failure that killed a mere 18 people. Most of those who were killed were probably common laborers or ordinary citizens, people whose passing would have seemed unremarkable to chroniclers.

The lack of extrabiblical documentation for these or similar events is not surprising since most ancient events, even remarkable ones, went altogether unrecorded, not to mention failing to be present in multiple attested sources. Documentation was by no means comprehensive in that era, and even documented events could be lost to history with the destruction of the impermanent materials on which they were recorded. As an example of how incomplete the records are, despite our certainty that Pilate existed and ruled for Rome in Judea from ad 27 to 36, we do not have a single document from the period that is directly from him. All we have is one inscription that has his name. So the fact that some events, such as those in Luke 13:1–5, are recorded only in the NT is not a reason to reject their historicity.

> 10 As He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath, 11 a woman was there who had been disabled by a spirit ’ for over 18 years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. 12 When Jesus saw her, He called out to her, “ Woman, you are free of your disability.” 13 Then He laid His hands on her, and instantly she was restored and began to glorify God.
>
> 14 But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, responded by telling the crowd, “There are six days when work should be done; therefore come on those days and be healed and not on the Sabbath day.”
>
> 15 But the Lord answered him and said, “Hypocrites! Doesn't each one of you untie his ox or donkey from the feeding trough on the Sabbath and lead it to water? 16 Satan has bound this woman, a daughter of Abraham, for 18 years — shouldn't she be untied from this bondage on the Sabbath day? ”
>
> 17 When He had said these things, all His adversaries were humiliated, but the whole crowd was rejoicing over all the glorious things He was doing.

A woman was there who had been disabled by a spirit (13:11): If a spirit

caused this woman's condition, why was her healing not achieved via exorcism? Does this verse indicate Jesus believed demonic activity lay behind all illnesses? The Gospels recognize clearly that disease is not necessarily linked to demonic activity. Luke, for instance, had three categories for the relationship between demonic activity and illness: naturally occurring medical conditions that are unrelated to demons (8:43–48; 18:35–43), demonic affliction that does not cause illness (4:31–37), and a combination of the two (9:37–45). The woman's affliction fell into the last category. Like the boy cured of epilepsy, this woman's ailment was complex and involved more than just a medical condition. Some have speculated that the demon that was oppressing her caused her to suffer depression. Her symptoms involved an excessively bowed or slouched posture, which in turn can lead to a medical condition in which the victim cannot straighten up.

It may be more accurate to think of the woman as influenced or oppressed by the demon rather than actually possessed by it, for the focus of the passage is her medical condition and it says nothing about her manifesting behaviors typical of demon possession. On bodily weakness being caused by evil spirits, see 1Qap Gen 20.17, 21–29; Stählin, *TDNT* 1:493; Marshall 1978, 557.

Come on those days and be healed (13:14): Luke portrays the synagogue ruler as being indignant that Jesus healed the woman on the Sabbath, but was healing really forbidden on the Sabbath? While the synagogue ruler challenged Jesus' choice to heal on the Sabbath because he regarded this as an act of labor, we do not have a specific Jewish text from this period that forbids healing on the Sabbath (Meier 2009, 235–67, questions the authenticity of the scene on this basis). But there can be no doubt about the strict approach many took regarding the Sabbath. We have texts that list an array of things prohibited, such as the famous "40 less one" text of *m. Shabbat* 7.2 (Bock/Herrick 2005, 80) that lists 39 actions prohibited on the Sabbath. The ruler's rebuke apparently depends on a traditional reading of Exodus 20:8–11 and Deuteronomy 5:12–15 (Danker 1988, 261; Tiede 1988, 250; Schneider 1977a, 300). Such rules forbade 39 forms of labor on the Sabbath. Other kinds of limited labor were permitted, such as leading cattle to water, a point similar to the one Jesus raises (Luke 6:2; Manson 1949, 189–90, 275; Str-B 2:199–200; Schweizer 1984, 222). The Mishnah allows cattle to be led on the Sabbath as long as they do not carry a load (*m. Shabbat* 5). Also an animal can be tied up in order to prevent it from wandering (*m. Shabbat* 15.2).

The Essenes were even stricter than the Pharisees; CD 11.13–14 reads, "No

one shall help an animal in its delivery on the Sabbath day. And if it falls into a pit or a ditch, one shall not raise it on the Sabbath." However, the Essenes did allow a person to travel as many as two thousand cubits (3,000 feet) in order to pasture their cattle (CD 11.5–6; Marshall 1978, 558–59; Manson 1949, 275).

The synagogue ruler's complaint mirrors the reaction of the scribes and Pharisees to an earlier Sabbath healing performed by Jesus (Luke 6:6–11). The ruler is portrayed as having learned nothing from Jesus' earlier warnings. For the synagogue ruler, any day but the Sabbath is fine for healing. For Jesus, there is no better day for God to show his goodness than the Sabbath.

One Sabbath, when He went to eat at the house of one of the leading Pharisees, they were watching Him closely. 2 There in front of Him was a man whose body was swollen with fluid. 3 In response, Jesus asked the law experts and the Pharisees, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not? " 4 But they kept silent. He took the man, healed him, and sent him away. 5 And to them, He said, "Which of you whose son or ox falls into a well, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day? " 6 To this they could find no answer.

7 He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noticed how they would choose the best places for themselves: 8 "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, don't recline at the best place, because a more distinguished person than you may have been invited by your host. 9 The one who invited both of you may come and say to you, 'Give your place to this man,' and then in humiliation, you will proceed to take the lowest place.

10 "But when you are invited, go and recline in the lowest place, so that when the one who invited you comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' You will then be honored in the presence of all the other guests. 11 For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

12 He also said to the one who had invited Him, "When you give a lunch or a dinner, don't invite your friends, your brothers, your relatives, or your rich neighbors, because they might invite you back, and you would be repaid. 13 On the contrary, when you host a banquet, invite those who are poor, maimed, lame, or blind. 14 And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

15 When one of those who reclined at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Him, "The one who will eat bread in the kingdom of God is blessed! "

16 Then He told him: "A man was giving a large banquet and invited many. 17 At the time of the banquet, he sent his slave to tell those who were invited, 'Come, because everything is now ready.'

18 "But without exception they all began to make excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. I ask you to excuse me.'

19 "Another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm going to try them out. I ask you to excuse me.'

20 “And another said, ‘I just got married, , and therefore I’m unable to come.’

21 “So the slave came back and reported these things to his master. Then in anger, the master of the house told his slave, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the city, and bring in here the poor, maimed, blind, and lame! ’

22 “ ‘Master,’ the slave said, ‘what you ordered has been done, and there’s still room.’

23 “Then the master told the slave, ‘Go out into the highways and lanes and make them come in, so that my house may be filled. 24 For I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will enjoy my banquet! ’ ”

One Sabbath (14:1): Yet another Sabbath healing (cp. 4:38–41; 6:6–11; 13:10–17) shows that Jesus repeatedly and purposefully set up situations that would bring to the forefront the question of his authority. This provided Israel with ample chance to respond, yet despite Jesus’ repeated signs and warnings, nothing changed among the religious leadership.

The poor, maimed, blind, and lame! (14:21): Among his Jewish contemporaries, some of the most important evidence for Jesus’ identity as Messiah was his role as a healer and an advocate for the lowly, which fulfilled messianic expectations established by such passages as Isaiah 61:1–2: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is on Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor, and the day of our God’s vengeance; to comfort all who mourn.” This present verse (Luke 14:21), with its emphasis on the “poor, maimed, blind, and lame,” parallels remarks found earlier in Luke (4:16–18 and 7:22–23), where Jesus’ work among this class of people showed that he was bringing the promised new era and that he was the one sent from God.

Make them come in (14:23): This verse does not mean God brings people into heaven by compulsion. Rather, the idea here is urgency. God fixes the hour of the banquet. He will not adjust the timing just because the slave was not having success in getting people to attend. The unresponsiveness of sinners will not alter the divine timing, a fact that heightens the gravity of our response to the invitation. The banquet pictures the end-times fulfillment of the kingdom with the coming of Christ (Rev 19:9).

25 Now great crowds were traveling with Him. So He turned and said to them: 26 “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters — yes, and even his own life — he cannot be My disciple. 27 Whoever does not bear his

own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

28 “For which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn’t first sit down and calculate the cost to
see if he has enough to complete it? 29 Otherwise, after he has laid the foundation and cannot
finish it, all the onlookers will begin to make fun of him, 30 saying, ‘This man started to build
and wasn’t able to finish.’

31 “Or what king, going to war against another king, will not first sit down and decide if he is
able with 10,000 to oppose the one who comes against him with 20,000? 32 If not, while the
other is still far off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. 33 In the same way,
therefore, every one of you who does not say good-bye to all his possessions cannot be My
disciple.

34 “Now, salt is good, but if salt should lose its taste, how will it be made salty? 35 It isn’t fit
for the soil or for the manure pile; they throw it out. Anyone who has ears to hear should listen!
”

Hate his own father and mother (14:26): Must we really hate our loved ones in order to follow Jesus? Rather than setting up hatred of family as a literal ethic here, Jesus used rhetorical language to address which allegiances should have priority. One should love God and pursue him as top priority. So the call to “hate” did not have a literal hate in view. Otherwise, he would be contradicting his own teaching that we should love our neighbors as ourselves (Luke 10:25–37). The call to hate simply means to “love less,” as seen elsewhere in Scripture (Gen 29:30–31; Deut 21:15–17; Judg 14:16). The image is purposefully strong, highlighting the priority of setting God as your highest pursuit. All other concerns must take second place to following Jesus (Luke 8:19–21; 9:59–62; 12:4, 49–53; 16:13). Matthew 10:37–39, Luke 9:24, and John 12:25 make a similar point, though Matthew softened the emotive force of Jesus’ statement by having him warn against the dangers of allowing love for family to be greater than love for him. This is the meaning of Luke as well, though he presented it in much starker terms.

To set Jesus’ statement in context, we must recall that, at the time, many would view a Jew who chose to follow Jesus as a traitor, resulting in potential alienation from his family. Given this fact, anyone who desired acceptance by family more than a relationship with God might have weighed the outcomes and decided against following Jesus. This is the irresolution Jesus was warning against. Disciples must be willing to follow him even if it means losing all else.

Whoever does not bear his own cross (14:27): On the question of whether this is an anachronistic saying, borrowed from the early church setting and placed on Jesus’ lips by Luke, see comments on 9:23.

If salt should lose its taste (14:34): In ancient Israel salt (Gk *halas*) was used as seasoning, fertilizer, and a preservative (Job 6:6; Luke 14:35; BAGD 35; BAA 67). But does it make sense to speak of salt losing its taste or becoming useless? A couple of different circumstances could give rise to this situation. First, bakers spread salt over the floor of their ovens to produce a catalytic effect on the fuel, which was usually cattle dung. The effect would eventually wear off, prompting the baker to discard the now useless salt (Marshall 1978, 596; Creed 1930, 195). Second, most of the salt used in Israel came from evaporated pools surrounding the Dead Sea and was mixed with gypsum and other impurities. It was not nearly as pure as modern table salt. When this compound became moist, evaporation would draw away much of the salt, leaving behind mostly impurities, resulting in a loss of the salty taste. Such "salt" was therefore thrown away (Jeremias 1963a, 168–69; Kistemaker 1980, 3–4; Hauck, *TDNT* 1:229; Nolland 1993a, 765).

11 He also said: "A man had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give
me the share of the estate I have coming to me.' So he distributed the assets to them. 13 Not
many days later, the younger son gathered together all he had and traveled to a distant country,
where he squandered his estate in foolish living. 14 After he had spent everything, a severe
famine struck that country, and he had nothing. 15 Then he went to work for one of the citizens
of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 16 He longed to eat his fill from the
carob pods the pigs were eating, but no one would give him any. 17 When he came to his
senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have more than enough food, and here I
am dying of hunger! 18 I'll get up, go to my father, and say to him, Father, I have sinned against
heaven and in your sight. 19 I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of
your hired hands.' 20 So he got up and went to his father. But while the son was still a long way
off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, threw his arms around his neck,
and kissed him. 21 The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight.
I'm no longer worthy to be called your son.'

22 "But the father told his slaves, 'Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring
on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Then bring the fattened calf and slaughter it, and let's
celebrate with a feast, 24 because this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and
is found! ' So they began to celebrate.

25 "Now his older son was in the field; as he came near the house, he heard music and
dancing. 26 So he summoned one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 27 'Your
brother is here,' he told him, 'and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has
him back safe and sound.'

28 "Then he became angry and didn't want to go in. So his father came out and pleaded with

him. 29 But he replied to his father, ‘Look, I have been slaving many years for you, and I have never disobeyed your orders, yet you never gave me a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your assets with prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.’

He became angry and didn’t want to go in (15:28): Critics belonging to the so-called New Atheism claim the Bible portrays God as a moral monster who cares more about rules than about people. But this parable, where the father represents God, depicts God as so merciful toward the repentant son that the elder son is provoked. The barrier standing between sinful man and holy God is not God’s unwillingness to forgive or a preference for judgment over mercy. It is instead our refusal to repent. As this parable illustrates, however, just as soon as we repent God throws open the gates of mercy and welcomes us in. Besides giving us a true image of God’s heart toward the lost, this parable is a good reminder that as we engage unbelievers with our apologetics presentations, we must have the same readiness as God to welcome them unconditionally when they have a change of heart.

He also said to the disciples: “There was a rich man who received an accusation that his manager was squandering his possessions. 2 So he called the manager in and asked, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you can no longer be my manager.’

3 “Then the manager said to himself, ‘What should I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I’m not strong enough to dig; I’m ashamed to beg. 4 I know what I’ll do so that when I’m removed from management, people will welcome me into their homes.’

5 “So he summoned each one of his master’s debtors. ‘How much do you owe my master? ’ he asked the first one.

6 “ ‘A hundred measures of olive oil,’ he said.

“ ‘Take your invoice,’ he told him, ‘sit down quickly, and write 50.’

7 “Next he asked another, ‘How much do you owe? ’

“ ‘A hundred measures of wheat,’ he said.

“ ‘Take your invoice,’ he told him, ‘and write 80.’

8 “The master praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted astutely. For the sons of this age are more astute than the sons of light in dealing with their own people. 9 And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of the unrighteous money so that when it fails, they may welcome you into eternal dwellings. 10 Whoever is faithful in very little is also faithful in much, and whoever is unrighteous in very little is also unrighteous in much. 11 So if you have not been faithful with the unrighteous money, who will trust you with what is genuine? 12 And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to someone else, who will give you what is your

own? 13 No household slave can be the slave of two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You can't be slaves to both God and money."

Jesus' use of an unethical example **(16:1–13):** Did Jesus commend unethical behavior in this parable? After all, the impression many readers get is that the steward dishonestly revised debts downward in order to curry favor. Common suggestions for explaining what the steward did are as follows: First, perhaps the steward simply lowered the price without any obvious justification. The steward had to figure this act would likely undercut and anger his master, but at the same time it would have won the favor of the debtors, which could come in handy given his coming unemployment. Second, possibly he canceled the interest charge, which was in accordance with the Mosaic law (Exod 22:25; Lev 25:35–37; Deut 15:7–8; 23:19–20; Derrett 1970, 56–63, esp. 56–57). This act would increase his chances of getting a job and also do his master the favor of bringing him into line with the law. A possible strike against this proposed solution is the fact that the debts are reduced by differing rates (the first bill is halved, the second is reduced by 20 percent), but perhaps different products drew different interest rates (Derrett 1970, 66, 69). Third, it is possible that the steward canceled his own commission from the debt total, sacrificing his own money rather than his master's. The differing rate of reduction could be attributed to his drawing different rates of commission on different products.

Which of these views is best? Derrett (1970, 65–72) made a good case that the Jewish setting best supports the second view, where the steward cancelled interest from the bills. Clearly the steward's motive was to engender gratitude among those who could help him upon the termination of his employment, but given the master's favorable response (v. 8), it is doubtful that the steward acted dishonestly as the first view entails.

So perhaps the debt reduction did not involve dishonesty after all. The reference to the steward being "dishonest" may allude only to the charges of 16:1 and not what follows. This fits with the master commending the steward for acting "astutely" (*phronimōs*), a commendation he would hardly give if the steward had just proven himself dishonest all over again. The steward was thinking ahead, which is what Jesus commended. He foresaw the unemployment he was going to face. So he acted generously toward others in order that they would take consideration of his plight.

4 The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and scoffing at
Him. 15 And He told them: “You are the ones who justify yourselves in the sight of others, but
God knows your hearts. For what is highly admired by people is revolting in God’s sight.
16 “The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then, the good news of the kingdom of
God has been proclaimed, and everyone is strongly urged to enter it. 17 But it is easier for
heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter in the law to drop out.
18 “Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and
everyone who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.
19 “There was a rich man who would dress in purple and fine linen, feasting lavishly every
day. 20 But a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, was left at his gate. 21 He longed to
be filled with what fell from the rich man’s table, but instead the dogs would come and lick his
sores. 22 One day the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s side. ,
The rich man also died and was buried. 23 And being in torment in Hades, he looked up and
saw Abraham a long way off, with Lazarus at his side. 24 ‘Father Abraham! ’ he called out,
‘Have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue,
because I am in agony in this flame! ’
25 “ ‘Son,’ Abraham said, ‘remember that during your life you received your good things, just
as Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here, while you are in agony.
26 Besides all this, a great chasm has been fixed between us and you, so that those who want to
pass over from here to you cannot; neither can those from there cross over to us.’
27 “ ‘Father,’ he said, ‘then I beg you to send him to my father’s house — 28 because I have
five brothers — to warn them, so they won’t also come to this place of torment.’
29 “But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’
30 “ ‘No, father Abraham,’ he said. ‘But if someone from the dead goes to them, they will
repent.’
31 “But he told him, ‘If they don’t listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be persuaded
if someone rises from the dead.’ ”

Everyone is strongly urged to enter it (16:16): Where HCSB renders the end of verse 16 this way, other translations have “everyone forces his way into it” (ESV), “every man presseth into it” (KJV), and “everyone is forcing his way into it” (NASB). Is the approach taken in these other renderings preferable? If so, what does it mean that people were forcing their way into God’s kingdom? This rendering might seem to imply that we can work our way to salvation.

Two important issues for determining the translation and meaning of verse 16 involve *biazetai* and *biazō*. First, is *biazetai* middle voice or passive voice? This is the difference between everyone acting for themselves (i.e., “everyone enters forcibly themselves”) and something that is done to all (i.e., “everyone is forced to enter”). Second, is the meaning of *biazō* “enter,” “insist,” or “violently arrive”?

Another issue is the influence of Matthew 11:12–13 for interpreting Luke 16:16. The passages have distinct contexts and must be approached individually. Matthew's wording is different; he also said the kingdom of heaven arrives violently or suffers violence (*biazetai*) and that men of violence take it by force (*biastai*). While "kingdom of heaven" and the "kingdom of God" present the same idea, the rest of the imagery differs significantly. What Matthew attributed specifically to violent men must be attributed to all people in Luke, if indeed Luke and Matthew are taken to be parallel here. It is best to conclude that Matthew is of no value in determining how to handle Luke's wording and that the remarks take place in distinct settings.

As for the meaning of *biazō*, the basic sense is "to apply force." Several proposed interpretations for Luke 16:16 bear examination (Leaney 1958, 223–24; BAGD 140–41; BAA 280–81). First, the term may be negative and in the middle voice: "all act violently against it." On this rendering the kingdom is subject to universal opposition (Ellis 1974, 203, mentions demonic forces). This view presupposes a linkage to Matthew, since in the Matthean passage the force is clearly negative, where the whole world stands opposed to the kingdom. But as mentioned above, the link between Matthew and Luke here is doubtful.

Second, the term may be positive and in the middle voice: "everyone tries to force his way into it" (Hendriksen 1978, 774; Manson 1949, 134–35; Schrenk, *TDNT* 1:612). But does this positive outlook match Jesus' experiences? Far from everyone running to press their way into the kingdom, resistance to Jesus' teachings and claims has been the common theme.

Third and most probable, the verb may have a softened force and be in the passive voice: "all are urged insistently to come in" (Schweizer 1984, 258; Fitzmyer 1985, 1117). The HCSB adopts this approach. This view fits the context, where Jesus exhorted his opponents constantly in a bid to persuade them to accept him. Jesus presented the message to all, and all were given the chance to enter and share in the kingdom's benefits (cp. 14:15–24). But if one was to share in the kingdom message, one must respond to Jesus' authority—not scoff at it (16:14).

This third option obviously relieves the difficulties raised above in the introductory paragraph. If the image Luke meant to convey is of people being urged to enter the kingdom, there is no question of their entering forcibly, being forced in by another, or working their way to salvation.

Everyone who divorces his wife (16:18): The Matthean parallels (Matt 5:32; 19:9) include an exception clause ("except for sexual immorality") that both

Mark 10:11 and Luke 16:18 lack. Are these texts therefore in conflict? Luke's remark here is brief and offered as an example of how the kingdom's coming in Jesus does not mean a shift in ethical commitments. Luke gave the basic principle rather than the full teaching (Arndt 1956, 362). Stated most simply, the principle says, "do not divorce." Divorce violates the three-way covenant between God, the husband, and the wife. Jesus' words in Luke are put in absolute terms: divorce leads to adultery because it is presupposed that a person seeks a divorce because they have decided they want to marry someone else, in which case the remarriage itself is an act of unfaithfulness to the original vows (Marshall 1978, 631).

Matthew more comprehensively treated divorce and remarriage, and in doing so mentioned that divorce is allowed in cases of *porneia*, which could be unfaithfulness during betrothal, an interfamily marriage that voids the first marriage (Lev 18:6–19; 20:11–21; Deut 27:20; Ezek 22:10; CD 4.20–5.10), or, far more likely, any kind of sexual immorality (BAGD 693; BAA 1389). The implication of the exception clause seems to be that, if divorce is granted because of adultery, the faithful partner is free to remarry. Paul, who knew Jesus' teaching, added that desertion by an unbeliever also permitted a divorce (1 Cor 7:10–16). (See further comments at Matt 9:9 and Mark 10:11.)

Is Luke 16:19–31 a parable or a historical narrative? Several important questions surround this story. Regarding genre, is it a parable? And should we look to this story for true details about the afterlife? Several factors may suggest to some that the story is not a parable. First, it is not called a parable, and parables are typically identified as such (e.g., 8:4; 12:16, 41; 13:6; 15:3; 18:9). Second, parables make comparisons to everyday situations in order to teach a spiritual truth, but the introduction to this story makes no such comparison. However, we must note that there is precedent for parables lacking such an introduction (e.g., Mark 12:1; Luke 15:1; 19:12; Linnemann 1966, 16). Third, no other parable gives names for its characters. The fact that this passage does suggests to some that it is not a parable. Fourth, the present passage includes vivid details about the afterlife, something not done in other parables. However, the case for this account being a parable is strong.

Along with the stories of the Good Samaritan (10:25–37), the rich fool (12:13–21), and the Pharisee and the tax collector (18:9–14), Linnemann called the story of the rich man and Lazarus an illustration, a special kind of developed parable (1966, 4–5). Notably, the Good Samaritan passage also lacks an introductory note specifying that the material is a parable. The present account is

clearly illustrative and comparative, and Fitzmyer (1985, 1126) rightly calls it an example story. Blomberg (1990, 73) considers example stories a subclass of parables, so we are justified to see this account as parabolic. It does not present a literal historical event, much like the Good Samaritan does not, but all the same it pictures possible behavior. One of the characters being named in this parable is not an indication that a literal historical figure is in view, but is instead the means by which Jesus pointed out that the rich man knew who the poor man was—that Lazarus had sat at his gate and the rich man had done nothing to help him. This inaction emphasizes the moral lack vividly illustrated in this parable. Another indication that we are dealing with a parable is the rich man being able to see Lazarus and Abraham in their blessed state. This befits an illustrative story, not a literal portrayal of communications between Hades and Heaven. Thus we should not press Luke 16:19–31 for accurate descriptions of what either hell or the blessed state is like.

Nevertheless, it does make some points about the afterlife that are true. First, once someone is judged, there is no second chance (cp. Heb 9:27). Second, the afterlife is such that one does not want to experience judgment.

Abraham's side (16:22): Is "Abraham's side" an extrabiblical tradition incorporated by Luke? Is it a sort of pre-heaven state? As stated in the comments directly above on 16:19–31, this account is a subclass of parables that we should not read as literal history. Thus we should not press for details about what, if any, afterlife realities are in view with the mention of Abraham's side. It is simply an expression that points to being blessed in the afterlife.

Abraham's side ("bosom" in other translations) was conceived of as a place of blessing where Abraham welcomed the faithful. The Greeks spoke of the "bosom of Mother Earth" to designate their conception of the abode of the dead (MM 353). Perhaps the concept of Abraham's side arose as an answer to this. It is also possible that this concept arose simply as a more concrete way of saying someone had been "gathered to the fathers" (Gen 15:15; 47:30; Deut 31:16; Judg 2:10; 1 Kgs 1:21; Ernst 1977, 474).

> He said to His disciples, "Offenses will certainly come, but woe to the one they come through!
> 2 It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea than for him to cause one of these little ones to stumble. 3 Be on your guard. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. 4 And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and comes back to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."

5 The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith.”

6 “If you have faith the size of a mustard seed,” the Lord said, “you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.

7 “Which one of you having a slave tending sheep or plowing will say to him when he comes in from the field, ‘Come at once and sit down to eat’? 8 Instead, will he not tell him, ‘Prepare something for me to eat, get ready, and serve me while I eat and drink; later you can eat and drink’? 9 Does he thank that slave because he did what was commanded? 10 In the same way, when you have done all that you were commanded, you should say, ‘We are good-for-nothing slaves; we’ve only done our duty.’ ”

Placement and source of the sayings in 17:1–6: The setting of these sayings differs from Matthew and Mark, and the sayings themselves are somewhat different as well.

- Luke 17:1–3a is like Matthew 18:6–7 and Mark 9:42.
- Luke 17:3b-4 is like Matthew 18:15.
- Luke 17:5–6 is like Matthew 17:19–21 and Mark 9:28–29.
- Luke 17:7–10 is unique to his Gospel.

Did Jesus say these things multiple times, or did the evangelists modify the accounts for their purposes?

The rationale for Luke’s grouping of these statements is unclear. Interpreters typically hold that Luke was using Q, a source Matthew and Luke shared. Overlap between Luke and Mark might suggest otherwise, but most interpreters see Q present throughout while taking Mark to influence 17:1–3a. Mark or special Lucan material is seen as significant in 17:5–6.

The lack of verbal correspondence and the differences in the illustrations with the overall makeup of 15:1–17:10 raises another possibility: perhaps Luke drew this material from his special Lucan source, meaning these are distinct sayings using similar themes. Matthew 18:6–7 discusses the elements found in Luke 17:1–3a in reverse order. Luke 17:3–4 is located in two distinct sections in Matthew (18:15 and 18:21–22). Matthew gives the discussion about forgiving a brother seventy times seven in response to Peter’s question, while Luke gives the statement about forgiveness as a direct teaching. In Matthew 17:20 Jesus said a mountain can be moved by faith, whereas Luke 17:6 has Jesus teaching that through faith a disciple can command a mulberry tree to be uprooted and planted in the sea. These illustrations are radically different between Luke and Matthew.

In conclusion, since most of 15:1–17:10 is similar to but not parallel with Matthew, it is best to conclude that Luke’s material is distinct from Matthew’s, that it comes from Luke’s special material (often designated as L), and that we

therefore have a setting in Luke distinct from the accounts in Matthew and Mark.

If you have faith the size of a mustard seed (17:6): Was Jesus advocating a name-it, claim-it approach to prayer? Actually, the issue Jesus stressed is not how much faith one has (since it only takes a little), but in whom that faith is placed (the God who is able to do whatever we ask). Even a little bit of faith can accomplish a lot. This is not a carte blanche promise that says we will get from God whatever we ask, because ultimately it is God's will that determines how our prayers are answered. Paul is an example of a faithful Christian who asked for something in prayer (the removal of the thorn in the flesh) but found that God's will was to decline his request (2 Cor 12:7–9).

We are good-for-nothing slaves (17:10): Critics sometimes say the Bible portrays humans as worthless, mere grist for the mill of God's judgment. Sometimes they even say that biblical anthropology reflects the Greek philosophical view called the hierarchy of being, where truly good things are immaterial, and all material things are by nature less good than immaterial realities. The statement that we are "good-for-nothing slaves" may seem to support this, but that would be a misunderstanding of this verse and biblical anthropology in general. Jesus' present comment was rhetorical and spoke to the humility of humankind before God, not our supposed unworthiness as creatures. Certainly we are fallen and separated from God due to our sins (Gen 3:22–23; Rom 3:23), but we are still the objects of God's love and the subject of his redemption plan (Ps 8:5–6; John 3:16; Rom 6:23).

> 11 While traveling to Jerusalem, He passed between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As He entered a village, 10 men with serious skin diseases met Him. They stood at a distance 13 and raised their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us! "
>
> 14 When He saw them, He told them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And while they were going, they were healed.
>
> 15 But one of them, seeing that he was healed, returned and, with a loud voice, gave glory to God. 16 He fell facedown at His feet, thanking Him. And he was a Samaritan.
>
> 17 Then Jesus said, "Were not 10 cleansed? Where are the nine? 18 Didn't any return to give glory to God except this foreigner? " 19 And He told him, "Get up and go on your way. Your faith has made you well." ,

While traveling to Jerusalem, He passed between Samaria and Galilee (17:11): Some critics say Luke is guilty of geographical confusion here, for to

pass along the border dividing Galilee from Samaria one must move east and west, seemingly inconsistent with Jesus' continued journey toward Jerusalem, which is to the south of Samaria. There is a textual variation in this verse, suggesting ancient readers of Luke recognized the possible geographical difficulty this passage raises and tried to clarify it.

As a possible solution, Marshall (1978, 650) suggested Luke was classifying Perea (which is east of Jerusalem) as a part of Galilee. In this case Jesus was indeed moving south, more or less directly toward Jerusalem. But this suggestion is problematic, for as Marshall noted elsewhere (1970, 70–71), Judea would have included both Perea and Galilee when united under a single ruler (Pliny, *Natural History* 5.15 §70; also Tacitus, *Annals* 12.54; Strabo 16.2.21 [c756]; Dio Cassius 37.16.5). It would not be a distinct area. This historical fact makes it unlikely Luke would have conflated Perea and Galilee in such a way as to exclude Judea. Had Jesus been going south, the natural reference would have been to Judea. This assumes that Luke was using broad geographical descriptions that fit his time and that Jesus at this point was traveling east and west.

Upon further consideration it seems the geographical problem is overstated in the first place. We should see the journey-to-Jerusalem theme as more temporal or literary than strictly geographical. In this light it would be accurate to say Jesus was "nearing" Jerusalem even when he was not physically moving toward it, for all the while the time was drawing nearer for him to go to Jerusalem. This passage refers to a journey of destiny, not an itinerary.

> 20 Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God will come, He answered them,
> "The kingdom of God is not coming with something observable; 21 no one will say, 'Look
> here! ' or 'There! ' For you see, the kingdom of God is among you."
>
> 22 Then He told the disciples: "The days are coming when you will long to see one of the days
> of the Son of Man, but you won't see it. 23 They will say to you, 'Look there! ' or 'Look here! '
> Don't follow or run after them. 24 For as the lightning flashes from horizon to horizon and
> lights up the sky, so the Son of Man will be in His day. 25 But first He must suffer many things
> and be rejected by this generation.
>
> 26 "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be in the days of the Son of Man: 27 People
> went on eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until the day Noah boarded the ark,
> and the flood came and destroyed them all. 28 It will be the same as it was in the days of Lot:
> People went on eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, building. 29 But on the day Lot left

Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all. 30 It will be like that on the day the Son of Man is revealed. 31 On that day, a man on the housetop, whose belongings are in the house, must not come down to get them. Likewise the man who is in the field must not turn back. 32 Remember Lot's wife! 33 Whoever tries to make his life secure , will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. 34 I tell you, on that night two will be in one bed: One will be taken and the other will be left. 35 Two women will be grinding grain together: One will be taken and the other left. [36 Two will be in a field: One will be taken, and the other will be left.]"

37 "Where, Lord? " they asked Him.

He said to them, "Where the corpse is, there also the vultures will be gathered."

The kingdom of God is among you (17:21): Had the kingdom of God arrived in Jesus' day, or was it yet a future reality? It might seem that Jesus was inconsistent on this issue, for in the present verse he spoke of the kingdom as a present reality rather than something to be watched for, whereas elsewhere he spoke of it as a future reality (e.g., Luke 22:18, where he said, "For I tell you, from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes").

Rather than contradicting himself, Jesus' statements indicate that the kingdom of God came to be present through his ministry and yet also awaits a future and complete fulfillment at the time of his second coming. This already-not-yet theme is present throughout the NT, as for example in 1 Peter 1:5, which says that believers are presently kept by God's power (kingdom is present) for a salvation to be revealed in the end times (kingdom is future).

In the present context Jesus was stressing that the kingdom is within reach. Jesus' presence and activity meant that the kingdom did not need to be searched for; Jesus brought it with him (Luke 11:20 is similar in force). In what follows, Jesus indicated that the end or consumption of kingdom promise will come about at the return of the Son of Man, but that cannot take place before his suffering. This return will happen in the midst of life when many will not be ready for it or for the judgment that comes with it.

Is verse 36 original to Luke? Though some manuscripts (D, most Itala, some Syriac, some Lect, several minuscules, and family 13) include this illustration of two fieldworkers, important Alexandrian and Byzantine manuscripts do not (P^{75}, ℵ, A, B, L, Δ, Θ, Ψ, family 1, Byz, Coptic). For this reason verse 36 should probably not be considered original to Luke's text (Metzger 1994, 142–43). As to how the insertion came to be present in some Mss, most likely it is an assimilation to Matthew 24:40, where this illustration is textually secure.

He then told them a parable on the need for them to pray always and not become discouraged:
2 “There was a judge in a certain town who didn’t fear God or respect man. 3 And a widow in
that town kept coming to him, saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’
4 “For a while he was unwilling, but later he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or
respect man, 5 yet because this widow keeps pestering me, I will give her justice, so she doesn’t
wear me out by her persistent coming.’ ”
6 Then the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 Will not God grant justice to His
elect who cry out to Him day and night? Will He delay to help them? 8 I tell you that He will
swiftly grant them justice. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He find that faith on
earth? ”

Pray always (18:1): Jesus encouraged incessant prayer here, but elsewhere he condemned those who “babble” and use “many words” (Matt 6:7). Does Jesus contradict himself in these two passages? Jesus’ present remark does not advocate wordy or showy prayers that are the mark of those who wish to draw attention to themselves, but instead encourages consistent and repeated prayer by the faithful. Disciples are not to grow tired of praying for justice.

When the Son of Man comes, will He find that faith on earth? (18:8): Jesus’ remarks show a tension. On the one hand Jesus promised God will give a quick vindication of his elect (“He will swiftly grant them justice”), which implies God will not delay helping his people (vv. 7–8). On the other hand Jesus spoke of a delay so long it is questionable whether faith will have persisted on the earth. The tension here is important. Only by disregarding this tension can critics say Jesus promised his contemporaries an immediate vindication and complete fulfillment of the kingdom.

15 Some people were even bringing infants to Him so He might touch them, but when the
disciples saw it, they rebuked them. 16 Jesus, however, invited them: “Let the little children
come to Me, and don’t stop them, because the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 17 I
assure you: Whoever does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter
it.”

Whoever does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it (18:17): Critics say Christian proselytizing preys on the ignorance and naïveté of unbelievers. Does Jesus’ statement here justify this charge by teaching us to be naïve and uncritical in our acceptance of Christian faith? Rather than prescribing a mindless acceptance of the kingdom, Jesus was holding forth as

exemplary an unrestrained trust in God, similar to the trust children place in their parents.

18 A ruler asked Him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? ”

19 “Why do you call Me good? ” Jesus asked him. “No one is good but One — God. 20 You know the commandments:

Do not commit adultery;
do not murder;
do not steal;
do not bear false witness;
honor your father and mother.”

21 “I have kept all these from my youth,” he said.

22 When Jesus heard this, He told him, “You still lack one thing: Sell all that you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me.”

23 After he heard this, he became extremely sad, because he was very rich.

24 Seeing that he became sad, Jesus said, “How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! 25 For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

26 Those who heard this asked, “Then who can be saved? ”

27 He replied, “What is impossible with men is possible with God.”

28 Then Peter said, “Look, we have left what we had and followed You.”

29 So He said to them, “I assure you: There is no one who has left a house, wife or brothers, parents or children because of the kingdom of God, 30 who will not receive many times more at this time, and eternal life in the age to come.”

No one is good but One—God (18:19): Critics suggest Jesus indirectly denied his deity here by saying no one is good but God, but a close look at the context reveals Jesus was not seeking to make a point about his own identity. There are two possible aims Jesus may have had in mind. First, Jesus may have sensed that the ruler was insincere in calling him “Good Teacher.” If so, Jesus’ response was a rejection of the ruler’s flattery (Danker 1988, 299; Arndt 1956, 383). This would have had the effect of causing the ruler to reconsider his careless words. Second, Jesus sought to narrow the ruler’s focus to the question of whether he would be responsive to God (Fitzmyer 1985, 1199; Warfield 1914, 211).

The second explanation fits the context best given the fact that Jesus immediately went on to cite God’s commandments (v. 20). The ruler attempted to honor Jesus by calling him “Good Teacher,” but he needed to recognize that “good” is a relative term except when applied to God. Being good by human

standards is not the same as being good by God's standards. God must supply the kind of good necessary for us to reach eternal life. The ruler should also have realized that if he really thought Jesus was a good teacher, he should follow his instructions.

In summary, rather than seeking to define himself as non-divine, Jesus' statement that no one is good but God emphasized God's holiness and righteousness over against the vain human attempt to earn eternal life. If the ruler really wanted to follow the "good one," Jesus invited him to follow God and obey the teachings of his "Good Teacher."

You know the commandments (18:20): Jesus' answer has perplexed readers who expect him to speak of grace rather than works in response to the ruler's question about what he needed to do to "inherit eternal life" (v. 18). Was Jesus teaching works salvation here?

Jesus was saying salvation involves responding rightly to God, which according to popular opinion in Judaism at that time meant response to the law (Deut 27:26). Acts of righteousness were seen as a requirement for earning eternal life. Deuteronomy 30:15–20 can be seen as a commentary and summary on the same point Jesus made (Danker 1988, 300). The NT elsewhere is clear that the only way to meet God's requirements for righteousness is to plead for grace rather than attempt to earn righteous standing through works (e.g., Rom 3:21–31; also Luke 18:9–17). In the present passage, Jesus focused on revealing to the ruler that he had not fulfilled all the law after all, for Jesus identified at act of obedience that the ruler found too difficult to accomplish and called on the man to follow him instead (vv. 22–23; cp. Matt 11:28–30).

In his response Jesus cited commandments 7, 6, 8, 9, and 5 from the Decalogue (Exod 20:12–16; Deut 5:16–20). Why did he focus exclusively on the ethical portion of the Decalogue (those laws regulating man-to-man relationships), skipping commandments relating to the vertical relationship (man-to-God)? One aspect of the answer is that how you treat others is a measurable indication of what your relationship with God is like. This recalls the teaching of Luke 1:16–17, where the angel explained to Zechariah that turning to God would lead to reconciliation in many human relationships. Another factor may be Luke's tendency to include warnings to the rich that they should not be selfish. Jesus' emphasis on the ethical portion of the commandments served as a reminder that the ruler should be other-centered, looking to the welfare of others (Luke 12:13–21; 16:19–31). People will treat others well as a result of their being rightly related to God (10:27).

Sell all that you have and distribute it to the poor (18:22): Critics say true Christians should follow this command and renounce ownership of all worldly goods. But was Jesus stating a requirement that applies to all disciples?

Jesus' command here was a specific diagnosis for the ruler, whom Jesus realized was placing his trust in wealth. The call to sell his possessions would force him to place his trust in God instead. This reading fits with the overall theme for this section of Luke, which stresses humility before God and reliance on him for our needs (e.g., the tax collector in vv. 9–14, little children in vv. 15–17, and the blind beggar in vv. 35–43). Zacchaeus's response (19:1–10) showed a willingness to heed the call to be generous that contrasted with the Pharisee (18:9–14), the ruler (vv. 18–23), and the disciples (vv. 25–30).

The fact that Jesus did not ask Zacchaeus to sell everything he owned shows that selling our possessions is not required of all disciples. The prescription for how a disciple handles his possessions will match the diagnosis of his spiritual condition, and thus differs from person to person in particulars. But in all cases the disciples must trust God and have him in first place (16:13). Jesus' radical command that the ruler sell all his possessions brought this point home to him forcefully.

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle (18:25): It has been common in the history of interpretation to say that "eye of a needle" refers not to a sewing needle but to a narrow gate called the Needle Gate. This was a smaller door set within the much larger city gates, and camels could pass through them only by taking to their knees.

However, contrary to this popular interpretation, Jesus' statement had in view a sewing needle and not a gate. Jesus' point was that it is impossible for a rich person to come to God on his own. Rather than an aid to gaining heaven, worldly wealth can breed a self-reliance and pride that actually hinders a rich person's relationship with God. This went against common Jewish expectation, which explains the strong reaction of the disciples: "Then who can be saved?" (v. 26). Their assumption was that wealth was a sign of blessing from God and that this implied assured membership in the kingdom of God. It is true that wealth can be a sign of blessing from God (Gen 24:35; Prov 10:22), but of course there is a distinction between being blessed and being saved (Luke 12:16–21; 16:19–31). Wealth can come to those who live in accordance with good morals and wisdom, and in this sense they are blessed of God due to their lifestyle, but spiritual rebirth is an altogether separate issue.

31 Then He took the Twelve aside and told them, “Listen! We are going up to Jerusalem. Everything that is written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. 32 For He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and He will be mocked, insulted, spit on; 33 and after they flog Him, they will kill Him, and He will rise on the third day.”

34 They understood none of these things. This saying ’ was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.

35 As He drew near Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the road begging. 36 Hearing a crowd passing by, he inquired what this meant. 37 “Jesus the Nazarene is passing by,” they told him.

38 So he called out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! ” 39 Then those in front told him to keep quiet, but he kept crying out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me! ”

40 Jesus stopped and commanded that he be brought to Him. When he drew near, He asked him, 41 “What do you want Me to do for you? ”

“Lord,” he said, “I want to see! ”

42 “Receive your sight! ” Jesus told him. “Your faith has healed you.” , 43 Instantly he could see, and he began to follow Him, glorifying God. All the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.

Everything that is written through the prophets about the Son of Man (18:31): What prophets and OT passages did Jesus have in mind here? Many name texts like Isaiah 52–53 put next to texts like Daniel 7:9–14 and Psalm 118:22–26, but the majority of scholars conclude there is no evidence that pre-Christian Jews understood Isaiah to be speaking about a crucified Messiah. Additionally, even Jesus’ disciples did not understand Isaiah this way until after Christ’s resurrection. In this light critics deny that the OT texts foretold Jesus and his passion. Where NT authors cite OT texts as prophecies of Christ, critical scholars see OT texts that the early church (and authors such as Luke) reappropriated or reinterpreted as Christians sought to justify their beliefs by grounding them in the OT. Demonstrating an OT basis for their beliefs would greatly bolster their credibility in a society that universally revered the OT Scriptures.

Most likely Jesus did have in mind Isaiah 52–53 in addition to other passages. It is true that we lack evidence that first-century Judaism read Isaiah in this way. Rather than expecting the Messiah to suffer and die (at the hands of Jews, no less!), they expected him to be a triumphant, powerful political figure. Texts such as the Suffering Servant passages in Isaiah were fully understood only after Jesus pointed back to them and underscored the element of individual suffering in the text (Luke 24:27). But this fact does not justify the skeptic’s conclusion that Luke and other NT authors are guilty of reading Jesus into the OT. The

general failure of the Jews to discern OT texts dealing with the Messiah can be attributed to other factors. First, there is spiritual dullness. Jesus chided his followers for being “unwise and slow” to believe what was spoken through the prophets (Luke 24:25). We can attribute some of this to the complex combination of texts that had to be assimilated to create a synthesized messianic portrait. The failure to meet this challenge led to many views of the Messiah at the time, not just one view. However, all such views (a powerful delivering political figure, a powerful figure sent from heaven, a combined king-priest figure) lacked a note of suffering. This was in part because Isaiah 52–53 is the one text where this theme comes up, and as an exception to texts that highlighted deliverance and power it was not appreciated. Second, apart from the issue of spiritual factors, it is difficult for interpreters of any age to escape the predominant interpretive paradigms to which they belong. Third, by their very nature the OT prophecies about the Messiah’s suffering, death, and resurrection walked a thin line between veiling and unveiling. Had the texts come right out and said in the clearest possible terms who the Messiah would be, what he would experience, and that he ultimately would be rejected and killed by his own people, they would have inspired many false fulfillments as pretenders tried to live out the prophecies, falsely claiming to be the Messiah. Further, the texts themselves could have gotten in the way of Jesus fulfilling his mission if well-intentioned but misguided followers sought to divert Jesus into what they perceived to be a better outcome, namely one that did not include crucifixion.

All these factors may explain why pre-Christian readers missed prophecies about Christ, and especially how they fit together. It took the ministry of Jesus, plus a lifting of the veil by the Holy Spirit, for readers to discern the true depth of prophetic texts such as Isaiah 52–53 and to put together a coherent portrait of the Messiah.

He will be mocked, insulted, spit on . . . they [will] flog . . . [and] kill Him (18:32–33): Again Jesus made an explicit and detailed prediction of his execution and resurrection (Luke 9:21–22; 13:33). Did Luke represent this correctly, or did he put words into Jesus’ mouth after the fact? After all, it seems hard to account for the unpreparedness of the disciples during Jesus’ arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection if Jesus indeed had been this explicit in his predictions.

As stated in the comments on 18:31, the disciples had not read OT passages such as Isaiah 52–53 as pointing to a suffering Messiah. As a result, even when Jesus explicitly predicted his execution, the disciples were hearing a new and

difficult concept. Their total lack of preparedness when Jesus' passion was fulfilled is not an indication that Jesus never made passion predictions, but rather that the disciples had never been able to understand and accept that God's plan for the Messiah could include his rejection, arrest, torture, and execution. For them the Messiah was to be a figure of power. Even after Jesus was raised, they had to be reminded of such predictions (Luke 24:6–7).

This saying was hidden from them (18:34): Luke underscored that the disciples failed to understand by stating it three different ways in this verse, this being the most arresting way. A similar statement occurs at 9:45. Does this language imply that God dulled the perceptions of the disciples? The verb *kekrummenon* ("was hidden") is passive. While many passive verbs in the Bible are called "divine passives" because they imply the work of God (e.g., 6:37–38), in this case it merely indicates that the hiddenness was a matter of failure to comprehend rather than active concealment. As discussed in the previous two notes, the disciples were unable to grasp how Jesus' death could be part of God's plan for the Messiah. It took the events themselves to make it clear.

As He drew near Jericho (18:35): Was Jesus leaving or entering Jericho at the time of the healing? Matthew 20:29–30 has Jesus departing Jericho as he encountered two blind men, whereas Luke had Jesus approaching Jericho. The most likely explanation for the difference is that Luke rearranged his account for logical and literary reasons. By placing the healing near Jericho before the account of Zacchaeus, Luke preserved the logical order of his two pictures of salvation. By treating the blind man before Zacchaeus, Luke first pictured someone coming to salvation and then the response of someone who was already saved. In this way Luke compared the blind beggar to the disciples' blindness and inability to understand Jesus' passion predictions, plus he contrasted him with the rich ruler who walked away without salvation. Luke's rearrangement gave the impression that Jesus was entering Jericho, but the intention was probably simply to pinpoint Jericho as the nearby city. The case for this approach is enhanced syntactically if *engizō* can mean "to be in the vicinity of" rather than "to draw near," as Porter (1992) argued. (See further comments at Matt 20:29–34 and Mark 10:46.)

A blind man (18:35): In his version of this account Matthew spoke of two blind men (Matt 20:29–34), while Luke and Mark (Mark 10:46–52) had Jesus encountering and healing only one blind man. Rather than signaling a contradiction, this is just an instance where one author provided more detail than

the others. Mark focused on only one blind man and even took the trouble to name him as Bartimaeus. Possibly he gave the name because Bartimaeus was a known figure in the early church. Bartimaeus is an Aramaic name, a fact that perhaps explains why Luke lacks the name (Klostermann 1929, 183). As for Matthew's inclusion of two men, this fits with Matthew's tendency to discuss pairs (Matt 8:28; 9:27). And neither Mark nor Luke included a statement ruling out the presence of a second blind man. They simply focused on one without excluding the possibility that a second man was present. (See further comments at Matt 20:29–34 and Mark 10:46.)

> He entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 There was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. 3 He was trying to see who Jesus was, but he was not able because of the crowd, since he was a short man. 4 So running ahead, he climbed up a sycamore tree to see Jesus, since He was about to pass that way. 5 When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down because today I must stay at your house."
>
> 6 So he quickly came down and welcomed Him joyfully. 7 All who saw it began to complain, "He's gone to lodge with a sinful man! "
>
> 8 But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, I'll give half of my possessions to the poor, Lord! And if I have extorted anything from anyone, I'll pay back four times as much! "
>
> 9 "Today salvation has come to this house," Jesus told him, "because he too is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost."

Today salvation has come to this house (19:9): Did Jesus teach that Zacchaeus had been saved because of the good works he promised to do? Zacchaeus's response to Jesus about righting the wrongs he had done showed a penitent heart. So Jesus spoke of him as a "son of Abraham." Once again, as is common in Luke, proper response to God translates into proper treatment of other people. This is why Jesus spoke of salvation coming to Zacchaeus. It is not salvation by works but salvation through a changed heart, responsive to the call of God to love him and others.

The verbs expressing Zacchaeus's commitments express present resolve, reflecting Zacchaeus's repentance and faith as a result of encountering Jesus (cp. Luke 3:8; Marshall 1978, 697–98; Nolland 1993b, 906). Luke did not mention Zacchaeus's faith because his actions were an outflow of faith. This recalls the emphasis in Luke 3:8, where John the Baptist said, "Therefore produce fruit consistent with repentance." Repentance proves faith's presence (see comments

on 3:10). The same thing is seen in the episode where the sinful woman washed Jesus' feet (7:36–50). Zacchaeus's encounter with Jesus converted not just his soul but the way he handled money. Rather than taking advantage of people, he would now serve them. Zacchaeus was truly a changed person.

28 When He had said these things, He went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29 As He
approached Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, He sent two of the
disciples 30 and said, "Go into the village ahead of you. As you enter it, you will find a young
donkey tied there, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks
you, 'Why are you untying it? ' say this: 'The Lord needs it.' "
32 So those who were sent left and found it just as He had told them. 33 As they were untying
the young donkey, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the donkey? "
34 "The Lord needs it," they said. 35 Then they brought it to Jesus, and after throwing their
robes on the donkey, they helped Jesus get on it. 36 As He was going along, they were
spreading their robes on the road. 37 Now He came near the path down the Mount of Olives,
and the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the
miracles they had seen:

38 **The King who comes**

in the name of the Lord ' '
is the blessed One.
Peace in heaven
and glory in the highest heaven!

39 Some of the Pharisees from the crowd told Him, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples."
40 He answered, "I tell you, if they were to keep silent, the stones would cry out! "
41 As He approached and saw the city, He wept over it, 42 saying, "If you knew this day what
would bring peace — but now it is hidden from your eyes. 43 For the days will come on you
when your enemies will build an embankment against you, surround you, and hem you in on
every side. 44 They will crush you and your children within you to the ground, and they will not
leave one stone on another in you, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation."
45 He went into the temple complex and began to throw out those who were selling, 46 and He
said, "It is written, **My house will be a house of prayer**, but you have made it **a den of
thieves**! "
47 Every day He was teaching in the temple complex. The chief priests, the scribes, and the
leaders of the people were looking for a way to destroy Him, 48 but they could not find a way
to do it, because all the people were captivated by what they heard.

A young donkey . . . on which no one has ever sat (19:30): How many donkeys were involved in this episode? Luke mentioned only one whereas Matthew 21:2 mentions a donkey and her colt. Most likely Matthew chose to

mention both an adult and juvenile donkey in order to make a more explicit connection to Zechariah 9:9, which says the King will ride "on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." As for Luke's mentioning only one animal, recall the scene in Luke 18:35–43, where Matthew had two blind men but Luke had one. Once again it seems Luke has simplified the scene by narrowing the focus from two participants to one (see comments on 18:35). (See further comments at Matt 21:2 and Mark 11:2.)

The King who comes in the name of the Lord is the blessed One (19:38): Does this chorus necessarily indicate the masses were receiving Jesus as Messiah? After all, Jesus was widely rejected a short time later.

Luke was specific in noting that it was "the whole crowd of the disciples" (v. 37) who called out and hailed Jesus as "the King who comes" (v. 38). The scene, taking place in the midst of the crowded feast celebration, seems to have developed as follows: Jesus rode into town on a donkey, his disciples acknowledged him as king, and others in the crowd who were not disciples joined in the proclamation because they were swept up in the celebratory mood of the festival. This is plausible since it was customary to greet pilgrims entering Jerusalem during festival week.

The sequence is important because the crowds would call for Jesus' condemnation in a few days (23:13–25; John 19:13–16). Many see this turnaround in the public's attitude as improbable and hard to accept. Two issues are involved. First, there is no guarantee that the crowd that called for Jesus' condemnation during his trial was the same crowd that hailed him as he entered Jerusalem on the donkey. Second, as noted in the suggested sequence above, it was Jesus' disciples who drove the praises as he entered Jerusalem (conversely, Jesus' enemies incited the crowd at the trial: Matt 27:20; Mark 15:11). To conclude from the events of Luke 19:36–38 that the general citizenry of Jerusalem had aligned themselves with Jesus is to read too much into the text, especially since the number of disciples entering the city was not a large group—only 120 were said to be present after Jesus died (Acts 1:15). (See further comments at Mark 11:9–10.)

He went into the temple complex and began to throw out those who were selling (19:45): While the Synoptics record Jesus cleansing the temple in the final week of his ministry (Matt 21:12–13; Mark 11:15–19; Luke 19:45–48), John recorded a temple cleansing at the outset of Jesus' ministry (John 2:13–22). Did Jesus cleanse the temple twice, or did John perhaps shift the event forward

for literary reasons?

It is possible Jesus cleansed the temple twice, once early and another time late in his ministry, given some of the differences between the Synoptic and Johannine versions. For instance, John's Gospel cites Psalm 69:9 (John 2:17) whereas the Synoptics do not. However, all things considered it is slightly more likely that John was recounting the same temple cleansing as the Synoptics and has simply shifted the event to an early portion of his Gospel for literary reasons, namely to give readers an early glimpse of the kind of negative reactions Jesus would regularly generate. The temple cleansing fits well with Jesus' last, controversy-filled week, and it figures prominently at his trial (Mark 14:58; John 2:19). (See further comments at John 2:13–23.)

> One day as He was teaching the people in the temple complex and proclaiming the good news,
> the chief priests and the scribes, with the elders, came up 2 and said to Him: "Tell us, by what
> authority are You doing these things? Who is it who gave You this authority? "
> 3 He answered them, "I will also ask you a question. Tell Me, 4 was the baptism of John from
> heaven or from men? "
> 5 They discussed it among themselves: "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why didn't
> you believe him? ' 6 But if we say, 'From men,' all the people will stone us, because they are
> convinced that John was a prophet."
> 7 So they answered that they did not know its origin.
> 8 And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things (20:8): Jesus' evasiveness here is not a sign that he wished to avoid the subject of his authority. Rather, he was simply answering in the same manner as the chief priests, scribes, and elders (v. 7). If they refused to answer, so would he. But rather than putting the matter off indefinitely, Jesus was just saving the answer for later. In Luke 20:41–44 he would raise the issue of his authority by appealing to Psalm 110:1, and in Luke 22:69 he answered most clearly about his authority by saying, "But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the Power of God," setting the stage for his condemnation by the Sanhedrin.

> 9 Then He began to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard, leased it to tenant
> farmers, and went away for a long time. 10 At harvest time he sent a slave to the farmers so that
> they might give him some fruit from the vineyard. But the farmers beat him and sent him away

empty-handed. 11 He sent yet another slave, but they beat that one too, treated him shamefully,
and sent him away empty-handed. 12 And he sent yet a third, but they wounded this one too and
threw him out.

13 “Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What should I do? I will send my beloved son.
Perhaps they will respect him.’

14 “But when the tenant farmers saw him, they discussed it among themselves and said, ‘This
is the heir. Let’s kill him, so the inheritance will be ours! ’ 15 So they threw him out of the
vineyard and killed him.

“Therefore, what will the owner of the vineyard do to them? 16 He will come and destroy
those farmers and give the vineyard to others.”

But when they heard this they said, “No — never! ”

17 But He looked at them and said, “Then what is the meaning of this Scripture: ,

The stone that the builders rejected —
this has become the cornerstone?

18 Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and if it falls on anyone, it will
grind him to powder! ”

19 Then the scribes and the chief priests looked for a way to get their hands on Him that very
hour, because they knew He had told this parable against them, but they feared the people.

Differences in the presentations of this parable: The other Synoptics (Mark 12:1–12; Matt 21:33–46) parallel the parable of the vineyard owner. Variations between these accounts have sparked scholarly discussion.

Luke’s Gospel parallels Mark’s closest in wording. Even so, there are noticeable differences between them (Ellis 1974, 232; Fitzmyer 1985, 1278). First, Luke’s introduction is shorter and does not provide as much detail about the vineyard, reflecting less of the wording from Isaiah 5 (cp. Luke 20:9 and Mark 12:1). Second, Luke spoke of three servants being sent while Mark had several more. Third, in Luke the son was thrown out and then killed, whereas in Mark he was killed first and then thrown out (cp. Luke 20:15 and Mark 12:8). As a result of this difference, Luke portrayed the son as dying outside Jerusalem. Fourth, only in Luke was the son the only one slain. Fifth, Luke is unique in his description of the crowd’s exclamatory reaction (20:16b). Sixth, Luke included a strong statement about judgment. Seventh, Luke’s conclusion to the parable (20:19) was given in his own words (cp. Mark 12:12).

The major difference between Luke’s Gospel and Matthew’s is that Matthew placed the parable between the parable of the Two Sons and the parable of the Marriage of the King’s Son—neither of which Luke included. Matthew 21:39 agrees with Luke in having the son first cast out and then killed, but Matthew differs with Luke (and agrees with Mark) in giving a long description of the

vineyard, in discussing more than three servants, and in depicting the killing of the servants. Matthew has a variety of punishments for the servants (beating, killing, stoning), while Mark has an escalation (beating, beating over the head, killing, some beaten, some killed).

What are we to make of these variations? Apparently the parable circulated widely in the early church and included the diversity we see in the Synoptics. The flexibility in detail and presentation does not rise to a level that makes the versions incompatible. Despite the diversity, each version is clearly depicting the same occasion, and the key point is the same in each version: Israel had repeatedly rejected those whom God has sent to her, and now they were about to reject God's son. This parable in its parallels shows the flexibility in presentation that sometimes takes place in the Synoptics. These differences reflect literary choices of each version, including in some cases bringing out things that in other versions may have been more implicit.

> 27 Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came up and questioned Him:
> 28 "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that **if a man's brother** has a wife, and **dies childless, his brother should take the wife and produce offspring for his brother.** ' 29 Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife and died without children. 30 Also the second 31 and the third took her. In the same way, all seven died and left no children. 32 Finally, the woman died too. 33 In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For all seven had married her."
> 34 Jesus told them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage. 35 But those who are counted worthy to take part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. 36 For they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are sons of God, since they are sons of the resurrection. 37 Moses even indicated in the passage about the burning bush that the dead are raised, where he calls the Lord **the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.** , 38 He is not God of the dead but of the living, because all are living to Him."
> 39 Some of the scribes answered, "Teacher, You have spoken well." 40 And they no longer dared to ask Him anything.

He is not God of the dead but of the living (20:38): Jesus appealed to Exodus 3:6 as if it provides clear evidence for ongoing personal existence after death as well as future bodily resurrection, but does a careful reading of Exodus 3:6 really lead to this conclusion? Some skeptics doubt this, as have non-skeptics. In the episode in question, God revealed his identity to Moses by saying, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"

(Exod 3:6). Note the present tense here, expressed long after the patriarchs had died. (The MT lacks a verb, but the LXX has the present tense form of "to be.") Clearly this remark teaches that God has ongoing existence since his presence has spanned many centuries, and it established for Moses that he was being confronted by the same God who appeared in ages past to the patriarchs. However, in what way did it imply that the deceased patriarchs have an afterlife? The question of life after death does not arise explicitly in this passage; yet the context suggests God is still functioning as God for the patriarchs. That idea assumes some form of afterlife. Was Jesus' handling of this text a rhetorical tactic rather than grammatical-historical exegesis? No, it developed an implication of the text and made it explicit.

Jesus' use of Exodus 3:6 carried a premise: if God is the God of the living and the patriarchs are going to experience all of God's promises expressed to and for them, then they must have ongoing personal existence and will participate in a future bodily resurrection. Jesus could have appealed to Daniel 12:2 for scriptural backing for the doctrine of resurrection, but since the Sadducees held the Torah in highest regard, his use of Exodus was maximally persuasive and was designed to generate some reflection on the topic by bringing out an implication of the Exodus 3 text.

No matter what approach one thinks Jesus was taking to the OT text, the impact of his use of Exodus 3:6 on "some of the scribes" is instructive. They acknowledged he had "spoken well" and they "no longer dared to ask Him anything" (Luke 20:39–40). So whatever we make of Jesus' handling of the Exodus passage, a hostile audience affirmed its legitimacy and effectiveness.

> 41 Then He said to them, "How can they say that the Messiah is the Son of David? 42 For David himself says in the Book of Psalms:
>
> The Lord declared to my Lord,
> **'Sit at My right hand**
> 43 **until I make Your enemies Your footstool.'**
>
> 44 David calls Him 'Lord'; how then can the Messiah be his Son? "

David calls Him "Lord" (20:44): Jesus cited Psalm 110:1, the psalm NT authors most often cited when seeking to ground Jesus' identity and authority in the Scriptures (Acts 2:34; 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3; 7:17, 21; 1 Pet 3:22). Luke and the other Synoptics closely follow the LXX form of Psalm 110:1 (109:1 LXX). Important questions surround this text and Jesus' usage of it.

Did David write Psalm 110? Was it a coronation psalm King David wrote for his son, Solomon? In the Hebrew of Psalm 110:1, the second use of "Lord" is *'adon* rather than YHWH. Does this indicate that the Lord in view here is not divine? Does the citation in Luke 20:42–43 really go back to Jesus, or is it a creation of the early church?

Some argue that Jesus' attribution of this psalm to David was just a generic reference to David as responsible for the Psalter generally and should not be taken to mean David actually authored Psalm 110. An example offered in support of this approach is Acts 4:25, where a group of early Christians attributed Psalm 1 to David even though the MT does not do so. One common view says the speaker in Psalm 110 was a prophet (Kraus 1989, 346–47), but this conflicts both with Jesus' argument (Jesus' argument is invalid if David does not stand behind Ps 110 as at least the speaker of v. 1) and with the first-century belief that David wrote this psalm.

Psalm 110 may capture David's inspired declaration given to Solomon (Chisholm 1991, 271–72). In this scenario David's declaration could have been recorded and passed on as an expression of the Davidic line's regal hope. If the psalm was used as a declaration of Davidic hope, a prophet may have conveyed David's words to each new king, reflecting David's hope that his descendant would be worthy of the dynastic hope and would fulfill God's promises. Thus the text looks ultimately to the realization of promise the Davidic dynasty is to bring. David could look up to such a king even though this king was his descendant.

Psalm 110 (a royal psalm and likely a coronation psalm as well) depicts the king's authority and may be related to battle preparation. The language is highly idealized; the king is a warrior-priest who represents God on the earth. The command to "sit at My right hand" implies the conveyance of protection, power, and authority to rule. The phrase also calls to mind God's presence or the place of blessing (Pss 16:8, 11; 48:10) or power (Pss 17:7; 18:35; 20:6; 21:8; 44:3; 60:5; 63:8; 77:10; 121:5). A close parallel is found in Psalm 45:9, where the queen stands at the king's right hand. Sitting at the right hand of God expresses the rule entrusted to the person in this position, plus his connection with God.

As to the identity of "my Lord" in Psalm 110:1, Jesus was asking how this could be a reference merely to David's son if David called him by the title *Lord*. In raising this question Jesus did not mean to deny his Davidic sonship, but rather he affirmed that the Messiah transcends David as Lord. In this light the key title to associate with the figure in Psalm 110:1 is *Lord*, not merely *son of*

David. This title, plus his position at the right hand of God, suggests a superiority of the Messiah over the dynastic head. Who can be greater than Israel's beloved King David? Jesus left his listeners to ponder this question. Jesus himself would provide greater clarity later (Luke 22:66–71).

Many scholars argue that Luke 20:41–44 is a creation of the early church and not an authentic saying of Jesus (e.g., Hahn 1969, 104–5). A basis for this argument is the assumed use of the Septuagint, with its ambiguous use of *kurios* for "Lord." The Hebrew of Psalm 110 distinguishes between God and the figure who is commanded to sit at his right side; YHWH (Yahweh) refers to God and *'adon* (Lord) to the regal figure at his side. But this argument ignores the first-century practice of rendering texts orally and not pronouncing the divine name YHWH. Therefore the ambiguity in Luke's text possibly reflects an ambiguity in both Hebrew and Aramaic when the text was presented orally (Bock 1987, 130–31, 331). This shows Jesus could easily be the source of this saying. As for the question of whether the use of *'adon* in the Hebrew at Psalm 110:1 excludes the possibility that the figure at the right hand is divine, note that Psalm 114:7 and Malachi 3:1 both clearly use *'adon* in reference to God. Another factor arguing for Jesus as originator of this saying is the fact that the present passage leaves the reader pondering the question, Who is the Lord who is able to sit at God's side in heaven? The early church was avid to state high Christology in clear terms, so if they had created this saying, it likely would have portrayed Jesus as stating the point more directly (Keener 2009, 270). Read as a statement in the way Jesus presented it, the remark was arguing that the Lord of David is able to sit with God in heaven. This forced the audience to consider what that act said about who that figure is. Who can sit with God and share the divine presence?

So the psalm was originally about Israel's king and expressed a hope that he would be the one to show full authority as David's promised King-priest. When Jesus later tied this passage to God's vindication of him in his resurrection and ascension into heaven (Luke 22:69), it is clear that by "Lord" Jesus meant not merely a human "lord" but a Lord who has heavenly authority shared with God. This explains why the ancestor (David) could ascribe superior honor to a descendant (the Lord Jesus).

Jesus was applying the psalm to himself in an escalated typological-prophetic sense. It applied to him in a pattern (or type) that reflected Israel's kingship authority from God, except there was a "plus" factor (an escalation): Jesus saw the original promise as entailing an exalted heavenly authority and not merely the earthly authority of a regular king or kingdom. As Keener says it, "If he is

David's 'lord,' enthroned not simply in Jerusalem but at God's right hand, how can he be his 'son'?" (Keener 2009, 270). The answer is that he is son to David in a lesser sense than he is David's Lord. In addition, this Lord sharing God's presence implies much more about his person than his merely being a normal regal figure. (See further comments at Mark 12:35–37.)

5 As some were talking about the temple complex, how it was adorned with beautiful stones
and gifts dedicated to God, He said, 6 "These things that you see — the days will come when
not one stone will be left on another that will not be thrown down! "
7 "Teacher," they asked Him, "so when will these things be? And what will be the sign when
these things are about to take place? "
8 Then He said, "Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in My name,
saying, 'I am He,' and, 'The time is near.' Don't follow them. 9 When you hear of wars and
rebellions, don't be alarmed. Indeed, these things must take place first, but the end won't come
right away."
10 Then He told them: "Nation will be raised up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.
11 There will be violent earthquakes, and famines and plagues in various places, and there will
be terrifying sights and great signs from heaven. 12 But before all these things, they will lay
their hands on you and persecute you. They will hand you over to the synagogues and prisons,
and you will be brought before kings and governors because of My name. 13 It will lead to an
opportunity for you to witness. , 14 Therefore make up your minds not to prepare your defense
ahead of time, 15 for I will give you such words , and a wisdom that none of your adversaries
will be able to resist or contradict. 16 You will even be betrayed by parents, brothers, relatives,
and friends. They will kill some of you. 17 You will be hated by everyone because of My name,
18 but not a hair of your head will be lost. 19 By your endurance gain your lives.
20 "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that its desolation has
come near. 21 Then those in Judea must flee to the mountains! Those inside the city must leave
it, and those who are in the country must not enter it, 22 because these are days of vengeance to
fulfill all the things that are written. 23 Woe to pregnant women and nursing mothers in those
days, for there will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. 24 They will fall
by the edge of the sword and be led captive into all the nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled
by the Gentiles , until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.
25 "Then there will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars; and there will be anguish on the earth
among nations bewildered by the roaring sea and waves. 26 People will faint from fear and
expectation of the things that are coming on the world, because the celestial powers will be
shaken. 27 Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.
28 But when these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your
redemption is near! "

29 Then He told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. 30 As soon as they put
out leaves you can see for yourselves and recognize that summer is already near. 31 In the same
way, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near. 32 I
assure you: This generation will certainly not pass away until all things take place. 33 Heaven
and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away.
34 “Be on your guard, so that your minds are not dulled from carousing, drunkenness, and
worries of life, or that day will come on you unexpectedly 35 like a trap. For it will come on all
who live on the face of the whole earth. 36 But be alert at all times, praying that you may have
strength to escape all these things that are going to take place and to stand before the Son of
Man.”
37 During the day, He was teaching in the temple complex, but in the evening He would go
out and spend the night on what is called the Mount of Olives. 38 Then all the people would
come early in the morning to hear Him in the temple complex.

Is this discourse a creation of the early church? Critics suggest these verses, which predict persecution for believers and destruction of the Jerusalem temple, were put onto Jesus’ lips after the early church began suffering persecution and the temple was destroyed. In this way the authors provided suffering believers with the comforting thought that Jesus had foreseen their troubles. Is this a correct assessment of the origin of this passage?

The argument that the church created this discourse after the temple’s destruction in ad 70 underestimates the influence of covenantal teaching as a background to Jesus’ remarks. Deuteronomy 28–32 includes statements teaching that if the nation were unfaithful to God, then judgment would come to Israel through the nations. So if Jesus believed the nation had missed the time of visitation from God through the Messiah (Luke 13:31–35; 19:41–44), he could easily have anticipated the judgment he outlined on the basis of OT teachings. Arguably he would not even have needed divine foreknowledge to make these predictions. The idea that Jesus’ rejected followers would be brought before synagogues and kings was supported by the precedent of countless times when God’s people were rejected (e.g., the events documented in 2 and 4 Maccabees), not to mention the opposition Jesus sometimes faced there himself. And the idea that Rome would besiege Jerusalem was in keeping with this being a regular Roman method of warfare. In conclusion, none of the things Jesus said in this passage requires an after-the-fact vantage point. Therefore the argument that the early church created this discourse is unsubstantiated.

In addition to the above points that suggest Jesus could have read the circumstances and guessed what was coming, for those accepting Jesus as the incarnate Son of God, there is no difficulty in believing he foreknew the troubles

that awaited his followers.

Differences in the versions of this speech: Much discussion surrounds the differences between Luke 21:5–38 and the parallels in Matthew 24 and Mark 13. Do the differences signal disagreement between the Evangelists? Jesus' apocalyptic speech is a prophecy based in pattern (the destruction of the temple pictures a time like the end). He predicted that what would take place in Jerusalem in the short term (ad 70) would mirror what would happen again in the long term (the end times). As a result of this similarity and the resulting ambiguity about which portion of the pattern is in view, an author recounting Jesus' discourse could justifiably emphasize events on either end of the pattern. Luke's speech emphasized Jerusalem's desolation and fall in the near term, whereas Matthew focused primarily on the long term: the end of the pattern in the end-times events. The opening questions that set up the discourses demonstrate this difference, as Matthew 24:3 explicitly speaks of the end time coming in a way Mark 13:4 and Luke 21:7 do not. Luke lacks reference to coming tribulation (Mark 13:8) and omits the remark expressing uncertainty about the hour or day (Mark 13:32). Overall Luke's version is less apocalyptic in tone since he differentiated events that are not a part of the end from those that are (Tiede 1988, 355). For Luke, Jerusalem's fall in ad 70 was part of God's judgment and pictured the end. By showing that these climactic events were part of God's plan, Luke reassured his readers that God directs history. They would see confirmation of this as the events of ad 70 unfolded, and that confirmation would assure them that the rest of God's plan would be fulfilled as well.

Among other points Luke made uniquely, we find the most important in verse 12, where he noted that the persecution would take place "before all these things." By this he meant that the events of persecution would come before other events he had just noted, and even the latter did not yet belong to the end times. This temporal marker helps to clarify the progress of the speech in Luke. Luke 21:12–19 runs backwards in time towards the time of the disciples (like a recorded video in reverse). Verses 25–28 focus on the events that relate to the return of Jesus in the end times. Another key difference is Luke's mention of "its desolation" in verse 20, a reference to the general fall of the city of Jerusalem. This is distinct from Matthew's and Mark's "abomination that causes desolation" (Matt 24:15; Mark 13:14), where the focus is specifically on the desecration of the temple. Matthew even told us he was referring to the destruction "spoken of by the prophet Daniel" (Matt 24:15; cp. Dan 9:27). These differences illustrate how each writer has looked at distinct places in the pattern of events that mirror

each other. Mark's account seems to reflect the full ambiguity of the speech the most. Matthew focused on the time of the end, while Luke drew more attention to the events that would unfold in Jerusalem a few decades after Jesus' death and resurrection.

The Festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called Passover, was drawing near. 2 The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to put Him to death, because they were afraid of the people.

3 Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, who was numbered among the Twelve. 4 He went away and discussed with the chief priests and temple police how he could hand Him over to them. 5 They were glad and agreed to give him silver. 6 So he accepted the offer and started looking for a good opportunity to betray Him to them when the crowd was not present.

7 Then the Day of Unleavened Bread came when the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. 8 Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover meal for us, so we can eat it."

9 "Where do You want us to prepare it? " they asked Him.

10 "Listen," He said to them, "when you've entered the city, a man carrying a water jug will meet you. Follow him into the house he enters. 11 Tell the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks you, "Where is the guest room where I can eat the Passover with My disciples? " ' 12 Then he will show you a large, furnished room upstairs. Make the preparations there."

13 So they went and found it just as He had told them, and they prepared the Passover.

14 When the hour came, He reclined at the table, and the apostles with Him. 15 Then He said to them, "I have fervently desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. 16 For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." 17 Then He took a cup, and after giving thanks, He said, "Take this and share it among yourselves. 18 For I tell you, from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."

19 And He took bread, gave thanks, broke it, gave it to them, and said, "This is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me."

20 In the same way He also took the cup after supper and said, "This cup is the new covenant established by My blood; it is shed for you. 21 But look, the hand of the one betraying Me is at the table with Me! 22 For the Son of Man will go away as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed! "

23 So they began to argue among themselves which of them it could be who was going to do this thing.

24 Then a dispute also arose among them about who should be considered the greatest. 25 But He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles dominate them, and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' 26 But it must not be like that among you. On the contrary, whoever is greatest among you must become like the youngest, and whoever leads, like the one serving. 27 For who is greater, the one at the table or the one serving? Isn't it the one at the

table? But I am among you as the One who serves. 28 You are the ones who stood by Me in My
trials. 29 I bestow on you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one on Me, 30 so that you
may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom. And you will sit on thrones judging the 12 tribes
of Israel.
31 "Simon, Simon, look out! Satan has asked to sift you like wheat. 32 But I have prayed for
you that your faith may not fail. And you, when you have turned back, strengthen your
brothers."
33 "Lord," he told Him, "I'm ready to go with You both to prison and to death! "
34 "I tell you, Peter," He said, "the rooster will not crow today until you deny three times that
you know Me! "
35 He also said to them, "When I sent you out without money-bag, traveling bag, or sandals,
did you lack anything? "
"Not a thing," they said.
36 Then He said to them, "But now, whoever has a money-bag should take it, and also a
traveling bag. And whoever doesn't have a sword should sell his robe and buy one. 37 For I tell
you, what is written must be fulfilled in Me: **And He was counted among the outlaws.** Yes,
what is written about Me is coming to its fulfillment."
38 "Lord," they said, "look, here are two swords." "Enough of that! " He told them.

Passover, was drawing near (22:1): The parallel account in Matthew has Jesus making a betrayal prediction two days before Passover (Matt 26:2). Mark does not have Jesus making the prediction, but as narrator Mark stated, "The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a treacherous way to arrest and kill Him" (Mark 14:1). It is easy to imagine these scenarios coinciding; Jesus predicted his betrayal even as the chief priests and scribes were plotting it. Like Mark, Luke chose to omit Jesus' betrayal prediction at this juncture, saving it for the Lord's Supper, where Jesus again made the prediction (Luke 22:14–23; cp. Matt 26:21; Mark 14:18). Luke's failure to mention Jesus' prediction in the present passage does not signal disagreement with Matthew.

Day of Unleavened Bread . . . when the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed (22:7): The timing and exact identity of this meal is much discussed because John seems to portray Jesus' Jewish opponents as being concerned about their possible disqualification from the Passover meal on the morning of Jesus' crucifixion (John 18:28), which leads to the conclusion that Jesus was slain at the time when Passover lambs were killed. Further, John seems specifically to place the Lord's Supper prior to the Passover Feast (John 13:1), in contrast with the Synoptics.

Those who seek to harmonize the accounts usually accept the chronology in the Synoptics and argue that John alluded to the Passover week generally and not the meal specifically by his remarks at 18:28. Passover ran immediately into the

long feast of Unleavened Bread, which ran for a week. All of it could be considered the time of Passover or the time of Unleavened Bread. Others who accept the Synoptics chronology conclude that John shifted the event for thematic purposes, which allows for the coincidence of Jesus' crucifixion and the slaying of Passover lambs throughout the city. Marshall, however, argues for the accuracy of John's chronology, saying it makes the events of the trial more straightforward (see Marshall in Bock and Webb 2009, 541–60). If so, the Synoptics have Jesus giving this meal, which technically was not the Passover meal, a strong Passover connection.

This last proposal, favoring John, is difficult for many interpreters to accept, which is why most believe John is alluding to the emphasis on ceremonial cleanliness during Passover week generally at John 18:28 and not the Passover meal itself. The fact that the entire Festival week could be named after a single event (the Passover) creates ambiguity in the span of the holiday. This is much like our Christmas season, where Christmas parties and family gatherings regularly occur on days other than December 25, but we nevertheless refer to them as Christmas celebrations. (See further comments at Mark 14:12 and John 18:28.)

This is My body . . . This cup is . . . My blood (22:19–20): Did Jesus mean for Christians to believe they are literally consuming his flesh and blood during the Lord's Supper? The Catholic tradition sees a "transubstantiation," where the Supper literally becomes the body and blood of Jesus and serves as a sacrament bringing grace. This explains their emphasis on the mass. Some Protestant traditions speak of Jesus' presence around the elements, a concept known as "consubstantiation." This was Luther's view. Most Protestants see in the Supper a symbolic connection to Jesus with nothing "special" happening to the elements. The Supper functions as a form of remembrance and is tied to Passover, which commemorates the Exodus, the first great act of divine salvation for Israel. The meal had symbolic and covenantal associations that Jesus reconfigured around his death. This suggests a symbolic view of the elements. Still the Supper also served as a covenantal meal, a type of corporate declaration and affirmation of association with God that this death and symbolism bring. In other words, the meal is more than just a memorial. It is also a corporate statement of allegiance by those who share in it. (See further comments at Mark 14:22–24.)

***Variations in the wording at the Supper* (22:14–23):** There are two versions of

the wording at the table: Matthew 26:26–29 and Mark 14:22–25 are parallel, while 1 Corinthians 11:23–25 and Luke 22:19–20 are similar. The differences point to interpretive and explanatory divergence in the oral tradition surrounding this event. There was some flexibility in reporting the words and their meaning. It is not unlike the variations in wording we have seen elsewhere in the Gospels (see comments on 1:2; 1:3). The variations do not change the meaning of the original saying, but serve to draw out its force.

Related to this discussion, some Lucan manuscripts lack verses 19b-20. Did Luke originally have the "long" text of 22:17–20, yielding the sequence cup-bread-cup (P^{75}, ℵ, A, B, C, L, T, W, Δ, Θ, Ψ, family 1, family 13, Byz, Lect, some Itala, Vulgate, some Syriac, some Coptic)? Or is the "short" text of 22:17–19a original instead, yielding the sequence cup-bread (D, some Itala)? Westcott and Hort (1881, 1:177) and Creed (1930, 263–65) adopted the shorter reading. Their chief reason was the difficulty of seeing how the shorter text could have emerged from the longer text. Supporters of the shorter reading also appeal to *Didache* 9 (Luce 1933, 330). However, we should accept the long text due to strong support in the manuscripts and because it is the more difficult reading, introducing as it does a second cup that lacks parallels in the other accounts. (See further comments at Mark 14:22–24.)

A dispute also arose among them about who should be considered the greatest (22:24): Jesus had foretold his execution several times at this point, and he had just said that he desired to eat the Passover with the disciples before his suffering occurred and that one of the disciples was set to betray him. Given this backdrop, how could the disciples dare to debate who among them was the greatest? Does it seem believable that they could be of such a mindset at this time? Mark 10:39–45 records a similar event in which James and John vied for positions of privilege directly after Jesus' third prediction of his death. Jesus took that opportunity to teach all the disciples about humility. How could the disciples be in need of the same lesson so soon afterwards?

This scene is so unflattering to the disciples that it is clear the discussion is not a creation of the early church. Given the importance of the disciples, no one in the church would invent a story to make them look so bad. Thus despite the bad image it gives the disciples, we should accept this scene as authentic. Even so, some interpreters find the present scene so difficult that they suggest Luke has shifted an earlier discussion here (Mark 10:39–45). This is possible but not likely. The fact that the disciples had come into Jerusalem hoping Jesus would

bring the kingdom and affirm his place of authority secures the plausibility of the scene. The triumphal entry would have pushed their thoughts further in this direction, prompting them to discuss the coming kingdom and their roles in it. The temptation to ambition in this setting is not surprising, especially since to this point they had failed to accept or even comprehend Jesus' predictions of death. It should not astound us that Jesus had to repeat the lesson on humility. Humility is hard to manifest in the context of such great personal expectations as the disciples entertained at the dawn of the kingdom.

Satan has asked to sift you like wheat (22:31): Since Peter denied Christ a short time after Jesus prayed for him (22:54–62), are we to conclude that Jesus' prayer for Peter failed? Jesus prayed that Simon's faith would not fail in the ultimate sense, but this does not mean he prayed that Peter would not cave in temporarily. Jesus' telling Peter, "When you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (v. 32) proves that Jesus expected Peter's short-term failure. Peter's post-resurrection ministry as chronicled in the book of Acts powerfully demonstrated the efficaciousness of Jesus' prayer. (see further comments at Matt 26:69–70.)

The rooster (22:34): Were people allowed to keep chickens in Jerusalem? Some critics say *m. Baba Qamma* 7.7 shows this was disallowed, which calls into question the historicity of Jesus' prediction about the rooster crowing. However, Nolland (1993b, 1073) noted that the reference in *m. Baba Qamma* 7.7 forbidding chickens in Jerusalem is probably a later idealization and not an accurate reflection of the historical situation in Jesus' day, thus posing no challenge to Jesus' prediction. (See further comments at Mark 14:27–31 and John 13:38.)

Matthew 26:34 and John 13:38 agree with Luke that Jesus predicted only one rooster crow, but Mark 14:30 has Jesus saying Peter's denial would come "before the rooster crows twice." So how many times was the rooster to crow? This question probably reads too much into the level of precision that these accounts are to convey. The point the Evangelists sought to make was that Jesus predicted Peter would deny him on the very day in which Peter proclaimed he would lay down his life for Jesus. In fact it would happen even before sunrise, which is heralded by roosters. Possibly Jesus had in mind the third of four Roman watches, corresponding to midnight to 3:00 a.m. This watch was known as the "crowing of the rooster" (Mark 13:35). (See further comments at Matt 26:34, Mark 14:68, and John 13:38.)

Deny three times that you know Me! (22:34): Matthew 26:30–35 and Mark 14:26–31 place the predictions of Peter's denial and the scattering of the disciples on the journey to the garden, whereas Luke included only the prediction of Peter's denial, which is placed during the Lord's Supper before the journey is undertaken (see Luke 22:39). John split the predictions between the Supper and the journey, with Peter's denial predicted at the Supper and the scattering predicted on the way to the garden. Do these differences represent contradictions?

We have another example of proximate description of timing here. The meal scene is a complex of events involving both the meal itself and the walk to the garden of Gethsemane as the topics discussed at the meal spilled over into the journey. Sometimes a proximate chronology was all the evangelists cared to give. This afforded them the chance to place certain details in different order without compromising the meaning and importance of the events.

Here are two swords (22:38): In response to the disciples bringing forth two swords, Jesus said, "Enough of that!" Other translations render Jesus' response "It is enough" (KJV; ESV) or "That is enough" (NIV). These renderings are accurate but do not hint at the possibility that the phrase was a Semitic expression that amounted to a dismissal of the gesture made by the disciples. Jesus was not interested in an inventory of weapons that would support engaging in violence. Absent a signal of the dismissive element, readers could reach the mistaken conclusion that Jesus was endorsing the use of violence in his struggle against his opponents. Plummer (1896, 507) and Marshall (1978, 827) saw Jesus' expression as dismissive here based on evidence from Genesis 45:28; Exodus 9:28; Deuteronomy 3:26; 1 Kings 19:4; 1 Chronicles 21:15; and 1 Maccabees 2:33. Fitzmyer (1985, 1434) and Rengstorf (*TDNT* 3:295–96), however, doubted such an idiomatic expression was present in Jesus' response. If Jesus' statement in Luke 22:38 was not dismissive, then it was a figurative way of saying the disciples would now need to watch out for their well being. Jesus was not saying the disciples would need to fight violently to defend themselves.

Consideration of the broader context supports the suggestion that we should indeed take Jesus' response to the two swords as dismissive of using violence. Recall that when Jesus was arrested, Peter drew a sword and sliced off the ear of Malchus, the high priest's slave (John 18:10). Had Jesus meant in Luke 22:38 that swords were germane to his cause, he would not have objected to Peter's action. However, Jesus did in fact object to Peter's action: "Sheathe your sword! Am I not to drink the cup the Father has given to Me?" (John 18:11).

39 He went out and made His way as usual to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed
Him. 40 When He reached the place, He told them, “Pray that you may not enter into
temptation.” 41 Then He withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and began to
pray, 42 “Father, if You are willing, take this cup away from Me — nevertheless, not My will,
but Yours, be done.”
[43 Then an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. 44 Being in anguish, He
prayed more fervently, and His sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground.]
45 When He got up from prayer and came to the disciples, He found them sleeping, exhausted
from their grief. 46 “Why are you sleeping? ” He asked them. “Get up and pray, so that you
won’t enter into temptation.”

His sweat became like drops of blood (22:44): Two questions surround this incident. First, there is the question of whether the text is original. Second, does the text mean to teach that Jesus literally sweated drops of blood?

First we cover the textual problem. The originality of 22:43–44 is at question due to divided manuscript evidence. Supporting the exclusion of these verses are P^{69} (apparently), P^{75}, 1) ℵst copyist), B, A, T, W, some Syriac, and Marcion. In contrast to this, ℵ (original and second copyist), D, L, Γ, Θ, Ψ, Byz, most Itala, some Syriac, and Justin Martyr all support including these verses as original to Luke. The external evidence is also divided, in that the dates of manuscripts slightly favor omission of the verses, while considerations of family distribution favor their inclusion.

Fitzmyer (1985, 1444) cautiously rejected the disputed verses because (1) their omission involves the shorter reading, and the shorter reading is typically preferred, (2) they have no Synoptic parallel, (3) it is atypical for Luke to note emotion, (4) the longer text is absent from the oldest manuscript (P^{75}), and (5) the longer text shows hortatory concerns, which may suggest an early-church origin (so also Nolland 1993b, 1080–81, 1084). These considerations are not definitive, however, and can be countered as follows: (1) Preference for the “shorter-text” may not be valid when whole verses are missing; (2) the absence of a Synoptic parallel is irrelevant since these verses may have been omitted from some Lucan manuscripts because they lacked such a parallel (i.e., a copyist omitted them in an attempt to harmonize Luke with the other Gospel accounts); (3) while it is true that Luke tends to avoid emotion, other details, such as the prayer, are typical Lucan emphases; (4) to reduce the decision chiefly to one manuscript (P^{75}) seems unadvisable; and (5) the presence of hortatory concerns

is not a cogent reason for rejection since there is no reason Luke's original text cannot have included exhortation. Besides, it is not clear that the additional text actually should be taken as an exhortation, so this point may be irrelevant to the question of the text's origin.

Important early witnesses to include the text are א* and Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 103.8. Numerous scholars favor including the verses as original (Ernst 1977, 605; Marshall 1978, 831–32, does so with hesitation; Danker 1988, 356; Goulder 1989, 741–42, who finds the case for inclusion "overwhelming"). R. Brown (1994, 180–86) identified points of style in these verses that fit Luke, and he also argued they may have been pulled out by a scribe who felt they suggested angels had helped Jesus, a point that may have seemed to make Jesus too human in the midst of the Christological controversies of the second century (also Wiefel 1988, 377). Like Brown, Neyrey (1985, 59–62) noted details that fit Luke's style and concluded the text is original. He also noted the contrast and parallel of these verses to the aftermath of Jesus' temptations. In Matthew 4:11 and Mark 1:13 angels aided Jesus after the temptations, but in Luke 4:13 all that is said is that the Devil "departed from Him for a time." Then in Luke 22:31, Jesus signaled the return of Satan, and Satan's presence was again indicated in 22:53 by the reference to the dominion of darkness. The reference to angelic aid, which Luke chose not to mention in 4:13, is thus appropriate in 22:43–44, since Jesus was facing the temptation to avoid death.

In conclusion, it is likely that the verses were original to Luke, but the textual variants and their distribution do indicate some uncertainty on this. If we omit the verses the question of whether Jesus literally sweated blood becomes moot. However, even if we include the verses, readers should not take the text to say that Jesus literally sweated blood. Luke is making a comparison; Jesus' sweat drops were large like drops of blood flowing from a wound. The scene portrays intense emotion as Jesus faced death. Overall, this fits Luke's careful portrayal of Jesus' humanity.

54 They seized Him, led Him away, and brought Him into the high priest's house. Meanwhile
Peter was following at a distance. 55 They lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down
together, and Peter sat among them. 56 When a servant saw him sitting in the firelight, and
looked closely at him, she said, "This man was with Him too."

57 But he denied it: "Woman, I don't know Him! "

58 After a little while, someone else saw him and said, “You’re one of them too! ”
“Man, I am not! ” Peter said.
59 About an hour later, another kept insisting, “This man was certainly with Him, since he’s also a Galilean.”
60 But Peter said, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about! ” Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. 61 Then the Lord turned and looked at Peter. So Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times.” 62 And he went outside and wept bitterly.
63 The men who were holding Jesus started mocking and beating Him. 64 After blindfolding Him, they kept asking, “Prophesy! Who hit You? ” 65 And they were saying many other blasphemous things against Him.
66 When daylight came, the elders of the people, both the chief priests and the scribes, convened and brought Him before their Sanhedrin. 67 They said, “If You are the Messiah, tell us.”
But He said to them, “If I do tell you, you will not believe. 68 And if I ask you, you will not answer. 69 But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the Power of God.”
70 They all asked, “Are You, then, the Son of God? ”
And He said to them, “You say that I am.”
71 “Why do we need any more testimony,” they said, “since we’ve heard it ourselves from His mouth? ”

Man, I am not! (22:58): Does Luke 22:58 contradict Matthew 26:71 and Mark 14:69, both of which say a woman or women prompted Peter’s denials rather than a man? A detailed comparison of the parallels (including John) reveals a conversation involving many different people through the course of Peter’s denial of Jesus. A woman gave the first challenge in Luke (Luke 22:56–57), which fits easily with Matthew and Mark. The second challenge in Luke is at 22:58, and asserted that Peter was “one of them too!” Peter’s reply makes it clear that a man voiced the challenge: “Man [Gk *anthrōpe*], I am not.” John 18:25 has the group of bystanders say to Peter, “You aren’t one of His disciples too, are you?” This parallels the man’s challenge in Luke 22:58, and prompts Peter to declare, “I am not!” The issue is whether men and women as a group made the identification at points, something “bystanders” makes likely, even if there was a spokesperson for the group at points. Of the four denial accounts, John and Luke stand closest. (See further comments at Matt 26:71.)

The Lord turned and looked at Peter (22:61): Was Jesus kept outdoors during the proceedings? Otherwise how was he able to turn and look at Peter? But the text explicitly says Jesus was led “into the high priest’s house” (v. 54). In this

scene we should think of the common structure of ancient houses of wealthy people in Jerusalem. The high priest's house would have had an open atrium or courtyard area in the middle with rooms built around it. These rooms opened to the atrium via large archways, allowing for easy access back and forth from the atrium and for circulation of air. In this way, Jesus could be in the house and yet catch a glimpse of Peter, who was standing in the courtyard.

***Sources for Jesus' trial testimony* (22:68–70):** Critics sometimes reject the authenticity of Jesus' statements at the trial due to uncertainty about sources. After all, the disciples were not present to record Jesus' words. However, it is safe to say the Jewish leadership would have been eager to make the details of the trial widely known in an attempt to justify their decision in the public debate that certainly followed Jesus' execution. Given the radical nature of Jesus' statements, their case would have seemed open and shut to many observers. Even apart from the leaders intentionally spreading the word, many people attended the trial and would have spread the details without needing express permission to do so.

The Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the Power of God (22:69): For those who deny that Jesus taught his divinity, his answer here and the response of the religious leadership both present stumbling blocks. So clear was Jesus' assertion that it ended up being the basis of his conviction by the religious authorities. By all appearances Jesus was subject to the judgment of the religious leadership at this scene where they were examining him to bring evidence before Pilate, but ironically he said the reverse was true. Jesus' reply drew on Psalm 110 and answered the dilemma he posed about messiahship in Luke 20:41–44, where he indicated it was more important to see the Messiah as David's Lord than as his son. At the examination he said from that point on he was to be understood to be the Son of Man (i.e., Lord) who would be seated at the Father's side. (This was not technically a trial, since the Jews could not render a death verdict; only Rome could do that.) A few days later it became clear that the allusion to being seated at God's side was fulfilled in the supernatural complex of resurrection and ascension (see comments at Luke 24:50–51). Peter's speech in Acts 2:30–36 completed this development by using Psalm 110 to show that the ascension to God's right hand resulted in Jesus functioning as a mediatorial vice regent at God's side. A major point of Acts 2 is that Jesus' sitting in heaven initially fulfills the Davidic promise that a descendant would sit on David's throne (2 Sam 7:12–16). Jesus' coming

sovereignty is declared in his sitting at the right hand of God, a figure of speech indicating rule (Exod 11:5; 12:29; 1 Kgs 1:17; 3:6; 8:25; 1 Chr 17:16). Judaism believed that God is so transcendent that angels had to serve as mediators between God and humans, so Jesus' claim that he would soon sit at God's right hand would inevitably elicit strong reactions. Thus the council declared that no other witnesses were needed in Jesus' trial, for he had condemned himself with his own statement (Luke 22:71).

But Jesus' mention of sitting at the right hand of God is not the only suggested trigger of his condemnation. Scholars have given at least five different suggestions to explain what it was about Jesus' statement(s) that got him condemned (Catchpole 1965; Marcus 1989; Schaberg 1989; Gundry 1990; C. A. Evans 1991):

(1) the claim to be the Messiah (Mark 14:62)
(2) the claim to be the Son of God (Luke 22:70)
(3) the word against the temple (Mark 14:58)
(4) the use of the divine name in the reply "I am" (Mark 14:62)
(5) the claim to sit at God's right hand (Luke 22:69)

Each of these can be taken as indication of Jesus' divinity, but which one was the chief cause of Jesus' condemnation? According to some Jewish sources a person was not considered to be guilty of formal blasphemy unless he pronounced the divine name, YHWH (*m. Sanhedrin* 7.5), though some sources prior to the Mishnah held that a person could be charged with blasphemy on other grounds, such as impugning God's person or attributes (Hooker 1967, 172) or profaning the Shekinah (*m. Sanhedrin* 6.4), as Rabbi Akiva was said to have done when he argued that David would have a session at God's right hand (*b. Sanhedrin* 38b). Catchpole (1965) concluded that merely claiming to be the Messiah was not considered blasphemy, and that Jesus' use of the divine name in his "I am" statement is too debatable to have been the cause of his conviction.

What about Jesus' words against the temple? This kind of offense had the potential to get him convicted, but the charges did not stick (Mark 14:55–59), and Luke did not even mention the temple charges, which means they could not have formed the basis of Jesus' conviction in his Gospel. Jesus' use of the title "Son of God" (Luke 22:69) is also unlikely to have formed the basis of his conviction, for the Synoptics use this title to explain his claim to be the Messiah. The claim to be the Messiah was not of itself considered blasphemous.

This leaves option 5, Jesus' claim about sitting at God's right hand, as the cause of his conviction. All of the Synoptics have Jesus making this statement.

Jesus' claim was seen as blasphemous due to the heightened emphasis on God's transcendence in Judaism at that time, an emphasis preserving God's holiness and identity as the one true God who alone should receive honor. Practical results from this included hesitation to pronounce or even write the divine name (e.g., some Qumran documents have an ellipsis in substitution for the divine name; in others, the term *'adonai* [Lord] is substituted for YHWH [Yahweh]; Byington 1957) and the alteration of anthropomorphisms in the LXX and Targums to lessen the impression that God has human characteristics. In this context, any notion of coming into God's presence without having first undergone cultic purification and without coming for the express purpose of worshiping God would be seen as insulting the deity's uniqueness. Biblical figures who went into God's presence were first cleansed (cp. Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1). In early rabbinic tradition, only God sits in heaven. One may stand in His presence, but never sit. Thus, when Jesus said that he could sit at God's side, he profaned God's person in the view of the Jewish leaders, and they understood the implications Jesus intended: that he was the Judge over them rather than vice versa.

***Absence of allusion to Daniel 7* (22:69):** The Synoptic parallels (Matt 26:64; Mark 14:62) have Jesus making allusion to Daniel 7:13 at an evening examination before the Sanhedrin. This clear image of Jesus' deity is absent in Luke's account of a morning hearing before the Sanhedrin, though he included reference to it earlier (Luke 21:27). The allusion to Daniel 7 in Matthew and Mark is noteworthy for two reasons: (1) Jesus is portrayed as a *supra*natural figure, since the OT illustrates God's sovereign rule over the earth in this way (Exod 14:20; 34:5; Num 10:34; Ps 104:3; Isa 19:1; Bock 1987, 134–35), and (2) the order of events makes it clear that Jesus was speaking of a literal return from heaven and thus indicating his return to judge.

Two considerations may help explain the absence of the Daniel 7 allusion in Luke's account of the Sanhedrin trial. First, it may simply be a result of Luke reporting a distinct point in the examination in which Jesus did not allude to Daniel. Second, the basic point that Jesus made in all three Synoptics was his heavenly session at God's right hand, which assumes that he will rule from the side of God and go directly into his presence. Jesus is the Judge and the religious authorities had no final authority over him—a point made in all three Synoptics.

You say that I am (22:70): Jesus' reply may seem vague at first glance. Some have even seen it as a denial of his divine sonship. But Jesus' reply is best seen

as reflecting the fact that the leaders asked the question not from sincerity, but from a desire to elicit a condemning confession from Jesus. For this reason Jesus was intentionally ambivalent in his response (see comments on 23:3). Some have described the response has as a “grudging admission” (Marshall 1978, 851; BDF §441:3), and Vermes (1973, 148–49) said it is equivalent to “this is what you infer.” It should not be seen as an unqualified “yes” (*contra* Dalman 1909, 308–9; cp. Matt 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3), though R. Brown (1994, 493) disagreed, arguing that Luke rejoined Mark’s account while paralleling Jesus’ answer to Pilate in Luke 23:3. In conclusion, Jesus answered both the Sanhedrin and Pilate indirectly but clearly enough to have been understood by his questioners. Besides circumlocution, there may also be irony in Jesus’ replies: “You, though you disbelieve, have said it!” In any event, the council heard enough from Jesus to ask that Rome convict him.

> Then their whole assembly rose up and brought Him before Pilate. 2 They began to accuse
> Him, saying, “We found this man subverting our nation, opposing payment of taxes to Caesar,
> and saying that He Himself is the Messiah, a King.”
>
> 3 So Pilate asked Him, “Are You the King of the Jews? ”
>
> He answered him, “You have said it.”
>
> 4 Pilate then told the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no grounds for charging this man.”
>
> 5 But they kept insisting, “He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee
> where He started even to here.”
>
> 6 When Pilate heard this, he asked if the man was a Galilean. 7 Finding that He was under
> Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem during those days.
> 8 Herod was very glad to see Jesus; for a long time he had wanted to see Him because he had
> heard about Him and was hoping to see some miracle performed by Him. 9 So he kept asking
> Him questions, but Jesus did not answer him. 10 The chief priests and the scribes stood by,
> vehemently accusing Him. 11 Then Herod, with his soldiers, treated Him with contempt,
> mocked Him, dressed Him in a brilliant robe, and sent Him back to Pilate. 12 That very day
> Herod and Pilate became friends. ’ Previously, they had been hostile toward each other.
>
> 13 Pilate called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, 14 and said to them,
> “You have brought me this man as one who subverts the people. But in fact, after examining
> Him in your presence, I have found no grounds to charge this man with those things you accuse
> Him of. 15 Neither has Herod, because he sent Him back to us. Clearly, He has done nothing to
> deserve death. 16 Therefore, I will have Him whipped ’ and then release Him.” [17 For
> according to the festival he had to release someone to them.] ’

You have said it (23:3): Was Jesus evasive in his answer to Pilate? Did he

affirm or deny what Pilate said? While Jesus' reply was enigmatic (cp. 22:67c–68, 70; see comments on 22:70), it should have been received as a tacit affirmation that he was, in some sense, king of the Jews. Jesus affirmed this in a cautious way in order to qualify the implications and what perceptions lay behind Pilate's question (BDR §441:4). Pilate would naturally take a king to refer to someone who holds political and military power, but this was not the sort of king Jesus had in mind (John 18:36). He would not seek to overthrow Rome or conscript an earthly army. But Pilate used Jesus' answer, and the charges brought against him by the religions leaders, as inspiration for placing a placard above Jesus' head during the crucifixion that read, "King of the Jews." For Pilate this was a means of mocking the Jewish charges as well as Jesus' credentials for kingship (Matt 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19; K. Schmidt, *TDNT* 1:577). (See further comments at Mark 14:61–62.)

***The trial before Herod* (23:7–12):** Where might Luke have gotten the information he disclosed here? Certainly none of the disciples were present. Possibly Luke's source related to Herod's steward, Chuza, whose wife, Joanna, had become a follower and financial supporter of Christ after he had healed her (Luke 8:1–3). Pilate also gave a brief report on the meeting with Herod (23:15), which numerous people could have heard and thus made public. It is no surprise that details surrounding Jesus' examinations became well known in Jerusalem, given the visibility of Jesus and the public drama that surrounded his conflict with the leadership. Even someone like Saul of Tarsus, who was decidedly outside the Jesus movement until his conversion, was well aware of the Jewish take on Jesus (Acts 7–9).

Herod and Pilate became friends (23:12): There is no explicit extrabiblical corroboration that Herod and Pilate became friends at this or any time, but other events may indicate this. Background for their relationship included Pilate antagonizing Herod by requiring that Herod hang Roman shields in his palace (*Embassy to Gaius* 38 §§ 299–305). Later these were removed, possibly a signal that tensions had eased between Herod and Pilate. Luke 13:1 also tells of an incident where Pilate had had some Galileans killed in the temple area. Pressure from the emperor Tiberius toned down Pilate's insensitivity for a time (Tacitus, *Annals* 3.54, 64–65; 6.27), possibly setting a broader context that allowed Herod and Pilate to become friends during their intertwined examinations of Jesus.

Textual issue at 23:17: Many translations treat this verse as not original to Luke since a number of manuscripts omit it. These include P^{75}, A, B, L, and T.

Manuscripts that include the verse are א, W, family 1, family 13, Byz, most Itala, and some Syriac. Codices Θ and Ψ have the verse, but with different word order. Other manuscripts (D and some Syriac) include the verse but locate it after verse 19.

Though some scholars argue for the inclusion of verse 17 (Kilpatrick 1965a), it is best to conclude that it is not original to Luke's Gospel given that many of the manuscripts are late and that the verse appears in different places and in different word order. Most likely it was added to make Luke conform to Mark 15:6 and Matthew 27:15 (Arndt 1956, 463; Marshall 1978, 859; Metzger 1975, 179–80).

According to the festival he had to release someone to them (23:17): I argued in the comment above that this verse is probably not original to Luke's Gospel. The verse seems to imply that Pilate was obligated to release a prisoner during the festival. Many have doubted this is historically accurate (Fitzmyer 1985, 1485–86; Luce 1933, 347). But even if the verse is not original, that Pilate was obligated to release a prisoner or, better, that he did so as a personal custom, is plausible. Pilate tried to portray Jesus as guilty of disturbing the peace, a charge that he did not believe warranted the death penalty. He saw Jesus as a public nuisance, not an offender worthy of death. Further, Pilate's choice to be kind here reflected an attempt to be sensitive to the Jews. This was not an obligation for him, but the sovereign act of a ruler who was exercising legal latitude. Finally, it would be inadvisable to reject the authenticity of Pilate's offer of amnesty simply because his doing so is not corroborated elsewhere. We have very limited sources about Pilate, so an argument against the authenticity of the amnesty offer is an argument from silence that excludes this mention as evidence.

> 26 As they led Him away, they seized Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country, and laid the cross on him to carry behind Jesus. 27 A large crowd of people followed Him, including women who were mourning and lamenting Him. 28 But turning to them, Jesus said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and your children. 29 Look, the days are coming when they will say, 'The women without children, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed, are fortunate! ' 30 Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us! ' and to the hills, 'Cover us! ' , 31 For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry? "

***The citation of language from Hosea* (23:30):** Hosea 10:8 has the mountains covering and the hills falling. Jesus switched this, such that the mountains fall and the hills cover. Does this difference indicate that Jesus had a loose regard for Scripture and felt he could change it freely, or does it maybe indicate he remembered the verse incorrectly?

Rather than displaying poor memory or a disregard for accuracy, Jesus was merely playing with the parallelism in this citation. It was common in an oral context to cite texts in a way that introduced some variation. Jesus' alteration of the original text does not change the meaning. Having earned God's wrath through rejection of the Messiah, the pain of Jerusalem's fall would be so great that the people would want a "quick death" (Klostermann 1929, 228). That is the point regardless of the order of the imagery. Death would be better than the misery of knowing they were the objects of God's irreversible wrath. (See further comments at Matt 27:15, Mark 15:6, and John 18:39.)

> 32 Two others — criminals — were also led away to be executed with Him. 33 When they
> arrived at the place called The Skull, they crucified Him there, along with the criminals, one on
> the right and one on the left. [34 Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, because they do not
> know what they are doing."] And they divided His clothes and cast lots.
>
> 35 The people stood watching, and even the leaders kept scoffing: "He saved others; let Him
> save Himself if this is God's Messiah, the Chosen One! " 36 The soldiers also mocked Him.
> They came offering Him sour wine 37 and said, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!
> "
>
> 38 An inscription was above Him:
>
> THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

The place called The Skull (23:33): Matthew 27:33 and Mark 15:22 name "Golgotha" as the site of execution. All three Synoptics give the meaning "Skull" (*kranion*) to the location, but Luke did not name Golgotha, which leads some critics to suggest he placed the crucifixion in a different location from Matthew and Mark. But Luke also omitted the Semitic name of Gethsemane in 22:39–46, plus his word choice here may have reflected his predominantly Greek audience. That Luke called the place "The Skull" in accord with Matthew and Mark shows all three were describing the same locale. The name *Calvary* comes from *calvaria*, the Latin translation of *kranion*. (See further comments at Matt 27:33.)

Textual issue at 23:34: Some question the authenticity of Jesus' prayer in this

verse due to disputed attestation in the manuscripts. The prayer is unique to Luke, and some manuscripts lack it (numerous Alexandrian and Western witnesses, e.g., P^{75}, 1] ℵst copyist], B, D*, W, Θ, and Syriac).

While the manuscript evidence suggests the prayer is not original, we must consider other evidences internal to Luke's writings and the Gospels. First, the parallel prayer of Stephen in Acts 7:60, Luke's other book, may favor the authenticity of Luke 23:34 since Luke frequently notes parallelism between events. (So, for example, Peter and Paul perform healings as Jesus did. Jesus and Paul both preach in the synagogue.) Second, that this prayer is not paralleled in the other Gospels suggests there was no clear motivation for a copyist to insert it here. Third, Luke commonly emphasized that people sometimes act in ignorance (Acts 3:17; 13:27; 17:30). Fourth, each major subunit in Luke's crucifixion narrative contains a saying of Christ (Luke 23:28–31, 34, 43, 46). Omission of the prayer would leave this subunit without such a saying (Marshall 1978, 868). Finally, the prayer's removal by a copyist is easier to explain than the prayer's insertion by a copyist. After all, he may have found the prayer too forgiving of the Jews (R. Brown 1994, 979), or he may have judged the prayer unanswered in light of the destruction of Jerusalem in ad 70 and thus removed it to avoid embarrassment.

These evidences suggest the manuscript evidence is not definitive and that the prayer is original to Luke (Ernst 1977, 634; Grundmann 1963, 432–33; Tiede 1988, 417; Ellis 1974, 267; and Marshall 1978, 867–68).

THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS (23:38): The four Gospels put the wording of the sign differently:

THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS (Matt 27:37)
THE KING OF THE JEWS (Mark 15:26)
THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS (Luke 23:38)
JESUS THE NAZARENE THE KING OF THE JEWS (John 19:19)

Critics have seen these differences as proof that the Gospels contradict one another. Though the charge on the placard varies, the gist of the message is the same in all four accounts. Only if one holds the discredited dictation view of divine inspiration (see Introduction) would one see these variations as problematic. In part, we understand what divine inspiration of Scripture is and how it worked by looking at how the texts handle parallel scenes. Repeatedly we have seen that the standards of historiography of that day permitted authors to convey identical truths keeping the gist of the event the same while using variation and summary approaches. The variations do not contradict in terms of

presenting the historical significance, but may make explicit what is implicit in another version. Here it is clear Jesus was executed for being associated with the kingship of the Jews. (See further comments at Matt 27:37, Mark 15:26, and John 19:19.)

Two others—criminals—were also led away to be executed with Him (23:32–43): Matthew 27:44 and Mark 15:32 have both criminals mocking Jesus, but never mention that one of them repented and believed. Does this represent a contradiction between those two Gospels and Luke? It is important to remember that Jesus' time on the cross lasted at least six hours based on what we can gather from the Gospels. Each account mentions episodes that add up to only a fraction of this time. This fact alone leads us to expect differences in what is related. Besides, the man's repentance was not core to the meaning or outcome of Jesus' death on the cross. Furthermore, additional details across the various sources of the tradition could account for the differences in particulars. The silence of Matthew and Mark about the repentance of one of the criminals does not call into question the accuracy of Luke. He simply tells more of the story. (See further comments at Matt 27:44 and Mark 15:32.)

> 39 Then one of the criminals hanging there began to yell insults at Him: "Aren't You the Messiah? Save Yourself and us! "
>
> 40 But the other answered, rebuking him: "Don't you even fear God, since you are undergoing the same punishment? 41 We are punished justly, because we're getting back what we deserve for the things we did, but this man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me ' when You come into Your kingdom! "
>
> 43 And He said to him, " I assure you: Today you will be with Me in paradise."

Today you will be with Me in paradise (23:43): Did Jesus and the repentant thief go to heaven the moment they died? If so, does that contradict what Jesus said to Mary Magdalene after His resurrection: "Don't cling to Me . . . for I have not yet ascended to the Father" (John 20:17)?

Jesus referred in John 20 to a bodily ascension to heaven (Acts 1:9), which was no mere visitation but a new residency that would not change until the second coming. Jesus promised the penitent criminal that the criminal would not have to wait to experience the blessings of the kingdom he asked to join. Jesus' reference in Luke 23:43, however, clearly did not have in mind a bodily experience. Thus Luke and John were not discussing the same things.

The emphasis on immediacy fits with Luke's approach elsewhere (2:11; 4:21; 5:26; 13:32–33; 22:34, 61; Grundmann 1963, 434). Jesus was speaking of moving immediately into an intermediate state where one is conscious of God's blessing. This conflicts with the popular idea that the dead enter some sort of limbo state. The only delay is for the bodily resurrection, which comes at the end of time.

How do heaven and paradise relate? This question is bound up with the meaning of *paradeisos* (paradise). *Paradeisos* comes into Greek from the Persian world, though related terms appear in non-eschatological contexts (Gen 2:8; 13:10; Neh 2:8; Song 4:13; Eccl 2:5; BAGD 614 §2; BAA 1241 §2; Fitzmyer 1985, 1510–11; Jeremias, *TDNT* 5:765–73; Grelot 1967; R. Brown 1994, 1010–12; Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.1.3 §37). Later texts use the term to refer to the eschatological garden or paradise (Isa 51:3; Ezek 28:13; 31:8). In extrabiblical Judaism, it referred to the abode of the righteous (*1 Enoch* 17–19; 32.3; 60.8; 61.12; *2 Enoch* 65.10; *T. Levi* 18.10–11; *T. Dan* 5.12; *Pss. Sol.* 14.3; *Sipre* 307.3 on Deut. 32:4; Str-B 2:264). Arndt (1956, 471) equated it with Abraham's bosom, an image that also highlights immediate reception after death, as we see in Luke 16 with the afterlife of Lazarus. Two other NT texts (2 Cor 12:3–4 and Rev 2:7) are relevant, both of which seem to allude to the heavenly realm where the righteous are gathered.

We cannot construct a full doctrine of the intermediate state from Luke 23:43. We really cannot say anything more specific than that the text implies the repentant criminal will upon his death enter into a conscious, intermediate state of some kind until the time of his bodily resurrection. Death is a mere transition for this man, not an ultimate cessation of his existence. He will experience victory and deliverance through his confession of Jesus, and that deliverance is immediate (Nolland 1993b, 1152).

> 44 It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three, 45 because the sun's light failed. The curtain of the sanctuary was split down the middle. 46 And Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, **into Your hands I entrust My spirit.**" , Saying this, He breathed His last.
>
> 47 When the centurion saw what happened, he began to glorify God, saying, "This man really was righteous! " 48 All the crowds that had gathered for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, went home, striking their chests. ' 49 But all who knew Him, including the women who had followed Him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Darkness came over the whole land until three (23:44): Though some ancient writers (e.g., Thallus, as noted in George Syncellus, *Chronography* 391), wrote that this darkness was caused by a solar eclipse, solar eclipses cannot occur during full moon, and Passover falls during full moon. Was the darkness therefore a miracle? And does "the whole land" indicate the darkness covered the entire world or just the region of Palestine?

We should interpret this event, commonly called the "crucifixion eclipse," as a cosmic miracle rather than a natural occurrence that just happened to coincide with the crucifixion of Christ. God is indicating through a portent in nature the significance of what is taking place in the crucifixion. Some have suggested that God obscured the sun through the agency of such things as clouds or a sandstorm, but this cannot be established either way. The Greek (*ekleipō*) indicates the light has been obscured, but offers no hint as to what agency God employed.

The supernatural darkness recalls judgment imagery from the day of the Lord (Amos 8:9; Joel 2:10, 30–31 [3:3–4 MT]; Zeph 1:15; Fitzmyer 1985, 1517) and indicates the cross of Christ is a place of God's judgment. The Son pays for human sins, and the Father signifies the divine presence and exercise of divine wrath against sin through the darkness. Brown (1994, 1042–43) noted that the darkness can be seen as a theological symbol contrasting to Jesus as light. Brown also tied the darkness to the Greek motif that signs occur at the death of great persons (Plutarch, *Romulus* 27.6; Plutarch, *Caesar* 69.4; Ovid, *Fasti* 2.493; Cicero, *Republic* 6.22 §24; Pliny, *Natural History* 2.30 §98; Grández 1989). Such background is not limited to Greco-Roman contexts, for the Jewish culture saw God as active in all events and capable of speaking through signs in nature. Thus both Jews and Gentiles would have recognized the foreboding mix of cosmic responses surrounding the cross.

As to the geographical extent of the darkness, the phrase "the whole land" is not closely defined. It is possible the darkness affected only Judea or even just Jerusalem itself. We have no way of knowing precisely how much of the earth the darkness covered, for the biblical figure of speech, rendered "the whole land" by the HCSB, could refer to a local event from the perspective of those present (cp. "that whole area" in Matt 9:26, 31). However, a number of early accounts portray the darkness as an event known throughout the Greek world (cp. "the whole world" in Rev 3:10; 12:9). Sextus Julius Africanus and Eusebius both cited Phlegon of Tralles, the second-century Greek historian, on this point. Christian apologist Tertullian (c. 160–220) told unbelievers that the darkness was

recorded in secular records that could be viewed in his day (*Apology* 21.19). (See further comments at Matt 27:45, Mark 15:33, and Luke 23:44.)

Father, into Your hands I entrust My spirit (23:46): The last recorded words of Christ vary among the Gospels. Does this indicate a contradiction? Luke noted that Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Father, into Your hands I entrust My spirit." The Synoptic parallels also note that Jesus "shouted again with a loud voice" (Matt 28:50) or "let out a loud cry" (Mark 15:37) just prior to expiring. The difference between Luke and the other Synoptics, therefore, is in the level of detail given about this cry. Both Matthew and Mark noted earlier that Jesus' penultimate cry from the cross was a quote of Psalm 22:1 (see Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34), but they chose not to give the content of the last shout. Luke alone supplied the content, though apparently even he chose to leave out a portion of it, for John 19:30 has a short remark, "It is finished" (*tetelestai*), that was likely uttered along with the quote Luke gave in verse 46. These variations reflect complementary rather than contradictory information.

Jesus' final words in Luke before his death come from Psalm 31:5, the prayer of a righteous sufferer who asks to be delivered from his enemies and expresses trust that his fate is in God's hands. We should see Jesus' use of the psalm as typico-prophetic. Jesus fit the pattern of righteous suffering and was in fact the righteous sufferer *par excellence*. In Luke, as he faced death, he expressed his trust that God would care for him.

This man really was righteous! (23:47): Both Matthew and Mark reported that Jesus was proclaimed as "Son of God" by the centurion here (Matt 27:54; Mark 15:39). Did Luke alter the centurion's actual words, or is his version of the centurion's statement likely closer to the original? The centurion's utterance functioned as a judgment over the events he had just witnessed. Though Jesus had been executed as a criminal, the centurion judged that Jesus was *dikaios*. The word normally means "righteous" but can also mean "innocent" (Prov 6:17; Joel 3:19; Jonah 1:14; Matt 23:35; 27:19; Jas 5:6; 1 Pet 3:18). In this legal context, the more natural meaning is "innocent," since numerous confessions of Jesus' innocence have preceded this scene (Luke 23:4, 14, 22, 41; Kilpatrick 1942). Brown (1994, 1163–67) preferred "just" (i.e., righteous), which he correctly noted entails innocence.

Brown saw three possible explanations for Luke's change of Mark (or Matthew), if in fact that is what has occurred. First, the change from "Son of God" to "righteous" permits an allusion to Psalm 31:18: "Let lying lips be

quieted; they speak arrogantly against the righteous with pride and contempt." Second, the use of the title *Righteous One* to refer to the Messiah (cp. Isa 53:11; Jer 23:5; Zech 9:9) may have been common in the church and would have commended this approach. Third, the use of "righteous" or "innocent" corresponds to Luke's portrayal of Jesus in the earlier trial scene. The centurion's verdict affirmed Jesus' character and proclaimed the execution to have been a miscarriage of justice. Jesus was an innocent sufferer (a theme developed in Acts 3:14; 7:52; 13:28; 22:14; Neyrey 1985, 100). This seventh confession of innocence in Luke 23 was the ultimate commentary on these events (cp. Luke 23:4, 14, 15 [twice], 22, 41).

Matthew noted that other soldiers accompanied the centurion, keeping watch over Jesus. They too saw the earthquake and were filled with awe. Mark mentioned only the centurion, who faced Jesus and saw him breathe his last. Matthew and Mark agreed on what was said (though Matthew had it as a group confession): "This man really was God's Son!" Given that these men were Gentiles, this statement probably had a functional, regal meaning instead of an ontological meaning. The soldiers accepted Jesus' claims of sonship because of the signs accompanying his death.

It is possible that Luke has rendered the centurion's remark in a more summarizing form, either because the expression *Son of God* would not mean anything to his audience or because they might misunderstand it to indicate that Jesus was *a* son of God. Conversely, it could be that Luke's rendering is closer to original and that Matthew and Mark rendered the result of what it means to regard Jesus as innocent. It is also possible that several different statements were made, especially given the number of witnesses to the crucifixion (noted by Matthew). The most likely choice, given Luke's preference for the term *dikaios*, is that he explicitly explained the force of the centurion's confession. If Jesus was confessed as "Son of God," he was clearly innocent and had suffered unjustly—a theme that Luke developed more than the other Synoptics. Thus, in Luke the final note about Jesus' death was that he died as an innocent man. (See further comments at Matt 27:54 and Mark 15:39.)

The women . . . stood at a distance, watching these things (23:49): Were the women watching from afar (Matt 27:55–56; Mark 15:40) or from near the cross (John 19:25)? Rather than indicating a contradiction, this variation reflects the fact that these events took place over a period of at least six hours. At some point during the event they were standing afar; at another time, likely later, they had come near.

50 There was a good and righteous man named Joseph, a member of the Sanhedrin, 51 who had not agreed with their plan and action. He was from Arimathea, a Judean town, and was looking forward to the kingdom of God. 52 He approached Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. 53 Taking it down, he wrapped it in fine linen and placed it in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever been placed. ' 54 It was preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. 55 The women who had come with Him from Galilee followed along and observed the tomb and how His body was placed. 56 Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.

***Joseph's tomb* (23:53):** Critics have objected that executed criminals were not allowed the privilege of being buried in family tombs, and that Luke's testimony is therefore historically inaccurate. But Jesus was not buried in his family's tomb. Jesus was unrelated to Joseph, and thus Jesus' burial, though unusual, did not conflict with ancient practice (*m. Sanhedrin* 6.5).

They returned and prepared spices and perfumes (23:56): Did the women prepare spices before the Sabbath (Luke 23:56) or after the Sabbath (Mark 16:1)? The suggestion that they did both, preparing some spices before the Sabbath and then purchasing additional spices after the Sabbath, is complicated by Luke 24:1 ("they came to the tomb, bringing the spices they had prepared") seeming to presume that the only spices the women bore to the tomb on resurrection morning were those they had prepared just before the Sabbath began (23:56).

A possible solution to these difficulties is to suggest that one of the authors has compressed his account of the events, a common issue in the Gospels. Mark may have compressed the timing since the application of the spices was not to occur until Sunday. On the other hand, it may be Luke who has compressed the account, thus giving the impression that the preparation occurred after the Sabbath while really only setting up a transition to the resurrection (Marshall 1978, 881). There is no way to be sure. Though Luke's account does not mention any purchases, it remains possible that the women went with already-prepared spices and also obtained additional spices on the way. It is also possible that the women bought spices twice, which may indicate a desire to honor Jesus with an abundance of care. In any case, it is clear that the women did not anticipate the resurrection of Jesus.

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices they had prepared. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb. 3 They went in but did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men stood by them in dazzling clothes. 5 So the women were terrified and bowed down to the ground.

"Why are you looking for the living among the dead? " asked the men. 6 "He is not here, but He has been resurrected! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, 7 saying, 'The Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and rise on the third day'? " 8 And they remembered His words.

9 Returning from the tomb, they reported all these things to the Eleven and to all the rest. 10 Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them were telling the apostles these things. 11 But these words seemed like nonsense to them, and they did not believe the women. 12 Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. When he stooped to look in, he saw only the linen cloths. ' So he went home, amazed at what had happened.

They found the stone rolled away from the tomb (24:2): Did the women find that the tomb's sealing stone had already been removed when they arrived (Mark 16:4; Luke 24:2; John 20:1), or were they present to see the angel roll the stone away (Matt 28:1)?

As we have seen with numerous texts, differences can arise when authors choose to share different levels of detail. Some accounts summarize and collapse the report of what took place. Luke presented the rolled-away stone as the first hint of the resurrection (Marshall 1978, 884). He posed a nice literary contrast in 24:2–3 between what the women found upon their arrival (the stone rolled away) and what they surprisingly did not find upon entering the tomb (Jesus' body).

In first-century Israel a round stone disc was often placed in a channel carved in the rock so it could be rolled easily to cover the usually rectangular tomb entrance (Fitzmyer 1985, 1544; Abel 1925). But the stone might merely have plugged the entrance, with no channel (Nolland 1993b, 1189). There is no way to know which was the case here.

Mark is alone in recounting that the women discussed among themselves the question of who would roll away the large stone (Mark 16:3). Matthew did not mention that the women came to the tomb intending to anoint Jesus' body. He only stated that they came to "view the tomb" (Matt 28:1). Dillon (1978, 16) attributed Matthew's silence about an anointing to the presence of the guards (Matt 28:11–15). The guards' job was to prevent anyone from gaining access to the body (seen in their sealing of the tomb), so Dillon argued that Matthew dropped the anointing tradition because he saw it as incompatible with the presence of guards. But the idea of the women performing an anointing with

guards present at the tomb is not impossible. According to ancient custom, the women should have been able to anoint the body as long as they did not remove it.

The issue surrounding the seal in Matthew 27:66 is whether it was designed to prevent anyone from ever entering the tomb or if it was a way to assure that no one got in without gaining official approval. Even if the seal was meant to block all access, the women might not have known that the tomb was sealed and guarded in this way. Thus there is no difficulty in saying they came to the tomb intending to anoint Jesus' body.

Finally, Matthew's account is somewhat ambiguous about the exact time at which the angel opened the tomb. The women were approaching when the earthquake struck and the angel removed the stone. They could have been too far away to see the tomb, and yet it would still be accurate to say they were approaching the tomb site at some point along their journey. Luke does not specifically tell us that the women witnessed the stone's removal. The transition into the angel's monologue at verse 5 fits naturally with the conclusion that the women were indeed present to see the stone removed, but we should uphold the ambiguity of the text. (See further comment at John 20:1–2.)

***Timing and placement of those who announce the resurrection* (24:4–6):** Matthew 28:5–6 has an "angel" who is *sitting outside* the tomb announce Jesus' resurrection to the women prior to the women fetching the male disciples in verse 8. Mark 16:5–6 has the resurrection news coming to the women from **one** young "man" *sitting inside* the tomb and does not report the women going to tell the male disciples. Luke 24:5–6 has the resurrection news coming to the women from **two** "men" *standing inside* the tomb before the women left to relay the news to the male disciples. John 20:11ff has Mary Magdalene alone discover "two angels" inside the tomb, and this occurs *after* she has gone to fetch the male disciples to report that Jesus' body had been stolen. The angels in the tomb do not announce the resurrection to Mary, but instead ask her why she is crying. Mary discovers the truth of the resurrection only when she encounters Jesus himself (John 20:14–17). The differences between the individual Synoptic Gospels and between the Synoptics as a group and John seem impressive on the surface. Do they represent contradictions that undermine the reliability of the resurrection accounts?

Gospel	Herald	Location	Women's Response
Matthew	one "angel"	sitting outside	women then fetch disciples
Mark	one "man"	sitting inside	

Luke	two “men”	standing inside	women then report to disciples
John	two “angels”	inside	Mary had already reported to disciples

Though Luke spoke of two “men” making the announcement from inside the tomb in 24:5–6, he described them as “angels” in verse 23. Mark 16:5 spoke of a young “man” in a white robe; the glistening white color suggests an angelic appearance, and Matthew and Luke picked up on this. Thus all four Gospels saw the messengers as angels. Rather than contradictions on the identity of the messengers, we are seeing multiple versions rendering the same details in distinct ways. These are like the variations we have seen in other texts, including the timing of the stone’s being rolled away. What may have been the case is that two angels made the announcement, one initially stationed inside and the other outside. One writer chose to present the announcement outside, while the other paired the announcement with the observation that the body was gone from the tomb. Collapsing all of this is also another possibility. Again one account gives more detail; the others summarize and collapse the report of what took place. The important fact is that the tomb was empty and Jesus’ resurrection was variously announced or demonstrated. (See further comments at Matt 28:5–6, Mark 16:5–6, and John 20:12.)

Another issue is the timing of Mary’s realization that Jesus was raised. John 20:1–2 has Mary run back to Peter and the other disciple to tell them the tomb is empty. At this point she had heard no announcement and did not know what had become of the body. She encountered Jesus only later, after the men had returned home. She reported to them her sighting of the Lord (John 20:18).

Finding coherence between John and the other Gospels is difficult since the Synoptics appear to have an immediate angelic announcement on Mary’s first trip to the tomb. There are at least four major attempts to solve this apparent discrepancy:

First, it is suggested that Mary made two trips to the tomb (J. Wenham 2005, 83, 90–95; Osborne 1984, 149n2; Westcott 1908, 2:337), something that John disclosed (20:1, 11) but that the Synoptics do not mention. The sequence would look like this: First, Mary saw the tomb empty and ran away to fetch the men immediately, not bothering to check inside before leaving. When Mary returned to the tomb behind the running disciples, she still did not know what had happened. She then saw Jesus (Matt 28:9–10; John 20:11–18). An apparent problem with this view is that the Synoptics indicate that the male disciples went to the tomb as a result of the women’s report about Jesus’ resurrection (Luke 24:10–12). Telescoping is possible: in this case Mary arrived first to the men and

reported the empty tomb while the other women brought their report of resurrection a little later, having trailed slightly behind Mary. Thus Mary returned to the tomb having no basis for resurrection belief other than the report of the women. But there is also the question of where Matthew 28:9–10 fits, since the meeting between Jesus and the women recounted there seems to have occurred as the women were on their way to report to the men. Was Mary not a part of this? Matthew and the shorter version of Mark do not report Peter's visiting the tomb, making Matthew's event look like the first trip home. Wenham's suggestion can be correct only if Matthew truncated the first report so that Matthew 28:9–10 equals John 20:11–18, meaning that both accounts recall an event that occurred after the women had visited the men. The major obstacle is the question of how Mary could be in doubt in John 20:11–18 if Jesus had appeared to the women on their first return home. Matthew's truncation would imply either that Mary was not party to the resurrection appearance Matthew recounts in 28:9–10 (despite its similarity to John), or that Matthew (again telescoping) placed this later resurrection appearance where he does because he did not mention Peter's visit to the tomb.

A second suggested resolution, closely related to the first, says John truncated the disciples' response, giving the impression that "Simon Peter and . . . the other disciple" went to the tomb immediately after hearing Mary speak about the empty tomb when in fact they waited around long enough to hear from the group of women who came after Mary. The second group of women gave a more momentous report than Mary had given: they reported Jesus' appearance to them, and this is what most immediately prompted the men to visit the tomb. The major problem with this suggestion is that it presents Mary Magdalene as being ignorant about a claim of resurrection until she heard the other women report it to the men, and yet Luke 24:10–11 lists her first among those who reported Jesus' resurrection to the men. In addition, if this second proposed solution is correct, why did John present Mary's remarks as the catalyst for the men leaving for the tomb? His "At that" (John 20:3) certainly gives the impression that Mary's report is what sparked the men to action. John's language here could represent a collapse of detail, since Mary would have been the first to raise the issue of the empty tomb and then the others followed with the claim of resurrection. But does not Mary's doubt in John 20:11–13, which appears to be a later scene, contradict the other women's report of resurrection? But if the women's report of resurrection was met with doubt, maybe Mary became uncertain about what had happened, especially if she had not been at the tomb

long. If confirmation of the resurrection thus comes to her in John 20:14–18, then John 20:14–18 does not equal Matthew 28:9–10 but is a separate, similar appearance. This combination of events is possible, though it assumes a great deal of compression in all of the accounts.

Third, some propose that John 20:1–10 and 20:11–18 describe the same event. In this case John 20:1–10 is not interested in reporting anything about how Mary saw the Lord, but simply notes that she saw the empty tomb. In addition, they suggest that, in the tradition underlying verses 1–10, Mary was a little uncertain how to break the resurrection news to the disciples in a believable way. She opted for an ambiguous "half-report" and said that someone had taken the body, a view that probably reflected her initial impression about what had happened when she had seen the empty tomb but had not yet seen the risen Lord. This first report led the disciples and later Mary after them to go to the tomb and investigate. John 20:11–18 then brings in the detail of the confirming appearance that had come to Mary before she ever went to report to the men. The major challenge to this proposed solution is the apparent contrast between John 20:10 and 20:11 (Gk *de*), which most easily is read as a transition to a subsequent scene and not a retelling of the scene in verses 1–10.

A fourth suggested solution says John started the account in John 20:2 by describing a perspective he and Mary had in common—uncertainty about where Jesus' body was—and that the introductions to each account in John 20:2 and 20:13 are largely simultaneous in real time, but that John tells the first account to reflect his own initial experience and discovery ("the other disciple, the one Jesus loved," i.e., the beloved disciple). The narrative perspective in John 20:1–10 thus reflects John's own point of view, while the narrative perspective of John 20:11–18 is that of Mary. So John recounted his perspective prior to Mary's even though Mary's experiences occurred first chronologically. John 20:2 has Mary say that "we" do not know where they have laid the body, which seems to assume that Mary was not alone. John 20:13 has Mary say "I" do not know where they have put the body. The beginning of Mary's report about the empty tomb and missing body (John 20:2) set Peter and the beloved disciple off to the tomb before Mary could get any further and discuss how the announcement was made. The other disciples who remained behind heard from Mary the whole account (i.e., what is reported in 20:11–18 or the Synoptic reports of the announcement). In this way, John 20:1–10 replays John's actual perspective of the event when it happened. Since he did not hear Mary's story all the way through, verses 1–10 understandably do not include mention of the

announcement or resurrection appearance. And John told the story from the perspective of how *he* experienced the resurrection. This would mean that Matthew 28:9–10 is reporting the same resurrection appearance as John 20:14–18. In this case Mary made only one trip to the tomb, which is the natural conclusion drawn from the Synoptics. John told of his discovery in full (20:1–10) and then went back to tell Mary's story (20:11–18), which though occurring earlier in time, was related to him later and recounted by him later in the text. The linkage is made literarily in the overlap of Mary's note about the missing body in John 20:2 and 20:13. In the real sequence, John 20:13–18 belongs with and follows John 20:2, detailing what had happened to Mary and the other women. This option preserves the primary role that Mary seems to have played as the first to see Jesus raised and the first to announce his resurrection to the men, and it also explains the focus on John, the beloved disciple, in John 20:1–10.

The major problems in this scenario are that the initial report by the women in John states that they did not know where the body was (which rubs against the report in the Synoptics that the angels had told them what took place), and that the appearance to Mary by Jesus points to more happening than the mere report that angels explained the tomb is empty. Nevertheless, if Mary filled out this picture later in her remarks by reporting her sighting of Jesus, and if the women made a full report that Peter and John did not hear all the way through before going to check out the tomb, then all this can be reconciled.

In sum, the exact sequence of resurrection events remains obscure because of the variety of witnesses and the variety of perspectives from which the Gospels present the details. It is possible to harmonize the traditions if one allows for literary variation. I slightly prefer the fourth option. The accounts complement one another and were left distinct for a reason—to present the resurrection from distinct angles.

Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee (24:6): This remark alludes back to texts like Luke 9:45 and 18:34. The question is, if Jesus predicted his resurrection on numerous occasions and sometimes with surprising clarity, why were the disciples so slow to accept it and not prepared for its coming? It is a good question. When Jesus gave the prediction, the texts note that the disciples did not understand it, probably in the sense that they did not understand how the prediction would work. They anticipated a resurrection at the end of time, yes, but a resurrection three days after death was an innovation on Second Temple Jewish resurrection hope. This is a detail that they probably

missed. Even though Jesus told them, it was something unprecedented that Jesus was announcing to them. The detail did not register with them until they saw it fulfilled. And again, they had no concept for the Messiah being killed in the first place, much less rising from the dead.

Also, whereas Luke had the angels allude to what Jesus said "when He was still in Galilee," in Matthew 28:6–7 the angel reported that Jesus "is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see Him there." Matthew's account follows Mark's, where an angel told the women that Jesus "is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see Him there just as He told you" (Mark 16:7). Matthew went on to report that Jesus appeared to the disciples in Galilee (Matt 28:16–20), which fits with the expectation set up by 28:6–7. Luke, on the other hand, did not report any appearances in Galilee, and in fact seemed to restrict Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to Jerusalem and nearby Emmaus, with the Eleven seeing him only in Jerusalem. For the question of whether Matthew/Mark are in tension with Luke on this geographical difference, see comments on 24:36.

The women's report **(24:9–10):** Why did Luke fail to mention that Jesus appeared to the women? He had them going back to report only the empty tomb and the angelic announcement. That seems surprising if Luke also knew that the women had actually seen the risen Jesus. Does Luke's silence indicate he disbelieved or disputed what the other Gospels say about Jesus appearing to the women? Also, did Luke conflict with Mark, who reported that the women kept quiet (Mark 16:8)?

The first thing to note about the women's report is that the male disciples took it all to be "nonsense" (v. 11). This is not a detail one would invent. It makes the disciples look slow to believe, a less than flattering portrait of them as future leaders of the church. That Luke included it in his account is surely an indication that it is historically accurate, an embarrassing but true fact that they were not willing to cover up.

We see the same type of summarizing in these reports that we see elsewhere in the resurrection accounts (see comments on 24:4–6). The women did not report the appearance by Jesus, possibly because the oral tradition Luke incorporated focused on how they initially realized the tomb was empty through the angelic report. More fascinating is to think about the difference with Mark 16:8, which as the likely original ending of Mark says the women "said nothing to anyone, since they were afraid." Of course, the women eventually took courage and relayed their experiences to the male disciples, or else none of the Gospels would have included traditions about the empty tomb! Mark did not share this

with his readers (he assumed readers knew that the women did eventually speak). Mark's conclusion at verse 8 was a literary ending that effectively conveyed that God had done a mighty work and that fear ensued, leaving all involved (including Mark's readers) with the question of how they would respond. An earlier section in Mark (4:42; 5:33) raised the "fear or faith" theme and thus anticipated the literary ending to Mark's Gospel. Mark ended with a choice for his readers: would they fear the resurrection or have faith in it? (See comments on Mark 16:9–20 and Matt 28:8–9.)

Who ran to the tomb? **(24:12):** Does Luke's failure to mention "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 20:2–4) mean that he believed Peter ran to the tomb alone? Luke 24:12 is yet another example of a simplified summary. Peter as the key disciple is reported to have run to the tomb to check it out. It is not that Luke intended to say Peter alone visited the tomb, for in 24:24 he indicated that others went as well. So it is clear Luke's report in verse 12 focused on Peter alone, probably because of his prominence. (See further comments at John 20:3–4.)

13 Now that same day two of them were on their way to a village called Emmaus, which was
about seven miles ' from Jerusalem. 14 Together they were discussing everything that had taken
place. 15 And while they were discussing and arguing, Jesus Himself came near and began to
walk along with them. 16 But they were prevented from recognizing Him. 17 Then He asked
them, "What is this dispute that you're having with each other as you are walking? " And they
stopped walking and looked discouraged.
18 The one named Cleopas answered Him, "Are You the only visitor in Jerusalem who doesn't
know the things that happened there in these days? "
19 "What things? " He asked them.
So they said to Him, "The things concerning Jesus the Nazarene, who was a Prophet powerful
in action and speech before God and all the people, 20 and how our chief priests and leaders
handed Him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified Him. 21 But we were hoping that
He was the One who was about to redeem Israel. Besides all this, it's the third day since these
things happened. 22 Moreover, some women from our group astounded us. They arrived early
at the tomb, 23 and when they didn't find His body, they came and reported that they had seen a
vision of angels who said He was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb
and found it just as the women had said, but they didn't see Him."
25 He said to them, "How unwise and slow you are to believe in your hearts all that the
prophets have spoken! 26 Didn't the Messiah have to suffer these things and enter into His
glory? " 27 Then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted for them the things
concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

28 They came near the village where they were going, and He gave the impression that He was
going farther. 29 But they urged Him: “Stay with us, because it’s almost evening, and now the
day is almost over.” So He went in to stay with them.
30 It was as He reclined at the table with them that He took the bread, blessed and broke it,
and gave it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him, but He
disappeared from their sight. 32 So they said to each other, “Weren’t our hearts ablaze within us
while He was talking with us on the road and explaining the Scriptures to us? ” 33 That very
hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem. They found the Eleven and those with them
gathered together, 34 who said, “The Lord has certainly been raised, and has appeared to
Simon! ” 35 Then they began to describe what had happened on the road and how He was made
known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Emmaus appearance and other appearances **(24:13–15):** Why did Luke skip over the earliest post-resurrection appearances and narrate Jesus’ appearance to the unnamed disciples on the road to Emmaus as if this were the first of his post-resurrection appearances? Or does 24:34 indicate that Luke indeed knew that Jesus put in some appearances prior to the road to Emmaus? Or is it possible that Jesus’ appearance to Peter, mentioned in 24:34, happened sometime while the unnamed disciples hurried back from Emmaus to Jerusalem to meet with the other disciples, which still leaves Luke saying that Jesus appeared first to the unnamed disciples heading for Emmaus?

Luke was aware that there were other appearances that he chose not to provide detail about in his account, for he alluded to them in verses 24 and 34. He highlighted the appearance to the disciples heading for Emmaus possibly because of its vividness and because it involved two otherwise unknown disciples. This is yet another example of choices made by each Gospel writer to give us fresh angles on these events.

The exact timing of when Jesus appeared to Peter is not clear. It could have taken place before or after the appearance at Emmaus. In the face of claims that these scenes are creations of the early church and not real events, we should note that we have no detailed tradition about the face-to-face meeting between Jesus and Peter or the face-to-face meeting between Jesus and James. All we have are bare statements telling us that Jesus appeared to these men (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor 15:7). Now if these stories are so easy to create and sell as true, why do we not have a detailed story of Jesus’ appearances to Peter and James? Surely it would be of value to explain exactly how Peter and especially James came to have their important roles in the early church. That we do not have such details shows that the Evangelists took care with the traditions that came to them, resisting the

temptation to fill in the gaps by creating fictional details.

They were prevented from recognizing Him (24:16): Did these two disciples not recognize Jesus because he took on a different form (Mark 16:12), or was it that their perceptions were somehow dulled (Luke 24:31a)? Are the Gospels inconsistent in describing why the disciples were unable to recognize the risen Jesus? Is this part of Luke's stupefaction theme (cp. 9:45; 18:34; 24:45)?

It is not clear why some people were able to recognize the risen Jesus immediately (Matt 28:9), while others, such as the disciples at Emmaus (Luke 24:16) and Mary Magdalene (John 20:14), were not. Perhaps in some circumstances there was something about the way Jesus showed himself that disguised initially who he was. Mary's mistaking him for a gardener could have been inspired by emotional distress and her presumption that Jesus could not be alive from the dead, plus she was apparently turned away from Jesus when he first spoke to her (John 20:16). The familiarity of his voice when he spoke her name is what eventually led to her realization that she was in the presence of the risen Jesus.

The situation seems different in Luke's present text, where it says the disciples "were prevented from recognizing Him" (24:16). The statement in Mark 16:12 that Jesus "appeared in a different form" to the Emmaus disciples has questionable bearing on this discussion since the long ending of Mark is likely inauthentic (see comments on Mark 16:9–20). Nevertheless, the stupefaction theme is not the most likely explanation for Luke's version. The point coming from the disciples being prevented from recognizing Jesus is that God is in control of the revelatory process. The resurrection and its disclosure is divine business.

It's the third day since these things happened (24:21): Does "third day" indicate that these disciples recalled Jesus' predictions, understood them, and expected him to rise again on the third day? If so, that would present a challenging contrast to the lack of such understanding and expectation in Jesus' core group of disciples. But this verse presents no such challenge. The reference to "third day" is merely a statement about how much time had passed since the momentous event of the crucifixion, about which these two disciples believed their traveling companion was ignorant. Further, they were as surprised by the women's report as anyone else was, which indicates that they were not expecting a resurrection on the third day.

How unwise and slow you are to believe . . . all that the prophets have

spoken! (24:25): Were the prophecies about the Messiah's death, resurrection, divinity, etc., really so clear as to warrant Jesus calling the disciples "unwise and slow" for not apprehending them? The rebuke of the disciples for being slow to understand probably appealed to many of the texts on messianic hope that are cited or alluded to in Luke-Acts. Among these would be Daniel 7 on the Son of Man, Psalms 2, 110, and 118 on the Son and King, and Isaiah 53 on the suffering Servant. Jesus combined these texts in a portrait of a single figure in a way that was innovative at that time, but it was something people should have been able to see and grasp, especially the disciples since they accompanied Jesus daily and were privileged to hear him speak private messages about his identity and purposes.

He disappeared from their sight (24:31): If Jesus rose bodily from the dead, how is he able to disappear into thin air? Jehovah's Witnesses say Jesus was raised as a spirit rather than a body, and that episodes such as this prove that he only took on bodily form for the sake of appearing to his followers.

That Jesus rose bodily and not just as a spirit is made clear in the resurrection accounts where the tomb lacks Jesus' decaying body. He speaks (John 20:15), walks (Luke 24:15), eats (John 21:13), and can be embraced (Matt 28:9), and his wounds can be probed (John 20:27). Yet his is no ordinary body. It has new properties. His body has both material and spiritual properties, something Paul also explains in 1 Corinthians 15:35–59. It is material enough to interact with his followers in ordinary ways but includes other abilities as well.

> 36 And as they were saying these things, He Himself stood among them. He said to them,
> "Peace to you! " 37 But they were startled and terrified and thought they were seeing a ghost.
> 38 "Why are you troubled? " He asked them. "And why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 Look
> at My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself! Touch Me and see, because a ghost does not have
> flesh and bones as you can see I have." 40 Having said this, He showed them His hands and
> feet. 41 But while they still were amazed and unbelieving because of their joy, He asked them,
> "Do you have anything here to eat? " 42 So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish, 43 and He
> took it and ate in their presence.
>
> 44 Then He told them, "These are My words that I spoke to you while I was still with you —
> that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be
> fulfilled." 45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. 46 He also said to them,
> "This is what is written: The Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead the third day, 47 and
> repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations,

beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And look, I am sending you what My Father promised. As for you, stay in the city until you are empowered , from on high.” 50 Then He led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up His hands He blessed them. 51 And while He was blessing them, He left them and was carried up into heaven. 52 After worshiping Him, they returned to Jerusalem with great joy. 53 And they were continually in the temple complex praising God.

***Appearances in Galilee or Jerusalem?* (24:36):** Does Jesus' appearance to the disciples in Jerusalem (see v. 33) conflict with the Gospel of Matthew? After all, in Matthew 28:10, Jesus told the women to go tell the male disciples to leave for Galilee, where he would meet up with them; and verses 16–18 report that the disciples obeyed the message and met Jesus in Galilee, whereupon they worshiped him "when they saw him," which would fit especially well with a first sighting.

We see here another example of how each writer focused his reports differently. Matthew reported appearances in Galilee (Matt 28:16–18), while Luke reported appearances in Judea. It is probably wrong to think of these scenes as reports of the "first" appearance, as if there is an intention to present the literal order of these events. Each writer was selecting examples of appearances and presenting them as impactful. Luke did have Jesus command the disciples to stay in Jerusalem (Luke 24:49), but this should probably be understood to mean they were to keep this as their base until they were clothed with the Spirit to engage in mission throughout Judea and abroad, starting from this key city (vv. 47, 49). The disciples had originally come down to Jerusalem only for the feast week and would have needed to return home to Galilee to get supplies and provisions for an extended stay in Judea. Matthew 28:7 speaks of a command to go to a specific locale in Galilee to receive more instructions. Appearances took place in each locale as Jesus commanded. They received instructions at both locales. There was a commission in Galilee and a promise to receive the Spirit in Jerusalem. (See further comments at Matt 28:10.)

This is what is written: The Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead the third day (24:46): What OT verse predicts that the Messiah will rise on the third day? Psalm 16:10 does not mention three days, nor does its original context seem to reference the coming Messiah. Hosea 6:1–2 mentions three days but does not seem to reference or allude to the Messiah.

It is hard to be sure what OT passage speaks of a third-day resurrection. It is best to see the idea of Scripture promising a resurrection and not specifying that it would take place after three days. The Greek allows that Jesus' intention may

have been to say that what was written was that "the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead." The phrase, "the third day," may simply be Jesus' elaboration, an additional detail that he added to describe the timing of the event without meaning to cite an OT text.

Stay in the city until you are empowered from on high (24:49): In Luke's account Jesus told the disciples to stay in Jerusalem "until you are empowered from on high," but Matthew 28:10, 16–18 portrayed the disciples going to Galilee in the meantime. For the question of whether Matthew and Luke are in conflict, see comments on 24:36.

***Ascension from Mount of Olives or Bethany?* (24:50–51):** Is Luke inconsistent about the locale from which Jesus ascended? In Luke 24:50–51 he stated that Jesus "led them out as far as Bethany" and was taken up from that locale. In Acts 1:9–12, however, he reported that after Jesus ascended and two angels spoke to the disciples about Jesus' future return, the disciples "returned to Jerusalem from the mount called the Mount of Olives, which is near Jerusalem —a Sabbath day's journey away." Additionally, Mark 16:14–20 seemingly has Jesus ascend during or directly after dining with the disciples "at table." Can this fit with either Bethany or the Mount of Olives as the locale for Jesus' ascension?

First, it is possible that Luke was narrating two distinct events in Luke 24:50–51 and Acts 1:9–12 (see the next comments). Second, even if Luke was narrating the same event in both texts, there is no serious issue involved if Luke 24:50–51 speaks of an ascent from Bethany and Acts 1:9–12 says it took place on the Mount of Olives, for Bethany was located on the edge of the Mount of Olives. It was simply on the other side of that mountain that stood opposite of the Temple Mount. In one case Luke was naming the closest town, while in the other he named the key topographical locale. The possible tension between Luke's two accounts and the Gospel of Mark is resolved by Mark 16:9–20 not being included in the best manuscripts and therefore not being regarded as an original part of Mark. (On the issues tied to the long ending of Mark 16, see comments there, and see also Black 2008.)

***Timing of the Ascension* (24:50–51):** Did Jesus have a final ascension into heaven within 24 hours of his resurrection, as some believe Luke 24 teaches, or did he ascend 40 days after his resurrection, as Acts 1:1–11 has it? The traditional Christian belief is that Luke authored both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, and it is unlikely that he would contradict himself between these two writings. Thus the conclusion is that Luke 24 does not mean to portray

Jesus' final ascension as occurring within 24 hours of Jesus' resurrection since this would set up unavoidable tension with Acts 1.

Attempts to harmonize the Luke 24 ascension with the Acts 1 ascension usually argue that they portray the same ascension and chronology conflicts are only apparent and not real. Some suggest that in Luke 24 there is a time gap between verses 43 and 44, or 49 and 50, such that the "Then He" phrases of verses 44 and 50 are not meant to convey immediate chronological continuance.

However there are difficulties with this traditional "gap" theory. First, neither verse 44 nor verse 50 redefine the participants, which best fits the conclusion that we do have chronological continuation throughout the account. Second, the "Then He" linking phrases in verses 44, 45, and 50 best fit chronological continuation. Third, it is not typical for Luke to use "Then He" when shifting from one event to another that is separated in time. Fourth, Luke's resurrection account, which is entirely encompassed in chapter 24, focuses exclusively on resurrection appearances in Jerusalem, never mentioning (and maybe not even leaving room for) appearances in Galilee. This would fit the conclusion that the Gospel of Luke accomplishes resurrection and ascension all in a single day in the city of Jerusalem. Fifth, a study of the time markers in chapter 24 reveals no gap in time, but strongly suggests a continuation that ended late in the night less than 24 hours after Jesus' resurrection. The time markers are:

- Verse 1—"On the first day of the week, very early in the morning"
- Verse 13—"Now that same day"
- Verse 29—"Stay with us, because it's almost evening, and now the day is almost over" (Since Monday began at 6 p.m., we're about 13 hours after the resurrection at this point.)
- Verse 33—"That very hour" (So we're maybe 14 hours post-resurrection at this point as the Emmaus disciples head back to Jerusalem.)
- Verse 36—"As they were saying these things" (If it took the Emmaus disciples two hours to walk the seven miles back to Jerusalem, we are now 16 hours post-resurrection.)
- Verse 44—"Then He"
- Verse 45—"Then He"
- Verse 46—"He also"
- Verse 50—"Then He" (It is late at night by now.)

Sixth, a difficulty of the view that sees Luke 24 portraying the ascension within 24 hours of the resurrection is that the ascension would take place at night

in this scenario. How would the disciples watch Jesus rise up into the heavens if it were dark? In answer, some defenders of the nighttime ascension note that the moon is full at Passover, and the trees on the Mount of Olives were not large and towering, so the moonlight could have been unobstructed, giving the disciples a fair view as Jesus rose into the sky. Other defenders of the nighttime ascension simply say the nighttime ascension is further proof that Luke 24 is not historical.

Considering all of the above points against the traditional harmonization approach, three possible conclusions arise:

1. The Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts are at variance and were written by the same author. Implications would be one or more of the following: (a) that Luke contradicted himself; (b) that Luke's writings, whether his Gospel or Acts, have been corrupted; or (c) that Luke was writing thematically in one account (Luke 24)—exercising the same kind of freedom John exercised if he shifted the temple cleansing to a different date—and more chronologically correct in the other account (Acts 1). Against this first conclusion is the fact that Luke seems to be a more careful author than this view suggests.
2. The Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts are at variance and were not written by the same author. But the opinion that Luke and Acts are not written by the same author is not a very common one due to the close links that exist in the theology of the two volumes (for this linked theology, see Bock and Köstenberger, 2012).
3. The Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts were both written by Luke and are not at variance because, despite similarities, the two texts are not recounting the same ascension event. This conclusion rejects the traditional harmonization approach as too complicated, and instead sees Luke 24 narrating Jesus' temporary departure to heaven rather than his final ascension narrated in Acts 1. In Luke 24 Jesus simply is taken away from the disciples and heads to his new abode in heaven, an act that ends this one appearance but does not end his time on earth. Acts 1:1–11 then notes 40 more days of appearances before Jesus' final ascension into heaven. This is the simplest and therefore the most likely explanation for harmonizing Luke's two ascension accounts.

Apologetics Commentary on the Gospel of John

John's Gospel was written as the last of the four Gospels in the Christian canon, completing what the early church called the "fourfold Gospel." In this way, John completes the one canonical Gospel according to four witnesses: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. While their accounts are essentially unified, each of these witnesses lends his own unique and distinctive voice to the canonical witness concerning Jesus Christ. John, in particular, is set off from the so-called "Synoptic Gospels" in that he opens his Gospel with reference to the pre-existent Word who was with God in the beginning and who is himself God. John later notes that this Word became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. More than in any of the other Gospels, the deity of Christ is at the heart of John's witness to Jesus. At the same time, John stresses the full humanity of Christ. For these and other reasons, John's Gospel featured prominently in the ecclesiastical doctrinal debates of the first centuries of the Christian era. Today, his Gospel continues to be of utmost importance in establishing the true identity of Jesus Christ, the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit, and several other major biblical and theological themes.

Authorship

Like the Synoptics, John's Gospel is formally anonymous. Yet, the author left a series of internal clues to his identity which, when examined in conjunction with the external attestation of the book, converge to suggest authorship by John, the son of Zebedee. The author identifies himself not by name but by the epithet "the disciple Jesus loved" (John 21:20, 24). This person is not only the author but also a prominent figure in the narrative itself, including the Last Supper (13:23), the crucifixion (19:26), the empty tomb (20:2), and the resurrection appearances (21:7, 20).

Since the author never refers to himself by name, he cannot be one of the named disciples in the Gospel, which include Peter (e.g., 13:6–9), Philip (e.g., 14:8–9), Thomas (e.g., 14:5), Judas the son of James (14:22), Nathanael (21:2; probably to be identified with Bartholomew in the Synoptic lists; see comments

on 1:45 below), or Judas Iscariot (e.g., 13:2, 26–27). James the son of Zebedee, John's brother, can also be safely ruled out since he was martyred in AD 42 (see Acts 12:2), as can Matthew, the author of the first Gospel. Other than John, this leaves only Simon the Zealot and James the son of Alphaeus, neither of whom was ever seriously considered as the likely author of the Gospel.

Add to this the prominent reference to John in other NT writings (see esp. Luke 22:8; Acts 1:13; 3–4; 8:14–25; Gal 2:9), and it is clear that John has no serious rival for authorship of the Gospel that bears his name. In fact, the only more significant challenge to Johannine apostolic authorship pertains to the church father Papias' possible reference to another John, "John the Elder," whom some consider to be different from John the apostle and the likely author of John's Gospel. The Papias reference is fraught with difficulty, however (Carson and Moo 2005, 229–54, esp. 233–34; Köstenberger 2009, 74), and unable to overturn the strong likelihood that the author is John the son of Zebedee.

The external evidence nicely confirms the above reading of the internal evidence. In the second half of the second century, the church father Irenaeus attributed the Gospel to John the apostle: "John the disciple of the Lord, who leaned back on his breast, published the Gospel while he was a resident at Ephesus in Asia" (*Against Heresies* 3.1.2). In the same vein, Clement of Alexandria wrote, "John, last of all . . . composed a spiritual gospel" (quoted by Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.7). For virtually the entire period of church history until at least 1820, the church, without any notable dissent, attributed the authorship of John's Gospel to the apostle John.

More recently, some have rejected apostolic authorship, in some cases in favor of authorship by a "Johannine community" or "school" (possibly founded by John the apostle) following John's death (Culpepper 1975; Brown 1979; Martyn 1968; 1979). However, there is very little evidence for this in the church fathers (Hengel 1993) and whatever internal evidence is marshaled in support of such a view is less than convincing (Köstenberger 2009, 55–60). Like the other Gospels, John's Gospel focuses primarily on demonstrating the true identity of Jesus (Christology) and the question of what it means to follow him (discipleship). The circumstances surrounding the writing of John's Gospel should certainly be adequately considered, but not be used to detract from this primary focus.

Others have rejected apostolic authorship on other historical grounds and opted instead for John the Elder or some other unidentified figure as the likely author (Hengel 1993; Bauckham 2007). R. Bauckham (1993, 35–69) does so

primarily on the basis of his reading of the patristic evidence (Papias, Polycrates, Irenaeus) and his understanding of the reference to "Zebedee's sons" in John 21:2 (regarding which he feels that John, as the author, would not have referred to "Zebedee's sons" in this way; but see regarding both points Köstenberger and Stout 2008, 209–32; see also Köstenberger 2009, 75–79). However, none of these proposals is able to overturn the compelling reading of the internal evidence presented above indicating that John the son of Zebedee wrote the Gospel that by tradition bears his name.

Date

The earliest date of writing would seem to be after AD 70 in light of John's reference to Peter's martyrdom (c. AD 65/66) in his Gospel (21:19) and the implicit indication that at the time of writing the temple had already been destroyed (AD 70). We may infer the latter point by John's presentation of Jesus as the new temple (see esp. 2:20–22; and discussion below). The latest date of writing is prior to c. AD 135, the date of a NT papyrus manuscript containing portions of John (the John Rylands papyrus, labeled P^{52}, which includes 18:31–32 and 37–38). On the back end, some time should be allowed for the manuscript to be written and copied and make its way to Egypt (where P^{52} was found), so that a date of writing in the 80s or early 90s seems most likely.

There are several pieces of internal evidence supporting such a conclusion. First, while the Synoptics and Paul refer to Jesus' divinity, John is even more overt in lodging such claims, which makes it likely that a certain amount of additional time elapsed between the writing of the Synoptics and Paul's letters and the composition of John's Gospel.

Second, if John's Gospel was written after the destruction of the temple, it is likely that a certain amount of time had to pass between this momentous event and the writing of John's Gospel. Carson makes this point well: "[It is] hard to believe that . . . the date was *immediately* after AD 70 [the destruction of the temple]. . . . The reverberations around the Empire, for both Jews and Christians, were doubtless still too powerful. A little time needed to elapse . . . before a document like the Fourth Gospel could be free *not* to make an *explicit* allusion to the destruction of the Temple" (Carson 1991, 85).

Third, John does not refer to the Sadducees, a sect active in Jesus' day but rendered inactive subsequent to the temple's destruction. John's lack of reference to the Sadducees, likewise, makes perfect sense if John writes a decade or so after AD 70.

Fourth, the alert reader notes John's dual reference to the Sea of Galilee as "the Sea of Tiberias" (6:1; 21:1). Historically, Herod Antipas (one of Herod the Great's sons) established the city of Tiberias (named after the Emperor Tiberius, who ruled AD 14–37) on the shores of the Sea of Galilee around AD 17–18 (Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.2.3). Gradually, then, people came to refer to the Sea of Galilee by the name of the Sea of Tiberias because Tiberias was the most prominent city located by it. Evidence suggests that this shift probably took place in the AD 80s or 90s.

Fifth and finally, Thomas's confession of Jesus as "my Lord and my God" in 20:28 is most readily understood against the backdrop of the Roman Emperor Domitian's insistence that he be called *Dominus et Deus* (Latin for "Lord and God"). Since Domitian ruled from AD 81–96, this, too, suggests the likelihood that John's Gospel was written sometime in the mid 80s or early 90s.

Provenance and Destination

Where did John write his Gospel, and what was the location of his first readers? Regarding the first question, Irenaeus attested that "John, the disciple of the lord . . . published the gospel while living in Ephesus in Asia" (*Against Heresies* 3.1.2). Eusebius confirms that after the Jewish War (AD 66–70) scattered the early apostles, John went to Asia (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.1.1), which places him in or near Ephesus during the 80s or early 90s. In light of this likely provenance, it seems probable that people living in or around Ephesus, primarily Diaspora Jews and Gentiles, were at least part of John's intended readership. Beyond this, it seems safe to assume that, like the other canonical Gospels, John's was a "Gospel for all Christians" (Bauckham 1998b) intended for a universal readership: "After all, John's gospel is a *Gospel*, heralding the universal good news of salvation in Christ" (Köstenberger 1999, 26).

Occasion and Purpose

As to the occasion for John's writing, it seems wise to keep in mind at least the following three important historical data. First, according to the book of Acts, the early church, led by Paul, had embarked on a worldwide mission taking the Christian gospel to the ends of the earth (see, e.g., Acts 1:8). This background explains John's universal outlook (see esp. John 3:16), emphasizing that while Jesus came first and foremost to the Jews, the saving significance of his death extended also to non-Jews.

Second, the destruction of the temple in AD 70 constituted an earth-shattering event in the immediate past (speaking from the vantage point of John writing his

Gospel). Most likely, John wrote his Gospel, at least in part, to urge that the new temple—now that the old sanctuary had been destroyed—was Jesus, and faith in him as God's Messiah was the only acceptable way of worshiping God "in spirit and in truth" (4:24).

Third, there is evidence in the writings of the NT that precursors of Gnostic thought—the first Christian heresy—already reared their head during the end of the apostolic period (e.g., 1 Tim 6:20). Thus it is possible that John, by emphasizing both the full humanity and the complete deity of Jesus Christ, countered any diminishment of either aspect of Jesus' nature by such Greek dualists (who pitted the two elements against each other and denied either Jesus' full humanity or his deity). Clearly, it would have been hard (if not impossible) for Gnostics to affirm that the pre-existent Word—himself God—"became flesh" in Jesus as John affirms in the introduction to his Gospel (John 1:14).

Perhaps, then, it is best to see the destruction of the temple as an important aspect of the occasion for John's writing (see Köstenberger 2006, 69–108) against the backdrop of the universal outreach of the church and the rising Gnostic threat.

In terms of the Gospel's purpose, John does us the favor of stating it clearly toward the end of his Gospel. In 20:30–31 he says, "Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in His name." This makes clear that by writing his Gospel, John sought to elicit faith in his readers that Jesus was in fact the promised Messiah, whether directly or indirectly (i.e., by having them share the contents of the Gospel with others outside the church).

The purpose statement also includes many of the major building blocks of John's demonstration that Jesus is the Messiah in the body of his narrative. Most conspicuous are Jesus' signs, which are adduced by John as major proofs of Jesus' true identity: the turning of water into wine at the wedding of Cana (2:1–11); possibly the clearing of the temple (2:13–22; a possible non-miraculous sign); the healing of the centurion's son (4:43–54); the healing of the lame man (5:1–15); the feeding of the 5,000 (6:1–15); the healing of the man born blind (chap. 9); and the raising of Lazarus (chap. 11; Köstenberger 1995b, 87–103). "Believing" and "life" are also important themes throughout John's Gospel (the verb "to believe" occurs almost 100 times; the "life" word group is represented over 50 times).

Apologetics Commentary on the Gospel of John

In the beginning was the Word, ’
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
2 He was with God in the beginning.
3 All things were created through Him,
and apart from Him not one thing was created
that has been created.
4 Life was in Him, ’
and that life was the light of men.
5 That light shines in the darkness,
yet the darkness did not overcome it.
6 There was a man named John
who was sent from God.
7 He came as a witness
to testify about the light,
so that all might believe through him.
8 He was not the light,
but he came to testify about the light.
9 The true light, who gives light to everyone,
was coming into the world. ’
10 He was in the world,
and the world was created through Him,
yet the world did not recognize Him.
11 He came to His own,
and His own people did not receive Him.
12 But to all who did receive Him,
He gave them the right to be children of God,
to those who believe in His name,
13 who were born,
not of blood,
or of the will of the flesh,
or of the will of man,
but of God.
14 The Word became flesh ’
and took up residence among us.
We observed His glory,

the glory as the One and Only Son from the Father,
full of grace and truth.
15 (John testified concerning Him and exclaimed,
“This was the One of whom I said,
‘The One coming after me has surpassed me,
because He existed before me.’ ”)
16 Indeed, we have all received grace after grace
from His fullness,
17 for the law was given through Moses,
grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.
18 No one has ever seen God.
The One and Only Son —
the One who is at the Father’s side —
He has revealed Him.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (1:1): In this opening verse of John’s Gospel, God is set in relation to the Word. The Word, which in verses 14–18 is clearly identified as Jesus Christ, is an eternal being that existed prior to creation. However, it is not simply that the Word was with God (so, too, was Isaiah’s personified Word and Wisdom), but John refers to the Word itself as God. This is quite a claim coming from a Jewish monotheist. From the patristic era (Arius) to the present (Jehovah’s Witnesses), some have argued that, because there is no definite article in front of *theos*, this verse merely identifies Jesus as *a* god rather than as God. Interestingly, around 1950 there was a change in how Jehovah’s Witnesses dealt with this verse. Before 1950, they carried a copy of the American Standard Version of the Bible. However, the problem they faced was that the ASV rendered verse 1 accurately with the phrase “the Word was God.” In an effort to resolve the difficulty this rendering posed for its theology, the Watchtower Society (the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ publishing group) issued its own translation of the Bible, which rendered the verse as “the Word was a god” (Reed 1986, 71). However, there are several reasons why this translation is inaccurate.

First, John, as a monotheistic Jew, would not have referred to another person as “a god.” The Jews had no place for demigods in their belief system. Second, if John had placed a definite article before *theos*, he would have abandoned the distinction between the two persons he established in the previous clause (“the Word was *with* God”). Third, the view defended by Jehovah’s Witnesses misunderstands Greek syntax. It is common in Greek for a predicate noun to be specific without having an article. For example, later in this chapter reference is made to Nathanael’s confession of Jesus, “you are the King of Israel” (1:49),

with no article being before “King” in the Greek (for other NT examples of this construction, see 8:39; 17:17; Rom 14:17; Gal 4:25; Rev 1:20). From these examples, it is clear that the lack of an article in Greek does not necessarily imply indefiniteness (“a” god). Finally, John could have used the word *theios* if he were simply trying to say that Jesus was “divine” (i.e., that he had God-like qualities) rather than being God himself. The anarthrous (article-less) *theos* is most likely used to explain that Jesus “shared the essence of the Father though they differed in person” (Wallace 1996, 269). As D. A. Carson explains, “In fact, if John had included the article, he would have been saying something quite untrue. He would have been so identifying the Word with God that no divine being could exist apart from the Word. In that case, it would be nonsense to say (in the words of the second clause of this verse) that the Word was *with* God” (1991, 117).

The Word was with God, and the Word was God (1:1): Critics often say that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is unbiblical. While it is true that no verse specifically spells out that God is “three divine persons in one essence,” as our historic creeds have stated, the fact is the biblical witness demands the Trinitarian doctrine. The present verse disproves any monistic model of God, for the Word is at one and the same time “with” God, meaning there is some way of making distinction between Word and God, while at the same time the Word is God. Hence from this verse one would conclude that there are at least two personal beings united in the one godhead. A sampling of other verses supporting Trinitarianism includes Genesis 1:26; Isaiah 9:6; Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 2:10; and Colossians 1:17.

The true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world (1:7, 9): Some have used these verses to teach that all people will in the end be saved through Jesus, a view called “universalism.” Yet, this confuses the *desired* with the *actual* result of John the Baptist’s testimony concerning Jesus. In other words, while God desires all people to believe (cf. 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9), this is not the actual outcome, because not all people will in fact believe.

John does not speak here of internal illumination in the sense of general revelation (contra Morris 1995, 84), but of external illumination in the sense of objective revelation requiring a response (Brown 1966, 9). The rest of the Gospel illustrates clearly that not all did in fact *receive* the light, though it was *available* to all through Jesus’ presence and teaching (Borchert 1996, 113). In the present verse, John is emphasizing the universal scope of Jesus’ coming and the

potential spiritual enlightenment available to all who believe, an enlightenment available not only to Jews but to all people (cf. 1:12–13; 3:16; 10:16; 12:32; cf. 1:10; 3:19–21).

Reading the verses following verse 9, it becomes increasingly apparent that John is not proposing a form of universalism: “He was in the world, and the world was created through Him, yet the world did not recognize Him. He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him” (1:10–11). Even though the world was created through the Word (an echo of 1:3), it did not recognize that Word, because it was estranged from him (Ridderbos 1997, 44). Yet the world should have recognized the one through whom it was made. Keener is correct to point out that “God did provide the light for all humanity in Jesus’ incarnation [for instance, *T. Levi* 14:4 says that the law was given to ‘enlighten every person’] just as in the Jewish tradition he provided the light of Torah to all nations at Sinai. But just as the nations rejected Torah, so the world rejected God’s Word made flesh” (2003, 395).

The Word became flesh and took up residence among us (1:14): One should not be confused by the word “flesh” and conclude that the Word must have been stained by sin when he became a man. It is important to note that while “flesh” can have a negative connotation in biblical language, this meaning is not present in this verse. The word “flesh” can be used in different ways throughout Scripture. For example, it can refer to physical parts of the human body (e.g., Jas 5:3; Rev 17:16; 19:18, 21); to earthly human form (Heb 2:14; 12:9); to humanity (Acts 2:17; 1 Pet 1:24); to the incarnation of Jesus (1 John 4:2; 2 John 7); or negatively to the old or present age in salvation history (Heb 7:17; 9:13–14; 1 Pet 3:18). Therefore, as is the case with all words, meaning is finally determined by context. “Flesh” here denotes “all of the human person in creaturely existence as distinct from God” (Ridderbos 1997, 49). In other words, the Word genuinely became human in addition to being eternally divine.

While John does not explain the exact way in which Jesus took on human flesh, his contention that deity assumed human nature in Jesus would have been anathema for Greeks, who held to a spirit-matter dualism and could hardly have imagined immaterial Reason becoming a physical being. The concept of gods appearing in the form of humans was not uncommon to the ancients. Yet John is clear that the Word did not merely come as an apparition—as was alleged by the Docetists (an early Christian heresy holding that Jesus only *appeared* to become human)—but that the Word literally became flesh.

Those who conclude that Jesus was or would have become sinful if he truly

became human have more in common with the ancient heresy of Gnosticism than with orthodox Christianity. Gnosticism was a religious movement prevalent in the second and third centuries AD that orthodox Christians deemed heretical for good reason. Most scholars believe that "the foundational conviction of the Gnostics is the commitment to a radical anti-cosmic dualism in which all that is material—the world and the body—is seen as evil and as the creation of a lesser, inferior god" (Martin and Davids 1997, 401).

In contrast, the biblical view is that God created all things and pronounced material creation "good," including the physical body (Genesis 1–2; see esp. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31; and Paul's defense of the goodness of God's creation in 1 Tim 4:3–4, esp. v. 4: "For everything created by God is good"). However, due to humanity's rebellion against God (cf. Genesis 3), the physical and spiritual aspects of God's creation are under the curse of the fall and are not functioning as they should. God promises to redeem both aspects of his creation, the material and the immaterial (cf. Rev 22:3: "there will no longer be any curse").

Here John's message is that the incarnation is of equal importance with creation of the world. The entire world—including God's chosen people (1:10–11)—is fallen and in need of spiritual rebirth (1:13; cf. 3:3, 5), available only through the pre-existent Word made flesh (cf. 1:29, 36). This directly contradicts Gnostic thought, which denied not only Jesus' incarnation—on the basis that it was inconceivable for God, who is spirit, to take on matter, since matter was considered evil—but also human sinfulness (cf. 1 John 2:2; 4:10).

Another question that has been posed concerning this passage is whether the phrase "the Word became flesh" indicates that Jesus is a created being. As we have already observed from the opening verses, while the "Word" was in some ways distinct from God, it was pre-existent and actually God. Moreover, the Greek word rendered "became," "made," or "born" does not mean "changed into" in the sense that Jesus, by becoming human, ceased to be God. Nor does it mean "appeared" human or even "took on" humanity. The main point is that God now had chosen to be with his people in a more personal way than ever before. J. C. O'Neill writes, "The Word did not turn into flesh, did not change its nature and become flesh, did not masquerade as flesh, and did not come on the scene as flesh . . . 'The Word was born flesh' or 'the Word was made flesh'" (1991, 127).

Building off the previous question, this verse seems to be connected to the characteristic of God that theologians have historically identified as the "immutability of God." Herman Bavinck summarizes this doctrine well as he writes, "The doctrine of God's immutability is of the highest significance for

religion. The contrast between being and becoming marks the difference between the creator and the creature. Every creature is continually becoming. It is changeable, constantly striving, seeks rest and satisfaction, and finds rest in God, in him alone, for only he is pure being and no becoming" (1978, 49).

Because Scripture consistently affirms that God is unchangeable (e.g., Pss 33:11; 102:27; Isa 46:8–11; Mal 3:6; Matt 13:35; Eph 1:4, 11; 1 Pet 1:20), some may object that verse 14 contradicts this doctrine. However, as Carson points out, theologians acknowledge that God is not immutable in every possible way: "He is unchanging in his being, purposes, and perfections. But this does not mean he cannot interact with his image-bearers *in their time*. The purposes of God from eternity past were to send the Son, but at a set moment in our time-space continuum the Son was actually incarnated. Even the most superficial reading of Scripture discloses God to be a personal Being who interacts with us. None of this is meant to be ruled out by immutability" (1999, 55). For this reason the doctrine of immutability must not be applied in such a way as to negate the emphasis of verse 14 and other NT passages that clearly indicate that at one point in space-time history, the second person of the Trinity became a man.

The One coming after me has surpassed me, because He existed before me (1:15): Some have suggested that John the Baptist could not possibly have known of Jesus' pre-existence as the eternal Son of God. Therefore, it has been argued that verse 15 is only a later Christian affirmation placed on the lips of the Baptist. It is possible that John the Baptist knew by special revelation that Jesus was the divine Son of God, even though scholars with an anti-supernatural bias exclude this option. However, without excluding supernatural knowledge of Jesus' divine status *a priori*, it seems likely, given the Baptist's later misunderstanding concerning Jesus' ministry (Luke 7:18–30), that the Baptist himself did not fully understand the significance of his words (see comments on 1:29 below for an explanation of why the Baptist questioned Jesus' messiahship while he was in prison).

That Jesus "comes after me" reflects that the Baptist was six months older than Jesus (Luke 1:24, 26) and began his ministry before Jesus did (Luke 3:1–20). The OT generally (though not without exception) supports the notion that rank and honor are tied to one's age (e.g., Gen 49:3; Prov 16:31). Hence, being the firstborn often implied preeminence (cf. Deut 21:17; Isa 61:7). Due to the Baptist's older age and earlier ministry, both he and the author are seeking to show that Jesus really was "before" John and therefore appropriately honored

above him.

The Baptist, possibly unaware of Jesus' pre-existence as the Word, may simply have intended to affirm that Jesus "surpassed him." If so, he spoke better than he knew (Kruse 2003, 72). For in the context of the Gospel of John's prologue—where Jesus is depicted as existing eternally with God—the Baptist's confession also points to Jesus' eternal origin (1:14; cf. 8:58; 12:41) and thus preeminence. If the Baptist here spoke better than he knew, this would not be the only time where the Evangelist shows that the words spoken by an individual in his Gospel had a deeper meaning than the original speaker intended (e.g., 11:48–50).

No one has ever seen God (1:18): John's words here should not be seen as denying or contradicting OT passages that speak of people seeing God, because within the OT itself there is a distinction between God revealing himself partially through certain means and people seeing him in all his fullness. In the OT, God stated that no one could see his face and live (Exod 33:20; Mowvley 1984, 137). Moses received a glimpse of God's "back" (Exod 33:23), as did Hagar (metaphorically; Gen 16:13). OT believers were normally terrified of seeing God (Exod 3:6b; Judg 13:21–22; Job 13:11; Isa 6:5). There are at least two reasons humans could not see God. First, God is spirit (John 4:24). Second, humans fell into sin and were expelled from God's presence (Genesis 3; Isa 59:2). However, Jesus overcame both obstacles. First, he, himself God, became a human being, so that others could see God in him (John 1:14; 14:9–10; cf. 20:28). Second, being sinless, he died for humans, so that their sinfulness no longer prevents them from entering into fellowship with God (John 1:29; cf. Rom 5:1–2, 6–11).

There are two significant issues related to the correct rendering of this verse. The first is in regard to a textual variant within the manuscript tradition. The question is whether the original reading here is *monogenēs huios* (one and only Son) or *monogenēs theos* (one and only [Son, himself] God). With the acquisition of P^{66} and P^{75}, both of which read *monogenēs theos*, the available evidence now favors the latter reading. M. Harris (1992, 78–80) expresses a "strong preference" for *monogenēs theos* for at least four reasons: (1) it has superior manuscript support; (2) it represents the more difficult reading; (3) it serves as a more proper climax to the entire prologue, attributing deity to the Son by way of inclusion with 1:1 and 1:14; and (4) it seems to account best for the other variants. Most likely, then, *monogenēs huios* represents a scribal assimilation to 3:16 and 3:18 (i.e., scribes, knowing that *monogenēs huios* was

the reading in those later passages, conformed the reading in 1:18 to 3:16 and 18). For a defense of *monogenēs huios* as original, which is followed by the HCSB, see Clendenen 2012, 136–38.

The second issue is that Mormons claim that this passage teaches that Jesus was begotten by sexual union between God and Mary. This error is perpetuated by the KJV's translation of the adjective *monogenēs* as "begotten." The term is best rendered as describing Jesus as God's "one-of-a-kind Son" (*monogenēs*). Keener points out that "'Only begotten' fails the etymology test, as it would require a different word, *monogennētos*; *monogenēs* derives instead from a different root, *genos*, leading to the meaning 'one of a kind.' This observation hardly settles the Johannine sense of the term, since usage rather than etymology determines word meaning in practice; but further analysis confirms the conclusion based on the term's derivation" (2003, 412–13).

Monogenēs is used in the OT and the Apocrypha to mean "only child" (Judg 11:34; Tob 3:15; 8:17). Being an only child, and thus irreplaceable, makes a child of special value to his parents (cf. 7:12; 8:42; 9:38; see Pendrick 1995, 593–94). Therefore, the LXX often uses *agapētos* (beloved) instead of *monogenēs* (Gen 22:2, 12, 16; Jer 6:26; Amos 8:10; Zech 12:10; cf. Prov 4:3; in Judg [A] 11:34, both words are used). The decisive event in OT history in this regard is Abraham's offering of Isaac, who in Genesis 22:2, 12, 16 is called Abraham's "one and only son" (Hb *yahid*; note the probable allusion to this text in John 3:16), even though the patriarch earlier had fathered Ishmael (cf. Heb 11:17; Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.13.1 §222: *monogenēs*). The evidence suggests, therefore, that the KJV's translation of *monogenēs* is inaccurate and that the Mormon teaching concerning this verse is erroneous because the term does not mean "only begotten" but rather "one and only" (i.e., unique) son (for a more detailed argument for this understanding, see Pendrick 1995).

19 This is John's testimony when the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him,
"Who are you? "

20 He did not refuse to answer, but he declared: "I am not the Messiah."

21 "What then? " they asked him. "Are you Elijah? "
"I am not," he said.

"Are you the Prophet? " '
"No," he answered.

22 "Who are you, then? " they asked. "We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What can you tell us about yourself? "

23 He said, “I am a **voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord** ’ — just as Isaiah the prophet said.”

24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. 25 So they asked him, “Why then do you baptize if you aren’t the Messiah, or Elijah, or the Prophet? ”

26 “I baptize with water,” John answered them. “Someone stands among you, but you don’t know Him. 27 He is the One coming after me, ’ whose sandal strap I’m not worthy to untie.”

28 All this happened in Bethany across the Jordan, ’ where John was baptizing.

***John’s denial that he was Elijah* (1:21):** Elijah, who had never died (2 Kgs 2:11), was to come “before the great and awesome Day of the LORD” (Mal 4:5; Morris 1995, 118). It was widely accepted that Elijah would “restore everything” (Matt 17:11), turning the hearts of the fathers to their children and vice versa (Mal 4:6; cf. Sir. 48:10; Luke 1:17).

Was John the Baptist Elijah? This question could be confusing if one were looking both at the Synoptics’ and the Gospel of John’s portrayal of John the Baptist. In Matthew 11:12, Jesus seems to contend that John the Baptist is indeed Elijah, and in Luke 1:17, John is said to be acting “in the spirit and power of Elijah.” However, in John’s Gospel the Baptist *denies* being Elijah. Do we have a contradiction between these accounts?

We should note that the Synoptics never actually contend that John the Baptist was *literally* Elijah. After all, they all present Elijah as appearing with Moses at the transfiguration (Matt 17:3; Mark 9:4; Luke 9:30), and Luke indicates simply that John had come *“in the spirit and power of Elijah”* (Luke 1:17). The Synoptics appear to view the Baptist as a typological fulfillment of the prophecy of Malachi 4:5. It is therefore possible, as Carson writes, that the Baptist simply did not see the full significance of his ministry: “The Synoptic Gospels report that Jesus identified John the Baptist with the promised Elijah (Matt 11:14; 17:12; Mark 9:13; cf. Luke 1:17), but they never suggest that the Baptist himself made the connection. Here he refuses to make it—a refusal which, when placed beside the Synoptic evidence, suggests that he did not detect as much significance in his own ministry as Jesus did” (1991, 143). Or perhaps the Baptist was substantially aware of the significance of his role but denied being “Elijah” to counter the expectation (current in his day) that the same Elijah who escaped death in a fiery chariot would return in like spectacular manner. (See further comments at Matt 11:14.)

“**I baptize with water,” John answered them (1:26):** Modern translations render the phrase *en hudati* as either “with water” (HCSB, ESV, NET, NLT, KJV, NIV) or “in water” (NASB). Both renderings are defensible from the original

Greek, and no definitive conclusion can be drawn from this phrase as to the mode (immersion or sprinkling) of early Christian baptism. Thus the critic's charge that translators choose to render this verse according to their personal doctrine and not the meaning of the Greek is unsubstantiated.

All this happened in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing (1:28): Some have argued that this verse contains a geographical mistake because there was no Bethany "across the Jordan." Instead of being a mistake, it appears that John adds the phrase "across the Jordan" to distinguish the Bethany to which he was referring from the "Bethany near Jerusalem," which he mentions later in 11:1 and 11:18. The Bethany here is most likely not a village but the region of Batanea in the northeast (called Bashan in the OT; see Carson 1991, 147; Keener 2003, 450; Witherington 1995, 66). This is suggested by the fact that Jesus is said to leave Bethany for Galilee in 1:43 and apparently calls Philip to follow him on the same day. Hence, Bethany must have been within a day's journey and thus closer to Galilee than to Judea. If so, "Bethany" is a variant spelling of "Batanea" used by the author to emphasize that Jesus' ministry began and ended in "Bethany."

29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Here is the Lamb of God, who
takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is the One I told you about: 'After me comes a man
who has surpassed me, because He existed before me.' 31 I didn't know Him, but I came
baptizing with water so He might be revealed to Israel."
32 And John testified, "I watched the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He rested
on Him. 33 I didn't know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The One
you see the Spirit descending and resting on — He is the One who baptizes with the Holy
Spirit.' 34 I have seen and testified that He is the Son of God! " '
35 Again the next day, John was standing with two of his disciples. 36 When he saw Jesus
passing by, he said, "Look! The Lamb of God! "
37 The two disciples heard him say this and followed Jesus. 38 When Jesus turned and noticed
them following Him, He asked them, "What are you looking for? "
They said to Him, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are You staying? "
39 "Come and you'll see," He replied. So they went and saw where He was staying, and they
stayed with Him that day. It was about 10 in the morning.
40 Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard John and followed Him.
41 He first found his own brother Simon and told him, "We have found the Messiah! " ' (which
means "Anointed One"), 42 and he brought Simon to Jesus.
When Jesus saw him, He said, "You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas"

(which means “Rock”).

Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (1:29, 36): Critics argue that these verses are examples of where the Evangelist, writing in the early church era, places later ecclesiastical affirmations on John the Baptist’s lips. After all, say critics, John could not possibly have made such statements referring to Jesus as “the Lamb of God,” which has a connotation of suffering, sacrifice, and atonement that fit with what Jesus would eventually experience, and then later question Jesus’ messianic identity when Jesus did not usher in the victory of the kingdom expected by the Baptist (Luke 17:18–23). In other words, John seems to anticipate Jesus’ rejection here, but then balks in the face of that rejection later.

It appears that this is another case where the Baptist spoke better than he knew (Ridderbos 1997, 69–72, esp. 71; contra Sandy 1991). The Evangelist commonly writes on multiple levels where characters make statements that are valid on one level but are also true on a deeper, second level (e.g., 11:49–52). There are several other references that the Baptist could be thinking of here without being aware of the deeper level that later Christians would find meaningful in his statement (see Keener 2003, 452–54). Options include the apocalyptic warrior lamb of *1 Enoch*, the gentle lamb of Jeremiah 11:19, the scapegoat of Leviticus 16, the guilt offering of Leviticus 14/Numbers 16, and the lamb led to the slaughter in Isaiah 53:7.

Carson (1991, 150) makes a credible case that the Baptist has in mind the apocalyptic warrior lamb featured in Second Temple Jewish texts (*1 Enoch* 90:9–12; *T. Jos.* 19:8; *T. Benj.* 3:8) and also in the book of Revelation (Rev 5:6, 12; 7:17; 13:8; 17:14; 19:7, 9; 21:22–23; 22:1–3). Carson reasons that this would fit well with the Synoptics, who present the Baptist as proclaiming that Jesus would bring judgment and deal with the sin of Israel. Therefore, John the Baptist’s statement concerning Jesus taking away the sins of the world, at least in the Baptist’s original context, may have had to do more with judgment than atonement.

While a “warrior lamb” provides an attractive explanation as to the background of the Baptist’s original statement, apocalyptic lambs are scarce in the literature preceding John the Baptist (Keener 2003, 452). It is perhaps more probable that Isaiah 53:7 serves as the background. This would mean that the Baptist is thinking of the lamb led to the slaughter referred to in Isaiah 53:7, which contemporary Judaism did not interpret as a dying Messiah but as a substitutionary suffering for sin that fell short of actual death (cf. Matt 11:2–3;

Luke 7:18–20).

In any case, regardless of which of the above contexts forms the background for the Baptist's statement, the Evangelist appears to place the Baptist's declaration into the wider context of the passion narrative where Jesus is shown to be the ultimate fulfillment of the yearly Passover lamb (cf. Exodus 12) whose bones must not be broken (John 19:36; cf. 19:14). (See further comments at Matt 11:3.)

I didn't know Him (1:31–33): Critics argue that the Baptist's words are a case where John's Gospel contradicts the Synoptics. They argue that the Baptist here implies that he did not know Jesus whereas Matthew says he did (Matt 3:13–14). And of course Luke has Mary visit Elizabeth when both women were pregnant, at which time fetal John is said to have leapt in his mother's womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:39–56). The women, who were related, spent the next three months together, and it seems likely John and Jesus at least knew of one another growing up. So what could the Gospel of John mean when it portrays John as saying he did not know Jesus? It is most likely, given the surrounding context, that the Baptist is simply acknowledging that he did not know *that Jesus was the Messiah* until he saw the sign mentioned in 1:32–33.

This conclusion may be surprising at first, for it is natural to assume that Elizabeth would have told her son that Mary's son, Jesus, is the Messiah. But closer examination reveals that this assumption is not well founded. Perhaps Elizabeth felt the revelation of Jesus' identity was to be kept private until such a time as God saw fit to make it known to John, whose life was marked out for a preparatory ministry from the outset (Luke 1:16–17). It is also possible, given their advanced age (Luke 1:7), that John's parents died early in his life and did not have a chance to share with him the remarkable revelation about Jesus that came to Elizabeth at the time of Mary's visit (Luke 1:39–56).

Lamb of God . . . Messiah . . . the One Moses wrote about . . . Son of God . . . King of Israel! (1:36, 41, 45, 49): Each of these verses includes Jesus being called explicit names and titles, which could imply an early awareness of Jesus' identity that would seem to contradict the disciples' apparent misunderstanding throughout Jesus' ministry concerning his true identity and mission. Thus some have claimed that the Evangelist anachronistically placed these Christological statements in the mouths of these early followers of Jesus.

In response, however, we counter that these confessions provide a credible motive why these men would make such a dramatic decision to leave everything

behind to follow Jesus. If they thought Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah (though admittedly in time Jesus would change their understanding of the type of Messiah that he was), this would provide the answer to the obvious historical question: Why did these men leave their families and occupations, forsaking everything, in order to follow Jesus?

Another important question, along similar lines, is: Why did some of Jesus' first disciples come from John the Baptist? John depicts these disciples as leaving the Baptist at the height of his popularity in order to follow Jesus. Historically, the question arises: What would motivate these men to do so? The answer is rather obvious: "[T]hey changed their allegiance precisely because it was the Baptist himself who pointed Jesus out as the one who was coming to fulfill the promises of Scripture. In that case, the confessions of John 1 are not only plausible, but almost historically necessary" (Carson 1991, 148).

At the same time, as mentioned, there is no need to suggest that by these proclamations the early followers of Jesus understood the full significance of their words. Among the four Gospels, John insists most emphatically that the disciples did not actually understand what they initially confessed (the Johannine "misunderstanding theme" in 2:20; 3:4; 4:10–15, 31–34; 6:32–35, 52; 7:41–42; etc; see Carson 1991, 147–48, 153–54; Culpepper 1983, 161–62; Köstenberger 1999, 66–69; for a complete list, see Köstenberger 2009, 141–45). This fact appears to account adequately for the growing understanding of the disciples as depicted in the Synoptics.

In keeping with this understanding, one should not read a later Christological understanding into Nathaniel's reference to Jesus as the "Son of God." While "Son of God" and "King of Israel" are both messianic titles (Barrett 1978, 186; Ridderbos 1997, 91), the latter expression may reflect strong nationalistic overtones (Morris 1995, 147n115). In fact, Jesus' response in 1:50–51 may provide a correction (cf. 6:15; 12:16; 18:36). While Nathanael's judgment is vindicated, and his expectation apparently fulfilled when Jesus is hailed as "King of Israel" at his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (12:13), there is no reason to believe that Nathanael's glowing confession reveals greater insight than do previous confessions by disciples (1:41, 45; Ridderbos 1997, 91; cf. Lindars 1972, 119). More likely, he spoke better than he knew (see comments at 1:29, 36 above).

The two disciples heard him say this and followed Jesus (1:37): Critics allege that this passage contradicts the Synoptics, which have the disciples called at a later point in Jesus' ministry (cf. Matt 4:18; Mark 1:6; Luke 5:1). However, this

is an example of the Synoptics and John's Gospel interlocking in such a way as to make most historical sense when read together (see the detailed analysis in Köstenberger forthcoming). As mentioned previously, the disciples are depicted as following Jesus with such eagerness and urgency that it is difficult to believe historically that Jesus' call in the Synoptic accounts constituted their first exposure to him. For this reason the traditional harmonization of the Johannine and Synoptic accounts seems to be the most plausible: John's account details some of Jesus' initial encounters with the disciples while the Synoptics describe Jesus' formal appointment of the Twelve.

> 43 The next day He decided to leave for Galilee. Jesus found Philip and told him, "Follow Me! "
>
> 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the hometown of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip found Nathanael ' and told him, "We have found the One Moses wrote about in the Law (and so did the prophets): Jesus the son of Joseph, from Nazareth! "
>
> 46 "Can anything good come out of Nazareth? " Nathanael asked him.
>
> "Come and see," Philip answered.
>
> 47 Then Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him and said about him, "Here is a true Israelite; no deceit is in him."
>
> 48 "How do you know me? " Nathanael asked.
>
> "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you," Jesus answered.
>
> 49 "Rabbi," Nathanael replied, "You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel! "
>
> 50 Jesus responded to him, "Do you believe only because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this." 51 Then He said, "I assure you: You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Philip found Nathanael (1:45): The Synoptics never mention Nathanael, though John refers to him here and again in 21:2. It is likely that this was the personal name of Bartholomew (Bar-Tholomaios = son of Tholomaios). Not only is Bartholomew absent from John's Gospel, he is linked with Philip in all three Synoptic apostolic lists (Matt 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14; though not in Acts 1:13), which corresponds to Nathanael's connection with Philip in John's Gospel. Since Bartholomew was a patronymic (a personal name based on the name of one's male ancestor), it is very plausible that this man was also known by another name (Morris 1995, 143; Hill 1997, 47; cf. Carson 1991, 159). Intriguingly, *b. Sanhedrin* 43a may provide independent attestation for the existence of a Nathanael among Jesus' disciples (Bauckham 1996a, 34; cited in Hill 1997, 46–47). All this provides persuasive evidence that Bartholomew and

Nathanael are one and the same person.

(and so did the prophets) (1:45): Some have suggested that the phrase "and so did the prophets" in verse 45 was a later scribal addition. There is no manuscript evidence to suggest this conclusion. It is possible that the Evangelist himself added the phrase as his own parenthetical aside to what Philip had announced, but most likely these words were meant to be understood as coming from Philip himself.

Jesus the son of Joseph (1:45): While critics latch onto this statement as proof that Jesus was seen as a mere man fathered by Joseph, there is no reason to draw any type of Christological conclusions from this passage. It would have been too early for Philip to know about the circumstances surrounding Jesus' miraculous birth. He spoke in accordance with his knowledge at the time. It is evident that people commonly knew Jesus as "the son of Joseph" (6:42), even though he had been conceived in Mary's womb through the Holy Spirit (Matt 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35) and existed with God from all eternity (John 1:1–2). (See comments on Luke 1:27, 35.)

Can anything good come out of Nazareth? (1:46): Recently, some scholars have questioned the accuracy of this passage because Nazareth was located about 3.5 miles from Sepphoris, the regional capital and a booming center for Hellenized culture. It is likely that citizens of Nazareth had connections with their more cosmopolitan neighbors and more than likely also came into contact with the Greek-speaking Gentile traders who passed through Sepphoris in the north or the Esdraelon Valley in the south. However, there is no reason to surmise that this connection to Sepphoris precludes a pejorative attitude toward Nazareth, even if it was perhaps an unfair stereotype concerning this town of no more than two thousand people. Further, the so-called backwardness of Nazareth would have stood out all the more given its proximity to cosmopolitan Sepphoris.

Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you (1:48–50): Jesus is shown not only here, but throughout John's Gospel, to have supernatural knowledge (1:42; 2:4, 19, 24–25; 4:17–18; 6:64, 70; 11:4, 11–14; 13:1, 10–11, 38; 21:18–19). While in Hellenism this type of knowledge was normally attributed to magic or some kind of connection to the gods, for the Jews this was considered a mark of a true prophet. Jesus was, of course, more than a prophet. John's Gospel is the most explicit of the four Gospels concerning Jesus' divinity, and this type of supernatural knowledge fits well with his high

Christology.

Nevertheless, there is no reason to assume that Nathanael had Jesus' divinity in mind when he said: "You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" By proclaiming Jesus to be the "Son of God," Nathanael is affirming Jesus as the Messiah predicted in the OT (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7; cf. 1 Sam 26:17, 21, 25), for the term "Son [of God]" was a current messianic title in Jesus' day. Similarly, "King of Israel" was a common messianic title. The titles converge in Jewish literature where the Davidic king is described as God's son (4QFlor 1:6–7; 1QSa 2:11–12; *1 Enoch* 105:2; 2 Esd [*4 Ezra*] 7:28–29; 13:52; 14:9).

> On the third day a wedding took place in Cana of Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and 2 Jesus
> and His disciples were invited to the wedding as well. 3 When the wine ran out, Jesus' mother
> told Him, "They don't have any wine."
>
> 4 "What has this concern of yours to do with Me, ' woman? " Jesus asked. "My hour has not
> yet come."
>
> 5 "Do whatever He tells you," His mother told the servants.
>
> 6 Now six stone water jars had been set there for Jewish purification. Each contained 20 or 30
> gallons.
>
> 7 "Fill the jars with water," Jesus told them. So they filled them to the brim. 8 Then He said to
> them, "Now draw some out and take it to the chief servant." And they did.
>
> 9 When the chief servant tasted the water (after it had become wine), he did not know where it
> came from — though the servants who had drawn the water knew. He called the groom 10 and
> told him, "Everyone sets out the fine wine first, then, after people have drunk freely, the
> inferior. But you have kept the fine wine until now."
>
> 11 Jesus performed this first sign in Cana of Galilee. He displayed His glory, and His disciples
> believed in Him.
>
> 12 After this, He went down to Capernaum, together with His mother, His brothers, and His
> disciples, and they stayed there only a few days.

On the third day a wedding took place in Cana of Galilee (2:1): John's mention of Cana with the additional "of Galilee" presumably distinguishes the present location from another Cana, in Lebanon, that is referred to in Joshua 19:28 (cf. Josh 16:8; 17:9). The location of Cana in Galilee has been a matter of debate. Some older commentators propose Kafre Kenn, which is four miles northeast of Nazareth on the road to Tiberias. However, this proposal is of doubtful merit because of the doubling of the *n* in "Kafr Kenn" (Mounce, *ISBE* 1:585). It is more likely that the location is Khirbet Qân in the Plain of Asochis, about eight miles northeast of Nazareth (cf. Josephus, *Life of Josephus* 16 §86;

41 §207). The Plain of Asochis was part of the royal domain of the Herodians and was cultivated by their tenants under the supervision of royal officials (cf. John 4:46; see Avi-Yonah 1964:138). Khirbet Qân overlooks a marshy plain featuring plenty of reeds, which corresponds to the meaning of Cana ("place of reeds"). The site has yet to be excavated, but cisterns and the remains of buildings are visible, and nearby tombs are cut into the rocks. Also, first-century coins have been found on the site.

"What has this concern of yours to do with Me, woman?" Jesus asked (2:4): "Woman" (*gunai*) in contrast to "dear woman" (original NIV) is a better translation (so NIV 2011) because there is no equivalent for "dear" in the original. Jesus' address of his mother should not be seen as rude, though from the context it appears he seems to be at the very least establishing a polite distance. This address is unusual and without parallel in ancient Jewish or Greco-Roman literature (Brown et al. 1978, 188). Without denying Jesus' filial affection for his mother, it is evident throughout Jesus' ministry that his relationship with his mother is constrained by kingdom concerns (cf. Matt 12:46–50 pars.; Luke 2:48–51; 11:27–28).

The basic meaning of Jesus' question is "What do you and I have in common (as far as the matter at hand is concerned)?" The implied answer: "Nothing." Perhaps surprisingly, other than here the expression is only found in the Gospels on the lips of demons who strongly oppose Jesus (see Matt 8:29 pars.; Mark 1:24 par.). OT parallels indicate that the phrase always distances two parties and frequently signifies disapproval (see Judg 11:12; 2 Sam 16:10; 1 Kgs 17:28; 2 Kgs 3:13; 2 Chr 35:21). This suggests that Jesus here is issuing a fairly pointed rebuke (cf. 12:46–50), similar to his reproach of Peter when he failed to understand the nature of Jesus' calling (cf. Matt 16:23). Instead, Jesus explains to his mother that he had already decided to help but would do so in the manner and at the time of his own choosing rather than in response to her prompting (cf. 2 Kgs 3:13).

***Jesus and the wine* (2:9):** What was the substance that Jesus turned the water into in this verse? In the ancient world, including first-century Palestine, three kinds of wine were made from grapes. Fermented wine (*oinos*; e.g., Eph 5:18; not from the most recent harvest) was usually mixed in the proportion of two or three parts of water to one part of wine (*b. Pesahahim* 108b). New wine (*oinos neos*; e.g., Matt 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37–38; cf. Hos 9:2; Hag 1:11; Zech 9:17; 1QS 6:4–6; 1QSa 2:17–18, 20; 1QH 10:24) was made from the most recent

harvest and was not fermented. Finally, there were wines that were non-alcoholic due to the process of fermentation being stopped by boiling the unfermented grape juice (called "must"). Wine was also, though less frequently, made from pomegranates (Song 8:2) and raisins (*b. Baba Batra* 97b) along with apples, dates, honey, herbs, and figs.

The Gospels clearly portray Jesus as drinking fermented wine (Matt 11:19; Mark 14:25). The latter passage also intimates that wine will be drunk in heaven. In stark contrast to the portrayal of John the Baptist, Matthew and Luke indicate that Jesus "came eating and drinking" and was promptly accused of being "a glutton and a drunkard" (Matt 11:19; Luke 7:34). This shows that Jesus was known to have drunk fermented wine regularly while associating with his contemporaries.

The current passage in John recounts Jesus' turning a large quantity of water into wine (*oinos*) at a family wedding in Cana of Galilee. This is Jesus' first of a series of messianic signs selected by John for inclusion in his Gospel. There is no indication in these verses that Jesus would have turned the water into non-alcoholic wine. Instead, the use of *oinos* combined with Jesus' use of fermented wines throughout the Gospels leads to the conclusion that Jesus turned the water into wine containing alcohol. That the chief servant made comment about the tendency of hosts to set out the "inferior" wine last, after the guests have "drunk freely," confirms this conclusion, for if guests have drunk freely from non-alcoholic wine, they would not be duped by the inferior wine that followed (John 2:10).

After this, He went down to Capernaum, together with . . . His brothers (2:12): The traditional Roman Catholic interpretation denies that Mary had any children other than Jesus. This passage, along with 7:3–9, suggests otherwise (see also Matt 13:55; Mark 6:33). We should understand Jesus' brothers as half-brothers, since they are children of Mary and Joseph. Nowhere in the NT is there any indication that these brothers were not Mary's biological sons.

> 13 The Jewish Passover was near, so Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple complex He found people selling oxen, sheep, and doves, and He also found the money changers sitting there. 15 After making a whip out of cords, He drove everyone out of the temple complex with their sheep and oxen. He also poured out the money changers' coins and overturned the tables. 16 He told those who were selling doves, "Get these things out of here! Stop turning My Father's house into a marketplace! " '

17 And His disciples remembered that it is written: **Zeal for Your house will consume Me.** ’

18 So the Jews replied to Him, “What sign of authority will You show us for doing these things? ”

19 Jesus answered, “Destroy this sanctuary, and I will raise it up in three days.”

20 Therefore the Jews said, “This sanctuary took 46 years to build, and will You raise it up in three days? ”

21 But He was speaking about the sanctuary of His body. 22 So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this. And they believed the Scripture and the statement Jesus had made.

23 While He was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many trusted in His name when they saw the signs He was doing.

Cleansing the temple **(2:13–23):** These verses contain a number of issues requiring resolution. The most obvious matter is that John places the temple cleansing at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, while the Synoptics place a similar account at the beginning of Jesus’ final week in Jerusalem (Mark 11:15–19). Critics argue that John simply got it wrong. Yet, assuming that John is familiar with the Synoptic Gospels (or at least the tradition), it is unlikely that this was a mistake by John. It is difficult to see how a writer as astute as John did not notice the difference between his and the Synoptics’ presentation of the temple cleansing(s). John has a demonstrable commitment to historical accuracy, both in his claim to eyewitness testimony and in his “witness theme” (see Lincoln 2000; Bauckham 2006). For these and other reasons it is likely that John deliberately placed the temple cleansing toward the beginning of his Gospel.

Scholars normally suggest one of two solutions to this apparent problem. The majority contend this is an example where John follows a topical rather than chronological arrangement because he was under no obligation to maintain the order of the Synoptic material. In this scenario he shifted the temple cleansing to an earlier point in Jesus’ ministry for thematic reasons. Yet it is also possible that this is a “doublet,” a type of event that occurred more than once during Jesus’ ministry (such as feeding the multitudes; cf. Matt 14:13–21; 15:32–39). If so, Jesus may have cleared the temple twice, with John recording only the first instance and the Synoptics only the second one. In view of the following evidence, it appears the latter is more likely.

First, while it is commonly recognized that the Synoptics and John’s Gospel are not arranged primarily by chronological considerations, in the case of the accounts of the temple cleansing they both use historical markers and temporal references to the preceding and following narratives. Also, the absence of any Synoptic material in the first five chapters of John (except for the sections on

John the Baptist) and the differences in the details recorded add to the likelihood that these are two different events (Carson 1991, 177). Speaking of the temple cleansing in the Synoptics compared to the cleansing account in John, Morris (1995, 167) states that "there are practically no resemblances between the two narratives, apart from the central act"; only five words are shared.

In weighing the possibility of there having been two temple cleansings, Keener (2003, 518–19) has argued that it is unreasonable to believe that Jesus could challenge the temple system in such a dramatic way and then continue on in public ministry for two or three years, even visiting Jerusalem at times. Yet, to the contrary, an early temple cleansing helps explain historically why Jesus faced hostility early in his ministry (5:18). In addition, Jesus' common practice of withdrawing (3:22; 6:15; 7:9–10; 8:59; 10:40) makes it historically plausible that he could have continued his ministry for two or three years after an initial temple cleansing.

It is important to understand the purpose of the temple cleansing in order to avoid seeing Jesus' actions as overly harsh or unjustified. In clearing the temple, Jesus was not simply responding to the existence of merchants and moneychangers or even the fact that they charged inflated prices for their services (though that was bad enough). He primarily addressed the issue of merchants disrupting Gentile worship in the only place open to them. The so-called "Court of the Gentiles" was as close to the temple as Gentiles could get, and it was insensitive at best and evidence of religious arrogance at worst to disrupt their worship. The temple establishment was extremely wealthy in Jesus' day, which made the merchants and moneychangers part of a system that exploited the poor in order to beautify and administer the affairs of the temple. The sale of sacrificial animals and the exchange of currency should have been facilitated near the temple rather than within its walls. This is exactly what had been the case earlier in Israel's history when the animal merchants had set up shop across the Kidron Valley on the slopes of the Mount of Olives.

Jesus' actions should be seen against the backdrop of Zechariah's prophecy that "on that [last] day there will no longer be merchants in the house of the Lord Almighty" (14:21, author's translation), and Malachi's prophecy that on the coming day of judgment, "the Lord you seek will suddenly come to His temple," so that people may once again offer acceptable sacrifices to the Lord (3:1, 3; Carson 1991, 179). Moreover, Jesus' actions stir in his disciples the memory of the righteous sufferer of Psalm 69:9 (cf. John 2:16, "My Father's house," with Ps 69:9, "zeal for Your house"). Although God cautioned against "zeal . . . without

knowledge" (Prov 19:2; cf. Rom 10:2), religious zeal was an important part of Jewish piety. In the OT, Phinehas is promised a covenant of a lasting priesthood "because he was zealous for his God" (Num 25:13) and God himself is shown to be zealous for his holy name (Isa 59:17; Ezek 39:25).

Some may question Jesus' action in the temple cleansing because it may seem to conflict with the image of the Messiah given in Isaiah 42:3, which says "He will not break a bruised reed, and He will not put out a smoldering wick." This verse is applied to Jesus in Matthew 12:18–20. However, a closer look at Isaiah 42:3 and its NT usage reveals that the Messiah would not only fail to "break a bruised reed" but that he would also "faithfully bring justice" (Isa 42:3). Caring for the weak and exploited implies identifying and speaking out against injustice. Thus, the temple cleansing fits well within the whole picture presented by Isaiah 42. (See further comments at Matt 21:12–13 and Mark 11:15.)

Destroy this sanctuary, and I will raise it up in three days (2:19): Jesus' statement should not be seen in contradiction to passages that imply the Father raised Jesus from the dead (John 2:22; Acts 2:24, 32; 5:30; 13:30). Throughout John's Gospel, the persons of God the Father and the Son are thoroughly and inextricably intertwined (see Köstenberger and Swain 2008). For this reason, the language here should not be pressed to imply that John believed God the Father had no active role in the resurrection of Jesus.

This sanctuary took 46 years to build (2:20): The HCSB rendering and the NIV rendering, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple," may both be incorrect renderings (see ESV footnote). Historical records indicate that Herod the Great (reigned 37–4 BC) began the project of restoring the temple building in the eighteenth year of his reign, that is, 20/19 BC (Josephus, *Antiquities* 15.11.1 §380), with completion eighteen months later in 18/17 BC (*Antiquities* 15.11.6 §421). Forty-six years later is AD 29/30 (there was no year 0), which places Jesus' first Passover in the spring of AD 30 (Wallace 1996, 560). The restoration of the entire temple area (*hieron*) was not completed until AD 63/64 under Herod Agrippa II and Governor Albinus (*Antiquities* 20.9.7§219), shortly before its destruction by the Roman army in the Jewish war of AD 66–70 (cf. Schürer 1973–79, 1.308–9). The phrase "forty-six years" is in the dative (locative), not the accusative (durative), which also speaks against the renderings above. Taking note of the use of the aorist passive (Wallace 1996, 560–61) "was built," the best translation of this passage, which dates back at least as far as to Badcock (1935, 40–41), is "This temple was built forty-six years ago."

There was a man from the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2 This man came to Him at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher, for no one could perform these signs You do unless God were with him.”

3 Jesus replied, “I assure you: Unless someone is born again, ’ he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

4 “But how can anyone be born when he is old? ” Nicodemus asked Him. “Can he enter his mother’s womb a second time and be born? ”

5 Jesus answered, “I assure you: Unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, ’ he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again. 8 The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

9 “How can these things be? ” asked Nicodemus.

10 “Are you a teacher of Israel and don’t know these things? ” Jesus replied. 11 “I assure you: We speak what We know and We testify to what We have seen, but you do not accept Our testimony. 12 If I have told you about things that happen on earth and you don’t believe, how will you believe if I tell you about things of heaven? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except the One who descended from heaven — the Son of Man. ’ 14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 so that everyone who believes in Him will have eternal life.

16 “For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world that He might condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. 18 Anyone who believes in Him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the One and Only Son of God.

19 “This, then, is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone who practices wicked things hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed. 21 But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be shown to be accomplished by God.”

No one could perform these signs You do unless God were with him (3:2): Nicodemus’s statement may contain hyperbole in light of the fact that Scripture elsewhere speaks of false signs performed by false prophets (e.g., Deut 13:1–5; cf. Matt 24:23–24; Acts 8:9–11; 2 Thess 2:9–11; Rev 13:13–14; 16:14). The belief that miracles attest to God’s presence was widespread in Judaism. References to “signs” in the OT cluster around two major periods: (1) the “signs and wonders” performed by Moses (e.g., Exod 4:1–9); and (2) signs—with attendant symbolism, but not necessarily miraculous—acted out by various OT prophets (e.g., Isa 20:3; see Köstenberger 1995b, 87–103).

Jesus has performed various signs, both miraculous (e.g., 2:1–11) and non-miraculous (2:14–22). Nicodemus is probably referring primarily to Jesus' Jerusalem signs (cf. 2:23; for a similar acknowledgment, see 11:47). The special nature of Jesus' signs indicates that he is not a false prophet but a true teacher from God. What is more, he is the long-awaited Messiah who would establish the promised new covenant and pour out his Spirit (3:1–21; 6:14; 7:31, 40; 20:30–31).

Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God (3:3): Jesus' phrase "born again" finds no parallel in the concept of reincarnation found in Eastern religions. Nicodemus was "a teacher of Israel," not a Hindu guru, and Jesus expected him to understand what he was saying because Nicodemus taught the Jewish Scriptures (3:10). The prophets (e.g., Jer 31:33–34; Ezek 11:19–20; 36:25–27) regularly speak of a new beginning and inner transformation in a person's life. "Born again/from above" in 3:3 is further explained as "born of water and the Spirit" in 3:5 (Louw 1986, 9–10). The phrase probably refers to one's spiritual birth (Carson 1991, 194). This is suggested by the fact that "born of water and the Spirit" in 3:5 explicates the meaning of "born again/from above" in 3:3; by the use of one preposition (*ek*) to govern both phrases in 3:5; and by antecedent OT theology. The OT background is likely Ezekiel 36:25–27, which envisions God's cleansing of human hearts with water and their inner transformation by his Spirit (see also Isa 44:3–5; *Jub.* 1:23–25).

You must be born again (3:3–7): Since Jesus most likely spoke Aramaic, a legitimate question arises: Did Jesus actually say, "You must be born again," since this phrase depends on a word play that exists in Greek but not Aramaic? This question brings into play the even more foundational issue of whether the Gospels contain the "very words" of Jesus (*ipsissma verba*), which would mean we have word-for-word renderings of what Jesus said, or his "very voice" (*ipsissima vox*), which means the Gospels have captured the meaning of Jesus' teachings, but not word-for-word retellings. We need to consider several factors. First, there are obvious variations between the four Gospel accounts. Darrell Bock explains, "[T]he text reports Jesus' sayings, even those that can be tied to the same setting, with variation of wording. Such variations, reported by authors who knew the tradition's wording, reveal their intent to summarize and explain, not merely to quote, as they sought to apply Jesus' teaching to their audiences, selected what to discuss, and sometimes arranged their material for topical reasons rather than by sequence" (1995, 76).

Second, Jesus probably taught mostly in Aramaic while the Gospels were written in Greek. Hence most of Jesus' teachings in the Gospels already represent translation rather than verbatim quote. Third, most of the accounts of Jesus in the Gospels include him saying only a few sentences at a time. However, the Gospels tell us that Jesus taught for hours at a time (e.g., Mark 6:34–36). Based on this it seems likely the authors of the Gospels have recorded shorter summaries of Jesus' longer discourses. Finally, Scripture itself, when quoting other parts of the Bible (e.g., the NT use of the OT), frequently does not use word-for-word quotations. Consequently, it should not be surprising to see the Gospels doing the same thing in recording the words of Jesus.

This evidence points strongly toward the Gospels containing Jesus' *ipsissma vox* (Bock 1995, 74–99), though there are certainly places where we have Jesus' *ipsissima verba* (esp. in Aramaisms such as *Talitha koum!* ["Little girl, get up!"; Mark 5:41] or *Eloi, Eloi, lemá sabachtháni?* ["My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"; Mark 15:34]). That we have *ipsissima vox* is hardly surprising when one considers the historical nature of the Christian faith. Jesus lived in a historical culture (first-century Judaism), and his teachings were heard and recorded in the context of that culture. This position has been widely accepted by conservative scholars and accords well with the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture (see Article XIII of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, where the framers "deny that inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision . . . or the use of free citations").

Returning to the original question, then, what are we to make of the fact that the word play in Greek between "born anew" and "born again" (3:3, 5) does not work in Aramaic? It is hard to be certain, but most likely John preserved a misunderstanding between Jesus and Nicodemus that occurred but did not hinge on any one Aramaic word but on the sense of Jesus' original statement. This is where it helps to understand that John, in this and other instances, did not necessarily preserve Jesus' very words (*ipsissima verba*) but most certainly his very voice (i.e., the sense of his statement; *ipsissima vox*).

Unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God (3:5): Some scholars argue that water refers to baptism (e.g., Brown 1966, 139–41), contending that this would have been the likely understanding of John's immediate audience. We can say several things in response. First, this view is anachronistic, for Christian baptism had not yet been instituted. It would make no sense for Jesus to chastise Nicodemus (3:10) for not understanding an as-of-yet future practice. Second, this interpretation does not fit

the context. Jesus uses repetition in verse 6 but makes no mention of "water." If verse 5 was meant to teach baptism as essential for entering into God's kingdom, it seems odd for verse 6 to drop "water" altogether. What is more, the context nowhere refers to rites or institutions but rather focuses on internal spiritual realities. Third, if John was referring to Christian baptism, this would be the only such reference in the entire Gospel.

Another view argues for two births: a physical birth (from the womb) and a spiritual birth (by the Spirit). The support cited for this interpretation is that the context links water with physical birth (3:4, 6). Some advocates of the two-birth theory argue that water refers to the amniotic fluid that breaks before childbirth. Others contend that water refers to male semen. While it can be granted that the context of the passage allows for the possibility of two births, the attempt to try to link water to either amniotic fluid or semen is unpersuasive. No examples are extant in ancient sources that refer to physical birth as birth "of water." While there are some ancient sources that use the term "drops" to refer to semen, such references are infrequent and do not closely parallel Jesus' use of the expression "water" in John 3:5.

More likely, the syntax of the sentence points to one birth, as the one preposition "of" governs both the nouns "water" and "spirit." Also, Jesus chastises Nicodemus, a teacher of the Scriptures, for not understanding the meaning of his words, which would seem to make most sense if Jesus was alluding to the Scriptures with which Nicodemus would have most likely been familiar. In view of the problems associated with the other views, the evidence that Jesus was referring to one birth, and his rebuke of Nicodemus for not understanding, it appears likely Jesus was alluding to the OT, which foresaw a time of spiritual cleansing and renewal when God would pour out his Spirit. The OT prophets, in particular Ezekiel 36:25–27, looked forward to a future day when God would institute a new covenant and his people would be given a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek 11:19–20; Jer 31:33–34, Joel 2:28).

No one has ascended into heaven except . . . the Son of Man (3:13): It is reasonable to ask whether this verse contradicts passages that indicate that certain OT figures ascended to heaven without dying. Jesus is certainly contrasting himself, the "Son of Man" (cf. Dan 7:13), with other human figures who are said to have entered heaven, such as Enoch (Gen 5:24; cf. Heb 11:5), Elijah (2 Kgs 2:1–12; cf. 2 Chr 21:12–15), Moses (Exod 24:9–11; 34:29–30), Isaiah (Isa 6:1–3), and Ezekiel (Ezek 1:10). However, in context (see v. 12), the emphasis in verse 13 appears to be on Jesus' unique authority because of his

descent from heaven. If Jesus descended from heaven, that is his place of origin; thus his subsequent ascension to heaven is qualitatively different from the ascension of any mere human. Carson explains, “No-one [else] has ascended into heaven and remained there [so as to be able to speak authoritatively about heavenly things] but only the one who has come down from heaven [is equipped to do so]” (1991, 200). This is similar to the prologue’s portrayal of Jesus as the incarnate Word and the one-of-a-kind Son from the Father who has given a full account of him (1:14, 18).

His One and Only Son (3:16): The overwhelming biblical support for Jesus’ sonship is in direct contradiction with Islam. Surah 23:91 of the Koran says: “No son did God beget, nor is there any God along with him.” In particular, the term “Son” occupies a central role in the Christology of John’s Gospel. Twice Jesus is called the “son of Joseph” (1:45; 6:42); four times the “one and only Son” (1:14, 18, 3:16, 18); eight times the “Son of God” (1:34; 3:18; 5:25; 10:36; 11:4, 27; 19:7; 20:31); thirteen times the “Son of Man” (1:51; 3:13, 14; 5:27; 6:27, 53, 62; 8:28; 9:35; 12:23, 34 [2x]; 13:31); and eighteen times “the Son” (3:16, 17, 35, 36 [2x]; 5:19 [2x], 20, 21, 22, 23 [2x], 26; 6:40; 8:36; 14:13; 17:1 [2x]).

The introduction to John’s Gospel refers to Jesus as the *monogenēs* or “one and only Son” from the Father (1:14) and stresses his unique relationship with him (1:18). The main OT usage of *monogenēs* is “only child.” Being an only child makes a child particularly special to his parents. Hence the LXX often uses *agapētos* (“beloved”) instead of *monogenēs*. In Genesis 22:2, 12, and 16, Isaac is called Abraham’s “one and only son” (Hb *yahid*), despite the fact that the patriarch had earlier fathered Ishmael. *Monogenēs,* therefore, means in all likelihood, not “only begotten,” but “one-of-a-kind” (i.e., unique or very special) son.

References to Jesus as the Son of God are more prevalent in John’s Gospel than in the Synoptics. The opening confession of Nathanael, the Evangelist’s identification of Jesus as the Son of God, and Jesus’ first self-reference in 5:25 set the stage for the Christological controversy that dominates the entire first half of the Gospel, focused on the question of whether Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God (cf. 10:36; 11:4, 27). While the Jewish authorities deny that this is Jesus’ true identity (19:7), John’s purpose statement identifies Jesus as Messiah and Son of God (20:31).

John unmistakably affirms that the Word made flesh in the Son and God the Father are both equally God. Thus Jesus can say, “The Father and I are one” (10:30). At the same time, Jesus, while being himself God, sustains a

relationship with God (Yahweh) that can be described as that of a Son (who is "sent") to a Father ("the one who sent").

God did not send His Son into the world that He might condemn the world (3:17): This passage stands in at least apparent contradiction with 5:27 and 9:39, which indicate that Jesus did come for the purpose of judgment. However, the provision of salvation for all who believe implies Jesus brings judgment for those who do not believe. What is more, while "the purpose of Christ's coming was redemptive, . . . when His saving work is rejected, judgment results. Even though judgment results from unbelief, condemnatory judgment was not the purpose of the incarnation" (Laney 1992, 82). For this reason the passages do not actually contradict each other because the sense of *krinō* ("judge") in the context of the present passage is strongly negative ("condemn"), whereas in 5:27 and 9:39 it is neutral (Carson 1991, 207).

People loved darkness rather than the light (3:19): Here, "light" and "darkness" have clear moral connotations, grounding the world's rejection of Jesus in human depravity, which is the result of the fall (Genesis 3; Rom 1:18–32). From this perspective, sin (including people's failure to recognize God's Messiah) is irrational and self-destructive. All people, including Jews, are shown to be in bondage to sin and spiritual blindness, refusing to face their guilt and preferring to suppress the truth instead (John 8:31–59; 9:39–41; cf. Matt 21:33–46 pars.; Acts 7).

Some have questioned verse 19 in view of the pervasive religiosity which characterizes humanity throughout history and the portions of the Bible that speak about a knowledge of God that can be perceived by observing creation (Rom 1:19–20). Historically, Christian theologians have referred to this as general revelation (in contrast to special revelation). John is not denying a universal knowledge of God in the general sense. The problem John is addressing here is not that people fail to have a belief in or a desire for a being that transcends them, but that people, left to themselves, do not desire to turn from their evil ways ("darkness") to the true God ("light").

> 22 After this, Jesus and His disciples went to the Judean countryside, where He spent time with them and baptized. 23John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water there. People were coming and being baptized, 24 since John had not yet been thrown into prison.

John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim (3:23): The location of Aenon near Salim is disputed. The two primary sites that have been suggested both lie in Samaria: one is the Salim eight miles southeast of Beth Shean (Scythopolis); another is the Salim four miles southeast of Shechem farther south. The presence of a town (known from early times) called Sâlim in the latter location and of modern ‘Ainûn, eight miles northeast of Sâlim, appears to favor the second site. Also, this second site is further south and thus seems to cohere better with the geographical markers of 3:22 and 4:3. In either case, assuming the reconstruction of “Bethany across the Jordan” in 1:28 to be correct, John would have moved south by this time.

> When Jesus knew that the Pharisees heard He was making and baptizing more disciples than
> John 2 (though Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were), 3 He left Judea and
> went again to Galilee. 4 He had to travel through Samaria, 5 so He came to a town of Samaria
> called Sychar near the property that Jacob had given his son Joseph. 6 Jacob’s well was there,
> and Jesus, worn out from His journey, sat down at the well. It was about six in the evening.
> 7 A woman of Samaria came to draw water.
> “Give Me a drink,” Jesus said to her, 8 for His disciples had gone into town to buy food.
> 9 “How is it that You, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman? ” she asked Him.
> For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.

He had to travel through Samaria . . . to a town . . . called Sychar (4:4–5): Some have argued that John displays geographical ignorance when he indicates Jesus “had to travel through Samaria.” However, “had to” (*edei*) may indicate divine rather than geographical necessity; Jesus’ going through Samaria was according to the plan and will of God (cf. 9:4; 10:16; 12:34; 20:9). Keener is correct when he writes, “Given John’s usage of *dei* elsewhere (esp. in 3:14, 30; 9:4; 10:16; 12:34; 20:9), the ‘necessity’ that compels Jesus to take this route is probably his mission” (2003, 590). Nevertheless, traveling through Samaria also was strongly suggested geographically (cf. Luke 9:51–55). Hence travelers going from Judea to Galilee normally passed through Samaria (see Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.6.1 §118; cf. *Jewish War* 2.12.1 §232; *Life of Josephus* 52 §269).

Since John is the first ancient author to mention Sychar, some have argued the city never existed. Despite the claims of these critics, the small city was probably located at the site of modern ‘Askar, about two miles east of Nablus, centrally situated just east of Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. ‘Askar may also be the *ên Soker* mentioned in the Mishnah (*m. Menahot* 10.2; see Avi-Yonah

1964:140). An identification of Sychar with biblical Shechem (about a mile from ‘Askar) is unlikely, since Shechem probably was destroyed in 128 BC (or at least prior to 107 BC) by the Hasmonean high priest John Hyrcanus I (Josephus, *Jewish War* 1.2.6 §63; *Antiquities* 13.9.1 §§255–56). Subsequent to the conquest of Jerusalem by the Roman general Pompey (63 BC), Sychar apparently replaced Shechem as the most important Samaritan city.

A woman of Samaria came to draw water. “Give Me a drink,” Jesus said to her (4:7–8): Critics say that Jesus’ request for the woman to give him a drink of water was chauvinistic. However, the text itself does not indicate Jesus’ motive for asking the question. He could have been seeking to strike up a conversation with the woman or perhaps he was simply in need of a container to draw out the water. Further, it may have been customary for women to serve men in this way. Certainly the woman shows no sign of taking offense. Possibly she is even honored (v. 9). In any case, the accusation of chauvinism on Jesus’ part has no basis in the text or context of the passage.

How is it that You, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman? (4:9): Jews and Samaritans were generally antagonistic toward each other. This explains why the Samaritan woman is surprised when Jesus asks her for a drink. The Samaritan woman is astonished Jesus would use a drinking vessel handled by a Samaritan because this would defile him since Jews considered Samaritans “unclean.” Moreover, by asking for a drink from a woman who had come to the well alone and by Jesus himself being alone (see v. 8), he fell outside the boundaries of Jewish piety. By taking the initiative, Jesus exposed himself to the accusation of acting in a flirtatious manner, as men in this culture usually did not speak to women in public (Borchert 1996, 202). What is more, the fact that Isaac’s and Jacob’s prospective wives were met at wells (Gen 24:17; 29:10) created the sort of precedent that would have caused devout Jews to be leery of spending much time talking to women at wells. (See further comments on 4:27 below.)

24 God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

25 The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah ʼ is coming” (who is called Christ). “When He comes, He will explain everything to us.”

26 “I am He,” Jesus told her, “the One speaking to you.”

27 Just then His disciples arrived, and they were amazed that He was talking with a woman.

Yet no one said, “What do You want? ” or “Why are You talking with her? ”

God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth (4:24): If God is spirit, what of all the verses where God appears bodily, such as in Genesis 3 where God walks in the garden? This passage is consistent with the entire witness of Scripture in identifying God as a spiritual rather than material being (e.g., Isa 31:3; Ezek 11:19–20; 36:26–27). Because God is spirit, the Israelites were not to make idols “in the shape of anything” as did the surrounding nations (Exod 20:4). Nevertheless, this should not be seen as a contradiction with anthropomorphisms (portraying God in human terms), the incarnation (God becoming flesh), or theophanies (divine appearances).

Part of this apparent contradiction is solved once literal and metaphorical language is properly distinguished. John Frame explains this as he writes, “The Bible often speaks of God as if he were a man, not only by using images that describe him as a king, a shepherd, a father, and a judge, but also by speaking of God as walking (Gen 3:8), smelling an aroma (Gen 8:21), etc. Scripture also ascribes body parts to God, including arms (Num 11:23), hands (Ps 111:7), a mouth (Deut 8:3), and eyes (Deut 11:12). . . . Scripture describes God not only as a man, but also as animals and inanimate objects. But . . . all created images reflect God’s nature. So the use of such language is not necessarily inappropriate. We may speak anthropomorphically of God, because he has theomorphized man” (i.e., created man in his image; Frame 2002, 366–67).

Moreover, while God is spirit, this does not mean he is unable to reveal himself in other forms when he so chooses. He controls the universe. Therefore, he can and has appeared within his creation in the form he desires.

“I am He,” Jesus told her, “the One speaking to you” (4:26): In this passage, Jesus seems more forthright about being the Messiah with this Samaritan woman than he often was with Jewish religious leaders. Jesus is generally shown as reluctant to identify himself publicly as the Messiah to the Jewish religious authorities or the Jews in general. At least in part, this is likely related to the nationalistic overtones often associated with the term “Messiah” among the Jews, which Jesus sought to avoid (Brown 1966, 173; cf. Morris 1995, 241). In this case, Jesus apparently did not have the same hesitation when talking to the Samaritan woman because, for her, the Messiah would not have been associated with the same nationalistic expectations held by the Jews. Also, this was a private conversation, not one of the highly public disputes in which Jesus engaged with the religious leaders at other occasions.

They were amazed that He was talking with a woman (4:27): Jesus' disciples were shocked to find their Master conversing with a woman (Seim 1987, 59). As Neyrey remarks, "It is bad enough that a female is conversing with an unrelated male in a public place at an unusual hour. Worse, the reader is told that she considered the most significant item in this conversation Jesus' remarks on her shameless sexual behavior" (1994, 82; cf. Pazdan 1987, 148).

Some rabbis (such as Yose ben Yohanan; see Goldin 1980, 41–61) held that to talk too much to a woman, even one's own wife, was a waste of time, distracting one's attention from the study of the Torah. It was held that this habit could grow to be a great evil, leading even to hell (*m. 'Abot* 1.5). Consequently, some rabbis taught that it was as inappropriate to provide one's daughter with a knowledge of the Torah as it was to sell her into prostitution (*m. Sotah* 3.4; attributed to Rabbi Eliezer [c. AD 90–130]).

Jesus, however, broke with his fellow rabbis' prejudice in his treatment of this woman, as he did in other situations (see 7:53–8:11; 11:17–40; Luke 7:36–50; 8:2–3; 10:38–42). This indicates the importance he placed on every individual as being created in God's image and as standing in need of salvation regardless of ethnic background, race, or gender. In the present case, it also shows that Jesus affirmed the salvation-historical significance of extending the good news beyond Jews to Samaritans and to Gentiles because he was the "Savior of the world" (4:42).

39 Now many Samaritans from that town believed in Him because of what the woman said
when she testified, "He told me everything I ever did." 40 Therefore, when the Samaritans came
to Him, they asked Him to stay with them, and He stayed there two days. 41 Many more
believed because of what He said. 42 And they told the woman, "We no longer believe because
of what you said, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this really is the Savior of the
world."

43 After two days He left there for Galilee. 44 Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no
honor in his own country. 45 When they entered Galilee, the Galileans welcomed Him because
they had seen everything He did in Jerusalem during the festival. For they also had gone to the
festival.

46 Then He went again to Cana of Galilee, where He had turned the water into wine. There
was a certain royal official whose son was ill at Capernaum. 47 When this man heard that Jesus
had come from Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and pleaded with Him to come down and
heal his son, for he was about to die.

48 Jesus told him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe."

49 “Sir,” the official said to Him, “come down before my boy dies! ”

50 “Go,” Jesus told him, “your son will live.” The man believed what Jesus said to him and departed.

51 While he was still going down, his slaves met him saying that his boy was alive. 52 He asked them at what time he got better. “Yesterday at seven in the morning the fever left him,” they answered. 53 The father realized this was the very hour at which Jesus had told him, “Your son will live.” Then he himself believed, along with his whole household.

54 This, therefore, was the second sign Jesus performed after He came from Judea to Galilee.

They asked Him to stay with them, and He stayed there two days (4:40): Jesus’ openness here toward the Samaritans poses a potential problem when read against the Synoptic account of Jesus prohibiting the disciples to go into any Samaritan town (Matt 10:56). However, there is a clear difference between Jesus being accompanied by the disciples to a Samaritan city versus Jesus prohibiting his disciples to go by themselves on what can be described as a “training mission.” If the disciples thought they should go to the Samaritans because they saw Jesus do so at the present occasion, Jesus would have instructed them that this was not their responsibility at that point (Matt 10:5–6). Carson suggests, “[T]he Twelve were still far too immature to attempt cross-cultural evangelism of people they would accept only when the welcome mat was out: cf. Luke 9:52–56, where at least some disciples are eager to call down fire from heaven on another Samaritan town that shut its doors against Jesus and his followers” (1991, 239–40).

Historically, Jesus’ Samaritan mission may anticipate the early church’s effort at evangelizing this group. Theologically, John may seek to show that the Samaritan mission of the early church was modeled after Jesus’ own ministry (cf. Acts 1:8; 8:4–25). Jesus’ pattern of ministry in John coincides with that of the mission of the early church (Acts 1:8): first Jerusalem and Judea (chap. 3: Nicodemus; see also v. 22); then Samaria (chap. 4); then the Gentiles (4:46–54: the royal official most likely was a Gentile; see also 10:16; 11:52; 12:20–32).

***Healing an official’s son in the Synoptics and John* (4:43–54):** The similarities between this episode and Matthew 8:5–13 // Luke 7:1–10 have led some to conclude that this passage in John contradicts the Synoptic accounts of the same event. However, there are significant differences that make it likely these are two altogether separate incidents. First, the Synoptic story occurs in Capernaum, while John’s takes place in Cana. Second, in the Synoptic account, Jesus heals the servant of a Roman Gentile, but in John’s account the official’s ethnic and national identity is unspecified (though he probably is a Gentile as well; see note

at 4:40 above). Third, in the Synoptics, the centurion declares himself unworthy to have Jesus come to his house. In John, the official pleads with Jesus to do so. Fourth and finally, Jesus' response to the official in John is more negative than his reply to the centurion in the Synoptics (Carson 1991, 234). (See further comments at Matt 8:5–13 and Luke 7:2–10.)

Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe (4:48): Is Jesus' response to the royal official calloused? After all, the man is concerned for the life of his son and has just asked Jesus to save his life, and Jesus' immediate response seems to ignore the state of the son and address instead the crowd's hunger for showy signs. (See further comments at Matt 8:5–13 and Luke 7:2–10.)

Rather than being callous, Jesus' retort reveals that the people's earlier "welcome" (4:45) was shallow and based primarily on Jesus' miracle-working ability (cf. 2:23–25). Jesus' use of the plural "you people" indicates that his initial response to the official was not directed to the official alone but to the crowd, whose motivations may have significantly diverged from those of the official. In any event, Jesus treated the official as a representative of the Galileans' signs-based response to him. Jesus' words should be understood as designed to challenge this desperate, concerned father (and by extension the entire crowd) to go beyond self-interest and to recognize Jesus as more than a healer and miracle-worker. In essence, Jesus is calling on the Galileans to recognize his true identity (Ridderbos 1997, 176; note similar challenges in 2:4; 11:23–24; see Schnackenburg 1990, 1:468). This, in turn, is part and parcel of the Johannine "signs" motif as a whole in that John consistently draws attention away from the signs' miraculous component to their function of revealing Jesus' true messianic identity (see esp. 20:30–31).

> After this, a Jewish festival took place, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 2 By the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem there is a pool, called Bethesda in Hebrew, which has five colonnades. 3 Within these lay a large number of the sick — blind, lame, and paralyzed [— waiting for the moving of the water, 4 because an angel would go down into the pool from time to time and stir up the water. Then the first one who got in after the water was stirred up recovered from whatever ailment he had].
>
> 5 One man was there who had been sick for 38 years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there and knew he had already been there a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to get well? "
>
> 7 "Sir," the sick man answered, "I don't have a man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I'm coming, someone goes down ahead of me."

8 “Get up,” Jesus told him, “pick up your mat and walk! ” 9 Instantly the man got well, picked
up his mat, and started to walk.

Now that day was the Sabbath, 10 so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “This is
the Sabbath! It’s illegal for you to pick up your mat.”

11 He replied, “The man who made me well told me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’ ”

12 “Who is this man who told you, ‘Pick up your mat and walk’? ” they asked. 13 But the man
who was cured did not know who it was, because Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that
was there.

14 After this, Jesus found him in the temple complex and said to him, “See, you are well. Do
not sin anymore, so that something worse doesn’t happen to you.” 15 The man went and
reported to the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

By the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem there is a pool, called Bethesda in Hebrew (5:2): While some have doubted the historicity of the pool of Bethesda, excavations have proven its existence (see Dunn 1991, 299; cf. Keener 2003, 646). Qumran’s *Copper Scroll* may also demonstrate the historicity of such a pool: “By Beth ha-Ashuhin [Bethesda?], in the pool at the entrance [is] the smaller water basin” (3Q15 11.12–13). Located near the Church of St. Anne, in the northeast quarter of the Old City (near Nehemiah’s “Sheep Gate”), there were two pools bordered by four covered colonnades in a rough trapezoid, with a fifth colonnade separating the two pools.

Some have argued the present tense form *estin* (“is”) in 5:2 indicates a date prior to AD 70 for the composition of the Gospel, since the gate likely was destroyed during the events of 66–70. This, however, probably concludes too much from the present tense (see Blomberg 2002, 43; Carson 1991, 241; Bultmann 1971, 240n4; contra Wallace 1990, 197–205). John at times uses the present tense to refer to past events (e.g., 10:8; 19:40), which is often referred to as the “historic present” (see the interaction in Köstenberger 2004a, 177–78).

As mentioned in the Introduction, John most likely wrote his Gospel in the context of the Christian Gentile mission (e.g., 20:30–31), the emergence of early Gnostic thought, and, perhaps most importantly, the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70, a traumatic event that left Judaism in a national and religious void and caused Jews to look for ways to continue their ritual worship (Köstenberger 2009, 60–67). John takes the opportunity for (Jewish) evangelism and presents Jesus as the temple’s replacement (2:18–22; cf. 1:14; 4:21–24) and as the fulfillment of the symbolism inherent in Jewish festivals (see Hoskins 2007; Draper 1997, 264–65). This reconstruction makes it most likely that the Gospel was written subsequent to AD 70. If Thomas’s confession of Jesus as “my Lord and my God” is meant to bring to mind emperor worship under

Domitian (AD 81–96), a date after AD 81 seems most likely.

Textual problem bracketed in verses 3–4: The end of verse 3 and the entire verse 4 are clearly inauthentic. This is indicated by poor external attestation and the presence of as many as seven non-Johannine words in this one sentence (Brown 1966, 207). It is likely that verses 3b-4 were added as marginal glosses echoing the popular belief concerning the reason for the water's movement.

Verse 7, which is not in question, indicates that the waters were moved on occasion. The miraculous power associated with the pool of Bethesda appears to reflect a superstitious belief tolerated by official Judaism as a concession to popular sentiment since healing shrines were characteristic of pagan cults, not traditional Judaism. The two pools may have been fed by recurrent springs, which caused the water to be disturbed (Carson 1991, 242).

This is the Sabbath! It's illegal for you to pick up your mat (5:10): Here the Jewish leaders' primary objection was that the law allegedly prohibited the man from carrying his mat on the Sabbath and thus Jesus was enticing someone to break the law (Bultmann 1971, 243; Brown 1966, 208). The OT did ban work on the Sabbath, and it is likely that the Jewish leaders have passages such as Exodus 31:12–17; Nehemiah 13:15–19; and Jeremiah 17:21–27 in mind. However, the man did not actually break any biblical Sabbath regulations. The Mishnah forbids 39 classes of work, including carrying an object "from one domain into another" (*m. Shabbat* 7.2; in the present instance, the man's mat). Evidently, the predominant rabbinic opinion allowed for a bed to be carried with a person lying on it, but not one that was empty (*m. Shabbat* 10.5).

Do not sin anymore, so that something worse doesn't happen to you (5:14): Jesus seems to imply here that in at least some cases sickness may be a result of sin. The syntax of the verse emphasizes the urgency of the situation and connects the phrases "stop sinning" and "something worse may happen to you" with the message that what had happened to the man was caused by the sinful behavior that he was to stop. Many of Jesus' Jewish contemporaries believed that suffering was a direct result of sin (cf. 9:2). Given expression already by the "miserable counselors" in the book of Job, rabbinic literature enunciates the principle as follows: "There is no death without sin, and there is no suffering without iniquity" (*b. Shabbat* 55a, with reference to Ezek 18:20). This understanding fits well with other passages in the NT where some suffering is viewed as the result of specific sin (e.g., Acts 5:1–11; 1 Cor 11:30; 1 John 5:16). We may safely conclude, therefore, that Jesus, along with the rest of Scripture,

indicated that at least some cases of suffering are the result of specific sin.

It does not follow, however, that every illness or tragedy is the consequence of a particular sin. The OT features several instances in which suffering is transparently not a result of sin (e.g., 2 Sam 4:4; 1 Kgs 14:4; 2 Kgs 13:14). Jesus also rejected overly simplistic cause-and-effect explanations (cf. John 9:3; Luke 13:1–5). Carson (1991, 246) fits Jesus' teaching well within a broader biblical framework:

> . . . all sickness is the result of sin, but not necessarily of some specific, individual sin. . . . But although suffering and illness have this deep, theological connection with sin in general, and although John elsewhere insists that a specific ailment is not *necessarily* the result of a specific sin (9:3), there is nothing in any of this that precludes the possibility that *some* ailments are the *direct* consequences of *specific* sins. And that is the most natural reading of this verse.

> 16 Therefore, the Jews began persecuting Jesus because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. 17 But Jesus responded to them, "My Father is still working, and I am working also."
> 18 This is why the Jews began trying all the more to kill Him: Not only was He breaking the Sabbath, but He was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.
> 19 Then Jesus replied, "I assure you: The Son is not able to do anything on His own, but only what He sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, the Son also does these things in the same way. 20 For the Father loves the Son and shows Him everything He is doing, and He will show Him greater works than these so that you will be amazed. 21 And just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son also gives life to anyone He wants to. 22 The Father, in fact, judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, 23 so that all people will honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

The Jews began trying all the more to kill Him (5:18): This verse raises questions about first-century Jewish expectations concerning the coming Messiah. Some reacted to Jesus' claims negatively not merely because he was not the type of Messiah they expected but, as evidenced by this verse, because he was "making Himself equal with God" (v. 18). This reaction is understandable against the backdrop of the Jewish people's strict monotheism, a conviction firmly grounded in the Shema: "Listen, Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deut 6:4). The first two commandments in the Decalogue prohibit Israelites from worshiping any gods other than Yahweh (Exod 20:2–6; Deut 5:6–

10). As R. Bauckham notes, “Judaism was unique among the religions of the Roman world in demanding the exclusive worship of its God. . . . Jewish monotheism was defined by its adherence to the first and second commandments” (*ABD* 3:816; see also Bauckham 1998a; 2008).

Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, it is this one God who manifests his character and acts in human history both in terms of redemption and revelation. This includes seminal events such as the exodus (Exod 20:2; Deut 4:32–39; Isa 43:15–17), the giving of the Law, and the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles. This God is the Creator and sole sovereign Ruler of all things (e.g., Isa 43:11; 44:6; 45:5–6, 14, 18, 21–22; 46:9). The belief in, and worship of, one and only one God set Israel apart from the polytheistic beliefs and practices of its pagan neighbors (e.g., Tacitus, *Historiae* 5 §5: “the Jews conceive of one God only”). While the Jews had lapsed into the worship of other deities in the period prior to the exiles, post-exilic Judaism, including that of the first century AD, was committed to monotheism and monolatry.

As Christopher Wright (2006, 105) aptly observes, faith in the one and only God anchored “the theocentric, monotheistic worldview of first-century Jews” and constituted “the assumptive bedrock of Jesus and all his first followers.” “This God,” Wright continues, “was acknowledged now by Israel, his covenant people. But the God of Israel was also the universal God to whom all nations, kings, and even emperors must finally submit.” In view of the Jewish context of John’s Gospel and the Jewish belief in monotheism, it is apparent that a claim to deity by anyone would have been fiercely opposed by pious first-century Jews. John 5:18 and numerous other passages in John’s Gospel (e.g., 8:59; 10:31–33; cf. 11:8) suggest that this is in fact what occurred when Jesus’ Jewish contemporaries repeatedly attempted to stone Jesus on account of blasphemy. What is more, at Jesus’ trial before Pilate, the Jews, after initially insinuating that Jesus was a political threat to Roman imperial power (see, e.g., 18:33–34), eventually insisted that Jesus “must die, because He made Himself the Son of God” (19:7). Thus, Jesus died first and foremost because he claimed to be God (cf. Matt 26:65).

The Son is not able to do anything on His own, but only what He sees the Father doing (5:19): In view of Jesus’ response in 5:19, one might ask how the Son can be fully divine if he can only mimic the Father. Breaking the Sabbath was a serious offense, but making oneself equal to God “was challenging the fundamental distinction between the holy, infinite God and finite, fallen human beings” (Carson 1991, 249). In response to the Jews, Jesus claims that he, while

equal to God, is functionally subordinate to him as a son is to his father (Morris 1995, 277; Borchert 1996, 236; Carson 1991, 250; cf. N. T. Wright 1986). “To do nothing on one’s own authority” is a frequent Johannine idiom, emphasizing Jesus’ reliance on and obedience to the Father “who sent” him. In response to the accusation of blasphemy and without denying his coeternal existence with the Father, Jesus underscored his subordination to the Father.

The Son also gives life to anyone He wants to (5:21): In the OT and Second Temple literature, only God has the prerogative to raise the dead and to give life. For example, in 2 Kings 5:7 the assumption is that only God can both kill and bring back to life as the question is asked, “Am I God, killing and giving life . . . ?” Rabbi Yohanan, in later Jewish literature, describes the three keys with which God did not entrust his representatives: the key of the rain (cf. Deut 28:12), the key of the womb (cf. Gen 30:22), and the key of the resurrection of the dead (cf. Ezek 37:13; Carson 1991, 254; *SB* 1:523–524, 737, 895). Because Jesus’ contemporaries did not believe that the Messiah would be divine (see comments at 5:18) or given authority to raise the dead, their reaction to Jesus is understandable. While Elijah sometimes was considered to be an exception because he was used by God to raise the dead, Jesus’ claim is much bolder in that he claimed not merely to be God’s instrument in raising people from the dead but to give life himself *to whom he is pleased to give it*. The implications are clear enough: Jesus was claiming to possess the prerogatives of God.

The Father, in fact, judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son (5:22): This verse corresponds well with the implications of the preceding verses concerning Jesus’ divine identity. In the OT, just as raising the dead was the sole prerogative of God, so also was judgment. Moreover, in Second Temple literature, while the Messiah plays a role in judgment, he remains very much in the background, apart from carrying out God’s judgment on the Jews’ national enemies (cf. *Pss. Sol.* 17:21–27). Rabbinic writings also attribute judging the world to God alone. For an explanation of how this verse can be squared with passages where Jesus indicates that he does not judge (e.g., John 8:15; 12:47 and Luke 12:14), see comments on 3:17.

24 “I assure you: Anyone who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life
and will not come under judgment but has passed from death to life.

25 “I assure you: An hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the

Son of God, and those who hear will live. 26 For just as the Father has life in Himself, so also
He has granted to the Son to have life in Himself. 27 And He has granted Him the right to pass
judgment, because He is the Son of Man. 28 Do not be amazed at this, because a time is coming
when all who are in the graves will hear His voice 29 and come out — those who have done
good things, to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked things, to the
resurrection of judgment.
30 "I can do nothing on My own. I judge only as I hear, and My judgment is righteous,
because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

Those who have done good things, to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked things, to the resurrection of judgment (5:29): The future division of the dead described in these verses will take place on the basis of what people have "done." Because believing often proves insincere (e.g., 2:23–25), a person is to be judged by what he or she does, not merely what they say. This is not tantamount to salvation by works. After all, later in John, Jesus insists, "This is *the work of God*—that you *believe* in the One He has sent" (6:29). Not only is believing the one requirement for salvation in John, believing itself is said to be the "work of God," that is, in characteristic Johannine *double entendre*, both the work done *for* God (objective genitive) and the work *done by God himself* (subjective genitive). In John's Gospel, those who have done good things are those who have come to the light (cf. 3:21), whereas those who do evil things do so because they love darkness (cf. 3:19). Therefore, while works are not the *basis* of salvation, the life that one lives forms "the test of the faith they profess" (Morris 1995, 285).

31 "If I testify about Myself, My testimony is not valid. 32 There is Another who testifies
about Me, and I know that the testimony He gives about Me is valid. ' 33 You have sent
messengers to John, and he has testified to the truth. 34 I don't receive man's testimony, but I
say these things so that you may be saved. 35 John ' was a burning and shining lamp, and for a
time you were willing to enjoy his light.
36 "But I have a greater testimony than John's because of the works that the Father has given
Me to accomplish. These very works I am doing testify about Me that the Father has sent Me.
37 The Father who sent Me has Himself testified about Me. You have not heard His voice at
any time, and you haven't seen His form. 38 You don't have His word living in you, because
you don't believe the One He sent. 39 You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have
eternal life in them, yet they testify about Me. 40 And you are not willing to come to Me so that
you may have life.
41 "I do not accept glory from men, 42 but I know you — that you have no love for God

within you. 43 I have come in My Father's name, yet you don't accept Me. If someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. 44 How can you believe? While accepting glory from one another, you don't seek the glory that comes from the only God. 45 Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. 46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, because he wrote about Me. 47 But if you don't believe his writings, how will you believe My words? "

If I testify about Myself, My testimony is not valid (5:31): At 8:14, in response to the Pharisees' assertion that his testimony was invalid because he was testifying about himself, Jesus replies, "Even if I testify about Myself . . . My testimony is valid, because I know where I came from and where I'm going. But you don't know where I come from or where I'm going." Though on the surface this might appear to contradict Jesus' present statement, there is actually no real problem once the context of each verse is taken into consideration.

In 5:31, Jesus does not indicate that he actually will testify about himself; he is simply stating a supposition in order to comment on it (Wallace 1996, 471). In other words, Jesus is asserting that if all he had were his own claims, this would be insufficient (Carson 1991, 259; Morris 1995, 287n95). He would not "pose as an independent, self-authenticating authority" (Barrett 1978, 264), because that would be open to the charge of having his own interests in mind (Bultmann 1971, 263). Therefore, in the following verses (5:31–47) Jesus enumerates several corroborating witnesses (Brown 1966, 340; Bultmann 1971, 279).

In 8:14, Jesus is responding to the Pharisees' primary point in the preceding verse, which is that he is not adhering to standard legal procedure (Morris 1995, 390). OT law required multiple witnesses in capital cases and other crimes (Num 35:30; Deut 17:6; 19:15). Later Jewish legislation adopted the principle and applied it to other legal situations (*m. Ketubbot* 2.9; cf. *m. Rosh HaShanah* 3.1).

In 5:31, Jesus has already affirmed the importance of witnesses. In 8:14, Jesus asserts the acceptability of his testimony, though he later again indicates his agreement with Jewish law (cf. 8:17; see Ridderbos 1997, 294; cf. Morris 1995, 390–91; Pancaro 1975, 264–65). Jesus bases the acceptability of his testimony on his origin and destination. Since he ultimately hails from the Father, he is able to verify the legitimacy of his words. As Schnackenburg (1990, 2:192–93) points out, "Words which in a human being would inevitably look like exaggerated arrogance, can take no other form in the mouth of the eschatological revealer." Jesus is not limited by mere creatureliness, so that in awareness of his true identity and divine origin he is able to give a trustworthy testimony (Barrett 1978, 338). Put succinctly, Jesus testifies about himself, and other witnesses—

including God the Father—confirm his testimony (Carson 1991, 260; Beasley-Murray 1999, 78; Ridderbos 1997, 202).

I don't receive man's testimony (5:34): Foreseeing his audience's need for additional witnesses, Jesus refers to "another." The Jews initially may take this as a reference to John the Baptist (cf. 5:33–35; so Chrysostom, cited in Morris 1995, 288n96), but Jesus is referring to God the Father (5:37), avoiding the name of God as is common in Jewish writings. Jesus did not need the Baptist's witness (5:34); it was for the people (Carson 1991, 260; Bultmann 1971, 264–65). The point is not that Jesus would not accept or affirm any person's testimony about himself. For example, he readily accepts Peter's confession near Caesarea Philippi (Matt 16:16). Rather, in view of 5:19–30, which has highlighted Jesus' intimate knowledge of the Father, Jesus is explaining that he does not need or accept human testimony to validate his identity because he has the testimony of none other than God himself.

You have not heard His voice at any time, and you haven't seen His form (5:37): In this verse, Jesus is not denying that in the past people had heard the voice of God, had seen the Lord in one sense or another, or had the word of God living in them. Jesus was fully aware of the OT figures who had heard the voice of God, such as Noah (Gen 7:1–4), Abraham (Gen 12:1–3), Moses (Exod 3:4–4:17; 19:3–6, 9–13; 33:11), Samuel (1 Sam 3:4, 6, 8, 11–14), and Elijah (1 Kgs 19:13, 15–18). He also surely knew that Abraham (Gen 18:1–2), Jacob (Gen 32:24–30), Moses (Exod 33:11), and Isaiah (Isa 6:1–5) all "saw" the Lord (see Carson 1991, 62; Morris 1995, 291). Moreover, Jesus' language concerning the word of God harks back to the OT depiction of a God-fearing individual, such as Joshua (Josh 1:8–9) and the psalmist (Ps 119:11), as someone who has the Word of God dwelling in his or her heart.

Jesus was not making a universal statement (i.e., no one had ever heard or "seen" God in some sense), but a statement directed at the Jewish listeners who were rejecting him. Unlike OT figures who recognized God's voice, these Jews did not discern God's voice in Jesus, and unlike people in the OT who saw God's form, these Jews did not perceive Jesus as the manifestation of God. Unlike God-fearing individuals in the OT, they had not hidden God's word in their heart. If they had been like the believing patriarchs, their ancestors, they would have accepted Jesus rather than rejecting him (Ridderbos 1997, 204).

I do not accept glory from men (5:41): Jesus not accepting "glory from men" should not be confused with him accepting the appropriate response (i.e.,

worship) to himself. Here Jesus is anticipating the charge that he is acting out of self-interest. Therefore, he declares that he is not seeking human acclamation (though he deserves it), in contrast to his interrogators (5:41; cf. 5:44; see Carson 1991, 264) who are devoid of love for God (not "love of God"; see Bultmann 1971, 269n2; Moloney 1998, 192) and whose self-love caused them to reject the God-sent Messiah (Carson 1991, 264). Humans will praise Jesus; yet it is not because he seeks to please sinful men but because he seeks as his ultimate goal to bring glory to the Father.

Your accuser is Moses . . . because he wrote about Me (5:45–46): In the OT, Moses regularly served as Israel's mediator. Yet both the "Song of Moses" and the Book of the Law function as witnesses *against* Israel (Deut 31:19, 21, 26; cf. Rom 3:19). In Jesus' day, many Jews, in keeping with the portrayal of Moses in OT and Second Temple literature, saw Moses' role as that of continuing mediator and advocate. Ironically, while the Jews set their hopes on Moses (cf. 9:28–29), according to Jesus it was Moses who served as their accuser.

Jesus can say the Jews have set their hope on Moses and at the say time charge them with not believing Moses because they misunderstood both Moses and the law. Rather than being an end in itself, the law was meant to point to Christ (Carson 1991, 266). "Moses . . . wrote about me" (v. 46; cf. 5:39) may refer to the first five books of the OT (attributed to Moses) or to the prediction of a prophet like Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15 or both. "But if you don't believe his writings, how will you believe My words?" refers to the Jews' failure to grasp the true essence of the Scriptures, including their prophetic orientation toward Jesus (cf. Matt 5:17).

Though the Jews in general and even Jesus' own disciples before the resurrection did not recognize how the OT Scriptures pointed to Jesus, John's Gospel, as well as the rest of the NT, testifies to the trajectory of OT passages pointing toward and culminating in Jesus. Nevertheless, even Jesus' own disciples did not see the prophetic orientation of many of the Scriptures until after the resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit (e.g., John 12:16; 20:9). While these prophetic elements were often misunderstood, they were nonetheless contained in the OT texts themselves (see Carson 2004, 393–436).

> After this, Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias). [2] And a huge crowd was following Him because they saw the signs that He was performing by healing the sick. [3] So Jesus went up a mountain and sat down there with His disciples.

4 Now the Passover, a Jewish festival, was near. 5 Therefore, when Jesus looked up and
noticed a huge crowd coming toward Him, He asked Philip, “Where will we buy bread so these
people can eat? ” 6 He asked this to test him, for He Himself knew what He was going to do.
7 Philip answered, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread wouldn’t be enough for each of them
to have a little.”
8 One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to Him, 9 “There’s a boy here who
has five barley loaves and two fish — but what are they for so many? ”
10 Then Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.”
There was plenty of grass in that place, so they sat down. The men numbered about 5,000.
11 Then Jesus took the loaves, and after giving thanks He distributed them to those who were
seated — so also with the fish, as much as they wanted.
12 When they were full, He told His disciples, “Collect the leftovers so that nothing is
wasted.” 13 So they collected them and filled 12 baskets with the pieces from the five barley
loaves that were left over by those who had eaten.
14 When the people saw the sign He had done, they said, “This really is the Prophet who was
to come into the world! ” 15 Therefore, when Jesus knew that they were about to come and take
Him by force to make Him king, He withdrew again to the mountain by Himself.

Jesus took the loaves, and . . . distributed them to those who were seated—so also with the fish, as much as they wanted (6:11): Even though the word “miracle” is not specifically used in this passage, it is clearly a suitable word to describe what Jesus did. There were about five thousand men (presumably heads of households; Moloney 1998, 200). In addition, there were women and children (cf. Matt 14:21; recall the presence of a boy with his lunch in John 6:9). The total number may have been as many as twenty thousand people, and Jesus feeds them all with only five loaves and two fish.

Skeptics who attempt to argue that Jesus simply inspired an attitude of love among the people causing them to share their food with each other fail to read the text closely. This kind of naturalistic interpretation is most likely caused by a bias against the supernatural. The most natural rendering of the text is that Jesus miraculously multiplied the food to feed the large crowd, which is why the people responded by declaring Jesus a prophet and wanting to make him king. The parallel accounts in the Synoptics (Matt 14:13–21; Mark 6:30–44; Luke 9:10–17) understand this to be a miracle as well and thus also make any kind of natural explanation of this event highly improbable. What is more, there is also the OT precedent of Elisha feeding 100 men with 20 barley loaves and some ears of grain (2 Kgs 4:42–44). It is quite clear that John wants the reader to understand the present account against the backdrop of this OT event. This is indicated by the use of the word *paidarion* (boy) in John 6:9 (its only NT

occurrence) and several times in the LXX of the 2 Kings passage (there referring to Elisha's servant); the mention of barley; and the overall mode of narration, including a question of disbelief, the command to distribute the loaves, and the fact that all ate with food left to spare. (See further comments at Matt 14:15–21 and Luke 9:13.)

> 16 When evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, 17 got into a boat, and started
> across the sea to Capernaum. Darkness had already set in, but Jesus had not yet come to them.
> 18 Then a high wind arose, and the sea began to churn. 19 After they had rowed about three or
> four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea. He was coming near the boat, and they were
> afraid.
> 20 But He said to them, "It is I. ' Don't be afraid! " 21 Then they were willing to take Him on
> board, and at once the boat was at the shore where they were heading.

***Jesus walks on water* (6:16–21):** The account of Jesus' walking on the water is also found in two of the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 14:22–33; Mark 6:45–52). In comparing the different accounts of this event, the first question that arises is whether or not John 6:17 (and Matt 14:23) contradicts Mark 6:45, which has the disciples setting out for Bethsaida rather than Capernaum. It appears that, from the site where the feeding of the five thousand took place, "to the other side" means the west shore, and this is where the boat landed (Gennesaret; cf. Mark 6:53; Matt 14:34). Here John provides the name of the town, Capernaum. The apparent contradiction is that Mark 6:45 indicates that Jesus sent his disciples "on ahead to the other side to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd" (Carson 2010, 292–93).

An attractive solution to this difficulty is that Jesus sent his disciples off to the other side of the lake but instructed them to wait on the eastern shore only for a limited time. This would explain why it was not until the fourth watch (Matt 14:25; sometime after 3 a.m.) that Jesus walked on water. Carson suggests that the differing syntax in the two Synoptic accounts of this event lends support to this harmonization: "Matthew's *heōs hou* plus the aorist subjunctive verb should normally be rendered 'until' (as in 13:33; 17:9; 18:34; though cf. 26:36)—i.e., the disciples were to 'go on ahead' (*proagein*) of him *until*, not *while*, he was free of the crowds, after which he hoped to join them, after some time alone in prayer; they would then cross 'to the other side.' Mark (6:45) specifies Bethsaida but has *heōs* plus the indicative [in the best MSS]: the disciples were to go 'to Bethsaida while,' not 'until,' he sent the crowds" (2010, 293).

Other differences in the account are also evident, with John providing the briefest version. Matthew and Mark note that the disciples thought Jesus was a ghost (Matt 14:26; Mark 6:49). Mark also points out that the disciples had not understood about the loaves, for their hearts were hardened (Mark 6:52), while Matthew adds the episode with Peter and the response of worship when Jesus got into the boat (Matt 14:28–33). In John's more succinct account, he has chosen to emphasize primarily the calming effect of Jesus' presence on the disciples. His silence on certain aspects of the events should not lead one to question their historicity. The Gospel writers, as all writers of history, were selective in what details they chose to include (see, e.g., 20:30–31; 21:24–25). Moreover, each writer chose to emphasize particular theological themes that derived from certain events.

Finally, some skeptics have suggested that Jesus was actually walking on the shoreline instead of striding on the water, adducing verse 21 as support ("and at once the boat was at the shore"). However, most likely John, along with the Synoptic authors, understood this to be yet another miraculous event, not merely Jesus walking on the shore, and thus included this second miracle, too, in his accounts (albeit in a rather understated manner). The disciples' reaction to Jesus further testifies to the miraculous nature of this event (Matt 14:44; Mark 6:51). Most likely, therefore, the boat's arrival at the shore "at once" (*eutheōs*) indicates a second miracle, in which case the "walking on water" would be followed by a "miraculous landing" (Keener 2003, 674). Alternatively, *eutheōs* could simply imply that soon after Jesus' miraculous walking on the water, the boat reached the shore.

> 30 "What sign then are You going to do so we may see and believe You? " they asked. "What are You going to perform? 31 Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, just as it is written: **He gave them bread from heaven to eat.**" ' '
>
> 32 Jesus said to them, "I assure you: Moses didn't give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the real bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is the One who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."
>
> 34 Then they said, "Sir, give us this bread always! "
>
> 35 "I am the bread of life," Jesus told them. "No one who comes to Me will ever be hungry, and no one who believes in Me will ever be thirsty again.

What sign then are You going to do so we may see and believe You? (6:30): At least initially, it does seem curious that the crowds would ask for a sign in

order to authenticate Jesus' authority after he has just fed the five thousand. Though this does not explain why the crowd wanted another sign, it is apparent throughout the NT that the Jews characteristically expected a sign of authentication (cf. 2:18; Matt 12:38 // Luke 11:16, 29; Matt 16:1 // Mark 8:1; 1 Cor 1:22). In Judaism, a "sign from heaven" was considered to be the highest form of validation. The crowd pledges that if Jesus were to perform the sign they demanded, they would believe. The question "What are you going to perform?" is a common OT expression of incredulity (Job 9:12; Eccl 8:4; Isa 45:9; see Derrett 1993, 142–44).

It is possible that the crowd asked for yet another sign because they reasoned if Jesus was the prophet like Moses as they had previously speculated (6:14), he could be expected to perform further signs. Carson notes that later rabbis believed the Messiah would call down manna from heaven, as did Moses. He writes, "There is at least a little evidence that such beliefs were not unknown in the first century (*cf.* the reference to 'hidden manna' in Rev. 2:17, and *2 Baruch* 29:8, dated about AD 100). If this is what the synagogue crowd means, it is a demand that Jesus prove his messianic status by duplicating or surpassing the miracle of the manna" (1991, 286).

I am the bread of life (6:35): Jesus' statement here (reiterated in 6:48, 51) is the first of seven Johannine "I am" sayings (*egō eimi* plus a predicate). The other six sayings identify Jesus as: (1) the light of the world (8:12); (2) the gate (10:7, 9); (3) the good shepherd (10:11, 14); (4) the resurrection and the life (11:25); (5) the way, the truth, and the life (14:6); and (6) the true vine (15:1, 5). Because John stands alone among the Gospels in highlighting these "I am" statements, they are often deemed to be unhistorical. However, the historicity of John's recounting of these statements of Jesus can be defended along several lines (Blomberg 2007, 209–11).

First, many of the "I am" statements would have been difficult to comprehend for a first-century Jew. As Blomberg (2007, 209–10) observes,

> A first-century Jewish audience hearing a rabbi refer to himself as, say, the bread of life, would probably not have known what to make of it, which is precisely the response John records (6:60). Jesus is described as using the formula "I am" much more often in the Fourth Gospel than in the Synoptics, but it is not clear that these revelations make his claims for himself that much more explicit. Jesus' apparently ungrammatical proclamation "before Abraham was born, I am" (8:58), may refer back to the divine name revealed in Exodus 3:14, "I am what I am," but it is not

> obvious that in the rigidly monotheistic context of Judaism this would be the only conclusion drawn. The fact that the Jews immediately tried to stone him does not mean they understood his statement as a direct equation of himself with God. Claiming that Abraham had seen his day (v. 56) itself bordered on blasphemy, and the Jews had already tried to kill him for much lesser "crimes," such as healing on the Sabbath (Mark 3:6) and speaking of God's love for the Gentiles (Luke 4:29)!

Second, there are virtually no parallels to Jesus' "I am" statements in the first century. The closest parallels are in descriptions of the claims of the mythical Egyptian goddess Isis (a well-known figure in Greek culture). Yet Isis' "I am" statements are not only for the most part written too late to have influenced John, but they also have a different style than Jesus' statements (e.g., "I am the one who discovered fruit for men"; "I am the one who is called goddess among women" [Horsley 1981, 10–21; cf. Blomberg 2007, 210]). For this reason Blomberg's conclusion is the most likely: "The much more natural background for Jesus' 'I am' statements is the Old Testament name for God, even if Jesus sufficiently veiled it so that his claims were not always thought blasphemous" (2007, 211).

Third, when the Jews ask Jesus directly about his identity, similarly to the Synoptics, he replies cryptically (e.g., John 8:25; 10:25; 16:29).

Fourth, in at least two different places, the Synoptics also use the phrase "I am" in ways that could bring to mind the divine name (cf. Exod 3:14; this characterization of God is also taken up in the second half of the book of Isaiah; see, e.g., Isa 43:10). For instance, in Mark 6:50 Jesus appears walking on water and proclaims, "Have courage! It is I. Don't be afraid," but the verse could also be translated, "Have courage. 'I am.' Don't be afraid." In Mark 13:6, Jesus speaks of false Christs who will come saying "I am He"; yet the words could again be translated "I am."

For these and other reasons, Jesus' "I am" statements are to be regarded as authentic. By identifying himself as the "I am"—a term referring in the OT exclusively to Yahweh, the Creator and covenant-keeping God of Israel (Exod 3:14; Isa 43:10)—and by linking this reference with a variety of divine attributes—Jesus underscores his claim to deity.

41 Therefore the Jews started complaining about Him because He said, "I am the bread that
came down from heaven." 42 They were saying, "Isn't this Jesus the son of Joseph, whose

father and mother we know? How can He now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’? ”

Isn’t this Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? (6:42): Some critics have cited this passage as support for the theory that John was unaware of the virgin birth. Yet this type of claim goes far beyond the evidence. This verse shows that the Jews in Jesus’ part of Palestine in his day were ignorant of his virgin birth, not John when he wrote decades later. John appears to be highlighting the irony in the situation. The Jews here object, not to the notion that a man such as Jesus could receive a divine calling, or even that someone like Elijah might appear on earth and dwell among human beings, but to Jesus’ claim of descent from heaven in face of his obvious (or so it seemed) human origin (Odeberg 1968, 264–65n3). Ironically, then, both Jesus’ known human origins and his claim to deity proved an obstacle to people’s acceptance of Jesus as Messiah and Son of God. The absence of a direct reference to the virgin birth does not imply that John was unaware of the virgin birth tradition. John chooses to open his Gospel with the affirmation that the Word (Jesus) was God and at the same time distinct from God (1:1–18); this fits well with the Synoptic explanation of Jesus’ miraculous conception.

52 At that, the Jews argued among themselves, “How can this man give us His flesh to eat? ”
53 So Jesus said to them, “I assure you: Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink
His blood, you do not have life in yourselves. 54 Anyone who eats My flesh and drinks My
blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day, 55 because My flesh is real food
and My blood is real drink. 56 The one who eats My flesh and drinks My blood lives in Me, and
I in him. 57 Just as the living Father sent Me and I live because of the Father, so the one who
feeds on Me will live because of Me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven; it is not
like the manna your fathers ate — and they died. The one who eats this bread will live forever.”

***Did Jesus mean we should eat his literal flesh and drink his literal blood?* (6:53–58):** Jesus meant for his words to be taken neither in a literal nor in a sacramental sense. The expression “flesh and blood” constitutes a Hebrew idiom referring to the whole person (cf. Matt 16:17; 1 Cor 15:50; Gal 1:16; Eph 6:12; Heb 2:14). John 6:55, in line with 6:27 and 6:32, stresses that Jesus’ flesh and blood are real—that is, spiritual—food and drink. The result of a believer’s partaking of Jesus’ flesh and blood is mutual indwelling (6:56). This anticipates the fuller explanation of this notion in chapter 15.

In Johannine idiom, “real” or “true” also carries the connotation of

eschatological, typological fulfillment in relation to OT precursors. This interpretation is further validated in 6:58 as Jesus returns to the events of the exodus account that he introduced a few verses earlier in proclaiming himself the "bread of life" (6:48–51). Although later rabbinic teaching speaks (figuratively) of "eating the Messiah" (*b. Sanhedrin* 99a; see Talbert 1992, 138), a literal understanding of Jesus' words here militates against people's scruples against the drinking of blood and the eating of meat containing blood, both of which were proscribed by the Hebrew Scriptures, in particular the Mosaic law.

Against a sacramental understanding are five lines of evidence: (1) Jesus' use of the title "Son of Man"; (2) the personal pronoun *me* ("me") instead of "my flesh/blood" in 6:57 (Carson 1991, 299); (3) the fact that the Jews would not have understood Jesus' words in a sacramental sense; (4) the term "flesh" is never used in the NT to refer to the Lord's Supper; and (5) to do so would attribute inappropriate significance to such a practice (Ridderbos 1997, 240–41). On a secondary level, however, John may expect his readers to read Jesus' words in light of the church's observance of the Lord's Supper, though not necessarily in a sacramental sense (Carson 1991, 296–97; Beasley-Murray 1999, 95).

There is a clear parallelism in 6:57 between the Father's relationship with Jesus and Jesus' relationship with the believer. The ground of Jesus' own being is the living Father (cf. 5:26); likewise, Jesus is the ground of believers' spiritual existence (Carson 1991, 299; Moloney 1998, 222). However, we should not understand the two relationships as exactly analogous so as to make Jesus a dependent creature. Believers have life because the Son grants it to them; Jesus has life in himself (5:26). As Carson puts it, "Jesus lives *because of the Father, i.e.* because of the Father's determination that Jesus should have life-in-himself (5:26); those who feed on Jesus live (Jesus says) *because of me*: there is both parallelism and breach of parallelism. Clearly, they live because of the Son's determination, but unlike him they never have life-in-themselves, but only in him" (1991, 299).

66 From that moment many of His disciples turned back and no longer accompanied Him.
67 Therefore Jesus said to the Twelve, "You don't want to go away too, do you? "
68 Simon Peter answered, "Lord, who will we go to? You have the words of eternal life.
69 We have come to believe and know that You are the Holy One of God! " '
70 Jesus replied to them, "Didn't I choose you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is the Devil! "
71 He was referring to Judas, Simon Iscariot's son, ' one of the Twelve, because he was going to

betray Him.

Does Jesus abbreviate Peter's confession here? **(6:68–69):** Despite some similarities, Peter's Synoptic and Johannine confessions appear to be separate events (Morris 1995, 343–44n161; Witherington 1995, 160). At the same time, this passage represents the Johannine equivalent to Peter's great confession at Caesarea Philippi in the Synoptics (Matt 16:16 pars.). Since the term *kyrios* ("Lord") here introduces a confession of Jesus as the "Holy One of God," it is not used simply to address Jesus as "sir," but rather to acknowledge him as Lord. At the very least, *kyrios* here means "Master." The term may allude to the name used for God in the LXX (Morris 1995, 344).

Peter's profession of Jesus as "the Holy One of God" looks forward to later references in the Gospel to Jesus being set apart for God (10:36; 17:19). There is no evidence that indicates the expression functioned as a messianic title in Judaism; yet it clearly does so in this verse.

> After this, Jesus traveled in Galilee, since He did not want to travel in Judea because the Jews were trying to kill Him. 2 The Jewish Festival of Tabernacles ' ' was near, 3 so His brothers said to Him, "Leave here and go to Judea so Your disciples can see Your works that You are doing. 4 For no one does anything in secret while he's seeking public recognition. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world." 5 (For not even His brothers believed in Him.)
>
> 6 Jesus told them, "My time has not yet arrived, but your time is always at hand. 7 The world cannot hate you, but it does hate Me because I testify about it — that its deeds are evil. 8 Go up to the festival yourselves. I'm not going up to the festival yet, because My time has not yet fully come." 9 After He had said these things, He stayed in Galilee.
>
> 10 After His brothers had gone up to the festival, then He also went up, not openly but secretly.

For not even His brothers believed in Him (7:5): Some have argued Jesus' siblings' unbelief indicates that the events surrounding Jesus' birth were later creations of the Evangelists. After all, it is reasoned, if Mary and Joseph spoke of the earlier revelations concerning Jesus (which seems likely), it is difficult to understand the family's apparent skepticism. However, this argument misunderstands the type of unbelief in view in this passage.

The verses leading up to John's statement about Jesus' brothers' unbelief have Jesus' siblings urging him to display his credentials publicly in Judea in order that his disciples can witness Jesus' mighty works. The reference to "your disciples" may be to his followers who had fallen away (6:60, 66). According to

Jesus' brothers, the upcoming Jerusalem festival is the opportune time for him to reclaim his lost followers.

The conjunction "for" at the beginning of verse 5 indicates that the subsequent statement concerning Jesus' brothers' unbelief explains why the brothers were telling Jesus to go to Judea to achieve public recognition (vv. 3–4). Verse 3 indicates that Jesus' brothers did not doubt his ability to perform miracles; these were the very things they were calling on Jesus to do in Jerusalem. Jesus' brothers' unbelief did not reside in their lack of faith that he was able to do the miraculous. Rather their unbelief revealed lack of understanding as to the way in which Jesus went about pursuing his messianic calling. Jesus' brothers' attitude resembles that of Satan at Jesus' temptation, who misconstrued Jesus' messianic calling in self-seeking terms (Matt 4:5–7 par.; see Brown 1966, 306–8; Borchert 1996, 280–81). In addition, it is audaciously presumptuous for Jesus' brothers to think that the Messiah is in need of their advice. The brothers' words also reveal their confusion: it is not Jesus' failure to show himself to the world (v. 4) that limits the reception of his message but the world's sinful rejection of its Creator (Carson 1991, 305–6). While Jesus ultimately must be revealed as Messiah, in the present circumstances he chooses a more gradual, judicious approach (though this is not a matter of secrecy or deception: see 18:20; cf. 7:14). His brothers, "like so many of the superficial disciples in 2:23–25; 6:60ff., could not perceive the *sign*ificance of what they saw, and therefore did not penetrate to Jesus' real identity and entrust themselves entirely to him" (Carson 1991, 307). In this, they are no different from Jesus' mother who had earlier prompted him to perform a miracle and was sharply rebuffed by Jesus (2:3–4).

***Textual problem* (7:8):** The textual tradition here is divided between "not" (א D) and "not yet" ($p^{66, 75}$ B). The harder reading is clearly the first, and it is possible that later scribes changed "not" to "not yet" in order to avoid the apparent discrepancy, as Jesus later does indeed go up to the festival (7:10). In light of the papyrus readings, however, if this change was made, it would have had to occur fairly early.

Yet even if we accept the more difficult reading as original, the passage is not problematic once the context is taken into account. Jesus' comment "I'm not going up to the festival yet" does not need to imply that he is not ever going up, but rather he is not going up *now* (Morris 1995, 354–55). He will not go to Jerusalem until the Father directs him to do so (Carson 1991, 308–9). As at 2:4, Jesus is not going to be pressured to act before his time. The statement in 7:10

that Jesus went up “not openly, but secretly” may also be designed to alleviate the apparent contradiction (Ridderbos 1997, 259–60).

> 11 The Jews were looking for Him at the festival and saying, “Where is He? ” 12 And there was a lot of discussion about Him among the crowds. Some were saying, “He’s a good man.” Others were saying, “No, on the contrary, He’s deceiving the people.” 13 Still, nobody was talking publicly about Him because they feared the Jews.
>
> 14 When the festival was already half over, Jesus went up into the temple complex and began to teach. 15 Then the Jews were amazed and said, “How does He know the Scriptures, since He hasn’t been trained? ”

How does He know the Scriptures, since He hasn’t been trained? (7:15): The question could read literally, “How does this man know letters (*grammata*) . . . ?” Hence, it is possible to render the passage to mean, “How is it that he can read and write?” However, this interpretation is rather unlikely for the following reasons. It was common for Jewish males in Jesus’ day to be able both to read and write and to have a basic understanding of the Scriptures. Therefore, it makes little sense to surmise that Jesus’ Jewish contemporaries were surprised that Jesus could read and write. What was unusual, however, was that, despite Jesus’ lack of formal training with a Jewish rabbi, he had the ability to carry on a sustained discourse in the manner of the rabbis, including frequent references to Scripture. Moreover, whereas the rabbis of Jesus’ day would teach by frequent appeal to other authorities, Jesus regularly introduced his teachings by declaring his own authority: “You have heard that it was said, but I tell you”; “I tell you the truth”; “Truly, truly, I say to you” (Riesner 1981, 97–245).

> 16 Jesus answered them, “My teaching isn’t Mine but is from the One who sent Me. 17 If anyone wants to do His will, he will understand whether the teaching is from God or if I am speaking on My own. 18 The one who speaks for himself seeks his own glory. But He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him. 19 Didn’t Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law! Why do you want to kill Me? ”
>
> 20 “You have a demon! ” the crowd responded. “Who wants to kill You? ”
>
> 21 “I did one work, and you are all amazed,” Jesus answered. 22 “Consider this: Moses has given you circumcision — not that it comes from Moses but from the fathers — and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. 23 If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses won’t be broken, are you angry at Me because I made a man entirely well on the

> Sabbath? 24 Stop judging according to outward appearances; rather judge according to righteous judgment."

Judge according to righteous judgment (7:24): Here Jesus commands the Jews to stop judging wrongly and instead to judge righteously. There could appear to be a tension here between other verses (e.g., Matt 7:1; Luke 6:37) which forbid judging. Yet the tension is easily resolved once the respective contexts are considered. In the context surrounding John 7:24, Jesus responds to the anger he invoked by healing a man on the Sabbath. Jesus raises the problem that two commandments of God seemed to conflict with one another. The Jews were commanded to circumcise their males on the eighth day after birth (Lev 12:3). However, no regular work was to be performed on the Sabbath. What should be done when the eighth day after birth fell on a Sabbath? The Jews had long decided that it was permissible to go ahead and circumcise on the eighth day regardless of whether or not it fell on a Sabbath. Later rabbinic teaching generally concurred that, granted the lesser premise that circumcision (which "perfects" but one member of the human body) supersedes the Sabbath commandment, the saving of the entire body transcends it all the more.

The issue at hand is not judgmentalism, which is condemning others because their righteous deeds do not live up to one's own supposed good deeds. Rather, the judging in view here has to do with spiritual discernment. Had the Jews judged righteously (i.e., had possessed spiritual discernment), they would have realized that Jesus fulfilled the law in a manner indicated by the law (cf. 1:17; see Ridderbos 1997, 266; Carson 1991, 316).

In contrast, Luke 6:37 and Matthew 7:1 appear to have a negative type of judging—judgmentalism—in view. The point in these two passages is not that if a person has spiritual discernment, God will have spiritual discernment toward that person; this would make little sense. In these two passages, judging is better understood as "excoriating self-righteous legalism" or "censorious heresy-hunting" (Carson 1991, 307). These definitions fit well within the context of taking the log out of one's own eye before taking the speck out of that of one's brother (Matt 7:3–5) and the command not to condemn others (Luke 6:37).

Even in the context of Matthew 7:1, there is indication that Jesus is calling his followers to judge others in the sense of having spiritual discernment. After all, Jesus does command his listeners to take the speck out of their brother's eye after they have removed the log out of their own. Moreover, the command just a few verses after 7:1 not to give what is holy to dogs or to toss pearls before swine implies that people should use discernment (judge) in order to identify the

“dogs” and the “pigs” (7:6).

> 25 Some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, “Isn’t this the man they want to kill? 26 Yet, look! He’s speaking publicly and they’re saying nothing to Him. Can it be true that the authorities know He is the Messiah? 27 But we know where this man is from. When the Messiah comes, nobody will know where He is from.”
>
> 28 As He was teaching in the temple complex, Jesus cried out, “You know Me and you know where I am from. Yet I have not come on My own, but the One who sent Me is true. You don’t know Him; 29 I know Him because I am from Him, and He sent Me.”
>
> 30 Then they tried to seize Him. Yet no one laid a hand on Him because His hour had not yet come.

Nobody will know where He is from (7:27): In this passage the people of Jerusalem ask, “The rulers have not concluded that he is the Christ, have they?” The question springs from people’s surprise that the authorities have not arrested Jesus. Perhaps, they ponder, “the rulers”—that is, the Sanhedrin (cf. 7:48; 12:42; see Schürer 1973–1979, 2:199–226)—have uncovered new evidence to suggest that Jesus is indeed the Christ (Carson 1991, 317; Morris 1995, 365; Barrett 1978, 321). This is not to say that the Sanhedrin actually believed Jesus was the Messiah; here John only gives us the question of the people of Jerusalem, not the actual belief of the Sanhedrin.

Nevertheless, the crowd quickly dismisses the possibility that Jesus might be the Christ. After all, they know where “this one” (the expression seems at least mildly disdainful; Ridderbos 1997, 268) is from (i.e., Galilee; cf. 6:42); the Christ’s origins, on the other hand, will be unknown. According to rabbinic teaching, some believed that the Messiah would be born of flesh and blood yet wholly unknown until he set out to procure Israel’s redemption (Carson 1991, 317–18). Others in Judaism, such as the priests and scribes summoned by Herod in Matthew 2:1–6, were quite sure about the geographic origin of the Messiah (Mic 5:2; cf. John 7:42). Apparently, however, those authorities could tell Herod little else about the Messiah’s family, circumstances, or other information.

As He was teaching in the temple complex, Jesus cried out (7:28): It is possible that one could find a contradiction between Jesus’ words here and the messianic prediction of Isaiah 42:2: “He will not cry out or shout or make His voice heard in the streets.” However, finding a contradiction between these two verses could be possible only if one misunderstands the nature of prophetic language. Isaiah’s words are not to be taken overly literally to mean that this

servant of the Lord would never cry out. Following this logic, it would also mean that Jesus could not "make his voice heard in the streets." Instead, it appears that Isaiah is using prophetic language to explain that this servant's methods will be characterized by gentleness and that he would not support his claims by boisterous demonstrations, both of which predictions are true of Jesus' ministry.

No one laid a hand on Him because His hour had not yet come (7:30): Although the Jewish authorities attempted to take Jesus into custody, they were not able to do so because "His hour had not yet come." Whether a miracle occurred, the text does not say. Yet the phrase, "His hour had not yet come," clearly attributes Jesus' avoidance of capture to divine sovereign providence (cf. 8:20).

> 37 On the last and most important day of the festival, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone
> is thirsty, he should come to Me ᾽ and drink! aa 38 The one who believes in Me, as the Scripture
> has said, will have streams of living water flow from deep within him." 39 He said this about
> the Spirit. Those who believed in Jesus were going to receive the Spirit, for the Spirit had not
> yet been received ᾽ because Jesus had not yet been glorified.

The one who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, will have streams of living water flow from deep within him (7:37–39a): There is some question as to which particular OT passage is in view here. Some have concluded that the reference in verse 38 pertains not to any specific passage of Scripture but to common prophetic teaching (e.g., Calvin 1959, 198–99). This is possible, but several OT passages seem relevant to the discussion. Potential scriptural allusions include those promising spiritual blessings, including the blessing of the Spirit, in line with the feast itself. The phrase "He said this about the Spirit" appears to echo occasional OT passages where water is used as an emblem for the Holy Spirit (cf. Isa 44:3; Ezek 36:25–27; Joel 2:28). Manna or water and the gift of the Spirit are linked in Nehemiah 9:20 (cf. 9:13, 15; see Carson 1991, 326–28; Shidemantle 2001).

The Spirit had not yet been received because Jesus had not yet been glorified (7:39): Most translations correctly supply the word "given" or "received" into this verse, but the original literally says, "for the Spirit was not yet." John is not saying the Spirit did not yet exist or was not at work in the world. After all, the Evangelist had already written about the Spirit's work of

resting on and working through Jesus (1:32; 3:34). Carson correctly explains the meaning, “What the Evangelist means is that the Spirit of the dawning kingdom comes as the result—indeed, the entailment—of the Son’s completed work, and up to that point the Holy Spirit was *not* given in the full, Christian sense of the term (*cf*. also the notes on 3:1–15)” (1991, 329).

> 40 When some from the crowd heard these words, they said, “This really is the Prophet! ” ’
> 41 Others said, “This is the Messiah! ” But some said, “Surely the Messiah doesn’t come from
> Galilee, does He? 42 Doesn’t the Scripture say that the Messiah comes from David’s offspring
> and from the town of Bethlehem, where David once lived? ” 43 So a division occurred among
> the crowd because of Him. 44 Some of them wanted to seize Him, but no one laid hands on
> Him.

Doesn’t the Scripture say that the Messiah comes from . . . Bethlehem? (7:40–42): “The Prophet” (v. 40) refers to the prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15–18; so Carson 1991, 329; contra Ridderbos 1997, 276–77). Today it may be difficult to understand the discussion of whether Jesus was the Prophet or the Messiah, because Christians today may see the two designations as different titles for the same person. However, in first-century thinking the Prophet and the Christ were often viewed as two separate personages (cf. John 1:21). For example, the Qumran community looked forward to the coming of the Prophet and the Anointed Ones of Aaron and Israel (1QS 9:11), whereby the Prophet was held to be different from the priestly and royal Messiah(s). Another example is *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 1.9, which says in reference to the future successor of Moses, “As the former redeemer made a well to rise [Num 21:17–18], so will the latter Redeemer bring up water [Joel 4:18].” Carson suggests that it is possible “that Christians were the first to identify the Davidic Messiah with the Prophet like Moses, precisely because they recognized in Jesus the one who perfectly fulfilled both prophecies—just as it is doubtful that anyone systematically linked the suffering servant prophecies with the royal messianic prophecies until Jesus himself came on the scene (on the complex evidence, *cf*. Schürer, 2. 547–549)” (1991, 329).

This passage testifies to the belief that the Christ comes as a descendent of David and from the town of Bethlehem, not from Galilee. There was ample scriptural support for people’s contention that the Messiah would come from David’s family and from Bethlehem, a village (*kōmē* [elsewhere in John only applied to Bethany: 11:1, 30]) located south of Jerusalem in the heart of Judea.

Matthew 2:5–6 bears witness to the fact that at least by the beginning of the first century AD, Scripture-literate Jews believed that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (cf. Luke 2:1–20). No such evidence exists for a Galilean origin (cf. John 7:52).

Here once again appears to be Johannine irony (Carson 1991, 330; Morris 1995, 380; contra Ridderbos 1997, 278). For whereas apparently some of Jesus' contemporaries erroneously thought Jesus was from Galilee, John seems to expect his readers to know that Jesus had actually been born in Bethlehem, in keeping with OT prophecy (cf. Matt 2:5–6; Luke 2:4, 15). Jesus' interrogators are unmasked as ignorant (cf. John 7:52, where Jesus' Pharisaic opposition is shown to be in error). F. F. Bruce observes, "If we infer from this passage that the fourth Evangelist either did not know or did not accept Jesus' Davidic descent or nativity in Bethlehem, we expose our own failure to appreciate his delicate handling of this situation" (1983, 184; cf. Carson 1991, 330). The apparent difficulty of Jesus' supposed Galilean origin was one that Christian apologists (including John) had to deal with already in the first century.

> 45 Then the temple police came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, "Why haven't you brought Him? "
> 46 The police answered, "No man ever spoke like this! " '
> 47 Then the Pharisees responded to them: "Are you fooled too? 48 Have any of the rulers or Pharisees believed in Him? 49 But this crowd, which doesn't know the law, is accursed! "
> 50 Nicodemus — the one who came to Him previously, being one of them — said to them, 51 "Our law doesn't judge a man before it hears from him and knows what he's doing, does it? "
> 52 "You aren't from Galilee too, are you? " they replied. "Investigate and you will see that no prophet arises from Galilee." '

Investigate and you will see that no prophet arises from Galilee (7:52): Here the members of the Sanhedrin are in error. Prophets had indeed come out of Galilee in the past, including Jonah (2 Kgs 14:25) and possibly Elijah (1 Kgs 17:1) and Nahum (Nah 1:1). In fact, Rabbi Eliezer (c. AD 90) maintained that no tribe of Israel failed to produce a prophet (*b. Sukkah* 27b). This is a case of Scripture accurately recounting an inaccurate statement by a person or group, which in no way calls into question the truthfulness of the Bible itself.

[53 So each one went to his house. 1 But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

2 At dawn He went to the temple complex again, and all the people were coming to Him. He sat down and began to teach them.

3 Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, making her stand in the center. 4 "Teacher," they said to Him, "this woman was caught in the act of committing adultery. 5 In the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do You say? " 6 They asked this to trap Him, in order that they might have evidence to accuse Him.

Jesus stooped down and started writing on the ground with His finger. 7 When they persisted in questioning Him, He stood up and said to them, "The one without sin among you should be the first to throw a stone at her."

8 Then He stooped down again and continued writing on the ground. 9 When they heard this, they left one by one, starting with the older men. Only He was left, with the woman in the center. 10 When Jesus stood up, He said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? "

11 "No one, Lord," she answered.

"Neither do I condemn you," said Jesus. "Go, and from now on do not sin anymore."]

The adultress forgiven **(7:53–8:11):** This passage was most likely not part of John's original Gospel. Most translations use square brackets to indicate the probable non-inclusion in the original Gospel. Fourteen out of eighty-two words used in this pericope (or 17 percent) are unique to John (Morgenthaler 1958, 60–62). Almost every verse from 8:1–11 (the sole exception being 8:5) contains words found nowhere else in the Gospel (and, except for *presbyteros*, rarely or not at all in the other Johannine writings). Several other words occur only once or twice elsewhere in the Gospel. Moreover, standard Johannine vocabulary is conspicuously absent (detailed in Morgenthaler 1958, 61).

Nevertheless, an examination of these 14 words used only here in John's Gospel by itself is less than conclusive. First, the issue of adultery is not addressed elsewhere in the Gospel, which could explain why the verb and noun for "adultery" are limited to the present context. Second, three closely related verbs describing Jesus' bending down and straightening up may likewise be unique to the present passage. "Without sin," too, may be explained as unique to the present situation. Thus, only a handful of words remain that may suggest non-Johannine authorship. However, a comparison of Johannine style characteristics leads to a more definitive conclusion. Damaging to the argument for inclusion, Ruckstuhl and Dschulnigg (1991, 185–86) identify only two of John's standard style characteristics in the entire pericope (7:53–8:11), a ratio of 21:1.

An assessment of the external evidence for the inclusion or non-inclusion of

this pericope confirms the analysis of the internal evidence (see esp. the exhaustive treatment by Petersen 1997, 191–221). Petersen notes that "the entire twelve verses of the *pericope adulterae* are completely absent from *all* of the oldest manuscripts of the Gospel of John." The pericope first appears in the fifth-century Codex Bezae (D). Even after this, the spread of the pericope into the manuscript tradition is very slow. For these reasons scholarship has overwhelmingly come to regard the passage as a later insertion, for, in Petersen's words, "reasons [that] are massive, convincing, and obvious." The following six reasons persuasively support this conclusion (Köstenberger 2004a, 247):

1. Its utter absence from all pre-fifth-century AD manuscripts, including P^{66}, P^{75}, א, B, and probably A and C (Metzger 1994, 187–88).
2. Its appearance in no fewer than five different places in the manuscript tradition (after John 7:36, 44, or 52; at the end of John's Gospel; or after Luke 21:38), bearing all the marks of a "bouncing around . . . 'floating' logion" (Petersen 1997, 193); one should also note the large number of variants pertaining to the entire pericope, which also suggests an unstable MS tradition (Burge 1984, 144; O'Day 1992, 639n22; contra Sanders 1990, 337).
3. Non-Johannine literary and linguistic features (see the discussion above).
4. The interruption of the narrative flow from 7:52 to 8:12, breaking up the literary unit 7:1–8:59. On a historical level, the setting of 7:53–8:1 suggests most plausibly Jesus' pattern during the week before his passion (cf. Mark 11:11, 19; 13:3; and esp. Luke 21:37; see Carson 1991, 334; Burge 1984, 144).
5. The lack of citation in early patristic writings up to the fourth century (the earliest Greek patristic reference of a variation of this narrative occurring in a commentary by Didymus the Blind [d. 398]; see Ehrman 1988; Beck 1997, 102–3; but cf. McDonald 1995).
6. The suggested scenario that the pericope passed from its original place in the Gospel according to the Hebrews to John's Gospel (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.17, citing Papias).

Some have argued in favor of inclusion due to Augustine's (and Ambrose's) suggestion that it may have been removed by "enemies of the true faith" who feared "that their wives be given impunity in sinning" (cited in Petersen 1997, 199; a theory recently revived by O'Day 1992, 631–40; cf. Riesenfeld 1970); its inclusion in the Latin Vulgate; and its quotations in *Didascalia apostolorum*,

which usually is dated to the first half of the third century. However, none of these points overturns the weighty external evidence that leads to the conclusion that the pericope is likely not Johannine or original.

The earliest extant reference to the pericope (specifically, the phrase *oude egō [kata] krinō*, "neither do I condemn," 8:11) is likely found in the Protevangelium of James (second half of the second century AD?), an apocryphal Christian romance (Peterson 1997, 204–21). Yet instead of regarding John as this document's source, it is possible there is joint dependence on an earlier source, presumably the aforementioned *Gospel according to the Hebrews*, which meets all the criteria: pre-dating AD 150; composed in Greek; preserving narrative portions as well as words of Jesus; and circulation in Egypt at an early date (Petersen 1997, 215–16). This theory is attractive because it offers an explanation of the non-Johannine style, awkward position, and absence of the pericope from all the oldest manuscripts of John (Petersen 1997, 217).

Burge (1984, 148) calls this pericope "an edifying *agraphon* [unwritten, i.e. authentic but non-canonical, saying] of Jesus." He may be right, but the fact remains that the account was almost certainly not part of the original Gospel. If so, the pericope is not part of the canon and cannot claim divine inspiration. People may be edified by studying the passage, but conservatism would seem to call for omitting the passage from inclusion in the main body of translations, even within square brackets.

> 12 Then Jesus spoke to them again: "I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows Me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life."
>
> 13 So the Pharisees said to Him, "You are testifying about Yourself. Your testimony is not valid."
>
> 14 "Even if I testify about Myself," Jesus replied, "My testimony is valid, because I know where I came from and where I'm going. But you don't know where I come from or where I'm going. 15 You judge by human standards. ' I judge no one. 16 And if I do judge, My judgment is true, because I am not alone, but I and the Father who sent Me judge together. 17 Even in your law it is written that the witness of two men is valid. 18 I am the One who testifies about Myself, and the Father who sent Me testifies about Me."

***Does Jesus contradict himself?* (8:14–15):** See comments on 3:17; 5:22; and 5:31 as to whether Jesus' statement here contradicts what he says at other places about judging and testifying about himself.

Even in your law it is written that the witness of two men is valid (8:17–18):

Mormon theology teaches that *Elohim* is the name of God the Father, an individual distinct from *Jehovah*. Accordingly, *Elohim*, or God the Father, was once a man and still has a resurrected body of flesh and bones. What is more, *Jehovah* is the pre-incarnate name for Jesus Christ. In Mormonism, humans have the goal of becoming gods. The basic difference between gods and humans is that humans have yet to achieve exaltation (Reed and Farkas 1992, 23–24). Within this theological framework, Mormons argue that John 8:17–18 indicates that both the Father and the Son are human since Jesus is speaking about the validity of the testimony of humans.

Mormon theology has severely misunderstood this passage and the NT teaching on the matter. Jesus' statement with regard to both the Father and the Son presupposes the context of the OT two-witness requirement for reliable testimony (e.g., Deut 17:6). Rather than ontology (being), the point of Jesus' statement is that he and his Father are the two witnesses that attest to his truthfulness (Pancaro 1975, 275–78; Neyrey 1987, 512–15; Cory 1997, 104–5). Throughout the Gospels, one of Jesus' terms for God is "Father" (4 times in Mark; 44 times in Matthew; 15 times in Luke, and 109 times in John; cf. Green, McKnight, and Marshall 1992, 271). Neither Jesus nor his contemporaries, as strong monotheists, would have understood God to be any type of created being. To be sure, the NT, including John's Gospel, recognizes Jesus' humanity. At the same time, the NT, and John in particular, consistently makes clear that Jesus was also God (see esp. 1:1, 18; 20:28; Köstenberger and Swain 2008; Köstenberger 2011:91–114). Ironically, in this passage, which Mormons have sought to use in support of their theology, there may be a hint of Jesus' deity in his statement "I am," recalling passages such Isaiah 43:10 (Morris 1995, 393n25; Ball 1996, 186).

> 21 Then He said to them again, "I'm going away; you will look for Me, and you will die in your sin. Where I'm going, you cannot come."
>
> 22 So the Jews said again, "He won't kill Himself, will He, since He says, 'Where I'm going, you cannot come' ? "
>
> 23 "You are from below," He told them, "I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. 24 Therefore I told you that you will die in your sins. For if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."

"You are from below," He told them, "I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world" (8:23): Jesus' statement should not be confused

with Gnosticism, which taught that the immaterial realm (above) was good while the material realm (below) was evil. Similar to Gnosticism, Judaism recognized the contrast between an "upper" heavenly realm and a "lower" earthly one. However, in Judaism these two spheres were considered to be related through the concept of creation. The realm of the dead was imagined as being under the earth, and in *Jubilees* (c. 150 BC) this underworld, the "darkness of the depths" (*Jub*. 7:29; cf. 5:14), was also regarded as the place of judgment (*Jub*. 22:22).

Distinct from a certain mystery in Jewish thought as to the division between what is above and what is below (*m. Hagigah* 2.1), and Gnostic thought which assigned both knowledge (*Gos. Truth* 22:3–4) and salvation to the realm "above" (*Gos. Truth* 25:35–26:1; 35:1–2), the present passage differentiates between "above" as the realm of God and "below" as that of humanity. The repeated personal pronouns *humeis* ("you") and *egō* ("I") and the repeated reference to "this" world combine to accentuate the gap between the Jews' earthly orientation and Jesus' heavenly provenance (Moloney 1998, 273; Morris 1995, 396).

30 As He was saying these things, many believed in Him. 31 So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, ' you really are My disciples. 32 You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

33 "We are descendants of Abraham," they answered Him, "and we have never been enslaved to anyone. How can You say, 'You will become free'? "

34 Jesus responded, "I assure you: Everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin. 35 A slave does not remain in the household forever, but a son does remain forever. 36 Therefore, if the Son sets you free, you really will be free. 37 I know you are descendants of Abraham, but you are trying to kill Me because My word is not welcome among you. 38 I speak what I have seen in the presence of the Father; ' therefore, you do what you have heard from your father."

39 "Our father is Abraham! " they replied.

"If you were Abraham's children," Jesus told them, "you would do what Abraham did. 40 But now you are trying to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do this! 41 You're doing what your father does."

"We weren't born of sexual immorality," they said. "We have one Father — God."

42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, because I came from God and I am here. For I didn't come on My own, but He sent Me. 43 Why don't you understand what I say? Because you cannot listen to My word. 44 You are of your father the Devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and has not stood in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks from his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of liars. 45 Yet because I tell the truth,

you do not believe Me. 46 Who among you can convict Me of sin? If I tell the truth, why don't you believe Me? 47 The one who is from God listens to God's words. This is why you don't listen, because you are not from God."

We have never been enslaved to anyone (8:33): How does this claim square with Jewish history, which included the Egyptian enslavement and the forced exiles? Freedom was considered to be the birthright of every Jew. The law commanded that no Jew should be a slave (Lev 25:39–42). The Mishnah states, "Even the poorest in Israel are looked upon as freemen who have lost their possessions, for they are the sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (*m. Baba Qamma* 8.6; cited in Schlatter 1948, 212). At times, Jewish revolts began owing to the belief that Jews were to obey no earthly ruler because God was their only King (see Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.1.6 §23; *Jewish War* 7.8.6 §323; cf. Acts 5:29).

The Jewish nation had been subjected to the political control of at least four empires: Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. The Jewish outlook may have been that since these nations were simply operating as God's instruments, administering his judgment on the Jews, they should not be considered enslaved by a sovereign nation. In the end, God would break the dominance of these foreign powers and rule through his people Israel. Hence the Jewish people were not truly enslaved (at least in their mind), since their capture was not permanent.

"We weren't born of sexual immorality," they said. "We have one Father—God" (8:41): The Jews understand Jesus' claim that they were not Abraham's children (8:39–40) as an attack on their loyalty to God and thus respond by saying what can literally be translated as "we have not been born of sexual immorality." This may imply the belief in the illegitimacy of Jesus' birth: "*we* have not been born of sexual immorality—*you* have." In the ancient Near East (not to mention other cultures), "to question a man's paternity is a definite slur on his legitimacy" (Morris 1995, 393n28, quoting Merrill Tenney). The earliest statement testifying to the Jewish belief that Jesus was born out of *porneia* (sexual immorality) may be *m. Yebamot* 4.13: "I found a family register in Jerusalem and in it was written, 'Such-a-one is a bastard through [a transgression of the law of] your neighbor's wife (Lev 18:20).'"

While John nowhere explicitly mentions Jesus' virgin conception, his high Christology throughout the Gospel fits well with the miraculous birth accounts in Matthew and Luke. John has chosen to use the introduction of his Gospel, going back much further than the Synoptics, to highlight Jesus' role in creation and to make explicit his equality with God the Father.

You are of your father the Devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires (8:44): Some have accused the Jesus of John's Gospel of anti-Semitism and contend that this passage is a prime example. Yet this argument cannot hold up under close scrutiny. In John, the term "Jews" frequently has the Jewish leaders in view and in the present case specifically names the Pharisees (8:13). The issue in question in chapter 8, as well as throughout the Gospel, is not a matter of race or ethnicity but whether or not the Jews accept God's revelation in and through Jesus: "Those who respond to Jesus, whether Jews, Samaritans or 'other sheep' (10:16) to be added to Jesus' fold, are blessed; those who ignore him or reject him do so out of unbelief, disobedience (3:36), and culpable blindness (9:39–41), not genes" (Carson 1991, 92).

The OT prophets consistently called on the nation of Israel to repent in stark terms, and it would be absurd to label all Jewish prophets as anti-Semitic. It is equally absurd to label the Jewish Messiah anti-Semitic for calling the Jews to repent from their evil ways. In the present context, Jesus' point significantly hinges on the fact that the Jews, like all people (but contrary to their self-understanding), are sinners, identifying sin as the root cause of their unbelief in the Messiah (note that in the Synoptic Gospels, the Jews object to Jesus' fraternizing with "tax collectors and sinners" [thus excluding themselves from the purview of "sinner"]). Finally, John the Evangelist himself, as well as virtually all of the first followers of Jesus, was a Jew; should we consider all of these anti-Jewish? It should also be noted that John, in accord with the rest of the NT, affirms that salvation is "from the Jews" (4:22), acknowledging their salvation-historical role in God's plan.

When he tells a lie, he speaks from his own nature (8:44): Jesus' statement about Satan being a murderer from the beginning and a liar according to his nature does not mean Satan was created to be a liar. Jesus refers not to Satan's nature as created by God, but rather to the way things have been since the beginning of the human story, primarily to the fall narrative (Genesis 3). On a secondary level, there might be a reference to Cain, the murderer of Abel (cf. 1 John 3:15, the only other reference featuring the term "murderer" in John's writings; see Brown 1966, 358). If this is correct, Jesus' comment may imply that the Devil is the father of "the Jews" because they were going to kill Jesus, their fellow Jew, just as Cain had killed his brother Abel (Díaz 1963, 75–80; Dahl 1963, 129–62). "Not holding to the truth" (cf. John 8:31–32) could refer to the fall of Satan (Isa 14:12?), which took place prior to the fall of humanity in

Genesis 3. The Genesis narrative, in turn, makes clear that Satan flatly contradicted the truthfulness of God's word (Gen 3:3–4; cf. 2:17).

> 50 I do not seek My glory; the One who seeks it also judges. 51 I assure you: If anyone keeps
> My word, he will never see death — ever! ”
> 52 Then the Jews said, “Now we know You have a demon. Abraham died and so did the
> prophets. You say, ‘If anyone keeps My word, he will never taste death — ever! ’ 53 Are You
> greater than our father Abraham who died? Even the prophets died. Who do You pretend to be?
> ”
> 54 “If I glorify Myself,” Jesus answered, “My glory is nothing. My Father — you say about
> Him, ‘He is our God’ — He is the One who glorifies Me. 55 You've never known Him, but I
> know Him. If I were to say I don't know Him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know Him,
> and I keep His word. 56 Your father Abraham was overjoyed that he would see My day; he saw
> it and rejoiced.”
> 57 The Jews replied, “You aren't 50 years old yet, and You've seen Abraham? ”
> 58 Jesus said to them, “I assure you: Before Abraham was, I am.”
> 59 At that, they picked up stones to throw at Him. But Jesus was hidden and went out of the
> temple complex.

I do not seek My glory; the One who seeks it also judges (8:50): Despite Jesus' lofty claims, he asserts that none of his previous words should be understood as an attempt to elevate himself (Morris 1995, 415). He does not seek his own honor, though "there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge" (a clearer translation of the second portion of this verse). Jesus is not concerned with what others think; his concern is to seek the glory that comes from God the Father's approval. This does not contradict what Jesus says in other places in the Gospel about him being glorified (e.g., 11:4; 12:23; 17:1, 5). These other verses do not indicate that Jesus is ultimately seeking to honor himself or find the approval of others, but rather affirm that it is God the Father's will for the Son to be glorified.

I assure you: If anyone keeps My word, he will never see death—ever! (8:51): This statement refers to eternal life, not some promise that Jesus' followers will never experience physical death. "The assurance relates to life which physical death cannot extinguish, and so to the death of the spirit; the believer receives eternal life, *i.e.* the life of the kingdom of God, over which death has no power and which is destined for resurrection" (Beasley-Murray 1999, 137; cf. Carson 1991, 355).

Jesus said to them, "I assure you: Before Abraham was, I am" (8:58): Jesus' language here echoes God's self-identification to Moses in Exodus 3:14. Jesus is not merely claiming preexistence—otherwise he could simply have said, "Before Abraham was born, I *was*"—but deity (Motyer 1997, 159; note the reaction in 8:59). The present instance of *egō eimi* ("I am") climaxes occurrences of this expression earlier in this chapter (e.g., 8:24, 28; Freed 1983). In 8:59, Jesus' opponents react by taking up stones in order to throw them at him (cf. 10:31–33; 11:8). This is understandable in view of John's emphasis on Jesus' claim to deity. Stoning was the prescribed punishment for blasphemy (Lev 24:16; cf. Deut 13:6–11; *m. Sanhedrin* 7.4; see Carson 1991, 358), though mob violence was never allowed (Deut 17:2–7; see Daube 1956, 306). This reaction to Jesus' statement and the syntax of the verse (see above) render the Jehovah's Witnesses' attempt to avoid Jesus making a claim to deity by translating the current passage "I have been" implausible.

> As He was passing by, He saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples questioned Him:
> "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? "
> 3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," Jesus answered. "This came about so that God's
> works might be displayed in him. 4 We must do the works of Him who sent Me while it is day.
> Night is coming when no one can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the
> world."
> 6 After He said these things He spit on the ground, made some mud from the saliva, and
> spread the mud on his eyes. 7 "Go," He told him, "wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means
> "Sent"). So he left, washed, and came back seeing.
> 8 His neighbors and those who formerly had seen him as a beggar said, "Isn't this the man
> who sat begging? " 9 Some said, "He's the one." "No," others were saying, "but he looks like
> him."
> He kept saying, "I'm the one! "
> 10 Therefore they asked him, "Then how were your eyes opened? "
> 11 He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and told me, 'Go to
> Siloam and wash.' So when I went and washed I received my sight."
> 12 "Where is He? " they asked.
> "I don't know," he said.

Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? (9:2): It is wrong to assume based on the disciples' question that they believed in some form of reincarnation in which the blind man had bad "karma" for the actions of a previous life. Though belief in reincarnation is attested in antiquity, the

disciples were committed Jews, not Hindus. It is highly unlikely that Jesus' followers, speaking from a first-century Jewish context that did not share the same assumptions as Eastern religions, would have believed in reincarnation. The implied premise, that there is a direct cause-and-effect relationship between suffering and sin, fits well with the general beliefs of Jewish rabbis (cf. *b. Shabbat* 55a; see also the book of Job, e.g., 4:7). The question appears to arise because it is difficult to understand how the man was born blind as a result of his own sin, and thus the disciples reason that the blame could possibly be placed on the parents. Keener (2003, 778) notes, "Most would have accepted the proposal that blindness could derive from the parents' sin (cf. Exod 20:5); some would even associate a birth defect or other malady with a sin of the mother during pregnancy."

That all suffering in a general sense is a result of the fall (Genesis 3) is, of course, true. Yet the belief implied here is that all individual suffering can be traced to particular sins. Jesus does not reject the possibility that certain instances of individual suffering may be linked to specific sin (e.g., John 5:14), but he does deny that such was invariably the case (cf. Luke 13:2–3a; see Ridderbos 1997, 333). Paul likewise acknowledged that a specific illness or experience of suffering may be the consequence of sin (Rom 1:18–32; 1 Cor 11:30), but he also made clear that this did not follow automatically (2 Cor 12:7; Gal 4:13; see Carson 1991, 361). Moreover, Jesus' response does not deny the reality of evil, but rather affirms that even evil ultimately contributes to the greater glory of God. This is displayed most clearly in the human sinfulness resulting in Christ's crucifixion (e.g., 12:28, 37–41; 17:1, 5; cf. Rom 8:28).

This came about so that God's works might be displayed in him (9:3): One should not see God's pursuit of his own glory here as selfish or uncaring because God's glory is connected with his grace and covenant-keeping faithfulness. The ultimate purpose of Jesus in John's Gospel is to bring glory to God (1:14, 16), and the ultimate place of this glorification is at the cross (12:23–33; 13:31–32; 14:13; 17:1; 4–5) where God's love for the world is made most evident (e.g., 3:16; Köstenberger 2010, 107–26; 2011:141–59).

Night is coming when no one can work (9:4): This statement (cf. 11:9–10; 12:35–36) has the ring of common sense, if not a proverbial saying. It conveys the notion that Jesus' time to work is short (Ridderbos 1997, 334). This verse does not imply that Jesus will no longer be the light of the world once he is no longer in this world. Rather, Jesus is announcing that his earthly role will be

limited in time (cf. 7:33–36; 12:35–36; 13:33), contrary to the popular notion that the Messiah and the messianic age would last forever (cf. 12:34). Jesus indicates that his light is most evident during his human life until the glorification: “Throughout that period he is the light that exposes the world, judges the world, saves the world. Those who enjoy his light will be engulfed by darkness when he is taken away (12:35)” (Carson 1991, 363).

He spit on the ground, made some mud from the saliva, and spread the mud on his eyes (9:6): Jesus’ use of spit (9:6, cf. 9:11, 14–15) is reminiscent of the healing of the deaf and mute man in the Decapolis (Mark 7:33) and of the blind man in Bethsaida (Mark 8:23). The exact significance of Jesus’ use of saliva is uncertain. Scholars have proposed several possibilities. Some have seen a connection with the belief of certain Jewish rabbis that the saliva of the firstborn had healing properties (*b. Baba Batra* 126b). On the other hand, in the surrounding pagan culture, saliva was frequently associated with magical practices, so that many rabbis seem to have condemned its use (e.g., Akiba, in *t. Sanhedrin* 12:10).

Another possible background is that, like people in other cultures, Palestinian Jews apparently believed that human excreta (including saliva) were forms of dirt that rendered a person ceremonially unclean. Under certain conditions, however, it apparently was held that this “dirt” could become an instrument of blessing in the hands of authorized individuals. Thus, blood and saliva generally pollute, but in certain contexts blood cleanses and saliva cures.

In Jesus’ Jewish context, saliva may convey ceremonial uncleanness (Lev 15:8). If the reversal of this taboo also applies, then by using saliva to cure a man, Jesus claims to possess unusual spiritual authority. If this were correct, it would find similarities with Matthew 8:1–4: Jesus does not become unclean by touching the leper but instead heals him. Following David Smith’s proposal, Carson remarks: “[T]he taboos surrounding the human body give symbolic expression to massive social constraints. To attack the symbols, as Jesus clearly did on some occasions (whether or not this be judged to be one of them), would be perceived as an attack on the social, political, and religious system. This interpretation squares with at least one major reading of who the Pharisees were and what interested them, and with the witness of the Fourth Gospel that records the fear gripping the authorities over the possibility that their fiefdom could be overthrown” (1991, 364).

18 The Jews did not believe this about him — that he was blind and received sight — until
they summoned the parents of the one who had received his sight.
19 They asked them, “Is this your son, the one you say was born blind? How then does he now
see? ”
20 “We know this is our son and that he was born blind,” his parents answered. 21 “But we
don’t know how he now sees, and we don’t know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he’s of age.
He will speak for himself.” 22 His parents said these things because they were afraid of the
Jews, since the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him as Messiah, he would be
banned from the synagogue. 23 This is why his parents said, “He’s of age; ask him.”

The Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him as Messiah, he would be banned from the synagogue (9:22): The reference to expulsion from the synagogue is often considered to be an anachronistic insertion in John’s account because it is said that this was too early for followers of Jesus to be banned from the synagogue. This claim is based on the liturgical Eighteen Benedictions, which were recited by all pious Jews three times a day (Schürer 1973–1979, 2:459–63). The twelfth of these benedictions is believed to have been rewritten by Samuel the Lesser, a rabbi at the school at Jamnia (c. AD 85–90), in response to a request by Rabbi Gamaliel II, who headed up the school (cf. *b. Berakot* 28b). It is believed that this revision, ironically called “the benediction of the heretics” (*birkat ha-minim*), was prepared for the Sanhedrin reconstituted after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. It is believed that the purpose of this revision was to exclude Christian Jews from the synagogue by including in the liturgy a phrase that no Christian could utter. Hence, some have argued that since a formal exclusion did not happen during Jesus’ lifetime, but rather in the life of the early church, this event was inserted back into John’s Gospel.

The problem with this reasoning is that it assumes that an official decision is required for the Jewish exclusion of confessors of Jesus from the synagogue. It seems more probable that 9:22 reflects a more informal set of circumstances. Historically, it is quite plausible to imagine that the same group that sought to arrest and kill Jesus would also seek to intimidate its followers by threatening to expel them from the synagogue if they followed Jesus. Also, the adverb *nun* (“now”) suggests that opposition to Jesus had escalated to an advanced stage (cf. 7:13; see Ridderbos 1997, 343; Carson 1991, 371). The reference in 9:22 is therefore most likely to “an incidental measure adopted . . . with a view to a specific concrete situation.”

24 So a second time they summoned the man who had been blind and told him, “Give glory to
God. ’ We know that this man is a sinner! ”
25 He answered, “Whether or not He’s a sinner, I don’t know. One thing I do know: I was
blind, and now I can see! ”
26 Then they asked him, “What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes? ”
27 “I already told you,” he said, “and you didn’t listen. Why do you want to hear it again? You
don’t want to become His disciples too, do you? ”
28 They ridiculed him: “You’re that man’s disciple, but we’re Moses’ disciples. 29 We know
that God has spoken to Moses. But this man — we don’t know where He’s from! ”
30 “This is an amazing thing,” the man told them. “You don’t know where He is from, yet He
opened my eyes! 31 We know that God doesn’t listen to sinners, but if anyone is God-fearing
and does His will, He listens to him. 32 Throughout history no one has ever heard of someone
opening the eyes of a person born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, He wouldn’t be able
to do anything.”
34 “You were born entirely in sin,” they replied, “and are you trying to teach us? ” Then they
threw him out. ’

We know that God doesn’t listen to sinners (9:31): On occasion, Scripture is true in the sense that it accurately reports what people have said even when what people have said is factually incorrect (see comments on 7:52 above). For example, at times in Scripture Satan speaks lies (e.g., Gen 3:1–5), yet no one should contend this jeopardizes the truthfulness of Scripture (unless, of course, it were argued that Satan did not actually utter the words attributed to him). In the case of the statement by the cured man in verse 31, it seems he is at least partly correct. There is ample OT substantiation that God hears the prayers of the righteous (Pss 34:15; 145:19; Prov 15:29). There is no reason to suggest that the man meant to limit God’s ability to hear (and to know) all things. Rather, this is simply a way to express that God has promised to receive and respond to the prayers of those who fear God. On the other hand, one should be careful not to necessarily equate miraculous power with God’s blessing; even the magicians in Egypt during the exodus apparently were able to perform miracles (e.g., Exod 7:11). Carson notes of the cured man, “His spiritual instincts are good, even if his theological argumentation is not entirely convincing. His ‘givens’ are simple: his congenital blindness has been healed, and the God who performed the healing does not answer the prayers of sinners” (1991, 375).

35 When Jesus heard that they had thrown the man out, He found him and asked, “Do you

believe in the Son of Man? ” ’

36 “Who is He, Sir, that I may believe in Him? ” he asked.

37 Jesus answered, “You have seen Him; in fact, He is the One speaking with you.”

38 “I believe, Lord! ” he said, and he worshiped Him.

39 Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment, in order that those who do not see will see and those who do see will become blind.”

40 Some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and asked Him, “We aren’t blind too, are we? ”

41 “If you were blind,” Jesus told them, “you wouldn’t have sin. ’ But now that you say, ‘We see’ — your sin remains.

In order that those who do not see will see and those who do see will become blind (9:39): This passage seems to suggest that Jesus has come not only to give sight to the blind but also to cause some who currently see to “become blind.” However, the point of this passage is not that Jesus makes people blind but rather that he judges those who deny their own spiritual blindness. The imagery of giving sight to the blind and the blinding of those who see is a common OT theme (Barrett 1978, 365–66). The Pharisees think they can see, so when the true light shines, they refuse to look closely (Barrett 1978, 366). In other words, “those who see” is Jesus’ sarcastic way of saying “those *who think* they can see.” Jesus repeatedly calls the Pharisees “blind guides” (Matt 23:16; cf. 15:14; 23:26). As Jesus makes clear, it is not the Pharisees’ sin, but their repudiation of grace, that renders them lost (9:41; Ridderbos 1997, 351). There is no cure for people who reject the only cure there is (Barrett 1978, 366; cf. Bultmann 1971, 341–42) and no hope for those who are wise in their own eyes (Prov 26:12; Kruse 2003, 231). While Jesus brought salvation to those who believe in him, condemnation awaits those who reject him.

“If you were blind,” Jesus told them, “you wouldn’t have sin” (9:41): Jesus is not here implying that spiritual ignorance makes one innocent of sin. Jesus’ response to the Pharisees fits well within his frequent use of irony in John’s Gospel. The blindness he is referring to here is the blindness of which he spoke previously (9:39), that is, the blindness of those who were aware of their spiritual blindness and called out for help. If the Pharisees were blind in this way, they would not be guilty of the sin of unbelief, because they would confess their sin and cast themselves on God’s mercy and believe in his Messiah. Instead, in their pride they claim they can see and thus reject Jesus, and so their sin remains (Carson 1991, 378).

7 So Jesus said again, “I assure you: I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who came before Me are
thieves and robbers, but the sheep didn’t listen to them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by Me,
he will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture. 10 A thief comes only to steal
and to kill and to destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance.
11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired
man, since he is not the shepherd and doesn’t own the sheep, leaves them and runs away when
he sees a wolf coming. The wolf then snatches and scatters them. 13 This happens because he is
a hired man and doesn’t care about the sheep.
14 “I am the good shepherd. I know My own sheep, and they know Me, 15 as the Father
knows Me, and I know the Father. I lay down My life for the sheep. 16 But I have other sheep
that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will listen to My voice. Then there will
be one flock, one shepherd. 17 This is why the Father loves Me, because I am laying down My
life so I may take it up again. 18 No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down on My own. I have
the right to lay it down, and I have the right to take it up again. I have received this command
from My Father.”

All who came before Me are thieves and robbers (10:8): A question that naturally arises from this verse is the identity of the “thieves and robbers” (cf. 10:1). A probable OT background is found in Ezekiel, who refers to the “shepherds of Israel, who have been feeding themselves” and “do not tend the flock” (Ezek 34:24; see the entire chapter). Jesus’ reference to “all who came before Me” hints at impostors who promised their followers freedom but instead led them into armed conflict and doom. Moreover, Jesus’ statement may have more overtly political overtones, evoking memories of then-recent events in Jewish history. The verse certainly excludes the faithful covenant leaders of the OT (e.g., Moses, David, Jeremiah, etc.).

The terms “thieves and robbers” may also encompass pseudo-prophets such as the ones mentioned by Luke and Josephus (cf. Acts 5:36–37; 21:38; *Antiquities* 20.5.1 §§97–98; 20.8.5 §§169–72; 20.8.10 §188; *Jewish War* 7.11.1 §§437–40), the Zealots, and even the high-priestly circles that controlled Judaism in Jesus’ day. Sadducees had a reputation for profiting from temple religion, and elsewhere both the Pharisees (Luke 16:14) and the scribes (Mark 12:40) are denounced by Jesus for their greed.

I have other sheep that are not of this fold (10:16): The claim, proffered by Mormons, that this verse is proof that Jesus came and taught North American Indians is without warrant. Against the backdrop of the Jewish Scriptures, Jesus’ statement is spoken to Jews who would have understood “sheep” and “flock” as

imagery for the people of God. This statement would make no sense to the original hearers if Jesus were referring to a people on a continent that was not even known by his Jewish audience. Instead, this passage should be seen in view of OT expectations for the incorporation of the Gentiles among God's people. The "other sheep" probably are Gentiles (see esp. Isa 56:8). The "fold" (*aulē*; cf. 10:1) presumably is "the whole of historic Israel" (Ridderbos 1997, 363). The passage clearly indicates that Jesus envisioned a full-fledged Gentile mission subsequent to his death on the cross (Köstenberger 2002, 67–96).

Then there will be one flock, one shepherd (10:16): This statement should not be used to negate the legitimacy of denominations in contemporary Christianity. Jesus appears to be alluding specifically to Ezekiel 34:23; 37:2. The notion of one flock being led by one shepherd as a metaphor for God's providential care for his united people is firmly rooted in OT prophetic literature and continued in later Jewish writings. Though hinted at in certain latter OT prophetic passages (e.g., Isa 56:6–8; Ezek 37:15–28; Mic 2:12), the OT typically uses these metaphors to describe the gathering of dispersed Israel. Jesus, however, here widens the scope of the customary use of the imagery in the OT to refer to the bringing together of Jews and Gentiles into one messianic community (cf. Eph 2:11–22; 4:3–6; Lindars 1972, 363). The upshot is that while the proper merits or demerits of denominations in Christianity today are subject to debate, this passage should not be used to support either position. Jesus is not making a point about denominations but is emphasizing that there will be one people of God made up of both Jews and Gentiles.

> 22 Then the Festival of Dedication took place in Jerusalem, and it was winter. 23 Jesus was
> walking in the temple complex in Solomon's Colonnade. ’ 24 Then the Jews surrounded Him
> and asked, "How long are You going to keep us in suspense? If You are the Messiah, tell us
> plainly." ’
>
> 25 "I did tell you and you don't believe," Jesus answered them. "The works that I do in My
> Father's name testify about Me. 26 But you don't believe because you are not My sheep. ’
> 27 My sheep hear My voice, I know them, and they follow Me. 28 I give them eternal life, and
> they will never perish — ever! No one will snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has
> given them to Me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.
> 30 The Father and I are one." ’

If You are the Messiah, tell us plainly (10:24): The Jews' "surrounding"

(*kukloō*) of Jesus demonstrates that they were determined to receive a definite response to their question: “How long are You going to keep us in suspense,” which could also be rendered “How long are you going to annoy us?” (Carson 1991, 392; Barrett 1978, 380). If the first rendering is accepted, the Jews’ questioning of Jesus is not necessarily hostile but simply a request that he clarify the question of his status once and for all. On the other hand, in the context of the Gospel’s negative portrayal of the Jewish leaders, it is likely the Jews are to be understood as gathering evidence for a later attack. Regardless of which reading is accepted, the question arises as to why the Jews say, “If You are the Messiah, tell us plainly,” when to many interpreters of the Gospel it appears that Jesus has already made his identity crystal clear at previous occasions. However, what is obvious to many interpreters concerning Jesus’ identity is so, at least in part, due to hindsight, by virtue of the reception of further revelation by the church (i.e., the NT documents) and the work of the Holy Spirit.

What is more, the Jews’ request for Jesus to make his identity clear reveals, somewhat pathetically, that the entire significance of the preceding good shepherd discourse had eluded Jesus’ opponents—a spiritual dynamic similar to that found in the Synoptic parables suggesting Jewish obduracy (see 10:26; cf. Mark 4:11–12 pars.). Due to the political connotations of the term “Messiah” in first-century Palestine, Jesus generally avoided using the term as a label for himself (cf. John 6:14–15; 11:48; see comments on 4:26 above). In private conversations with outsiders (4:26) and at certain times with his disciples (e.g., Matt 16:13), Jesus addressed the question of his identity directly. However, publicly in a Jewish environment Jesus avoided explicitly declaring he was the Messiah.

While hindsight has certainly contributed to the clarity with which contemporary interpreters of the Gospels are able to understand Jesus’ claims regarding his identity, it is also true that Jesus’ actions and words witnessed by his contemporaries were more than sufficient to bring people to believe in him as the Messiah. This is why Jesus replies to the question by saying, “I did tell you and you don’t believe” (v. 25); and “The works that I do in My Father’s name testify about Me” (v. 26). As Carson (1991, 392) notes, it was the Jewish leaders’ spiritual blindness that caused their disbelief:

> [E]ven if Jesus had spoken with utmost clarity, “the Jews” would not have believed on him. John himself is convinced that the actual record of Jesus’ words and works, with all its restraint, was more than enough to bring people to believe that the Son of God was Jesus (20:30–31). Indeed, for

those with eyes to see (John informs his readers), so deft had been Jesus' self-references, his use of the OT, his handling of titles, his discussions of the relation between God and himself, that he has virtually pointed himself out as the Messiah. The Jews demand that he tell them *plainly* (the same word as used in 7:4, 13, 26); the reader can see that even Jesus' description of himself as the good shepherd (vv. 1–8) was tantamount to such plain speaking.

The Father and I are one (10:30): Jesus' statement echoes the fundamental confession of Judaism "Listen, Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deut 6:4). This claim fits well with the opening of the Gospel (John 1:1–2), where the Word is both one with the Father and yet distinct from him. The word in verse 30 for "one" is the neuter *hen*, not the masculine *heis*, which is relevant to the discussion of Jesus' relationship with the Father in that the use of the neuter indicates that the Father and Son are not one *person* but one *entity*. While Father and Son are united in purpose and mission, they are distinct in personhood. This is why Jesus can pray to his Father, be commissioned by him, and be obedient to him (Carson 1991, 394).

While there is therefore a distinction between God the Father and Jesus the Son, the Jews' reaction and the overall context of John's Gospel indicate that Jesus clearly lodges a claim to deity. While the emphasis here is on the unity of their works (Ridderbos 1997, 371; Carson 1991, 394), an ontological (rather than merely functional) unity between Jesus and the Father seems presupposed. Jesus' assertion of oneness with the Father challenged narrow Jewish notions of monotheism (Köstenberger and Swain 2008, chap. 1), which is why they sought to stone him (cf. 10:31, 33). Yet the Jews should have seen that there were already hints in the OT of a plurality within the Godhead, some of which Jesus was careful to expose (e.g., Matt 22:41–46 pars.). What is more, while there were widespread messianic expectations in the first century, it was not expected that the Messiah would actually be divine. Nevertheless, several OT texts appear to describe the Messiah in ways that do not fit well with a mere human figure (e.g., Ezekiel 34; Isa 9:6), though these texts are no doubt understood more clearly in view of Jesus' self-disclosure.

31 Again the Jews picked up rocks to stone Him.

32 Jesus replied, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. Which of these works are you stoning Me for? "

33 “We aren’t stoning You for a good work,” the Jews answered, “but for blasphemy, because
You — being a man — make Yourself God.”
34 Jesus answered them, “Isn’t it written in your scripture, **I said, you are gods**? , 35 If He
called those whom the word of God came to ‘gods’ — and the Scripture cannot be broken —
36 do you say, ‘You are blaspheming’ to the One the Father set apart and sent into the world,
because I said: I am the Son of God? 37 If I am not doing My Father’s works, don’t believe Me.
38 But if I am doing them and you don’t believe Me, believe the works. This way you will
know and understand that the Father is in Me and I in the Father.” 39 Then they were trying
again to seize Him, yet He eluded their grasp.

You—being a man—make Yourself God (10:33): With this statement, Jesus’ controversy with “the Jews” in chapters 5–10 has come full circle (5:18; see Ridderbos 1997, 372). This is the third account of the Jews seeking to execute Jesus in John’s Gospel (cf. 5:18; 8:59). Each of these three attempts occurs because his opponents perceived that Jesus was claiming equality with God, which is in fact accurate, though not in a way that violated Jewish monotheism. Despite Jesus’ frequent use of veiled language in public in order to avoid causing unnecessary offense to his audience, the Jews did understand the import of Jesus’ statements but refused to believe they were true.

Some have stated that according to the Mishnah (*m. Sanhedrin* 7:5) blasphemy technically occurred only when a person pronounced the name of God. Therefore, the argument goes, since Jesus never made such a statement, John shows his ignorance of first-century Judaism. However, over against this understanding, it is highly unlikely that the Sadducees, who controlled legal proceedings in the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish court, ever adopted so narrow a definition of blasphemy in Jesus’ day (Carson 1991, 396; Barrett 1978, 382–83; Beasley-Murray 1999, 175). Rather, a broader interpretation of blasphemy prevailed, based on passages such as Numbers 15:30–31 (“the person who acts defiantly . . . blasphemes the LORD”) and Deuteronomy 21:22 (“guilty of an offense deserving death”).

Isn’t it written in your scripture, I said, you are gods? (10:34–36): This passage raises several pertinent issues. First, one should not conclude that by using the expression “your scripture” (lit *nomos*, “law”) Jesus is distancing himself from the law itself; after all, he adds in the second half of verse 35 that the Scripture cannot be broken. Instead, Jesus appears to be distancing himself from his opponents’ *approach* to the law.

The second issue centers on Jesus’ use of the OT in his response. Several legitimate questions surround Jesus’ argument: What does this OT passage mean

in its original context? Why does Jesus argue here from the OT the way he does? Is Jesus saying that humans are gods? The passage quoted is Psalm 82:6. The OT often uses the phrase "to whom the word of God came" with reference to those who speak or act in God's name. In the original context, the expression may have referred to (1) Israel's corrupt judges who were called "gods" because the administration of justice was a divine prerogative delegated to a few select individuals (Deut 1:17; cf. Ps 82:1–4); (2) angelic powers who abused the authority that God had given to them over the nations (unlikely in light of the scarcity of references to angels in John); (3) Israel at the time of the giving of the law. Jesus appears to be using a familiar rabbinic technique, arguing from the lesser to the greater, to make his point: if Israel can in some sense be called "god" in the Scriptures, how much more is this designation appropriate for him who truly is the Son of God. The argument is *ad hominem* in the sense that Jesus is not subscribing to his opponents' exegesis and is not using the psalm to prove that he is the Son of God. The presence of a riled-up mob may suggest that Jesus uses this approach to calm down his critics in order to appeal once more to his mighty works and words (Carson 1991, 399).

Finally, Jesus' high regard for the Jewish Scriptures (our OT) is evident here in that he affirms their complete truthfulness; for Scripture "cannot be broken." This corresponds to Jesus' teachings elsewhere as he contends that "until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass from the law until all things are accomplished" (Matt 5:18). In this belief, Jesus knew himself united with his Jewish contemporaries (cf. Matt 5:20). Paul and Peter concurred (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20–21). In the present instance, Jesus affirms, over against his opponents' claim that they alone upheld the authority of God's word, that he, too, has a high view of Scripture.

> Now a man was sick, Lazarus, from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.
> 2 Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair,
> and it was her brother Lazarus who was sick. 3 So the sisters sent a message to Him: "Lord, the
> one You love is sick."
> 4 When Jesus heard it, He said, "This sickness will not end in death but is for the glory of God,
> so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." 5 Now Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and
> Lazarus. 6 So when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He
> was.

This sickness will not end in death but is for the glory of God (11:4): The

HCSB is correct to translate this verse with the phrase, “This sickness will not end in death” rather than “This sickness is not unto death” (NKJV). The latter translation could misleadingly suggest that Lazarus never actually died. The remainder of the chapter makes clear that Lazarus did in fact die and was subsequently brought back to life.

For the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it (11:4–6): Jesus’ statement should not be interpreted as uncaring. John insists that Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus (v. 5). The Son of God being glorified in Lazarus’ death and his subsequent resurrection is in accord with Jesus’ love for this family. It is, however, true that on the face of it Jesus’ apparent lethargic attitude appears to be a classic *non sequitur*. One would have expected Jesus to rush to the scene instantly. Yet once again Jesus confounds conventional thinking (see Schlatter 1948, 248; Ridderbos 1997, 389, citing Giblin 1980, 209). What defies human reasoning prevails when the glory of God is the driving motivation and the sovereignty of God the guiding force. As Ridderbos (1997, 388–89) notes, “The whole of vss. 5–7 shows how the human and the divine—his love for his own *and* his regard for the times appointed for him by the Father—are inseparably intertwined in Jesus’ conduct and therefore in his glorification as the Son of God (vs. 4).”

It appears that Jesus was staying in the region of Batanea, located approximately 100 miles to the northeast of Jerusalem (cf. 1:28; 10:40–42), when the news of Lazarus’s illness reached him. Thus, the following reconstruction of the events related to the raising of Lazarus best fits the evidence (Carson 1991, 407; contra Morris 1995, 479–80). Lazarus was still alive when the initial news regarding his illness reached Jesus (11:4). Two days after the news arrived, Jesus, presumably by means of supernatural insight, announces to his followers that Lazarus has died, taking this as the divine signal to depart for Bethany (Riesner 1987, 44–45). A healthy man in the first century could cover between 20 and 30 miles per day on foot. Hence, the fact that Batanea where Jesus was staying was about 100 miles from Bethany explains why four days passed between Lazarus’s death and Jesus’ arrival on the scene (11:17).

17 When Jesus arrived, He found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.
18 Bethany was near Jerusalem (about two miles away). 19 Many of the Jews had come to

Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother. [20] As soon as Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet Him. But Mary remained seated in the house.

The site of Lazarus' tomb **(11:17–20):** The present Bethany, where Lazarus is from (not previously mentioned in this Gospel), is different from the Bethany featured in 1:28 and alluded to in 10:40–42. The village referred to here was located east of the Mount of Olives, less than two miles from Jerusalem on the road to Jericho. This Bethany is the place where Jesus stayed when visiting Jerusalem (Matt 21:17; 26:6). It likely should be identified with the village of Ananyah (mentioned in Neh 11:32), which today is called El-Azariyeh in commemoration of Lazarus.

Jewish beliefs about death **(11:17–24):** The Evangelist's statement "Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days" is part of his way of emphasizing that Lazarus was truly dead. Later Jewish sources attest the rabbinic belief that death was irrevocable three days after a person had died because it was on this third day that the soul left the body (*Leviticus Rabbah* 18.1 on Lev 15:1; cf. *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 12.6; universally cited by commentators: e.g., Ridderbos 1997, 393; Carson 1991, 411; Morris 1995, 485). However, Keener (2003, 841n63) warns that the belief that the soul left the body three days after death is not widely attested in the early period.

In ancient Palestine, burial normally took place on the day of death, which was followed by mourning. The Talmud prescribes seven days of deep mourning and thirty days of light mourning (*b. Moed Qatan* 27b). Martha, in keeping with what is known of her personality elsewhere, takes the initiative and goes to meet Jesus, apparently without being summoned (so Morris 1995, 486; cf. 11:28). Keener (2003, 843) argues that Martha, who was sitting, in keeping with proper etiquette should have stayed in the house and let Jesus come to her. Keener understands Martha to be paying Jesus great respect by going out to meet him (also noting the verbal parallel with 12:13). Yet Mary stays at home (the Greek text says that she "remained sitting in the house"). It was customary within this culture for those grieving the death of loved ones to be seated when receiving the condolences of their friends (Morris 1995, 487). John's characterization of Mary and Martha agrees with Luke's Gospel where Mary sits at Jesus' feet while Martha is busy with her household duties (cf. Luke 10:38–42; see Lindars 1972, 393; contra Pollard 1973, 438).

28 Having said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, saying in private, “The Teacher
is here and is calling for you.”
29 As soon as she heard this, she got up quickly and went to Him. 30 Jesus had not yet come
into the village but was still in the place where Martha had met Him. 31 The Jews who were
with her in the house consoling her saw that Mary got up quickly and went out. So they
followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to cry there.
32 When Mary came to where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell at His feet and told Him,
“Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died! ”
33 When Jesus saw her crying, and the Jews who had come with her crying, He was angry in
His spirit and deeply moved. 34 “Where have you put him? ” He asked.
“Lord,” they told Him, “come and see.”
35 Jesus wept.
36 So the Jews said, “See how He loved him! ” 37 But some of them said, “Couldn’t He who
opened the blind man’s eyes also have kept this man from dying? ”
38 Then Jesus, angry in Himself again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying
against it. 39 “Remove the stone,” Jesus said.
Martha, the dead man’s sister, told Him, “Lord, he’s already decaying. It’s been four days.”
40 Jesus said to her, “Didn’t I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God? ”
41 So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes and said, “Father, I thank You that
You heard Me. 42 I know that You always hear Me, but because of the crowd standing here I
said this, so they may believe You sent Me.” 43 After He said this, He shouted with a loud
voice, “Lazarus, come out! ” 44 The dead man came out bound hand and foot with linen strips
and with his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Loose him and let him go.”

Is it likely that Martha called Jesus “Teacher”? **(11:28):** “The teacher” would have been an expected way for a disciple to refer to Jesus in the pre-resurrection period. Yet it should not be missed that a woman uses the expression here (talking to another woman; Morris 1995, 491). Rabbis in Jesus’ day regularly refused to instruct women and in many cases had a negative view of women (Scholer [1992, 880] notes several examples from first-century Judaism). Josephus says the Law places women as inferior to men (*Against Apion* 2.25 §201). Philo holds that female traits are examples of weakness (e.g., *De Opificio Mundi* 151–52; *Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesin* 1.33). Sirach states that “better is the wickedness of a man than a woman who does good; it is woman who brings shame and disgrace” (Sir 42:14 NRSV). The rabbinic Tosefta recounts that a Jewish man prayed three benedictions daily, including one in which he thanked God that he was not made a woman (*t. Berakot* 7.18). In contrast to this negative stance toward women, Jesus not only respects women but includes them as disciples during his ministry.

Then Jesus, angry in Himself again, came to the tomb (11:38): When Jesus saw Mary and her Jewish friends weeping, he was visibly agitated. “Deeply moved” (NIV) hardly does justice to the underlying Greek word (*embrimaomai*), which has the connotation of snorting (in animals). Thus, Jesus is shown here not so much to express empathy or grief as to bristle at his imminent encounter with and assault on death (see further below). “Stirred” has connotations of inner agitation and turmoil (cf. Esth 4:4), as in the case of the waters of Bethesda (John 5:7) or the waves and breakers of a waterfall (Ps 42:5–7).

A survey of the major commentators on this verse reveals a vast array of interpretations. Some say that Jesus was deeply moved but deny that he was angry (Morris 1995, 494). Most insist that Jesus’ emotions went beyond sorrow to actual indignation (for a survey of interpretations see Köstenberger 2004a, 339n91). The object of Jesus’ anger is variously identified as death itself (Michaels 1989, 203; Whitacre 1999, 289); the realm of Satan represented by death (Brown 1966, 435); the mourners’ unbelief (Keener 2003, 846); or a combination of all three (Brodie 1993, 395). However, there may be no dichotomy (note particularly the lack of an expressed object), as the primary reference may be neither to grief nor to anger (contra the HCSB translation above). The term *embrimaomai* may simply indicate Jesus’ excited anticipation of what he is going to do as he bristles and braces himself for his impending assault on death.

Again in 11:38, Jesus is described by way of the verb *embrimaomai*. The HCSB translates this as Jesus being “angry in Himself.” Again, while this is possible, it is more likely that this verb is used to indicate Jesus’ excitement at the prospect of confronting death. This comports well with Ridderbos’ (1997, 403) comment, “He strides to the tomb, not in sovereign apathy of the great Outsider, but as the One sent into the world by the Father, as the Advocate who has entered human flesh and blood.”

Logistics of Lazarus’s resurrection **(11:43–44):** Lazarus’ feet and hands (the word order in the Greek; reversed in several standard translations, including the HCSB, to “hands and feet,” though there may be a reason why the feet are mentioned first by the Evangelist) were wrapped with strips of linen. The practice of wrapping of feet and hands of a dead person in linen cloths is not attested in other surviving Jewish texts. In contrast to pagan custom, the Jews did not bind up their dead to prevent them from returning to life. Thus one ought not to conclude, as some critics have done, that Lazarus’ grave clothes restricted his movement to the extent that he was unable to come out of the tomb. Even if

the wrappings somehow immobilized Lazarus (which is unlikely), this is only problematic if one subscribes to anti-supernaturalism. If Jesus can bring a dead man back to life, surely some tightly wrapped clothes would not pose a problem.

Apart from the astounding miracle it depicts, the pericope's presence in John's Gospel has led some to cast doubt on its historicity. This critique is part of a larger argument against the historicity of John's Gospel based on its omission of many events found in the Synoptics and its inclusion of material absent from the other Gospels. However, this critique is ultimately unconvincing. For no matter one's theory as to how John composed his Gospel, it is apparent that he had a large amount of material from which to choose. If John was aware of the Synoptics as he was writing, which is probable (see Bauckham 1997a, esp. 147–71; Köstenberger 2009, 553–55), then he could reasonably be expected to assume much of the material they contain. On the other hand, if John wrote without knowledge of the Synoptics, then it is likely that at least some of the differences can be attributed to the large amount of material from which he had to choose. This corresponds with what John later writes: "Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His disciples that are not written in this book" (20:30). Craig Blomberg rightly notes, "Any two ancient historians' accounts of a given person or period of history differ from each other at least as much as John does from the Synoptics, when they do not rely on common sources for their information" (Blomberg 2007, 207). In addition, it stands to reason that John had his own theological emphases and unique perception of the significance of the events surrounding Jesus, not to mention his own individuality, style, interests, and distinctive eyewitness recollection from which to draw.

Nevertheless, some maintain that if Jesus had really raised Lazarus from the dead, this would have been such a significant event that the other Gospels would have been bound to include it. Yet this does not necessarily follow. Why does an event require multiple attestations in the Gospels to be considered historical? Throughout the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus performs a host of miracles, including raising people from the dead (an admittedly rare feature), so critics certainly cannot legitimately argue that Lazarus' resurrection fails to comport with the general Synoptic portrait of Jesus. Although it is impossible to know for certain why a given author selects or omits particular material in his or her account, one possible reason for the omission of the story of Lazarus in the other Gospels is their focus on Galilee (the raising of Lazarus takes place in Judea).

Also, in *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, Bauckham (2006, 184–87) cites

favorably G. Theissen's theory of "protective anonymity," according to which the evangelists sought to shield individuals who were still living from persecution by not naming them. If Lazarus was still alive when the Synoptic Gospels were written, but died in the interim between their publication and the composition of John's Gospel, this, likewise, may account for the Synoptic non-inclusion of the account and John's inclusion of it. Lazarus's death would have meant he no longer needed protection from persecution, so that John was free to include the account of his raising from the dead by Jesus.

> 45 Therefore, many of the Jews who came to Mary and saw what He did believed in Him.
> 46 But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.
> 47 So the chief priests and the Pharisees convened the Sanhedrin and said, "What are we going to do since this man does many signs? 48 If we let Him continue in this way, everyone will believe in Him! Then the Romans will come and remove both our place and our nation."
> 49 One of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all! 50 You're not considering that it is to your advantage that one man should die for the people rather than the whole nation perish." 51 He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, 52 and not for the nation only, but also to unite the scattered children of God. 53 So from that day on they plotted to kill Him.

Caiaphas, who was high priest that year (11:49): "That year" should not be taken to mean that the high priestly office rotated annually. Caiaphas held on to his office for a remarkably long time (18 years [AD 18–36]), which makes it likely that "that year" simply indicates that Caiaphas happened to be high priest in "that fateful year" when Jesus was tried and crucified (Morris 1995, 503; cf. Schnackenburg 1990, 2:349). Alternatively, John's remark may be intended to convey that the high priest's term generally lasted for a year but that considerable uncertainty attached to the high priestly office in that day (Beasley-Murray 1999, 197). This uncertainty is observed in that the high priest could be removed if even just one of his actions displeased the Roman governor. For example, Valerius Gratus, Pilate's predecessor, repeatedly deposed high priests after a short length of office. Thus, the three high priests prior to Caiaphas (AD 15–18), as well as his immediate successor (AD 36), each held his office for only about one year; the same was the case with the three high priests under Agrippa (AD 41–44) and the majority of high priests from AD 44 to 66 (Hengel 1999, 332).

Being high priest that year he prophesied (11:51): There is Jewish tradition that links the high priest with prophecy. In Numbers 27:21, the high priest is found prophesying. Second Samuel 15:27 (MT) refers to Zadok the priest as a "seer." At one time, the high priest sought to determine God's will by way of the Urim and Thummim (lots?). Josephus recounts how Saul ordered the high priest to wear his high priestly garments and to prophesy whether or not an attack on the Philistines will be successful (*Antiquities* 6.6.3 §§115–16; cf. 1 Sam 14:15–23). At another juncture, Josephus cites the high priest Jaddua's prediction that Alexander the Great would spare Jerusalem (*Antiquities* 11.8.4 §327). Josephus also points to the prophetic gift of the Hasmonean ruler John Hyrcanus (135–104 BC), who was said to unite in himself the offices of king, priest, and prophet. It appears that in the relative vacuum of prophetic voices in the Second Temple period, the priestly class claimed the gift of prophecy for itself. Philo claims that "the true priest is necessarily a prophet" (*On the Special Laws* 4.36 §192).

He prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to unite the scattered children of God (11:51–52): John regularly capitalizes on statements that ironically have a deeper meaning than most initial speakers or hearers would have understood (e.g., 2:19). Here John sees in the high priest's pronouncement a deeper meaning, unknown to Caiaphas himself, which affirmed an important divine truth related to the nature of Jesus' cross-death. Caiaphas, for his part, thinks on a political level, but John wants to indicate that Caiaphas speaks better than he knows. The view that utterances could on occasion have a deeper prophetic meaning is found in Judaism (cf. Philo, *On the Life of Moses* 1.49 §274; 1.50 §277; 1.51 §283; 1.52 §286; *Midr. Ps.* 90 §4). John "invites his readers to think in terms of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Carson 1991, 422).

So from that day on they plotted to kill Him (11:53): As mentioned at 2:13–25, it seems best to suppose that Jesus cleansed the temple twice, once at the beginning of his ministry (recorded in the Gospel of John) and once at the end of his ministry (recorded in the Synoptics). If so, this still leaves the question as to what actually caused the Jewish leaders to seek Jesus' death. Was it the temple cleansing (so the Synoptics) or the resurrection of Lazarus (as seems to be intimated in the Gospel of John)? While the Synoptics and John's Gospel clearly set the emphasis differently, one must be careful to avoid a false dichotomy. Historically, it appears that numerous events contributed to the Jewish leaders' hatred of Jesus. There is no good reason to deny that both Jesus' raising of

Lazarus and his final cleansing of the temple were critical triggers that led to his arrest and execution. History is a complex matrix of circumstances, and reductionism rarely (if ever) serves to appreciate the full-orbed panorama of events such as the conditions surrounding Jesus' crucifixion.

> Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany where Lazarus was, the one Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 So they gave a dinner for Him there; Martha was serving them, and Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him. 3 Then Mary took a pound of fragrant oil — pure and expensive nard — anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped His feet with her hair. So the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.
>
> 4 Then one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot (who was about to betray Him), said, 5 "Why wasn't this fragrant oil sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor? " 6 He didn't say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief. He was in charge of the money-bag and would steal part of what was put in it.
>
> 7 Jesus answered, "Leave her alone; she has kept it for the day of My burial. 8 For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me."

The anointing at Bethany **(12:1–8):** This pericope appears to be referencing the same event that is narrated in Matthew and Mark (Matt 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9). Both Evangelists indicate that the anointing takes place in Bethany at Simon the Leper's house (John specifies Bethany but does not identify Simon the Leper's house). Both also place the event near the end of Jesus' public ministry. In Matthew and Mark, as in John, an unnamed woman anoints Jesus' head with ointment from an alabaster jar of nard, and those present were incensed (John specifically names Judas Iscariot as objecting to the anointing). Moreover, in both Matthew and Mark, Jesus defends the woman and uses the anointing to discuss his imminent death and burial, to contrast his temporary presence with the poor's continual presence, and to stress the abiding memory of the woman's deed (again, the similarities with John's account are palpable).

Matters are different with Luke's account of an anointing of Jesus (Luke 7:36–38; for a detailed analysis see Köstenberger 2001, 49–63). Although some critics argue that Luke is recounting the same historical event, differences abound, and the event depicted by Luke is likely another event altogether. The main commonality between the two accounts is that both narrate an anointing of Jesus. But this is where the commonality ends. The other three Gospels recall an occasion at the house of one Simon the Leper (unnamed in John) in Bethany; Luke reports a dinner at the home of an unnamed Pharisee. The main heroine in Luke's account is a woman with an immoral past; there is no word about any

immorality on Mary of Bethany's part in the other three Gospels (note also that while the woman in Luke's Gospel, like in the other Gospels, uses an alabaster jar of perfume, in Luke there is no mention of nard). The discussion following the anointing in Luke's account, unlike in the other Gospels, includes no reference to the poor or of Jesus' burial but focuses on Jesus' response to the Pharisee's disapproval of his interaction with an immoral woman.

Despite the similarities between John on the one hand and Matthew and Mark on the other, there are also a few differences that cannot be ignored. In Matthew and Mark, the story takes place after the triumphal entry, while in John it is placed before it. However, one should not be troubled by the different settings since the Gospels are at times arranged topically rather than chronologically. Another difference is that Mark's account includes the woman anointing Jesus' head, while John has the woman anointing Jesus' feet and then wiping his feet with her hair (cf. Luke's account). This has led some to conclude that these were two separate incidents which had been retold in the Jesus tradition before the Gospels were written down and by the time the Gospels came into being some of the historical details were conflated in John's Gospel.

However, if one avoids a hermeneutic of suspicion and allows for the various accounts to speak for themselves, the details converge to provide a reasonable picture of what happened (Carson 1991, 427). John notes that Mary used a *litra* (a Roman pound), and Mark implies that the jar was full, hence the need to break the neck to pour it out. It appears that this is too much nard simply to be poured over Jesus' head. Both Matthew 26:12 and Mark 14:8 observe that the perfume was poured over Jesus' body in preparation for his burial, which seems to imply that more than Jesus' head was anointed. Moreover, it is possible that Matthew and Mark refer specifically to Jesus' head in order to emphasize that he is being honored as king, an emphasis that would fit well within their Gospels. Conversely, while John's account does not ignore royal overtones (the next event is Jesus' triumphal entry), John is likely mentioning Jesus' feet to highlight the woman's humility before Jesus. Carson explains, "She thus becomes a foil not only of the religious authorities who were actively plotting Jesus' death, but of the disciples who, in the very next chapter, have to be *taught* to wash one another's feet by Jesus himself (13:1ff.)" (1991, 427). (See further comments at Matt 26:6–13 and Mark 14:3–9.)

Finally, some claim that John's statement "six days before the Passover" (12:1) creates an irresolvable chronological problem. However, it is likely that John thinks of Passover as beginning Thursday evening (as do the Synoptics),

and “six days before the Passover” refers to the preceding Saturday, which began on Friday evening. For more on this chronological issue, see comments on 13:2.

> 9 Then a large crowd of the Jews learned He was there. They came not only because of Jesus,
> but also to see Lazarus the one He had raised from the dead. 10 Therefore the chief priests
> decided to kill Lazarus also 11 because he was the reason many of the Jews were deserting them
> and believing in Jesus.

The chief priests decided to kill Lazarus also (12:10): This statement concerning the chief priests fits well within the context of the Gospel and cannot be simply written off as an instance of Johannine anti-Semitism with no basis in history. The presence of the resurrected Lazarus would have created a major embarrassment for the Sadducees (many of whom were among the chief priests), who held that there was no resurrection of the dead. Earlier, the high priest was talking about the death of “one man” (11:50); now, the chief priests plot to kill a second man as well. The faith “many of the Jews” placed in Jesus in 12:11 seems to be of the fleeting variety, as it was for many Jews throughout John’s Gospel (so, rightly, Schnackenburg 1990, 2:370; contra Morris 1995, 518). In any case, the charge of anti-Semitism is false. John, himself a Jew, was recounting the chief priests’ plot against a particular Jew, Jesus, because other Jews believed in Jesus. In other words, this account is negative toward the chief priests, not all Jews, and is so on account of the chief priests’ unbelief in Jesus rather than their ethnicity. What is more, it has often been noted that the Jewish Scriptures, in particular the prophetic writings, are replete with harsh indictments of Jewish unbelief. Surely it would be illegitimate to charge the Jewish Scriptures with being anti-Semitic merely because they contain prophetic denunciations of Jewish unbelief. For the same reason, it misses the target to accuse John of anti-Semitism.

> 12 The next day, when the large crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was
> coming to Jerusalem, 13 they took palm branches and went out to meet Him. They kept
> shouting: “***Hosanna!*** **He who comes in the name of the Lord is the blessed One** ’ — the
> King of Israel! ”
>
> 14 Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written: 15 **Fear no more, Daughter**
> **Zion. Look, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt.** ’
>
> 16 His disciples did not understand these things at first. However, when Jesus was glorified,

> then they remembered that these things had been written about Him and that they had done these things to Him.

His disciples did not understand these things at first (12:16): This passage is similar to John's statement in 2:22 concerning the disciples' misunderstanding of Jesus' words concerning rebuilding the temple in three days after its destruction: "So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this. And they believed the Scripture and the statement Jesus had made." In both accounts, the disciples understand the significance of Jesus' words only after his resurrection from the dead.

Some have argued that there is an inherent contradiction in this passage (e.g., Barrett 1978, 416–17). They reason that if Jesus' own disciples did not understand the event as a fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9, then surely the crowds would not announce him as King of Israel in fulfillment of this very same passage. It makes little sense, these detractors contend, to suppose that the crowds would have understood the passage's connection with Jesus' ministry better than Jesus' own followers; thus the passage should be considered unhistorical.

However, this argument only works if the disciples' misunderstanding centered on Jesus' identity as king. Yet all the Gospels testify that Jesus' followers indeed understood him to be the messianic king before his final entry in Jerusalem. The point was rather that they cherished the wrong kinds of expectations for this royal Messiah, and it is *this* misunderstanding that John's narrative is careful to expose. Hence Zechariah 9:9 is introduced only after the crowds have announced Jesus as King of Israel. Jesus sends a symbolic message by choosing to enter Jerusalem on a donkey rather than a warhorse. By doing so, he diverts incorrect political and nationalist implications and fulfills OT expectations.

By riding on a donkey, Jesus expresses his willingness to become the king of Israel (Ridderbos 1997, 424), though in more humble terms than those of the prevailing nationalism of his day. Two associations with the donkey were dominant in first-century Palestine: humility and peace. The donkey was a lowly beast of burden: "Fodder and a stick and burdens for a donkey" (Sir 33:25; cf. Prov 26:3). Donkeys were also known as animals ridden by those seeking peace, be it ordinary folk, priests, merchants, or persons of importance (Judg 5:10; 2 Sam 16:2).

This passage, therefore, helps to explain the growth of understanding through which the first disciples went in grasping the full significance of Jesus and the

OT Scriptures, a process that took a major turn with the resurrection of Jesus. Rather than constituting a problem, this passage thus provides a strong argument for the historicity of the narrative. As Carson notes, “Not only is their failure to comprehend the nature of Jesus’ kingship and the inevitability of the cross universally attested in the Gospels, that failure was also something that *could not* be misunderstood *after* Jesus’ death and glorification. Christians could scarcely be thought to be Christians without understanding these fundamentals, and Jews in any sort of intimate dialogue with Christians would also understand what Christians meant” (1991, 434–35).

> 20 Now some Greeks were among those who went up to worship at the festival. 21 So they
> came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and requested of him, “Sir, we want to see
> Jesus.”
> 22 Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. 23 Jesus replied
> to them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.
> 24 “I assure you: Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains by itself. But
> if it dies, it produces a large crop. ’ 25 The one who loves his life will lose it, and the one who
> hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 If anyone serves Me, he must follow
> Me. Where I am, there My servant also will be. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.
> 27 “Now My soul is troubled. What should I say — Father, save Me from this hour? But that
> is why I came to this hour. 28 Father, glorify Your name! ” ’
> Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again! ”
> 29 The crowd standing there heard it and said it was thunder. Others said that an angel had
> spoken to Him.
> 30 Jesus responded, “This voice came, not for Me, but for you. 31 Now is the judgment of this
> world. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out. 32 As for Me, if I am lifted up from the
> earth I will draw all people to Myself.” 33 He said this to signify what kind of death He was
> about to die.

So they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee (12:21): Some have argued that this is an example of a historical error since Bethsaida is in Gaulanitis, not Galilee (e.g., McKinsey 1995, 132). However, there is evidence that people in this time period would commonly refer to any territory east of the Jordan as “Galilee.” For example, Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.4) refers to “Judas the Galilaean” as coming from Gamala, east of the lake (Acts 5:37; cf. Carson 1991, 158). A contemporary analogy would be someone claiming to be from Atlanta, Georgia, though technically they are from a suburb of the city of Atlanta. The claim to be from Atlanta is not erroneous to those who understand

the term “Atlanta” as it is commonly used to describe Atlanta and its surrounding suburbs. In a similar way, it appears “Galilee” came to refer to a larger territory than an overly strict usage demands.

Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains by itself (12:24): It unfairly presses Jesus’ analogy too far to argue that in terms of modern science it is incorrect to say that a seed “dies” when it falls to the ground. Jesus is simply using the seed as an analogy. The seed is buried in the ground, no longer existing in its previous form (analogous to death), in order to sprout and bear fruit (analogous to life). This illustrates the principle of life through death. In the rabbinic literature, the kernel of wheat is repeatedly used as a symbol of the eschatological resurrection of the dead: “If the grain of wheat, which is buried naked, sprouts forth in many robes, how much more so the righteous, who are buried in their raiment” (*b. Sanhedrin* 90b).

***Did John borrow from events at Gethsemane to build this depiction?* (12:27–29):** Jesus’ attitude concerning the suffering that awaits him certainly corresponds well with what is found in the Synoptic accounts of Gethsemane (Matt 26:39, 42 pars.). Those who claim that John is merely borrowing from the events at Gethsemane in composing his portrait put the Fourth Gospel in an impossible predicament. If Jesus’ attitude conveyed in John’s Gospel is markedly different from the Synoptics, John is in conflict with the other Gospels. Conversely, if the depictions are similar, as is the case in the present instance, John is but parasitic of the other Gospels. Instead, there seems to be a better explanation: Jesus’ soul was actually troubled by the thought of the weight of humanity’s sin that he was to bear on the cross and this anguish was expressed at different times in his ministry.

***Why was there confusion about whether the sound was thunder or an angel?* (12:27–31):** John 12:28 depicts one of three occasions in the Gospels when a heavenly voice attests to Jesus’ identity. Here the Father strengthens Jesus’ resolve and calms his troubled soul by affirming that his prayer has already been answered. The rabbis called the heavenly voice *bath qol* (literally, “daughter of a voice”). Most believed that the prophetic office had ceased and would not be renewed until the onset of the messianic age. Hence the *bath qol*, a mere echo of the divine voice, was the most that could be expected in the interim. This is striking when compared to the NT instances of the heavenly voice where the voice attesting Jesus is the voice of God himself.

John’s note that some thought the heavenly voice was actually thunder likely

indicates that though not all heard the voice, all did hear a sound (Morris 1995, 530). Thunder was perceived to speak of the power and awesomeness of God and has a significant place in the OT and Second Temple literature (1 Sam 12:18; 2 Sam 22:14; Job 37:5). As such, it was part of the theophany at Mount Sinai (Exod 19:16, 19). God's intervention on behalf of his people is portrayed as a fierce thunderstorm sweeping down on his enemies (Ps 18:7–15). In such instances, the power of the Creator is tied to that of Israel's redeemer (Exod 9:28; 1 Sam 7:10; Ps 29:3; cf. Sir 46:16–17). The manifestations of God's power also highlight the contrast between his omnipotence and the powerlessness of idols (Jer 10:13 = 51:16).

What is more, John adds that some heard a voice (not simply thunder) but assumed it was an angel. In OT times, angels (or the angel of the Lord) regularly spoke to significant individuals (Gen 21:17; 22:11; Acts 7:38; 2 Kgs 1:15; Dan 10:4–11), so it is not surprising that some would have identified this voice as angelic.

Now the ruler of this world will be cast out (12:31): Verse 31 signals that the power struggle between Satan and God has entered its decisive stage (Kovacs 1995). What is at stake "is nothing less than the transfer of power over the present God-hating world into the hands of the Son of Man" (Ridderbos 1997, 438). Yet Satan fails, because with the crucifixion he has lost all grounds of appeal against sinful humanity; redemption has been achieved through Jesus' vicarious sacrifice (Ridderbos 1997, 439). There is a certain amount of tension between the current passage and other passages in the NT that maintain that Satan remains active in the present world. Yet this tension falls short of actual contradiction. Satan's work continues, but "the fundamental smashing of his reign of tyranny takes place in the death/exaltation of Jesus" (Carson 1991, 443). In other words, the NT indicates that even though the war still continues, the decisive battle has already been won and the ultimate defeat of Satan and victory of God are not in doubt.

If I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all people to Myself (12:32): What does Jesus mean when he says he will "draw all people" to himself. The surrounding context, particularly its emphasis on final judgment (v. 31), militates against the possibility that according to Jesus all people will be saved. In 12:32, "all people" directs the reader back to the Greeks who arrived on the scene in the previous verses. The double *nun* (now) in Jesus' response in verse 31 harks back to Jesus' statement in verse 23 (in response to the Greeks' coming) that the hour

has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Another link between verses 23 and 31 is the "Gentile connection." What is merely intimated in Jesus' evasive response to the Greeks in the earlier passage is now spelled out in greater detail (Carson 1991, 444; Barrett 1978, 27): it is only subsequent to his cross-death (the third link; compare 12:24 with 12:33) that Jesus will draw "all people," including Gentiles, to himself (cf. 10:16; 11:51–52).

Finally, the use of the same verb *helkuō* ("to draw") in 6:44 stands firmly against an attempt to use 12:32 as a proof text for universalism. In 6:44, Jesus explains that only those whom the Father draws to the Son will come to him and be raised on the last day. For this reason, Jesus' emphasis on judgment in the surrounding context, the Gentiles visit to Jesus in chapter 12, and Jesus' explanation of how it is that a person comes to the Son in 6:44 demand that this verse be interpreted to mean that all types of people (i.e., *both Jews and Gentiles*) will be drawn to Jesus, rather than all people *without exception*.

> 37 Even though He had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in
> Him. 38 But this was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet, who said:
>
> **Lord, who has believed our message?**
> **And who has the arm of the Lord**
> **been revealed to?**
>
> 39 This is why they were unable to believe, because Isaiah also said:
>
> 40 **He has blinded their eyes**
> **and hardened their hearts,**
> **so that they would not see with their eyes**
> **or understand with their hearts,**
> **and be converted,**
> **and I would heal them.**
>
> 41 Isaiah said these things because he saw His glory and spoke about Him.

***The fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy* (12:38–40):** The Jews' refusal to believe harks back to the unbelief of the wilderness generation who had seen God's mighty acts of power during the exodus (Deut 29:2–4; see Carson 1991, 447; Ridderbos 1997, 444; Brown 1966, 485). Despite the great signs the Jews saw Jesus perform, they rejected him owing to a lack of faith. However, as John makes clear with his quotation of OT passages, rather than thwart God's purposes, the Jews' rejection of their Messiah actually fulfilled Scripture.

The use of the formula "this was to fulfill" (*hina . . . plērōthē*) leads off a

whole series of OT quotations that stress the fulfillment of prophecy in the events of Jesus' life, especially those surrounding his crucifixion. The first passage cited is Isaiah 53:1 LXX (cf. Rom 10:16). In the context of the book of Isaiah, this verse refers to the Servant of the Lord, whom the people rejected but God exalted (cf. Isa 52:13–15). In John, the verse is applied to Jesus the Messiah, who is the promised Servant, and to the rejection of his message and signs ("arm of the Lord") by the Jews. Therefore, Jewish rejection of God's words is nothing new in salvation history—just as Isaiah's message had been rejected, so was Jesus' (Ridderbos 1997, 444).

These verses are both predestinarian yet compatibilist (rather than fatalistic), as they include elements of human responsibility as well as of divine sovereignty (Carson 1991, 447; Barrett 1978, 431). In the scriptural quote, faith and the divine activity (the "arm of the Lord") are connected: "even unbelief has some place in the purpose of God" (Morris 1995, 536). John explains that though the Jews, God's chosen old covenant people, have rejected their Messiah, they are not outside the ultimate purposes of God. The Evangelist's explanation, far from implying that the Jews are not responsible for their refusal to believe (19:11–12, 15), points to the ultimate purpose of God's judicial hardening of the Jewish people (similar to Pharaoh, cf. Rom 9:17). The quotation is from Isaiah 6:10 (here closer to the Hebrew than to the LXX), a text frequently cited in the NT (cf. Matt 13:13–15 pars.; Acts 28:26–27).

> 44 Then Jesus cried out, "The one who believes in Me believes not in Me, but in Him who sent
> Me. 45 And the one who sees Me sees Him who sent Me.

The one who sees Me sees Him who sent Me (12:45): Jesus is not denying any distinction between God the Father and himself. Rather, the principal notion here is that Jesus rejects the idea that he came on his own initiative and authority and for his own glory. Once again invoking a common Jewish maxim (yet transcending it; Carson 1991, 451–52), Jesus asks people to believe in him, not in his own right, but as the representative of the Father (12:44; cf. 5:23; Ridderbos 1997, 448). In fact, the entire closing section presupposes Jewish teaching on representation, according to which the emissary represents the one who sends him (see 14:9; cf. *m. Berakot* 5.5). John has emphasized throughout his Gospel that Jesus is not only equal with God but subordinate to the Father in such a way that he only does what the Father tells him to do (3:31–36; 5:19ff.;

6:37–40; 7:27–29; 8:14–17, 28–29, 42–43; 10:34–36). Jesus as God the Father's representative is a notion that is validated in the other Gospels as well (Matt 10:40; Mark 9:37; Luke 9:48; 10:16).

> Before the Passover Festival, Jesus knew that His hour had come to depart from this world to the Father. Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.
>
> 2 Now by the time of supper, the Devil had already put it into the heart of Judas, Simon Iscariot's son, to betray Him.

Is this meal the Passover meal? **(13:2):** Some scholars have concluded that there is a contradiction between John's chronology of the Passover and that of the Synoptics. The most natural reading of the Synoptic Gospels places Jesus and his disciples celebrating the Passover together during the morning of 15 Nisan (Matt 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:15). In that year, it appears the Passover ran from Thursday evening to Friday evening, starting and ending at sundown. The same scholars contend that John's Gospel places the last supper on 14 Nisan (Wednesday evening; John 13:1; 13:27; 18:28; 19:14, 31, 36, 42).

Some seek to harmonize the apparent differences in the Gospel chronologies of the Passover by attributing these alleged discrepancies to the use of different calendars. John, they argue, like the Judeans and Sadducees, uses a lunar, sunset-to-sunset calendar, while the Synoptics, like the Galileans, Pharisees, and Jesus and his followers, employ a solar, sunrise-to-sunrise reckoning (e.g., Hoehner 1977:85–90: see chart on p. 89; Morris 1995, 684–95). Alternatively, John shifts the type of calendar he uses: his light-darkness theme (grounded in the Genesis account) is conveyed by way of a solar calendar while elsewhere a lunar system is used (building on exodus redemptive motifs; Busada 2003). While these theories are possible, they are not probable, since there is a lack of clear textual evidence in the Gospels themselves in support of them and since they unnecessarily complicate the situation while a simpler solution lies close at hand.

The most probable solution is that both John and the Synoptics present Jesus as having eaten a final meal with his disciples—a Passover meal—on Thursday night, with the crucifixion taking place on Friday. In 19:31, Jesus' crucifixion is placed on "the preparation day," with the very next day being a "special" Sabbath (i.e., the Sabbath of Passover week). This suggests that even in John, the crucifixion takes place on Friday, with "the preparation day "—in John as in the Synoptics—referring not to the day of preparation *for the Passover* but *for the Sabbath* (Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 16.163–64). Since

the Passover lasted an entire week, in conjunction with the associated Feast of Unleavened Bread (Luke 22:1), it was fitting to speak of the day of preparation for the Sabbath as "the day of Preparation of *Passover Week*" (though not of the Passover in a more narrow sense, John 19:14).

> 21 When Jesus had said this, He was troubled in His spirit and testified, "I assure you: One of
> you will betray Me! "
> 22 The disciples started looking at one another — uncertain which one He was speaking about.
> 23 One of His disciples, the one Jesus loved, was reclining close beside Jesus. 24 Simon Peter
> motioned to him to find out who it was He was talking about. 25 So he leaned back against
> Jesus and asked Him, "Lord, who is it? "
> 26 Jesus replied, "He's the one I give the piece of bread to after I have dipped it." When He
> had dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas, Simon Iscariot's son. 27 After Judas ate the piece of
> bread, Satan entered him. Therefore Jesus told him, "What you're doing, do quickly."

One of His disciples, the one Jesus loved, was reclining close beside Jesus (13:23): As noted previously (see Introduction), the epithet "the one Jesus loved" most likely refers to the historical figure of John, the son of Zebedee. Here this character is introduced for the first time in the narrative. He later reappears at the foot of the cross (19:26–27), at the empty tomb (20:2–9), by the Sea of Tiberias (21:1, 20–23), and in the final two verses identifying him as the author of this Gospel (21:24–25). The "other disciple" of 18:15–16 and 20:2–9 should in all likelihood also be identified as the "disciple Jesus loved," since 20:2 combines both expressions ("the other disciple, the one Jesus loved").

The Synoptics confirm what John suggests: that only the Twelve were present with Jesus at the Last Supper (Matt 26:20; Mark 14:17; Luke 22:14; John 13:18; cf. 6:70). If so, "the one Jesus loved" must be one of the 12 apostles. A comparison of all four Gospels yields the unequivocal conclusion that John, the son of Zebedee, is by far the most likely candidate for "the one Jesus loved." Since his recipients doubtless knew him well, the author can dispense with his proper name (Jackson 1999, 31); "the one Jesus loved" serves an epithet of authorial modesty (see the equally modest phrase *oimai*, "I think," in the final verse of the Gospel; cf. Köstenberger 2004b, 72–88; see the Introduction for a more extensive argument for John, the son of Zebedee as the author of the Gospel).

The "disciple Jesus loved" is described as literally sitting "in his lap" or "at his side" (*kolpos* [cf. Luke 6:38; 16:22, 23]). The reference echoes 1:18, where Jesus

is said to be “at the Father’s side” (Carson 1991, 473; Brown 1970, 577; Beck 1997, 113). The idea of being close to another person for the sake of imparting important insights regarding the identity of that person appears to be in view in both contexts (Stibbe 1993, 149–50). Jesus’ closeness to the Father enabled him to make God known in a unique, authoritative manner. Similarly, John’s (physical) proximity to Jesus permits him to discover the identity of the betrayer before the other disciples know. Thus the passage legitimizes and authorizes the author and his testimony.

Recently, some have suggested that the physical proximity of the two men indicated some type of homosexual or homoerotic behavior. This is unequivocally wrong. Even today in many places in the world, men express friendship in different ways: greeting each other with a warm embrace or kisses on both cheeks, etc. Arguing that there is any hint of homosexuality in this scene shows no sensitivity to the social norms of the first century in the ancient Near East.

***How can the disciples be uncertain what Jesus meant?* (13:25–27):** Jesus responds to the beloved disciple’s request to know the identity of the betrayer by saying, “He’s the one I give the piece of bread to after I have dipped it” (v. 26). There is no reason to find a contradiction with Jesus’ identification of Judas as the betrayer and the disciples’ confusion over what Jesus meant by telling Judas to act quickly (13:27–30). The simplest explanation is that Jesus responded to the beloved disciple discreetly, such that the other disciples could not hear his statement. This puts the beloved disciple in a position of privileged insight at this juncture of the narrative (Ridderbos 1997, 471; and see comments on 13:23 above). John’s comment in verse 28, “None of those reclining at the table knew why He told him this” is in this approach seen as a reference only to Jesus’ statement in verse 27, not verse 26.

Satan entered him (13:27): John ominously notes that at this point Satan entered into Judas (see 13:2; 1 Chr 21:1; cf. 2 Sam 24:1), which finds parallels in the Synoptic accounts. The term *eiserchomai* (enter) is used by the other Gospels with regard to demon possession (e.g., Mark 5:12; Luke 8:30; 11:26). Here it is not demons but Satan himself who is said to enter a person, which is without parallel in later Judaism (Foerster, *TDNT* 7:162–63). However, a crucial parallel is Luke 22:3, where Satan is said to have entered Judas prior to his betrayal (see also Matt 16:23 par.). Jesus gently prods Judas to go ahead and follow through with what he has already decided to do in his heart. This shows that rather than

being a victim of forces beyond his control or an unwilling prey of divine child abuse, Jesus was well in control of the situation and willingly went to the cross (cf. John 10:11, 15, 16–18; and esp. 18:4–11).

> 36 “Lord,” Simon Peter said to Him, “where are You going? ”
> Jesus answered, “Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you will follow later.”
> 37 “Lord,” Peter asked, “why can’t I follow You now? I will lay down my life for You! ”
> 38 Jesus replied, “Will you lay down your life for Me? I assure you: A rooster will not crow until you have denied Me three times.

Where did Jesus make the prediction of Peter’s denials? **(13:38):** While Mark and Matthew have this prediction taking place on the journey to the garden, Luke and John place it at the Last Supper. The Gospel authors’ varied placement of Jesus’ prediction of Peter’s denial should not be viewed as problematic since, as mentioned, they do not claim to have arranged their books chronologically in every instance. It is widely recognized that while following a general time line of Jesus’ ministry, the Evangelists felt the freedom to arrange Jesus’ events and teachings topically at times.

Were chickens allowed to be kept in Jerusalem? **(13:38):** Another alleged difficulty with the biblical record is the argument that chickens were not allowed in Palestine. However, as best as we are able to determine, this is inaccurate. Evidence indicates that roosters in Palestine frequently crowed in the late-night hours, so that the Romans assigned the label “cockcrow” to the watch between midnight and 3:00 a.m. (cf. Mark 13:35). (See further comments at Mark 14:27–31 and Luke 22:34.)

How many times was the rooster to crow? **(13:38):** Some manuscripts of Mark 14:30, 68, 72 indicate the idea of two cock-crowings, as opposed to the one indicated by the other Gospels. Even if this reading were original, however, it poses no real threat to the veracity of the Gospel accounts. As Carson (citing Alexander) points out, the matter is akin to the difference between saying “before the bell rings” and “before the second bell rings” for church or dinner (2010, 607). In other words, these texts are not problematic if one’s presuppositions and methodology allow for simple, plausible harmonization. (See further comments at Matt 26:34, Mark 14:68, and Luke 22:34.)

“Your heart must not be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Me. 2 In My Father’s house
are many dwelling places; if not, I would have told you. I am going away to prepare a place for
you. 3 If I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come back and receive you to Myself, so
that where I am you may be also. 4 You know the way to where I am going.” ’
5 “Lord,” Thomas said, “we don’t know where You’re going. How can we know the way? ”
6 Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except
through Me.

I am going away to prepare a place for you (14:2): Here Jesus indicates that he is going to prepare an eschatological dwelling place for the disciples. However, Matthew 25:34 appears to indicate that heaven was “prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” This apparent contradiction is easily explained once the passages are understood in the respective contexts of Matthew 25 and Johannine theology. In John, Jesus is not arriving on the scene only to begin preparing a place. Rather, the preparation includes Jesus’ departure, that is, his death and resurrection, events that were part of God’s sovereign plan from the beginning. In Matthew 25:34, the emphasis is on the fact that the future kingdom was always in the plan of God: “Jesus is not speaking of some afterthought, but of what God had always planned to bring about, and that will come to its consummation at the end of this age” (Morris 1992, 636).

Another question pertains to the kind of place Jesus is going to prepare for his followers. Later in 14:23, Jesus speaks of the Father and himself coming and making their dwelling within the believer in a spiritual sense. The present reference, on the other hand, speaks of a reality external to believers. “Many” dwellings stresses the large number of dwelling places and the abundant space available. In Jesus’ day, multiple dwelling units often combined to form an extended household. Sons customarily added to their father’s house once they married, so that the entire estate grew into a large compound. Jesus’ listeners may also have been familiar with the luxurious Herodian palaces in Jerusalem, Tiberias, and Jericho (see Josephus, *Jewish War* 5.4.4 §§176–83). If so, Jesus’ language may have conveyed to his followers a vision of a future heavenly existence that was superior even to that enjoyed by the most exalted ruler or wealthy person of that day.

As part of the farewell discourse, the present passage speaks of Jesus’ provision for his followers after his departure (cf. 13:33–37; Köstenberger 1998, 124–26). Just as Jesus’ first disciples asked him where he was staying and he invited them to “come and see” (1:38–39), Jesus now assures his followers that

he will not relinquish his responsibility as their teacher. In fact, his provision of permanent, eternal dwellings for them will transpose this theme onto a higher, eternal plane. Elsewhere, Jesus promises eternal rewards in exchange for "houses" left behind (Matt 19:29 pars.). Here, rather than elaborating on the characteristics of the Father's house, Jesus is content to stress that there is plenty of room where he is going and that believers' future is bound up with a homecoming comparable to a son's return to his father's house (cf. Luke 15:11–32). In keeping with Jewish patriarchal culture, Jesus, the Son of the Father, establishes his followers "as members of the Father's household" and "makes his home accessible to them as a final place of residence" (Schrenk, *TDNT* 5:997).

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me (14:6): In an age of religious pluralism, Christianity's exclusive claims are considered inappropriately narrow, even intolerant. What is more, pluralism itself has, ironically, become the criterion by which all truth claims are judged (Köstenberger and Kruger 2010). First-century Judaism prized law-keeping and scrupulous observance of religious customs (cf. 5:10; 6:28; 9:16). By contrast, Jesus claimed that allegiance to him was the way. Some have tried to argue that "way," "truth," and "life" should be read together as "the true way of life." Yet John elsewhere uses multiple terms that remain distinct when linked with the conjunction "and" (e.g., John 2:14; 14:6). Carson rightly notes that in the larger context Jesus is claiming to be "the Savior (4:42), the Lamb of God (1:29, 34), the one who so speaks that those who are in the graves hear his voice and come forth (5:28–29). He so mediates God's truth and God's life that he is the very way to God, the one who alone can say, *No one comes to the Father except through me*" (1991, 491).

By affirming that "no one comes to the Father except through Me," Jesus states what the early Christians maintained: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people, and we must be saved by it" (Acts 4:12). In the OT, people expressed their faith in God by keeping the law given through Moses; now that Jesus has come, he is the way. In the monotheistic Jewish world and polytheistic Greco-Roman culture of the first century, as well as in today's pluralistic climate, Jesus' message is plain: he is not one among many different options—he is the only way.

[7] "If you know Me, you will also know My Father. From now on you do know Him and have seen Him."

8 “Lord,” said Philip, “show us the Father, and that’s enough for us.”

9 Jesus said to him, “Have I been among you all this time without your knowing Me, Philip? The one who has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? 10 Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words I speak to you I do not speak on My own. The Father who lives in Me does His works. 11 Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me. Otherwise, believe because of the works themselves.

The one who has seen Me has seen the Father (14:9): These verses are part of one of the central themes of John’s Gospel: the unity of God the Father and Jesus the Son. References to Jesus’ unity with the Father are conspicuous throughout the Gospel (see esp. 5:18; 10:30). John’s presentation clearly implies *ontological* unity (unity of being), but the emphasis lies on *functional* unity, that is, the way in which God is revealed in Jesus’ words and works (called “signs” by John; cf. 10:38). Jesus can provide first-hand revelation of God precisely because he is God himself (cf. 1:18).

Because he has not yet grasped that in Jesus God has made himself known, Philip apparently asks for some form of theophany (Morris 1995, 571) as seen in the OT (Exod 33:18; cf. 24:10; Isa 6:1; 40:5). In keeping with OT teaching, John has repeatedly denied the possibility of a direct vision of God (unmediated by Jesus; see esp. 1:18; 5:37; 6:46). For this reason Philip’s request is utter foolishness (Bultmann 1971, 608).

After gently rebuking Philip with the question, “Have I been among you all this time without your knowing Me, Philip?” Jesus claims, “The one who has seen Me has seen the Father.” Morris writes that Jesus’ assertion is “staggering in its simplicity and its profundity” (1995, 572). While it is true that Jesus’ answer adduces the Jewish principle of representation (see *m. Berakot* 5.5; cf. John 13:20; Barrett 1978, 459), John’s Christology surely transcends the mere notion of the messenger in Jewish life (Carson 1991, 494). Jesus is the paradigmatic messenger, the messenger *par excellence*; he is the “Sent One” from the Father (e.g., 9:7). Jesus continues, “How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me?” This union with the Father is given expression in both Jesus’ words—his teaching—and his works (especially the “signs”): “The words I speak to you I do not speak on My own. The Father who lives in Me does His works.”

This mutual indwelling of Father and Son—called *perichoresis* (from Greek *peri*, around, and *chorein*, to contain) by some of the church fathers—reiterated in verse 11 (“I am in the Father and the Father is in Me”) emphasizes the unity of Father and Son without obliterating their uniqueness (Carson 1991, 494). While

remaining distinct in personhood and role, “each can (in slightly different senses) be said to be in the other. The Father abiding in the Son does his works; the Son rests from, and to eternity in the Father’s being” (Barrett 1978, 460).

> 12 “I assure you: The one who believes in Me will also do the works that I do. And he will do
> even greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. 13 Whatever you ask in My
> name, I will do it so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask Me anything in
> My name, I will do it. ’

The one who believes in Me . . . will do even greater works than these (14:12): Jesus’ claim here is remarkable (cf. 5:20; see Köstenberger 1995a, 36–45). Only a superficial reading of Jesus’ words would conclude that they are inaccurate due to the inability of any of Jesus’ disciples to exceed or even match the spectacular nature of Jesus’ many miracles. After all, since the signs in John serve to authenticate Jesus as God’s true representative (Köstenberger 2009, 327), it seems unlikely that Jesus means here that his disciples’ works will be “more supernatural” than the Messiah’s. Thus, a number of alternate interpretations have been offered.

Some have suggested that these “greater things” refer to deeds of humility (13:15) or love (13:34–35). However, there seems to be no sufficient reason to restrict these “things” in this way. As Carson notes, “Jesus’ ‘works’ may include more than his miracles; they never exclude them” (1991, 495). Many early interpreters took the “greater things” to refer to the missionary successes of the early church. The book of Acts certainly provides support for this reading. Jesus’ followers were in a position to influence a greater number of people and to reach a much larger geographical area than Jesus did during his earthly ministry. However, this reading lacks adequate support from the context of John’s Gospel itself.

In John, “greater things” has primarily a qualitative dimension, marking Jesus’ “signs” as preliminary and his disciples’ ministry as “greater” in the sense that their ministry is based on Jesus’ completed cross-work (12:24; 15:13; 19:30) and thus belongs to a more advanced stage in salvation history. A similar teaching can be seen in Jesus’ remark concerning the greatness of John the Baptist and the least in the kingdom (Matt 11:7–15; see Carson 2010, 306–11). Jesus’ followers are benefiting from the labors of others, reaping what they have not sown, and thus will bear fruit that remains (John 4:31–38; 15:8, 16).

This interpretation finds ample support within the context of motifs current in both Jewish life in general and farewell discourses in particular: the disciples are designated as Jesus' successors, taking their place in a long string of predecessors ranging from the OT prophets to John the Baptist and climaxing in Jesus. In John, it is Jesus' followers—not just his original disciples but whoever believes in him—who will do greater things than even Jesus did, aided by answered prayer in Jesus' name (14:13) and performed in close spiritual union with their exalted Lord (15:1–17).

If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it (14:14): This verse is not meant to indicate that all someone has to do is ask God for something and it will be given to him or her on the basis of Jesus' name being attached to the end of the prayer. Other references in Scripture (e.g., 1 John 5:14–15) preclude such a shallow reading. Praying in Jesus' name is not meant to be understood as forcing God's hand through reciting magical words but rather expresses alignment of one's desires and purposes with God.

> 15 "If you love Me, you will keep My commands. 16 And I will ask the Father, and He will
> give you another Counselor to be with you forever. 17 He is the Spirit of truth. The world is
> unable to receive Him because it doesn't see Him or know Him. But you do know Him, because
> He remains with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you.

And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever (14:16): Muslims who claim that this verse refers to the coming of Mohammed disregard the clear context of this passage. The entire section of 14:15–24 envisions the giving of the "Spirit of truth" (later referred to as the Holy Spirit; cf. 14:26) subsequent to Jesus' exaltation, at which time Jesus and the Father will make their dwelling in believers through the Spirit. Nowhere in this passage is there is any mention of a future prophet who will supersede Jesus' message.

> 23 Jesus answered, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. My Father will love him, and
> We will come to him and make Our home with him. 24 The one who doesn't love Me will not
> keep My words. The word that you hear is not Mine but is from the Father who sent Me.
> 25 "I have spoken these things to you while I remain with you. 26 But the Counselor, the Holy
> Spirit — the Father will send Him in My name — will teach you all things and remind you of
> everything I have told you.

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit—the Father will send Him in My name (14:26): This passage looks forward to the giving of the Holy Spirit to the disciples narrated in Acts 2. The "sending" terminology integrates the Spirit into a network of sending relationships depicted in this Gospel. First, John the Baptist was sent (1:6); then, the Father sent Jesus, the paradigmatic Sent One from the Father (9:4, 7); later, Jesus became the sender of the nucleus of the early church (17:18; 20:21). Thus the string of sending relationships reaches from John the Baptist to Jesus to the Spirit and finally to the disciples (Köstenberger 1998).

Here, the Father sends the Holy Spirit in Jesus' name. In 15:26, Jesus sends "the Counselor . . . from the Father." There is no reason to see a contradiction here. The Father is never sent; he is sender of both the Son and the Spirit. The Spirit is never the sender; he is sent by both the Father and the Son. Only Jesus is both Sent One and sender; sent by the Father, he sends both the Spirit and his followers.

The Spirit's future ministry is described here in terms of teaching Jesus' followers all things (cf. 1 John 2:20, 27; see Schlatter 1948, 302) and of reminding them of Jesus' words. Jesus' promise that the Spirit will remind his followers of everything he had told them has important implications for the life of the church and for the writing of the NT. One of the chief characteristics of the Spirit according to John is that he bears witness to Jesus and elucidates the meaning of his message. This cautions against any undue elevation of the Spirit over the Son or any pitting of the Spirit against the Son.

> 27 "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Your heart must not be troubled or fearful. 28 You have heard Me tell you, 'I am going away and I am coming to you.' If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. 29 I have told you now before it happens so that when it does happen you may believe. 30 I will not talk with you much longer, because the ruler of the world is coming. He has no power over Me. ' 31 On the contrary, I am going away so that the world may know that I love the Father. Just as the Father commanded Me, so I do.
> "Get up; let's leave this place.

The Father is greater than I (14:28): Jehovah's Witnesses and other cults often cite this passage to support their claim that Jesus was not divine. Of course, this is no new controversy. The early church had to defend the doctrine of the Trinity against Arians who claimed Jesus was less than God. The root issue is how to hold together the twin truths of Jesus' equality with the Father and his

subordination to the Father, which are taught not only in John's Gospel but throughout the NT.

On the one hand, Jesus is identified as equal with God (1:1, 18; 5:16–18; 10:30; 20:28). On the other hand, Jesus obeys and depends on the Father (4:34; 5:19–30; 8:29; 12:48–49). Error is introduced when one truth is accepted while the other is neglected. Arians (and their modern-day theological counterparts) accept that Jesus submits to the Father and thus reason (incorrectly!) that Jesus must not be God. Gnostics, another early heretical group, recognized the deity of Jesus while reasoning (again incorrectly) that Jesus could not be fully human.

In the present passage, Jesus' statement, "the Father is greater than I," is not meant to indicate ontological inferiority on his part. Jesus stated earlier in John's Gospel that he and the Father are one (that is, one entity, part of one Godhead; 10:30). Rather than indicating that he is not God or a lesser god, Jesus stresses his subordination to the Father, which, as the NT makes clear, is not merely part of his incarnate ministry but rooted in his eternal sonship (cf. esp. 1 Cor 15:28; see Beasley-Murray 1999, 262; contra Morris 1995, 584).

Get up; let's leave this place (14:31): Jesus' comment, "Get up; let's leave this place"—dubbed an *aporia*, or alleged literary seam betraying underlying sources—has been the center of considerable scholarly debate. If Jesus commanded his disciples to get up and leave, why does his discourse continue for three more chapters (15–17)? The traditional answer is that chapters 13–14 take place in the Upper Room while chapters 15–17 unfold against the backdrop of Jesus and his followers setting out on the road to the Mount of Olives. However, many modern scholars have rejected this reading as a forced attempt at harmonization since the most natural way to take 18:1, according to these scholars, is that Jesus and his disciples did not leave the Upper Room until after 18:1.

Consequently, many scholars have suggested that 14:31 is misplaced and should come later in the discourse. However, it has rightly been noted that these displacement or rearrangement theories, rather than alleviating the alleged problem, only serve to compound the difficulties and to introduce new, additional problems (Carson 1991, 477). For example, chapter 14 includes many questions asked by the disciples that make little sense if chapters 15–16 came prior to these questions. What is more, 14:16–17 is likely meant to serve as an introduction to the rest of the passages about the Holy Spirit in this section. Yet if they originally came after the rest of the verses concerning the Holy Spirit, this again would be a rather odd sequence.

Others have argued that chapter 14 was the original discourse of Jesus with

John adding chapters 15–16 as his own personal meditations on Jesus' words. However, it is difficult to understand why John did such a poor job of editing his final draft. This proposal also faces the problem of answering the question of why Jesus covers so much of the same ground in the two units if the second section is simply John's meditation on Jesus' teaching. There are many additional problems with this reconstruction as well.

Based on the common material between chapters 13–14 and 15–16, some have suggested that these are two accounts of the same discourse. Yet for this to be the case, John or a later redactor would have had to be rather inept literarily, not knowing how to integrate the two versions more smoothly. Most literary works are more polished after the successive drafts. For these theories to become plausible, one would have to accept that John's Gospel became less polished after (alleged) editing. In addition, there is little evidence to suggest that modern interpreters could correctly sift through the various layers of proposed tradition. In view of the considerable amount of evidence suggesting that the Gospel is based on eyewitness testimony, it is best to accept and interpret the text as it stands.

However, the question remains why John had Jesus make this comment and then continue on for three more chapters before narrating movement. The simplest solution seems most probable: John included this statement because he remembered Jesus saying it. Two possible scenarios could explain the statement's location. First, it may be that Jesus and his followers indeed left the room where the last supper was held and embarked on a nocturnal walk that led them to Gethsemane, perhaps passing vineyards on the way. This locale would have provided a fitting backdrop for Jesus' teaching on the vine and the branches (see 15:1–8). Some have suggested that Jesus' "vine" metaphor was occasioned by the golden vine overhanging the main entrance to the temple. Another possibility is that Jesus told his disciples that it was time to go and then added some further instruction before finally getting underway (cf. 18:1).

On a literary level, there are also several plausible explanations for Jesus' comment in 14:31 that do not require resorting to source-critical theories. Thielman (1991, 180) suggests that the present passage may be an instance of a "purposeful attempt at obscurity" common to ancient writers (citing the transition from 5:47 to 6:1 as a possible parallel). Kellum (2005, 230) has suggested that statements indicating movement in John's Gospel regularly serve as ways to move along the narrative, contending that when John recorded Jesus' words, "Let's go," the evangelist left it to his readers to infer that Jesus and his

disciples actually went without explicitly narrating them doing so. Stibbe (1993, 159), likewise, is able to make "very good sense" of the narrative as it stands. For him, 14:31 is part of the Johannine theme of the "elusive Christ": after saying in 14:30 that the Devil "has no hold" on him, Jesus, knowing that the "prince of this world" is now coming, evades his captors one final time.

> "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vineyard keeper. 2 Every branch in Me that does not produce fruit He removes, and He prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit.

Every branch in Me that does not produce fruit He removes (15:2): It presses the imagery of this passage too far to conclude Jesus is teaching that genuine disciples can lose their salvation. Rather, Jesus is using "vine" and "branches" imagery to stress that true Christians must produce fruit. If anyone is without fruit, he or she is a dead branch. In 15:5, Jesus makes clear that the branches in the present symbolic discourse represent his followers. In the case of Jesus' followers, "in Me" (15:2) included Judas (cf. 13:10–11; see Brown 1970, 675–76; Morris 1995, 594n10; Carson 1991, 515). The particular branches that are removed did not produce fruit and had never produced any real fruit (e.g., Judas). If they had produced fruit, they would have remained. This interpretation is in line with the examples throughout the NT of people who had some connection with Jesus or the church but eventually denied the faith, demonstrating that, despite initial appearances, the person never had true saving faith (e.g., Matt 13:18–23; 24:12; John 8:31; Heb 3:14–19; 1 John 2:19; 2 John 9).

> 22 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin. ' Now they have no excuse for their sin. 23 The one who hates Me also hates My Father. 24 If I had not done the works among them that no one else has done, they would not have sin. Now they have seen and hated both Me and My Father. 25 But this happened so that the statement written in their scripture might be fulfilled: **They hated Me for no reason.**

If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin (15:22): Jesus is not implying that the world would have been better off if he had not come or that those who have never heard about him bear no responsibility for their sin. Instead, Jesus is merely stressing the world's culpability in rejecting the divine revelation brought by him (Carson 1991, 526). What is more, he is emphasizing

that there is a finality both to God's ultimate expression of his love in Jesus (3:16) and to the world's final rejection of this love (Ridderbos 1997, 524). The sin mentioned in the statement, "Now they have no excuse for their sin" (v. 22), rather than constituting a generic reference to sin, appears to pertain specifically to crucifying Jesus (8:40, 44).

The one who hates Me also hates My Father (15:23): Jesus can boldly announce that whoever hates him also hates the Father because of the close identification between Jesus and the Father on the one hand and Jesus and his followers on the other, to which Jesus already alluded in 15:20 (see also 5:23; 1 John 2:23). Although the Pharisees and Sadducees had a zeal for God (Rom 10:2), they actually were rejecting God because they rejected Jesus, God's representative. "Hate" (see 15:18–19) is a strong term indicating rejection. Jesus' language suggests that people must ultimately choose between two and only two options: either they embrace Jesus and his message and thus embrace God or they reject Jesus and the good news of salvation and thus show that they in fact hate God (see 3:16–21).

> "I have told you these things to keep you from stumbling. 2 They will ban you from the synagogues. In fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering service to God. 3 They will do these things because they haven't known the Father or Me. 4 But I have told you these things so that when their time comes you may remember I told them to you. I didn't tell you these things from the beginning, because I was with you.
>
> 5 "But now I am going away to Him who sent Me, and not one of you asks Me, 'Where are You going? ' 6 Yet, because I have spoken these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. 7 Nevertheless, I am telling you the truth. It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I don't go away the Counselor will not come to you. If I go, I will send Him to you. 8 When He comes, He will convict the world about sin, righteousness, and judgment: 9 About sin, because they do not believe in Me; 10 about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will no longer see Me; 11 and about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.
>
> 12 "I still have many things to tell you, but you can't bear them now. 13 When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth. For He will not speak on His own, but He will speak whatever He hears. He will also declare to you what is to come. 14 He will glorify Me, because He will take from what is Mine and declare it to you. 15 Everything the Father has is Mine. This is why I told you that He takes from what is Mine and will declare it to you.

Not one of you asks Me, "Where are You going?" (16:5): There is an apparent contradiction here between Jesus' claim that no one asked him, "Where are You

going?" and John 14:5 ("Lord," Thomas said, "we don't know where You're going. How can we know the way?"). Some have argued that the contradiction is real and may be the result of an author who held to his source material with such deference that he did not resolve the conflict. However, it is unlikely that John, an eyewitness, would have been so slavishly tied to sources (to whatever extent he used them) as not to smooth out problems, especially since the Gospel is widely recognized as having a common, unified style throughout.

Several proposals have aimed to explain the apparent contradiction. Some have argued that Jesus is not saying the disciples have never asked such a question but rather they have not *now*, in the present, asked him where he was going. Others have argued that the disciples knew where Jesus was going, and that he was rebuking them for their excessive sorrow.

Carson contends that the difficulty stems from not being sensitive to the literary nuances of the text. He argues that in the context of 14:5, it is unclear whether Thomas really is asking the question that is formally represented by his words. The disciples had been "self-absorbed in their own loss" and did not have a category for a suffering Messiah (Carson 1991, 532). Thus, while they were asking a lot of questions, it is possible that they did so more out of protest or self-pity than a genuine desire to understand. Carson offers the following analogy: "A little boy, disappointed that his father is suddenly called away for an emergency meeting when both the boy and his Dad had expected to go fishing together, says, 'Aw, Dad, where are you going?' but cares nothing at all to learn the destination. The question is a protest; the unspoken question is 'Why are you leaving me?'" (1991, 533).

I still have many things to tell you, but you can't bear them now (16:12): In 15:15, Jesus tells his followers, "I have made known to you everything I have heard from My Father." If Jesus has made everything known to the disciples (15:15), how can he say at the same time that he still has "many things to tell" them (16:12)? The alleged problem is resolved once we read these two statements in view of each other. In the context of 15:15, Jesus is explaining that he no longer calls the disciples servants; he now calls them friends. Whereas servants or slaves are simply told what to do, friends are given more information, which enables them to attain a fuller understanding in their obedience (Carson 1991, 523). With the exception of the things that they cannot understand (16:12), Jesus has told his "friends" all the things that he has heard from the Father (15:15; cf. 1:18; 5:19–20).

23 In that day you will not ask Me anything.

"I assure you: Anything you ask the Father in My name, He will give you. 24 Until now you have asked for nothing in My name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.

25 "I have spoken these things to you in figures of speech. A time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. 26 In that day you will ask in My name. I am not telling you that I will make requests to the Father on your behalf. 27 For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came from God. ' 28 I came from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I am leaving the world and going to the Father."

29 "Ah! " His disciples said. "Now You're speaking plainly and not using any figurative language. 30 Now we know that You know everything and don't need anyone to question You. By this we believe that You came from God."

Anything you ask the Father in My name, He will give you (16:23): On the question about whether this is a blanket promise, see comments on 14:14.

Until now you have asked for nothing in My name (16:24): It is not that the disciples failed to ask Jesus for things before but that they did not ask the Father for things *in Jesus' name*. This new type of "asking" will be the mark of the new age inaugurated by Jesus' death and resurrection on behalf of believers and has already been sounded in John 15 (e.g., 15:7, 11, 16). Believing prayer rooted in submission to Jesus' word will lead to complete joy for Jesus' disciples.

Now You're speaking plainly and not using any figurative language (16:29): Despite their confidence, the disciples were wrong. Jesus is not speaking with any more clarity here than he did on previous occasions. What is more, Jesus' followers are no closer to understanding than before. Apparently, the disciples think that the promise of 16:23a has already been fulfilled, failing to realize that "in that day" points to the time subsequent to Jesus' resurrection.

The disciples' misunderstanding is evident by Jesus' mild rebuke, "Do you now believe?" (16:31). As in 13:38, Jesus' response apes the wording of the disciples' comment, revealing both irony and exasperation (with *arti*, corresponding to *nun*, in 16:29–30; see Ridderbos 1997, 544n205). The disciples' persistent lack of understanding becomes evident when they scatter at Jesus' arrest.

Jesus spoke these things, looked up to heaven, and said:

Father,
the hour has come.
Glorify Your Son
so that the Son may glorify You,
2 for You gave Him authority
over all flesh; ’
so He may give eternal life
to all You have given Him.
3 This is eternal life:
that they may know You, the only true God,
and the One You have sent — Jesus Christ.
4 I have glorified You on the earth
by completing the work You gave Me to do.
5 Now, Father, glorify Me in Your presence
with that glory I had with You
before the world existed.
6 I have revealed Your name
to the men You gave Me from the world.
They were Yours, You gave them to Me,
and they have kept Your word.
7 Now they know that all things
You have given to Me are from You,
8 because the words that You gave Me,
I have given them.
They have received them
and have known for certain
that I came from You.
They have believed that You sent Me.
9 I pray for them.
I am not praying for the world
but for those You have given Me,
because they are Yours.
10 Everything I have is Yours,
and everything You have is Mine,
and I have been glorified in them.
11 I am no longer in the world,
but they are in the world,
and I am coming to You.
Holy Father,
protect them by Your name
that You have given Me,
so that they may be one as We are one.
12 While I was with them,
I was protecting them by Your name
that You have given Me.
I guarded them and not one of them is lost,

except the son of destruction,
so that the Scripture may be fulfilled.
13 Now I am coming to You,
and I speak these things in the world
so that they may have My joy completed in them.
14 I have given them Your word.
The world hated them
because they are not of the world,
as I am not of the world.
15 I am not praying
that You take them out of the world
but that You protect them from the evil one.
16 They are not of the world,
as I am not of the world.
17 Sanctify ’ them by the truth;
Your word is truth.
18 As You sent Me into the world,
I also have sent them into the world.
19 I sanctify Myself for them,
so they also may be sanctified by the truth.
20 I pray not only for these,
but also for those who believe in Me
through their message.
21 May they all be one,
as You, Father, are in Me and I am in You.
May they also be one in Us,
so the world may believe You sent Me.
22 I have given them the glory You have given Me.
May they be one as We are one.
23 I am in them and You are in Me.
May they be made completely one,
so the world may know You have sent Me
and have loved them as You have loved Me.
24 Father,
I desire those You have given Me
to be with Me where I am.
Then they will see My glory,
which You have given Me
because You loved Me before the world’s foundation.
25 Righteous Father!
The world has not known You.
However, I have known You,
and these have known that You sent Me.
26 I made Your name known to them
and will make it known,

so the love You have loved Me with
may be in them and I may be in them.

***Overview of Jesus' prayer* (17:1–26):** The length of this prayer has caused some to dispute its authenticity based on the unlikelihood that it was copied down word for word or could have been remembered well enough by the disciples. If one adopts an anti-supernatural worldview, this reasoning is perhaps convincing. Yet if one is open to the possibility that Jesus actually gave the disciples the Holy Spirit in order to remember his words (14:26), the length of the prayer poses no problem.

Moreover, this critique loses its force when a modern expectation for reporting accuracy is replaced with what was the norm in the first century. Jesus' teachings were heard and recorded in the context of the first-century Jewish culture in which he lived. The Gospel authors, in line with other first-century historiography, had the freedom to summarize and explain a person's words. Though this might seem strange in a culture with copy machines, voice recorders, and the ability to "copy and paste," this was standard in ancient historiography (see at 3:3–7; cf. Bock 1995, 74–99).

This is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and the One You have sent—Jesus Christ (17:3): Many religions relate life after death to the knowledge of God or of gods. Yet the Bible is distinct in that "to know" God does not refer merely to cognitive knowledge (the Greek conception); it means living in fellowship with God. Of course, God can also be known to a limited extent through creation (Rom 1:18–25), but ultimately knowledge of God is contingent upon salvation. Moreover, here Jesus is presented as the sole authorized representative of this one true God. He is the God-sent Messiah, God's Anointed One, the Christ. Just as there is only one true God, there is only one way to the Father: Jesus Christ (14:6; Carson 1991, 556; Morris 1995, 638).

The expression "Jesus Christ" is used in this Gospel only here and in 1:17 (see also 1 John 4:2). It may strike the modern reader as unlikely that Jesus in a third-person reference would call himself "Jesus Christ." However, self-reference in the third person was common in antiquity (cf. 21:24; see Jackson 1999, esp. 24–31). It also might reveal hindsight. For more on the use of Jesus' exact words versus exact voice, see comments at 3:3–7.

***Does* "son of destruction" *indicate Judas was predestined to betray Jesus?* (17:12):** Judas's actions raise a series of questions: In what sense did Judas fulfill the OT Scriptures? What is the relationship between Judas's responsibility

and God's sovereignty? Did Judas lose his salvation? First, in what sense did Judas fulfill the OT Scriptures? The NT uses the OT in a variety of ways. Sometimes the OT is fulfilled in what has traditionally been understood as straightforward promise-fulfillment. Yet, often NT passages refer to the fulfillment of a previous pattern of people, events, or institutions. This is called typological fulfillment and appears to be how John is using the OT in this case. The OT passage in mind is probably Psalm 41:9 (applied to Judas in John 13:18). Other Scriptures fulfilled through Judas are Psalms 69:25 and 109:8 (cited in Acts 1:20). "Destruction" (*apōleia*) commonly refers in the NT to final condemnation; similarly, "son of destruction" occurs in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, there with reference to "the man of lawlessness," the antichrist. This suggests that "son of destruction" labels Judas Iscariot as part of a typology of evil personages seeking to thwart God's sovereign purposes across the sweep of salvation history (cf. 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; see Carson 1991, 563; Borchert 2002, 199).

Second, what is the relationship between Judas's responsibility and God's sovereignty? This is an example of John's consistent presentation of compatibility between God's sovereignty and human responsibility (Carson 1981). Judas's betrayal is said to have occurred "so that the Scripture may be fulfilled." However, this does not alter the fact that Judas made his decision as a responsible agent and that he will be held accountable and judged for his evil act (see Mark 14:21 = Matt 26:24; so, rightly, Calvin 1961:143). Yet God, for his part, sovereignly overrode Judas's evil designs to bring about his own good purposes (cf. Gen 50:20; see Morris 1995, 645; see also comments on 12:37–40).

Did Judas lose his salvation? No, he did not. Judas was part of a unique time in salvation history. Though Jesus was instituting the new covenant, the full benefits of the NT, in particular, the gift the Holy Spirit, as a deposit guaranteeing salvation (Eph 1:14), did not yet dwell within his disciples. Therefore, one should not look back on those who followed Jesus during his earthly ministry and consider them "disciples" in the full new covenant sense until after the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1–4). Due to the era of salvation history of which he was a part, Judas, like Jesus' other followers, did not possess the indwelling Holy Spirit, and so was not regenerate. Therefore, he could not lose what he never had in the first place (the Holy Spirit), and as Paul says in Romans 8:9b, "But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." What is more, Judas never seems to have fully embraced the

true identity of Jesus or placed his trust wholeheartedly in him. On the other hand, Judas is somewhat analogous to those who seemed to be part of the early church but due to their later defection were found not to have actually ever been true believers (1 John 2:19).

> After Jesus had said these things, He went out with His disciples across the Kidron Valley, where there was a garden, and He and His disciples went into it. 2 Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with His disciples. 3 So Judas took a company of soldiers and some temple police from the chief priests and the Pharisees and came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons.
>
> 4 Then Jesus, knowing everything that was about to happen to Him, went out and said to them, "Who is it you're looking for? "
>
> 5 "Jesus the Nazarene," they answered.
>
> "I am He," ' Jesus told them.
>
> Judas, who betrayed Him, was also standing with them. 6 When He told them, "I am He," they stepped back and fell to the ground.

***Does* "company of soldiers" *indicate that Romans were involved in Jesus' arrest?* (18:3):** Only John notes that Romans soldiers were also involved in the arrest of Jesus. The Greek *speira* indicates that the detachment of soldiers consisted of a cohort of Roman soldiers. A full cohort was led by a "chiliarch" (lit "leader of a thousand," rendered "tribune" or "commander") and was comprised of 1,000 men, though in practice it often numbered only 600. The noun *speira* here could refer to a smaller group, since it is possible that not the entire cohort was sent out. Nevertheless, the Romans could use surprisingly large numbers of soldiers even in dealing with a single person (such as the 470 soldiers protecting Paul in Acts 23:23), especially when they feared a riot. Roman troops were stationed in Caesarea, but during festivals they gathered northwest of the temple by the fortress of Antonia in order to keep a close watch on the large crowds and to suppress quickly any potential mob violence.

Then Jesus . . . said to them, "Who is it you're looking for?" (18:4): All the Gospels indicate that Jesus knows what will happen to him. John, in particular, has emphasized Jesus' supernatural knowledge throughout his Gospel (see esp. 13:1, 3), so that Jesus' knowing beforehand "everything that was about to happen to Him" comes as no surprise to the reader. Nevertheless, although Jesus knows exactly what is about to take place, he asks the question: "Who is it you're looking for?" It is not abnormal for Jesus or God the Father (e.g., Genesis

3) to ask questions even though they are aware of the answers. The asking is a means of being in relation to humans.

They stepped back and fell to the ground (18:6): Jesus' "I am He" response in verse 6 is one in a series of "I am" statements (cf. 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19) denoting a high Christology. In view of the response ("they stepped back and fell to the ground"), it is likely that Jesus is lodging another claim to divinity in this verse. It is possible that the soldiers' falling to the ground could have been in response to such a bold claim. Carson explains, "If they have been awed by Jesus before, if they have been dumbfounded by his teaching, his authority, his directness in the full light of day in the precincts of the temple where they most feel at home, it is not hard to believe that they are staggered by his open self-disclosure on a sloping mountainside in the middle of the night—the more so if some of them hear the overtones of God's self-disclosure in the prophecy of Isaiah" (Carson 1991, 578). Also, their falling back could have been the result of an overwhelming power felt in the presence of Jesus after he lodged his claim to divinity, as falling to the ground was regularly a reaction to divine revelation (e.g, Num 22:31; 2 Chr 5:14; Ezek 44:4).

> 12 Then the company of soldiers, the commander, and the Jewish temple police arrested Jesus
> and tied Him up. 13 First they led Him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who
> was high priest that year. 14 Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was
> advantageous that one man should die for the people.

First they led Him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year (18:13): Jesus' preliminary hearing before Annas is recorded only in John. There is no reason to deem it unreliable simply because the other Gospels did not record it. Moreover, this verse is completely understandable in view of the historical situation. Annas had previously been the high priest from AD 6 until 15 when Pilate's predecessor, Valerius Gratus, deposed him. Although no longer formally in office, Annas continued to wield immense influence in Jesus' day. In fact, many considered him to be the "true" high priest (cf. the likely reference to him as "high priest" in 18:19). The appropriateness of such a designation even after such an official was removed from office is confirmed by both the Mishnah (*m. Horayot* 3.1–2, 4) and by Josephus (*Jewish War* 2.12.6 §243; cf. 4.3.7–9 §§151–60). In addition, Annas was the patriarch of a high priestly family that saw no fewer than five of Annas's

sons, as well as Caiaphas his son-in-law, hold the office at one time or another. There may even have been an element of defiance in the Jewish practice of continuing to call previous high priests by that name, challenging the Roman right to depose officials whose tenure was meant to be for life according to Mosaic legislation (cf. Num 35:25). Luke reinforces this view when he places the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry "during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas" (Luke 3:2; cf. Acts 4:6). Hence, Jesus was apparently brought to Annas first due to Annas's continuing power and stature. The absence of witnesses suggests that this hearing was informal. In the ensuing narrative, John alternates between Jesus' hearing before Annas (18:12–14, 19–24) and Peter's denials (18:15–18, 25–27).

> 15 Meanwhile, Simon Peter was following Jesus, as was another disciple. That disciple was an acquaintance of the high priest; so he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard. 16 But Peter remained standing outside by the door. So the other disciple, the one known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the girl who was the doorkeeper and brought Peter in.
>
> 17 Then the slave girl who was the doorkeeper said to Peter, "You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you? "
>
> "I am not! " he said. 18 Now the slaves and the temple police had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold. They were standing there warming themselves, and Peter was standing with them, warming himself.
>
> 25 Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said to him, "You aren't one of His disciples too, are you? "
>
> He denied it and said, "I am not! "
>
> 26 One of the high priest's slaves, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, said, "Didn't I see you with Him in the garden? "
>
> 27 Peter then denied it again. Immediately a rooster crowed.

***Peter denies Jesus* (18:15–18, 25–27):** Some have cited this passage as a case where John and the Synoptics contradict each other. However, a close comparison of the parallel passages demonstrates that it is not necessary to reach such a negative conclusion. Matthew, Mark, and Luke (Matt 26:69–75; Mark 14:66–72; Luke 22:54–62) list the denials before a servant girl in the courtyard (apparently, according to Luke, the scene took place near a fire); then another girl by the gateway (Luke does not specify the person or location); and finally before a group of onlookers in the court (Luke only mentions a person, not the group). In John, the three denials take place in response to a servant girl at a door; a group of people; and the high priest's servant, a relative of Malchus. In

comparing John and the Synoptics, there is no reason to find contradictions between a group leveling an accusation and an individual person doing so, as an author has the prerogative to focus on an individual within a group without rendering his account inaccurate historically. Regarding the location of the first two denials, Carson has suggested that the "order of the first two denials may be reversed between John and the Synoptics, but which Gospel has the historical order cannot easily be determined. John has the 'girl at the gate' asking the first question and implies, but does not state, that this occurs on Peter's way in. Matthew and Mark have Jesus move back out to the gate as the setting for their second denial. Several possibilities come to mind, but no adequate way of testing them" (2010, 623).

> 19 The high priest questioned Jesus about His disciples and about His teaching.
>
> 20 "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus answered him. "I have always taught in the synagogue and in the temple complex, where all the Jews congregate, and I haven't spoken anything in secret. 21 Why do you question Me? Question those who heard what I told them. Look, they know what I said."
>
> 22 When He had said these things, one of the temple police standing by slapped Jesus, saying, "Is this the way you answer the high priest? "
>
> 23 "If I have spoken wrongly," Jesus answered him, "give evidence about the wrong; but if rightly, why do you hit Me? "
>
> 24 Then Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

I have spoken openly to the world . . . I haven't spoken anything in secret (18:20): The point of Jesus' reference to the public nature of his instruction seems to be that the Jewish authorities would have been more than able to gather eyewitness testimony from those who had heard Jesus teach. Jesus was not seeking to keep his message secret but rather taught publicly. While he did at times teach his disciples privately, this was in order to explain further or to build upon what he had previously spoken in public.

In contrast to religions that were founded on claims to private, non-verifiable revelations from God (such as Islam and Mormonism), Christianity originated in claims that were open to verification by eyewitnesses. Still today, religions or cults are practiced that require a person to accept certain initiation rites before they can receive the complete teachings of the group. This kind of secrecy stands in contrast to the teachings of Jesus and the origins of Christianity.

By responding to Pilate's questions, Jesus does not contradict Isaiah 53:7: "He

was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth. Like a lamb led to the slaughter and like a sheep silent before her shearers, He did not open His mouth." Jesus was not refuting his accusers in replying to Pilate's questions. When he was accused by the chief priest at his Jewish trial (Matt 27:12–14; Mark 15:1–4), Jesus did remain silent in fulfillment of Isaiah 53:7.

28 Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning.
They did not enter the headquarters themselves; otherwise they would be defiled and unable to
eat the Passover.
29 Then Pilate came out to them and said, "What charge do you bring against this man? "
30 They answered him, "If this man weren't a criminal, we wouldn't have handed Him over to
you."
31 So Pilate told them, "Take Him yourselves and judge Him according to your law."
"It's not legal for us to put anyone to death," the Jews declared. 32 They said this so that Jesus'
words might be fulfilled signifying what kind of death He was going to die.
33 Then Pilate went back into the headquarters, summoned Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You
the King of the Jews? "
34 Jesus answered, "Are you asking this on your own, or have others told you about Me? "
35 "I'm not a Jew, am I? " Pilate replied. "Your own nation and the chief priests handed You
over to me. What have You done? "
36 "My kingdom is not of this world," said Jesus. "If My kingdom were of this world, My
servants ' would fight, so that I wouldn't be handed over to the Jews. As it is, My kingdom does
not have its origin here." '
37 "You are a king then? " Pilate asked.
"You say that I'm a king," Jesus replied. "I was born for this, and I have come into the world
for this: to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice."
38 "What is truth? " said Pilate.
After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no grounds for
charging Him.

They did not enter the headquarters themselves; otherwise they would be defiled and unable to eat the Passover (18:28): The current passage indicates that the Jews did not enter the palace in order to avoid ceremonial uncleanness so that they could eat the Passover. The question of how to understand the Synoptic portrayal of Jesus eating the Passover meal and then being crucified the next day has already been discussed above (see comments on 13:2). It was suggested that the most probable solution is that John and the Synoptics present Jesus as having eaten a final meal with his disciples, a Passover meal, on Thursday night, with the crucifixion having taken place on Friday afternoon. If

so, the present reference is not to the Passover in a narrow sense but more broadly to the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which included the Passover and in its entirety lasted seven days (note Luke 22:1: “the Festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called Passover”), and in particular to the feast-offering (*hagigah*), which was brought on the morning of the first day of the festival (cf. Num 28:18–19). “Eat the Passover” probably simply means “celebrate the feast” (cf. 2 Chr 30:21).

Evangelical scholars differ in their assessment of the legitimacy of a biblical author’s transposition of a given account from its actual historical setting to a different point in his narrative. If a topical rather than chronological arrangement is indicated in some way in the narrative, this would seem to be unobjectionable, since inerrancy is measured by authorial intention as reflected in the text. Problems arise, however, where temporal markers suggest a certain historical point in time in a case where another Scripture passage specifies a different location in time. In such instances (e.g., the temple cleansing, on which see comments on 2:13–22 above), it seems important to take the time indicators seriously and to respect the historical accuracy of the narrative in its purported setting rather than to resort to the theory that the Evangelist transposed his account of a given event for alleged theological reasons. (See further comments at Mark 14:12 and Luke 22:7.)

“It’s not legal for us to put anyone to death,” the Jews declared (18:31): There are several instances where the Jewish authorities are involved in executions. For instance, one thinks of the stonings of Stephen (Acts 7) and of James the half-brother of Jesus in AD 62 (Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.9.1 §200), as well as the burning of a priest’s daughter accused of committing adultery (*m. Sanhedrin* 7.2), all of which involved lynch law or breaches of authority. Nevertheless, the Sanhedrin did not legally have the power of capital punishment (Barrett 1978, 533–35; Morris 1995, 695–97; Hengel 1999, 330; Winter 1974). Josephus reports, “The territory of Archelaus [AD 6] was not reduced to a province, and Coponius, a Roman of the equestrian order, was sent out as procurator, entrusted by Augustus with full powers, including the infliction of capital punishment” (*Jewish War* 2.2.4 §117). Josephus also tells of a case where the high priest had sentenced certain people to death by stoning, a sentence that was protested by some, apparently for the reason that the Sanhedrin did not have the authority to impose the death penalty during Roman rule in Judea. Sure enough, the high priest was ousted for his presumption (*Antiquities* 20.9.1§§ 197–203). This is consistent with the Talmudic literature, which acknowledges

that the Jews had lost this power "forty years" before the destruction of Jerusalem (*m. Sanhedrin* 1:1; 7:2).

"My kingdom is not of this world," said Jesus (18:36): Earlier in John, Jesus had rejected people's efforts to make him king (6:15). In John, Jesus regularly renounces political aspirations, most notably in the present reference. However, even though Jesus disavows a political agenda, he does not deny being a king. If he did, he would fail to testify to the truth. What is more, Jesus is not implying that his kingdom is inactive or unrelated to this world (cf. Beasley-Murray 1989, 331). John affirms that the present world will be changed by the power of Jesus' Kingdom (e.g., 1 John 5:4). Hence, John is not in contradiction with passages such as Luke 1:32–33 that indicate that Jesus' kingdom will have an earthly dimension. Nor is John in conflict with OT passages that foretell that the Messiah's kingdom will be earthly (e.g., Ps 72:8; Dan 7:14, 27; Zech 9:10). The point in the present passage is rather that the battle for Jesus' kind of kingdom is not fought with earthly armies (cf. the armed soldiers' arrest of Jesus and Peter's brief resistance in 18:1–11, who is promptly rebuked by Jesus).

> 39 You have a custom that I release one prisoner to you at the Passover. So, do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews? "
>
> 40 They shouted back, "Not this man, but Barabbas! " Now Barabbas was a revolutionary.

You have a custom that I release one prisoner to you at the Passover (18:39): The custom of releasing one prisoner at Passover may go back to Hasmonean times and then continued to be practiced by the Romans after taking over Palestine (see Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.9.3 §209; Livy, *Roman History* 5.13; *b. Pesahim* 91a). The release probably served as a gesture of goodwill designed to lessen political conflict. One mishnaic passage (*m. Pesahim* 8.6) suggests that such releases were common enough to warrant legislation. Roman law provided for two kinds of amnesty: pardoning a condemned criminal (*indulgentia*) and acquitting someone prior to the verdict (*abolitio*). In Jesus' case, the latter would have been in view (Keener 1993, 309). (See further comments at Matt 27:15, Mark 15:6, and Luke 23:17.)

> Then Pilate took Jesus and had Him flogged. 2 The soldiers also twisted together a crown of thorns, put it on His head, and threw a purple robe around Him. 3 And they repeatedly came up

to Him and said, “Hail, King of the Jews! ” and were slapping His face.

4 Pilate went outside again and said to them, “Look, I’m bringing Him outside to you to let you know I find no grounds for charging Him.”

Pilate took Jesus and had Him flogged (19:1): It seems odd that even though Pilate affirmed that Jesus was innocent (18:38), he had him flogged (*emastigōsen*). John’s account parallels Luke 23:13–16 where Pilate announces, “I have found no grounds to charge this man,” but then concludes, “Therefore, I will have Him whipped and then release Him.” A related question arises when Mark 15:15 states that Jesus was flogged (*phragellōsas*) after the capital sentence was given. How does the flogging recorded in Mark 15:15 (cf. Matt 27:26) relate to the one recorded in John (see also Luke)?

There were three forms of flogging administered by the Romans in the first-century: (1) the *fustigatio*, the least severe beating given for smaller offenses such as hooliganism; (2) the *flagellatio*, a more brutal flogging to which criminals were subjected whose offenses were more serious; and (3) the *verberatio*, the most terrible form of this punishment, regularly associated with other reprisals such as crucifixion. With the *verberatio*, the criminal was tied to a post unclothed and beaten by several torturers for an extended period of time. Many times the victim died during the flogging.

In John, the flogging in view is probably the least severe form, the *fustigatio*, which was intended in part to appease the Jews and in part to teach Jesus a lesson. After the sentence of crucifixion, Jesus was scourged again, as recounted in Mark (and Matthew), this time in the most severe form, the *verberatio*. This explains why Jesus was too weak to carry his own cross very far.

***The soldiers mock Jesus* (19:2–3):** The soldiers’ greeting mimics the “Ave Caesar” extended to the Roman emperor. Their mocking of Jesus as king seems to copy scenes frequently featured on stage and in Roman circuses (Winter 1974, 148–49). The game of “mock king,” scratchings of which are preserved on the stone pavement of the fortress of Antonia, was played by soldiers during the Roman Saturnalia. If Mark and John are indeed talking about two different floggings, it appears that they played this game during both floggings. John likely includes this “royal” mockery to underscore the irony: Jesus really is the king of Israel. (See further comments at Matt 27:27–31 and Mark 15:17.)

5 Then Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Here is the man! ”

6 When the chief priests and the temple police saw Him, they shouted, “Crucify! Crucify! ”
Pilate responded, “Take Him and crucify Him yourselves, for I find no grounds for charging Him.”
7 “We have a law,” the Jews replied to him, “and according to that law He must die, because He made Himself the Son of God.”
8 When Pilate heard this statement, he was more afraid than ever. 9 He went back into the headquarters and asked Jesus, “Where are You from? ” But Jesus did not give him an answer.
10 So Pilate said to Him, “You’re not talking to me? Don’t You know that I have the authority to release You and the authority to crucify You? ”
11 “You would have no authority over Me at all,” Jesus answered him, “if it hadn’t been given you from above. This is why the one who handed Me over to you has the greater sin.”
12 From that moment Pilate made every effort to release Him. But the Jews shouted, “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend. Anyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar! ”
13 When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside. He sat down on the judge’s bench in a place called the Stone Pavement (but in Hebrew *Gabbatha*). 14 It was the preparation day for the Passover, and it was about six in the morning. Then he told the Jews, “Here is your king! ”
15 But they shouted, “Take Him away! Take Him away! Crucify Him! ”
Pilate said to them, “Should I crucify your king? ”
“We have no king but Caesar! ” the chief priests answered.
16 So then, because of them, he handed Him over to be crucified.
Therefore they took Jesus away.

Jesus did not give him an answer (19:9): There are probably several reasons why Jesus gave Pilate no answer. He and Pilate occupied entirely different worlds, and no answer, short or long, would have been sufficient to adequately address Pilate’s question (Carson 1991, 600). Nicodemus and the Jewish authorities had not understood where Jesus had come from; it would be naïve to expect this Roman governor to grasp his true origin. The Greco-Roman pantheon was full of gods having sex with women resulting in human offspring; someone who had embraced these myths would have grave difficulty comprehending Jesus’ relationship with his Father. Moreover, Jesus’ silence recalls the suffering Servant of Isaiah (53:7; cf. 1 Pet 2:22–23).

In response to Jesus’ silence, Pilate reminds him that he has the authority to release him. Jesus’ response is “typical of biblical compatibilism, even the worst evil cannot escape the outer boundaries of God’s sovereignty—yet God’s sovereignty never mitigates the responsibility and guilt of moral agents who operate under divine sovereignty, while their voluntary decisions and their evil rebellion never render God utterly contingent” (Carson 1991, 600). Pilate finds himself in charge ultimately because of God’s sovereign action, and yet he is

responsible for failing to act in accordance with truth and justice (for a thorough exploration, see Köstenberger 2005, 19–51).

When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside (19:13): Apparently, Pilate was not convinced of Jesus' guilt (cf. 18:38; 19:4, 6). Perhaps also owing to his superstitious nature (19:8) and because he was impressed by Jesus' courage in the face of death (considered virtuous in the Greco-Roman world), he was reluctant to have Jesus crucified. Yet as at other instances, Pilate, despite his boast to Jesus that he had power to release and power to crucify (19:10; see Brown 1970, 894), eventually yielded to Jewish demands (see Philo, *Gaius* 38 §§301–2).

Critics argue that Pilate's fear of the Jews cannot be reconciled with historical documents, which indicate that Pilate hated the Jews and was recalled by Rome because his prejudice and strained relations weakened his effectiveness as a leader. It is more likely that Pilate, knowing the Jews had previously conveyed their displeasure with his leadership to the emperor and recognizing that Tiberius was known to act decisively when suspicions were cast on the conduct or loyalty of his subordinates, had good reason to fear the Jews. By the time of Vespasian (AD 69–71), "friend of Caesar" had virtually become an official title; even in Jesus' day, the term may have had semi-technical force. It is possible that Pilate had acquired "friend of Caesar" status through his mentor Sejanus. But since Sejanus recently had fallen from grace (executed October 18, AD 31), Pilate would have ample reason to be concerned that his favored status with the emperor likewise would be removed. In fact, he was recalled three years subsequent to Jesus' crucifixion in AD 36.

It was the preparation day for the Passover (19:14): Some argue that *paraskeuē* (Day of Preparation) refers to the day preceding Passover, that is, the day on which people made preparations for Passover (in the present case, Thursday morning). If so, it would seem that in John Jesus is sent to be executed at the time at which Passover lambs are slaughtered in the temple. The Synoptic Gospels, however, portray Jesus and his disciples as celebrating the Passover on the night prior to the crucifixion. Moreover, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Josephus all use *paraskeuē* to refer to the day preceding the Sabbath. The term therefore should be taken to refer to the day of preparation *for the Sabbath* (i.e., Friday).

If this is accurate, then *tou pascha* means not "of the Passover," but "of Passover *week*." Indeed, "Passover" may refer to (the day of) the actual Passover meal or, as in the present case, the entire Passover week, including Passover day

as well as the associated Feast of Unleavened Bread. “Day of Preparation of Passover week” is therefore best taken to refer to the day of preparation for the Sabbath (i.e., Friday) of Passover week (so rightly Carson 1991, 603–4). Thus all four Gospels agree that Jesus’ last supper was a Passover meal eaten on Thursday evening (by Jewish reckoning, the onset of Friday; see comments on 13:2 and 18:28 concerning the chronological problems associated with reconciling John’s and the Synoptics’ portrayal of the crucifixion; see also the detailed study by Köstenberger 2010, 6–30).

It was about six in the morning (19:14): The present passage raises at least two issues. The first is bound up with the question of how the ancients reckoned time. The Jews started counting at sunset (i.e., 6 a.m.), while the Romans started at midnight. Thus “sixth hour” by Jewish reckoning would be noon, while by Roman reckoning it would be 6 a.m. Depending on their judgment as to whether John used the Jewish method (as did the Synoptics) or the Roman way of timekeeping, the existing versions differ in their translation of the phrase “the sixth hour” in the present passage. Some Bible translations simply provide a literal translation: “the sixth hour” (KJV, NKJV, ESV; though see ESV note: “about noon”). Others have “six in the morning” (HCSB; cf. NASB note: “Perhaps 6 a.m.”; Roman reckoning). This was the view of A. T. Robertson (1950, 284–87) and B. F. Westcott (1958, 282). Yet other translations render the phrase “about noon” (NIV, NLT, NRSV; cf. ESV note; Jewish reckoning). On balance, it seems more likely that all four Gospels used the Jewish method of reckoning time, a view favored by a majority of commentators. If so, the phrase translated “about six in the morning” in the HCSB would actually mean “about noon” (as translated in the NIV, NLT, NRSV; assumed in the following paragraph).

The second question has to do with apparently contradictory indications as to the time of Jesus’ trial before Pilate and the specificity of biblical time references in general. In the present case, did Jesus stand trial before Pilate at the third (Mark 15:25) or the sixth hour (John 19:14)? Since people related the estimated time to the closest three-hour segment, any time between 9:00 a.m. and noon may have led one person to say that an event occurred at the third (9:00 a.m.) or the sixth hour (noon). Accordingly, Blomberg explains, “When one recognizes that the widespread lack of precise timekeeping devices in the ancient world led to the practice of dividing the day into fourths so that people often did not worry about speaking any more specifically than this, it becomes plausible to interpret Mark’s ‘third hour’ to mean any time between 9 am and noon. John’s ‘about the

sixth hour' would also then refer to sometime before midday, perhaps within an hour or so" (2007, 228). In the context of his larger narrative, Mark's concern likely was to provide the setting for the three hours of darkness (15:25, 33), while John seeks to stress the length of the proceedings, starting in the "early morning" (18:28) before Pilate. (See further comments at Mark 15:25.)

"We have no king but Caesar!" the chief priests answered (19:15): Critics say this verse falsely portrays the Jews as being devoted to Roman rule, which is historically inaccurate. However, this fails to understand the Jewish attitude and intention in the narrow context represented in these verses. By professing to acknowledge Caesar alone as their king, the Jews play politics to get what they want. In other words, the Jewish leaders betray their entire national heritage, as well as deny their own messianic expectations based on the promises of Scripture, in order to have Jesus killed. This, then, is John's point, especially for his first Jewish readers: the Jewish rejection of the Messiah involved religious compromise and a failure to worship God. Yet the Jews spoke better than they knew. For in truth, the Jews joined the world in its rejection of the God-sent Messiah, thus failing to give homage to God and showing that they had, in fact, no king but Caesar (Morris 1995, 710).

> 17 Carrying His own cross, He went out to what is called Skull Place, which in Hebrew is
> called *Golgotha*. 18 There they crucified Him and two others with Him, one on either side, with
> Jesus in the middle. 19 Pilate also had a sign lettered and put on the cross. The inscription was:
>
> JESUS THE NAZARENE
> THE KING OF THE JEWS.
>
> 20 Many of the Jews read this sign, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the
> city, and it was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. 21 So the chief priests of the Jews said to
> Pilate, "Don't write, 'The King of the Jews,' but that He said, 'I am the King of the Jews.' "
> 22 Pilate replied, "What I have written, I have written."
> 23 When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took His clothes and divided them into four parts, a
> part for each soldier. They also took the tunic, which was seamless, woven in one piece from
> the top. 24 So they said to one another, "Let's not tear it, but cast lots for it, to see who gets it."
> They did this to fulfill the Scripture that says: **They divided My clothes among themselves,**
> **and they cast lots for My clothing.** And this is what the soldiers did.

Carrying His own cross (19:17): According to the Synoptics, Simon of Cyrene aided Jesus in carrying the cross (Matt 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26). However, John here notes that Jesus carried his own cross. Only an

unsympathetic reading necessitates an actual contradiction between the Synoptics and John. It is likely that John means nothing more than that Jesus carried the cross himself when he "went out" to the site of crucifixion. After carrying the cross as far as the city gate, Jesus presumably collapsed, weakened by loss of blood, and the soldiers compelled Simon who, according to Mark, was "coming in from the country." John's lack of reference to Simon of Cyrene may be due to the fact that mention of Simon would have distracted from John's central themes. One such emphasis is John's consistent portrayal of Jesus as in charge of events throughout the Passion Narrative (e.g., 18:4; cf. 13:1–3).

He went out to what is called Skull Place, which in Hebrew is called *Golgotha* (19:17): The wording of the phrase "Skull Place" (Golgotha in Hebrew or Aramaic) recalls the earlier description of "a place called the Stone Pavement" (Gabbatha in Hebrew or Aramaic) in 19:13. The Greek term "Golgotha" transliterates the Aramaic expression for "skull." The Latin equivalent (found in the Vulgate version of all four Gospels) is "Calvary." The location may have been given its name owing to its skull-like appearance. A site just outside Gennath Gate, near the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, is the most likely option.

JESUS THE NAZARENE THE KING OF THE JEWS (19:19): The signs in the other Gospels make similar statements: "THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS" (Matt 27:37); "THE KING OF THE JEWS" (Mark 15:26); "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS" (Luke 23:38). The small differences could be due to the fact that the sign was possibly written in three different languages (Aramaic, Latin, and Greek). Aramaic was the most widely understood language in use in Judea; Latin was the official language of the Roman occupying force; and Greek was the "international language" of the empire, understood by most Diaspora Jews as well as Gentiles. Other sources have noted this type of trilingual postings at crucifixions (Bauer 1933:173) designed to issue a stern warning to the general population, no matter their language, to avoid committing serious crimes. (See further comments at Matt 27:37, Mark 15:26, and Luke 23:38.)

Let's not tear it, but cast lots for it, to see who gets it (19:24): John recounts that the soldiers divided Jesus' "clothes" (*himatia*; the form is plural) into four parts. Some have understood *himatia* to refer to the outer garment alone, which the soldiers tore into four parts. However, due to its plural form it is more likely "clothes" refers to Jesus' belt, sandals, head-covering, and outer garment (Carson

1991, 612). It was common Roman practice to strip crucified persons naked. This reading also corresponds well to the Synoptics (Matt 27:35; Mark 15:24). According to the other Gospels, a centurion was present as well. It is possible that additional soldiers were involved in preparing the other two men for crucifixion. (See further comments at Mark 15:23–24.)

They did this to fulfill the Scripture (19:24): Rather than constituting a direct promise-fulfillment, John's use of Psalm 22:18 is part of a larger OT typological pattern anticipating Jesus' death identified by NT authors. Moreover, the scene is part of John's portrayal of Jesus' crucifixion as in keeping with the experience of the righteous sufferer in the Psalms (cf. 19:28, 36, 37; see the extensive treatment of the use of the OT in these passages in Köstenberger 2007, 500–506). According to the fourth Evangelist, by dividing Jesus' garments among them and by casting lots for his robe, the Roman soldiers unwittingly fulfilled Scripture. The soldiers' reasoning was that they did not want to tear Jesus' tunic, which was woven as a single piece of cloth (19:23–24). In God's sovereignty, the soldiers did exactly what was foretold in Scripture centuries earlier.

> 25 Standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple He loved standing there, He said to His mother, "Woman, here is your son." 27 Then He said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.

***Why do three of the Gospels have different women at the cross?* (19:25):** Several people stood by the cross of Jesus. Although there is little direct evidence to confirm this, it appears that crucified persons may often have been surrounded by family, friends, and relatives. While none of the Gospel authors claim to provide an exhaustive list of women who were at the cross, the individual Gospel accounts differ slightly with regard to the list of women mentioned. Matthew lists Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee (Matt 27:55–56); Mark mentions the first two women but has Salome as the third (Mark 15:40); Luke mentions the women but gives no names, other than to say that these were the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee (Luke 23:49; cf. 8:2–3, which mentions Mary Magdalene, Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, Susanna, and many others; cf. Mark 15:41, who also mentions "many other women").

John refers to a group of women composed of Jesus' mother, his mother's

sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene, whereby the Greek allows for there to be two, three, or four women. The wording adopted could be plausibly interpreted to denote four women: (1) Jesus' mother Mary (not named here, as elsewhere in this Gospel); (2) his mother's sister (perhaps Salome, the mother of the sons of Zebedee, mentioned in Matthew and Mark); (3) Mary (the wife) of Clopas (cf. Luke 24:18?); and (4) Mary Magdalene (cf. John 20:1–18). If Jesus' mother's sister was indeed Salome, the mother of the sons of Zebedee (which, incidentally, would make John Jesus' cousin on his mother's side, his mother's nephew, a possibility that makes Jesus' assigning care of his mother to John, the "disciple Jesus loved," even more plausible), and Mary the wife of Clopas is to be identified with the mother of James and Joseph, the lists in Matthew, Mark, and John are virtually identical.

Finally, the Synoptic writers mention that at one point the women stood at a distance while John speaks of the group of women as "standing by the cross." However, during the several hours of vigil it is possible, even likely, that there would be a certain amount of coming and going on the part of Jesus' followers. (See further comments at Matt 27:55–56 and Mark 15:40.)

He said to His mother, "Woman, here is your son" (19:26): Jesus' mother, likely widowed and in her early fifties and with little or no self-generated income, would have depended heavily on Jesus, her oldest son. Consistent with the biblical command to honor one's parents (Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16), Jesus arranges for his mother's care. Why would Jesus entrust her care to someone other than her other sons? It may be because, at this time, Jesus' brothers did not believe in him (7:5; so, e.g., Laney 1992, 348). John was a relative of Jesus (see above), so this lends plausibility to Jesus' entrusting his mother to his care. Roman Catholic exegesis understands this verse symbolically as John representing a model of all true disciples, with Mary serving as the mother of the church. Yet this is dubious, considering Mary did not take the beloved disciple into *her* home. Rather, the beloved disciple took Mary into *his* home, and it was he who was directed by Jesus to care for his mother, not vice versa.

28 After this, when Jesus knew that everything was now accomplished that the Scripture might
be fulfilled, He said, "I'm thirsty! " 29 A jar full of sour wine was sitting there; so they fixed a
sponge full of sour wine on hyssop ' and held it up to His mouth.
30 When Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished! " Then bowing His head,
He gave up His spirit.

He said, "It is finished!" Then bowing His head, He gave up His spirit (19:30): Although the final words of Jesus are recorded differently in the Gospels, there is no reason to assume that he did not utter each expression before his death. In fact, the Gospels record as many as seven statements of Jesus at the cross: (1) "Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34); (2) "I assure you: Today you will be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:43); (3) "Woman, here is your son. . . . Here is your mother" (John 19:26–27); (4) "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34; traditionally referred to as the "cry of dereliction"); (5) "I'm thirsty!" (John 19:28); (6) "It is finished!" (John 19:30); and (7) "Father, into Your hands I entrust My spirit" (Luke 23:46; see Köstenberger, Kellum, Quarles 2009:315).

> 31 Since it was the preparation day, the Jews did not want the bodies to remain on the cross on
> the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a special day). They requested that Pilate have the men's legs
> broken and that their bodies be taken away. 32 So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the
> first man and of the other one who had been crucified with Him. 33 When they came to Jesus,
> they did not break His legs since they saw that He was already dead. 34 But one of the soldiers
> pierced His side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. 35 He who saw this has
> testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows he is telling the truth.
> 36 For these things happened so that the Scripture would be fulfilled: **Not one of His bones will**
> **be broken.** 37 Also, another Scripture says: **They will look at the One they pierced.**

One of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out (19:34): According to medical experts, the spear may have pierced Jesus' heart, resulting, either directly or via chest and lung, in the flow of blood and water (Barbet 1953; Edwards, Gabel, Hosmer 1986, 1455–56; cf. Carson 1991, 623). The flow of blood and water underscores that Jesus died as a fully human being. Perhaps "blood and water" also points to Jesus' two natures, human and divine. The parallel 1 John 5:6–8 refers to spirit, water, and blood; Jesus gave up his spirit when he died (19:30), leaving behind blood and water.

John also could be alluding to Exodus 17, especially verse 6: "when you hit the rock, water will come out of it and the people will drink" (cf. Num 20:11; see Carson 1991, 624). An allusion to the Passover may also be in view (*m. Pesahim* 5.5–8; cf. *m. Ohalot* 3.5), consisting of (1) the hyssop (19:29), (2) the unbroken bones (19:33, 36), and (3) the mingled blood (19:34; Barrett 1978, 557; Burge 2000, 532). If this is correct, then John may witness to all three events that depict Jesus as the Passover lamb. In addition, Jewish sacrificial law required that the

victim's blood not be congealed, but rather flow freely at the moment of death so that it could be sprinkled (*m. Pesahim* 5.3, 5).

He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe (19:35): By this statement, our author claims he was an eyewitness to the crucifixion, which sits well with his consistent claim of being an eyewitness to Jesus' life and ministry.

These things happened so that the Scripture would be fulfilled: Not one of His bones will be broken (19:36): It appears that John is referring to two sets of Scripture: (1) Psalm 34:20, depicting God's care for the righteous man: "He protects all his bones; not one of them is broken"; (2) Exodus 12:46 and Numbers 9:12, specifying that no bone of the Passover lamb may be broken. Apparently, "in Jewish thought disfiguration was an obstacle to resurrection," which may further explain why John takes pains to stress that no bones were broken.

The reference to bones not being broken in Exodus 12:46 comes in the context of requirements for Passover observance. No bone of the sacrificial animal may be broken, because, among other reasons, it is a symbol of the unity of the worshiping family and of the entire covenant community. The command of Exodus 12:46 is reiterated in Numbers 9:12. Psalm 34, a Davidic psalm, constitutes a (slightly irregular) acrostic poem centered on the assurance that the Lord will deliver the righteous.

The only difference between Exodus 12:46 and Numbers 9:12 is that the verb in the former text is in the second person plural (*suntripsete* [cf. Exod 12:10 LXX]), while the latter has it in the third person plural (*suntripsousin*). There are three differences between these texts and the citation in John 19:36: (1) the omission of the initial *kai*; (2) the omission of the preposition *apo* (Hb bô; presumably owing to the influence of the psalm verse; cf. Menken 1996, 152); (3) the verbal form, which is a third person singular passive in John 19:36 rather than a second- or third-person plural active as in the Pentateuchal texts. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the Septuagint version of Psalm 34:20 (Ps 33:21 LXX) features the exact same verb form as John 19:36: *suntribēsetai*. This makes it likely that Psalm 33:21 LXX is the source for the verbal form in John's quotation. Hence it is most likely that John's OT quotation represents a combination of Exodus 12:46/Numbers 9:12 and Psalm 34:20.

This quotation, together with the other fulfillment citations in reference to his crucifixion, authenticates Jesus' claim of his messianic identity. In the present instance, a powerful link is established between Jesus' sacrificial death and the

Jewish Passover, which commemorated the deliverance of the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt (Exod 12:46; Num 9:12). This marks Jesus as the "lamb of God" who takes away the sins of the world (1:29, 36), in keeping with the Baptist's witness. This pattern of typology is also part and parcel of the Johannine replacement theme, according to which Jesus fulfills the symbolism inherent in a variety of Jewish festivals and institutions. Also, Jesus, in keeping with Davidic typology, is presented as a righteous man who is preserved by God in accordance with the assurance expressed by God's servants in the past (Ps 34:20).

Also, another Scripture says: They will look at the One they pierced (19:37): The present passage cites Zechariah 12:10 as being fulfilled by the Roman piercing of Jesus' side in John 19:34. The text of Zechariah 12:10 reads, "Then I will pour out a spirit of grace and prayer on the house of David and the residents of Jerusalem, and they will look at Me whom they pierced. They will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child and weep bitterly for Him as one weeps for a firstborn." This will result in great mourning in Jerusalem and by the family of the house of David (Zech 12:11–14).

Zechariah 12:9–10 is part of the second and final oracle, spanning 12:1–14:21, which focuses, by way of divine speech, on Yahweh's action against the nations. While 12:1–8 describes the external events to occur in Jerusalem "in that day," 12:9–14 depicts the internal condition of God's people. In particular, Yahweh pouring out a spirit of grace (cf. Ezek 36:25–26?) and supplication is connected to people looking on one whom they have pierced. An individual has been killed, which is followed by a period of profound mourning. In context (note the first person references in 12:9–10), the phrase "on me" can refer only to Yahweh himself.

The concept of the "piercing of Yahweh" in Zechariah 12:10 suggests that suffering is not an unfamiliar experience to God, but that he knows it firsthand. This suggests a mystery that can be understood more fully only in light of the incarnation and crucifixion of the Word-made-flesh, Jesus, who, as the God-man, was pierced for our transgressions (Isa 53:5) as the messianic shepherd and the suffering servant in keeping with the pattern of OT prophecy regarding a suffering Savior.

Together with the realization of other OT passages in conjunction with Jesus' cross-death, such as Isaiah 53, John saw the fulfillment of Zechariah 12:10 at the crucifixion as confirmation that the Messiah was Jesus (cf. 20:31). John's appropriation of Zechariah 12:10 in the present passage operates on the basis of

the hermeneutical axiom that Yahweh acts in the person of his authorized representative, the messianic shepherd, so that to strike and kill the shepherd, or to pierce him, is in a sense to pierce Yahweh himself (for a fuller discussion, see Köstenberger 2007, 504–6).

> 38 After this, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus — but secretly because of his fear of the Jews — asked Pilate that he might remove Jesus' body. Pilate gave him permission, so he came and took His body away. 39 Nicodemus (who had previously come to Him at night) also came, bringing a mixture of about 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes. 40 Then they took Jesus' body and wrapped it in linen cloths with the aromatic spices, according to the burial custom of the Jews.

Nicodemus . . . also came, bringing a mixture of about 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes (19:39): It appears that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus worked together to care for Jesus' body, with Joseph taking care of legal matters and Nicodemus bringing the spices. Nicodemus brought along a mixture of myrrh and aloes—literally, 100 *litrai*. Interpreters have generally taken this to be equivalent to 75 pounds (so HCSB, NET, NIV, ESV) while older traditions have put it at "about a hundred pounds" (so KJV and NKJV). The entry for "Weights and Measures" in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (6:907) is helpful.

> The "pound" ***(litra)*** of ointment used by Mary on Jesus' feet in John 12:3 and the "hundred pounds" of embalming ointments brought by Nicodemus in 19:39 are not intended as precise measures but are expressed in weight because ointments and perfumes, being expensive, were usually reckoned in weight rather than capacity; the underlying conceptual unit is probably either the Roman pound of ca. 326.4 g (= 96 denarii) or the mina of ca. 340 g (= 100 denarii).

If this is correct, then a litra would be either .72 lb. or .75 lb (since one pound equals 453.6 grams), and 100 litras would therefore be right at 75 pounds. The sheer quantity of the spices has seemed infeasible to some interpreters, but there is no need to assume Nicodemus carried the spices by himself. Most likely servants were used to carry the aromatic mixture, take Jesus' body down from the cross, transport it to the burial place, and prepare it for burial. The heavy use of spices is not without precedent in the Jewish context. During the times of Israel's monarchy, King Asa died and was laid out in "a coffin that was full of spices and various mixtures of prepared ointments" (2 Chr 16:14). Later, "five hundred servants carrying spices" participated in the funeral procession of Herod

the Great (Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.8.3 §199).

> On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark. She saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. 2 So she ran to Simon Peter and to the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put Him! "
>
> 3 At that, Peter and the other disciple went out, heading for the tomb. 4 The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and got to the tomb first. 5 Stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying there, yet he did not go in. 6 Then, following him, Simon Peter came also. He entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there. 7 The wrapping that had been on His head was not lying with the linen cloths but was folded up in a separate place by itself. 8 The other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, then entered the tomb, saw, and believed. 9 For they still did not understand the Scripture that He must rise from the dead. 10 Then the disciples went home again.

***Who went to the tomb and when? Was the stone rolled away?* (20:1–2):** Mark indicates that the time was "at sunrise" (16:2; Matt 28:1: "at dawn"; Luke 24:1: "very early in the morning"); John indicates that "it was still dark." There are several possible ways to account for the differences. Perhaps Mary Magdalene was the first among a group of women to reach the tomb. Or, John may refer to Mary's leaving home while Mark speaks of her arrival at the gravesite. The plural "we" in Mary's statement, "We don't know where they have put Him!" may indicate that she came in the company of other women (Maccini 1996, 208–10). This corresponds well with the other Gospels that have Mary as part of a group at the empty tomb. It is further suggested here by the fact that Mary went to the tomb while it was still dark (20:1), which she would hardly have done on her own, especially during religious festivals when Jerusalem was crowded with visitors of uncertain character. Yet, at some point, after Mary's arrival, she apparently was separated from the others and at that time saw the risen Lord (20:10–18). (See further comments at Matt 28:1 and Mark 16:1–2.)

John indicates that the stone had already been removed when Mary arrived at the tomb ("She saw that the stone had been removed," v. 1). Yet Matthew's account seems most naturally to indicate that the stone was removed in the presence of the women, who were shocked and fearful in the angel's presence (Matt 1:1–7). Read in isolation from the other Gospels, there would be little cause to doubt this impression. However, the existence of the parallel accounts leads us to take a closer look, and this reveals that the initial reading of Matthew

can be called into question. As Blomberg notes, the rolling away of the stone "probably preceded the women's arrival, since Matthew seems to link it with the coming of the angel, who is [perhaps] already in place when they get to the tomb (cf. Mark 16:3–4)" (2001, 426–27). This reading assumes that "went to the tomb" in verse 1 does not indicate the women have already arrived at the tomb, plus it assumes that the women were afraid because of the open tomb and the presence of the angel, and not because they had seen the angel descend and roll away the stone (neither of which they witnessed on this view).

That all four Gospels have women as the first eyewitnesses to the resurrection stands against those who claim that these accounts are mythical legends produced by the disciples suffering from cognitive dissonance. If first-century Jews were going to make up a story, it would be counterintuitive to make women the first eyewitnesses. In this culture, women were not permitted to testify in a court of law (e.g., Trites 1977, 54–55; O'Collins 1995, 94; Bauckham 2002, 268–77; cf. Wright 2003, 607). For example, Josephus wrote: "From women let no evidence be accepted, because of the levity and temerity of their sex" (*Antiquities* 4.219). The fact that all four Gospels include women as the first eyewitnesses points toward the historicity of the resurrection. N. T. Wright has convincingly made this point: "If they [the evangelists] could have invented stories of fine, upstanding, reliable male witnesses being first at the tomb, they would have done it. That they did not tells us either that everyone in the early church knew that the women, led by Mary Magdalene, were in fact the first on the scene, or that the early church was not so inventive as critics have routinely imagined, or both. Would the other evangelists [assuming Markan priority] have been so slavishly foolish as to copy the story unless they were convinced that, despite being an apologetic liability, it was historically trustworthy?" (2003, 608).

Peter and the other disciple went out, heading for the tomb (20:3): With Luke 24:12 mentioning only Peter running to the tomb, some have argued that John's account of both men running to the tomb contradicts Luke. However, Luke also reports (Luke 24:24) that the two companions on the road to Emmaus said, "*Some* of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they didn't see Him." The plural "some" confirms John's account.

The other disciple . . . entered the tomb, saw, and believed (20:8): It appears that, for the "disciple Jesus loved," the linen strips (*ta othonia*) were sufficient

evidence that the body had not simply been moved. The beloved disciple's eyes then fell on the face cloth that had been around Jesus' head. In contrast to Lazarus, who came out of the tomb still wearing his grave clothes (11:44), Jesus' resurrection body apparently passed through the linen wrappings very much in the same way as he later was able to appear to his disciples in a locked room, meaning the walls presented no barrier to his entry (20:19, 26). The cloth (*soudarion*), presumably used to keep Jesus' jaw in place (cf. *b. Moed Qatan* 27a; see Morris 1995, 735n18), was folded (or rolled) up in a place (*eis hena topon*) by itself, separate from the linen. John draws attention to the care that had been taken in the way the tomb was left. It would make little sense for grave robbers to leave expensive linen wrappings or spices. However, even if supposed grave robbers did for some reason leave these behind, the care taken to fold the linen rules out any possibility of such a theory, for they undoubtedly would have acted in haste.

They still did not understand the Scripture that He must rise from the dead (20:9): This comment may point to a specific OT passage (suggestions include Ps 16:10; Isa 53:10–12; and Hos 6:2), although it is possible that the reference is to Scripture in its entirety (cf. Luke 24:25–27, 32, 44–47). Though Jesus had told the disciples that he would be killed and rise again, the disciples failed to comprehend Jesus' predictions. All the Gospels, in varying ways, describe the disciples as failing to understand Jesus' statements concerning his death, burial, and resurrection prior to these events and the subsequent gift of the Holy Spirit.

The OT anticipated the coming of the Messiah and the events surrounding his death and resurrection, but the disciples were slow in understanding these Scriptures. These misunderstandings are likely due to several factors, including their own spiritual blindness, their position in salvation history (i.e., prior to the giving of the Holy Spirit), and erroneous expectations concerning the Messiah and his identity and the circumstances surrounding his coming. Apparently the disciples, along with other first-century Jews, believed that the Messiah would serve as a national deliverer, engage in military conquest, and set up a kingdom on earth. That he would die on a cross and subsequently be resurrected from the grave simply did not fit with their expectations.

11 But Mary stood outside facing the tomb, crying. As she was crying, she stooped to look into
the tomb. 12 She saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet,

where Jesus' body had been lying. 13 They said to her, "Woman, why are you crying? "
"Because they've taken away my Lord," she told them, "and I don't know where they've put Him." 14 Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not know it was Jesus.
15 "Woman," Jesus said to her, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for? "
Supposing He was the gardener, she replied, "Sir, if you've removed Him, tell me where you've put Him, and I will take Him away."
16 Jesus said, "Mary."
Turning around, she said to Him in Hebrew, *"Rabbouni!"* — which means "Teacher."
17 "Don't cling to Me," Jesus told her, "for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to My brothers and tell them that I am ascending to My Father and your Father — to My God and your God."
18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord! " And she told them what He had said to her.

She saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet (20:12): Here in John's account, Mary sees *two* angels *sitting* in the tomb where Jesus' body had been lying. Matthew 28:5–6 has *one* angel who is *sitting outside* the tomb announce Jesus' resurrection, whereas Mark 16:5–6 has the news coming from *one* young man *sitting inside* the tomb and Luke 24:5–6 has the news coming from *two* men *standing inside* the tomb. What can be said about a possible harmonization of these details?

While it is possible to harmonize these accounts in several different ways (for one plausible harmonization, see Wenham 2005), it is hard to be certain about the precise reconstruction. In general terms, no one should be surprised at the presence of different perspectives on an event as significant as the resurrection. Consider the following contemporary analogy: "The chancellor of this author's university died at the end of an address to the student body. Within an hour of the event a sociology professor has his thirty students each write down their own account of what happened. Each was instructed to write an honest and detailed account as they could, given the limited time of the class period. When the accounts were later composed, there were numerous differences in detail, although all agreed that the chancellor had died at the end of his address" (Kaiser, Davids, Bruce, Brauch 1996). The point of the analogy is not that any of the students were necessarily wrong (though some might have been), but that each perceived and recalled the events that transpired from their own unique vantage point, so that any reconstruction of the exact historical details and chronology from these different perspectives must be done with caution.

In the present case, it appears that John narrates what happened when Mary Magdalene remained behind after the initial discovery of the empty tomb (John

20:1). The difference in number (one angel vs. two) in the narratives is a standard type of variation found in the Gospels (e.g., Mark 10:46–52 and Matt 20:29–34). There is no reason to assume a contradiction when a particular author mentions fewer characters than another author describing the same event. All history writing is of necessity selective, so that one author's reference to fewer characters than another author in a parallel account does not exclude the possibility that both authors knew that multiple characters were present. In much the same way, it is trivial to argue over whether the characters delivering the news were sitting or standing and whether they were outside or inside the tomb. It takes little imagination to appreciate the fact that the angels were doubtless moving around during the events described and thus could be accurately described as standing at one point while sitting down at another, or as being located inside or outside the tomb, depending on the precise moment at which a given narrative is placed. (See further comments at Matt 28:5–6, Mark 16:5–6, and Luke 24:4–6.)

She turned around and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not know it was Jesus (20:14): As is commonly the case in resurrection narratives, Jesus is not recognized immediately (see 21:4; Luke 24:16; cf. Matt 28:17). Although Jesus' resurrection body could be seen and touched (John 20:27; Luke 24:39) and still bore the marks of crucifixion (John 20:20, 25, 27), and though Jesus continued to share meals with his followers (21:9, 13; Luke 24:41–43), his resurrected body apparently rose through the linen wrappings (20:6–8); was able to walk through closed doors (20:19, 26); and was often not recognized immediately. The Jehovah's Witnesses' argument that Jesus rose as a spirit and took a temporary and unfamiliar body in order to interact with Mary makes little sense, especially since Jesus still bore the marks of the crucifixion.

Apart from grave robbers or other mourners, neither of whom would have been likely visitors at this early morning hour, gardeners attending to the grounds where the tomb was located (cf. 19:41) would have been the only people around. Mary's guess indicates that at first blush the resurrected Jesus was indistinguishable from an ordinary person.

Here in John, Mary Magdalene sees Jesus at the tomb. Matthew 28:8–9 has some of the women seeing him after he leaves the tomb. Luke never mentions the women seeing Jesus. That the Gospels include different details concerning the resurrection accounts is indisputable. The more important question is whether these events can be harmonized responsibly (see comments on 20:12 concerning the harmonization of resurrection accounts). Luke not mentioning

any women seeing Jesus does not necessarily suggest that Luke believed no women saw the risen Jesus, just that Luke chose not to include this detail. Moreover, it is plausible that Jesus met the women after they left the tomb and was also seen by Mary at the tomb.

***The apologetics value of Mary being the first witness to the risen Jesus* (20:16–17):** In light of the limitations placed on women's witness in first-century Judaism (*m. Rosh HaShanah* 1.8), Mary's role as one of the first eyewitnesses and Jesus' entrusting Mary with this important message surely is significant (for more on Mary and other women being the first eyewitnesses and the evidence it provides for the historicity of the resurrection, see comments on 20:1–2).

"Don't cling to Me," Jesus told her (20:17): Mary, upon Jesus' self-identification to her, presumably had proceeded to embrace Jesus (cf. Matt 28:9 where she clings to his feet). Her reaction is entirely natural, yet reveals misunderstanding. Apparently, Mary was determined not to lose a second time what it had cost her such effort to find again; but she must not now cling to Jesus, for his ascension to the Father was still future. The renderings "Don't cling to me" or "Don't hold on to me" are superior to the translation "Don't touch me" or "Touch me not" (KJV). While the phrases are similar, "Don't touch me" fails to bring adequate attention to Jesus' likely meaning: Mary should not expect him to remain with her in the present form. By salvation-historical necessity, Jesus must move on; the Spirit will take his place (14:16–17). Jesus' statement ("Don't cling to Me") has nothing to do with the Gnostic view that the material corrupts the immaterial and so cannot corrupt itself by coming into contact with non-ascended beings such as Mary. In contrast to Gnosticism, John readily speaks of the Word becoming flesh (1:14) and makes clear that Jesus' resurrected body was a physical body (e.g., 21:1–14).

My God and your God (20:17): Jesus' distinction between "My Father and your Father" and "My God and your God" highlights the different sense in which God is God and Father of both Jesus and of believers (cf. 1:12, 14, 18, 34). God is the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ within the context of their shared deity; he is the God and Father of believers in the sense that he is their Creator and that they are now brought back into a right relationship with him through the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus his Son. Jesus' distinction between "My Father and your Father" and "My God and your God" helpfully, and importantly, maintains the distinction between himself and believers,

preserves the unique sense in which Jesus is both Son of God and himself God (e.g., 1:1, 14, 18), and precludes the confusion of sense and referent that were to result if the natures of Jesus and believers were unduly equated simply because God, properly understood, can be said to be the God and Father of both.

> 19 In the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples were gathered together with the doors locked because of their fear of the Jews. Then Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you! "
>
> 20 Having said this, He showed them His hands and His side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.
>
> 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 22 After saying this, He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Then Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" (20:19): In noting that the doors were "locked," John emphasized the miraculous nature of Jesus' entry. Jesus was raised bodily from the dead and yet, as is apparent from this passage, had the ability to appear and disappear miraculously. Again, Jehovah's Witnesses' use of this passage as support for their belief that Jesus was only raised as a spirit is misguided. John's account focuses on Jesus' hands and side, which would have shown the wound inflicted by the Roman soldier's spear (19:34). The scars of Jesus proved to the disciples that the person before them really was their bodily resurrected Lord, not some imposter or ghost (which Luke mentions the disciples at first mistakenly imagined they had seen; Luke 24:37).

He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (20:22): Jesus' words here display similarities with the commissions in Matthew 28:18–20 and Luke 24:47. However, it is appears that these are distinct events with different settings. The present reference most likely represents a symbolic promise of the soon-to-be-given gift of the Spirit, not the actual giving of it 50 days later at Pentecost (cf. Acts 2; see Carson 1991, 649–55; cf. Witherington 1995, 340–41). Otherwise, it is hard to see how John would not be found to stand in actual conflict with Luke's Pentecost narrative in Acts 2.

John's Gospel itself affirms this harmonization as the Evangelist includes Jesus' disclaimers that the Spirit would be given only subsequent to Jesus' glorification (7:39), which entailed his return to the Father. The disciples' behavior subsequent to the present incident would also be rather puzzling had

they already received the Spirit (e.g., 20:26: locked doors; 21:2–3: Peter and six others go fishing, catch nothing, and at first do not recognize Jesus). The present gesture is made to the group in its entirety rather than to separate individuals, just as the authority to forgive or retain sins is given to the church as a whole.

As the HCSB properly translates, the Greek verb (*enephusēsen*) means "breathed *on*" rather than "breathed *into*." The theological antecedent is plainly Genesis 2:7, where the exact same verb form is used. There, God breathes his Spirit into Adam at creation, which constitutes him as a "living being." Here, at the occasion of the commissioning of his disciples, Jesus constitutes them as the new messianic community in anticipation of the outpouring of the Spirit subsequent to his ascension.

If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them (20:23): In Matthew, the power to forgive or retain sins is attributed to Peter in a universal, salvation-historical sense (Matt 16:19; cf. Acts 1–12) and to the disciples in an intra-church context (Matt 18:18). Both Matthew and John may echo the reference to the one who is given "the key of the House of David" in Isaiah 22:22 (cf. Rev 3:7). If so, what is at stake is the authority to grant or deny access to God's kingdom. However, whereas in Matthew the focus is on Peter's and the new messianic community's didactic and intracommunitarian authority, John's emphasis is on the pronouncement of forgiveness or retention of sins depending on a person's repentance or lack thereof (Ridderbos 1997, 644; Witherington 1995, 343).

In a Jewish context, the expression "binding and loosing" described the activity of a judge who declared an individual innocent or guilty and thus "bound" or "loosed" them from the charges made against them. This passage is not establishing any type of priesthood as found in the Roman Catholic Church. The passive voice in the verbs *aphēntai* ("forgiven") and *kekratōntai* ("they are not") implies that it is ultimately God who is at work. The context of this verse is the disciples' mission and the Spirit's work in empowering them. As Carson notes, "The Christian witnesses proclaim and declare, and, empowered by the Spirit, live by the message of their own proclamation; it is God who *effectively* forgives or retains the sin" (1991, 656).

24 But one of the Twelve, Thomas (called "Twin"), was not with them when Jesus came.
25 So the other disciples kept telling him, "We have seen the Lord! "
But he said to them, "If I don't see the mark of the nails in His hands, put my finger into the

mark of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will never believe! ”

26 After eight days His disciples were indoors again, and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them. He said, “Peace to you! ”

27 Then He said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and observe My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Don’t be an unbeliever, but a believer.”

28 Thomas responded to Him, “My Lord and my God! ”

29 Jesus said, “Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Those who believe without seeing are blessed.”

Doubting Thomas **(20:25–27):** Earlier in the narrative, Jesus disparaged people’s need for “signs and wonders” (4:48). In the present instance, Thomas asks not merely for a sign but for hard evidence. Perhaps he thinks that the disciples saw a ghost, not the resurrected Jesus in the flesh (cf. 6:19–21 pars.), and his statement expresses lack of confidence in his fellow disciples’ judgment as much as skepticism regarding the possibility of Jesus having risen from the dead.

From the Evangelist’s perspective, Thomas’s objection becomes a welcome foil for forestalling the incipient Gnostic notion that Jesus only *appeared* to be human (the heresy later termed “Docetism,” from *dokeō*, to seem) and, in contemporary debates, those who insist on a mere *spiritual* resurrection. Just as in the case of the prologue (1:14), John takes pains to affirm that Jesus “came in the flesh” (a major concern in John’s epistles; cf. 1 John 4:2–3; 2 John 7), such as Thomas is invited to “Put your finger here and observe My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Don’t be an unbeliever, but a believer.” This clearly indicates that Jesus’ resurrection body was not merely that of a phantom or spirit apparition but a “fleshy” (albeit transformed) body.

As on the previous occasion (see 20:19), the doors were locked (not merely closed), which seems to imply that the disciples’ fears of the Jewish leaders had not subsided (cf. 20:19). This continuing fear, coupled with Thomas’s doubt and the widespread depiction of the disciples’ slowness to understand and believe, provides powerful evidence for the trustworthiness of the Gospels (not to mention the fact that it supports the notion that the actual giving of the Holy Spirit was yet future; see at 20:22 above). In other words, if a small group of people decided to form a movement and rally a following around their teaching, why would they depict themselves in such negative ways? The most obvious answer is that they were recounting events that actually took place.

30 Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His disciples that are not written in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, ’ and by believing you may have life in His name.

Jesus performed many other signs . . . that are not written in this book (20:30): This statement fits well with the narratives found in the four canonical Gospels. It is clear to even the casual reader that the Evangelists are selective in what they include. This is true of all history writers. For instance, all four Gospels give very little (if any) information about Jesus’ childhood, and while each Gospel includes parallel stories during Jesus’ ministry, the Evangelists chose at times to include different events. None of this is surprising, and here the Evangelist indicates that he is well aware that additional events could have been included in his account.

Was 20:31 the original ending of the Gospel of John? **(20:31):** This verse contains perhaps the clearest purpose statement found in any of the Gospels. This concluding passage is followed by what may be considered the epilogue of John’s Gospel, that is, chapter 21. Other places in the Johannine writings include similar summary conclusions that are followed by additional material (e.g., John 12:36–37; 1 John 5:13; Rev 22:5; Keener 2003, 1221; cf. Whitacre 1999, 489). It has been proposed that John originally planned to finish his Gospel at this point and only later appended an additional chapter. Alternatively, it has been suggested that someone other than John, perhaps some of his disciples, added chapter 21 after the apostle’s death. Both of these scenarios are possible.

However, the presence of an epilogue seems required by the opening prologue in order to preserve the balance and symmetry of structure. The prologue, in turn, is tied in so closely with the remainder of the Gospel that its composition cannot be easily relegated to a later follower of John. Consequently, both prologue and epilogue frame the Gospel in such a way that they form an essential part of the theological and literary fabric of the entire narrative. Particularly notable is the resolution of the relationship between Peter and the beloved disciple and the identification of the beloved disciple as the writer of John’s Gospel. What is more, the language and style in chapter 21 do not differ significantly from chapters 1–20. In fact, there are positive terminological links between this final chapter and the rest of the Gospel. Also, there is no textual evidence that the Gospel ever circulated in any form other than the present, canonical one. Finally, ending the Gospel immediately after Jesus’ encounter with Thomas would have seemed rather abrupt (for a thorough analysis, see

Köstenberger 2004a, 583–86).

For these and other reasons it must be maintained that the epilogue constitutes an integral part of John's Gospel. It is part of John's overall literary plan and provides the culmination of various strands carefully woven earlier in the Gospel. In fact, both the prologue and the epilogue can be shown to be integrally connected to the body of the Gospel by way of anticipation and resolution.

> 4 When daybreak came, Jesus stood on the shore. However, the disciples did not know it was Jesus.
>
> 5 "Men," Jesus called to them, "you don't have any fish, do you? "
>
> "No," they answered.
>
> 6 "Cast the net on the right side of the boat," He told them, "and you'll find some." So they did, and they were unable to haul it in because of the large number of fish. 7 Therefore the disciple, the one Jesus loved, said to Peter, "It is the Lord! "
>
> When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he tied his outer garment around him (for he was stripped) and plunged into the sea. 8 But since they were not far from land (about 100 yards away), the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish. 9 When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish lying on it, and bread.
>
> 10 "Bring some of the fish you've just caught," Jesus told them. 11 So Simon Peter got up and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish — 153 of them. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn.
>
> 12 "Come and have breakfast," Jesus told them. None of the disciples dared ask Him, "Who are You? " because they knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came, took the bread, and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish.
>
> 14 This was now the third time Jesus appeared to the disciples after He was raised from the dead.

The disciples did not know it was Jesus (21:4): It is uncertain why the disciples did not recognize Jesus here. Most likely, as at previous occasions, they were kept from being able to identify him (e.g., Luke 24:16). In addition, the early morning hour may have made it difficult to recognize Jesus from a distance.

***Is this passage a doublet of Luke 5:1–11?* (21:4–14):** Some have questioned the historicity of this event based on the argument that the present account is a doublet of Luke 5:1–11. However, the only overlapping portion of the dialogue is the command to the disciples to cast their nets. What is more, Carson notes that the disciples' inability to haul the net in due to the larger quantity of fish is a "rather different result from the episode of Luke 5:1–11, where two boats are so

filled with fish that they are in danger of sinking" (1991, 673).

Simon Peter . . . tied his outer garment around him (for he was stripped) and plunged into the sea (21:7): Simon Peter tying "his outer garment around him" and plunging "into the sea" might seem confusing to modern-day readers. Why dress before plunging into the water? Some have even taken it as a sign that Peter was again acting rashly. It was common for laborers to tuck up and tie up their clothes so that they had freedom of movement. The "outer garment" in the present case was probably a fisherman's coat that Peter wore in the morning chill. The Greek underlying "for he was stripped" means literally "for he was naked," but this probably means that Peter wore only his undergarment, the short tunic of the Greek workman (Avi-Yonah 1964, 155). He tucked in his outer garment in order to be able to swim (rather than wade—the shoreline drops off rather rapidly at most parts of the lake) ashore more easily and to be properly dressed for greeting Jesus.

Full of large fish—153 of them (21:11): Numerous attempts have been made to interpret the full net, and specifically the number 153, symbolically, but more likely 153 represents simply the number of fish actually caught and counted (for a virtually exhaustive list of interpretations, see Keener 2003, 1231–33). The inclusion of the specific number most likely reflects eyewitness recollection and points to the generous provision of Jesus. The fact that even with so many fish the net was not torn seems to be attributed by John to divine intervention (Morris 1995, 766)—yet one more detail in his narrative that exudes the aura of an encounter with the risen Jesus.

15 When they had eaten breakfast, Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love
Me more than these? "
"Yes, Lord," he said to Him, "You know that I love You."
"Feed My lambs," He told him.
16 A second time He asked him, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me? "
"Yes, Lord," he said to Him, "You know that I love You."
"Shepherd My sheep," He told him.
17 He asked him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me? "
Peter was grieved that He asked him the third time, "Do you love Me? " He said, "Lord, You
know everything! You know that I love You."
"Feed My sheep," Jesus said. 18 "I assure you: When you were young, you would tie your belt
and walk wherever you wanted. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and
someone else will tie you and carry you where you don't want to go." 19 He said this to signify

by what kind of death he would glorify God. After saying this, He told him, “Follow Me! ”

He said this to signify by what kind of death he would glorify God (21:19): According to Clement of Rome (c. AD 96), Peter had suffered martyrdom under Nero (AD 54–68; *1 Clem.* 5:4), probably during the final years of Nero’s reign (c. 64–66). Yet while the author’s explanation of Jesus’ comment was written after Peter’s execution, this in no way diminishes the authenticity of Jesus’ statement in verse 18. Instead, the author’s explanatory comment actually points to the historicity of Jesus’ statement. After all, why would the Evangelist even include Jesus’ comment and feel the need to explain it if Jesus did not actually utter his remark in the first place? It seems counterintuitive to include an utterance that was capable of being misunderstood and required additional explanation if Jesus did not actually make such a prediction.

20 So Peter turned around and saw the disciple Jesus loved following them. That disciple was
the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and asked, “Lord, who is the one that’s
going to betray You? ” 21 When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord — what about him? ”
22 “If I want him to remain until I come,” Jesus answered, “what is that to you? As for you,
follow Me.”
23 So this report spread to the brothers that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not tell
him that he would not die, but, “If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? ”

“If I want him to remain until I come,” Jesus answered, “what is that to you?” (21:22): Jesus’ response had apparently led some among “the brothers” (i.e., believers) to understand this to mean that the beloved disciple would not die prior to Jesus’ return. It is not impossible that these final verses were penned by John’s disciples subsequent to his death in order to counter the charge that Jesus’ prediction had been proven erroneous by John’s death. More likely, perhaps, is the suggestion that John himself, while still alive, sought to lay to rest the rumor that Christ had promised to return during his lifetime. This would be even more plausible if ancient patristic testimony is correct that John’s life span extended to the reign of Trajan (AD 98–117; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.22.5; 3.3.4). As Carson notes, “As it is, it seems simpler to think that the circulating rumour is making the rounds while the beloved disciple is still alive, but advancing in years, and he is determined to stifle it as well as he can for fear of the damage that would be done if he died before the Lord’s return. If the rumour is based on a false interpretation of Jesus that is circulating round the churches, it seems reasonable to suppose that, if the beloved disciple were already dead, the

falsity of that interpretation could instantly be established by pointing out the disciple's grave" (1991, 682).

> 24 This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.
>
> 25 And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which, if they were written one by one, I suppose not even the world itself could contain the books that would be written.

Closing statement in the Gospel of John **(21:24–25):** These final verses should be read in the context of the previous narrative. The beloved disciple, the one who was close to Jesus at the Last Supper (21:20), is in fact the one who wrote the entire Gospel; his "staying" (rather than dying a martyr's death, as did Peter) allowed him to do so and thus served an important purpose. Hence, 21:24 is to be understood as part of the answer to Peter's question in 21:21: "Lord—what about him?" (Carson 1991, 683; cf. Barrett 1978, 587)—though now it is no longer Jesus speaking but the Evangelist.

The statement in 21:24, "This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true" (see 19:35; 1 John 1:1–4), represents the signature and statement of autography also common in epistolary postscripts. It follows two retrospective references to "the disciple Jesus loved" in 21:7 and 21:20 and a third resumptive passage in 21:14. The function of the entire chapter is "to confirm the Beloved Disciple as author of the body of the document and to substantiate the credibility of his eyewitness authority for its content" (Jackson 1999, 9).

The present verse identifies the Fourth Evangelist, the author of John's Gospel, with the literary character of "the disciple Jesus loved." This figure, in turn, relates historically to John the apostle, the son of Zebedee. The verse is written in the third person in order to affirm the reliability of the author's own witness. In the second part of the verse, the Evangelist shifts to the first-person plural, and then in the next verse to the first-person singular (*oimai*, I suppose). Here the author strikes a more informal, familiar tone to underscore his personal involvement and not to seem unduly separated from the events recorded earlier (Jackson 1999, 8).

The identity of the "we" in 21:24 has been the center of much debate, with many identifying the expression as referring to the "community that formed around the beloved disciple, to which he left his Gospel and his legacy" (so, e.g., Ridderbos 1997, 671; cf. Brown 1970, 1125). Others have seen it as a reference

to the “apostolic church” (Barrett 1978, 588). In this case, it would be the community tracing its origin to the beloved disciple, or the larger church, that seeks to attest to the reliability of the Evangelist’s witness (Ridderbos 1997, 672). Nevertheless, “we” is likely a self-reference by the Evangelist, with the first person plural functioning editorially, as in other places in John’s Gospel or elsewhere in the NT.

Finally, verse 25 reiterates the principle of selection operative in the composition of the Gospel (cf. 20:30–31), which is an important factor in understanding the differences between John and the Synoptics. The verb *oimai* (I suppose) constitutes an epithet of authorial modesty and suggests that chapter 21 forms a literary unity with the rest of the Gospel and that it was written by the Fourth Evangelist rather than a later group of followers (Köstenberger 2004b, 72–88). This, then, is the final plank in the argument that John’s Gospel was written by John, the son of Zebedee, Jesus’ closest follower during his earthly ministry, and thus constitutes firsthand eyewitness testimony. As such, John’s Gospel can be trusted and rightly takes its place alongside the three other canonical Gospels as an authentic, historically reliable account of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Apologetics Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles

Acts treats, in a focused way, the mission of the early church. It is not an exhaustive volume, but selective, looking at the church in Jerusalem for a period, then in Antioch before looking to the mission of Paul. So it proceeds geographically as the narrative moves from Jerusalem to Rome. This narration pictures how the gospel went out from Israel into the known world. It seeks to explain how this "new" religion is really "old," reaching back to promises God made with the patriarchs. Gentile inclusion in the program also was a part of this promise and plan. So what really seemed like a new and dangerous religion, making formerly distinct groups into a new community, was really part of an old divine plan and effort to reconcile humanity to God and to each other. In a world that saw older religion as time-tested and in which ethnic groups tended to function separately and in tension with each other, this message legitimated this new movement as part of a long-standing plan of God to reconcile his creation. We will overview the key issues of introduction as they relate to the trustworthiness of Acts. This introductory material is heavily indebted to a fuller introduction that appears in my exegetical commentary on Acts (2007, 24–47).

At 1,003 verses, Acts is one of the longest books of the NT. By comparison Luke has 1,149 verses and Matthew 1,071. Acts covers 88 pages of the Nestle-Aland Greek text, while Luke covers 96 and Matthew 87. Witherington (1998, 6) notes that Acts has 18,374 words as compared with Luke's 19,404. Of the 5,436 *hapax* terms in the NT (words occurring only once), 2,038 of them occur in Acts (Culy and Parsons 2003, xiii).

Authorship

Many of the issues here parallel what I said about the authorship of Luke's Gospel. The external testimony to Acts comes from titles written onto the manuscripts and also remarks from historical figures in the second and third centuries. Fourth- to ninth-century manuscripts use the title *Acts* ($\mathfrak{p}^{74}$, א, B, D [*Act* likely by an error of hearing], and Ψ). Longer versions of the title name Luke (33, 189, 1891, 2344). Irenaeus speaks of Luke as the author in *Against*

Heresies 3.13.3. Tertullian also names Luke in *On Fasting* 10, as does Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata* 5.12). They wrote in the late second and early third centuries. The Muratorian Canon (lines 34–39) names Luke as the author. So our materials point to authorship being consistently tied to Luke starting by the end of the second century.

Internal evidence for Lucan authorship involves first of all seeing the two volumes (the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts) as making up one account in two parts (Cadbury 1922). Though a few critics challenge this idea (Parsons and Pervo 1993), the interlocking of the books with the ascension in Luke 24 and Acts 1, as well as the prologues (Luke 1:1–4; Acts 1:1–3), point to a single work by a single author. Some stylistic variation exists between the books, but this is in part due to shifts in subject matter. Luke focuses on an individual (Jesus), whereas Acts discusses the mission of the early Christian community. Stylistic variations may also be due to the distinct origins of the traditions the author used. Parallels with Jesus, Peter, and Paul also point to a unity of design and thus unity of authorship.

Internally for Acts, the most important authorship evidence involves the “we” sections (Bruce 1990, 3–5; Ellis 1974, 43–44; Hemer 1989, 312–34). They appear in 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–28:16. Some have said their appearance seems to fall at random parts of Acts (Fitzmyer 1989, 1–26), but close examination reveals that this is not entirely the case, for each “we” text involves a sea trip. That the presence of the “we” feature is limited to voyage scenes undercuts the claim that these are merely rhetorical descriptions and merely created for effect (Vielhauer 1966, 33–34, 47–48). If an author were creating this feature in an attempt to establish his credibility as eyewitness, he would not limit it to just these moments. So the “we” sections are either someone’s journal of these moments that the author has incorporated, or else the sections belong to the author himself, who was present on the voyages. The traditional position accepts the latter possibility and argues that this indicates that a companion of Paul authored the volumes. Ancient practice supports this conclusion. Fitzmyer (1998, 100–102) notes that there is no literary precedent for a travel narrative being a literary creation. Rather, as Fitzmyer argues, the “we” sections indicate the writer of Acts was present at some of the events being portrayed, part of the valued “eyewitness motif” that was common in Greek historiography. With this limitation, candidates for authorship become limited as well. An initial list might include Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Timothy, Titus, Silas, Epaphras, and Barnabas. We can exclude some of these (like Timothy,

Titus, Silas, and Barnabas) because Acts names them but does not include them among the "we."

Luke is interesting as a candidate because we know very little about him (Bruce 1990, 6). There is material that says he was a doctor (Col 4:14), and his name suggests he was Gentile. Some have suggested that Luke came to be identified as the author only by a process of elimination, and that the name was ascribed to the writing in order to give it credibility (Haenchen 1987, 14). However, there is nothing about Luke that is outstanding or prominent, thus there would have been no motivation for attaching his name to the work. Add to this the consistency of the early tradition naming Luke as author, and the case for his authorship seems well-founded.

An argument sometimes put forward against Lucan authorship says the theology of Paul as found in Acts does not match the theology of Paul as found in his own letters. If the author was Luke and Luke was a companion of Paul's, would we not expect Acts to portray accurately Paul's theology? The mismatch is said to involve issues of natural law, Jewish law, Christology, and eschatology (Vielhauer 1966). First, some pit Acts 17 and its openness to seeing God in creation against Romans 1, which seems to imply the revelation of God in creation is only enough to form a basis of our guilt before God. Second, they contrast Luke's lack of discussion about the role of the cross in salvation with Paul's emphasis on it. Third, critics say Luke has an adoptionistic Christology, where Jesus *becomes* Son of God during his earthly life. Fourth, some note how little Luke speaks about the end times, in contrast to Paul who emphasizes it.

Responses to this line of argument are plentiful (Ellis 1974, 45–47; Bruce 1976; Fitzmyer 1998, 145–47). First, Romans 1 no less than Acts 17 says creation testifies to God, but the issue is that Romans 1 points out that people (in this case, polytheists) resist this testimony and refuse to glorify God or show him gratitude (Rom 1:21). The different settings of these two passages are important; Acts 17 represents Paul's reaching out in an evangelistic setting, asking people to consider God, while in Romans 1 he is concerned with explaining the rejection of God and humanity's guilt. Second, Luke does note the cross briefly in two texts (Acts 20:28; Luke 22:18–20). The second text is disputed in terms of textual criticism, but the disputed portion is likely original. Third, Luke's Christology is not adoptionistic (Moule 1966, 159–86; Gathercole 2006). Jesus appears as Son from the very start of Luke (Luke 1:30–35). Fourth, Luke has an end-time theology, as the Acts 3 speech shows. Finally, the issue of how the law is viewed between Luke-Acts and Paul's writings is more complex, but the key

is to see what Paul himself says, namely that he is a Jew to the Jews and a Greek to the Greeks (1 Cor 9:19–23). So his approach varied depending on the circumstance, and this may account for different approaches seen between these bodies of writing.

Aside from theological differences, there are other arguments based on non-theological differences. One such challenge to Lucan authorship notes that Paul presents himself as an apostle (e.g., Rom 1:1), while Luke does not name him in this light (Haenchen 1987, 112–6). Another says Luke presents Paul as a miracle worker and great orator, whereas Paul does not present himself as either of these things. However, Paul is a miracle worker according to his own material (Rom 15:18–19; 1 Cor 5:4–5; 2 Cor 4:7; 12:9, 12; 1 Thess 1:5). While he lays no claims to being an orator, his letters are evidence of his rhetorical skills. In addition, Heanchen's description of Luke's portrayal of Paul as an orator is exaggerated; Luke has Paul failing to persuade the Athenians (Acts 17), failing to keep Eutychus awake (20:7–12), and giving Festus the impression that he has lost his mind (26:24). Paul's hesitancy about his own gifts in spots reflects his humility (Eph 3:1–9). Finally, critics claim that the cause of Paul's persecution differs between Acts and the Pauline epistles. They say that in the book of Acts, Paul is persecuted over the issue of resurrection, while in the Gospel of Luke it is because he rejects the Law. However, this ignores the cause of Paul's arrest in Acts 20 and also reflects a reductionism that highlights only one key reason from each work. Also, the different emphases may indicate a difference between the point Paul most wanted to stress and the point an interested observer (Luke) most wanted to stress. These differences of emphasis give depth to the portrait of Paul and his ministry and do not indicate a contradiction. In his letters Paul focuses on how Jesus saves through justification by faith, while Luke focuses on who does the saving in Acts. Nonetheless, Luke clearly has Paul speak of salvation through faith in Christ during his Pisidean speech (see Acts 13:13–41, esp. vv. 38–39).

One final issue is the lack of citation of Paul's letters in Acts. Bruce (1990, 52–59) argues that Acts was written too close to the time of Paul's letters for them to have been used, and that the issues about missions that are prevalent in Acts are distinct from the issues treated in Paul's letters. Two issues that do overlap are circumcision and Paul's relationship to the community in Jerusalem. These accounts also can be reconciled, especially if one sees Acts 15 taking place after Galatians 2 (Witherington 1998, 88–97).

In conclusion, the strongest point in the case for Luke being the author of

Luke-Acts is the evidence of early church testimony. The issues that arise from a comparison of Luke-Acts to the Pauline letters do not reach the level of overturning this testimony. In fact, explaining how the early church came to mention Luke consistently as the author when other, better-known candidates existed suggests it must have had a strong reason for identifying him as author.

Date

The date of Acts is tied to that of Luke and the sequence in which the gospels were written. As Conzelmann notes (1987, xxvii–xxxiii), second-century allusions to Acts include *1 Clem.* 2.2 (Acts 2:17); *1 Clem.* 5.4, 7 (Acts 1:25); Pol. *Phil.* 2.3 (Acts 20:35); Pol. *Phil.* 6.3 (Acts 7:52); Pol. *Phil.* 12.2 (Acts 2:5; 4:12; 8:21; 20:32); Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 50.1 (Acts 1:8). Allusions in Clement rule out a second century date for Acts, though some contend for it (O'Neill, 1961, 1–58).

One option is to place Acts after the destruction of the temple in AD 70. In this view, Mark was written either right before or just after this destruction and the other gospels come later, so Acts would follow Luke in this time frame. I detailed and evaluated those arguments in the treatment of Luke's date. Although possible, the view has some assumptions about how to read the Olivet Discourse as having a post-70 perspective that are not likely. Since this is a major reason for a late date, it raises questions about such a dating, although it is possible that Matthew and Luke are after 70, making this option a possibility. (Bock 2007, 25–27, has details on this discussion while opting for the option below.)

The other option is a date in the 60s, before the destruction of Jerusalem. To get this date, the dates of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) need to be placed before the destruction as well. In support of this date it is noted that the last event Luke discusses is Paul's imprisonment in Rome. This took place in the early 60s, prior to the destruction. So the claim is that Acts ends with Paul in prison because the book was written while he was still imprisoned and before Jerusalem was sacked (Hemer 1989, 383). This is possible, but it assumes that Luke would have chosen to narrate the outcome of Paul's imprisonment in Rome if he was writing at a time after the outcome was known. However, it is possible that Luke wrote at a time when the outcome was already known but that he decided not to narrate it because his goal for Acts was to conclude with confirmation that the gospel had reached Rome (Fitzmyer 1998, 52–53; Bock 2007, 676–77). Given this uncertainly about Luke's purpose for the ending of Acts, a date somewhere in the mid or late 60s is more likely than one in the early

60s.

Provenance

We do not know where Acts was written or for what community it was written. Numerous locales have been suggested, such as Rome (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.1.1.14) and Achaia (Anti-Marcionite Prologue), while Caesarea, Corinth, and Ephesus also have received consideration more recently (Pesch 1986, 28). But the fact is we do not know. Theophilus appears to be someone of status, but he could have lived anywhere in the Roman Empire.

Reliability of Manuscripts

The MS evidence for Acts is strong. Three families of text are extant: Alexandrian, Western, and Majority (I use the siglum "Byz" for this last family; Barrett 1994, 21–22; Fitzmyer 1998, 69). In general, the Western text is longer and more periphrastic than the Alexandrian and is the subject of much debate. Boismard and Lamouille (1984) have argued for the originality of the Western text (Barrett 1998, xix–xxii). A similar view, also discussed by Barrett, holds that two versions of Acts circulated initially (Barrett 1994, 22–23). The view is problematic because it requires that Acts did not circulate until the middle of the second century since the Western text is thought to date to that time.

Most scholars regard the Western text as the work of a later copyist who sought to improve the literary quality of the original version of Acts. Scholars debate whether this was done in the mid-second century or as late as the third or fourth centuries, but it may have been early enough that some of the readings reflect the original. Evidence suggests the Alexandrian text is closest to the original, but even so, we must assess variants on a case-by-case basis.

The discussion of MSS for Acts includes observing what texts exist and noting the special situation of the Western text. Here we survey mostly the key Greek MSS.

Major uncial and versional witnesses for the Alexandrian family include ℵ or Sinaiticus (fourth century); A, or Alexandrinus (fifth century); and B, or Vaticanus (fourth century). The Byzantine text (Byz) is best represented by H (ninth century), L (ninth century), P (ninth century), Ψ (eighth or ninth century), and 049 (ninth century). The Western text has witnesses in D, also known as Codex Bezae (fifth century), and the Harclean Syriac (seventh century). Codex D lacks Acts 8:29–10:14; 21:2–10, 16–18; 22:10–20; and 22:29–28:31. Codex E (sixth or seventh century) is a Greek-and-Latin text with a mix of mostly Western and some Byzantine readings. Key minuscules include 614 (thirteenth

century, Western and Byzantine mix) and 1739 (tenth century, eclectic).

Most of the fifteen papyri of Acts contain fragmentary portions of the book (Fitzmyer 1998, 66–67, has the complete list and identifies verses tied to each). Among the more important are p^{8} (fourth century, Acts 4:31–37; 5:2–9; 6:1–6, 8–15), p^{29} (third century, Acts 26:7–8, 20, Western), p^{38} (c. AD 300; Acts 18:27–19:6, 12–16, Western), p^{45} (a major witness containing large portions of 4:27–17:17, it is a third-century mix of Western and mostly Alexandrian readings; sometimes called Caesarean), p^{48} (late third century, Acts 23:11–17, 23–29, Western), p^{53} (third century, Acts 9:33–10:1), p^{74} (seventh century, large portions of Acts from 1:2 to 28:31, Alexandrian), and p^{91} (third century, Acts 2:30–37; 2:46–3:2). Other papyri are p^{33+58}, p^{41}, p^{50} (Alexandrian), p^{53}, p^{56}, and p^{57}. Alexandrian minuscules include 33 (Acts 11:26–28:31), 81, 104, 326, and 1175. Western minuscules are 383 and 614. The Byzantine text dominates the minuscules, including MS 33 for Acts 1:1–11:25.

In sum, the manuscript tradition for Acts is solid. We can be confident we have the core text of Acts.

Sources

We noted above that the “we” sections help us understand the origins of Acts by showing when the author himself was present in the events and served as a first-person source in a few scenes. It is more difficult to determine the extent to which Luke used other source material and whether we can identify such sources. Bruce (1990, 40) notes that some scholars have rightly called such efforts “largely guess-work.” There is no good way to determine the existence of such sources.

In Acts 1–12, it appears there are sources from the Jerusalem community and perhaps also Hellenistic Jewish communities, since Acts 6:8–8:40 seems to reflect the latter perspective, whereas most everything else up to this point has a Jerusalem perspective. Acts 12 seems to be Jerusalem-based, and the source for Acts 9 could well be Paul. More difficult to determine is the origin for Acts 10–11. Either locale for the source (the Jewish Jerusalem or the Hellenist Jerusalem community) could be present here. What makes the discussion so difficult is that Luke has taken over his sources and put the entire story into his own style.

Paul was likely a source in Acts 13–28, but beyond this it is hard to know if Luke worked with local traditions (whether oral, written, or both). Barrett (1994,

51–56) proposes Philip, Caesarea, Antioch, and Paul as potential sources, with Antioch having a key role even in the Pauline conversion account, the early journey, and the Jerusalem Council (Barrett 1998, xxiv). The Antioch thesis traces to the work of Harnack (1908, 131–58, 169–73), who argues for two distinct sources, one from Jerusalem and another from Antioch (Fitzmyer 1998, 82–83). Hengel (1990, 4) puts forth a variation of this, with a source about Peter and an Antiochene source for Acts 1–15. For the second and third journey, we have the "we source" and thus possible contact with Paul or his associates. This source was familiar with Corinth and Ephesus, as there is much local detail in these sections. Josephus and Paul's letters seem unlikely sources (Bruce 1990, 43–44).

Marshall (1980, 37) correctly notes the difficulty of discovering the sources for Acts and raises the question of how we can judge reliability when the sources are unknown. He makes two points. First, there is good evidence for the church having a well-circulated, reliable tradition, as Jervell (1972, 19–39) argues. Second, in places where we can check Luke against his sources, such as his likely use of Mark, he is careful with them.

Genre of Acts, Nature of Its Presentation of History, and the Speeches

In Hellenistic literature, the genre of "acts" normally recounts the deed of a single great individual, such as Alexander the Great (Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* 17.15; 18.1.6) or Augustus (*Res gestae divi Augusti*). In some cases, however, it covers a group, such as "Acts of the Early Kings" (Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* 3.1.1; Wikenhauser 1921, 94–104; Talbert 1997, 7; Fitzmyer 1998, 47–48). Such "acts" often were designed to present the hero as a kind of divine man or at least a man sent from God. This genre normally details the hero's acts, including miracles and anecdotes. Many challenge the category of a divine man. It is better to appreciate that such Greco-Roman "divination" has nothing to do with ontology, but merely was the way of honoring a ruler or a great figure in an honor-shame culture as one who had excessive human skill, like a god. So this background is not at all like what is going on with Jesus, and really does not apply to the book or the gospel.

It is likely that the title "Acts of the Apostles" was intended to highlight that the characters God uses in Acts are to be seen as sent from God. Acts, however, focuses less on individuals than on the growth of the community and its message. Its main actor is God whose plan and actions direct the movements in

the book. The book moves from locale to locale as God directs, starting in Jerusalem and culminating in the travels of Paul to Rome. In fact, the key character in Acts is not Paul or any of the other apostles, but God—his activity and his plan to spread the gospel.

Acts follows the basic rules of Hellenistic histories. Van Unnik (1979, 37–60) identifies 10 rules of such writing, most of which Luke follows in Acts. The rules are (1) a noble subject, (2) the usefulness of the subject for readers, (3) independence of mind and absence of partiality, (4) good narrative construction, (5) adequate collection of preparatory material, (6) the selection and variety of treatment of that material, (7) correct disposition and ordering of the account, (8) lively narration, (9) moderation in topographical detail, and (10) the composition of speeches adapted to the orator and rhetorical situation. Marguerat (2002, 14) holds that Luke follows eight of these ten rules, with his points of departure being his choice of subject and his lack of impartiality. But as Marguerat is aware (2002, 22), it is precisely because Luke is presenting *divine* acts and their significance that the subject matter is noble and the perspective is not impartial. In this Luke adopts a perspective that is in line with Jewish historiography.

Acts only highlights some of the Twelve: Peter and John are prominent in this group, but other key players are not part of the Twelve. These include Stephen, Philip, Paul, and James. Paul is called apostle in only one scene in Acts (14:4, 14), and this is when he appears with Barnabas. Some commentators highlight the Holy Spirit as the key character in Acts, but God the Father sovereignly directs the Spirit's work. Jesus mediates the Spirit's distribution (Acts 2:32–36).

Acts is a sociological, historical, and theological work explaining the roots of this new community God is building, and it is a sequel to the story of Jesus portrayed in Luke's Gospel. It is not so much a part of the genre of "acts" in the Greco-Roman sense; it is, rather, a "historical monograph" in the ancient sense of the term (Hengel 1979, 13–14, 36; Sterling 1992; Witherington 1998, 2–39). This classification also rejects the idea that Acts is ancient epic (*pace* Bonz 2000). Acts lacks the poetic nature of such works, is concerned with the church's relationship to Israel more than to Rome, and gives evidence, where we can check Luke's work, of being in touch with historical detail rather than being as creative with such detail as the epic classification suggests (Hemer 1989).

Luke is a historian in the ancient mold whose historiography is rooted in Jewish models. Acts is selective in its treatment of origins, highlighting themes and parallels Luke wants the reader to appreciate. That he does not fill in the

gaps distinguishes his work from later apocryphal “Acts” and speaks to its authenticity (Hengel and Schwemer 1997, 106, 385n554). Luke reveals the selective nature of his treatment as he tells his story. For example, he does not give us the origin of every community he treats, even important ones such as Antioch and Rome. Precedents for such a story of God’s work among his people are the various works about the Maccabean period (e.g., 1–2 Maccabees). Acts, however, is a unique account of the origins of God’s new community and is best understood as a part of the two volumes Luke composed. Luke was innovative in telling how God worked to bring about a new era and community (Roloff 1988, 1). Nothing indicates the sequel nature of the work more clearly than the reference to “the first account” in Acts 1:1, a reference looking back to Luke’s Gospel. The linkage between the works is further reinforced by the overlapping accounts of Jesus’ ascension at the end of Luke and the beginning of Acts (Luke 24:50–53; Acts 1:9–11).

Some academic contexts commonly define history like we have in Acts as “poetic history” in contrast to documentary history or explicative history (Marguerat 2002, 5–13). Documentary history looks at facts. Explicative history looks at the social and cultural viewpoints. Poetic history is rooted in myths and aims to give identity. Scholars like Marguerat observe that although Acts includes all the types of history, God’s activity makes key sections “poetic” in thrust.

What should we make of this distinction? There is a major worldview and definitional problem here. How does one treat Jesus’ post-resurrection appearance to Paul—as metaphorical and poetic or as a genuine documentary description? In Galatians 1, Paul treats this as a revelatory event, quite real and not merely poetically adorned. If it is a documentary event, why should we classify similar events in Acts as poetic? What is one to do with the myriad scenes in Acts where God is the reason events take place? Does the description “poetic” really suffice? Such a move may reflect a worldview that declares God’s activity historically out of bounds. This approach Acts secularizes before a page is read or a single event is narrated.

For some, the poetic vs. documentary distinction is a way to separate theology from history and to point out that theology claims more than history can demonstrate. In one sense this is correct. After all, how does one “prove” that sins have been forgiven? The “proof” is in the vindicated character of the one making the claim or any revelatory roots they name as backing for their claim. History, as we think of it, does not have adequate tools to assess such claims. But

to move portions of Acts into poetic categories nullifies the documentary and explicative features of the text simply because it puts forward a divine cause. What you believe about God and his activity directly impacts how you read Acts' portrayal of events, especially in those places where God is active.

In saying this, we do not deny that Acts has a constructed feature to it. Many works of history have this feature as authors choose to narrate select events out of a larger mass of happenings. In Acts, Luke strings together select scenes and relates them to each other by his choices and the structure he provides. This does not mean that he misrepresents history. The historian's perceptions are very much a part of what history is and how it works itself out. The historical insights of well-placed authors can be useful in showing us where history has gone or what might have driven it. There can be more than one interpretation of a given set of events, and particular interpretations are useful for identifying what the author hoped for and what he believed resulted from a set of events. History may entail more than digging up brute facts since these facts are interpreted, but some interpretations and points of view accurately mirror what the events produced, enlightening and/or revealing the events' later historical significance.

To properly assess Luke, it is important to become familiar with relevant Jewish and Greco-Roman sources, including especially Second Temple Judaism and classical literature. Classical historians respect Luke as a historian (Nobbs 2006), and a careful look at the details of Acts shows that, where we can check him, Luke is credible. The works of Sherwin-White 1963; Hemer 1990; and the six-volume series launched by Winter and Clarke in 1993 suggest that we should not be skeptical about Luke. We must read Acts open to a balanced view of its historical approach—in terms of its poetry, history, and cultural setting—as well as to the presence of divine activity.

Some scholars have read Acts as being largely creative, along the lines of ancient romance or legend (e.g., Pervo 1987). In varying degrees, writers such as Dibelius, Conzelmann, Haenchen, and others treat Acts as having little historical value. The roots of this view go back to the old Tübingen school and F. C. Baur in the nineteenth century. They portray Christianity in conflict and Luke as the mediator of the tension in Acts, trying to smooth over differences between Peter and Paul. According to this view, Luke tries to present a more idealized picture of the church than was really the case.

Another group of scholars, dating back to Ramsey and extending to Bruce, Gasque, Hemer, Hengel, Marshall, Sherwin-White, and Witherington, highly regards Luke's merits as an ancient historian. Ramsey in particular, in a careful

study of Acts, found that many of its details are more trustworthy than he expected prior to his study. To argue for Luke's reliability is not to deny that he writes a theology or brings a perspective to the account, nor is it to make the sharp disjunction between history and theology made by the other approach to Acts. A detailed consideration of historicity requires going through the data of Acts unit by unit. Space constraints dictate that we make only general remarks here. Still these details highlight the fact that conservative and moderate approaches to Acts do speak with respect for Luke's approach as a historian.

Regarding events that have documentary or historical corroboration, the consensus is that Luke fares well. Fitzmyer (1998, 126–27) notes nine elements of Acts that have external attestation, either through the Pauline Epistles or through outside historical sources. These nine are:

- Paul's escape from Damascus
- Paul's trip to Rome
- How Paul earned his livelihood
- Herod Agrippa's sudden death
- Gallio as proconsul of Achaia
- Felix and Festus as procurators in Judea
- Drusilla as wife of Felix
- Bernice as the wife of Herod Agrippa II
- Ananias as high priest

Fitzmyer also notes minor details that are correct, such as proper descriptions of cities (Philippi as a "colony" in 16:12) and city officials (politarchs in Thessalonica; see 17:6, 8). Much of what we can test shows that Acts is a credible historical source. The work of Hemer (1989) has shown how careful Luke is in numerous details. Hengel (1979, 60) affirms that Luke is no less trustworthy than other historians of antiquity, an assessment that might seem like faint praise, but in the environment of extreme skepticism, this is saying a great deal. Hengel says comparisons to largely fictitious, romance-like writings are a disservice. In this commentary, our treatment of passages and units that have come under criticism will confirm Hengel's conclusion.

So what kind of history is Acts? Often it is assumed that writers who have an apologetic purpose are less than accurate in what they write. Penner (2004) argues that ancient historiography was about persuasion, plot, and characterization—even the rewriting of history to make a convincing case—and he challenges less skeptical approaches to ancient history, such as those of

Hengel and Witherington. Penner also argues that ancient history is not about the veracity of the event described but about verisimilitude rooted in later personal experience (2004, 110). However, an appeal to experience that was direct and early also fits into ancient historical writing, a point Penner minimizes. Penner also emphasizes how all recognize that Luke is the creator of the text's wording, which makes it hard to reach the history apart from Luke's presentation of it (2004, 108, 111). But good history writing is about more than merely stating what happened and when; it also discusses causes and effects, and reveals motivations and rationale. One must avoid appealing to false oppositions here. Luke's creativity does not mean he created events, but rather that his perspective and purpose influenced his way of summarizing them, something that is true of every history writer.

Acts seeks to teach and persuade through the selective choice of events and intentional summaries. There is no doubt that Acts has a case to argue, as the prefaces to the Gospel and Acts both suggest. Acts seeks to give assurance, but this assurance is rooted in the essential character of the events Luke portrays. It may not be the only possible point of view on these events, but it is the one for which Luke contends. The book of Acts is like other ancient histories in its approach. The ancients understood history as the relating of deeds for edification, as Lucian of Samosata's discussion in *How to Write History* 49–55, 63, shows, and as do the remarks of Polybius (*Histories* 2.56.11) and Quintilian (*Institutio oratoria* 2.4.2). Lucian says that a historian should get his facts right. Greek historians valued personal observation and participation in events where they could find such sources. One Lucan contrast to this Greco-Roman tradition is that the key events he narrates are not political or military-related, as is the case in most Greek history; instead, they are social and communal, showing where God is at work.

Acts also fits into the genre of Jewish historiography. Here the primary concern is to tell "the story of a subgroup of people in an extended prose narrative" (Sterling 1992, 17) while highlighting God's activity. As Marguerat (2002, 25) says, "Judaeo-Christian *historia* has no other ambition than to point to God behind the event." However, a difference between Luke and these ethnic narratives is that he is trying to explain how God orchestrated the expansion of the gospel from its Jewish roots to include people of all sorts of backgrounds. Finally, a key theme in Jewish historiography is to show that what people are experiencing is part of the way God has acted for ages. This explains why such histories constantly appeal to the Scriptures by quotation and allusion.

In summary, Acts is an example of Hellenist and Jewish historiography. It emphasizes that the growing Christian community is rooted in God's OT promises, the Lord Jesus' current activity, and the Spirit's effective presence. Acts focuses on key human players as well, including Peter, Stephen, Philip, Paul, and James. The book places these characters and events in the context of the world's larger history. Its details are correct regarding provinces, governors, local color, and judicial practice (for the latter, see Sherwin-White 1963).

Speech material constitutes about a third of Acts. Scholarly assessment of this material falls along the same lines as the assessments made about the narrative material. Those who doubt the general accuracy of the speeches say that the style and parallel themes found in the speeches, along with the conventional ways ancient historiographers handled speech material, mean that Luke had only minimal concern about what was originally said. Dibelius set forth this position (1956, 138–85), and many scholars have defended it (Schweizer 1966). Dibelius presented his view as early as 1926, but his classic statement is a 1944 essay published in English in 1956. Wilckens (1974) reaffirms this position in a monograph on the speeches. An updated version of this argument comes from Marion Soards (1994, 1–17). He argues that the speeches are a literary device, a convention of historiography, and a theological-ideological device that help Acts form a unity in its argument.

On the other side stand those who say that while the exact wording of the speeches comes from Luke, he is summarizing his sources with a concern to report what was truly said (Dodd 1936; Bruce 1942; Ridderbos 1962; Marshall 1980, 39–42; Bruce 1990, 34–40; Witherington 1998, 46–49). In favor of this position is the fact that Luke circulated through the church communities, giving him good access to sources plus the opportunity to hear apostolic speeches in person. More importantly, the content of these speeches and their Christology differ enough to indicate that input from tradition is likely. One need only compare the heavy use of the OT in Acts 2 or 3 with the lack of such use in Acts 10, or the shift in those same chapters from Messiah, Holy One, or servant to a singular appeal to Lord or judge of the living and dead to see the difference (Bruce 1990, 37–39). The length of the speeches, most of which are short, speaks for their character as summaries. Witherington argues that the Lucan speeches are tightly fitted into their settings, suggesting authenticity.

When it comes to identifying the conventions of ancient historiography, the debate turns on the remarks of Thucydides in *Peloponnesian War* 1.22.1, where the author admits that he cannot recollect the exact words, but states that his goal

is to place in the speakers' mouths sentiments proper to the occasion and to give the general purport of what was actually said (Bruce 1990, 34). Thus he claims the freedom to summarize what was said. Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Letter to Pompey* 3) criticizes Thucydides for being so committed to historical accuracy over entertaining (Witherington 1998, 48). Polybius (*Histories* 2.56.10–12) also embraces the factual approach to history, noting that the historian is "to instruct and convince for all time serious students by the truth of the facts and the speeches he narrates." He stresses that the truth has precedent for the historian over the goal of entertaining. Fornara (1983) in a monograph on ancient historical writing affirms this technique in some, but not all, classical authors. So the question becomes, "What type of ancient historical writer is Luke?"

To answer this question, we first note that Luke has shown that he can carefully follow sources where we can test him—namely, in his use of sources in the Gospels (e.g., Acts 17:1–9). In addition, Luke lived in closer proximity to his sources than did Thucydides, giving Luke a good opportunity to know what the apostles preached. Bruce (1990, 39) refers to Luke as a writer who is Thucydidean but with "considerable restraint." Quoting Foakes-Jackson and Lake (1931, xvi), Bruce (1990, 39) argues that the speeches give us "an extraordinarily accurate picture of the undeveloped theology of the earliest Christians, and so enable us to determine the character of the most primitive presentation of the gospel." Hengel (1979, 61) says it this way:

> On the other hand, one can hardly accuse him [Luke] of simply having invented events, created scenes out of nothing and depicted them on a broad canvas, deliberately falsifying the traditions in an unrestrained way for the sake of cheap effect. He is quite simply not concerned with pious edification at the expense of truth. He is not just an "edifying writer," but a historian and theologian who needs to be taken seriously. His account always remains within the limits of what was considered reliable by ancient standards of antiquity. . . . True, the speeches interspersed through Acts always also serve to develop Luke's own theological ideas, but as a rule he does this by use of older traditions, and often attempts to give an appropriate characterization of individual speakers.

What about the role of rhetoric in Acts? Should its presence impact how we judge its historical accuracy? The presence of rhetorical persuasion and style, which is certainly prevalent in Acts, need not mean Luke is not staying true to the events he relates. Luke's two prologues (Luke 1:1–4 and Acts 1:1–3) indicate that he was equally concerned with accurate representation and persuasion. We

should judge his use of rhetoric in light of these stated concerns.

In summary, Luke is a careful, ancient historian. He writes with style and flair, often summarizing more complex events. But he is also interested in more than just entertaining his readers. He wishes to inform and persuade at the same time. What happened is as important for him as engaging the reader in his topic. Luke is selective in presenting his history and functions very much as an author, but he also is careful in doing so.

Canonicity

If Acts was written for the narrow purpose of informing Theophilus about the early spread of the gospel, it has achieved a far broader purpose since it circulated widely in the church and was recognized as canonical (Bruce 1990, 19–21). Like the four Gospels, Acts appears to have been well established as an authoritative source by the end of the second century. It is listed in the Muratorian Canon, in the Anti-Marcionite Prologues, and in Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 3.15.1, where he defends Acts' portrait of Saul's conversion in the face of some who challenged Paul's apostolic authority). The presence of apocryphal versions of Acts seems to assume the original version existed early and was regarded as authoritative, else why co-opt it? Acts is the link between the Gospels and the letters of Paul. This is important because by this time Paul's letters and the four Gospels were likewise well established as authorities. When Tertullian wrote against heretical views, he twice affirmed the authority of Acts (*Prescription against Heretics* 22.11; 23.3).

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> I wrote the first narrative, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach [2] until the day He was taken up, after He had given orders through the Holy Spirit to the apostles He had chosen. [3] After He had suffered, He also presented Himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

Many convincing proofs (1:3): The Greek word for proof (*tekmērion*) means that which causes something to be known in a convincing way. The proofs that took place over 40 days of post-resurrection appearances had convinced the

disciples that Jesus was literally raised from the dead. The proof had to be strong, for their starting points were panicked flight (Matt 26:56) and cowardly denial of Jesus (Luke 22:54–62). In the end they held a firm conviction that Jesus had taught them truth about the kingdom of God and that he was alive again.

With few exceptions Jesus chose to appear only to his followers during the 40 days after his resurrection. Critics have suggested this selectivity proves that the resurrection is fictional. After all, why would Jesus choose to visit only receptive audiences when his resurrection was strong enough proof to convince even the hardest skeptic? But in fact there are at least two examples of Jesus appearing to resolute unbelievers, namely James and Saul. Jesus appeared to his unbelieving (John 7:3–5) brother James in an event that is mentioned but not narrated (1 Cor 15:7). The proof was convincing enough that James went on to became leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13–21). At a later time Jesus appeared to Saul of Tarsus, who became so convinced of Jesus' divinity that he went from persecuting the church to becoming a key apostle and proclaimer of the gospel hope (Acts 9).

Aside from these counterexamples, a possible explanation for Jesus' habit of appearing to believers rather than unbelievers is that he intended that from the very start the resurrection message be spread by appointed spokespersons, those in whom he had already invested for several years. These chosen messengers were trained in his teachings and methods. Had Jesus gone on a parade to show himself to the mass of unbelievers, all sorts of superstition and misinformation would have spread, perhaps eclipsing the truth.

In addition, miracles were no guarantee of belief. Jesus had performed many such works and yet met with unbelief. People often see what they want to see. Luke 16:31 notes that those who do not believe Moses will not believe if one is raised from the dead.

Finally, we must note that Jesus' chosen method was effective. The gospel spread quickly as his followers were granted the powers of healing and miraculous signs as they proclaimed his resurrection (Acts 3–4).

> 4 While He was together with them, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait
> for the Father's promise. "This," He said, "is what you heard from Me; 5 for John baptized with
> water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."
>
> 6 So when they had come together, they asked Him, "Lord, are You restoring the kingdom to

Israel at this time? ”

7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by His
own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you
will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Baptized with the Holy Spirit (1:5): This remark is quite important for Luke in Luke and Acts. In Luke 3:16, John the Baptist had noted the way that one could recognize the Messiah had come (see Luke 3:15, which sets the context of his remarks). The greater one, the one who baptized with Spirit and fire, was the Messiah. So Jesus' bringing the Spirit points to his role as Messiah. The anointed one also anoints his own. Luke 24:49 repeats this idea, as does Acts 11:15–18 and 15:8–9. Acts 2 recounts its fulfillment.

In Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (1:8): This provides the geographic outline for Acts. The story moves from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and then out to the ends of the earth, concluding with a sea voyage (Acts 27), the danger of which fittingly captures the dangers and challenges that have been incurred in Jerusalem and Rome and every point in between. The whole movement of Acts is an apology for mission in the church, showing the gospel to be triumphant even in the face of risk and rejection.

9 After He had said this, He was taken up as they were watching, and a cloud took Him out of
their sight. 10 While He was going, they were gazing into heaven, and suddenly two men in
white clothes stood by them. 11 They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into
heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that
you have seen Him going into heaven.”

He was taken up (1:9): Only Luke tells us about the ascension of Jesus. Matthew and John do not recount it, and while the longer ending of the Gospel of Mark does mention it (Mark 16:9–20), it is probably not original to Mark, for it is not in the better, earlier manuscripts, plus the long ending mostly summarizes what we find elsewhere and does so in a way that creates tension. A scribe who felt that the abrupt ending at 16:8 was troubling likely added Mark's longer ending. So while the remark (16:14–19) that Jesus ascended to heaven from a room in Jerusalem is inconsistent with Luke's testimonies, it does not represent a biblical contradiction since the long ending of Mark is not authentic.

When and where did Jesus ascend to heaven? Answers hinge on whether Luke was narrating the same event in Luke 24 and Acts 1. The difference in location (Bethany in Luke 24:50–51 and the Mount of Olives in Acts 1:9) is not a

definitive indication that the events are distinct since the Mount of Olives stood between Jerusalem and Bethany with Bethany on the eastern side of the Mount. It is possible that in one case Luke was naming the closest town, while in the other he named the key topographical locale.

The question of timing is more complex. Luke 24:51–53 seems to place the ascension on the day of Jesus' resurrection, while Acts 1 places it 40 days after the resurrection. Are these the same event or two distinct events? Defenders of the single-event view explain the difference in various ways. Some break the scene in Luke 24 into two parts, with Luke 24:36–43 narrating events on resurrection day and Luke 24:44–53 looking ahead to events 40 days later, culminating in Jesus' ascension to heaven (Osborne in Bock/Webb 2009, 793). Others see a literary collapse of the scene into one setting in Luke 24. In this case Luke is summarizing the ascension at the close of his gospel before narrating it in detail in the opening chapter of Acts. This allows the link with ascension between Luke 24 and Acts 1 (Bock 1996, 1928). The discussion of the possible literary summary revolves around whether the meal scene of Luke 24:44–49 took place on the day of resurrection or 40 days later. In a case of a literary simplification where the temporal linking word in Luke 24:44 and 24:50 is simply "then" in both cases, either option is possible.

It is perhaps best to see two distinct events in Luke 24 and Acts 1. For more details on this option, see commentary on Luke 24:50–51.

A cloud took Him (1:9): Does the involvement of a cloud indicate that this scene is mythic and that the author believed heaven was a physical place located in the sky?

We should understand the reference to the cloud in the broader context of Scripture. It likely alludes to the Son of Man riding the clouds in Daniel 7:13–14. It is a way of showing that Jesus is headed to God's side in heaven, plus it is a sign of his authority to speak since the Son of Man receives authority from the Ancient of Days (God) in Daniel. The angel tells the disciples in Acts 1:11 that Jesus will return in the same way he departed. In Acts 3:20–21, Peter speaks of a physical return of Jesus to judge, while Paul speaks of Jesus coming on the clouds in 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

The journey up through the sky depicts moving toward heaven and life, not toward the underworld and death. Scripture depicts God as being omnipresent, located in all places, but when he is represented in a localized way, his dwelling is described as being above earth. So the point of the ascension is that Jesus goes up to be with God in heaven, which by convention is portrayed as being above

earth. Scripture does not intend to teach a physical cosmography, with heaven being a physical place in the sky above earth.

The imagery of the ascension—its being physical, literal, visible, and public—anticipates a similar return by Jesus. The language is not merely spiritual, nor does it look to a secret return by Jesus, as, for example, Jehovah's Witnesses argue.

> 12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called the Mount of Olives, which is near Jerusalem — a Sabbath day's journey away. 13 When they arrived, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying:
>
> Peter, John,
> James, Andrew,
> Philip, Thomas,
> Bartholomew, Matthew,
> James the son of Alphaeus,
> Simon the Zealot,
> and Judas the son of James.
>
> 14 All these were continually united in prayer, along with the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brothers.

A Sabbath day's journey (1:12): Critics have noted that Olivet is only a few miles outside Jerusalem and is thus not a day's walk away, and on this basis accuse Luke of geographical ignorance. However, if one is keeping to Jewish Sabbath restrictions, then a Sabbath day's walk is either 1,000 (CD 10.21) or 2,000 cubits (*m. Sotah* 5.3) in distance, depending on which Jewish tradition is being followed (and these are only the ones we know about). This distance translates to either 500 or 1,000 yards. The longer distance is about six tenths of a mile, a journey possible from Bethany or certain parts of Jerusalem on the Sabbath, again depending on which Sabbath distance rule is being followed. Josephus puts the distance between the mount and Jerusalem alternately as five (*Antiquities* 20.8.6 §169) or six stadia (*Jewish War* 5.2.3 §70), where a stadion equals 192 meters or about 219 yards. The fact there was variation in these distances means exact calculation is not possible, but we are not speaking of the 10–20 miles a day's normal travel by ancients on foot might encompass.

***The list of names* (1:13):** Is this list of disciples contradictory to the other disciple lists (Matt 10:2–4; Mark 3:16–19; Luke 6:13–16)? Acts only has 11 names, since by the time it was written Judas has defected and committed suicide, as the next scene will tell us. Acts groups the list in two sets of four, and

then the final three, as shown by how the Greek term for “and” (*kai*) is used in the list. John may be moved forward in the list because he is prominent in Acts (3:1, 3, 4, 11; 4:13, 19; 8:14; Barrett 1994, 87). Luke’s list in Acts 1 has the same names as his list in Luke 6, though in different order. In fact, there are differences in order in all the lists. This tells us Luke is either using a source that is distinct from his source of information in his Gospel or has worked from memory. The fact that these names show up in multiple sources tells us the idea of the Twelve is old and was widely circulated.

On the question about possible contradictions between the four disciple lists in the NT, see comments on Luke 6:12–16.

The mother of Jesus, and His brothers (1:14): The Greek term in this context (*adelphos*) is most naturally taken to refer to biological brothers, not merely spiritual brothers. Why make special mention of this group if spiritual brothers are meant? Are the “spiritual” brothers distinct from the disciples? There is no basis for such a distinction, and in fact the room is full of people who could be described as spiritual siblings, for this is the faith community. So the verse suggests Jesus had half-brothers and Mary was their mother. Such a view is not a problem biblically (as this verse shows) or theologically. Only those who adhere to the extrabiblical tradition of Mary’s perpetual virginity would sense a need to read this passage in a different way.

15 During these days Peter stood up among the brothers — the number of people who were
together was about 120 — and said: 16 “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled that the Holy
Spirit through the mouth of David spoke in advance about Judas, who became a guide to those
who arrested Jesus. 17 For he was one of our number and was allotted a share in this ministry.”
18 Now this man acquired a field with his unrighteous wages. He fell headfirst and burst open
in the middle, and all his insides spilled out. 19 This became known to all the residents of
Jerusalem, so that in their own language that field is called *Hakeldama* (that is, Field of Blood).
20 “For it is written in the Book of Psalms:

Let his dwelling become desolate;
let no one live in it; and
Let someone else take his position.

21 “Therefore, from among the men who have accompanied us during the whole time the Lord
Jesus went in and out among us — 22 beginning from the baptism of John until the day He was
taken up from us — from among these, it is necessary that one become a witness with us of His
resurrection.”

23 So they proposed two: Joseph, called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and

Matthias. 24 Then they prayed, “You, Lord, know the hearts of all; show which of these two
You have chosen 25 to take the place in this apostolic service that Judas left to go to his own
place.” 26 Then they cast lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias. So he was numbered with
the 11 apostles.

Scripture had to be fulfilled (1:16): Which Scripture verse does Peter have in mind when he speaks here? Luke as author often refers vaguely to Scripture or a section of it like the Psalms, leaving the specific passages unidentified (as in Luke 9:31; 24:43–47; see comments on Acts 1:20 below). The biblical texts did not have chapter or verse markings in ancient times (they were added in the late Middle Ages), so it is understandable that authors and speakers made general rather than specific references to Scripture in their speeches and writings.

Some commentators believe Peter/Luke makes an allusion to Psalm 41:9 here, where David is betrayed by one who sits at table with him. That psalm appeals to God’s mercy because of sin (41:4), something that would not refer to Jesus. However, one can read David’s psalm as a type of the pious person who is rejected and betrayed. The psalm is not just about Jesus; it is about the psalmist who in aspects of his experience reflects a pattern of activity that Jesus also shares (thus a type). Even so, Psalm 41 may not be in view in Acts 1:16. Peter may only be introducing the texts he cites later in verse 20. In fact, this is most likely what is going on here. The allusion to Psalm 41 fits better at the Last Supper.

The Death of Judas **(1:18–20):** Does this account conflict with Matthew 27:3–10 on the details surrounding Judas’s death? Key features in Matthew include:

- Judas felt remorse for his betrayal of Jesus and returned the money (v. 3).
- The chief priests and elders rebuffed the remorseful Judas (v. 4).
- Judas tossed the money into the sanctuary and went to hang himself (v. 5).
- The chief priests objected to using the “blood money” in the temple treasury (v. 6).
- The chief priests used the money to purchase a burial ground for foreigners (v. 7).
- “Therefore” the burial ground became known as “Blood Field,” the inference being that the name derives from the use of “blood money” to purchase it (v. 8).
- Matthew sees all of this as fulfilling Zechariah 11:13.

Key features in the Acts account include:

- Judas purchased a field with his "unrighteous wages" (v. 18).
- Judas "fell headfirst and burst open in the middle," apparently while walking the purchased field (v. 18).
- Judas's bloody demise became widely known in Jerusalem (v. 19).
- Knowledge of Judas's demise led to the field becoming known as the "Field of Blood" (v. 19).
- Luke sees all of this as fulfilling passages in Psalms (69:25 and 109:8).

Key differences between Matthew and Acts include:

- Matthew says Judas felt remorse; Acts does not mention Judas's remorse.
- In Matthew the chief priests purchase the field; in Acts Judas purchases it.
- In Matthew Judas commits suicide; in Acts Judas dies accidentally.
- In Matthew the field is called "Blood Field" due to the use of "blood money"; in Acts the name seems attributable to Judas's having bled to death in the field.

What we probably have are complementary accounts, the details of which differ because the authors were emphasizing different points. It is evident that Matthew wants to discuss more than just Judas's fate; he also wants to make known the involvement of the Jewish leadership in the betrayal of Jesus. This fits Matthew's polemic against the leadership. In distinction from this approach, Acts is interested only in Judas's eventual fate, not in any intervening activity, including any regret (however temporary or permanent) Judas may have felt. Any way you look at it, Judas's money and actions led to the purchase of the field by the priests. Thus it may well be that, in a "causative" sense, Judas purchased the field since the money the priests used had been both earned and returned by Judas. Another example of the causative sense would be a judge who sentences a criminal to death but does not personally execute him.

Some have suggested a resolution that has Judas himself purchasing the field, as Acts 1 notes, and then in remorse giving back to the priests a sum that was equivalent his blood money reward and purchase price of the field. The priests then purchased a separate field, or even the very field Judas had purchased (in this case purchasing it from Judas's estate).

Considering the broader biblical witness, Judas's horrific death indicates that God judged his unrighteousness (like the divine judgment that befalls Ananias

and Sapphira in Acts 5). Such judgments of bodily destruction are common, especially associated with dropsy, conditions of severe bodily swelling, or severe bodily damage (2 Sam 20:10; Prov 20:30; Acts 12:20–23; Bruce 1990, 109).

What about the details of Judas's death? The current traditional location of the Blood Field in Jerusalem is an area with a large overhang above a small sheer cliff. It is possible that Judas hung himself atop the cliff and eventually fell to the ground a distance below, bursting open. The fact that Matthew and Luke give different reasons for the field's association with blood can be attributed to the fact that multiple appropriate reasons existed for calling it the Blood Field, for through Judas the field is associated with Jesus' betrayal and death, Judas's death, and unrighteous wages paid by a priestly caste that sought to destroy Jesus.

One may also ask why either Luke or Matthew would create a false account of Judas's death and the naming of the field. This would only discredit them, for the facts of Judas's infamous act and death would be widely known. So it must be that contemporary readers were able to read both accounts and understand that both were compatible with the known facts of the matter.

In summary, it is better to see different purposes and concerns leading to the differing details. We can reconcile the differences by suggested harmonizations, but ultimately we cannot be sure of the exact sequence of events. Uncertainty about these details should not undermine our trust in the core points of the text.

***Use of Psalm 69:25 and 109:8* (1:20):** Does Peter misquote or misapply Psalm 69:25 (68:26 LXX) and Psalm 109:8? Psalm 69 is a plea to God for rescue from enemies. It is also a call for judgment from God, so that the enemy camp may be left desolate. Peter applies the psalm typically-prophetically to indicate that Judas has experienced such a judgment. Jesus, having been persecuted, mirrors the experience of the psalmist at this point. The psalm is prophetic because the pattern Jesus mirrors is seen as intended by God to link the two events to each other. The type of death Judas experienced left the field desolate for him and for others. Matthew 27:7 notes that the field became a cemetery. The wording differs from the LXX in two key ways. First, Acts simplifies the passage ("their tents" becomes "in it," referring to the habitation or homestead). Second, the rendering has been turned into a singular (*autou*, his) from a plural (*autōn,* their) to focus the application on Judas. Judas is included and specified as one of those about whom the psalm speaks. Judgment has fallen on this enemy of the righteous Jesus.

The second passage is from Psalm 109:8 (108:8 LXX). The link between the

two passages Peter cites is the use of the third-person pronoun *autou* (his). Such linking of passages through a shared word is common in Judaism and was called *gezerah shewa*, which translates as "an equivalent regulation." Once again the psalm in the MT is a lament of the psalmist asking for God's judgment. The request is that the enemy's days may be few and "another may seize his position [or goods]." Peter also uses this text in a typological-prophetical way to declare Judas judged in the pattern by which the righteous are vindicated. Judas's position as one of the Twelve is free to go to another, as justified by Scripture itself. Again the wording differs slightly from the LXX. The shift here is from an optative in the LXX ("may another take") to an imperative in Acts ("let another take"). The point is similar but slightly more emphatic in Acts.

Barrett overstates matters when he says (1994, 100) of Peter's usage of the Psalms: "[it] cannot be said that any attention is given to the context, still less to the original meaning and reference, of the passage cited." We can agree that Peter did not exegete the text in accordance with modern methods. But this is not the same as saying the original context and meaning do not matter to Peter. He understood that these passages are in the Psalter so that God's people will reflect upon the way God acts and cares for the righteous who cry out to God. The psalms were read not only as an individual's experience but as something the reader of the psalm should identify with if one fit the category being described.

What Peter has done is use the principle expressed in the psalm as a summary of how God acts on behalf of the righteous, and applies it to an event where God has judged an unrighteous persecutor. If the principle captures God's approach at various points in history, it is archetypically true in his response to the persecutor(s) of Jesus. Thus Peter operates within the psalm's meaning and spirit, and contra Barrett his use of the text is not far-fetched. Speaking of the use of Psalm 69, Marshall (1980, 65 and also n3) says, "It would be natural to find in this Psalm a prophecy or type of the betrayer of Jesus." He also notes that both passages could be used this way from their wording in the MT (so also Pesch 1986, 89; *pace* Haenchen 1987, 161, who says the text is rooted in a Hellenistic Christian reading). Bruce (1990, 110) speaks of Jesus as a type of David, as a hermeneutical backdrop for how Peter reads the psalm.

Witness (1:22): In Acts, this word "witness" (Gk *martus*, here accusative *martura*) is a technical term for someone who was witness to Jesus' ministry and resurrection. Many people knew what Jesus said and did during his ministry. The Twelve were among the most important of these people. They were to have a role in the public preaching and teaching of the church as overseers of the

tradition (Luke 1:1–2 alludes to their role as "eyewitnesses and servants of the word," where "word" refers not to the Bible but to the church's teaching and preaching). This suggests a type of control and care for the tradition about what Jesus said and taught. That tradition presents what Jesus said or did, or it represents the development of implications that are directly tied to what he said or did. The guardianship practiced by the eyewitnesses (the Twelve as well as the larger group of eyewitnesses) ensured that the message was kept accurate.

Casting lots **(1:26):** Some readers ask if this verse indicates that the early Christians practiced a form of divination, whereby supplicants seek God's will through the outcomes of chance events. This is one of two notes about casting lots in the NT. The other occurrence is when the Roman soldiers casted lots in a bid to see who would claim Jesus' grave clothes (Matt 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34b; John 19:24, in allusion to Ps 22:18).

Numerous OT texts mention a similar approach. In Leviticus 16:8 Aaron cast lots to determine the fate of the goats on the Day of Atonement. In Joshua 18:6 and 19:51, Joshua determined the allotment to the nation's tribes by casting lots. In several texts the casting of lots is associated with judgment, as when spoils are divided (Joel 3:3; Obad 11; Nah 3:10). Other OT examples of casting lots are found in Joshua 23:4; 1 Samuel 14:42; 1 Chronicles 6:65; 24–26; Nehemiah 10:34; 11:1; Isaiah 34:17; and Jonah 1:7.

The Hebrews viewed the casting of lots as a means of committing a decision to the Sovereign Lord who directs all outcomes. Proverbs 16:33 says, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD." Proverbs 18:18 indicates disputes were settled by casting lots: "Casting the lot ends quarrels and separates powerful opponents."

Fernando (1998, 79) observes that lots cease to be used after the Holy Spirit comes, for the next two selections that are made in Acts (6:1–7 and 13:1–3) are made by prayer and not by casting lots. This evidence may suggest the practice of casting lots was replaced in the early church after the Spirit came. Certainly the Bible does not present casting lots as normative, and in fact Scripture instructs us to seek God's will through prayer in this, the age of the Spirit who guides.

The use of lots in Acts 1 and elsewhere in Scripture is not divination; it represents an act of faith where supplicants entrust the decision to God. Everything about the scene in Acts 1—the unity of the group as well as the use of prayer and Scripture—points to a pious, faithful community.

How did casting of the lots work? Names may have been put on one stone

each and placed in a cloth bag or vessel, and then the first stone drawn out named the one selected (Conzelmann 1987, 12). If stones were not used, other possibilities include wood, animal bones, arrows, or pieces of pottery (Le Cornu and Shulam 2003, 49; *m. Yoma* 4.1).

> When the day of Pentecost had arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like that of a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were staying. 3 And tongues, like flames of fire that were divided, appeared to them and rested on each one of them. 4 Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different languages, as the Spirit gave them ability for speech.
>
> 5 There were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. 6 When this sound occurred, a crowd came together and was confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. 7 And they were astounded and amazed, saying, "Look, aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 How is it that each of us can hear in our own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites; those who live in Mesopotamia, in Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs — we hear them speaking the magnificent acts of God in our own languages." 12 They were all astounded and perplexed, saying to one another, "What could this be? " 13 But some sneered and said, "They're full of new wine! "

Filled with the Holy Spirit (2:4) ***and its relationship to John 20:22:*** Does Luke tell this story because he doubts or is unaware of the coming of the Spirit reported in John 20? Did the Spirit come twice?

Acts 2 discusses the distribution of the Spirit to the entire group of believers. John 20:22, on the other hand, discusses a similar gifting on a smaller group, apparently of the Twelve minus Thomas. The event in John was private, while Acts 2 narrates a public event. Pentecost fulfills Joel 2:28–32 because the Spirit comes on all the believers, men and women, not just leaders.

John 20:22 has been called the Johannine Pentecost, but it really is a much more confined event than Pentecost was. Some suggest the filling by the Spirit in John was temporary, but nothing explicit in the text points to this idea. In fact, the provision of authority to the leaders that comes with the giving of the Spirit suggests otherwise. And so the distinction between Acts and John is not a matter of the duration of the Spirit's filling, but the scope. Pentecost in Acts 2 was a public demonstration the Spirit had come on all believers equipping the entire church with enablement (or power as Luke 24:49 puts it) for mission. (See

further comments at John 20:22.)

It is possible the Jewish book of Jubilees sees Pentecost and the giving of the law as having fallen on the same day (Weiser, *EDNT* 3:70; BDAG 796; Betz, *TDNT* 9:296; Tob 2:1; 2 Macc 12:32). Luke himself makes nothing of this. However, if it is the case that both events fell on the same day, then the coming of the Spirit points to a second great deliverance event that guides the people. What Luke sees here is the realization of the divine program tied to the Messiah's promised work, as Peter's speech later in Acts 2 makes clear.

His own language (2:6): The tongues of Acts are human languages that people hear and understand without interpreters. The tongues served in this context to present the hope and message of God. These tongues were immediately understood and did not need the presence of someone with the gift of being an interpreter of the tongue. This direct availability of understanding differs from tongues in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, which were unintelligible without the presence of one with the gift of interpretation. This likely suggests a slight difference between tongues in Acts and tongues in 1 Corinthians.

14 But Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed to them: "Men of
Judah and all you residents of Jerusalem, let me explain this to you and pay attention to my
words. 15 For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it's only nine in the morning.
16 On the contrary, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

17 **And it will be** in the last days, says God,
that **I will pour out My Spirit on all humanity;**
then your sons and your daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
and your old men will dream dreams.
18 **I will even pour out My Spirit**
on My male and female slaves in those days,
and they will prophesy.
19 **I will display wonders in the heaven above**
and signs on the earth below:
blood and fire and a cloud of smoke.
20 **The sun will be turned to darkness**
and the moon to blood
before the great and remarkable Day of the Lord comes.
21 **Then everyone who calls**
on the name of the Lord will be saved.

22 "Men of Israel, listen to these words: This Jesus the Nazarene was a man pointed out to you

by God with miracles, wonders, and signs that God did among you through Him, just as you yourselves know. 23 Though He was delivered up according to God's determined plan and foreknowledge, you used lawless people to nail Him to a cross and kill Him. 24 God raised Him up, ending the pains of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it. 25 For David says of Him:

I saw the Lord ever before me;
because He is at my right hand,
I will not be shaken.
26 **Therefore my heart was glad,**
and my tongue rejoiced.
Moreover, my flesh will rest in hope,
27 **because You will not leave me in Hades**
or allow Your Holy One to see decay.
28 **You have revealed the paths of life to me;**
You will fill me with gladness
in Your presence.

29 "Brothers, I can confidently speak to you about the patriarch David: He is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn an oath to him to seat one of his descendants on his throne. 31 Seeing this in advance, he spoke concerning the resurrection of the Messiah:

He was not left in Hades,
and His flesh **did not experience decay.**

32 "God has resurrected this Jesus. We are all witnesses of this. 33 Therefore, since He has been exalted to the right hand of God and has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, He has poured out what you both see and hear. 34 For it was not David who ascended into the heavens, but he himself says:

The Lord declared to my Lord,
'Sit at My right hand
35 **until I make Your enemies Your footstool.'**

36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah! "
37 When they heard this, they came under deep conviction and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles: "Brothers, what must we do? "
38 "Repent," Peter said to them, "and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call." 40 And with many other words he testified and strongly urged them, saying, "Be saved from this corrupt generation! "

The citation of Joel 2 **(2:17–21):** Critics have suggested that Peter has misapplied Joel 2:28–32 here. After all, Joel speaks of "after this" instead of

“last days”; he does not mention slaves prophesying, and he seems to be speaking of destructive events. A common response says that Peter is pointing to a *partial* fulfillment of Joel.

Acts 2:16 begins a scriptural defense and description of the Pentecost event using four texts: Joel 2:28–32 and Psalms 16:8–11; 132:11; and 110:1. The verses largely reflect the LXX texts, which means that in that translation we are looking at Psalms 15, 131 and 109 since the chapters are numbered differently (in the LXX, Psalms 9 and 10 are combined into one psalm, which means all the following psalms are numbered one less than in our Bibles).

Joel’s text is set out with a “this is that” formula (Gk *touto estin*), which points to at least initial fulfillment. Since the citation alludes to events in the final judgment as well (by mention of the coming day of the Lord), the text is presented as *initially* fulfilled with more fulfillment to come. Peter does not cite it for analogy only. The formula is too strong to read the text as only being illustrative. More than that, the other texts cited are also texts that are fulfilled. So Peter is claiming these events are things God predicted would take place.

It is the pouring out of the Spirit that they are seeing and that Joel declares will take place in the last days. Later Jewish interpretation connected the Joel citation to other OT texts that explained the Spirit’s coming in the eschaton, a link that was conceptual (Isa 32:15; Jer 31:31–33; Ezek 34–37, esp. 36:22–32). Qumran also expresses the idea of how the Spirit enables discernment in this eschatological community (1QH 15.6–7 [= 7.6–7]; 1Q35; 4Q428.6–7; 1QS 4.2–4; Larkin 1995, 52, note on 2:17). This access to the Spirit fulfills the wish, expressed in Numbers 11:29, that God would put the Spirit in all God’s people. A later Jewish exposition, *Numbers Rabbah* 15.25, declares that in the “world to come all Israel will be made prophets,” while citing Joel 2. So the declaration may not be all that surprising to a Jewish audience.

This background explains why Peter changes Joel’s “after this” to “in the last days.” He is reading the text as it was read at the time, as being about what would happen at the end when God began to move toward comprehensive salvation of his people. Once Jesus came into the world, the last days began and the distribution of the Spirit is the guarantee that this time has come along with the Messiah (Luke 3:15–16).

Another change Peter makes to the Joel text is that he adds that slaves will prophesy (v. 18), whereas Joel had only said that God would pour his Spirit out on slaves. While not an exact recitation of Joel’s words, Peter has paraphrased Joel’s point in an acceptable manner, for certainly Joel’s point was that the

outpouring of the Spirit would be indiscriminate. Peter has simply made a broader statement about the impact of the outpouring. Peter is explaining that what they are hearing about God's works (Acts 2:11) is a revelation from God.

The mention of the Day of the Lord looks to judgment at the end. Joel's text spans the entire career of Jesus in both comings, something Peter will explain in Acts 3:18–22. In these OT passages it was often the case that the entire career of Jesus was presented in a single text where salvation and judgment appear side by side, even though in his career they are tied to distinct comings (see Isa 61:1–2 as another example). The end times judgment is of course the part of the text that is not yet fulfilled. Peter uses the approach of this judgment to warn his audience to respond to Jesus, the one God has sent and now has vindicated. The distribution of the Spirit shows not only what time it is on the divine calendar, but who the Messiah and Lord is (v. 36).

God's determined plan and foreknowledge (2:23): The Bible says that God designed the events surrounding Jesus' trial and crucifixion. Texts like Isaiah 53 tell us the Servant's own people would reject him before God would eventually exalt him. This raises an obvious question: If God pre-ordained Jesus' rejection and crucifixion, is human responsibility for these acts set aside?

In Scripture, God's foreordination never eliminates human responsibility. How exactly that works is a mystery hidden in the person, design, and foreknowledge of God. What God calls us to be concerned about is not the nature of how this works, but how we respond to him, for God holds us accountable for our response.

God raised Him up (2:24): In most texts of the NT that touch on the issue, Jesus is said to have been raised up by God (Acts 2:24, 32; 4:10; 13:30; Gal 1:1; Col 2:12; 1 Thess 1:10). This is because God, through the resurrection of the crucified Son, is vindicating the claims and work of the Son. An exception is John 2:19, where Jesus says that he himself will raise up "this sanctuary" after three days. Rather than indicating a contradiction between John's gospel and the rest of the NT witness, John's text is speaking to the fact that Jesus and God work as one, something John has stated elsewhere (John 10:30). What God does, Jesus does.

The citation of Psalm 16 **(2:25–28):** Peter's citation of Psalm 16:8–11 (Ps 15:8–11 LXX, matching its wording) raises questions, including: Does the psalm legitimately have messianic application, or does it only reference King David? Does the psalm speak of being raised from the dead or rather of being saved

from death in the first place?

Peter presents Psalm 16 as having been authored by David. The psalmist (note the first person singular) sees the Lord before him always, and God's presence at his right hand means he will not be shaken. Peter uses the psalm because the kind of defense God gave to the psalmist is like that which Jesus received, a typological-prophetic use. God's protection and the certainty of it are key to the citation's tone and use. Such confidence is reflected in the crucifixion scene as Luke presents it (Luke 23:46 uses Ps 31:5 [30:6 LXX]; cf. Larkin 1995, 56, who notes that Luke does not use Ps 22:1 in the crucifixion scene as Mark 15:34 does).

The psalmist describes his hopes for deliverance with confidence. His experience forms a base for his hope about the coming deliverer (Messiah) as well. The LXX reference to "in hope" replaces an MT reference to dwelling "in security," but this simply makes the image more vivid, as does the change from the MT's "my glory" (or perhaps "my liver") to the LXX's "my tongue" in the verse (the LXX accounts for Peter's use of "my tongue").

The key to Peter's citation is Acts 2:27 and the declaration, repeated later in the speech, that God will not abandon his soul to Hades or let the Holy One see corruption or decay. But is Jesus or David in view? As a psalm it is firstly about an individual in the original context, but it also extends beyond that individual. What this individual experiences is like what others who trust in God might hope for from God. That is why succeeding generations reflect on this psalm in worship. The hope expressed by David operates as a promise of God's protection for all believers. In particular this protection extends to any threat the "Holy One" faces, and no threat is greater than death.

In his reference to the "Holy One" David is pointing outside of himself to someone who has been "sanctified" before God and has experienced God's mercy, the "saint" (Bruce 1988a, 125; Johnson 1992, 51; Ps. 50:5 [49:5 LXX]). In Acts 13:35 "Holy One" reappears in another use of this OT verse, indicating that this psalm may well have been a part of church tradition explaining Jesus' resurrection. The passage also appears in the pseudepigraphal *Acts of Philip* 78 [15] (Barrett 1994, 146). "Holy One" (Gk *hosios*) is used 77 times in the LXX. It can refer to a priest (Deut 33:8), to the pious, or to the faithful. A reference to the faithful is the term's most common usage, especially in the Psalter (2 Sam 22:26; Pss 4:3 [4:4 LXX]; 12:1 [11:2 LXX]; 18:25 [17:26 LXX]). In Psalm 16, however, it is a reference to a specific person, as the singulars in the psalm show. It is easy to see why readers might think this specific person is the psalmist

David, given his regal status and the first-person references up to this point in the psalm. What we cannot rule out, however, is that the psalm could be read as about God's ultimate protection of the kingship of Israel that David's presence and connection to the psalm suggests. Israel's Messiah ultimately embodies the kingship of Israel. This connection will be alluded to in the promise made to David in Acts 2:30 from Psalm 132:11, which itself reaches back to 2 Samuel 7 and the Davidic covenant. Its placement in the Psalter may suggest that this hope of protection for the king went beyond the original setting and thus beyond David himself to Messiah. Peter will make this point explicit later in the speech (Acts 2:34–36).

The non-abandonment to Hades, the declaration that this one will not see decay, and the idea of the person being secure, including in his flesh, lead Peter to argue that resurrection, even an immediate bodily resurrection, is affirmed in Psalm 16 (Acts 2:30–31). The six appearances of "decay" in the NT are all in Acts 2 and 13 (2:27, 31; 13:34, 35, 36, 37). Many scholars argue that the original psalm had in mind being saved from a premature death and not being raised from the dead, which is quite possible given how the term "decay" is used and how death was seen at the time the psalm was written. But to exclude an application to the theme of resurrection is to read the psalm too narrowly.

These hermeneutical observations are important in the face of claims that only the LXX can justify the reading Peter makes and thus that the text has its roots in Hellenistic Christianity (so Haenchen 1987, 181–82). That is a far too narrow reading of the Jewish understanding in the first-century context. Luke 23:43 has Jesus express the confidence that his death will take him to paradise "today" and so apparently not to an intermediate stay in Hades.

The concept of an immediate resurrection within history was a fresh idea in Judaism. The Jews believed in a general bodily resurrection at the end of time for all the righteous and wicked together before the judgment (Isaiah 66; Dan 12:1–2; 2 Maccabees 7) but did not have an expectation of an earlier, immediate, special resurrection for anyone. Jesus' resurrection revealed this new idea of a resurrection before the end. In this speech Peter is arguing that Scripture predicted it, as all can now see.

Scholars debate whether the text is strictly prophetic (only about Jesus) or typological-prophetic (about the psalmist and any like him who anticipate vindication because they trust God). We must remember that in typological-prophetic texts, where a pattern is being applied to Jesus, he often fulfills the text to its maximum potential understanding. That is likely the case here. The

vindication the psalmist expects for the Holy One is over death into unending life. There is no higher possible form of vindication.

Received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit (2:33): Does Jesus' reception of the Spirit from the Father indicate that Jesus is only human or that his divinity is subordinate to the Father's? Jesus' reception of the Spirit as he sits at God's right hand in order to pour it out to his followers is a figurative way of saying that (1) Jesus shares the throne and rule of God the Father, and (2) Jesus mediates the Spirit from the Father as a messianic task. He functions as Messiah and Lord when the Spirit is poured out. The remark is figurative because God does not have a right hand! The figure is called an anthropomorphism, in which God is described with human attributes. The point of the figure is that Jesus shares full divine authority and performs salvation tasks with the authority of being Lord, even Lord over salvation's benefits in conjunction with the Father. Thus, the language gives us a glimpse of how the Father and Son function together. The origin of blessing is in the Father. The mediator of blessing is the Son. The gift of connection with God is the Spirit, who is sent to indwell those who turn to God, giving them relationship to God and unending life.

The Citation of Psalm 110 **(2:34–35):** Two important questions that people ask of Psalm 110 and its NT usage are: is the psalm Davidic, and is it proper to apply it to Messiah? Some interpreters argue that Psalm 110 was a psalm written about King David, not *by* King David. On questions about authorship of the psalm and its original setting, see the commentary on Luke 20:44. David is the speaker in the psalm, at the least, or the point Jesus argued in Luke 20 makes no sense. The psalm is also a royal psalm. It is about the position and hope tied to Davidic kingship, and ultimately the culmination of Davidic kingship in the Messiah.

Psalm 110:1 is often used as a key proof text in the NT. Dodd (1953, 35) calls it a "fundamental" text of early preaching. The wording here matches the LXX (109:1) except for the possible exclusion of the article *ho* before the first use of *kyrios* (Lord). Luke cited it previously in Luke 20:42–43, but the point made from the psalm in Acts 2 differs slightly from that which is made in Luke 20, where the concern is to raise a question about how the Messiah could be called David's son if David called him Lord. The point was that the lordship of the messianic figure was as important as being David's son, and that the son was no mere son. Luke left that conclusion more as an implication than as an explicit affirmation in his Gospel. In Acts, Peter is clear that the resurrection indicates Jesus' position at the Father's right hand. From this place of honor and unique

glory, Jesus mediates the blessing of the Spirit and salvation in accord with the promise of God's plan. This reveals who Jesus is. It is high Christology, associating Jesus with God's glory. Jesus sits with God in heaven at God's invitation.

Contemporary Judaism accepted that no person is allowed the honor of sitting permanently in God's presence. Only two texts even entertain this possibility, the Son of Man texts of 1 Enoch and a c. 250 BC text in Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagoge*, where Moses has a dream picturing his authority as "God to Pharaoh" (Exod 7:1) during the exodus. The Son of Man in 1 Enoch is given authority to judge from God's side. Recall that "Son of Man" was Jesus' preferred self-designation. *Exagoge* portrays Moses in a figurative and non-eschatological manner, so his sitting at God's side is not really relevant to our discussion. The observation that Jesus has gone to God's side demands a high Christology since it suggests an intimate connection and even equality between Jesus and the Father. The vindication (resurrection and ascension to God's right hand) of Jesus does more than show that he lives and that others will be raised in the end. It explains who Jesus is and how God showed him to be the Lord Christ.

It is sometimes suggested that this high Christology emerged late in the early church or that the argument could have been made only on the basis of the Greek LXX and not the MT (among many others, Jervell 1998, 149n257). But the LXX simply rendered the MT while respecting the unique name of God. The MT clearly distinguishes between Yahweh and David's *adoni* (the second use of Lord in the translations) in Psalm 110. Yet, in Second Temple Judaism, Jews did not always pronounce God's personal name but replaced it with a form of "Lord," whether in Aramaic, Hebrew, or Greek, as the LXX did. Evidence from Qumran shows that scribes may have inserted dots or an abbreviation so as to avoid pronouncing the sacred name (Isaiah Scroll at Qumran; Byington 1957, 57–58). Thus, orally rendering the MT would produce a reading that was very much like that which we find in the LXX. Hence the MT would support the high Christology just as capably as the LXX did. In any case, what is important here is not just the use of "Lord" as a shared term but the event context in which the text was viewed. It is being applied to a seating in heaven. So this argument about "late" development is not adequate (*pace* Conzelmann 1987, 21; Schneider 1980, 276).

Everything necessary to justify the conclusion that Jesus is Lord was in place as a result of the resurrection and ascension. There is no need to propose that high Christology was a later development or based on a distortion of the Psalm's

meaning. Nor is adoptionism entailed. Jesus did not become Lord but was shown to be Lord through the resurrection and ascension (Rom 1:2–4). As verses 21, 36–38 suggest, the "Lord" to be called upon is Jesus—and only God saves (Larkin 1995, 57). He is Lord of all (Acts 10:36; Witherington 1998, 147–53: "It was not that Jesus became *someone* different from who he was before, but that he entered a new stage in his career, or assumed new roles after the ascension" [149]).

Be baptized . . . for the forgiveness of your sins (2:38): Does Peter teach baptismal regeneration here, the idea that the act of baptism leads to spiritual rebirth? The context of Peter's statement is that he is responding to the question posed by the crowd in verse 37: "Brothers, what must we do?" At this point the crowd had already come under conviction, accepting as true the theological conclusion Peter had stated in verse 36: "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah!" Now, in response to their question and realizing that faith had already dawned in their hearts, Peter shares the application that is to follow belief in Christ. The application has three basic parts: (1) repent, (2) be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and (3) receive the gift of the Spirit.

Despite later controversy about whether one must believe and be baptized in order to be saved, what Peter says here and in his own later epistle shows that the key is the response to God, not the rite per se. This response and its cleansing effect are what the rite signifies, not what the rite accomplishes. The act of baptism portrays a washing and signifies what faith produces, cleansing. Peter explains this in 1 Peter 3:21: "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the pledge of a good conscience toward God) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

The rite is not magical but symbolizes what repentance is asking God to do, to give forgiveness (Acts 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18). To undertake baptism is to affirm in public what the heart has privately done to come into relationship with God. "Baptism is a natural part of the much more important conversion" and a "self-evident expression of conversion" (Schweizer, *TDNT* 6:413–14). Thus, baptism is the representation of the cleansing that belongs to salvation.

Be saved from this corrupt generation! (2:40): By urging his listeners to "be saved from this corrupt generation," is Peter construing salvation as a social movement meant to reform a particularly corrupt generation, and not a spiritual rebirth that must be undertaken by all generations?

Peter’s warning to be saved from “this corrupt generation” is an allusion to his mention of the Day of the Lord and the judgment that comes with the end (vv. 19–21). Thus the generation he refers to is not one that is more or less corrupted than any other. Rather, it is the generation that, more than any other before it, stands near the end times. In the face of impending judgment, all people should seek salvation in Jesus.

> 41 So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about 3,000 people were
> added to them. 42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to
> the breaking of bread, and to the prayers.
> 43 Then fear came over everyone, and many wonders and signs were being performed through
> the apostles. 44 Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. 45 They
> sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had a need.
> 46 Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple complex, and broke
> bread from house to house. They ate their food with a joyful and humble attitude, 47 praising
> God and having favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to them those who
> were being saved.

Sold their possessions and property (2:45): Does this verse indicate that communal living is a Christian mandate, or that the early Christians believed that the second coming was so immanent that communal living was called for?

This sharing of material things was not a required communalism but a voluntary, caring response to need, as the end of verse 45 shows. The verbs for “sell” (*epipraskon*) and “distribute” (*diemerizon*) are iterative imperfects. The implication is that this sharing was repetitive. That a community is really functioning with appropriate love and compassion is evident when material needs are being met.

Peter’s rebuke of Ananias in Acts 5:4 makes it clear that donation of material goods and money was not a requirement among early Christians, in contrast to the requirement at Qumran among the Essenes (1QS 1.11–12; 5.1–3; 6.2–3; CD 9.1–15; 1QS 9.3–11). That the later church did not keep the communal practice confirms the voluntary nature of the practice witnessed in Acts 2. Possessing all things in common was often seen as an ethical virtue in ancient culture (Philo, *Good Person* 12 §86; *Hypothetica* 11.10–13; *Abraham* 40 §235; Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.1.5 §20 [of the Essenes]). The Greeks held that friends share things in common (Plato, *Republic* 4.424A; 5.449C; *Critias* 110C–D; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1168B.31; Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras* 30.168). Later

rabbinic Judaism argued against it (*m. ’Abot* 5.10; Johnson 1992, 9).

The practice of communal living in Acts 2 was not driven by eschatological views. Rather, it was motivated by the intimate presence of God as proven by the “many wonders and signs [that] were being performed through the apostles” (v. 43). The fitting response was that each member of the growing community show concern for needy members (*chreian*, need; perhaps as Jesus taught in Luke 6:30–36 or from the OT and Deut 15:4–5; Polhill 1992, 121). Jesus’ teaching about not hoarding material provisions from God also may provide background (Luke 12:13–21). The same motivation appears in Acts 4:35, and failure to meet such needs in 6:3 among Hellenist widows leads to a complaint and resolution in the church (20:34 and 28:10 complete the uses of the term “need” in Acts).

All of this shows we are not dealing with a command here, but a heartfelt response of deep faith. As such, the passage neither authorizes that such behavior is required, but neither does it preclude it from being done in any era as an expression of meeting community needs.

> Now Peter and John were going up together to the temple complex at the hour of prayer at three in the afternoon.

Going up . . . to the temple (3:1): Peter and John continue to live as good Jews, participating in the temple. This surprises some readers, but nothing Jesus said or did explicitly meant that Jews were required to stop their practices. Developments leading to cessation of Jewish practices only began to appear in Acts, especially Acts 10. But throughout the NT there is evidence that Jewish Christians continued many of their traditional practices. As long as it was not seen as necessary for salvation, this was to be acceptable. This is why there is so much discussion about not pressuring believers on issues such as diet and holidays in texts like Romans 12–15. Mark 7:19 may seem to be against this idea when it says Jesus declared all food clean, but this is a narrative remark made by the evangelist. It reflects implications that, in time, came to be seen in Jesus’ teaching. Peter’s initial hesitation to eat common food in reaction to the vision of Acts 10 shows that at the time many Christian believers continued aspects of Jewish practice. In part, this was also because what the early church stressed was that being a good Jew meant accepting Jesus as Messiah. In other words, the new community did not position itself as something distinct from Jewish hope, but in continuity with it as its fulfillment.

11 While he was holding on to Peter and John, all the people, greatly amazed, ran toward them
in what is called Solomon's Colonnade. 12 When Peter saw this, he addressed the people: "Men
of Israel, why are you amazed at this? Or why do you stare at us, as though we had made him
walk by our own power or godliness? 13 The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our
fathers, has glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you handed over and denied in the presence of
Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. 14 But you denied the Holy and Righteous One and
asked to have a murderer given to you. 15 You killed the source of life, whom God raised from
the dead; we are witnesses of this. 16 By faith in His name, His name has made this man strong,
whom you see and know. So the faith that comes through Him has given him this perfect health
in front of all of you.
17 "And now, brothers, I know that you did it in ignorance, just as your leaders also did.
18 But what God predicted through the mouth of all the prophets — that His Messiah would
suffer — He has fulfilled in this way. 19 Therefore repent and turn back, so that your sins may
be wiped out, that seasons of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, 20 and that
He may send Jesus, who has been appointed for you as the Messiah. 21 Heaven must welcome
Him until the times of the restoration of all things, which God spoke about by the mouth of His
holy prophets from the beginning. 22 Moses said:

> **The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your brothers.**
> **You must listen to Him in everything He will say to you. 23 And everyone who will not**
> **listen to that Prophet will be completely cut off from the people.**

24 "In addition, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those after him, have also
announced these days. 25 You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made
with your ancestors, saying to Abraham, **And all the families of the earth will be blessed**
through your offspring. 26 God raised up His Servant and sent Him first to you to bless you by
turning each of you from your evil ways."

God predicted through . . . all the prophets . . . that His Messiah would suffer (3:18, 24): We should not take Peter's statement as a claim that all the OT prophets specifically foretold that Messiah would suffer. That is clearly not the case. Rather, Peter is appealing to the entire story of Scripture and promise. The volumes of Luke-Acts and their OT citations show that many different passages from many different OT authors contribute to the story of Messiah. The idea of suffering is indeed explicit in some texts, such as Isaiah 52:13–53:12 and numerous psalms (e.g., Psalms 22; 69; 110; 118).

Prophets from the beginning (3:21): Peter's statement that God's prophets had spoken about "the restoration of all things . . . from the beginning" means the restoration promise was at work from the start of God's campaign to reveal His

will through the prophets. The beginning of the world is not in view.

Peter starts with a citation from the Torah and Moses (3:22–23) and then mentions the promise that was made to Abraham in Genesis 12 (Acts 3:25). In his speech, Peter reviews the career of Jesus, both what has taken place and what is ahead. He shows how the angel's remarks in Acts 1:9–11 made an impression on him so that heaven holds Jesus until the times of refreshing can be completed.

The citation from Deuteronomy 18:15, 19 **(3:22–23):** Peter's handling of the Deuteronomy 18 passage has raised questions. Is he correct to find messianic reference there? In the original context, Moses is conveying God's promise that when the Hebrews enter the promised land, he will give the people a prophet like Moses so they will "not imitate the detestable customs of those nations" by doing such things as turning to mediums and fortune tellers (Deut 18:9–14). This promise would have most immediately alluded to Joshua or others, who would pick up Moses' mantle.

In addition to the initial fulfillment in the original historical context, the Deuteronomy 18 passage came to be seen by first-century Judaism as a typological promise referring to a prophet of the Mosaic leader-deliverer pattern who would be a part of the eschaton (Bock 1987, 191–94). The expectation that a Moses-like figure would arise in the end time was common in Judaism (1QS 1.9–11; 4Q175 1.5–8; 1 Macc. 14:41). Josephus (*Antiquities* 20.5.1 §97) writes about a first-century Jewish figure, Theudas, who tried to invoke Moses' parting of the sea in order to make a case that he was a prophet who could lead Israel (Witherington 1998, 188). The Samaritans pointed to Deuteronomy 18 as describing a restorer figure known as the *Taheb* (*Memar Marqah* 4.3; Teeple 1957, 63–68, 108–9; Polhill 1992, 136; DeWaard 1971; Scobie 1972–73; Jeremias, *TDNT* 4:848–73). This pattern and connection to the Mosaic promise are repeated in Acts 7:22, 25, 30–39 and were alluded to in Luke 9:35 (Pesch 1986, 157).

> 5 The next day, their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem 6 with Annas the high
> priest, Caiaphas, John and Alexander, and all the members of the high-priestly family. 7 After
> they had Peter and John stand before them, they asked the question: "By what power or in what
> name have you done this? "
>
> 8 Then Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders:
> 9 If we are being examined today about a good deed done to a disabled man — by what means
> he was healed — 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name

of Jesus Christ the Nazarene — whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead — by Him this man is standing here before you healthy. 11 This Jesus is

the stone rejected by you builders,
which has become the cornerstone.

12 There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people, and we must be saved by it."

Whom you crucified (4:10): Some have felt Peter is being anti-Semitic here. Certainly he is very direct in his statement about the nation's rejection of her Messiah. As the account makes clear, it was primarily the religious leadership that was responsible, plus some citizens in Jerusalem. This is not anti-Semitism. It is simply relating how Jesus got to the cross.

The remark raises the issue of responsibility for Jesus' death. Legally and technically, the Romans through Pilate were responsible for Jesus dying since the conviction to crucify him came from them. However, things would have never reached that stage had not the Jewish leadership pressed for execution. We have testimony from Josephus that Jesus died under Pilate at the behest of certain principal people in Israel (*Antiquities* 18.63–64). So some Jewish sources attest to this link to the leadership. Acts 4:27 holds Pilate, Herod, Jews, and Gentiles all responsible for Jesus' death.

There is salvation in no one else . . . no other name under heaven (4:12): Since Peter, just like anyone else among the early Christians, could not have known the sheer size of Earth or the number of its people groups and how long it would take to reach the whole world with the gospel, it has been suggested that "under heaven" ought not to be taken to mean that Jesus is the only way people can be saved. Might it just be that Jesus is the only means of salvation among the Jews and the people groups his ministry touched?

Witherington (1998, 194) correctly observes, "Peter is no advocate of modern notions of religious pluralism" (also John 14:6; 1 Tim 2:5; Heb 2:3). The consistent message throughout the NT is that Jesus is the only Savior for humanity. Human ignorance about the size of Earth's landmass and human population has no bearing on the central facts of humanity's need for redemption and the one means of redemption that is provided.

Of course the exclusiveness claim offends many readers, and they seek to avoid it by noting the primitive geographical understanding of biblical times. Two considerations speak against such an argument. First, the Roman Empire was like a sponge when it came to religion. Romans accepted all kinds of gods and religious ideas that came from the far corners of their vast empire. A trip to

Caesarea Philippi, a locale where Jesus did some of his ministry, shows the presence and awareness of many of these gods. So Peter and the other apostles were well aware of the plurality of religions, and they understood that many of these originated in faraway places they would never visit. They preached the exclusivity of Christ within the context of the religious melting pot that was the Roman Empire, and so the fact that there were other world religions about which they were ignorant does not mitigate their claims about the exclusivity of Christ.

Second, and more importantly, the claim was that Jesus meets an internal need all people everywhere have. Their claim was not that other people did not seek to be pious; they knew that virtually all people are religious. Their claim was instead that Jesus alone can remedy what is wrong with us. The disciples were so committed to this idea and its exclusiveness that they devoted themselves to getting the word out as far and wide as they could. The claim of there being no other such saving name under heaven indicates how comprehensive a solution Jesus is in the apostle's view.

> 13 When they observed the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated
> and untrained men, they were amazed and recognized that they had been with Jesus. 14 And
> since they saw the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in
> response. 15 After they had ordered them to leave the Sanhedrin, they conferred among
> themselves, 16 saying, "What should we do with these men? For an obvious sign, evident to all
> who live in Jerusalem, has been done through them, and we cannot deny it! 17 However, so this
> does not spread any further among the people, let's threaten them against speaking to anyone in
> this name again." 18 So they called for them and ordered them not to preach or teach at all in
> the name of Jesus.

Uneducated and untrained men (4:13): Does the fact that the apostles were "uneducated and untrained" suggest they were unreliable and illiterate? In answer to this, note that socially elite leaders made this assessment of the apostles, and this is something they would have said about anyone below their rank. It is a remark of social prejudice. These disciples may have lacked specialized training, but they are not fully illiterate. As merchants they would have had some literacy. The later ability of these figures to function in the diaspora shows some literacy. The leaders' reaction also reflects some concern, because although these disciples are common folk, the apostles surprisingly are quite effective. Would the apostles ignite a movement among the populace that would threaten the power and position of the elite? So we should not take the

remark to mean that the apostles were unreliable. In fact, the point of the statement is the exactly the opposite—the apostles are so good at making their point and winning assent among the people that the elites fear them, even with their lack of more official training.

For an obvious sign, evident to all (4:16): Apparently it was never debated that Jesus performed unusual works, just as here it could not be denied that the apostles had healed this man. Similarly, Jesus' opponents never denied that his tomb was found to be empty on Sunday morning. The explanations opponents provided were that Jesus acted by Satan's power (Luke 11:14–20) and that Jesus' body was stolen by the disciples (Matt 28:11–15). Jesus refuted the former idea by saying that Satan would not work against himself. The suggestion that the body was stolen implies that the disciples, in the midst of their grief and disillusionment after Jesus' execution, formed a conspiracy to make up a resurrection story, and then stuck to that story even as it cost them social scorn and eventually their lives. It is very unlikely that they would stick to a made up story at such high cost to themselves. Things get so problematic for the opposition that, later in Acts 5, Gamaliel raises the possibility that if the disciples work by God's power, no one can stop them.

> 23 After they were released, they went to their own people and reported everything the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 When they heard this, they all raised their voices to God and said, "Master, You are the One who made the heaven, the earth, and the sea, and everything in them. 25 You said through the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of our father David Your servant:
>
> **Why did the Gentiles rage**
> **and the peoples plot futile things?**
> 26 **The kings of the earth took their stand**
> **and the rulers assembled together**
> **against the Lord and against His Messiah.**
>
> 27 "For, in fact, in this city both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, assembled together against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your plan had predestined to take place. 29 And now, Lord, consider their threats, and grant that Your slaves may speak Your message with complete boldness, 30 while You stretch out Your hand for healing, signs, and wonders to be performed through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." 31 When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak God's message with boldness.

32 Now the large group of those who believed were of one heart and mind, and no one said
that any of his possessions was his own, but instead they held everything in common. 33 And
the apostles were giving testimony with great power to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and
great grace was on all of them. 34 For there was not a needy person among them, because all
those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the proceeds of the things that were sold,
35 and laid them at the apostles' feet. This was then distributed for each person's basic needs.
36 Joseph, a Levite and a Cypriot by birth, the one the apostles called Barnabas, which is
translated Son of Encouragement, 37 sold a field he owned, brought the money, and laid it at the
apostles' feet.

Citation of Psalm 2:1–2 **(4:25–26):** Does this passage violate the original context of Psalm 2 by making application to Jesus? The Jewish midrash reads the psalm as describing a historical principle of opposition at work from the time of Pharaoh and Aaron to the world of the Messiah to come, seeing it as having application beyond the life of King David. The most significant opposition of all is opposition to God's redemptive plan in the Messiah. Further, as a coronation psalm, the ultimate fulfillment will be in David's promised descendant. So this present text is another instance of Luke appealing to pattern prophecy, showing that God's plan is being executed, even in the suffering and rejection Jesus experienced.

Note that the opposition to Jesus is from every group; Herod and Pilate, as well as Jew and Gentile. In an original reading of the psalm, most Jews would have assumed that the opponents are all Gentiles, but the prayer's point is that one can identify God's enemies on the basis of their opposition to the Messiah, and this will include both Gentiles and Jews. The explanation following the citation makes the application explicit. This hermeneutical key to reading the psalm shows that this is not a misreading of the psalm once it is seen in its canonical role within the Psalter (*pace* Barrett 1994, 246). Also important here is the thrust of the entire psalm, namely, that opposing God's plan is futile.

Speak Your message with complete boldness (4:29): Given that skeptical theories hold that the apostles spread claims about Jesus that they knew to be false, it is important to note that in the face of opposition their prayer is not for revenge or judgment against those who reject Jesus, but for boldness for the believers so that they will speak boldly the message of Jesus. They wish to be good representatives and messengers of the word, being ready to speak up and give a defense for the hope that is in them (1 Pet 3:15). This ethic is a strong argument against the charge that they were spreading religious claims that they themselves had made up. More fitting is the conclusion that they gave

themselves to the spread of this message of hope because they knew it to be true.

No one said that any of his possessions was his own (4:32): On the question about whether the early Christians practiced a compulsory communalism, see commentary on 2:45.

> But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property. 2 However, he
> kept back part of the proceeds with his wife's knowledge, and brought a portion of it and laid it
> at the apostles' feet.
> 3 Then Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep
> back part of the proceeds from the field? 4 Wasn't it yours while you possessed it? And after it
> was sold, wasn't it at your disposal? Why is it that you planned this thing in your heart? You
> have not lied to men but to God! " 5 When he heard these words, Ananias dropped dead, and a
> great fear came on all who heard. 6 The young men got up, wrapped his body, carried him out,
> and buried him.
> 7 There was an interval of about three hours; then his wife came in, not knowing what had
> happened. 8 "Tell me," Peter asked her, "did you sell the field for this price? "
> "Yes," she said, "for that price."
> 9 Then Peter said to her, "Why did you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of
> those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out! "
> 10 Instantly she dropped dead at his feet. When the young men came in, they found her dead,
> carried her out, and buried her beside her husband. 11 Then great fear came on the whole
> church and on all who heard these things.

Ananias dropped dead . . . she dropped dead (5:5, 10): This instant judgment befell Ananias and Sapphira not because they kept some of the proceeds from their sale of land, but because they lied to God and the church, claiming that they had given *all* the proceeds to the church. There was no requirement that the couple donate all the proceeds, as Peter makes clear with his statements in verses 3–4. Had they said from the start that they were donating only a portion of the profits, there would have been no cause to judge them.

Readers may ask why the judgment was so swift. The sudden and divinely executed judgment was an exceptional case, and might be attributed to the unique circumstances of the foundational era of the church. God was working miracles through the apostles, verifying their teachings and bringing many to faith. To disrespect apostolic authority was to disrespect God's commissioning of the apostles. Their deaths also served as a stark reminder that God knows everything we do at all times and that sin has consequences.

12 Many signs and wonders were being done among the people through the hands of the
apostles. By common consent they would all meet in Solomon's Colonnade. 13 None of the rest
dared to join them, but the people praised them highly. 14 Believers were added to the Lord in
increasing numbers — crowds of both men and women. 15 As a result, they would carry the
sick out into the streets and lay them on cots and mats so that when Peter came by, at least his
shadow might fall on some of them. 16 In addition, a large group came together from the towns
surrounding Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits,
and they were all healed.
17 Then the high priest took action. He and all his colleagues, those who belonged to the party
of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. 18 So they arrested the apostles and put them in the
city jail. 19 But an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail during the night, brought them
out, and said, 20 "Go and stand in the temple complex, and tell the people all about this life."
21 In obedience to this, they entered the temple complex at daybreak and began to teach.
When the high priest and those who were with him arrived, they convened the Sanhedrin —
the full Senate of the sons of Israel — and sent orders to the jail to have them brought. 22 But
when the temple police got there, they did not find them in the jail, so they returned and
reported, 23 "We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing in front of the doors,
but when we opened them, we found no one inside! " 24 As the commander of the temple
police and the chief priests heard these things, they were baffled about them, as to what could
come of this.
25 Someone came and reported to them, "Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the
temple complex and teaching the people." 26 Then the commander went with the temple police
and brought them in without force, because they were afraid the people might stone them.
27 After they brought them in, they had them stand before the Sanhedrin, and the high priest
asked, 28 "Didn't we strictly order you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled
Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to bring this man's blood on us! "
29 But Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than men. 30 The God of our
fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had murdered by hanging Him on a tree. 31 God exalted this
man to His right hand as ruler and Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.
32 We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who
obey Him."

At least his shadow might fall on some of them (5:15): Does this verse indicate that early Christians were superstitious? When the people seek healing by Peter's shadow, this reflects a popular religious view of the power Peter has through God. The text does not present their beliefs and practices as normative for Christian faith, but merely describes what these early believers believed about the power of God manifested through the ministry of Peter. In any case, God was gracious and provided healing in this case. Luke 8:44 and Acts 19:12

are similar situations.

They entered the temple complex (5:21): Though some have claimed that the text implies that the angel took the apostles directly to the temple as he released them from prison, the text says no such thing. We're told that the angel "brought them out" of the jail (v. 19). He then told them to "go and stand in the temple complex" (v. 20). That they are told to "go" indicates that they had to walk there themselves and obey the directive to preach.

We must obey God rather than men (5:29): Some people have believed that this verse gives believers *carte blanche* to rebel against their governments if they claim to do so for biblical reasons. But bear in mind that the apostles were carrying out a specific commission they had received from Jesus on behalf of God's salvation plan (Luke 24:47). So with that commission explicitly in hand, they were obeying God even in the face of opposition. Further, rather than resist violently, they accepted the leaders' punishment for their obedience to God. So nothing in what they are doing promotes violent rebellion. Finally, we do not have a government here, but religious leadership.

Repentance (5:31): Is the Bible inconsistent about human and divine roles in a sinner's repentance? Similar to the present passage, 2 Timothy 2:25 speaks of God granting repentance. On the other hand, texts such as Matthew 3:2 and 4:17 call on people to exercise repentance. Rather than seeing a contradiction between these witnesses, we are to see a twin truth: God moves sin-deadened hearts to repentance *and* we are responsible to respond to God. I treated how these ideas relate to divine sovereignty in the discussion on God's plan in Acts 2:14–40.

> 33 When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. 34 A Pharisee named
> Gamaliel, a teacher of the law who was respected by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin
> and ordered the men to be taken outside for a little while. 35 He said to them, "Men of Israel, be
> careful about what you're going to do to these men. 36 Not long ago Theudas rose up, claiming
> to be somebody, and a group of about 400 men rallied to him. He was killed, and all his
> partisans were dispersed and came to nothing. 37 After this man, Judas the Galilean rose up in
> the days of the census and attracted a following. That man also perished, and all his partisans
> were scattered. 38 And now, I tell you, stay away from these men and leave them alone. For if
> this plan or this work is of men, it will be overthrown; 39 but if it is of God, you will not be able
> to overthrow them. You may even be found fighting against God." So they were persuaded by
> him. 40 After they called in the apostles and had them flogged, they ordered them not to speak
> in the name of Jesus and released them. 41 Then they went out from the presence of the

Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be dishonored on behalf of the Name.
42 Every day in the temple complex, and in various homes, they continued teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

Ordered the men to be taken outside (5:34): If the disciples were all sent out of the room, how did they (and eventually Luke) know what it was that Gamaliel said to the Sanhedrin? In answer, we must remember that some members of the faith community had contacts among the Jewish leadership. People like Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea, or even one who persecuted the church but became a believer (Saul/Paul; Acts 7:58; 8:1; 9:1–31). In addition, the discussions among the Jewish leaders may have become public through standard routes, such as leaks and public disclosures. Politicians then as now tend to talk.

Theudas [*and*] Judas the Galilean (5:36–37): Is Luke guilty of a historical anachronism regarding Theudas? The difficulty is reconciling the timing of Theudas's rebellion with the date of Gamaliel's speech in Acts. Josephus (*Antiquities* 20.5.1 §§97–98) mentions a Theudas revolting during the governorship of Fadus (AD 44–46), but this is too late to fit the timing of Gamaliel's speech, which was given more than a decade before Josephus's Theudas came onto the scene (Barrett 1994, 296, sees Luke erring here).

Given the popularity of the name Theudas and the turmoil of the period that led up to the census and Judas the Galilean during Jesus' early life, Gamaliel may well be pointing back to an earlier Theudas than the one mentioned by Josephus (Witherington 1998, 238–39). This Theudas presumably would have preceded the activity of Judas during the census period (because Gamaliel says "After this man" in v. 37). Bruce (1990, 176) argues that this Theudas may date back to insurgencies that arose in Palestine after the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC, a time that Josephus also mentions as turbulent (*Antiquities* 17.10.4 §§269–70; 17.10.8 §285; also Polhill 1992, 172–73).

Gamaliel's second example concerns Judas the Galilean, who led a rebellion during the time of the census (c. AD 6; Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.1.6 §23; 20.5.2 §102; *Jewish War* 2.8.1 §§117–18). Bruce (1990, 177) sees Quirinius as responsible for the census but appointing officers such as Coponius to supervise it in Judea. This Judas also drew an unspecified number of followers. After his death, however, his followers scattered and his movement disappeared. Only Luke mentions his death.

Gamaliel's two examples mirror each other. They show how if God is not in the movement, it will expire. Verse 39 entertains the other option: If God is backing the movement led by Jesus' disciples, no one can stop it. The book of

Acts is designed, in part, to argue that God is in the new movement, so it cannot and will not be stopped even if there is persecution and rejection. In the Greek, Luke rhetorically presents this option as a first-class condition (assumed true for argument's sake) in contrast to the earlier option given at the end of verse 38, which is a third-class condition (uncertain of fulfillment). This makes the option that God is in this more likely than the alternative, something the book as a whole is arguing. Gamaliel would not have spoken in Greek, so this is a translation move crafted by Luke, who intends to show which option is actually taking place.

> 7 So the preaching about God flourished, the number of the disciples in Jerusalem multiplied greatly, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith.
>
> 8 Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people.
> 9 Then some from what is called the Freedmen's Synagogue, composed of both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, came forward and disputed with Stephen.
> 10 But they were unable to stand up against his wisdom and the Spirit by whom he was speaking.
>
> 11 Then they persuaded some men to say, "We heard him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God! " 12 They stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; so they came, dragged him off, and took him to the Sanhedrin. 13 They also presented false witnesses who said, "This man does not stop speaking blasphemous words against this holy place and the law.
> 14 For we heard him say that Jesus, this Nazarene, will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed down to us." 15 And all who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at him and saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

A large group of priests became obedient to the faith (6:7): The conversion of a "large group of priests" has important apologetics value. The priests came to Jesus as previous opponents, so they must have assessed the claims of the apostles and found them convincing. Second, they would have checked the Scriptures carefully before deciding that the claims the apostles made about Jesus and God's salvation program were true. Third, they would have been aware of the harsh view Jewish officials took on Jesus, and so their daring to come to faith indicates their conviction was strong enough that they were willing to suffer the scorn their conversion would invite. Finally, in converting from the camp of opposition, the priests were able to supply the faith community with insider information on the official priestly assessment of Jesus and his followers. Such information supports the conclusion that the NT accurately represents what the Jewish leadership thought of Jesus and the church.

Blasphemous words (6:11): The opponents see Stephen's message as blasphemy because they say he demeans God's temple and the law. The following speech by Stephen shows he is not guilty of blasphemy, but that he declares that God is bigger than the temple, so the temple is not everything. This break from popular conceptions accounts for much of the animosity the Jewish leaders showed toward the early Christians.

> "Is this true? " the high priest asked.
>
> 2 "Brothers and fathers," he said, "listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he settled in Haran, 3 and said to him:
>
> **Get out of your country**
> **and away from your relatives,**
> **and come to the land**
> **that I will show you.**
>
> 4 "Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. From there, after his father died, God had him move to this land you now live in. 5 He didn't give him an inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground, but He promised to give it to him as a possession, and to his descendants after him, even though he was childless. 6 God spoke in this way:
>
> **His descendants would be strangers**
> **in a foreign country,**
> **and they would enslave**
> **and oppress them 400 years.**
>
> 7 **I will judge the nation**
> **that they will serve as slaves, God said**.
> **After this, they will come out**
> **and worship Me in this place.**
>
> 8 Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision. After this, he fathered Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; Isaac did the same with Jacob, and Jacob with the 12 patriarchs.

***Location of Abraham's call* (7:2):** The text here says God "appeared" (Gk *ōphthē*) to Abraham "when he was in Mesopotamia, before he settled in Haran." The OT does not specifically say that God visited Abraham in a vision. The text simply says: "The LORD said to Abram" (Gen 12:1). There is no contradiction between the OT text and Stephen's use of "vision" to describe God's communication to Abram. Stephen has simply made a deduction about the means by which God communicated to Abram, and possibly "vision" is a loose term, applicable to verbal communications from God.

Where was Abraham located when God gave him instructions to go to Canaan and made a promise to bless him? The location is mentioned indirectly in

Genesis 11:27–12:4, and seems to have God visiting Abraham after he had already left Ur and arrived in Haran with his father. Why, then, does Stephen place the appearance before Abraham settled in Haran (Acts 7:2)? There is a tradition in Judaism that Abraham's call came in Ur, based on Genesis 15:7 and Nehemiah 9:7 (see also Philo, *Abraham* 14 §62; Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.7.1 §154). A careful reading of the Genesis 15 and Nehemiah 9 texts shows that no explicit claim is made that God's call to Abraham came while he was in Ur. Rather, both texts say God is the one who "brought" Abraham from Ur. We may be dealing with a literary telescope here: the move from Ur to Haran is viewed as God providentially leading Abraham to the land, even though God's explicit instruction to Abraham may have come only after Abraham reached Haran. The account simply collapses the travel into one summarized remark. Polhill (1992, 189) suggests that a prior call took place in Ur, and he appeals to Genesis 15:7 for the point (so also Bruce 1988a, 134; Larkin 1995, 106).

Oppress them 400 years (7:6): Whereas this text says the bondage lasted 400 years, Exodus 12:40 says: "The time that the Israelites lived in Egypt was 430 years." Are these texts contradictory? The difference is probably nothing more than rounding off the number, a common feature of ancient literature. The lower figure is also seen in Rabbinic exegesis of Genesis 15:13 as a counting from Isaac's birth to the exodus (Str-B 2:668–71).

> 9 "The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt, but God was with him
> 10 and rescued him out of all his troubles. He gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of
> Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who appointed him ruler over Egypt and over his whole household.
> 11 Then a famine and great suffering came over all of Egypt and Canaan, and our ancestors
> could find no food. 12 When Jacob heard there was grain in Egypt, he sent our ancestors the
> first time. 13 The second time, Joseph was revealed to his brothers, and Joseph's family became
> known to Pharaoh. 14 Joseph then invited his father Jacob and all his relatives, 75 people in all,
> 15 and Jacob went down to Egypt. He and our ancestors died there, 16 were carried back to
> Shechem, and were placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the
> sons of Hamor in Shechem.

75 people in all (7:14): Was it 75 people or 70 people (Gen 46:27; Exod 1:5)? The Jewish textual and extrabiblical traditions support both figures, and both have existed for a long time, so it is hard to know which figure was original or most accurate. The number 75 reflects the LXX in Genesis 46:27 and Exodus 1:5, but Deuteronomy 10:22 has 70, as does the MT of Genesis 46:27 and

Exodus 1:5. Josephus, *Antiquities* 2.7.4 §176 and 4QGen-Exod^{a} 17.1–18.2 have 75, as does 4QExod^{b} 1.5. Genesis 46:26 LXX has 66 plus 9 sons of Joseph to make 75, while the MT apparently has only 2 sons of Joseph plus Jacob and Joseph to make 70 (Barrett 1994, 350 and Fitzmyer 1998, 374). Marshall (1980, 138) says that the seven remaining of Joseph's 9 sons are counted along with the 66 listed in Genesis 46 to make the number 75. Philo (*Migration* 36 §§198–207) notes both numbers and has a complicated allegorical explanation for the difference, where 70 points to the intellect and 5 to the senses. Jubilees 44.33 shows that the number was uncertain in the tradition from an early point. Jubilees was written in the centuries before the birth of Jesus, so the differences are older than the time of the apostles. It has 5 die in Egypt before 70 successfully reach Joseph. So there were two different numbers in the tradition from early on, and we may account for the difference by a distinction between who left for Egypt and who actually made it there.

The tomb that Abraham had bought . . . from the sons of Hamor in Shechem (7:16): The text here says Abraham bought the tomb from the sons of Hamor in Shechem, while Genesis 33:18–19 says: "After Jacob came from Paddan-aram, he arrived safely at Shechem in the land of Canaan and camped in front of the city. He purchased a section of the field where he had pitched his tent from the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, for 100 *qesitahs*." The explanation for Stephen's statement is likely based on Genesis 12:6–7, which says: "Abram passed through the land to the site of Shechem, at the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, 'I will give this land to your offspring.' So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him." Jacob's purchase of the land is a fulfillment of God's promise to his ancestor, Abraham, and for this reason Jewish audiences would have accepted as accurate Stephen's attribution to Abraham.

> 20 At this time Moses was born, and he was beautiful in God's sight. He was cared for in his
> father's home three months, 21 and when he was left outside, Pharaoh's daughter adopted and
> raised him as her own son. 22 So Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and
> was powerful in his speech and actions.

Moses was . . . powerful in his speech (7:22): Moses himself claimed he had "never been eloquent" and that he was "slow and hesitant in speech" (Exod 4:10). In Exodus 4:16, God speaks to Moses about Aaron, and says: "He will

speak to the people for you. He will be your spokesman, and you will serve as God to him." Does this indicate that Stephen contradicts the OT witness about Moses' abilities? Moses' protestations about his speaking abilities are either a case of his being humble or an attempt to get out of doing what God was calling him to do. In a similar case, the apostle Paul said: "My speech and my proclamation were not with persuasive words of wisdom" (1 Cor 2:4), but of course Paul was both persuasive and wise as a speaker. His intention was to highlight the work of the Spirit in bringing fruit from his preaching. God's appointment of Aaron to assist Moses is not so much an endorsement of Moses' claims about his speaking ability as it is a means of setting aside his excuses.

The fact is Moses was quite eloquent in his confrontations with Pharaoh (Exodus 5–11), and thus Stephen's remark is clearly justified. Moses' self-perception, humility, or attempt to shirk God's call have to be seen for what they are, especially when we consider his actual performance and his elite training and reputation growing up privileged in Pharaoh's household.

> 23 "As he was approaching the age of 40, he decided to visit his brothers, the Israelites.
> 24 When he saw one of them being mistreated, he came to his rescue and avenged the
> oppressed man by striking down the Egyptian. 25 He assumed his brothers would understand
> that God would give them deliverance through him, but they did not understand. 26 The next
> day he showed up while they were fighting and tried to reconcile them peacefully, saying,
> 'Men, you are brothers. Why are you mistreating each other? '
> 27 "But the one who was mistreating his neighbor pushed him away, saying:
>
> **Who appointed you a ruler and a judge over us? 28 Do you want to kill me, the same way you killed the Egyptian yesterday?**
>
> 29 "At this disclosure, Moses fled and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he fathered two sons.

He assumed his brothers would understand that God would give them deliverance through him (7:25): This reference seems surprising, given that at the time he killed the Egyptian Moses had not yet received a call from God to deliver the Hebrew people. The commission from God came later, when Moses was living in Midian (Exodus 3). Is Stephen thus guilty of a historical anachronism?

Stephen's may be a foreshadowing remark. Moses had stepped in for his people. He had delivered his own, and they did not appreciate it in the least. This foreshadowed the role he later came to have, and they missed that he was

fighting for them. This introduces a key theme is Stephen's speech: Israel often missed God's will and worked against it. This idea is not Stephen's. It is reflected in how Israel's history is told from Deuteronomy through Kings. This theme is often tied to the theology of Deuteronomy, which warned the people about the consequences of disobedience with the history tracing that record of failure in the subsequent books (note how the kings are evaluated in the books on Israel's history). Stephen is on good Jewish historical ground in making his case.

Who appointed you a ruler and a judge over us? (7:27): This remark (Gk *archonta kai dikastēn*) is from Exodus 2:14, the only place using this combination in the LXX. Anyone reading Stephen's summary would know that God had protected and prepared Moses to be a mediator for and between the Hebrews (vv. 20, 22), but this man did not see it and reacted against God's chosen one, a pattern of response Stephen points out in several events he narrates in his speech. The roles of ruler and judge parallel those God had for a later selected leader, Jesus. Acts 7:35–37 suggests this link between Moses and Jesus, because the same combination of ruler and judge appears there with the mention of Moses' promise to raise up a prophet like him. The promise is an allusion to Deuteronomy 18:15 and to Jesus (Acts 3:22). The ruler-and-judge combination in Acts 7:35–37 also refers back to Exodus 2:14. So Moses is a "type" or "pattern" for what Jesus was to do and be. Stephen is tracing what also applies to Jesus, as do other passages in Luke-Acts (Acts 3:17; 4:10–12; 13:27; Weiser 1981, 185).

> 35 "This Moses, whom they rejected when they said, **Who appointed you a ruler and a judge?** — this one God sent as a ruler and a redeemer by means of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. 36 This man led them out and performed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness 40 years.

***Red Sea or Reed Sea?* (7:36):** There is discussion among scholars about the relationship between the Red Sea (LXX: Exod 13:18; 15:4) and the Sea of Reeds (MT: Exod 13:18; 15:4; Fitzmyer 1998, 379). Once again Stephen reflects the tradition of his context, speaking of the Red Sea in accordance with the LXX. It is likely that the Red Sea and Reed Sea may have been considered the same thing, as the LXX rendering suggests. The language recalls Exodus 7:3 and Numbers 14:33 (Ps 104:27 LXX [105:27 Eng.]; Josephus, *Antiquities* 2.12.4

§276; *Assumption of Moses* 3.11; *Jubilees* 48.4, 12; Philo, *Moses* 1.14 §77; 1.15 §§90–91).

> 42 Then God turned away and gave them up to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets:
>
> **House of Israel, did you bring Me offerings and sacrifices**
> **40 years in the wilderness?**
> 43 **No, you took up the tent of Moloch**
> **and the star of your god Rephan,**
> **the images that you made to worship.**
> **So I will deport you beyond Babylon!**

***The citation of Amos 5:26–27* (7:42–43):** Did Stephen misquote Amos 5:26–27? The text in Amos represents the Lord saying through Amos: "But you have taken up Sakkuth your king and Kaiwan your star god, images you have made for yourselves. So I will send you into exile beyond Damascus." Points of difference between the Hebrew text of Amos and Stephen's citation include: (1) "took up the tent" in place of "took up," (2) "Moloch" in place of "Sakkuth," (3) "star of your god Rephan" in place of "Kaiwan your star god," (4) "images that you made to worship" in place of "images you have made for yourselves," and (5) "Babylon" in place of "Damascus."

Stephen is citing the LXX of Amos rather than the MT, but its sense brings out the rhetorical force of the Hebrew original. It asks, "Did you bring me sacrifices and grain offerings?" The question expects a negative reply. The people made sacrifices to another, not to God, which is how the LXX reads the Hebrew citation, or the sacrifices were brought with less than a pure heart. Verse 43 reinforces this reading by naming the false objects of worship Moloch and Rephan, as in the LXX. The line from Amos 5:26 looks to future idolatry like that of the past in the wilderness. The Hebrew text of Amos has *Sikkût* (probably Assyrian Sakkut) and *Kiyyûn* (probably Assyrian Kewan), Mesopotamian gods of the sky, the latter referring to Saturn, also known as Ninib. Moloch is the equivalent of this heavenly sky and sun deity, as represented by either pagan god in the Canaanite-Phoenician context (BDAG 657). Less clear are the roots of Rephan (BDAG 903), but it could be the sun god of Egypt, Repa (Bruce 1988a, 145n70). The reference may be to the defection to Baal of Peor (Num 25:1–9; Bruce 1990, 205).

There is some question whether Amos 5:25 in the Hebrew says that sacrifices were not important to God or whether the expression is negative: "The sacrifices

offered were not for me," reads the LXX. Against the former reading, which is often adopted (e.g., Haenchen 1987, 284; Conzelmann 1987, 55; Bruce 1990, 204), is the fact that sacrifices were commanded in the period for the tabernacle (Exod 24:4–5). Thus some other meaning is more likely. The point was that God commanded all sacrifices to be offered from the heart (i.e., you are not just to bring me sacrifices but also worship), which also implied that any defection was a perversion of this expectation, according to the LXX. In this light, Amos notes that the sin of idolatry extended itself for generations. Stephen cites Amos from the vantage point of centuries later, knowing the subsequent history as well, and alludes back to the wilderness sin and to the idolatry that followed (now also in the past). Sin led to more sin. It also led to judgment, as seen in the nation's exile. Stephen suggests a similar pattern of disobedience in his own time and possibly hints at judgment. At the least, accountability to God surfaces in this rebuke. In Greek the question begins with *mē*, so that a negative reply is expected. These sacrifices were not made to God. As Barrett (1994, 367) says, "Never had a people been so privileged or so completely negated their vocation." Ezekiel 20:25–26 possesses a similar rebuke of apostasy into Canaanite idolatry (also 2 Kings 10:29).

As Stephen's speech makes clear, the accusation is that Israel took up idols in the form of Moloch and Rephan, so that divine judgment followed. Stephen has updated the MT and LXX tradition referring to Damascus to Babylon to reflect the judgment that God executed on Israel (Le Cornu and Shulam 2003, 360). The point is that such idolatry is a pattern of Israelite behavior and that it results in national judgment. In fact, the change might well suggest that the pattern and consequences continued even beyond what Amos predicted. Stephen uses the text traditionally, effectively, and appropriately.

> 44 "Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the testimony in the wilderness, just as He who spoke
> to Moses commanded him to make it according to the pattern he had seen. 45 Our ancestors in
> turn received it and with Joshua brought it in when they dispossessed the nations that God drove
> out before our fathers, until the days of David. 46 He found favor in God's sight and asked that
> he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. 47 But it was Solomon who built Him a
> house. 48 However, the Most High does not dwell in sanctuaries made with hands, as the
> prophet says:
>
> 49 **Heaven is My throne,**
> **and earth My footstool.**

What sort of house will you build for Me?
says the Lord,
or what is My resting place?
50 **Did not My hand make all these things?**

Made with hands *and the use of Isaiah 66* (7:48–50): Stephen is not denigrating the temple. His point is that God cannot be confined to a locale, so no one should give too much importance to the temple. In the Greek, the negative particle is moved up and away from the verb it qualifies so that the reference to the Most High is emphasized (Turner 1963, 287). The NT uses the term "made with hands" in a deprecating way (Acts 19:26; Eph 2:11) that is common in Judaism at large (Lev 26:1; Isa 2:8; 46:6; *Sib. Or.* 3.650–51; 4.8–12; in the NT: Heb 9:11, 24; Williams 1990, 142). One can contrast this stance with the following NT texts where reference is made to things "not made with hands": Mark 14:58 (a new temple raised up after three days); 2 Corinthians 5:1 (resurrection body); and Colossians 2:11 (spiritual circumcision; see Bruce 1990, 207). Rabbinic Judaism also had hints of a spiritual view of the temple, where God or Messiah is an everlasting light (Le Cornu and Shulam 2003, 364–65; Tanhuma, *Tetzaveh* 8 [of Messiah]; *Gen. Rabbah* 59.5 [of God]).

Bruce (1988a, 149) says Stephen is rebuking the state of mind that tended to emerge about the temple. Stephen's critique must be set next to positive statements about the temple in Acts (2:46; 3:11; 5:20–21; 21:26; 22:17; 24:18), but Bruce is correct. Judaism overvalued the temple (also Gaventa 2003, 133).

The scholarly debate as to whether these remarks about the temple are positive or negative reflect, to a degree, this older debate, with points on each side having merit while neither option is the entire story. Stott (1990, 138–39) seems to have the balance right when he says that the point is not that it was wrong to construct the tabernacle or temple but that "they should never have been regarded as in any literal sense God's home." Stephen's remarks fit with OT teaching (see, conceptually, Isa 57:15 and Solomon's own words, 1 Kgs 8:27 and 2 Chr 6:18; Josephus, *Antiquities* 8.4.2 §107).

The citation in verse 49 is from Isaiah 66:1 and is given in a form resembling the LXX (also used later in *Barnabas* 16.2 and Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 22.11). God spans heaven and earth, with heaven as his throne and the earth as his footstool. The footstool (*hupopodion*) is a picture of God's sovereignty. The earth is the place where God sets his feet, and heaven is his throne (footstool of God: Matt 5:34–35 [heaven a throne and earth a footstool]; Luke 20:43; Acts 2:35; Heb 1:13; 10:13; OT: Pss 98:5 LXX [99:5 Eng.]; 109:1

LXX [110:1 Eng.]; Isa 66:1; Lam 2:1). God dwarfs the earth, so how can a building constructed on it contain him? There is a merism in the reference to heaven and earth, so that God is said to span the entirety of creation. Although there are OT roots for this idea, Stephen states it as emphatically as anywhere in Scripture. Still, this is a prophetic-like critique of a skewed view of the temple, a critique comparable to Jesus' statement in Luke 19:46 (Polhill 1992, 203–4). Stephen's point is that a dwelling place for God made by human hands is not the only place God dwells. Ultimately it is inadequate to contain God, and so to think of the temple as "his house and nowhere else" would be wrong. Witherington (1998, 273) speaks of this as a "God in a box" theology. God is present throughout the creation, as Isaiah 66 shows.

> 51 "You stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are always resisting the Holy Spirit; as your ancestors did, so do you. 52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They even killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become. 53 You received the law under the direction of angels and yet have not kept it.""

You received the law under the direction of angels (7:53): This verse has been a source of confusion as well as a target for critics who say it is inconsistent with OT testimony, but readers must bear in mind that such an association was often made in the Judaism of Jesus' time because often God was seen as acting through intermediaries and not directly. Stephen is speaking in accordance with that approach.

The phrase "through the direction of angels" (Gk *eis diatagas angelōn*) is one of means, as was the reference to an angel in Acts 7:35 (BDF §206.1). Again it is Jewish tradition that developed the idea that the giving of the law involved the angels, something Paul also notes (Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2). A rabbinic midrash on Exodus, Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael Baḥodesh 9) speaks of angels ministering with God to the people as the commandments were given (Le Cornu and Shulam 2003, 368–69). The term *diatagē* refers to a command or direction coming from someone (BDAG 237). So the idea is that the law came "by means of the command or direction of angels." The roots of the idea may go back to Deuteronomy 33:2 LXX, where angels accompany God at Sinai (also *Jubilees* 1.27–29; Polhill 1992, 200; Larkin 1995, 120, sees a possible circumlocution for "God" in the reference to angels). Perhaps the idea that God does not appear to anyone also fueled this idea of angelic mediation. As Paul suggests in Galatians

3:19, Stephen seems to suggest a less direct involvement by God in the giving of the law. However, the idea is certainly not that God was inactive in the giving of the law. In the NT the nation failed to keep the divinely given law (Acts 15:10; Rom 2:13, 23, 25).

> 54 When they heard these things, they were enraged in their hearts and gnashed their teeth at
> him. 55 But Stephen, filled by the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven. He saw God's glory, with
> Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and he said, 56 "Look! I see the heavens opened and
> the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God! "
> 57 Then they screamed at the top of their voices, covered their ears, and together rushed
> against him. 58 They threw him out of the city and began to stone him. And the witnesses laid
> their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 They were stoning Stephen as he called
> out: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit! " 60 Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice,
> "Lord, do not charge them with this sin! " And saying this, he fell asleep.
> 8Saul agreed with putting him to death.

Son of Man (7:56): This is one of only three occurrences of "Son of Man" outside the four Gospels (Rev 1:13 and 14:14 are the others; Heb 2:6 has the expression but it is not a title there). This use in Acts is the only time the exact title shows up outside the Gospels (the Revelation passages refer to one "like a Son of Man," making an allusion to Daniel 7:13). The near absence of this title outside the Gospels is surprising since this was Jesus' favorite self-designation, and some critics have claimed it proves that the Gospels were written far later than the epistles and reflect late-developing themes about Jesus. Late in his ministry, Jesus used the title to refer to the one with judgment authority from the right hand of God (Matt 26:64; Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69; for authenticity, see discussion in Bock 1996, 1796–1801; Bock 1998a, 220–30).

The reason why the early church did not use the "Son of Man" title for Jesus is not clear. It may have been out of respect for the fact Jesus used the term and infused it with meaning others would not likely appreciate. Or it may be that people tended not to comprehend the significance Jesus meant to convey by the title. In any case, it lost its usefulness as a piece of Christological shorthand for who Jesus was.

The term by itself means simply a human being and so on its own, without understanding of canonical context and Jesus' usage, would seem very innocuous. Only when it is linked with Jesus' use and Daniel 7 does its meaning of a human *with heavenly authority* become clear. Jesus' standing as Son of Man

is a unique combination in the NT usage. It likely looks to Jesus as vindicating judge welcoming Stephen to heaven.

One final issue needs to be treated. All of this language is visionary and metaphorical. God does not have a right hand and sits nowhere as a specific physical being. The imagery pictures Stephen's reception and should not be read too literally, or else Stephen's earlier point about the heavens not being able to contain God makes no sense (Acts 7:48–50).

Laid their robes at the feet of . . . Saul (7:58): It is commonly said by Christians that the laying of the robes at Saul's feet indicated he was in charge of the stoning of Stephen, but this is speculative and likely false. There is no clear indication in the text that Saul/Paul incited or directed the stoning of Stephen, and he makes no such claim in his later defense speeches when he speaks of persecuting the church. Had he directed Stephen's execution, it is hard to understand why he would not have cited this as chief evidence of his extremes as a persecutor of the church. Further, in Acts 22:20 Paul says of the stoning: "I was standing by and approving, and I guarded the clothes of those who killed him." This is hardly the statement of someone who was in charge. In Acts 26:10 he speaks of casting his vote against Christians facing capital punishment. The language in all three passages suggests that Paul supported Stephen's execution and did what he could to help make it happen. This is far from indicating that he orchestrated, ordered, or directed the execution.

> On that day a severe persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the land of Judea and Samaria. 2 Devout men buried Stephen and mourned deeply over him. 3 Saul, however, was ravaging the church. He would enter house after house, drag off men and women, and put them in prison.
>
> 4 So those who were scattered went on their way preaching the message of good news.

All except the apostles (8:1): If a widespread persecution against Jesus' followers broke out in Jerusalem, why were the apostles not scattered along with everyone else? In the first place, the fact that the apostles stayed behind may be evidence that "all . . . were scattered" is hyperbolic. If in fact all or virtually all except the apostles were driven out, one possible explanation is that the persecution may have been directed primarily against the Hellenist believers, of whom Stephen is an example (Schneider 1980, 479; Bruce 1988a, 162–63). Polhill (1992, 211) argues that the Hellenist believers' view of an "unbounded

God" was particularly offensive to those who are devoted to the temple. The fact that the next unit is about Philip's work outside the region, and that a vibrant Jewish believing church appears later in Acts, also suggests a Hellenist focus of the persecution (on the early Hebrew church in Jerusalem, see Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.18.4; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 6.5). The Judean Christ-followers participated at the temple and may have had a better reputation among non-Christian Jews, earning them greater tolerance. Nevertheless, it is not clear that only the Hellenists were persecuted. It could well be that the Hebrew Christians felt a greater loyalty to Jerusalem and were willing to suffer persecution.

Perhaps the apostles would have been safe in Jerusalem due to their being well known and thus practically untouchable, or perhaps they were not safe at all but were willing to face the risk, feeling it was their duty to remain (Bruce 1990, 215). Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.5.2) says that they were harassed until they finally left to engage in wider mission after James's death (Acts 12).

9 A man named Simon had previously practiced sorcery in that city and astounded the
Samaritan people, while claiming to be somebody great. 10 They all paid attention to him, from
the least of them to the greatest, and they said, "This man is called the Great Power of God! "
11 They were attentive to him because he had astounded them with his sorceries for a long time.
12 But when they believed Philip, as he preached the good news about the kingdom of God and
the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. 13 Then even Simon himself
believed. And after he was baptized, he went around constantly with Philip and was astounded
as he observed the signs and great miracles that were being performed.

14 When the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had welcomed God's
message, they sent Peter and John to them. 15 After they went down there, they prayed for
them, so the Samaritans might receive the Holy Spirit. 16 For He had not yet come down on any
of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then Peter and John laid
their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

18 When Simon saw that the Holy Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles'
hands, he offered them money, 19 saying, "Give me this power too, so that anyone I lay hands
on may receive the Holy Spirit."

20 But Peter told him, "May your silver be destroyed with you, because you thought the gift of
God could be obtained with money! 21 You have no part or share in this matter, because your
heart is not right before God. 22 Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the
Lord that the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. 23 For I see you are poisoned by
bitterness and bound by iniquity."

24 “Please pray to the Lord for me,” Simon replied, “so that nothing you have said may happen to me.”

25 Then, after they had testified and spoken the message of the Lord, they traveled back to Jerusalem, evangelizing many villages of the Samaritans.

***Simon Magus* (8:9–24):** In the second-century church, Simon Magus was seen as the prototypical heretic. This sets up a tension with the reading of the current passage. There has always been discussion about whether Simon’s faith in these verses is genuine or just a temporary, non-saving response driven by curiosity or greed. Barrett (1994, 409) says that nothing in the passage suggests that Simon’s faith is less sincere or less satisfactory than anyone else’s (so also Pesch 1986, 275; Fitzmyer 1998, 405). He notes that Calvin saw Simon’s response as somewhere between faith and pretense. Haenchen (1987, 303) calls Simon’s not the “soundest” faith. Marshall (1980, 156) suggests that overall nothing suggests a superficial faith but that it is too early in the narrative to know where Simon truly stands. Bruce (1988a, 167) calls the nature of Simon’s faith uncertain but counts the faith as sincere, superficial, and inadequate, which of course can be said of many new believers. In his later commentary (1990, 220), Bruce cites Drane’s view that Simon’s faith is sincere but confused. Stählin (1980, 121) argues that Simon’s is not true faith or conversion and that he remains a magician. The decision about the genuineness of Simon’s faith is not strictly a lexical issue, nor is it an easy decision, but some point out that whereas the Samaritans are said specifically to believe Philip’s message, Simon’s belief is stated with no explicit object (Witherington 1998, 288; see discussion in Acts 8:20, 21, and 24; Marshall 1980, 156 correctly suggests these early verses alone do not settle the matter).

So we turn to the final exchange between Peter and Simon Magus at the end of the unit (vv. 18ff). When Simon asks to buy the ability to give the gift of the Spirit, Peter is clear that the request is completely misguided and wrong. J. B. Phillip’s paraphrase is, “To hell with you and your money!” Some scholars take this rebuke as a sure indication that Simon was not a genuine believer, but only became associated with the faith community for superficial reasons. Marshall (1980, 159) equates the rebuke to excommunication and a curse; at the least it is a solemn warning Simon must heed if he is to avoid this fate (on the expression “be destroyed,” see Dan 2:5 and 3:96 LXX, Theodotion [3:29 MT]; Johnson 1992, 148–49). Proverbs 27:20 uses the phrase with reference to Hades. The expression refers to judgment (also in Greek sources, *PGM* 4.1247–48; Schille 1984, 206). Derrett (1982, 64–65) speaks of a curse. This is a most severe rebuke

because it makes an explicit reference to destruction (*apōleian*; BAGD 103; BDAG 127 §2). Barrett (1994, 414) argues that this is not a curse but the threat of one.

Barrett appears to be on the right track. Note how the effect of the remark here differs from Ananias and his immediate death in Acts 5, as the optative *eiē* expresses a wish and is followed by a call for repentance. Forgiveness could then follow. This final point is expressed inferentially as part of a condition (Gk *ei ara*, if perhaps) that is in doubt, given what Simon must do (Moule 1959, 158). Peter is testing Simon's heart with this rebuke. Simon's response indicates where he is in relationship to God. Peter warns that this judgment could happen and places responsibility on Simon Magus to respond actively.

Scholars debate the meaning of Simon's response. Weiser (1981, 205) argues that Simon's response in verse 24 is as sincere as in verses 12–13, and so argues that Luke sees Simon as responsive to the call (so also Schneider 1980, 495). Schille (1984, 207) argues the exact opposite because Simon refuses to act himself and instead asks for intervention. Bruce (1990, 223) says of verse 23, "It is clear that, in Peter's judgment, Simon was still unregenerate." (See also Bruce 1988a, 171–72: "Canonical literature bids farewell to Simon with this entreaty on his lips that by the apostle's intercession he may escape the judgment pronounced on his crooked heart.") Witherington summarizes by giving six reasons we should not see Simon's response positively: (1) the negative description in verses 9–11; (2) the fact that there is no object for his belief in verse 13; (3) his separate treatment from the Samaritans, including the motive of what drew him; (4) the desire to buy the gift in verses 18–19; (5) the negative description in verse 23; and (6) his failure to pray for himself as Peter recommends.

How we read verse 24 determines in the end whether we think Luke is portraying Simon as responsive. Simon's fate seems bound up ultimately with his response; that his response does not match Peter's command may indicate his faith is disingenuous. Still, that there is some debate shows the uncertainty about how Luke resolves the issue (Williams 1990, 158, expresses similar negative leanings about Simon's response and cites 1 Sam 24:16 with 26:21). Though not entirely clear, it appears that Simon is seen in a negative light here. That is certainly how the subsequent church saw him. Justin Martyr (*First Apology* 26) and Irenaeus discredit him by noting his moral failure and saying that he went around with a prostitute named Helena. Ignatius (*Philadelpians* 6) derides disciples of Simon Magus; Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 1.23.2) describes Simon

as one “from whom all sorts of heresies derive their origin”; 1.27.4 refutes the school of Valentinus, a “successor to Simon Magus”; 2.preface.1 denounces the doctrine of the pleroma and the demiurge as “declaring at the same time the doctrine of Simon Magus of Samaria, their progenitor, and of all those who succeeded him.” Though the church fathers’ connection of Simon to later Gnosticism and other heresies is incorrect, the fact that Simon Magus is seen as the model of false teaching shows how he was seen in light of his total career.

Peter’s closing rebuke fits with this negative assessment of Simon. He says Simon has “no part or share” (Gk *ouk estin soi meris oude klēros*) in this matter (v. 21; 1:25–26 has a positive use of “portion/lot”) unless his attitude changes by repentance (v. 22). The dative *soi*, which opens the phrase in verse 21, is a possessive dative, meaning that these things do not belong to Simon (Wallace 1996, 149). This is a way of saying that there is no blessing for him (Deut 12:12; 14:27; 18:1; Josh 18:7; *m. Sanhedrin* 10.1–4). Polhill (1992, 220) agrees and interprets the remark to mean that Simon has no share with God’s people (also Barrett 1994, 414). This word combination also suggests that Simon’s faith is deficient at the time when Peter addresses him.

***Samaritan reception of the Spirit* (8:15–17, 25):** Does the fact that the Spirit is given to the Samaritan believers through the involvement of the Jerusalem delegation indicate a sort of racism or spiritual elitism?

Because the gospel was moving to a new people group, the Jerusalem apostles came to verify what was taking place. God, who is the main actor in the book of Acts, shows his seal of approval of their inclusion by distributing the Spirit on them as the apostles make their visit. The expansive role played by Peter and the apostles in mission is why the Spirit is distributed in a manner distinct from most other settings. This will happen again when the gospel comes to Gentiles in Acts 10. The prayer of the apostles allows God to show his acceptance of the Samaritans so that the entire church can see it. Bruce suggests that the theological and social controversy over Samaritans within Judaism requires special evidence that God is directing matters here (see Larkin 1995, 128). The laying on of hands and confirmation of the Spirit are actions that indicate fellowship and identification with these new believers. The result is the unity of the church as all participate in the expansion to Samaria. So the action is not racist; it actually is God’s way of preventing any such condition from developing. If God is behind the expansion and all see it, then one can be assured this is God’s will.

26 An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip: “Get up and go south to the road that goes down from
Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is the desert road.) 27 So he got up and went. There was an Ethiopian
man, a eunuch and high official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of her
entire treasury. He had come to worship in Jerusalem 28 and was sitting in his chariot on his
way home, reading the prophet Isaiah aloud.
29 The Spirit told Philip, “Go and join that chariot.”
30 When Philip ran up to it, he heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, “Do you
understand what you’re reading? ”
31 “How can I,” he said, “unless someone guides me? ” So he invited Philip to come up and sit
with him. 32 Now the Scripture passage he was reading was this:

He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb is silent before its shearer,
so He does not open His mouth.
33 **In His humiliation justice was denied Him.**
Who will describe His generation?
For His life is taken from the earth.

34 The eunuch replied to Philip, “I ask you, who is the prophet saying this about — himself or
another person? ” 35 So Philip proceeded to tell him the good news about Jesus, beginning from
that Scripture.
36 As they were traveling down the road, they came to some water. The eunuch said, “Look,
there’s water! What would keep me from being baptized? ” [37 And Philip said, “If you believe
with all your heart you may.” And he replied, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”]
38 Then he ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the
water, and he baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord
carried Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any longer. But he went on his way
rejoicing. 40 Philip appeared in Azotus, and he was traveling and evangelizing all the towns
until he came to Caesarea.

The citation of Isaiah 53:7b-8a and its application to Jesus **(8:32–35):** Is this citation accurate, and is it legitimate to apply it to Jesus? While this passage is cited in a form resembling the LXX passage, the sense accurately reflects the MT. Williams (1990, 162) suggests that the Ethiopian official is more likely to have been reading the LXX than the MT. The differences in citation between the LXX and the MT are not crucial because the issue is not the details but the identity of the figure whom Isaiah describes. At the time, Jews may have considered three candidates for the subject of the text: (1) the prophet Isaiah, (2) Israel, and (3) another individual, such as an Elijah revived or a Messiah, though not a Messiah who suffered (Fitzmyer 1998, 414; Jeremias, *TDNT* 5:684–89).

Isaiah 53:7 speaks of a servant who suffers innocently and in silence and compares the figure to a sacrificial lamb, unjustly slain ("justice was denied Him," v. 33). "Lamb" (Gk *amnos*) appears only four times in the NT, each referring to Jesus (John 1:29, 35–36; Acts 8:32; 1 Pet 1:17–21). Philip compares Isaiah's description to Jesus (v. 35). The comparison to a lamb might suggest atonement, but substitution is the idea Luke likely has in mind (he makes such a point more clearly in the substitution with Barabbas, Luke 23:18–19; Acts 20:28). The death is described as being "taken from the earth" (Gk *airetai apo tēs gēs*). It also is called humbling (Gk *tapeinōsei*), a term witnessed four times in the NT (Luke 1:46–48; Acts 8:33; Phil 3:20–21; Jas 1:9–10). In context, the Isaiah passage refers most clearly to submission and injustice. Jesus' death would have been seen culturally as reflecting acts of shame (Gal 3:13) and something not worthy of a Messiah. So the text shows God anticipated such shameful suffering for his servant. The text also asks what kind of generation can take a life like this (v. 33), with the implication being that only a wicked generation can do so (Isa 53:8–9). The verb (Gk *airō*) in a context such as this means "to remove" something or "to take it out of the way" (BAGD 24 §4; BDAG 28–29 §3). Here justice is removed. This injustice was the major element in the Gospel description of Jesus' death in Luke 23, and Isaiah 53:12 is used also in Luke 22:37, where Jesus is counted among the criminals. Bruce (1988a, 176) suggests that Jesus alluded to the servant as well, as in Mark 10:45. He also notes that the voice at the baptism pointed to Isaiah 42, another servant passage. Johnson (1992, 156) notes the use of portions of Isaiah 52:1–53:12 in John 12:38; 1 Peter 2:21–25; and Romans 10:16.

The application of the Isaiah passage to Jesus is clearly appropriate, whether or not a pre-Christian reading of Isaiah set up expectations that Messiah would suffer such an unjust death. Jesus died unjustly because he was who he claimed to be, the promised one of Israel. But there is irony here: in the generation's act of taking Jesus' life from earth, there is also, for Jesus, God's vindication of that death. This, in effect, nullified the judgment against Jesus on earth. This combination of the innocent person suffering and being taken from the earth is probably what Philip eventually explains about Jesus, with an elucidation of what this death now means in light of God's vindication. This tragic, unjust death, which seemed to signify that all was lost, in fact resulted in everything being gained.

The bracketed text, Acts 8:37: Acts 8:37 ("And Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart you may.' And he replied, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of

God’”) appears only in MSS of the Western family and is thus omitted from this translation. It is not in p^{45}, p^{74}, ℵ, A, B, C, 33, 81, 614, or many Vulgate texts. It is in E, several minuscules, a few versions of the Itala, and some Vulgate texts (Metzger 1971, 359–60). It appears to be a scribal addition, likely motivated by the fact that the original text of Acts does not recount the eunuch making a confession of faith.

The call to believe with all one’s heart in a confession is unusual, and Barrett (1994, 433) argues that “believe” is used in two distinct ways within the verse. Barrett goes on to say that although the verse is not original, it is one of the earliest witnesses for how confession took place in the church. It is probably a second century addition that reflects practice at that time (Bruce 1988a, 178).

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord. He went to the high priest 2 and requested letters from him to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any men or women who belonged to the Way, he might bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem. 3 As he traveled and was nearing Damascus, a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him. 4 Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? ”

5 “Who are You, Lord? ” he said.

“I am Jesus, the One you are persecuting,” He replied. 6 “But get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the sound but seeing no one. 8 Then Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing. So they took him by the hand and led him into Damascus. 9 He was unable to see for three days and did not eat or drink.

10 There was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. And the Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias! ”

“Here I am, Lord! ” he said.

11 “Get up and go to the street called Straight,” the Lord said to him, “to the house of Judas, and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, since he is praying there. 12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and placing his hands on him so he can regain his sight.”

13 “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard from many people about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. 14 And he has authority here from the chief priests to arrest all who call on Your name.”

15 But the Lord said to him, “Go! For this man is My chosen instrument to take My name to Gentiles, kings, and the Israelites. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for My name! ”

17 So Ananias left and entered the house. Then he placed his hands on him and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road you were traveling, has sent me so that

you can regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."
18 At once something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up
and was baptized. 19 And after taking some food, he regained his strength.
Saul was with the disciples in Damascus for some days. 20 Immediately he began proclaiming
Jesus in the synagogues: "He is the Son of God."
21 But all who heard him were astounded and said, "Isn't this the man who, in Jerusalem, was
destroying those who called on this name and then came here for the purpose of taking them as
prisoners to the chief priests? "
22 But Saul grew more capable and kept confounding the Jews who lived in Damascus by
proving that this One is the Messiah.
23 After many days had passed, the Jews conspired to kill him, 24 but their plot became
known to Saul. So they were watching the gates day and night intending to kill him, 25 but his
disciples took him by night and lowered him in a large basket through an opening in the wall.
26 When he arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to associate with the disciples, but they were all
afraid of him, since they did not believe he was a disciple. 27 Barnabas, however, took him and
brought him to the apostles and explained to them how Saul had seen the Lord on the road and
that He had talked to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus.
28 Saul was coming and going with them in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the
Lord. 29 He conversed and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they attempted to kill him.
30 When the brothers found out, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.
31 So the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace, being built up and
walking in the fear of the Lord and in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, and it increased in
numbers.

Lord (9:5): Does Saul's use of "Lord" (Gk *kurie*) indicate that he already knew who was speaking to him, or that he professed Jesus' divinity? The answer to both questions is no. The fact is Saul asks who it is that is speaking to him. His use of the term "Lord" is a sign of respect or formal address. Saul is respectful, not worshipful. He senses that he is seeing some type of heavenly being in the vision, since the figure has a glorious, bright appearance.

The three versions of Saul's conversion: This is such an important event that Luke tells it three times: here, in Acts 22, and in Acts 26. A fourth NT text alludes to the event, where Paul says in Galatians 1:12, "I did not receive [the gospel] from a human source and I was not taught it, but it came by a revelation from Jesus Christ."

As is common in ancient retellings, each version has some variation so that each adds something to the reader's understanding. Witherington (1998, 303–15) has a helpful discussion of the relationship between these three accounts. He stresses that all of them are summaries and are not intended to provide comprehensive information. The present account is the most compact of the

three versions.

While the distinctions of each account are noteworthy, it is also noteworthy that all three of them share the same basic facts about Saul's conversion. In all three accounts

- Saul is on his way to Damascus to gather up Christians.
- He sees an intense light.
- The Lord asks why Saul is persecuting him.
- Saul asks who the speaker is.
- Jesus reveals that it is he.

The biggest differences in the accounts have to do with whether the men traveling with Saul see the light and hear nothing (22:9) or stand speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one (9:7). The elements at play here can be reconciled (Witherington 1998, 312–13), as for instance in the following way: The men hear a sound, but it is not intelligible to them; they also see a light but not Jesus himself. Only Saul sees someone in the light and is able to discern a speaking voice in the sound. Saul's companions experience something less than the full event, which means that the appearance is neither an entirely private vision nor a fully disclosed public event. It is a public event whose details are for one man alone, Saul of Tarsus.

Another difference is that Ananias does not appear at all in the Acts 26 account. This may be in part because the book has already mentioned him in detail twice, in Acts 9 and 22. Luke chooses not to be redundant on this detail, and so he provides a telescoped account.

Another key difference between the accounts is that Saul does not mention his call to reach the Gentiles in the account given in Acts 9, whereas he shares this detail in Acts 22 and 26. However, Ananias notes in 9:15 that Saul would be called to a Gentile mission, so we probably have another example of telescoping. Another possibility is that Luke chose not to note this detail in his third-person narrative because the Gentile mission had not yet taken place, but this argument is somewhat weakened by the mention of the mission to Ananias. In any case, Saul's not mentioning his Gentile mission in Acts 9 is simply an outcome of Luke's literary choice, the exact reason for which is not clear.

Here I am, Lord! (9:10): Ananias was quick to answer when he heard the Lord calling in a vision. His response seems to indicate that he simply fell right into customary conversation with God, even daring to question the Lord's judgment. Would we not instead expect Ananias to be surprised or even fearful? Would he

dare to argue with a voice from heaven? These elements of the narrative lead some to suggest that Luke is writing religious fiction.

Rather than evidence of fiction, the above-mentioned elements arise from the fact that this account is not a verbatim, comprehensive recounting of the Lord's visitation to Ananias, but is instead a summarization of and commentary on the event. Verse 17 provides evidence for this approach, for Ananias says to Saul: "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road you were traveling, has sent me so that you can regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Nowhere in verses 10–16 does Luke tell us that the Lord told Ananias that Jesus had appeared to Saul, but clearly this was part of the message given to Ananias since he is able to repeat the fact of Jesus' visitation to Saul. Hence we have evidence that Luke does not recount the entire conversation between the Lord and Ananias.

Visions expressed with the term *horama* appear here and there in the NT, but are prevalent in Acts (Matt 17:9; Acts 7:31–32 [Moses]; 9:10–12; 10:1–3 [Cornelius], 19 [Peter]; 11:5 [Peter]; 12:9 [Peter, mistakenly thinking he had a vision]; 16:9–10 [Paul]; 18:9–10 [Paul]). Another term, *ekstasis*, is also used for such events (10:10 [Peter]; 11:5 [Peter]; 22:17 [Paul]). When the Lord addresses Ananias, Luke records that Ananias responded with "Here I am," a familiar response in the literature, and an indication that Ananias is ready to obey (Gen 22:1–2, 11–12; 1 Sam 3:4–14; Isa 6:8; Jub 44.5; 2 Esd [*4 Ezra*] 14:1–2; Pesch 1986, 305).

One last interesting point is that, following as it does on the heels of the vision given to Saul, the vision given to Ananias forms the second element in a double vision. Double visions mean that an event is fixed by God (Gen 41:32).

Early chronology of Saul's life after his meeting with the Lord: The present account (esp. 9:8, 25–26) seems to have Paul going directly from Damascus to Jerusalem with no time for the intervening trip to Arabia that Galatians 1:15–18 mentions. When recounting the events in Galatians, Paul says that after his conversion he "did not go to Jerusalem to those who had become apostles before me; instead I went to Arabia and came back to Damascus" (Gal 1:17). Further, in 2 Corinthians 11:32–33 Paul says a threat of arrest from King Aretas prompted his escape in a basket, whereas Acts 9:23–25 blames the flight on a plot in which the Jews sought to kill him.

Barrett does not believe these differences can be reconciled (1994, 460–62, 466), but it is important to note that in Acts, Luke is not tracing Paul's entire career. Instead, he is intent on narrating the world-changing activities across the

expanse of the church. It is a book focusing on action, not meditation or periods of retreat and silence. Luke may have known about Paul's time in Arabia after his conversion, but felt it was not important enough to mention in the big sweep of events he is retelling. And if Paul did disappear from Jerusalem's sight for three years, might that not explain why some Christians were suspicious again when he did show up (Acts 9:26)? It fits just as well with the idea that Paul went to Jerusalem immediately after his conversion, so Luke's treatment does not rule out an intervening period between Damascus and Jerusalem.

Or could it be that Paul's ministry in Damascus occurred, like bookends, at both ends of his three-year sojourn in Arabia? In this case, Paul really did go straight from Damascus to Jerusalem, but only after having gone from Damascus to Arabia for a few years (Williams 1990, 175). Marshall (1980, 174) and Hengel and Schwemer argue for Paul entering an eighteen-month to two-year stay in Damascus doing ministry rather than entering a period of silence.

Finally, it may be that knowledge of Paul's journey to Arabia had not entered into the larger church tradition by the time Luke wrote Acts, which would explain Luke's silence about it. His silence about Arabia does not mean he contradicts Galatians, and as shown above, nothing Luke says rules out a trip to Arabia.

As for the cause of Paul's leaving Damascus, if his preaching caused a stir there, there is no reason to exclude the possibility that it was not just the local Jews who opposed Paul, but that a regional leader such as King Aretas would also oppose him due to concern for the public peace (Hengel and Schwemer 1997, 131). A similar thing happened when Pilate executed Jesus due to concern for the public peace, a concern he shared with many important Jews in Jerusalem. Fitzmyer (1998, 434) notes that even though Luke in Acts and Paul in Galatians give different reasons for fleeing Damascus, they are not incompatible reasons. He notes also Pesch's suggestion (1986, 315) that the Jews of Damascus denounced Saul to the ethnarch.

Ironically, the overlap of distinct details gives us some chronological pegs for Paul's ministry. Since Aretas died in AD 39, the beginning of Paul's ministry falls before this date. In addition, Aretas came to full power in the region after Tiberius died, sometime in AD 37, but he may well have had some significant influence before then. So an AD 36–39 time frame fits for 9:1–26.

43 And Peter stayed on many days in Joppa with Simon, a leather tanner.

Tanner (9:43): Some have argued that no scrupulous Jew would stay with a tanner, and that this detail shows that Luke is ignorant about key aspects of Jewish religious life. Tanners worked with animal carcasses, rendering theirs an unclean occupation (*m. Ketubbot* 7.10; *m. Baba Batra* 2.9; Le Cornu and Shulam 2003, 542–43 describe it as a "despised" trade). We should not make too much of this fact, however. Peter was not a Pharisee, who would be very sensitive about such scruples, but a fisherman-apostle who was accustomed to gritty work (Marshall 1980, 180). That Peter would house himself in such an unclean place shows that some in the church's leadership were not overly sensitive about all aspects of Jewish purity laws as interpreted by other pious Jews, though admittedly it poses compatibility questions with Peter's attitude in Acts 10:9–16 (see below). Perhaps Peter was simply inconsistent, a common trait among religious adherents.

> There was a man in Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment. 2 He was a devout man and feared God along with his whole household. He did many charitable deeds for the Jewish people and always prayed to God. 3 About three in the afternoon he distinctly saw in a vision an angel of God who came in and said to him, "Cornelius! "
>
> 4 Looking intently at him, he became afraid and said, "What is it, lord? "
>
> The angel told him, "Your prayers and your acts of charity have come up as a memorial offering before God. 5 Now send men to Joppa and call for Simon, who is also named Peter. 6 He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea."
>
> 7 When the angel who spoke to him had gone, he called two of his household slaves and a devout soldier, who was one of those who attended him. 8 After explaining everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.
>
> 9 The next day, as they were traveling and nearing the city, Peter went up to pray on the housetop about noon. 10 Then he became hungry and wanted to eat, but while they were preparing something, he went into a visionary state. 11 He saw heaven opened and an object that resembled a large sheet coming down, being lowered by its four corners to the earth. 12 In it were all the four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth, and the birds of the sky. 13 Then a voice said to him, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat! "
>
> 14 "No, Lord! " Peter said. "For I have never eaten anything common and ritually unclean! "
>
> 15 Again, a second time, a voice said to him, "What God has made clean, you must not call common." 16 This happened three times, and then the object was taken up into heaven.

Centurion (10:1): Against the stereotype that says Romans and Jews were universally antagonistic toward one another, this scene indicates that in some

cases relations between the two groups were good. Cornelius is seen as a pious man, open to God. So God is responsive to his openness.

The story about Cornelius also supports the account's historicity. As a centurion, Cornelius was a commander of one of the 6 units of 100 men within a cohort. A cohort had about 600 members and would have been part of a legion of about 6,000 men, which was the main division in the Roman military. He would have served under a tribune (BAGD 237; BDAG 299). Acts frequently notes such military figures (10:22; 21:32; 22:26; 24:23; 27:1, 6, 11, 43), and the conversion of soldiers was a key factor in the spread of Christianity. Luke 7:1–10 has a key account of a centurion who is likewise portrayed positively. Centurions were to be men who were "good leaders, of steady and prudent mind" (Polybius, *Histories* 6.24.8; Bruce 1990, 252). Cornelius's unit has a name, the Italian Cohort, and is probably an auxiliary force, not part of the regular army; an inscription found in Austria documents its presence in Palestine as late as AD 69 (*ILS* 9168; Polhill 1992, 251n69). The event here in Acts probably falls before AD 41 (Fitzmyer 1998, 449).

Vision (10:3): As was the case with Saul-Ananias (Acts 9:1–9, 10–16), we get a double vision here (10:1–8, 9–16) to show that God is directing the events that led into the inclusion of Gentiles in the new faith community.

No, Lord! (10:14): Questions have been raised about the believability of this account, not just because it involves a supernatural vision, but because it has Peter arguing against the voice from heaven ("No, Lord!" v. 14) and because it may seem inconsistent with Peter's earlier willingness to stay in the home of a tanner (see comments on 9:43).

Within the sheet are all kinds of unclean animals, reptiles, and birds. In the OT, there are a few cases where someone is asked to do something offensive or illegal. In Genesis 22:1–2, God asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac; in Hosea 1:2–3 God asks Hosea to marry a harlot; in Isaiah 20:2–3 God tells Isaiah to go naked for three years. In each case God asks the person to do that which is objectionable, and their responses differ from Peter's. Abraham felt certain from the start that God would provide a sacrifice other than his son, and so he moved forward in unquestioning obedience (Gen 22:8). Hosea also seems to have obeyed God's command straight away (Hos 1:3), as did Isaiah (Isa 20:2, "and he did so"). Peter's initial response is not analogous to these situations, but bears greater resemblance to the numerous cases in which people argue against surprising messages brought to them by heavenly messengers. Examples include

Mary, the mother of Jesus, who expressed confusion about how she, a virgin, could bear a son (Luke 1:34), and Zechariah, who argued with the angel in the temple when he was told that his aged wife would conceive and bear a son (Luke 1:18).

The heavenly command is to rise, sacrifice (Gk *thuson*), and eat (Gk *phage*) what is displayed. Barrett (1994, 507) argues that the term "sacrifice" almost makes the action a religious act. This may heighten Peter's objection to the instruction to eat. Luke's use of two negatives (Gk *mēdamōs* with *oudepote*) points to Peter's emphatic rejection of the suggestion.

By rejecting the call to eat, Peter believes he is being obedient to God. How does this mix with the fact that Peter apparently realizes he is talking to God? Peter's response is not surprising, for as a faithful Jew he knew that to eat these unclean things would be a violation of laws God had previously revealed (Lev 10:10; 20:25; Ezek 4:14; Dan 1:8–12; 2 Macc 5:27; 6:18–25 [a vivid account of a Jew refusing to eat pork]; Tob 1:10–11; Jdt 10:5; 12:2; Hauck, *TDNT* 3:790–91; Gaventa 2003, 166). Peter's resistance to God's command here may reflect the fact that he perceived an inconsistency. He knew what God had said in the past, and the Jews had lived in conformity to that message for many centuries. That God would say something different now was a shock to Peter, and Peter's initial resistance is believable. Another possible explanation for Peter's resistance is that Peter may have taken the command to be a test of his obedience, similar to the situation Abraham faced.

The heavenly reply makes clear that God has cleansed the food so that it is not common anymore (Rom 14:14 gives Paul's view, as does 1 Tim 4:3–4; also 1 Cor 10:19). That God has the right to declare food clean is the vision's fundamental premise, functioning much like a pronouncement in a pronouncement story (i.e., a Gospel account, such as Luke 20:20–26, whose focus is a solemn declaration by Jesus). The reply's point is emphatically made with a pronoun plus a negative (*su me*) that matches Peter's earlier refusal. The present imperative (Gk *koinou*, regard as common) means not to go on doing what he has been doing, that is, calling common such things that God has cleansed (Bruce 1990, 256; Wallace 1996, 487). The threefold presentation reinforces that God is speaking and is to be believed (Ps.-Philo, *L.A.B.* 53.6; Le Cornu and Shulam 2003, 568), and the effect of this repetition must be taken into consideration when trying to make sense of Peter's initial refusal.

As for the issue of staying with a tanner, the issue of diet was a major Jewish distinctive, but working with dead animals would be a natural part of certain

vocations. Uncleanness was not always tied to sin, but could involve the everyday activities of life (e.g., women's menstrual cycles were a part of this concern as was human death). So Peter could stay with a tanner and be sensitive to make himself clean, if necessary, and yet be more sensitive about diet which he can directly control. See also comments on 11:8.

> 34 Then Peter began to speak: "Now I really understand that God doesn't show favoritism,
> 35 but in every nation the person who fears Him and does righteousness is acceptable to Him.
> 36 He sent the message to the Israelites, proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus
> Christ — He is Lord of all. 37 You know the events that took place throughout Judea, beginning
> from Galilee after the baptism that John preached: 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with
> the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were
> under the tyranny of the Devil, because God was with Him. 39 We ourselves are witnesses of
> everything He did in both the Judean country and in Jerusalem, yet they killed Him by hanging
> Him on a tree. 40 God raised up this man on the third day and permitted Him to be seen, 41 not
> by all the people, but by us, witnesses appointed beforehand by God, who ate and drank with
> Him after He rose from the dead. 42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to solemnly
> testify that He is the One appointed by God to be the Judge of the living and the dead. 43 All
> the prophets testify about Him that through His name everyone who believes in Him will
> receive forgiveness of sins."
> 44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who
> heard the message. 45 The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded
> because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. 46 For they heard
> them speaking in other languages and declaring the greatness of God.
> Then Peter responded, 47 "Can anyone withhold water and prevent these people from being
> baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have? " 48 And he commanded them to
> be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay for a few days.

The person who . . . does righteousness is acceptable to Him (10:35): This verse on the surface can look like it teaches salvation by works, but it really is a summary about the person who fears God, responds to Him, and then receives the Spirit who instills in them the righteousness that comes from faith in God. So Peter highlights two traits of the person whom God regards as acceptable from any nation (Lev 19:5; Isa 56:7).

First, the person fears God, which Proverbs 1:7 calls the beginning of wisdom (Deut 10:12–13; Rom 1:21). Cornelius fears God (Acts 10:2), and so God extends revelation to him.

Second, the person does what is right ("performs righteousness," *ergazomenos*

dikaiosunēn; Ps 14:2 LXX [15:2 Eng.]; Heb 11:33; Jas 1:20; conceptually, Matt 7:23; Rom 2:10; 13:10; Gal 6:10).

In Judaism, Philo (*On the Special Laws* 2.15 §§62–63) speaks of duty to God in piety and holiness and of duty to people shown in humanity and justice. The idea Peter presents is like Micah 6:8 (also Gen 4:7; Rev 22:12). Again the commendations that Cornelius possesses were presented in Acts 10:2, 4, 22. The point is not that Cornelius had earned righteousness as his due (Rom 4:5), but that his responsiveness leads God to send Peter to reveal more of God's way to him. Cornelius and those with him must receive forgiveness and the enablement of the Spirit. These gifts allow them to honor God.

Witnesses appointed beforehand by God (10:41): The mention of appointed witnesses repeats the theme introduced in Acts 1:8 and mentioned here and there after that (2:32; 3:15; 13:31). These witnesses, all people of faith (except for James and Saul), testify that Jesus is raised as evidence that God vindicated Jesus' claims and that Jesus has unique authority to judge.

If the gospel is to be preached to all people, why did God grant resurrection appearances only to select persons? This is a question no one can answer with certainty, but the selectivity theme fits with aspects of Jesus' own approach (e.g., Mark 1:43–45; 4:11; 8:29–30). Also, it must be remembered that Jesus taught that even if someone appeared from the dead and offered a message from God, many would not believe it (Luke 16:30–31). To believe, one must be open to the word of God, open to the fact that God can do miracles, and open to the teachings and claims of Jesus. Without such openness, a resurrection appearance would make no impact because the unbeliever would explain it away on skeptical grounds. Fortunately, Cornelius and his house had open hearts and eyes.

In the name of Jesus Christ (10:48): Are people to be baptized into the name of "Jesus Christ," or the name of "the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19)? Some have seen a contradiction between Acts and Matthew here. That Cornelius was baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ" means that he was baptized *in the authority* of Jesus Christ. This fits with what Peter said in Acts 2:38 about Jesus as the one who mediates salvation by giving the Spirit that comes from the Father. Thus, the expression "in the name of Jesus Christ" is shorthand for this larger reality. In Matthew 28:19, the larger reality is made explicit in the call to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Matthew and Luke are not offering competing formulas. Rather one focuses on

the mediator of the gift, while the other is explicit about the full involvement of the Trinity.

> 6 When I looked closely and considered it, I saw the four-footed animals of the earth, the wild
> beasts, the reptiles, and the birds of the sky. 7 Then I also heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up,
> Peter; kill and eat! ’
> 8 “ ‘No, Lord! ’ I said. ‘For nothing common or ritually unclean has ever entered my mouth! ’
> 9 But a voice answered from heaven a second time, ‘What God has made clean, you must not
> call common.’

No, Lord! (11:8): In the midst of initially understandable complaints from Jewish believers that he had ignored sacred practices about fellowship with non-Jews (11:2–3), Peter explains how God led him to a new approach and how God endorsed the new approach by giving the Holy Spirit to Gentiles. The fact that this story is retold shows how important it is to Luke. It was a turning point in which God opened up access to himself and signaled to Jewish believers that they need not be excessively concerned with how to relate to Gentiles, for whom the dietary laws were irrelevant. Peter’s initial refusal to obey the vision reflects his attitude as a faithful Jew. It shows that Peter’s view was initially the same as those who were complaining against him.

Some suggest that it is unrealistic for Peter to argue with God, and that this is evidence that this is a created story. We argued against this criticism in the comments on 10:14 above. In further treatment of this question, we note that some incorrectly suggest that Peter’s argument about suffering and Messiahship with Jesus at Caesarea Philippi is evidence that Peter had previously and knowingly argued with God (Matt 16:13–20; Luke 9:20). This probably misreads the situation in Matthew 16. Peter’s confession at Caesarea Philippi likely highlights his understanding of Jesus as Messiah rather than Jesus as God, even though Matthew’s version has Peter calling Jesus “the Son of the living God.” The phrase “Son of God” in Judaism can refer to the king without being understood as a reference to divinity (Psalm 2; 2 Sam 7:7–17). It is likely that the disciples did not fully understand who Jesus was until God vindicated him in resurrection. Until they saw Jesus raised from the dead, Jesus’ death was an unspeakable disappointment to the disciples; they likely took it as evidence that they had been wrong to believe he was the messiah. All the versions of Peter’s remark at Caesarea Philippi mention Jesus as Christ, so Jesus as the Anointed One rather than Jesus as God is the point of that confession. The disciples

understood as Peter confessed that Jesus was the unique sent anointed one at the center of God's salvation program and not merely a prophet as the crowds believed (Mark 8:26–30). In summary, the feasibility of Peter's arguing with God should not be defended on an appeal to his confession at Caesarea Philippi as background.

> 27 In those days some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 Then one of them,
> named Agabus, stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine
> throughout the Roman world. This took place during the time of Claudius. 29 So each of the
> disciples, according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brothers who lived in Judea.
> 30 They did this, sending it to the elders by means of Barnabas and Saul.

Severe famine . . . during the time of Claudius (11:28): Mention of the famine during the time of Claudius helps situate the book of Acts historically. Claudius, a nephew of Tiberius Caesar, was Caesar of Rome from AD 41 to 54. He reluctantly succeeded another one of Tiberius's nephews, Gaius, upon his murder. At the time of Gaius's murder, Claudius hid behind a curtain because he fearing his own demise. Claudius proved to be an able administrator, but he had to deal with a series of natural disasters that befell the empire. So Agabus's prediction of the famine points to one of the prominent events in Claudius's reign.

Famine hit in the first, second, fourth, ninth, and eleventh years of Claudius's reign. One inscription from Asia Minor (*CIG* 3973.5–6) speaks of a famine that gripped the whole world. Fitzmyer (1998, 481–82) provides extensive discussion of how widespread these famines were. They struck Egypt (at the beginning of Claudius's rule), Greece (eighth to ninth years), and Rome (ninth to eleventh years) as well as Judea. We have notes about this famine concerning its presence in AD 40–41 and 46–47 (Talbert 1997, 117; Josephus, *Antiquities* 3.15.3 §§320–21; 20.2.5 §§51–53; 20.5.2 §101). This was a sporadic, empire-wide famine, but the final Josephus reference speaks of a famine in Judea in AD 44–48 (Riesner 1998, 132, 135, placing Agabus's prediction in AD 39–42).

> About that time King Herod cruelly attacked some who belonged to the church, 2 and he killed
> James, John's brother, with the sword. 3 When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to
> arrest Peter too, during the days of Unleavened Bread. 4 After the arrest, he put him in prison
> and assigned four squads of four soldiers each to guard him, intending to bring him out to the

people after the Passover. 5 So Peter was kept in prison, but prayer was being made earnestly to God for him by the church.

6 On the night before Herod was to bring him out for execution, Peter, bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while the sentries in front of the door guarded the prison. 7 Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell. Striking Peter on the side, he woke him up and said, “Quick, get up! ” Then the chains fell off his wrists. 8 “Get dressed,” the angel told him, “and put on your sandals.” And he did so. “Wrap your cloak around you,” he told him, “and follow me.” 9 So he went out and followed, and he did not know that what took place through the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. 10 After they passed the first and second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened to them by itself. They went outside and passed one street, and immediately the angel left him.

11 Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel and rescued me from Herod’s grasp and from all that the Jewish people expected.” 12 When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many had assembled and were praying. 13 He knocked at the door in the gateway, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer. 14 She recognized Peter’s voice, and because of her joy, she did not open the gate but ran in and announced that Peter was standing at the gateway.

15 “You’re crazy! ” they told her. But she kept insisting that it was true. Then they said, “It’s his angel! ” 16 Peter, however, kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astounded.

It’s his angel! (12:15): Although some thought Rhoda was delirious due to grief about Peter’s arrest, others took Rhoda’s announcement seriously and suggested an alternative to her claim that Peter was outside the gate: they said it was “his angel” instead. Does this imply belief in guardian angels? Does the Bible teach such a possibility?

The basis of the “angel” comment is probably extrabiblical. Tobit 5:4–16 reports that an angel called Raphael accompanied Tobias upon Tobias’s request, but Tobias was unaware that Raphael was an angel, and the text does not say the angel belonged to or represented Tobias in a way that befits the “guardian angel” concept. Still, the basic idea of an angel attending a human is in place, and could be one basis for growing a guardian-angel concept. A more fitting basis is the later rabbinic text *Gen. Rabbah* 78 [50a], which provides commentary on Genesis 33:10, and has a specific personal angel whose appearance matches that of the person he protects (Str-B 2:707–8; *L.A.B.* 59.4; *T. Jac.* 1.10; in early Christian literature, Shepherd of Hermas, *Mandate* 6.2.2; Johnson 1992, 213). The date of this evidence shows this idea is likely later than the New Testament writings.

Scholars have suggested that Rhoda’s companions may have assumed Peter

was already dead and that his angel was now present, having appeared after his death (Polhill 1992, 282n155). Polhill does not cite evidence for such a view, but the suggestion does fit with the fact that the disciples seem to have neglected the idea that God would spare Peter with a miraculous escape. Yet again God works beyond their expectation, just as Peter thought he was only experiencing a vision when the Lord initially appeared to him to grant him freedom (Acts 12:9).

For biblical testimony about angels, see, among other texts, Genesis 48:16; Psalm 91:11; Daniel 3:28; 6:22; Matthew 18:10; Hebrews 1:14; and Revelation 2–3, which has an angel associated with a church.

> 19 After Herod had searched and did not find him, he interrogated the guards and ordered their execution. Then Herod went down from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there.
>
> 20 He had been very angry with the Tyrians and Sidonians. Together they presented themselves before him. They won over Blastus, who was in charge of the king's bedroom, and through him they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food from the king's country. 21 So on an appointed day, dressed in royal robes and seated on the throne, Herod delivered a public address to them. 22 The assembled people began to shout, "It's the voice of a god and not of a man! " 23 At once an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give the glory to God, and he became infected with worms and died.

Tyre and Sidon **(12:20):** These cities were often seen as opponents of Israel, with tension between them going back centuries. In fact, the prophet Ezekiel predicted their destruction (26:14, 19–21; 27:36; 28:19). The texts in Ezekiel anticipate a final comprehensive judgment for these cities; does the fact that the cities still existed at the time Acts was written indicate that Ezekiel's prophecies were false?

Three considerations: First, the language is probably somewhat hyperbolic in Ezekiel, a feature common to apocalyptic and related genres. Thus it is possible that the judgments had already befallen both cities, yet leaving them extant. Second, if it is the case that the predicted judgments had not yet been fully fulfilled, that does not mean the fulfillment would never come. Third, Ezekiel is not the most relevant background for what Luke is recounting in Acts 12. Of clear relevance is the fact that Herod Agrippa was in a political dispute with people living in the contemporary cities known as Tyre and Sidon. Now as before, these cities were in political tension with Israel; their experience of judgment was not Luke's concern, and it is possible that he knew of fulfilled, but less than comprehensive judgments against them but left them unmentioned.

An angel of the Lord struck him (12:23): Is this account of Herod Agrippa's death compatible with extrabiblical accounts? In the *Antiquities*, Josephus recounts this same speech. He says Herod spoke to the people from his "royal" throne, dressed in royal robes made of silver that glistened in the sun (*Antiquities* 19.8.2 §344). These details match Luke's report that Herod addressed the Tyrians and Sidonians while "dressed in royal robes and seated on the throne" (v. 21). Further, Josephus says the crowd hailed Herod as being "superior to mortal nature," which agrees with Luke's report that the crowd proclaimed of Herod: "It's the voice of a god and not of a man!" (v. 22). Both Luke and Josephus see Herod's acceptance of the praise as the cause of his downfall; Luke says Herod did not give God the glory (v. 23), and Josephus notes that Herod did not rebuke the crowd or reject their "impious flattery."

Josephus says Herod died five days after the speech due to a stomach condition, and says this fate had been signaled by the portent of an owl seated on a rope (for Josephus's account, see *Antiquities* 18.6.7 §200; 19.8.2 §§343–50). Some critics have seen Josephus's mention of five days as contradictory to the account in Acts because they assume Luke means to say Herod died immediately upon being struck by the angel, but the text says no such thing. The immediacy was in being struck with the affliction, not in being killed (v. 23). Further, it is expected that death by worm infection is not immediate, so there is no legitimate basis for saying the biblical text pictures an immediate death.

Luke says Herod was "struck" by an angel of the Lord ("smote" in KJV, RSV; "struck" in NASB, NIV, NLT; "struck down" in NET). The term *patassō* (strike down) is occasionally used to describe a judgment and has OT roots (Gen 8:21; Exod 9:15; 12:23; Num 14:12; Deut 28:22; Rev 11:6; 19:15; BAGD 634 §2; BDAG 786 §2). Angels smite in the OT frequently (2 Sam 12:15; 2 Kgs 19:35; Bruce 1990, 289; Fitzmyer 1998, 491); although the Lord can also strike down (1 Sam 25:38; 2 Chr 13:20). The result is that Herod's body is "infected with worms" (v. 23), a severe disease leading to his painful death (Jdt 16:17, of the Lord's enemies as a group). The exact disease remains unknown.

The occasion of the speech may be the quinquennial games at Caesarea, held in March, or Claudius's birthday in August if it is not a special convocation. The likely date of Agrippa's death is March, AD 44, making this one of the key dates by which we can determine the chronology of events in Acts.

6 When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came across a sorcerer,

a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. 7 He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and desired to hear God's message. 8 But Elymas the sorcerer (this is the meaning of his name) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

9 Then Saul — also called Paul — filled with the Holy Spirit, stared straight at the sorcerer 10 and said, "You son of the Devil, full of all deceit and all fraud, enemy of all righteousness! Won't you ever stop perverting the straight paths of the Lord? 11 Now, look! The Lord's hand is against you. You are going to be blind, and will not see the sun for a time." Suddenly a mist and darkness fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand.

12 Then the proconsul, seeing what happened, believed and was astonished at the teaching about the Lord.

Paul . . . stared straight at the sorcerer (13:9): Paul here confronts a magician, much as Peter did earlier (Acts 8:9ff). Further, as the *Apologetics Study Bible* notes, "Scholars have noted Peter-Paul parallels in Acts: healing a lame man (3:2–8 and 14:8–10; cp. 5:15 and 19:12), exorcising (5:16 and 16:18), being divinely freed from prison (12:6–11 and 16:25–26), receiving the Spirit by the laying on of hands (8:17 and 19:6), and raising the dead (9:36–41 and 20:9–12)." Are these parallels believable as true history, or are they an indication that Luke has created parallel elements for effect?

We do not need to think of these parallels as literary creations. As narrator, Luke probably presented the accounts in tight parallelism by what he chose to include or exclude given their core similarities. He worked with existing parallels. The effect of this is to point out that Paul has the same gifts as Peter and is a leader worthy to take the gospel to Gentiles because God stands behind Paul no less than Peter. The parallelism is not just between Peter and Paul. In fact, several of these miracles mirror what Jesus did, showing that the Spirit Jesus sent to the apostles enables them to extend His ministry and pointing to the arrival of the new era (healing a paralytic: Luke 5:18–26; exorcism: 8:26–39; raising a dead person: 7:11–17; 8:40–56).

A mist and darkness fell on him (13:11): What is the meaning of the phrase, "a mist and darkness fell on him?" Does it mean to imply that a bystander would have reported seeing Elymas's head enveloped in fog of some sort?

This is one of very few judgment miracles in the New Testament. It shows how seriously God views magic and sorcery as a way of deluding people. Sorcery was popular among Gentiles, and as the gospel went among them and was embraced, sorcerers such as Elymas recognized that their position in society was under threat. The "mist and darkness" is a rhetorical way of saying Elymas became blinded. It was as if he were shrouded in fog or the dark of night, but

this should not be read overly literally, but merely as a picture of what took place.

13 Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. John,
however, left them and went back to Jerusalem. 14 They continued their journey from Perga
and reached Antioch in Pisidia. On the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.
15 After the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to
them, saying, “Brothers, if you have any message of encouragement for the people, you can
speak.”
16 Then Paul stood up and motioned with his hand and said: “Men of Israel, and you who fear
God, listen! 17 The God of this people Israel chose our ancestors, exalted the people during
their stay in the land of Egypt, and led them out of it with a mighty arm. 18 And for about 40
years He put up with them in the wilderness; 19 then after destroying seven nations in the land
of Canaan, He gave their land to them as an inheritance. 20 This all took about 450 years. After
this, He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. 21 Then they asked for a king, so God gave
them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for 40 years. 22 After removing him,
He raised up David as their king and testified about him: ‘**I have found David** the son of Jesse,
a man loyal to Me, who will carry out all My will.’
23 “From this man’s descendants, according to the promise, God brought the Savior, Jesus, to
Israel. 24 Before He came to public attention, John had previously proclaimed a baptism of
repentance to all the people of Israel. 25 Then as John was completing his life’s work, he said,
‘Who do you think I am? I am not the One. But look! Someone is coming after me, and I am
not worthy to untie the sandals on His feet.’
26 “Brothers, sons of Abraham’s race, and those among you who fear God, the message of this
salvation has been sent to us. 27 For the residents of Jerusalem and their rulers, since they did
not recognize Him or the voices of the prophets that are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled their
words by condemning Him. 28 Though they found no grounds for the death penalty, they asked
Pilate to have Him killed. 29 When they had fulfilled all that had been written about Him, they
took Him down from the tree and put Him in a tomb. 30 But God raised Him from the dead,
31 and He appeared for many days to those who came with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who
are now His witnesses to the people. 32 And we ourselves proclaim to you the good news of the
promise that was made to our ancestors. 33 God has fulfilled this for us, their children, by
raising up Jesus, as it is written in the second Psalm:

You are My Son;
today I have become Your Father.

34 Since He raised Him from the dead, never to return to decay, He has spoken in this way, **I
will grant you the faithful covenant blessings made to David.** 35 Therefore He also says in
another passage, **You will not allow Your Holy One to see decay.** 36 For David, after serving

his own generation in God's plan, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and decayed. 37 But the One God raised up did not decay. 38 Therefore, let it be known to you, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed to you, 39 and everyone who believes in Him is justified from everything that you could not be justified from through the law of Moses. 40 So beware that what is said in the prophets does not happen to you:

41 **Look, you scoffers,**
marvel and vanish away,
because I am doing a work in your days,
a work that you will never believe,
even if someone were to explain it to you."

The Law and the Prophets (13:15): Mention of "the Law and the Prophets" tells us that Judaism had a well-defined collection of sacred Scripture by this time in history. Its divisions were sometimes called the Law and the Prophets as here, or Law, Prophets, and Psalms as found in Luke 24:44. By the time of Jesus, the Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy), most of the Historical books, the Major Prophets, and most of the Minor Prophets would have been understood to be a part of this collection. Some other books were still being discussed as to their presence in the canon (or rule) of the faith. They would have included Esther, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Lamentations. However, the bulk of what we know today as the Old Testament was firmly regarded as Scripture in Jesus' time. These Scriptures, first a Law portion and then one from the Prophets, would have been read and discussed each Sabbath in the synagogue, as is happening in this present text.

OT allusions in verses 22–23: In verse 22b, Paul purports to share God's testimony about King David, but what he gives is a partial quote of two different verses in the OT. Does this mean Paul made a citation error or held a loose view of Scripture, or was it acceptable for people who had a high view of Scripture to quote it loosely? And in what sense can Jesus be called a descendant of David if He was virgin-born?

The key to answering the first question is to realize that Paul is making allusions to OT texts here by summarizing their content; he is not attempting to cite them verbatim. This has been done in various places throughout Acts (e.g., the use of Psalm 132 in Acts 2:30), and was acceptable in ancient times, in part due to limited access to scrolls and the impracticality of unrolling scrolls to search for a specific quote when a near quote drawn from memory was sufficient for the task at hand.

Paul stays true to both OT and NT teaching when he calls Jesus a descendant

of David. God spoke of David as a man after his heart who would perform God's will (1 Sam 13:14; Ps 89:19–29, esp. v. 21), and promised that his dynasty would be everlasting, producing a hope that spoke of a great descendant in this family (2 Sam 7:6–16; Pss 89:29, 36–37; 132:11–12, 17; Isaiah 9–11; Jer 23:5; 33:14–22; Ezek 21:27; 34:23; Ps. Sol. 17.4, 21–34). The NT is clear that Jesus is a son of David (see Matt 1:1; Mark 12:35; Luke 1:31–35; 3:23, 31; 18:38–39; 20:41; Rom 1:3; 2 Tim 2:8). Jesus grew up in a home of Davidic descendants and so is son of David. The Bible does not provide a genealogy for Mary (though some see one in Luke 3:23–38), but it is commonly thought that Jesus was a legal descendant of David through adoption by Joseph, and likely a blood descendant through Mary, his mother.

They took Him down from the tree (13:29): Paul says "they" took Jesus down from the cross and put him in a tomb. Paul's use of "they" in this passage has been a reference to "the residents of Jerusalem and their rulers" who "did not recognize [Jesus] or the voices of the prophets . . ." (v. 27). Further, he stated that, "Though they found no grounds for the death penalty, they asked Pilate to have Him killed" (v. 28). Paul does not redefine "they" in verse 29, and so it seems that he has in mind "the residents of Jerusalem and their rulers" when he says, "When they had fulfilled all that had been written about Him, they took Him down from the tree and put Him in a tomb."

The gospels state that followers of Jesus, not Jesus' enemies, took his body down from the cross and placed him in a tomb (Matt 27:57–61; Mark 15:42–47; Luke 23:50–56; John 19:38–42). Does Paul not know of the Gospel traditions regarding the entombment of Christ? Does he know the tradition and reject it?

Paul is summarizing here and using language in a causative sense. The reason Paul portrays the unbelieving Jews as being the ones who took Jesus' body down from the cross and entombed it is because it was their actions that led to his execution. He is making a rhetorical summary, placing blame where blame is due. First Corinthians 15 indicates that Paul knew the detailed tradition about Jesus' death, so his statement here does not reflect ignorance or doubt about the tradition relayed in the Gospels. Paul likely knew about the burial by Joseph of Arimathea, which was prominent enough to be mentioned in all four Gospels. It is not unusual for Scripture to speak in a summary fashion that is not literally a repeat of details provided elsewhere. A famous example is Jairus's daughter, who was not yet dead when Jesus was asked to help in Mark 5:25–43, but was portrayed as dead in Matthew's version (Matt 9:18–26). Matthew, who likely used Mark's account as a source, has simply collapsed the event, and the key

point is that Jairus's daughter was dead when Jesus got there.

Paul spoke in summary fashion in the present passage about responsibility for Jesus' death and is presenting an account of the events surrounding Jesus' entombment in this light. The only reason we can say this is because we have testimony elsewhere in Scripture (the Gospels) that gives additional, specific data on the events surrounding the handling of Jesus' body. Thus we elect not to take Paul's statement in 13:29 literally because other Bible passages suggest we should not do so. This raises an important question: What about the many things in Scripture that are mentioned only one time and are not supplemented by additional, more precise testimony? The tendency of believers is to read these stand-alone passages literally, as if they did not need the sort of clarification or context that additional testimony might have provided. But how do we know that things that are mentioned only once are conveyed literally rather than rhetorically or as a summary, as Paul has done here?

First, in order to read Scripture properly, we must be aware of the difference between accuracy and precision. Sometimes we only know the difference by comparing related texts in Scripture. We need to be aware of this as we read any text, whether or not it is paralleled. All Scripture is accurate, and this does not preclude the presence of summarization, literary compression, rhetoric, and other factors. Second, the distinction between accuracy and precision serves as a warning against undue literalism. We must take the Bible seriously and trust its truthfulness and accuracy, but guard against reading into it a precision that may not be there (see Bock in Hoffmeier and Magary 2012, 167–382).

God raised Him from the dead (13:30): Who raised Jesus from the dead—God the Father or Jesus himself? The resurrection is normally seen as God's act of vindication towards Jesus. The Father raises Jesus to show that Jesus is the Son. For further on this topic, see the commentary on Acts 2:24 above.

Citation of Psalm 2 and other OT allusions in verses 32–35: Does Paul misuse these OT passages (Pss 2:7; 16:10; Isa 55:3) by applying them to Jesus, his Sonship, and his resurrection? Essentially this same question was dealt with in reference to Psalm 16:10 in our comments on Acts 2:25–28 above. We noted there that Psalm 16 was probably being read in a typological-prophetic manner, and this has application for the present passage also. Not all prophecies set up an unambiguous prior expectation to only one person who fulfills it. Some texts point to a pattern of activity that was fulfilled again and again in several people, although the fulfillment in Jesus may be unique and greater than the other

examples. In Psalm 16 the psalmist was confident that God would deliver him. The language is applicable whether the deliverance is from death (as might have been the case for the psalmist) or, even in a great way, out of death (as in the case of Jesus). Often in pattern fulfillment Jesus fulfills the pattern to a greater degree. That is the case here. He completes the pattern and fulfills it to the uttermost, even uniquely so.

Scholars debate whether "raising up Jesus" in Acts 13:33 means raising him up onto the stage of history (so 3:22, 26; 7:37) or raising him up from the dead. Most think the reference is to Jesus' resurrection, since the immediate context references the resurrection (esp. v. 34). One could make the case that since the resurrection was already noted in verse 30, verse 33 is a generic reference to being elevated onto the scene of history, though these seems less likely.

Jesus' resurrection vindicated and made evident his Sonship (Rom 1:1–4). This is not Jesus *becoming* Son or being adopted as Son, but being made evident as Son (correctly, Marshall 1980, 22, versus Barrett 1994, 646, and Schweizer, *TDNT* 8:367). Paul uses Psalm 2 to declare that the resurrection shows Jesus to be Son. The remark is like that in Romans 1:2–4 where Paul speaks of the resurrection "declaring" Jesus the Son of God.

Paul also appeals to the promise of Isaiah 55:3, presenting Jesus' resurrection as the means by which God distributed the promised blessings that he gave to David for the people.

45 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to oppose
what Paul was saying by insulting him.
46 Then Paul and Barnabas boldly said: "It was necessary that God's message be spoken to
you first. But since you reject it and consider yourselves unworthy of eternal life, we now turn
to the Gentiles! 47 For this is what the Lord has commanded us:

I have made you
a light for the Gentiles
to bring salvation
to the ends of the earth."

48 When the Gentiles heard this, they rejoiced and glorified the message of the Lord, and all
who had been appointed to eternal life believed. 49 So the message of the Lord spread through
the whole region. 50 But the Jews incited the prominent women, who worshiped God, and the
leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelled
them from their district. 51 But they shook the dust off their feet against them and went to
Iconium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

Citation of Isaiah 49:6 **(13:47):** Does Paul quote and interpret Isaiah 49:6 correctly? Isaiah 49:6 defines the servant's role in Isaiah (on the servant as light, see Isa 42:6; 9:2). Paul's citation is closer to the MT than to the LXX, which mentions the servant being set up as a covenant for the people, an allusion to the covenant for the Jews (Fitzmyer 1998, 521). Paul says that the Lord has commanded Barnabas and Paul to undertake this role of being a guide to the nations concerning the way to God. This task is much like the way a light illumines a path. The expression "ends of the earth" recalls Acts 1:8 and alludes to the church's mission to take the message into the entire world.

You . . . consider yourselves unworthy of eternal life (13:46): This and similar remarks in this passage (vv. 46–52) are described as anti-Semitic by some critics, but the evidence suggests otherwise. First, it is an in-group critique, not a cross-ethnic denouncement. Second, it is a way for Paul and Barnabas to state that unbelieving Jews were responsible for their decision not to follow Jesus. Third, it is a way for them to express that they have done their part; they have done what we have been called to do. So Paul and Barnabas left the city, shaking the dust from their feet, a symbolic act against those who had opposed them and their message (Mark 6:11 = Luke 9:5; Luke 10:10–11 = Matt 10:14). This custom is a way of signaling that responsibility for an action is with the people or town (Str-B 1:571; Cadbury 1933). The city had decided not to respond and now the responsibility for the outcome of that choice is theirs. Shaking the dust from the feet portrays leaving defilement behind and moving on. In other words, no trace of their presence is left, even on their feet. Jesus also commanded this response in Luke 9:5. Other texts where Paul notes the judgment for rejection are Acts 18:6; 28:25–27.

> The same thing happened in Iconium; they entered the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a
> way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. 2 But the Jews who refused to
> believe stirred up and poisoned the minds of the Gentiles against the brothers. 3 So they stayed
> there for some time and spoke boldly in reliance on the Lord, who testified to the message of
> His grace by granting that signs and wonders be performed through them. 4 But the people of
> the city were divided, some siding with the Jews and some with the apostles.

Signs and wonders (14:3): In the face of miraculous signs and wonders such as healings and resurrections, how could so many people (in Iconium and elsewhere) remain unbelievers? Is their unbelief proof that the signs and wonders did not really take place?

Paul and Barnabas continue to give evidence through their miracles that God is working through them, endorsing their message. That the signs are commonly met with unbelief is explained by innate spiritual deadness plus the fact that unbelievers felt they were able to explain away the signs. For instance, they might describe them as deceptive signs. This explanation has been offered in countless religions as a way of securing their beliefs against unwelcome signs and evidences. The possibility of interpreting things in a different way gets in the way of accepting what these messengers from God are doing. Acts 14 is not alone in such a portrayal. In Matthew 8–9 Jesus performs many acts to confirm who he is and yet many think his actions do not show who he is (Matt 9:34 is but one example).

God often granted signs and wonders in the book of Acts, so why do things not continue in this same way today as Christians attempt to evangelize the world and bear witness in secular Western societies? The intense and consistent nature of signs and wonders in the book of Acts is not normative, but points to the arrival of a new era. A similar feature of clustered miracles happened at earlier points in biblical history, particularly at the time of the Exodus and the time of Elijah and Elisha. God did things with special intensification in those special periods, as a way of initiating new movements or new epochs of his work. The early church era is the exemplar of this approach. God in his sovereignty can choose to work miracles at any time and place, including today, but in the outworking of his plan there is variation in the intensity of these special signs.

> 8 In Lystra a man without strength in his feet, lame from birth, and who had never walked, sat
> 9 and heard Paul speaking. After observing him closely and seeing that he had faith to be
> healed, 10 Paul said in a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet! ” And he jumped up and
> started to walk around.
>
> 11 When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian
> language, “The gods have come down to us in the form of men! ” 12 And they started to call
> Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the main speaker. 13 Then the priest of
> Zeus, whose temple was just outside the town, brought oxen and garlands to the gates. He, with
> the crowds, intended to offer sacrifice.
>
> 14 The apostles Barnabas and Paul tore their robes when they heard this and rushed into the
> crowd, shouting: 15 “Men! Why are you doing these things? We are men also, with the same
> nature as you, and we are proclaiming good news to you, that you should turn from these
> worthless things to the living God, **who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything**

in them. 16 In past generations He allowed all the nations to go their own way, 17 although He did not leave Himself without a witness, since He did what is good by giving you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons and satisfying your hearts with food and happiness." 18 Even though they said these things, they barely stopped the crowds from sacrificing to them.

We are men also (14:15): The response of Paul and Barnabas to the attempt to worship them provides a window into their character and their motivations. They are exemplary missionaries who reject all praise and give glory to God alone. They keep Jesus as the point of their message even when they had an opportunity to gain fame and renown. Their rejection of praise ultimately leads to their being rejected and nearly killed (v. 19). Persecution for faithfulness is a common result of ministry, and the willingness of Paul and Barnabas to endure such suffering is evidence for their truthful witness.

God, who made the heaven . . . (14:15): Now that they are in Gentile territory, among people who do not know the story of the Bible, Paul and Barnabas show willingness to start their message in a different place. They start with God as Creator to whom all humans are accountable. Paul's speech in Athens in Acts 17 will start at the same place. We only respond to God if we believe he is there and see ourselves as creatures accountable to a Creator. The more the world loses this link, the harder it is for the gospel to make sense. In the ancient world just about everyone thought of themselves as created beings. The fact that people believe differently today will have to inform our approach to sharing the gospel.

Some men came down from Judea and began to teach the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom prescribed by Moses, you cannot be saved! " 2 But after Paul and Barnabas had engaged them in serious argument and debate, the church arranged for Paul and Barnabas and some others of them to go up to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem concerning this controversy. 3 When they had been sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, explaining in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and they created great joy among all the brothers.

4 When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church, the apostles, and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. 5 But some of the believers from the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to command them to keep the law of Moses! "

6 Then the apostles and the elders assembled to consider this matter. 7 After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them: "Brothers, you are aware that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the gospel message and believe. 8 And God, who knows the heart, testified to them by giving the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us. 9 He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by

faith. 10 Now then, why are you testing God by putting a yoke on the disciples' necks that
neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? 11 On the contrary, we believe we are
saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus in the same way they are."
12 Then the whole assembly fell silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul describing all the
signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. 13 After they stopped
speaking, James responded: "Brothers, listen to me! 14 Simeon has reported how God first
intervened to take from the Gentiles a people for His name. 15 And the words of the prophets
agree with this, as it is written:

16 **After these things I will return**
and rebuild David's fallen tent.
I will rebuild its ruins
and set it up again,
17 **so the rest of humanity**
may seek the Lord —
even all the Gentiles
who are called by My name,
declares the Lord who does these things,
18 **known from long ago.**

19 Therefore, in my judgment, we should not cause difficulties for those among the Gentiles
who turn to God, 20 but instead we should write to them to abstain from things polluted by
idols, from sexual immorality, from eating anything that has been strangled, and from blood.
21 For since ancient times, Moses has had those who proclaim him in every city, and every
Sabbath day he is read aloud in the synagogues."

All that God had done with them (15:4): God's direction and activity drives this scene. He was responsible for how the gospel was taken to the Gentiles and showed this is where the church's mission was to go. So he was behind all that Paul and Barnabas did. The same is true of Peter's actions. Note how God is the grammatical subject and cause of what is taking place in Peter's initial description of the events, now repeated from Acts 10–11 to show their importance. Note also how the giving of the Spirit to indwell is the sign that the new era has come.

Citation of Amos 9:12 **(15:16–18):** James's words here are drawn from more than one OT source, a fact which is signaled by his introductory statement: "the words of the prophets" (v. 15). Jeremiah 12:15 may be the source for the opening phrase, "After these things I will return," but on the other hand the phrase may be only a transition into James's reference to Amos and Isaiah. Most of James's quote is an abbreviation of the Septuagint version of Amos 9:11–12, with the material in verse 18 drawn from Isaiah 45:21.

Differences between the MT and LXX at Amos 9 are apparent. Amos 9:12 in

the MT refers to Edom and looks to its judgment as well as its inclusion during the rule of David's restored dynasty. As Fitzmyer (1998, 555) says, "Yahweh promises the prophet that the Davidic line will be restored, and God's people will inherit what is left of Edom and other nations that will be called God's people." In the LXX, on the other hand, all the peoples seek the rebuilt kingdom that comes from the restored Davidic line. Edom thus refers to all humanity. The key difference is that in the MT a people group is conquered and incorporated whereas in the LXX *all* people seek incorporation, an approach that clearly fits the context into which James is speaking.

James uses a shortened version of the LXX and follows the common Jewish practice of not always citing the MT but making use of a respected alternate text. Is this problematic? Bauckham (1996b, 160–61) accepts the adoption of the LXX against Haenchen (1987, 448), who argues that a Jewish Christian would never use such a text. Barrett (1998, 726–28) takes Luke rather than James to be the source of the citation in this form because of the deviation from the MT, but this makes too much of the deviation. Bruce (1990, 341) notes that the MT can also be read in a way that agrees with James, since the new community could be seen as having a claim of possession on Gentiles, and so the difference in rendering between the MT and LXX is not significant, moving in an explicitly positive direction. Polhill (1992, 329) notes that the key idea of Gentiles "called by my name" is in both versions of the citation. So James's use fits Jewish practice and does not violate the text in that the claim is that Gentiles will be incorporated by God, now clearly in a victorious way, thanks to the offer of the new era in Christ.

Further justification of James's usage is found in the fact that he shows deference and sensitivity in the debate by citing the Greek version of the OT text, which the Gentiles would recognize. The passage declares the rebuilding of the dynasty of David, fulfilled here in Jesus' messianic arrival, along with the current inclusion of Gentiles. God is acting to perform his work of restoration through Jesus, much as Acts 3 declared. The reconstructed booth of David, for James, portrays the place of the rule and benefits that come through the Messiah, Jesus. The current community now preaches about these benefits to Gentiles, who can also be included among God's people (Acts 2:30–36; 13:32–39). James argues that this Gentile inclusion is part of the plan of Davidic restoration that God through the prophets said he would do. The prophets affirm what is taking place now. So both divine events and Scripture sustain the church's inclusion of Gentiles.

Abstain from . . . eating anything that has been strangled, and from blood (15:20, 29): Jehovah's Witnesses cite this verse as backing for their refusal to take blood transfusions, but this misjudges the context and meaning of the prohibitions listed here. The intention of the list is to teach the early church not to engage in practices that offended Jews. Failure to practice sensitivity toward Jewish scruples would hinder the effectiveness of the Christian mission, especially as so many Gentiles were coming to faith.

The reference to things strangled is rare and is absent from the LXX. The verb *pnigē* (strangle) appears in Matthew 13:7; 18:28; and Mark 5:13, where it refers to plants choking other plants or to pigs drowning. This likely is a description of what happens with sacrifices or meals among Gentiles. The result of this form of death is that blood is not properly drained from the animal (Gaventa 2003, 222). Philo (*Spec. Laws* 4.23 §§122–3) describes such a practice.

The reference to blood appears to be drawn from Leviticus 17:10–14 (Bietenhard, *TDNT* 6:457–8; also Gen 9:4; Lev 3:17; 7:26–27; 19:26; Deut 12:16, 23, 25, 27; 15:23; 1 Sam 14:32–34; Ezek 33:25; Wis 12:2–5). The key here is the association of life and blood. Leviticus prohibits eating blood or meat that has not been properly drained of blood. This reflects a Jewish concern over the sacred nature of life as possessed in the blood (*1 Enoch* 7.5; 15.4; 98.11; *Jubilees* 6.7–16; 7.28–29; *m. Kerithot* 1.1; 5.1). What may have been particularly offensive to Jews was the practice of pagan Gentile priests tasting the blood of the sacrifice (Witherington 1998, 464).

The admonitions in Acts 15 do not conflict with 1 Corinthians 8:8 or 10:25, 27, where Paul seems to be indifferent to dietary restrictions. There Paul is in a primarily Gentile context, where Jewish sensitivities do not apply. His solution is that one is free to eat whatever is set before them unless someone present objects, in which case one should refrain. The same goal is operative in both Acts and 1 Corinthians: harmony between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

36 After some time had passed, Paul said to Barnabas, "Let's go back and visit the brothers in
every town where we have preached the message of the Lord and see how they're doing."
37 Barnabas wanted to take along John Mark. 38 But Paul did not think it appropriate to take
along this man who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone on with them to the
work. 39 There was such a sharp disagreement that they parted company, and Barnabas took
Mark with him and sailed off to Cyprus. 40 Then Paul chose Silas and departed, after being
commended to the grace of the Lord by the brothers. 41 He traveled through Syria and Cilicia,

strengthening the churches.

John Mark (15:37): Because of John Mark's failure to complete the last missionary journey, Paul was against his coming along this time. Unable to resolve the dispute and work together, the two leaders decide that it is better to engage separate missions rather than continue while disagreeing about John Mark.

Some scholars argue that the real point of contention was not differing assessments of John Mark by Paul and Barnabas, but that Barnabas preferred a Jewish Christian style of mission to Gentiles, as did Antioch, whereas Paul wanted a law-free effort (Roloff 1988, 122; Jervell 1998, 410–11). This view is unlikely (Schnabel 2004, 1126–27). There is no indication that Barnabas held to such a view; Paul challenged him not for a theological failure but for hypocrisy (Gal 2:13). Paul is still associating with Antioch later in Acts (18:22). Acts 16:3, where Paul has Timothy circumcised, shows that he is concerned to be careful about how ministry to the Jews takes place, not something you would expect if he was out to push a law-free mission to Jews.

The reading of an abiding theological conflict between Paul and Barnabas seems to be the result of connecting Acts 15 to Galatians 2, plus a residue of the approach championed at Tübingen University, which posited major ongoing tension in the early church on the basis of the work of F. C. Baur, who argued for a gulf between Jewish and Gentile Christianity. The view is lingering despite problems pointed out by J. B. Lightfoot as early as the late nineteenth century (Kümmel 1972, 174; Baird 2003, 71).

> Then he went on to Derbe and Lystra, where there was a disciple named Timothy, the son of a believing Jewish woman, but his father was a Greek. 2 The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke highly of him. 3 Paul wanted Timothy to go with him, so he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, since they all knew that his father was a Greek.

He took him and circumcised him (16:3): Does Paul here contradict what he said in Galatians 5:2 or what he condoned in Galatians 2:3? Paul chose to have Timothy circumcised to avoid having this sensitive issue getting in the way of his mission for the gospel. This is the same principle we saw at work in the decision made in Jerusalem in Acts 15 (see previous comments). This does not contradict the Galatians passages, where Paul argues that to require circumcision is to take on all the law. Paul is not requiring circumcision here as a component

of conversion of acceptance before God; rather, he is electing to take this step because it is prudent in the present situation. It removes an obstacle to Jewish acceptance of the gospel, something he affirms in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23.

> 6 They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia and were prevented by the Holy Spirit
> from speaking the message in Asia. 7 When they came to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia,
> but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. 8 So, bypassing Mysia, they came down to Troas.
> 9 During the night a vision appeared to Paul: A Macedonian man was standing and pleading
> with him, “Cross over to Macedonia and help us! ” 10 After he had seen the vision, we
> immediately made efforts to set out for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to
> evangelize them.

They . . . were prevented by the Holy Spirit from speaking the message in Asia (16:6): Why would the Holy Spirit prevent the preaching of the Gospel in Asia? Does this contradict Jesus’ Great Commission? How does the prohibition in 16:6 fit with the Asia mission witnessed elsewhere in Acts (19:10, 22, 26; 20:4, 18)?

It is only Paul’s mission that is prevented from going to Asia at this time. As such there is no conflict with the idea of the Great Commission going into the whole world or with the extension of the mission into Asia later in the book. This is a matter of timing for Paul’s mission, and in God’s providence there was good cause (unstated) for preventing the Asian mission.

> 11 Then, setting sail from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, the next day to
> Neapolis, 12 and from there to Philippi, a Roman colony, which is a leading city of that district
> of Macedonia. We stayed in that city for a number of days.

We ran a straight course to Samothrace . . . We stayed in that city (16:11–12): This is the first of four “we” sections in the book (Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–28), where it is likely that Luke is present, given his inclusion as narrator (see Introduction). It has been noted that all of the “we” sections involve sea voyages, and it is said by some that these sections are merely rhetorical and not reflective of a witness who is present. However, Acts does not treat every sea voyage on Paul’s itinerary as a “we” passage, an inconsistency that does not fit well with the idea that the “we” is merely rhetorical. It is best and most natural to take the “we” for what it appears to be: an indication that the author was an

eyewitness.

16 Once, as we were on our way to prayer, a slave girl met us who had a spirit of prediction. She made a large profit for her owners by fortune-telling. 17 As she followed Paul and us she cried out, “These men, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation, are the slaves of the Most High God.” 18 And she did this for many days.

But Paul was greatly aggravated and turning to the spirit, said, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her! ” And it came out right away.

19 When her owners saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. 20 Bringing them before the chief magistrates, they said, “These men are seriously disturbing our city. They are Jews 21 and are promoting customs that are not legal for us as Romans to adopt or practice.”

22 Then the mob joined in the attack against them, and the chief magistrates stripped off their clothes and ordered them to be beaten with rods. 23 After they had inflicted many blows on them, they threw them in jail, ordering the jailer to keep them securely guarded. 24 Receiving such an order, he put them into the inner prison and secured their feet in the stocks.

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the jail were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s chains came loose. 27 When the jailer woke up and saw the doors of the prison open, he drew his sword and was going to kill himself, since he thought the prisoners had escaped.

28 But Paul called out in a loud voice, “Don’t harm yourself, because all of us are here! ”

29 Then the jailer called for lights, rushed in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 Then he escorted them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved? ”

31 So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved — you and your household.” 32 Then they spoke the message of the Lord to him along with everyone in his house. 33 He took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds. Right away he and all his family were baptized. 34 He brought them into his house, set a meal before them, and rejoiced because he had believed God with his entire household.

35 When daylight came, the chief magistrates sent the police to say, “Release those men! ”

36 The jailer reported these words to Paul: “The magistrates have sent orders for you to be released. So come out now and go in peace.”

37 But Paul said to them, “They beat us in public without a trial, although we are Roman citizens, and threw us in jail. And now are they going to smuggle us out secretly? Certainly not! On the contrary, let them come themselves and escort us out! ”

38 Then the police reported these words to the magistrates. They were afraid when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. 39 So they came and apologized to them, and escorting them out, they urged them to leave town. 40 After leaving the jail, they came to Lydia’s house where they saw and encouraged the brothers, and departed.

Paul was greatly aggravated (16:18): Why was Paul bothered at the girl's proclamation? After all, she was telling the truth—Paul and Timothy were proclaiming the way of salvation, serving the Most High God.

One likely reason Paul was aggravated was the girl's association with magic and fortune telling, for it threatened to make a public spectacle of his mission, and to play into polytheistic ideas common among pagans. The confrontation shows how Paul is confronting pagan spiritual forces as he ministers. For "many days" the girl "cried out" (Gk *ekrazen*, imperfect tense, connoting ongoing action) her pronouncements. She describes Paul's group as "slaves [Gk *douloi*] of the Most High God." Paul commonly describes himself as a slave (e.g., Rom 1:1).

That the girl says Paul serves "the Most High God" (*tou theou tou hupsistou*) may seem to be distinctive in a polytheistic environment, but it could easily be misunderstood because non-Jewish religions also used the expression for their pagan gods (Barrett 1998, 786; Witherington 1998, 494; Trebilco 1989, 58–62; Schnabel 2004, 1154–55). This ambiguity may indicate a second cause for Paul's frustration. To Christian ears this title for God appears to highlight God's uniqueness by proclaiming him as the one true God, but it could have struck the non-Jewish ears of the Philippians as a reference to God as merely a great one (as was used of Zeus in Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 28–29). In other words, the girl could have been understood as saying that Paul's God was the highest among many gods, because the expression is not necessarily a reference to Yahweh but could apply to a supreme god of one's preference. Although what the girl is saying could be construed as ironically true, the fact that she represents many gods makes her testimony less than welcome and, ultimately, potentially misleading. The title "Most High God" (Gk *tou theou tou hupsistou*) is rare in the NT, although Luke uses "Most High" fairly often (Luke 1:32, 35, 76; 6:35; 8:28; Acts 7:48). Only Hebrews 7:1 has the full phrase "Most High God" as here.

Finally, the phrase *hodon sōtērias*, translated as "the way of salvation" in verse 17, may mean only "a" way of salvation, adding to the confusion of what she is saying and serving as another possible cause of Paul's aggravation.

By stopping her, Paul demonstrates that he has divinely-given power over the forces of sorcery. This is part of the significance of Paul's speaking in Jesus' name. It is Jesus' authority that is at work in this exorcism. The God Paul proclaims is specifically tied to the divine work through Jesus. Paul's exorcism is not well received by those who are earning money from the woman's activity

(Acts 16:19–24). Their negative reaction is important to the account of the miracle because it shows they do not see the danger in pursuing wealth by means of spiritually destructive forces.

The foundations of the jail were shaken (16:26): Was this a naturally occurring earthquake or an act of God? This is probably a misguided question. Although it could be simply a miraculous act of God's power, even if it was a natural earthquake, the timing belongs to the God who exercises providential control over nature (e.g., Job 38–41; Ps 29:3–10; Jer 31:35). So the answer could well be this was a natural earthquake ordained by God to coincide with the timing of Paul's imprisonment, resulting in his release. In any event, Paul's release is the Lord's doing.

The jailer . . . was going to kill himself (16:27): It is no exaggeration to say the soldier was contemplating suicide. Soldiers could be executed for allowing prisoners to escape (*Digest* 9.4.4; Chariton of Aphrodisias, *Chaereas and Callirhoe* 3.1.1; 1.5.2; 5.9.9–10; Xenophon of Ephesus, *The Ephesians* 2.4.6), so the jailer thought he was already as good as dead and figured he might as well take care of his fate himself. When Paul stopped him, he found new life.

Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved (16:31): Against attempts to multiply requirements for salvation, this is a wonderful and brief summary of the response the gospel asks of people. Faith in Jesus saves.

Roman citizens (16:37): As a Roman citizen Paul had certain rights, such as the right to a trial, which had not been observed since he had been beaten without a trial (16:22–23). This violation of Paul's rights made the commander nervous. He wanted to set things straight because Paul could have issued a complaint. Paul wants a public escort because he wants it clear that he did nothing against the law. Paul is thinking about the public perception of their activity in insisting he be escorted away. He wants to make clear that the church is no threat to Roman rule, nor is it a group of people who violate the law. Philippi was a military outpost and was filled with soldiers, so such a statement before representatives of Rome was important.

> Then they traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. 2 As usual, Paul went to the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and showing that the Messiah had to

suffer and rise from the dead: “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah.” 4 Then some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, including a great number of God-fearing Greeks, as well as a number of the leading women.

5 But the Jews became jealous, and they brought together some scoundrels from the marketplace, formed a mob, and started a riot in the city. Attacking Jason’s house, they searched for them to bring them out to the public assembly. 6 When they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city officials, shouting, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here too, 7 and Jason has received them as guests! They are all acting contrary to Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king — Jesus! ” 8 The Jews stirred up the crowd and the city officials who heard these things. 9 So taking a security bond from Jason and the others, they released them.

10 As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas off to Berea. On arrival, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 The people here were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, since they welcomed the message with eagerness and examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. 12 Consequently, many of them believed, including a number of the prominent Greek women as well as men. 13 But when the Jews from Thessalonica found out that God’s message had been proclaimed by Paul at Berea, they came there too, agitating and disturbing the crowds. 14 Then the brothers immediately sent Paul away to go to the sea, but Silas and Timothy stayed on there. 15 Those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving instructions for Silas and Timothy to come to him as quickly as possible, they departed.

This Jesus . . . is the Messiah (17:3): Critics often style early Christians as anti-Semitic, but it was not the intent of early Christian believers to separate from Judaism or degrade Jews. They went into the synagogues seeking to convince Jews that Jesus was the Messiah, the promised one of Israel. The church became distinct sociologically when they were forced out of the synagogues and had to form their own communities. As these messages to Jews in the book of Acts show, the argument in the synagogue was that if one was a good Jew and believed God’s promises, then one would embrace Jesus as the promised Messiah and become complete as a Jew.

Contrary to Caesar’s decrees (17:7): As was the case in Luke 23:2–3, so here the charge is that the Christians are erecting an empire and kingdom with a different king, a competitor to Caesar and Rome. Acts has shown that early Christians understood Jesus to declare a kingdom and that he is a king, but not in the sense this charge attempts to claim. Christians were law-abiding citizens, which is precisely why Paul wanted Roman authorities to escort him out of Philippi.

Agitating (17:13): In Berea, the Christians cause no trouble. They only offer

hope and promise. One of the ironic things Luke's story in Acts does is show that the cause of public disruption is not the Christians but those who agitate against their message.

> 22 Then Paul stood in the middle of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that you
> are extremely religious in every respect. 23 For as I was passing through and observing the
> objects of your worship, I even found an altar on which was inscribed:
>
> TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.
>
> Therefore, what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. 24 The God who made the
> world and everything in it — He is Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in shrines made
> by hands. 25 Neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He
> Himself gives everyone life and breath and all things. 26 From one man He has made every
> nationality to live over the whole earth and has determined their appointed times and the
> boundaries of where they live. 27 He did this so they might seek God, and perhaps they might
> reach out and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. 28 For in Him we live and
> move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'
> 29 Being God's offspring then, we shouldn't think that the divine nature is like gold or silver or
> stone, an image fashioned by human art and imagination.
> 30 "Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people
> everywhere to repent, 31 because He has set a day when He is going to judge the world in
> righteousness by the Man He has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by
> raising Him from the dead."

The God who made the world (17:24): Here we see a key way to introduce the Christian message for an audience that is unfamiliar with the story of God's activity as revealed in the Scripture. Most people believe in the existence of God and grant that we are accountable to him, providing a starting point for Christian proclamation. The Christian message agrees that we are all accountable to God and adds that the one through whom he judges us is Jesus, the one God raised from the dead. Paul never gets to the second half of this theme as he is interrupted just as soon as he mentions the resurrection of "the Man He has appointed" (vv. 31–32).

In Him we live and move and exist (17:28): Some have thought that Paul's statement here implies pantheism (all is god) or panentheism (all is in god), but such thought was foreign to Paul, a theologically trained Jew. Paul's point is that we are all accountable to God because we live in his world, the universe he created and governs. Every human being lives in God's presence and by his

enablement, whether they recognize it or not. As such, they are and will be accountable to him.

We are also His offspring (17:28): Mormons believe this verse teaches that God is literally our biological Father, and that he begot us with a Mother God, but such an idea is foreign to biblical revelation. Rather, it is a way of saying that we are God's children made in his image, as Genesis 1 teaches. It also is a way of saying that every child of God is accountable to the Father for their response to him.

Overlooked the times of ignorance (17:30): What does it mean that God "overlooked the times of ignorance" in this verse? It might seem to suggest that everyone living before Christ was not charged with their sins, and are thus guaranteed to enter heaven.

Paul does not make his meaning clear, though we should assume his meaning will fit with his teaching elsewhere, which rules out the idea that everyone before Christ was automatically pardoned by God. God's overlooking the times of ignorance (Gk *chronous tēs agnoias*) perhaps includes his not judging idolatry as severely as he could have (Rom 3:25; Acts 14:16; Larkin 1995, 259), though Romans 1:18–32 describes the price paid for idolatry. Another aspect of Paul's meaning may be that God did not turn his back on sinful humanity, which would have left them with no hope of salvation.

The verb *huperoraō* occurs only here in the NT. It means "overlook," "ignore," or to "scorn," as it often does in the LXX (Nah 3:11; Ezek 7:19). Paul's expression "times of ignorance" underscores the fact that the Greeks were ignorant of the true divinity. To charge Athenians with ignorance is bold given their impressive intellectual history. The remark also links the conclusion to the speech's opening, where ignorance is also noted about the unknown god (Acts 17:23). Paul will make clear that ignorance is no excuse for not responding to God, since God now commands all to repent, as the end of the verse affirms.

Luke often notes that repentance is the proper response to God's message (Luke 3:7–9; Acts 2:38; 3:19–21). In this case, it appears that Paul is saying that God did little to remedy the direction of the nations as a whole in the past (besides issuing prophetic warnings and calling Israel to be a light to the nations). Acts 14:16 says that God let them go their own way. He largely ignored them. Now, however, God has acted in Christ. God calls all people everywhere to repent. The call to repent matches Acts 14:15 with its call to turn from idols.

After this, he left Athens and went to Corinth, 2 where he found a Jewish man named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul came to them, 3 and being of the same occupation, stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade.

Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome (18:2): Is there extrabiblical confirmation of this expulsion, and if so does it fit with the time line of Acts? Luke says Priscilla and Aquila left Rome as a result of the edict of Claudius. This probably alludes to the decree in AD 49 that expelled Jews who created civil disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus (either a misspelled reference to Christ, an alternate spelling based on Latin pronunciation, or a reference to a figure we otherwise do not know about). The debate over Jesus had caused riots in the city, probably about whether Jesus was the Christ (Suetonius, *Claudius* 25). There is also the possibility the riots had nothing to do with Jesus but with some other figure. Paulus Orosius, a Christian writer of the fifth century, places the edict in the ninth year of Claudius's reign, giving us the date AD 49, a point most scholars accept (*Historiae adversum paganos* 7.6.15–16; Fitzmyer 1998, 620). Those who wish to place this decree in AD 41 on the basis of remarks by Dio Cassius (*Rom. Hist.* 60.6.6) fail to observe that the decree of AD 41 only prohibited Jews from gathering for meetings and explicitly said there was no expulsion. The date of AD 49 fits well with the timeframe of Acts.

12 While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack against Paul and brought him to the judge's bench. 13 "This man," they said, "persuades people to worship God contrary to the law! "

14 As Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of a crime or of moral evil, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you Jews. 15 But if these are questions about words, names, and your own law, see to it yourselves. I don't want to be a judge of such things." 16 So he drove them from the judge's bench. 17 Then they all seized Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the judge's bench. But none of these things concerned Gallio.

Gallio was proconsul of Achaia (18:12): Does extrabiblical evidence agree that Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, and does the timing fit Acts? In fact Gallio is a Roman proconsul about whom we have much information. He was a son of the orator Seneca the Elder (c. 50 BC–ca. AD 40) and the elder brother of the Stoic philosopher Seneca the Younger (4 BC–AD 65). Although popular, he was also

known to be anti-Semitic (Seneca, *Natural Questions* 4a.preface.11; Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 61.35; Tacitus, *Annals* 15.73). Witherington (1998, 551) cites Seneca the Younger as describing the Jews as an "accursed race" (cited by Augustine, *City of God* 6.11; Le Cornu and Shulam 2003, 1010). Cicero (*Pro Flacco* 280.67–69) saw Jews as holding to a "barbaric superstition." So Rome tended to be anti-Semitic. He was not proconsul for long in Corinth; a fever forced him to leave early (Seneca, *Moral Letters* 104.1). We can date his time there to AD 51–52, and so this incident in Acts is to be dated during this time period. It is one of the most solid dates in Acts.

If it were a matter of a crime or of moral evil (18:14): Gallio had two standards he was responsible to uphold as a magistrate. He had to oversee the enforcement of the Roman law and had a concern for the moral well-being of the society. In his view, Paul had not violated either of those standards and so he need not act. He would not get into religious disputes between Paul and the Jews who had brought Paul to him. This is a point Luke wanted his readers to see. Christians were not a threat to Rome, nor are they a threat in any era to disturb the peace by what they do in worship and the exercise faith. They seek only to live righteously before God and encourage others to do the same.

> 18 So Paul, having stayed on for many days, said good-bye to the brothers and sailed away to
> Syria. Priscilla and Aquila were with him. He shaved his head at Cenchreae because he had
> taken a vow. 19 When they reached Ephesus he left them there, but he himself entered the
> synagogue and engaged in discussion with the Jews. 20 And though they asked him to stay for a
> longer time, he declined, 21 but he said good-bye and stated, "I'll come back to you again, if
> God wills." Then he set sail from Ephesus.

He shaved his head at Cenchreae because he had taken a vow (18:18): Was Paul reverting to his pre-Christian practices by shaving his head and taking a vow? Paul often engaged in Jewish religious practice as a matter of choice, not because he was compelled to do so or felt that it was required of him in order to have right standing with God (e.g., he had Timothy circumcised in Acts 16:3, supported the Jerusalem Council decision).

It is not certain what kind of vow Paul made here. Four views are prevalent. Two of them assume a Jewish background. First and quite plausibly it may be a Nazirite vow (Num 6:1–21). Second, it may be a vow of thanksgiving for preservation as God promised Paul in verse 10 (Witherington 1998, 557; Bruce

1988a, 355 opts for a private vow). If this vow were Nazirite, then Paul for the duration would abstain from alcohol and uncleanness, such as touching a corpse. In addition, he would need to complete this vow by offering a sacrifice in Jerusalem, assuming that he is following the law and tradition on this matter (Jervell 1998, 465–66). It is also possible to cut the hair before offering the sacrifice to denote the vow's end (*m. Nazir* 3.6; 5.4; Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.15.1 §§309–14 relates a vow made in Jerusalem; Marshall 1980, 300; Polhill 1992, 390; Johnson 1992, 330).

A third option assumes a Greek background. Barrett (1998, 877–78) notes that sailors sometimes shaved after surviving a tough journey (citing Juvenal, *Satire* 12.81–82). A fourth option argues that this is a Lucan insertion, rejecting the historicity of the act. This view thinks it unlikely that Paul would have agreed to such a vow and argues that the practice of cutting the hair outside Jerusalem for a Nazirite vow was not possible (Weiser 1985, 497–98; Schneider 1982, 255). Since, however, 1 Corinthians 9:20 explains that Paul was a Jew to the Jews, such a vow, if a Jewish practice, was not out of character for him in certain circumstances. In addition, the Mishnah, as already noted, allows the hair to be cut before the sacrifice is made. It seems more likely that Paul acts out of his Jewish heritage rather than following Greek practice. So probably a private vow is more likely than a Nazirite vow.

> 24 A Jew named Apollos, a native Alexandrian, an eloquent man who was powerful in the use
> of the Scriptures, arrived in Ephesus. 25 This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord;
> and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught the things about Jesus accurately, although he
> knew only John's baptism. 26 He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. After Priscilla and
> Aquila heard him, they took him home and explained the way of God to him more accurately.
> 27 When he wanted to cross over to Achaia, the brothers wrote to the disciples urging them to
> welcome him. After he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace. 28 For
> he vigorously refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating through the Scriptures that Jesus is the
> Messiah.

He knew only John's baptism (18:25): In ways that are not clear, Apollos held an incomplete understanding of the gospel. Priscilla and Aquila stepped forward to fill in the details. The scene shows the couple working effectively together as a pair teaching on behalf of God in private discussion. Apollos's ignorance may have been similar to that of the disciples mentioned in Acts 19:1–7.

It is noteworthy that Apollos was corrected in his error even though he was

apparently effective in winning disciples. That he was eloquent, instructed in the way of the Lord, fervent in spirit, and powerful in the Scriptures was not enough. Teachers of the gospel are called to a high standard; the willingness of fellow disciples to correct them is an important means of promoting health in the church, and the willingness of teachers to be corrected is a key sign of their fitness for the teaching ministry.

> While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the interior regions and came to Ephesus.
> He found some disciples 2 and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? ”
> “No,” they told him, “we haven’t even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”
> 3 “Then what baptism were you baptized with? ” he asked them.
> “With John’s baptism,” they replied.
> 4 Paul said, “John baptized with a baptism of repentance, telling the people that they should believe in the One who would come after him, that is, in Jesus.”
> 5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began to speak in other languages and to prophesy. 7 Now there were about 12 men in all.

Speak in other languages (19:6): This is a reference in Greek to the gift of tongues. The activity, with the mention of prophecy, appears to be like what took place in Acts 2.

> 8 Then he entered the synagogue and spoke boldly over a period of three months, engaging in discussion and trying to persuade them about the things of the kingdom of God. 9 But when some became hardened and would not believe, slandering the Way in front of the crowd, he withdrew from them and met separately with the disciples, conducting discussions every day in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. 10 And this went on for two years, so that all the inhabitants of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the message about the Lord.

Two years (19:10): Does this verse, which states that Paul taught for two years at the lecture hall of Tyrannus, contradict Acts 20:31, which speaks of three years of teaching in Ephesus? We are told in Acts 19:8 that Paul preached at the synagogue for three months before moving to Tyrannus Hall for two years. So Paul ministered into a third year at Ephesus and was therefore counting inclusively in Acts 20:31 when he said, “night and day for three years I did not stop warning each one of you with tears.”

All the inhabitants of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the message

(19:10): Clearly it is not the case that literally “all the inhabitants of Asia . . . heard the message.” Rather than indicating that this verse is in error, this is an example of a biblical author writing in an inclusive and hyperbolic way. His meaning is, “the message was broadly preached in Asia or heard throughout the region.”

11 God was performing extraordinary miracles by Paul’s hands, 12 so that even facecloths or
work aprons that had touched his skin were brought to the sick, and the diseases left them, and
the evil spirits came out of them.
13 Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists attempted to pronounce the name of the Lord
Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, “I command you by the Jesus that Paul preaches!
” 14 Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. 15 The evil spirit answered
them, “I know Jesus, and I recognize Paul — but who are you? ” 16 Then the man who had the
evil spirit leaped on them, overpowered them all, and prevailed against them, so that they ran
out of that house naked and wounded. 17 This became known to everyone who lived in
Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. Then fear fell on all of them, and the name of the Lord Jesus
was magnified. 18 And many who had become believers came confessing and disclosing their
practices, 19 while many of those who had practiced magic collected their books and burned
them in front of everyone. So they calculated their value and found it to be 50,000 pieces of
silver. 20 In this way the Lord’s message flourished and prevailed.
21 When these events were over, Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and
Achaia and go to Jerusalem. “After I’ve been there,” he said, “I must see Rome as well! ” 22 So
after sending two of those who assisted him, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, he himself
stayed in Asia for a while.
23 During that time there was a major disturbance about the Way. 24 For a person named
Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis, provided a great deal of business
for the craftsmen. 25 When he had assembled them, as well as the workers engaged in this type
of business, he said: “Men, you know that our prosperity is derived from this business. 26 You
both see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this man Paul has
persuaded and misled a considerable number of people by saying that gods made by hand are
not gods! 27 So not only do we run a risk that our business may be discredited, but also that the
temple of the great goddess Artemis may be despised and her magnificence come to the verge
of ruin — the very one all of Asia and the world adore.”
28 When they had heard this, they were filled with rage and began to cry out, “Great is
Artemis of the Ephesians! ” 29 So the city was filled with confusion, and they rushed all
together into the amphitheater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were
Paul’s traveling companions. 30 Though Paul wanted to go in before the people, the disciples
did not let him. 31 Even some of the provincial officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent
word to him, pleading with him not to take a chance by going into the amphitheater.

32 Meanwhile, some were shouting one thing and some another, because the assembly was in
confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together. 33 Then some of the
crowd gave Alexander advice when the Jews pushed him to the front. So motioning with his
hand, Alexander wanted to make his defense to the people. 34 But when they recognized that he
was a Jew, a united cry went up from all of them for about two hours: “Great is Artemis of the
Ephesians! ”
35 However, when the city clerk had calmed the crowd down, he said, “Men of Ephesus! What
man is there who doesn’t know that the city of the Ephesians is the temple guardian of the great
Artemis, and of the image that fell from heaven? 36 Therefore, since these things are
undeniable, you must keep calm and not do anything rash. 37 For you have brought these men
here who are not temple robbers or blasphemers of our goddess. 38 So if Demetrius and the
craftsmen who are with him have a case against anyone, the courts are in session, and there are
proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. 39 But if you want something else, it
must be decided in a legal assembly. 40 In fact, we run a risk of being charged with rioting for
what happened today, since there is no justification that we can give as a reason for this
disorderly gathering.” 41 After saying this, he dismissed the assembly.

Facecloths or work aprons (19:12): Rather than representing a Christian endorsement of belief in magic or superstition, this verse should be seen as an example of God choosing to work with reference to common views and expectations of the era. Belief in magic and objects of power were common elements in the popular religions of the ancient world. It is important to note that behind the facecloths or aprons was not a conjurer, but Paul, a messenger appointed by God to spread the gospel among superstitious pagans. The outcome is seen in verse 17, where it says, “the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified,” and verses 18–19, where we learn that many converted to the faith and burned the tools of their magic craft. The confrontation with magical power in Ephesus was a real spiritual confrontation and the public disturbance (v. 23ff) that grew out of it showed where loyalties were placed.

Gods made by hand are not gods! (19:26): Paul is shown to preach against idolatry here. His message is so effective in Ephesus that behavior changed and people distanced themselves from magic and the idols that were made by local craftsmen. That is real social change, not something forced upon the people by Christians such as Paul. Paul was not a political figure, and he did not press for social change but appealed for a faithful walk with God, which inevitably impacted the local social scene. It is this that the Ephesian silversmiths react against since Ephesus was the location of the major temple to Artemis and attracted a huge religious pilgrimage trade as a result.

The courts are in session (19:38): Luke's note about a civic leader warning against a riot in reaction to the Christians is a part of his theme that (1) public disturbances were not caused by Christians but by those who rejected them, and (2) that there was nothing illegal about what Christians were doing. The opposition to Christians had nothing to do with their supposedly violating Roman laws. The pagans simply did not like the Christian message and felt threatened by it as it gained momentum.

> 4 He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia. 5 These men went on ahead and waited for us in Troas, 6 but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread. In five days we reached them at Troas, where we spent seven days.
>
> 7 On the first day of the week, we assembled to break bread. Paul spoke to them, and since he was about to depart the next day, he extended his message until midnight. 8 There were many lamps in the room upstairs where we were assembled, 9 and a young man named Eutychus was sitting on a window sill and sank into a deep sleep as Paul kept on speaking. When he was overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was picked up dead. 10 But Paul went down, fell on him, embraced him, and said, "Don't be alarmed, for his life is in him! " 11 After going upstairs, breaking the bread, and eating, Paul conversed a considerable time until dawn. Then he left. 12 They brought the boy home alive and were greatly comforted.

We sailed . . . we reached . . . we spent (20:6): The second "we" section of the book starts here. See comments on the "we" sections in the introduction to Acts.

Eutychus . . . was picked up dead . . . his life is in him! (20:9–10): Was Eutychus "dead" (v. 9) or yet living (v. 10) when Paul reached him? Was this a miracle or simply a case of a stunned man coming back to consciousness? Eutychus was killed by the fall. Paul's remark in verse 19 is similar to what Jesus said just before he raised Jairus's daughter from the dead but described her condition as sleep when he spoke to the gathered crowd (Mark 5:39). It was a way of saying that death would not be the final outcome. Paul's embracing Eutychus recalls the acts of Elijah and Elisha in 1 Kings 17:19–21 and 2 Kings 4:34–35. It also parallels acts by Peter (Dorcas in Acts 9:36–41) and Jesus (Luke 7:11–15: widow of Nain's son; 8:49–56: Jairus's daughter; John 11:38–44: Lazarus).

17 Now from Miletus, he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. 18 And when
they came to him, he said to them: “You know, from the first day I set foot in Asia, how I was
with you the whole time — 19 serving the Lord with all humility, with tears, and with the trials
that came to me through the plots of the Jews — 20 and that I did not shrink back from
proclaiming to you anything that was profitable or from teaching it to you in public and from
house to house. 21 I testified to both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faith in
our Lord Jesus.
22 “And now I am on my way to Jerusalem, bound in my spirit, not knowing what I will
encounter there, 23 except that in town after town the Holy Spirit testifies to me that chains and
afflictions are waiting for me. 24 But I count my life of no value to myself, so that I may finish
my course and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of God’s
grace.
25 “And now I know that none of you will ever see my face again — everyone I went about
preaching the kingdom to. 26 Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of
everyone’s blood, 27 for I did not shrink back from declaring to you the whole plan of God.
28 Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock that the Holy Spirit has appointed you to as
overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood. 29 I know
that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 And
men will rise up from your own number with deviant doctrines to lure the disciples into
following them. 31 Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for three years I
did not stop warning each one of you with tears.
32 “And now I commit you to God and to the message of His grace, which is able to build you
up and to give you an inheritance among all who are sanctified. 33 I have not coveted anyone’s
silver or gold or clothing. 34 You yourselves know that these hands have provided for my needs
and for those who were with me. 35 In every way I’ve shown you that by laboring like this, it is
necessary to help the weak and to keep in mind the words of the Lord Jesus, for He said, ‘It is
more blessed to give than to receive.’ ”
36 After he said this, he knelt down and prayed with all of them. 37 There was a great deal of
weeping by everyone. They embraced Paul and kissed him, 38 grieving most of all over his
statement that they would never see his face again. Then they escorted him to the ship.

Bound in my spirit . . . the Holy Spirit testifies to me (20:22–23): Here Paul says “I am . . . bound in my Spirit” or (“in the Spirit”) to go to Jerusalem, and yet in 21:4 some disciples “through the Spirit” told Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Did the Spirit tell Paul one thing and the disciples another?

Paul’s announcement here has a sense of the ominous: Jerusalem will be the place where his arrest sends him on his final journey in Acts, the journey to Rome. He recognizes that “chains and afflictions” await him as he continues. In this light the mention in Acts 21:4 of disciples who “through the Spirit . . . told Paul not to go to Jerusalem” can be seen as an expression of concern for Paul’s

safety rather than a prohibition against his going to the holy city. This fits with Acts 21:10–11, where the prophet Agabus does not prohibit Paul's continued journey but rather speaks of the danger awaiting him, using a belt as a prop to make the point. The prophecy is acted out, as Agabus takes Paul's waistband (Gk *zōnē*). This was a long band, wrapped around the waist in which money could be placed (BAGD 341; BDAG 431). The translation refers to a "belt," which may be a money belt. Paul may well have kept in it some of the Jerusalem collection money he was gathering. Agabus wraps it around his own hands and feet, and then declares that the Holy Spirit says that in this manner the Jews in Jerusalem "will bind" (Gk *dēsousin*) the waistband's owner and deliver him to the Gentiles. The reference to Jewish involvement in the binding here is "causative" in force: the Jews will not physically bind Paul but will be responsible for his being arrested (21:27, 30, 33; Wallace 1996, 412). The prophecy is accurate in this sense and is not to be pressed too literally.

Notice that Agabus does not tell Paul not to go to Jerusalem. He only declares what he will face there. Gaventa (2003, 292–93) is right to defend the idea that Agabus lays out what will happen and those around are free to draw their own conclusion as to what Paul should do. There is no dispute between Agabus and Paul on the one hand and the disciples of 21:4 or 21:12 on the other hand; both Paul and Agabus know what awaits Paul, and the disciples present on both occasions do not want harm to come of Paul.

The crowd reacts to Agabus's declaration by begging Paul not to go to Jerusalem. The imperfect verb *parekaloumen* (were urging) makes the pleas vivid. This pleading includes tears (v. 13), a reaction similar to 21:4. The language of the prophet's declaration recalls the prediction about Jesus in Luke 18:32 (Matt 20:18–19). The reaction of Paul and the others makes clear that he has a choice here. Stott (1990, 333) argues a distinction between a prediction and a prohibition in the various messages referring to utterances through the Spirit in this chapter. Agabus has predicted what will take place, and the Spirit-filled believers urge Paul not to go to Jerusalem. He is not, however, prohibited from doing so. He will go to Jerusalem and face his persecution and arrest. Paul tells them he is ready to face imprisonment and even death for the sake of the name of the Lord Jesus, and so they do not need to weep and break his heart. So Paul had a choice and made it, and there is no contradiction between these texts.

***Textual issues of wording surrounding* "the church of God" (20:28):** In light of textual evidence, there is some debate over whether the original reading here

is “church of God” or “church of the Lord.” The latter appears in p^{74}, A, C*, D, and E, while the reading “of God” is in ℵ, B, 614, 1175, and 1505. A combination, “of the Lord and God,” appears in a third hand of C, as well as in the Majority text of the Byzantine family. Are the textual issues here an indication that later scribes tampered with the original reading in an attempt to shore up its Christology (i.e., that the reading “church of the Lord and God” might have suggested an ontological distinction between the Lord Jesus and God, such that Jesus was a mere man?)

Because of how the sacred names “God” and “Lord” were abbreviated, the difference between the first two readings above is one letter in the text (Θ versus K). The more commonly attested reading, “church of God,” is also the most difficult (and thus the one least likely to have been inserted in place of the original) because, as the latter portion of verse 28 says, the church was obtained with “His own blood” or “blood of his own” (Metzger 1971, 480–81). This makes it likely that “church of God” is the original reading, because it is hard to see why a scribe would have inserted it in place of what would have seemed the more natural reading, “of the Lord.”

References to the Lord are natural given the sacrificial language of the verse, and so a scribe may have intentionally made the change in order to make the verse express things in the more common and expected manner. The combination of “Lord and God” (the third textual variety cited above) uses both of the earlier options and was last to develop in the sequence. The likely sequence of development means it is unlikely that a scribe sought to shore up Christology here by removing an original “Lord and God” to avoid a distinction between Jesus and God. Rather what happened is most likely a simple misreading of the above mentioned abbreviation, a mistake made all the more likely by the fact that the Lord Jesus was associated with blood atonement and purchasing the church through his death on the cross, both of which are mentioned in 20:28.

This is one of two direct references to Jesus’ sacrificial work in Luke-Acts. Luke 22:19–22 is the other. That Jesus purchased the church with his blood underscores the cost that God incurred to establish the church. Jesus “purchased” (Gk *periepoiēsato*) it with his own life (lit, *haimatos*, blood; Eph 1:7, 14; Heb 9:12; 1 Pet 1:2, 19; Rev 1:5; 5:9–10).

It is more blessed to give than to receive (20:35): Should we doubt the authenticity of the saying attributed to Jesus here? After all, it is not recorded

anywhere in the Gospels. Could it be that agraphal sayings (sayings that circulated orally and via non-canonical writings such as Q, etc.) actually reflect things Jesus really said and did? What data about the Jewish religious context would support taking these sayings as reliable?

This is one of the few places outside the Gospels where Jesus is directly quoted (Acts 1:4–5, 7–8; several quotes in the book of Revelation). The saying itself is not unique to Jesus, for there are numerous conceptual Greek parallels (Seneca, *Moral Ep.* 81.17; Plutarch, *Sayings of Kings and Commanders* (= *Moralia* 173D [Artaxerxes I] and 181F [Ptolemy Son of Lagus]); Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War* 2.97.4; Johnson 1992, 365). That it is more blessed to give than to receive was a familiar idea in antiquity, but Jesus' affirmation of the principle is what is important to Paul. Leaders should avoid love of money (1 Tim 3:3, 8; 6:3–10; Titus 1:7, 11; Polhill 1992, 429).

The saying seems to have been well known in church tradition since Paul called on his hearers to remember (Gk *mnēmoneuein*) what the Lord said. Jewish students of religion and religious Jews generally were known for their prowess in memorizing the sayings of their teachers, and so it is not surprising that the church would be able to preserve authentic sayings of Jesus that had not been recorded in the Gospels.

They embraced Paul and kissed him (20:37): Some advocates of the homosexual hermeneutic contend that this verse suggests homosexuality among the disciples, but this is a case of eisegesis, reading into the text a meaning that is not there. The scene involves what was known as the holy kiss of greeting or departure (Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26), a practice that is retained even today in parts of Europe, South America, and the Middle East.

> After we tore ourselves away from them and set sail, we came by a direct route to Cos, the
> next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. 2 Finding a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, we
> boarded and set sail. 3 After we sighted Cyprus, leaving it on the left, we sailed on to Syria and
> arrived at Tyre, because the ship was to unload its cargo there. 4 So we found some disciples
> and stayed there seven days. Through the Spirit they told Paul not to go to Jerusalem. 5 When
> our days there were over, we left to continue our journey, while all of them, with their wives
> and children, escorted us out of the city. After kneeling down on the beach to pray, 6 we said
> good-bye to one another. Then we boarded the ship, and they returned home.
>
> 7 When we completed our voyage from Tyre, we reached Ptolemais, where we greeted the
> brothers and stayed with them one day. 8 The next day we left and came to Caesarea, where we

entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the Seven, and stayed with him. 9 This man had four virgin daughters who prophesied.

10 While we were staying there many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. 11 He came to us, took Paul's belt, tied his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into Gentile hands.' " 12 When we heard this, both we and the local people begged him not to go up to Jerusalem.

13 Then Paul replied, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

14 Since he would not be persuaded, we stopped talking and simply said, "The Lord's will be done! "

15 After these days we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. 16 Some of the disciples from Caesarea also went with us and brought us to Mnason, a Cypriot and an early disciple, with whom we were to stay.

Through the Spirit they told Paul not to go to Jerusalem (21:4): The crowd, out of concern for Paul's safety, urges him not to go in light of what will happen to him in Jerusalem, but the choice is Paul's to make and he chooses to face the danger. On whether this verse contradicts Acts 20:22–23, see notes there.

Tyre (21:7): This is a key port just north of Israel, on the Mediterranean Sea in what is now Lebanon. See commentary above on 12:20.

17 When we reached Jerusalem, the brothers welcomed us gladly. 18 The following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. 19 After greeting them, he related in detail what God did among the Gentiles through his ministry.

20 When they heard it, they glorified God and said, "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law. 21 But they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to abandon Moses, by telling them not to circumcise their children or to walk in our customs. 22 So what is to be done? They will certainly hear that you've come. 23 Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have obligated themselves with a vow. 24 Take these men, purify yourself along with them, and pay for them to get their heads shaved. Then everyone will know that what they were told about you amounts to nothing, but that you yourself are also careful about observing the law. 25 With regard to the Gentiles who have believed, we have written a letter containing our decision that they should keep themselves from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from what is strangled, and from sexual immorality."

26 Then the next day, Paul took the men, having purified himself along with them, and entered the temple, announcing the completion of the purification days when the offering for each of them would be made. 27 As the seven days were about to end, the Jews from Asia saw him in

the temple complex, stirred up the whole crowd, and seized him, 28 shouting, “Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people, our law, and this place. What’s more, he also brought Greeks into the temple and has profaned this holy place.” 29 For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple complex.

30 The whole city was stirred up, and the people rushed together. They seized Paul, dragged him out of the temple complex, and at once the gates were shut. 31 As they were trying to kill him, word went up to the commander of the regiment that all Jerusalem was in chaos. 32 Taking along soldiers and centurions, he immediately ran down to them. Seeing the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. 33 Then the commander came up, took him into custody, and ordered him to be bound with two chains. He asked who he was and what he had done. 34 Some in the mob were shouting one thing and some another. Since he was not able to get reliable information because of the uproar, he ordered him to be taken into the barracks. 35 When Paul got to the steps, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the mob’s violence, 36 for the mass of people followed, yelling, “Take him away! ”

37 As he was about to be brought into the barracks, Paul said to the commander, “Am I allowed to say something to you? ”

He replied, “Do you know Greek? 38 Aren’t you the Egyptian who raised a rebellion some time ago and led 4,000 Assassins into the wilderness? ”

39 Paul said, “I am a Jewish man from Tarsus of Cilicia, a citizen of an important city. Now I ask you, let me speak to the people.”

James’s request to Paul **(21:23–24):** Some commentators have said that James and the elders at Jerusalem, bothered as they were about Paul’s preaching on the law, intentionally betrayed Paul to get him off the scene. Does the Bible support this conspiracy theory, or is it that James felt pressure and in response to that pressure made a bad suggestion (go to the temple and make a vow) that had unforeseen consequences (riot and arrest)? Further, does this passage portray Paul in a way that conflicts with the witness in his epistles?

This request was neither an effort to get Paul off the scene nor bad advice. James asked Paul for a statement that would be supportive of the ministry in Jerusalem, and showing respect for the Law was a reasonable way to achieve that. The problem arose when some Jews present mistakenly assumed Paul had brought Gentiles into the temple area forbidden to Gentiles.

Many scholars think it theologically impossible (Conzelmann 1987, 180) or at least unlikely that Paul, as portrayed in the epistles, would have acted in a way that suggested support for the law. Others (Roloff 1988, 315) do not see Paul’s actions in Acts 21 as being inconsistent with the ideas expressed in his epistles, especially 1 Corinthians 9:20 where Paul is willing to become like a Jew to win Jews. Fitzmyer (1998, 692), making the same point, adds 1 Corinthians 9:22 to

the argument, where Paul is willing to become weak to the weak, and indeed to become all things to all people if it will help save some. Further, readers should not forget that Paul made a vow earlier that probably shows some traces of Jewish practice (Acts 18:18); if so, his vow here is not without precedent. Roloff (1988, 313) also argues that James is tactical rather than conspiratorial here, "trying to build a golden bridge on both sides."

In contrast, Barrett (1998, 1000) suggests that Paul may have accepted James's advice and then later come to see its "sham" character from the results. Barrett also rejects (1013) the above mentioned appeal to 1 Corinthians 9, as the claim in Acts is that Paul is a regularly observant Jew. The issue is more complicated for the church, however, which has already made clear that certain practices of the law do not need to be followed when mixed fellowship with Gentiles is involved. Paul may well be an observant Jew in Jewish contexts, which is what he faces in Jerusalem. After all, why is he so anxious to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost? It is because he keeps the feasts.

We conclude that Barrett's reading is too harsh on James's proposal and seems to understate the new reality in the church, namely that the presence of Gentiles in the community of believers raised questions about observance of the law. The church is in the process of hammering out an understanding and is in transition on the question. Nothing in Paul's defense speeches indicates that he opposed this effort at harmony, and 1 Corinthians 9 represents him supporting such tactics. Paul does not try to persuade Jewish believers to live like Gentiles, but rather to be sensitive to issues related to them. This means that table fellowship, food laws, and issues tied to ceremonial purity may be handled differently when Gentiles are involved, but Paul probably did not see this as encouraging Jewish believers to ignore the law.

Do what we tell you . . . Purify yourself along with them (21:23–24): Does this episode indicate that Paul was deceptive in taking this vow? After all, he was encouraged to take the vow as a way of showing the people that "what they were told about [him] amounts to nothing" (v. 24), when in fact what they had been told about him was largely true—that Paul's view of the law differed from the majority view among Christian Jews.

The exact nature of the vow is not clear. Scholars commonly suggest that the purification for Paul was to restore purity after he had traveled extensively in Gentile areas; for the other men, it may have been an affirmation of a Nazirite vow they had taken of at least 30 days (*m. Nazir* 6.3). In this view, Paul's payment for sacrifices (see v. 26) and the shaving of the head are part of the

observance of the law. The OT and Jewish roots here include the Nazirite vow (Num 6:2–21) and restoring purity generally (Num 6:9–10; 19:12).

What motivated Paul to take the vow? It was obvious that the unbelieving Jews would discover Paul's presence in Jerusalem, and so the church asked him to demonstrate respect for the law by undertaking this vow. Paul has already been described as having taken a vow himself (18:18), and so the background supports the legitimacy of Paul's actions here. Paul is not deceptive or inconsistent in taking this vow. He respects Jewish believers who keep their practices and joins them here (Romans 14–15). Paul only complained when the church made such acts *mandatory* and saw them as being required for salvation.

In sum, Paul was asked to act with cultural sensitivity to the Jewish context, without compromising the gospel. He was willing to do this for the sake of the unity it might create. Such a curb on freedoms can be well advised, especially when one is visiting another context. Stott (1990, 342) cites a remark by F. F. Bruce: "A truly emancipated spirit like Paul's is not in bondage to its own emancipation." Liberty is great, but sometimes the expression of liberty can be counterproductive. Paul sensed that James's request made sense, so he willingly restricted his freedom. Paul taught this in other areas as well, as Romans 14–15 indicates.

We have written a letter containing our decision (21:25): Does James's statement in verse 25 imply that he believed Paul was unaware of the earlier letter that was sent out regarding the law (Acts 15:22–35)? After all, the most natural impression is that James believes he is informing Paul of new information. Speaking to Paul, he says: "With regard to the Gentiles who have believed, we have written a letter containing our decision that they should keep themselves from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from what is strangled, and from sexual immorality."

James's restating the content of the Acts 15 letter allows Luke to achieve two purposes as author of Acts: (1) repeat the point that Gentiles are not being asked to become Jews in their own practices, and (2) note that James recognizes and accepts a kind of cultural contextualization of practice with reference to the audience to whom the gospel is given. In other words, Luke is not presenting James as instructing Paul about this letter as if Paul did not previously know about it, but rather he presents James as reaffirming his acceptance of that earlier decision, which he sees the present request (vv. 23–24) as also fitting.

False charges against Paul and fulfillment of Acts 21:11 **(21:28):** The first

charge against Paul is that he teaches against "our people, our law, and this place [i.e., the temple]." This charge resembles the one made against Stephen in Acts 6:11–14 (Köster, *TDNT* 8:204–5). The second charge is that Paul brought Greeks into the temple area and defiled it. Gentiles were not allowed into the main temple area (*m. Middot* 2.3). Josephus noted that Gentiles who entered the sacred space were subject to the death penalty (*Antiquities* 15.11.5 §417). In the outer court that surrounded the Court of Women, four-and-a-half-foot-tall stone markers were erected that announced in Greek and Latin that foreigners were prohibited from entering the sanctuary (Wikenhauser 1961, 242). Two of these markers have been excavated. They read, "No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the temple and enclosure. Anyone who is caught trespassing will bear personal responsibility for his ensuing death" (Bruce 1988a, 409).

Four concentric rectangular inner courts of the temple precincts were reserved for Jews, with restrictions tightening as one moved inward. Gentiles were permitted to attend an outer court, outside the fourth court, the one for women. The four inner courts were the courts of women, then men, then the holy place for priests, and finally the holy of holies, where only the high priest could enter once a year on the Day of Atonement (Polhill 1992, 452). The Mishnah speaks of 10 ascending degrees of holiness within Israel's land: (1) a walled city, (2) within the walls of Jerusalem, (3) the temple mount, (4) the rampart, (5) the court of women, (6) the court of the Israelites, (7) the court of the priests, (8) the area between the porch and altar, (9) the sanctuary, and (10) the holy of holies (*m. Kelim* 1.6–9; Le Cornu and Shulam 2003, 1194–95). The inner court (item 6) is the issue in the charge against Paul.

The issue is racial and concerns the temple's sanctity. The charge also confirms in the eyes of those who make it that Paul does not care to follow the law. The accusers mistakenly suppose that Paul has brought Trophimus of Ephesus (Acts 20:4) into the temple area. These are false charges, evidence of zealotry for the law that led to persecution of Paul that was unjust in Luke's view. So Paul is taken into custody for his supposed actions. As predicted in general terms in 21:11, a Jewish reaction has led to Paul's being bound.

Aren't you the Egyptian? (21:38): This interesting question helps set historical context, plus provide biographical information on Paul. Paul's request for permission to address the commander in Greek caused the commander to think that Paul was an Egyptian rebel who led 4,000 men into the desert. The use of *ouk* indicates expectation of a positive answer, and when combined with *ara*,

indicates astonishment that this is who may be present (BDF §440.2). Paul's Greek and the tumult that has taken place led the man to this conclusion. Greek was widely spoken in Egypt, the *lingua franca* of the age, and it was not unknown in Israel (Gaventa 2003, 305). Paul's origin from Tarsus, however, would make him a Greek speaker from a young age.

The activities of this Egyptian rebel are summarized in Josephus (*Jewish War* 2.13.5 §§261–63 [which notes that he gathered 30,000 in the wilderness]; *Antiquities* 20.8.6 §§169–72; Barnett 1981, 681–3). The Egyptian attracted followers during the time of Felix and said he would bring down the walls of Jerusalem, much like had been done at Jericho (Josh 6:20). In the battle with the Romans near the Mount of Olives, the Egyptian escaped and never appeared as a public force again, while 400 of his followers died and 200 were captured. Bruce places this attack about three years earlier than the current scene. This fits well with the commander's response, for people naturally expected the Egyptian insurrectionist to reappear on the scene. The description of the Egyptian's men as *sikariōn* identifies them as political troublemakers. This term, which means "dagger men," became a reference to other political revolutionaries of the 60s in Israel, also known as assassins, who caused Rome to overrun the nation in AD 70.

Paul corrected the tribune, identifying himself as a Jew from Tarsus (Acts 9:11, 30; 11:25) and asking to speak to the people. Paul's hometown was known as a cultural center of Hellenism, rhetoric, and Stoic philosophy (Strabo, *Geogr.* 14.4.12–15; 14.5.13– 15; Witherington 1998, 662–63; Schnabel 2004, 1056–58). It had several hundred thousand inhabitants. Noted for its textile industry, it was a center for trade and possessed a lively literary and philosophical tradition (Larkin 1995, 316). With Ephesus and Smyrna, it was one of the three great cities on the southern coast of Asia Minor. Little surprise, then, that Paul is a cultured man.

40 After he had given permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned with his hand to the people. When there was a great hush, he addressed them in the Hebrew language:

1 "Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense before you." 2 When they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even quieter. 3 He continued, "I am a Jewish man, born in Tarsus of Cilicia but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel and educated according to the strict view of our patriarchal law. Being zealous for God, just as all of you are today, 4 I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women in

jail, 5 as both the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me. After I received letters from them to the brothers, I traveled to Damascus to bring those who were prisoners there to be punished in Jerusalem.

6 "As I was traveling and near Damascus, about noon an intense light from heaven suddenly flashed around me. 7 I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? '

8 "I answered, 'Who are You, Lord? '

"He said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, the One you are persecuting! ' 9 Now those who were with me saw the light, but they did not hear the voice of the One who was speaking to me.

10 "Then I said, 'What should I do, Lord? '

"And the Lord told me, 'Get up and go into Damascus, and there you will be told about everything that is assigned for you to do.'

11 "Since I couldn't see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus. 12 Someone named Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good reputation with all the Jews residing there, 13 came and stood by me and said, 'Brother Saul, regain your sight.' And in that very hour I looked up and saw him. 14 Then he said, 'The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will, to see the Righteous One, and to hear the sound of His voice. 15 For you will be a witness for Him to all people of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now, why delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins by calling on His name.'

17 "After I came back to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple complex, I went into a visionary state 18 and saw Him telling me, 'Hurry and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me! '

19 "But I said, 'Lord, they know that in synagogue after synagogue I had those who believed in You imprisoned and beaten. 20 And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I was standing by and approving, and I guarded the clothes of those who killed him.'

21 "Then He said to me, 'Go, because I will send you far away to the Gentiles.' "

***The vision repeated* (22:6–11):** Did the men with Saul hear a voice or not? Did Saul receive detailed instructions from the Lord while on the road (Acts 26:15–18) or only after getting into Damascus (9:6–7; 22:10–11)? In 9:18 Saul's blindness was cured when "something like scales" fell from his eyes. In 22:11 he says his blindness was "because of the brightness of that light." Are the different accounts of Saul's conversions contradictory?

Luke records Paul retelling the story here, as he will do again in Acts 26:12–23. The literary choice to do this in detail three different times indicates the event's importance. As we noted in remarks on Acts 9:6–7, in ancient oral contexts such retellings often came with slight variation of details. This allowed each retelling to add to the overall picture, plus connect with the specific audience in view. Acts 9:7 tells us the men heard a sound; the present text does

not deny this claim, but rather says they did not hear the voice (22:9). Perhaps the voice was just indistinct noise to their ears. It is said that Paul got instructions while still on the road in Acts 26:15–18; the notes in the present text (22:10–11) and in 9:6–7 stating that Paul received the instructions in Damascus may represent a confirmation event, or telescoping by Luke. Light caused Saul to be blind for a few days (22:11). How this relates to scales falling from his eyes is not clear, but the solution may lie in the fact that the text says something *like* scales fell from Saul's eyes (9:18). We should not press the details too closely. These are intended to be complementary elements that give each audience the core story while allowing for variation.

Jesus the Nazarene (22:8): Is it likely that Jesus would identify himself as "Jesus of Nazareth" when revealing himself to Saul? After all, Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Matt 2:1). Further, though he grew up in Nazareth, he never identified himself by this phrase elsewhere in the NT. Luke used "Nazarene(s)" and "Nazareth" more commonly than any other NT writer (eight times in the Gospel of Luke, and eight times in Acts as well). Has Luke merely put the phrase on Jesus' lips, then? If so, what are the implications? Might it suggest that Jesus was born in Nazareth rather than Bethlehem?

Scholars who argue that Jesus would not have been known as "the Nazarene" if he had really been born in Bethlehem are engaging in hyper-criticism. Jesus lived the bulk of his life in Nazareth, and so it is fitting that he is associated more with Nazareth than any other locale, including his birthplace. And it is not unreasonable to think that Jesus would have identified himself as "the Nazarene" to Saul. This is the one place Jesus makes this association, and in doing so he makes a penetrating point: Jesus identifies himself with the very group that Saul was persecuting, a group known as the Nazarenes (Acts 24:5). The implication would have been clear to Saul: to persecute the Nazarenes is to persecute Jesus.

22 They listened to him up to this word. Then they raised their voices, shouting, "Wipe this
person off the earth — it's a disgrace for him to live! "
23 As they were yelling and flinging aside their robes and throwing dust into the air, 24 the
commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, directing that he be examined with the
scourge, so he could discover the reason they were shouting against him like this. 25 As they
stretched him out for the lash, Paul said to the centurion standing by, "Is it legal for you to
scourge a man who is a Roman citizen and is uncondemned? "
26 When the centurion heard this, he went and reported to the commander, saying, "What are
you going to do? For this man is a Roman citizen."

27 The commander came and said to him, “Tell me — are you a Roman citizen? ”
“Yes,” he said.
28 The commander replied, “I bought this citizenship for a large amount of money.”
“But I was born a citizen,” Paul said.
29 Therefore, those who were about to examine him withdrew from him at once. The commander too was alarmed when he realized Paul was a Roman citizen and he had bound him.

Roman citizen (22:25–29): Critics have suggested that Paul was not really a Roman citizen. After all, nothing has been said of it until now. Did Paul claim Roman citizenship at the spur of the moment just because it could help him out of this circumstance? Has Luke just created this fact about Paul because it is fitting for the present context?

It is unreasonable to suppose that either Paul or Luke lied about Paul’s Roman citizenship. Paul’s facility in Greco-Roman settings fits easiest with Roman citizenship. Furthermore, falsely claiming to be a citizen was a crime (Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.3; Barrett 1998, 1048), and the commander would likely have found Paul out with a little questioning. Perhaps Paul carried his *diploma*, a wooden diptych that would prove his registration as a citizen (Suetonius, *Nero* 12; Sherwin-White 1963, 146–49).

Why would Paul reveal his Roman citizenship only now? Witherington (1998, 679–84) suggests that Paul waited to reveal his citizenship in a setting where Jews were not present. After all, Paul’s Gentile-like behavior had troubled the Jews. How much more so if it were discovered that he was a Roman?

1 Paul looked intently at the Sanhedrin and said, “Brothers, I have lived my life before God in
all good conscience until this day.” 2 But the high priest Ananias ordered those who were
standing next to him to strike him on the mouth. 3 Then Paul said to him, “God is going to
strike you, you whitewashed wall! You are sitting there judging me according to the law, and in
violation of the law are you ordering me to be struck? ”
4 And those standing nearby said, “Do you dare revile God’s high priest? ”
5 “I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest,” replied Paul. “For it is written, **You
must not speak evil of a ruler of your people.**” 6 When Paul realized that one part of them
were Sadducees and the other part were Pharisees, he cried out in the Sanhedrin, “Brothers, I
am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees! I am being judged because of the hope of the resurrection of
the dead! ” 7 When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees,
and the assembly was divided. 8 For the Sadducees say there is no resurrection, and no angel or
spirit, but the Pharisees affirm them all.

I did not know . . . that he was the high priest (23:5): Given that he was a

well-placed Pharisee, it would seem surprising if Paul failed to recognize the high priest. Explanations that have been offered include: (1) Paul did not hear the order for him to be struck, the implication being that he would not have spoken out had he realized that the high priest had ordered him struck. (2) Paul heard the order, but his poor eyesight prevented him from realizing that it was the high priest who gave the order. (3) Paul's long absence from Jerusalem resulted in his no longer recognizing the high priest (Fitzmyer 1998, 717; Bruce 1988a, 427). (4) The remark is ironic in the sense that Paul was trying to show that the high priest was not really the representative of the people and of God's way, but because the high priest is so perceived by the people, Paul retracts his words (Marshall 1980, 364; Williams 1990, 385; Culy and Parsons 2003, 440, note this view and read the verse with this ironic force: "Oh, I did not know he was the high priest"). (5) Paul reacts without considering the man's position (Polhill 1992, 469n68; Larkin 1995, 328).

The first two options are improbable and do not fit the text, while the third seems unlikely given Paul's past relationship with high-ranking Jews in Jerusalem. Either of the latter two options, or perhaps a combination of them, is more likely—that Paul was being ironic and/or was hasty in his response. The remark is rhetorical and reflects Paul's intensity. The remark makes no sense as a detail created by Luke; Paul was so well circulated in Jewish circles that no able author would think to portray him as being possibly or actually ignorant of the high priest's identity. Further, Paul's retraction is an unflattering detail that Luke would not likely invent.

I am being judged because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead! (23:6): Is Paul untruthful about the cause of his being on trial? He says it is because of his teachings on Jesus' resurrection, but Acts 21:28 and 24:5–6 indicate a different cause of his being on trial, critics say.

Paul is not explaining why he is on trial here from a Jewish point of view (as appears in Acts 21:28; 24:5–6) but from his own point of view. Paul rightly sees the foundational issue as resurrection, for if it really happened, as Paul saw demonstrated in Jesus' appearance to him as he traveled to Damascus, then Jesus is a figure of great promise and hope to Israel and to the world. So Paul says if he is guilty of anything it is in believing God raised Jesus from the dead.

23 He summoned two of his centurions and said, "Get 200 soldiers ready with 70 cavalry and

200 spearmen to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. 24 Also provide mounts so they can put Paul on
them and bring him safely to Felix the governor."
25 He wrote a letter of this kind:

26 Claudius Lysias,
To the most excellent governor Felix:
Greetings.
27 When this man had been seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them, I
arrived with my troops and rescued him because I learned that he is a Roman citizen.
28 Wanting to know the charge they were accusing him of, I brought him down before
their Sanhedrin. 29 I found out that the accusations were about disputed matters in their
law, and that there was no charge that merited death or chains. 30 When I was informed
that there was a plot against the man, I sent him to you right away. I also ordered his
accusers to state their case against him in your presence.

31 Therefore, the soldiers took Paul during the night and brought him to Antipatris as they
were ordered. 32 The next day, they returned to the barracks, allowing the cavalry to go on with
him. 33 When these men entered Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they also
presented Paul to him.

***Luke's knowledge of the letter* (23:25–30):** Did Luke somehow get access to the letter to Felix? Is he merely summarizing hearsay about what the letter said? Or did Paul convey the content to him (v. 34)?

Claudius Lysias wrote a letter of explanation that was to accompany Paul on his trip to the governor. Such letters, known as a *litterae dimissoriae*, were common in situations like this. They were sent in case of an appeal (*provocatio*; Justinian, *Digest* 49.6.1; Fitzmyer 1998, 726), and their general approach would be the same in each case. There is no official appeal here, but the circumstances are similar since it is not yet clear to the commander what took place. The nature of the charge, disturbing the peace in a major way, meant that the governor needed to handle the case (Polhill 1992, 474).

The phrase in verse 25, "a letter of this kind [Gk *echousan ton tupon touton*]," may indicate that Luke is not quoting the letter verbatim but is instead summarizing its content in typical form (Marshall 1980, 370). On the other hand, Bruce (1990, 471) suggests that the expression could indeed point to a verbatim copy, in which case the phrase would refer to a letter "that went like this" (*NewDocs* 1 no. 26; 2 no. 27; 1 Macc 11:29; 15:2; 3 Macc 3:30; *Letter of Aristeas* 34; Bruce 1978 [on Felix's name]; Hemer 1987). Bruce (1988a, 434) earlier preferred the view that says the phrase indicates that Luke just shared the gist or intent of the letter. This is possibly the correct sense of "a letter of this kind," for such letters as this were normally not made public, but in this case its

basic contents may have been revealed at the hearing, given the uncertainty of the situation. A decision on the sense and force of the phrase is not clear, since we do not have enough information to decide (Witherington 1998, 698). At the least, we have a translation of the original letter since the letter most likely was written in Latin.

In conclusion, it is not possible to know whether verses 26–30 are meant to represent the letter verbatim or merely the letter in spirit. Either view is possible, and thus there is no challenge to Luke's accuracy here.

> After five days Ananias the high priest came down with some elders and a lawyer named Tertullus. These men presented their case against Paul to the governor. 2 When he was called in, Tertullus began to accuse him and said: "Since we enjoy great peace because of you, and reforms are taking place for the benefit of this nation by your foresight, 3 we acknowledge this in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with utmost gratitude. 4 However, so that I will not burden you any further, I beg you in your graciousness to give us a brief hearing. 5 For we have found this man to be a plague, an agitator among all the Jews throughout the Roman world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes! 6 He even tried to desecrate the temple, so we apprehended him [and wanted to judge him according to our law. 7 But Lysias the commander came and took him from our hands with great force, 8 commanding his accusers to come to you.] By examining him yourself you will be able to discern all these things we are accusing him of." 9 The Jews also joined in the attack, alleging that these things were so.
>
> 10 When the governor motioned to him to speak, Paul replied: "Because I know you have been a judge of this nation for many years, I am glad to offer my defense in what concerns me. 11 You are able to determine that it is no more than 12 days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem. 12 They didn't find me disputing with anyone or causing a disturbance among the crowd, either in the temple complex or in the synagogues or anywhere in the city. 13 Neither can they provide evidence to you of what they now bring against me. 14 But I confess this to you: I worship my fathers' God according to the Way, which they call a sect, believing all the things that are written in the Law and in the Prophets. 15 And I have a hope in God, which these men themselves also accept, that there is going to be a resurrection, both of the righteous and the unrighteous.

Textual issue in verses 6–8a: The brackets around these verses indicate uncertainty about the wording of the text among the manuscripts of Acts. One strand of the manuscript tradition, the Western text, has an additional explanation after the mention of the Jews' seizure of Paul. It is that the Romans forcibly took Paul from Jewish hands. The addition reads, "and wanted to judge him according to our law. But Lysias the commander came and took him from our hands with

great force, commanding his accusers to come to you." The legal advocate's point would be that the Jews had the right to judge the case themselves. The remark introduces the matter from a Jewish perspective, since from the Romans' point of view it was the disturbance involved in seizing Paul that brought the Romans in, not the Romans' butting into Jewish affairs.

Most scholars question whether the original version of Acts made this additional point. It is possible that this is original because it states an objection to the Roman initiative, and Luke normally does not challenge that perspective, but the better MSS evidence is for the shorter reading (p^{74}, א, A, B, H, L, P; Polhill 1992, 481; Witherington 1998, 709). It is likely that the Western text added the expression because the copyist, failing to recognize the original remark's rhetorical dimension, found it hard to accept that Tertullus would completely commend the Roman role and simply recommend that the leader examine Paul.

I have a hope in God . . . that there is going to be a resurrection (24:15ff): Paul repeats his earlier defense that he is on trial for believing in the resurrection. This idea was discussed in a note above on Acts 23:1–8. Paul's defense is that if anyone had disturbed the *Pax Romana* (the Roman peace) it was not him but those who arrested him. He did nothing wrong.

Paul's method of witnessing to Felix is instructive. Felix got nervous when Paul began to address the issues of "righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come" (v. 25). Paul was presenting the faith in terms that were both understandable and pertinent to Felix's situation. The issue of final judgment would be familiar to Felix's wife Drusilla, since she was Jewish, but mostly new for a Roman like Felix (Larkin 1995, 343). As Bruce (1990, 483) observes, righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment are "three subjects Felix and Drusilla certainly needed to hear about." Drusilla was born in AD 38, and at this point she was not yet 20 years old, the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I and sister to Agrippa II. This was her second marriage. She had left her first husband, whom she had married in a customary, arranged marriage at age 14. She was Felix's third wife. Josephus (*Antiquities* 20.7.2 §§141–44) notes that Drusilla was beautiful and that she was persuaded by Felix to leave her first husband (also *Antiquities* 19.9.1 §354; Jewish War 2.1.6 §220; Suetonius, *Claudius* 28; Tacitus, *Histories* 5.9).

6 When he had spent not more than eight or 10 days among them, he went down to Caesarea.

The next day, seated at the judge's bench, he commanded Paul to be brought in. [7] When he arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him and brought many serious charges that they were not able to prove, [8] while Paul made the defense that, "Neither against the Jewish law, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I sinned at all."

Many serious charges that they were not able to prove (25:7): Here is Festus's verdict: Paul was not guilty of any offenses against Roman law. Festus discerned that this was a mere religious dispute. In the later scene when Festus is preparing Agrippa to examine Paul, Festus again says that Paul has not done anything deserving death (v. 25).

Festus, as new governor of Palestine, had a better reputation for fairness than Felix did (BAGD 856; BDAG 1053). Josephus (*Jewish War* 2.14.1 §271) says that he sought to prevent disturbances in the country, and *Antiquities* 20.8.9 §182 and 20.8.10 §§185–88 have him deal with the Zealots; *Antiquities* 20.8.11 §§193–95 has him agree to let some Jews go to Nero to make a case for leaving up a wall they had built to prevent Agrippa from seeing what went on inside important parts of the temple with respect to worship, something Nero agreed to allow. All we know of Festus comes from Acts and Josephus. These details indicate how sensitive the issues were in the early sixties.

[12] "I was traveling to Damascus under these circumstances with authority and a commission from the chief priests. [13] King Agrippa, while on the road at midday, I saw a light from heaven brighter than the sun, shining around me and those traveling with me. [14] We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice speaking to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

[15] "Then I said, 'Who are You, Lord? '

"And the Lord replied: 'I am Jesus, the One you are persecuting. [16] But get up and stand on your feet. For I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and a witness of what you have seen and of what I will reveal to you. [17] I will rescue you from the people and from the Gentiles. I now send you to them [18] to open their eyes so they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that by faith in Me they may receive forgiveness of sins and a share among those who are sanctified.'

[19] "Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. [20] Instead, I preached to those in Damascus first, and to those in Jerusalem and in all the region of Judea, and to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works worthy of repentance. [21] For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple complex and were trying to kill me. [22] To this very day, I have obtained help that comes from God, and I stand and testify to both small and great, saying nothing else than what the prophets and Moses said would take place — [23] that the Messiah must suffer, and that as the first to rise from the dead, He would

proclaim light to our people and to the Gentiles."

24 As he was making his defense this way, Festus exclaimed in a loud voice, "You're out of your mind, Paul! Too much study is driving you mad! "

25 But Paul replied, "I'm not out of my mind, most excellent Festus. On the contrary, I'm speaking words of truth and good judgment. 26 For the king knows about these matters. It is to him I am actually speaking boldly. For I am convinced that none of these things escapes his notice, since this was not done in a corner. 27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you believe."

The Damascus Road appearance for a third time **(26:12–18):** Luke has Paul narrate his Damascus Road encounter with Jesus for a third time (9:1–9 and 22:6–11). Again, the details differ slightly from one account to the next, a feature that is common in the telling and retelling of oral accounts. At midday a bright light shone around Saul's group on the road to Damascus (9:7; 22:6, 9; an appearance from heaven, Exod 20:18; Deut 4:12; Isa 60:1–3; Larkin 1995, 359). The present account is the only one to note that all of the men fell down. This shows that it was a real, external event, not merely a personal vision of Jesus experienced by Saul. Only Saul, however, understood the exchange. A voice spoke to Paul in a Hebrew dialect and asked why he was engaged in persecution. Saul was addressed by his Semitic name, *Saoul*. Elsewhere Luke uses the Greek form of the name, *Saulos* (Acts 9:1). The double naming, "Saul, Saul," points to a theophany (Gen 22:11; 46:2; 1 Sam 3:4; 2 Esd [*4 Ezra*] 14:1; *2 Bar* 22.2; Johnson 1992, 435).

There is no mention of the meeting with Ananias in the present version, an element that was key to the two earlier versions (9:10–19; 22:12–16). The absence of Ananias in this account does not indicate tension or contradiction. Paul was not obligated to share all possible details in his retelling of the event, and in this case he condensed the account and chose not to mention Ananias (Wikenhauser 1961, 271; Marshall 1980, 395). Readers of Acts did not need to have his involvement repeated.

Messiah . . . the first to rise from the dead (26:23): Is it correct to say that Jesus was the first to rise from the dead? Did not others rise from the dead earlier, like Lazarus (John 11), the widow of Nain's son (Luke 7:10–17), Jairus's daughter (8:50–56) or even those whom Elijah or Elisha healed (1 Kgs 17:19–22 and 2 Kgs 4:34–35)?

There is an important distinction between what happened to Jesus and what happened to all of these other people. Jesus was raised to new, unending life and was gifted by God the Father with a glorified body, some characteristics of

which differed from his pre-resurrection body (e.g., Luke 24:31). Death was forever behind him now. With all the others who came back from death, their experience was merely resuscitation from death. Their bodies were no different from before, and they were destined to die a bodily death yet again.

This was not done in a corner (26:26): The metaphor of things not being done in a corner refers to the fact that the foundational claims of Christianity were not hidden events tucked away somewhere in a corner, out of public sight (BAGD 168; BDAG 209; Malherbe 1985–86; Epictetus, *Discourses* 2.12.17; Plutarch, *Moralia* 777B; Fitzmyer 1998, 764). Paul can speak boldly and says that these events were public enough that anyone paying attention could know that they were true. Paul's claim was supported by living witnesses who not only experienced Jesus but whose changed lives spoke volumes to those around them as they gave testimony to God's work. Such living eyewitnesses to the life of Christ during the early church era ensured that the preaching of the apostles was "fact-checked" by people who could detect error or exaggeration. Luke presents Paul as such a model witness. Paul knew what Jesus did, his life was changed as a result, and he boldly but sensitively testified to what God had done, asking people to take a look at what God had publicly done for humanity in Jesus Christ.

> When it was decided that we were to sail to Italy, they handed over Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion named Julius, of the Imperial Regiment. 2 So when we had boarded a ship of Adramyttium, we put to sea, intending to sail to ports along the coast of Asia. Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us. 3 The next day we put in at Sidon, and Julius treated Paul kindly and allowed him to go to his friends to receive their care. 4 When we had put out to sea from there, we sailed along the northern coast of Cyprus because the winds were against us. 5 After sailing through the open sea off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we reached Myra in Lycia. 6 There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board. 7 Sailing slowly for many days, we came with difficulty as far as Cnidus. Since the wind did not allow us to approach it, we sailed along the south side of Crete off Salmone. 8 With yet more difficulty we sailed along the coast and came to a place called Fair Havens near the city of Lasea.
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> 9 By now much time had passed, and the voyage was already dangerous. Since the Fast was already over, Paul gave his advice 10 and told them, "Men, I can see that this voyage is headed toward damage and heavy loss, not only of the cargo and the ship but also of our lives." 11 But the centurion paid attention to the captain and the owner of the ship rather than to what Paul said. 12 Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided to set sail from there,

hoping somehow to reach Phoenix, a harbor on Crete open to the southwest and northwest, and to winter there.

13 When a gentle south wind sprang up, they thought they had achieved their purpose. They weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. 14 But not long afterward, a fierce wind called the “northeaster” rushed down from the island. 15 Since the ship was caught and was unable to head into the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along. 16 After running under the shelter of a little island called Cauda, we were barely able to get control of the skiff. 17 After hoisting it up, they used ropes and tackle and girded the ship. Then, fearing they would run aground on the Syrtis, they lowered the drift-anchor, and in this way they were driven along. 18 Because we were being severely battered by the storm, they began to jettison the cargo the next day. 19 On the third day, they threw the ship’s gear overboard with their own hands.

20 For many days neither sun nor stars appeared, and the severe storm kept raging. Finally all hope that we would be saved was disappearing. 21 Since many were going without food, Paul stood up among them and said, “You men should have followed my advice not to sail from Crete and sustain this damage and loss. 22 Now I urge you to take courage, because there will be no loss of any of your lives, but only of the ship. 23 For this night an angel of the God I belong to and serve stood by me, 24 and said, ‘Don’t be afraid, Paul. You must stand before Caesar. And, look! God has graciously given you all those who are sailing with you.’ 25 Therefore, take courage, men, because I believe God that it will be just the way it was told to me. 26 However, we must run aground on a certain island.”

27 When the fourteenth night came, we were drifting in the Adriatic Sea, and in the middle of the night the sailors thought they were approaching land. 28 They took a sounding and found it to be 120 feet deep; when they had sailed a little farther and sounded again, they found it to be 90 feet deep. 29 Then, fearing we might run aground in some rocky place, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight to come.

30 Some sailors tried to escape from the ship; they had let down the skiff into the sea, pretending that they were going to put out anchors from the bow. 31 Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.” 32 Then the soldiers cut the ropes holding the skiff and let it drop away.

33 When it was about daylight, Paul urged them all to take food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day that you have been waiting and going without food, having eaten nothing. 34 Therefore I urge you to take some food. For this has to do with your survival, since none of you will lose a hair from your head.” 35 After he said these things and had taken some bread, he gave thanks to God in the presence of all of them, and when he broke it, he began to eat. 36 They all became encouraged and took food themselves. 37 In all there were 276 of us on the ship. 38 When they had eaten enough, they began to lighten the ship by throwing the grain overboard into the sea.

39 When daylight came, they did not recognize the land but sighted a bay with a beach. They planned to run the ship ashore if they could. 40 After casting off the anchors, they left them in the sea, at the same time loosening the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the

foresail to the wind and headed for the beach. 41 But they struck a sandbar and ran the ship aground. The bow jammed fast and remained immovable, while the stern began to break up by the pounding of the waves.

42 The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners so that no one could swim away and escape. 43 But the centurion kept them from carrying out their plan because he wanted to save Paul, so he ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. 44 The rest were to follow, some on planks and some on debris from the ship. In this way, everyone safely reached the shore.

***The initial sea voyage and the final "we" section* (Acts 27):** This account includes an abundance of details that offer a window into the date of Paul's journey plus authentication given the known sailing conditions of the ancient era. Such an ocean voyage as recounted here, under the best of conditions and sailing straight to Rome, would take about five weeks (Bruce 1990, 511). It was likely autumn AD 59. The centurion named Julius (v. 1) is probably not the same Julius of Agrippa II's garrison, to whom Josephus refers (*Antiquities* 19.9.2 §§364–65). Rather, he is probably a centurion in the auxiliaries' army of Syria and Judea (*OGIS* 421; *ILS* 1.2683), a group more likely to handle prisoners (Witherington 1998, 758) and to have been composed mostly of Syrians, not Romans. The detailed account of Paul's sea journey is designed to show God's determination to bring Paul to Rome, no matter the obstacles. It may also be Luke's way of suggesting that Rome is on the road to the "end of the earth" in terms of distance from Jerusalem, although this meaning is disputed since some think the ancients took "end of the earth" as a reference to Spain. Spain as the "end of the earth" likely fits the Roman view since they took Rome to be the center of the earth. However, from a Jewish perspective Jerusalem was the center of the earth, and thus Rome would fittingly be considered the end of the earth.

The "we" section appears again as Paul and those with him board a private ship from Adramyttium, a seaport of Mysia, opposite the isle of Lesbos, 110 miles north of Ephesus and a day's journey east of Troas (on Mysia, see Schnabel 2004, 1144–45; on Adramyttium, Schnabel 2004, 1147; a port that was near silver mines). The "we" is prominent in the account (vv. 1a, 2, 3a, 4–8, 15–16, 18, 20c, 27a, 29a, 37; Pesch 1986b, 284). They will journey along the ports of Asia once they depart from Caesarea. Most ships were cargo ships rather than passenger ships. People who wished to travel by sea went to the dock to find a ship heading where they wanted to go. Sailing schedules were dependent on favorable winds and religious superstitions about the seas. Inauspicious days such as August 24, October 5, and November 8 were avoided as well as the end of the month (Le Cornu and Shulam 2003, 1422–23).

The more common route was by way of Alexandria. Paul travels with at least two companions: Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica (20:4), and Luke. Aristarchus is possibly the same figure noted in Colossians 4:10 and Philemon 24. Paul was not seen as dangerous by his keepers. At one port of call, Sidon, Julius allowed Paul to visit "his friends" (Gk *tous philous*) and receive care. Sidon is 69 miles north of Caesarea and would have taken a full day and night to reach. It was known as the "mother city of the Phoenicians" (Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon* 1.1) and had a double harbor (Bruce 1990, 512; Schnabel 2004, 776). Glass, the purple dye industry, and its port drove its commerce. Luke mentions it elsewhere (Luke 4:26; 6:17; 10:13–14). The ship likely stopped to unload or pick up cargo. Prisoners would be responsible for their own supplies.

The ship next sails under the lee of Cyprus, meaning they took a course that allowed the island to protect the ship from the westerly and northwesterly winds of summer and autumn (BAGD 846; BDAG 1040). They would be sailing east and north of the island. Here they could take advantage of currents running along the coast. After they passed Cilicia and Pamphylia, the next destination was Myra, a town of Lycia, about 15 days' journey by ship and more than 500 miles. Its port, called Andriace, was three miles west and south of the city. It lay due north of Alexandria, on the other side of the Mediterranean. Lucian (*The Ship* 7) records a nine-day journey on this route. The Western text is explicit in giving the length of the voyage. On the southern tip of Asia Minor, this seaport was 108 miles southeast of Colossae.

Here they found a private ship from Alexandria that was heading for Rome, so they boarded it. This was likely part of a grain fleet (v. 38). Egypt was the chief source of grain for Rome (Suetonius, *Claudius* 18–19; Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.16.4 §§385–86; Seneca, *Moral Letters* 77.1–2; Barrett 1998, 1185). Such ships were often used by Rome with its protection. The empire also offered insurance in case of damage at sea because of the importance of the food trade (Haenchen 1987, 699n2). It was late in the sailing season, so rapid progress was advised. These ships were large; an excavated ship called *Isis* is estimated to have weighed anywhere from 1,200 to 2,900 gross registered tons (Conzelmann 1987, 215–16; Casson 1950). Lucian (*The Ship* 1–9, esp. 5) describes a ship 120 by 30 by 29 cubits, or 180 by 45 by 43.5 feet (also Johnson 1992, 446; Barrett 1998, 1185; Eckey 2000, 559–60).

The voyage progresses slowly against the wind. They come to Cnidus, a trip of 130 miles (Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War* 8.24.35). This trip should have

taken only a couple of days, given the average speed of such ships at six miles an hour. In adverse conditions, the speed could reduce to two knots, or two miles an hour (Le Cornu and Sulam 2003, 1432). The trip from Alexandria to Rome normally took 10–13 days, but adverse conditions could slow the trip to as much as 45 days. Cnidus was on Asia Minor's southwestern coast, 108 miles south of Ephesus.

They then proceeded under the shelter of Crete, just off from Salmone on the northeast point of the island. The wind prevented them from taking the normal route across to the island of Cythera, north of Crete. Crete is located in the northern Mediterranean Sea, about 130 miles southwest of Cnidus. They eventually landed at Fair Havens near the city of Lasea. It was located on the south-central coast of Crete. It is not attested elsewhere. The normal route would have been Myra, Rhodes, and then south to and past Crete (Haenchen 1987, 699; Marshall 1980, 405). This harbor may have been too small to leave the boat safely in port for the three weather-beaten months of winter. Its bay was half open to the sea and so did not provide much protection (Bruce 1990, 514). This may be why debate swirls about whether to press the journey forward.

The favorable time for sailing is passing away. The timing is indicated by the reference to the fast (v. 9), which would be tied to the Day of Atonement (Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.4.3 §66; 18.4.3 §94). So we are in September and October, just before the winter months (v. 12), when sea travel would be especially perilous (Suetonius, *Claudius* 18; Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia* 2.122). Sea travel was normally not undertaken after mid-September and was avoided from November 11 to mid-March (Vegetius, *On Military Affairs* 4.39). The expression *mare clausum* (the sea is closed) marked this period (Roloff 1988, 361). Pliny the Elder (*Naturalis Historia* 2.122) places the resumption of sailing a little earlier, but the point is that November to mid-February were months to be avoided for sailing. When Luke has a three-month pause in 28:11, he is referring to this period and is using schematic language as opposed to precise days. Jewish views were even more cautious, as *Gen. Rabbah* 6.5b advises avoiding the sea from mid-October to mid-May (Larkin 1995, 368). In winter, the scant daylight, long nights, cloud cover, poor visibility, raging winds, rain, and snow were problems. Paul advises against going on (v. 10), but the professional sea voyagers press ahead. The ship pressed on with the goal of wintering at Phoenix, a harbor in Crete. The goal was to stay protected by sailing as close as possible to Crete (v. 13).

Phoenix was up the coast, at the most 50 miles west of Fair Havens. Its exact

location is not certain, although some ancient texts describe it (Strabo, *Geography* 10.4; Ptolemy, *Geography* 3.17; Ogilvie 1958). The Cape Mouros area of southern Crete is the locale commonly noted. Some scholars suggest Lutro on the east side whereas others argue that the description "open to the southwest and northwest" (Gk *kata liba kai kata chōron*) does not fit this site well. An alternate site is Phinika, a site across this peninsula to the west from Lutro (Williams 1990, 430; Hemer 1985, 97–98). The topography of the area has been altered since the first century by earthquakes and silting, so that it may well be that the first site gave more protection than it does now. Nevertheless, the second site, Phinika, is slightly more likely as the intended locale, given the work by Ogilvie and the textual evidence he cites (Hemer 1989, 139–40). Still, it is not certain which site is meant. It does not matter much, since the locale is not reached. This trip normally was quite simple, reachable in a day, even a half day.

Trouble arises in the form of tempestuous winds that were nicknamed with a hybrid Greek-Latin term, "the Northeaster" (*Eurakulōn*). It leaves them no longer in control of the ship. The noun form of the Greek term *tuphōnikos* is the origin of our word "typhoon." In Greek it refers to a severe windstorm that now takes hold of the ship (v. 15), with winds coming out of the northeast, driving the ship southward, away from the island and its protection. Such winds come off Mt. Ida, an 8,000-foot-high peak on the island. They are unable to turn the bow of the boat into the wind, literally "face the wind eye to eye" (Gk *antophthalmein tō anemō*). They are driven by the wind and not able to control the ship. To be at the sea's mercy was not unusual in ancient sailing (Homer, *Odyssey* 9.82–84; Lucian, *The Ship* 7; Heliodorus, *Aethiopica* 5.27.2; Johnson 1992, 448).

Fearing they would run aground on the Syrtis (27:17): The Syrtis refers to either of two distinct areas of dangerous sandbars and shoals off the cost of North Africa. The question arises: does Luke mean to refer to Syrtis Major or to Syrtis Minor? Syrtis Minor is to be identified with the Gulf of Gabes in the Mediterranean Sea along the North African Coast near modern Tripoli. Syrtis Major is much closer to Crete, and is located off the coast of what is now Libya in what is known also as the Gulf of Sidra. It lies a couple hundred nautical miles southwest of Phoenix, the ship's intended destination (v. 12), and is within similar reach of Cauda (modern Gavdo or Ghavdo, mispronounced "Gozzo" by many), the small island whose coast the ship is said to have traced in a bid for shelter (v. 16). Cauda (Gozzo) is not to be confused with Gozo Island, which is located just northwest of Malta, an island approximately 500 nautical miles west

of Phoenix.

***The storm's duration and the term* "Adriatic Sea" (27:27):** Storms of such duration are not normal for the area, but violent storms are not uncommon. Two Italian warships (the *Scirocco* and *Lanciere*) were sunk by a storm in this area after the Second Battle of Sirte in March, 1942.

The reference in verse 27 to the Adriatic Sea may confuse modern readers who are aware that "Adriatic Sea" today refers to a body of water well north of Malta. In ancient reference, however, the Adriatic referred to a larger area than what is called the Adriatic Sea today (Barrett 1998, 1202; Ptolemy, *Geography* 3.4.1; 3.15.1; 3.17.1 [Crete to Silicia]; Strabo, *Geography* 2.5.20; Pausanius, *Description of Greece* 5.25.3; Josephus, *Life* 3 §15 speak of sailing in the Sea of Adria to Rome; Bruce 1990, 522). It included what is today called the Ionian Sea and the northeastern Mediterranean (Polhill 1992, 525). Thus Luke's reference was correct for its time.

They dropped four anchors from the stern (27:29): Some have suggested that Luke proves that he is unfamiliar with sailing and the work of securing a ship when he portrays the sailors as having dropped anchors from the stern, when in fact this is usually done from the bow. This criticism misses two points. First, in the very next verse Luke tells us that some sailors tried to escape the imperiled ship by making as if they would drop anchors from the bow. Second, it is entirely possible that the position of the ship was such that dropping anchors first from the stern was the correct tactic.

Today is the fourteenth day that you have been . . . without food (27:33): Some have remarked that it seems unlikely that the crew would have gone 14 days without food. Three considerations lessen the problem. First, the violent pitching of the ship on the storm-tossed waters may have made them all seasick and thus disinterested in food. Second, normal routines, such as regular meal preparation, would be set aside during the life-threatening crisis. Third, Paul's remark about them not eating should not be overread. He may not have meant that they had absolutely nothing to eat for duration of the storm, but that it had been a long while since they had eaten a regular meal (note a parallel theme in Aelius Aristides, *Sacred Tales* 2.68).

Throwing the grain overboard (27:38): Luke says they jettisoned the grain at this point, but did they not already ditch the cargo in verse 18? Most likely the crew saved back some of the grain when they ditched the cargo earlier. They would still have need of some ballast. Besides, throwing all the food overboard

would truly be the last measure in a disaster at sea. Now, heading for land, they could toss much of what remained of the food in the hopes of getting up higher in the water, making them able to travel closer inland before running the ship aground.

> Once ashore, we then learned that the island was called Malta. 2 The local people showed us
> extraordinary kindness, for they lit a fire and took us all in, since it was raining and cold. 3 As
> Paul gathered a bundle of brushwood and put it on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat
> and fastened itself to his hand. 4 When the local people saw the creature hanging from his hand,
> they said to one another, “This man is probably a murderer, and though he has escaped the sea,
> Justice does not allow him to live! ” 5 However, he shook the creature off into the fire and
> suffered no harm. 6 They expected that he would swell up or suddenly drop dead. But after they
> waited a long time and saw nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said
> he was a god.
>
> 7 Now in the area around that place was an estate belonging to the leading man of the island,
> named Publius, who welcomed us and entertained us hospitably for three days. 8 Publius’s
> father was in bed suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went to him, and praying and laying
> his hands on him, he healed him. 9 After this, the rest of those on the island who had diseases
> also came and were cured. 10 So they heaped many honors on us, and when we sailed, they
> gave us what we needed.

Viper (28:3): Some have accused Luke of inaccuracy here, for it is said that Malta does not have a population of poisonous snakes. Barrett (1998, 1222) discusses the issue but reaches no clear conclusion. For a thorough discussion of Maltese snakes, see Le Cornu and Shulam (2003, 1479). Bruce (1990, 531), commenting on the possibility of poisonous snakes on Malta in the NT era, cites the analogy of Ireland, which had poisonous snakes at one time but no longer does. Perhaps something similar has happened on Malta. Pliny the Elder discussed snakes (*Natural History* 8.85–86) and said all snakes are poisonous and seek vengeance (see also Lucian, *Alexander the False Prophet* 10). Johnson (1992, 462) contends that such superstitious views about snakes were popular and widespread in the ancient world.

Publius (28:7): There is no extant extra-biblical testimony about this ruler. However, that is no argument for his non-existence. The description fits the historical context. Publius may well have been a procurator, if not merely the chief landowner (*IG* 14.601 confirms the use of this term for a ruler as it speaks of the “chief of Malta”; also *CIL* 10.7494; Bruce 1990, 532; Barrett 1998, 1224).

The use of only his Roman forename is unusual (Williams 1990, 444). Paul often establishes a relationship with leading figures in a locale (Acts 13:7; 16:22; 17:19; 18:12; 19:31; Johnson 1992, 462).

11 After three months we set sail in an Alexandrian ship that had wintered at the island, with
the Twin Brothers as its figurehead. 12 Putting in at Syracuse, we stayed three days. 13 From
there, after making a circuit along the coast, we reached Rhegium. After one day a south wind
sprang up, and the second day we came to Puteoli. 14 There we found believers and were
invited to stay with them for seven days.

And so we came to Rome. 15 Now the believers from there had heard the news about us and
had come to meet us as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns. When Paul saw
them, he thanked God and took courage. 16 When we entered Rome, Paul was permitted to stay
by himself with the soldier who guarded him.

17 After three days he called together the leaders of the Jews. When they had gathered he said
to them: “Brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our
ancestors, I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. 18 After
they examined me, they wanted to release me, since I had not committed a capital offense.
19 Because the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar; it was not as though I had
any accusation against my nation. 20 For this reason I’ve asked to see you and speak to you. In
fact, it is for the hope of Israel that I’m wearing this chain.”

21 Then they said to him, “We haven’t received any letters about you from Judea. None of the
brothers has come and reported or spoken anything evil about you. 22 But we would like to hear
from you what you think. For concerning this sect, we are aware that it is spoken against
everywhere.”

23 After arranging a day with him, many came to him at his lodging. From dawn to dusk he
expounded and witnessed about the kingdom of God. He tried to persuade them concerning
Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets. 24 Some were persuaded by what he said,
but others did not believe.

25 Disagreeing among themselves, they began to leave after Paul made one statement: “The
Holy Spirit correctly spoke through the prophet Isaiah to your ancestors 26 when He said,

Go to these people and say:
You will listen and listen,
yet never understand;
and you will look and look,
yet never perceive.
27 **For the hearts of these people**
have grown callous,
their ears are hard of hearing,
and they have shut their eyes;
otherwise they might see with their eyes
and hear with their ears,

understand with their heart,
and be converted,
and I would heal them.

28 Therefore, let it be known to you that this saving work of God has been sent to the Gentiles;
they will listen! ” [29 After he said these things, the Jews departed, while engaging in a
prolonged debate among themselves.]

30 Then he stayed two whole years in his own rented house. And he welcomed all who visited
him, 31 proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus
Christ with full boldness and without hindrance.

After three months we set sail (28:11–14): After three months, they set out again for Rome. It was February of AD 60 by now (Witherington 1998, 781n138) and the beginning of the new sailing season (Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 2.122). The critical part of the journey was the 60 miles to Sicily in open seas, followed by a largely protected sail along the eastern coast of Sicily and up the southwestern coast of Italy. It was a 210-mile journey to Rome from where they started out in Malta.

They boarded an Alexandrian ship whose front is “marked” (*parasēmō*) with figureheads of the Twin Brothers (*Dioskourois*). These are Castor and Pollux, sons of Zeus and Leda, the “savior gods” (BAGD 199; BDAG 251; Epictetus, *Discourses* 2.18.29; Lucian, *The Ship* 5, 9; Dölger 1950). Many statues of these gods still exist and are on display in Rome. Leda was queen of Sparta and married to Tyndareus, the king, but their children were connected by legend to Zeus. They sailed with Jason and the Argonauts (Le Cornu and Shulam 2003, 1490). Castor was said to be an excellent horseman, and Pollus could box. Their astral sign was Gemini. The pair were especially popular in Egypt (Haenchen 1987, 717). Euripides (*Electra* 1342–55) saw them as guarding the truth and punishing perjurers, and so their mention may again underscore Paul’s innocence. They were seen as protectors of good fortune on the seas, being said to rid the seas of pirates and buccaneers. This journey had an added symbol of protection for the Gentile travelers that had nothing to do with their gods: the Lord will deliver Paul to his destination.

The sail was fairly uneventful. For three days they stayed at Syracuse, on the eastern coast of Sicily (Cicero, *In Verrem* 2.4.117–19; Strabo, *Geography* 6.2.4). It was about 60 miles from Malta (so Le Cornu and Shulam 2003, 1492; Larkin 1995, 383). During Roman rule, it was the capital of Sicily and a center of Greek culture, a natural stop on a journey through the Straits of Messina. Cicero describes it as lovely and very prosperous due to its two harbors. It had been in Roman hands since 212 BC (Le Cornu and Shulam 2003, 1491). They then

traveled on, apparently with some difficulty, to Rhegium, located on the toe of Italy and 74 miles from Syracuse (Strabo, *Geography* 6.1.6). Leaving Rhegium, after two more days with a favorable south wind, they arrived at Puteoli (modern Pozzuoli), a port just over 200 miles northwest of Rhegium in the Bay of Naples, eight miles northwest of Neapolis (Naples) and about 130 miles south of Rome. This was the main port for grain in the country. Later this port was overtaken in importance by the recently built Ostia, although often passengers still disembarked here first (Barrett 1998, 1229). Josephus knew of Jews who lived in Puteoli (*Jewish War* 2.7.1 §104; *Antiquities* 17.12.1 §328).

Scholars sometimes discuss the feasibility of Paul stopping in the midst of a journey as a prisoner. Would a prisoner really be allowed such privilege? By the time the journey had progressed this far, however, Paul had achieved a level of respect with those who guarded him. Further, the church was already established in the area by now, something Paul's letter to the Romans, written years before this trip, also shows.

They were now a five-day walk from Rome by means of two well-traveled roads, the Campanian Way and the Appian Way. The latter route, which entered Rome from the south next to the Circus Maximus, was where many Jews lived in ancient Rome (Juvenal, *Satires* 3.10–16). Known as an area of light forest, the end of this route later became the location of the Christian catacombs, where persecuted Christians were buried in underground graves. The trip from Malta has taken three weeks. The total journey has taken well over four months. God's word has come to pass: Paul has made it to Rome.

And so we came to Rome . . . we entered Rome (28:14, 16): How many times did the party enter Rome? Verse 14 says they "came to" Rome, while verse 16 says they "entered" Rome. There is no contradiction or redundancy here. Verse 14 simply gives a summary statement, signifying that the goal of the journey had been achieved. Verse 16 then gives greater detail about what happened once they entered Rome: "Paul was permitted to stay by himself with the soldier who guarded him."

***Retelling of the Caesarea trial* (28:17–20):** As with the retelling of Paul's vision on the road to Damascus, this retelling of the trial at Caesarea has different details from the narrative in 25:6–12. An overview of the two texts is as follows:

Acts 25:6–12

a. The Jews presented their case against Paul, and were unable to establish the charges they made against Paul.

b. Paul was then given a chance to speak.
c. Festus asked Paul if he would be willing to go back to Jerusalem and stand trial there.
d. Paul refused to be sent to Jerusalem and instead appealed to Caesar. His appeal was an attempt to avoid going to Jerusalem and seemingly had no connection to a Jewish objection to Festus's supposed plans to release Paul, neither of which are mentioned in the chapter 25 account.
e. Festus agreed to send Paul to Caesar. To this point nothing has been said about Festus considering the possibility of releasing Paul outright.
f. Festus mentioned (26:31–32) a desire to release Paul only after Paul had a chance to speak before Agrippa and Bernice, "some days" after the original hearing where Paul appealed to Caesar.

Acts 28:17–19

g. Paul says "the Romans" wanted to release him.
h. An objection by the Jews followed this, which most naturally indicates that the Jews objected to Festus's desire to release Paul outright.
i. Paul says it was this Jewish objection that drove him to appeal to Caesar.

There are two key differences between the two accounts. First, Acts 28:17–19 has Paul appealing to Caesar *after* Festus formed and apparently articulated to the Jews a conviction of Paul's innocence and a desire to release him, whereas 25:6–12 has Paul appealing to Caesar without Festus entertaining or expressing these thoughts.

Second, Paul's motivation for appealing to Caesar appears to be different in the two accounts. In 25:9–11 Paul appeals to Caesar because he rejects Festus's offer to send him back to Jerusalem for trial, whereas in 28:18–19 Paul says he appealed to Caesar because the Jews objected to the Roman inclination to *release* him.

The first step in making sense of these differences is to note that Acts 28:17–19 is a brief summary of events that were narrated at greater length in 25:6–12. In answer to the first difference, it was likely obvious to onlookers that Festus regarded Paul as innocent long before he actually said as much. The chapter 25 account did not bother to make this explicit, whereas Paul has simply chosen to bring this out in his account in chapter 28. The second difference is more challenging. A possible solution is that the Jews, knowing that Festus held Paul to be innocent, foresaw that a trial in Jerusalem conducted by Festus would inevitably end in Paul's release. Thus both Paul and the Jews may have desired

for Paul to be sent on to Rome rather than go to trial in Jerusalem. If so, the accounts are compatible.

Citation of Isaiah 6:9–10 **(28:26–27):** Paul uses the words of Isaiah 6:9–10 and attributes them ultimately to the Holy Spirit, who originally addressed them to an earlier generation that Paul calls "your fathers" (Acts 3:25; 7:51–52; cf. 13:32–33; 26:6). Paul now separates himself from those who reject the way of God, since it was "your" fathers who were warned originally by Isaiah. Now this generation risks repetition of their error. Paul speaks like a prophet here, warning them about their rejection.

Questions arise about whether Paul quoted and applied Isaiah's text accurately. The cited passage agrees with the LXX with these exceptions: (1) In Acts the phrase "to the people" is connected to "go," rather than to "say" as in Isaiah. This difference, however, does not affect the meaning at all, since the audience is the same in both cases. (2) Also, Acts has finite verbs instead of imperatives for "make dull," "blind," and "closed." It presents the passage as describing something that has occurred instead of as a strict prediction, because this is how the matter has in fact turned out. The alterations make the application clearer. Isaiah 6:9–10 is a traditional Christian text, used in Matthew 13:14–15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; John 12:39–40; and Romans 11:8 (also Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 12.2; 33.1; 69.4). The form of the citation matches Matthew's version.

Israel's heart, mind, and eyes are closed to the proclamation of God coming from his prophet. Israel's problem is a dull heart. The verb *epachunthē* in verse 27 literally means "has grown fat" or "thick" and pictures a heart so full that it is unresponsive (BAGD 638 §2; BDAG 790). Nothing can penetrate it to its core. Their ears falter as well, since hearing has become difficult. The term *bareōs* (heavy) is used only twice in the NT (Matt 13:15, where Isaiah 6 is cited as well). The ears are pictured as tired and too weighed down to function. Paul also notes closed eyes. No sensory part of the person is responding. The dullness of the people has prevented their being responsive and turning to God for healing. Turning to God (*epistrepsōsin*) is the response that is lacking. Such turning would heal them, but they refuse to do so.

God was predicting their response through Isaiah. He told the fathers through the picture of Isaiah's call and ministry that they were stubborn, hearing a divine report but not understanding, seeing but not really perceiving. The pair of negative particles (*ou mē*) appears twice in verse 26. They are emphatic in force. Paul cites the passage to warn the audience that the nation of Israel is falling into

the national pattern of not believing and of reflecting hardheartedness. Paul is like Isaiah, and the present Jewish community is like the ancient nation. This warning fits the pattern of Acts 13, where Paul is associated with Isaiah's servant, but it is not a permanent rejection of the nation. Paul still preaches to anyone who might hear (vv. 30–31). In addition, the rebuke is much like that in 13:41, which cites Habakkuk 1:5. It is a prophetic warning (cf. Tannehill 1985; Moessner 1988; Moessner 1989b) that to refuse to hear the word is to risk reaching a point where it will never be heard (Marshall 1980, 425).

The result is expressed with a solemn call (v. 28) to understand what is taking place: "Let it be known to you" (Acts 2:14; 4:10; 13:38). Salvation goes to the Gentiles (Isa 40:5; Pss 67:2 [66:3 LXX]; 98:3 [97:3 LXX]; Acts 1:8; 10:1–11:18; 13:46–47; 18:6). They will hear the message and respond. Here Paul appears to be baiting Israel's people with this prophetic warning in the hope of making them jealous (Rom 11:11–12, 25–32) or prodding them not to be disobedient to God.

Textual issue in Acts 28:29: This verse, which is in brackets, is not well attested for the original text of Acts. It is missing in p^{74}, א, A, B, E, and Ψ, and so it is marked off from the rest of the translation. It has the Jews disputing among themselves as they depart from Paul's place, reading, "After he said these things, the Jews departed, while engaging in a prolonged debate among themselves." The reading is in Byz and in the Itala MSS.

Why does Acts end without mentioning Paul's fate? The book of Acts ends on a note of triumph. It is a final summary like the closing of earlier units (6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20). Paul, even though imprisoned, lives at his own expense and receives any who would visit him. The word of God, having reached Rome, is now going forth.

Luke famously does not disclose Paul's fate as the book ends. Some say this is because at the time of writing Paul's fate had yet to be decided. Witherington (1998, 807–9) treats the various views and specifically rejects the idea that Luke writes in about AD 62, at a time when Paul's fate was still undecided.

If Luke wrote Acts at a time after Paul's fate was revealed, his reason for silence on the matter cannot be conclusively known, but possibilities of how the imprisonment turned out and why Luke ended his book this way can be explored:

First, the idea that Luke contemplated writing a third volume in which he would disclose Paul's fate has much against it. Luke 21:12–19 predicts

persecutions will come to the early believers, a natural set-up for the narration of early church history in the book of Acts. In contrast, nothing in Acts gives any indication that Luke intends to take the story further. And of course there is the fact that no third book exists or was ever cited.

Second, the idea that Paul was released after a few years because his accusers failed to appear is unlikely, for this view is based on the improper dating of papyri that supposedly describe such a legal situation. Bruce (1990, 541) covers the discussion, as does Sherwin-White (1963, 112–19). Fitzmyer (1998, 796–97) appears to hold out for this option in the mention of the two-year stay, citing Claudius's example in Dio Cassius, *Rom. Hist.* 60.28.6. The later examples appear in Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* 10.56.4 and 10.57.2, and Philo, *Flaccus* 16 §128. Johnson (1992, 473) notes the same texts but argues that they cannot support the point. What would this option mean for Luke's conclusion to Acts? It would mean that the inquiry died for lack of interest, and so Luke did not mention it. However, if this happened, surely Luke would have had a great closing argument for Paul's innocence, a point that Acts had argued all along.

Third, some say that Luke knew that Paul was executed during his imprisonment but that this outcome was too negative for him to mention. Haenchen (1987, 732), for instance, argues that Luke's ending for Acts presupposes Paul's martyrdom but Luke did not wish to end on a note about martyrdom. Conzelmann (1987, 228) agrees with Haenchen, citing the farewell speech at Miletus. However, evidence from *1 Clement* 5.5–7 and Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 2.22) suggests that Paul did not die as a result of this inquiry, but that he instead lived through this imprisonment and was executed in a separate event in the late sixties, about the same time as Peter. Further, against Haenchen and Conzelmann is the fact that the account of Stephen's martyrdom in Acts 7 shows that Luke is willing to exalt a martyred figure.

A fourth view says Luke chose to end his book here because his goal was to narrate the arrival of the Gospel to the highest levels of Rome, the seat of world power. The book's ending is open-ended with respect to the future of the Jewish nation because the church is still preaching the word to whomever will hear it (Witherington 1998, 809). This was the key point Luke wanted to achieve in Acts, justifying his silence about Paul's eventual demise if in fact he knew of it as he finished the book. This is the best explanation for the ending of Acts, and it fits with the relationship between Acts and the dating of the Gospels, as mentioned in the Introduction.

The Book of Acts in Summary

The book of Acts is a book of witnesses to the risen Jesus. God is the primary witness, acting on Jesus' behalf and giving the Spirit through Jesus to his witnesses. The book ends with one of the key witnesses living out his calling despite having suffered unjustly. We see the continued tragic nature of Jewish unbelief, yet Paul continues to keep an open door to anyone who will listen to him and consider his message. Paul loves the Jews who persecute him and views them as brothers who have lost their way. We see what makes for good evangelism: (1) a confidence and readiness to share because God is sovereign, (2) a focus on God and God's kingdom program through Jesus, (3) an open door to any who will hear, and (4) a recognition that evangelism and mission are a priority, even the fundamental calling of the church in the world (Fernando 1998, 628–32). Nothing, including prison, persecution, or possible death, has hindered Paul's ability to minister and preach the message. We are to marvel at how God has protected Paul and accomplished his word (Stott 1990, 402). We also can see in this book that Paul suffered well. He kept the faith and continued to serve, living out his call.

All of this is the work of an active God. God has been directing events throughout the book. God set forth the call for the mission. God gave the Spirit. God directed the church to the Gentiles. God called out Paul with Barnabas and then sent Paul to Jerusalem and Rome. God protected Paul as he brought the word there as God's faithful witness. God can be trusted, and his calling is to be followed. Paul shows us that the combination of divine aid and a disciple's faithfulness to God's calling is powerful.

The theological premise of Acts is that Jesus is Lord of all, and so the gospel can go to all. Luke's message is this: be reassured; the unhindered progress of God's word about salvation to all people is occurring by God's direction, fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ, according to the long-revealed promise of Scripture to Israel—and despite opposition. The new religion is really an old one, rooted in God's promise and direction. The word will get out. In fact, despite all the obstacles we see in Acts, the book ends with the gospel going out unhindered, for wherever the gospel is shared, there is offered an open door to the presence of God, no matter how tension-filled or restricted life is. God is the hero of Acts, and the plot line is how he reveals his word through Jesus and a faithful church. God will make sure it happens, and so will a faithful church. The witnesses who are faithful support the hero of the story and his plan.

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