

ABOUT JESUS

**THE DISCIPLE'S HANDBOOK
AND STUDY GUIDE**

By Rev. Dr. Steven C. Brown

-The Life and continuing ministry of Jesus Christ, Messiah-

Pure Christianity Series: Volume #2

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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This book is dedicated first of all to our merciful Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and after Him I dedicate this book to everyone who helped to make it available to those who might learn from it and to my helpmate and the woman God gave to me, my wife, Marilyn.

To God goes all the glory, praise and honor for He alone is worthy.

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PREFACE

“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.”

Hebrews 1:1-4 NASB

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through Him. He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light. There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

John 1:1-14 NASB

The previous verses from the Holy Bible are perhaps a true mystery to those who are not followers of Jesus Christ. They may ask the question: "Who is this Jesus Christ?" or perhaps: "How can a man be both God and man?" They are not alone in asking these questions. The religious experts and others that knew Jesus during His life on earth asked similar questions, such as: "Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And His sisters are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?"

Matthew 13: 55, 56 NASB

Now the "things" that those asking the questions were referring to are mentioned in the verses previous to the ones just quoted: "He came to His hometown and began teaching them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" Matthew 13:54 NASB. Jesus of course knew that this was a bold step to take even in His hometown and around those that had known Him for some time, and Scripture testifies to their reaction: "And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in His own household." "And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief."

Matthew 13:57,58. NASB.

As believers, we spend a great deal of time in prayer and reading Holy Scripture. But is that enough? Is it enough to be prepared to answer the questions that non-believers and skeptics may present to us? We each have our own, personal view of Who Jesus Christ is in our own understanding, but can you explain to someone what it was that Jesus did before He was born a babe in a manger in Bethlehem? The Gospel of John tells us that Jesus is the Word, and that Word was with God in the beginning, not only after he came in the flesh. What else can we do so that we might recognize the man whom we have come to call Jesus Christ and Whom we have come to believe upon as the Lord and Savior of all that there is, has been and ever will be. I pray that this book might somehow help you come ever closer to that man...The God-man, know as Jesus Christ, Son of God, Son of man, Lord and Savior, Immanuel, Prince of Peace, Kings of Kings, Commander of the Heavenly Host, Lord of Lords and Messiah.

I know that my vision of Christ has changed over the years, as I am sure that yours has as well. We need to reach deep into our hearts and our prayerful communications with our Father to show us what He would have us to know. As our Lord sits at the right hand of the Father in His place of honor and with a Name above all names, we have the presence of His Holy Spirit to guide us and direct us, and to teach us in ways that no earthly teacher could ever accomplish.

As always, I ask God for the wisdom to understand the knowledge that He has for me in His Holy Bible, and the wisdom that He can supernaturally impart upon me to be able to apply that wisdom to my daily walk and the ministry that He has so graciously given me...a ministry that I am ever grateful for and ever-humbled by. It is a distinct honor to serve my Lord and Savior in any way He sees fit, and I eagerly walk toward that final goal with Him securely at my side.

The first few pages of this book are a collection of my early poetry and prose about Jesus and an example of more recent material, after which, we will gladly go swiftly into the Holy Scripture in search of that person we so lovingly call, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, and sit at His feet while we listen to Him.

“About Jesus...The Man”

“In speaking to a young friend today,
I accidentally told him of some real feelings I have,
about Jesus...the man.
“It’s amazing,” I told Bruce, but most people
won’t admit to the fact,
that Jesus was a man...a real man.
That He walked about the people of His land,
...and He touched them.
And when He walked,
His feet did actually touch the ground.
And He could feel the rocks
and the earth beneath Him.
And the blades of grass that He sat upon,
...when He tired.
For He too, must have become tired,
from time to time,
as He traveled the great distances
His Father asked of Him.
And Jesus, the man...must have cried,
for I am sure that He must have witnessed
a great many things
that were not as His Father had wished them
to be.
When they crucified my Savior,
...He bled.
And He questioned His Father
as to why this had
to be?
And He looked down from His cross,
and witnessed all there was
to see:
The soldiers,
the people,
the rain and the lightening
swelling in the sky above
Him.
And I am sure that He must have been able
to smell the fear...radiating
from those that knew Him as Jesus,
...the Savior,

and those that did not know Him at all.
For they all knew that He would die...
and they all knew why.
...Though they might not admit it.
And Jesus, the man,
Jesus the Savior,
Jesus...the Son of God the Almighty,
looked down upon all that had placed Him
upon the Cross,
and said:
“Forgive them Father,
for they know not
what they do.”
And Mother Mary cried,
for Jesus was Her Son,
and She loved Him.

And Bruce, my friend...did not ask for this,
but he was glad.
And as he shook my hand,
...he smiled.”

JESUS

-A Little Story About A Big Man-

What do we know about Jesus? Was He a man, or God? Or was He...is He, both? Did He just come to earth as a babe in a manger, to grow and become a famous Teacher, or was He more?

Many things are said about this great "Rabbi", but is there yet more to be said? Could He possibly have been more than even a great Prophet? Could He be the Messiah, Yeshua? Could He be the One who was promised for so long, and His quiet voice went basically unheard?

He was not the mighty King in a grand palace that David and Solomon were, for He lived a modest life and did not seek to acquire the things that men desire, yet is it possible that He actually possessed more than all?

Jesus' life was short and full of turmoil, yet He taught of a peace that was beyond anything we might ever imagine. He spoke softly, yet was declared a radical, a rebel...even a blasphemer. For He believed that it was better to do good than evil, at any cost. At any consequence.

Some of the most powerful and wealthy revered Him, and some even feared Him...but they all noticed Him. He who spoke without raising His voice caught the attention of the mighty with His gentle whisper.

And, He was truly loved...by sinner and by saint, by the righteous and by the unrighteous. He didn't need to ask for their affection. They gave it to Him. And He gladly received it. How could such a man be loved by so many, and continue to be so loved even today...while at the same time, continue to also be a stumbling block for those who ultimately fear Him?

He was born a babe of humble parents in a lowly stable in a crowded village. A birth that would normally have gone unnoticed in our time. But God set Him apart from all earthly things, and angels from the Heavenly Father announced His birth to even the shepherds in the fields.

God sent rich and powerful men of wisdom to this tiny baby to welcome Him and pay tribute to the One sent from above. Perhaps they expected to find Him in a castle, surrounded by royalty, but they found the tiny babe of a Jewish carpenter,

betrothed to a virgin, who had been especially blessed by God Almighty, a miracle.

His parents were poor but proud, and by the time the Child had grown to a youth, He, Himself, would teach His elders with authority. From where could He have received such wisdom? For His wisdom, even as a youth, surpassed that of His learned listeners, who had studied in earnest all of their lives. This must surely have puzzled them, for this was a miracle, and not mortal.

And as this gifted young man grew, little was recorded about His youth. It must have been a relatively quiet time in His life, where as a faithful and loving Son, He no doubt tended to His family's needs as other children were born into the family. He, being the eldest child, surely had many responsibilities, and His earthly father, Joseph, disappeared from record early in Jesus' life.

By the time Jesus had reached manhood, He was giving His life entirely to ministering to the people...especially the common people and those who were ill and lonely. This ministry was truly selfless and created many hardships for Jesus. But Jesus was totally committed to teach the people about the love and mercy of His Heavenly Father.

He spoke with such authority about God, that the people were completely in awe. They had never heard anyone speak that way. Is it possible that Jesus was not speaking as we do, in second-person...rather, Jesus spoke as One who knew God, personally? He told them that He had seen the Father, and had spoken with Him...and if they knew Him, they would also know the Father. For He said that they were one in the same.

Many of the people could not understand or accept what He was saying. They even called Him a blasphemer, and would eventually crucify Him for committing what they considered to be a grievous sin. But this threat did not deter Jesus. In the face of the threat of death, He showed no fear. This carpenter's Son was no coward, and even when He was placed up against seemingly insurmountable odds, His courage came by divine appointment.

Jesus' heart continuously went out to the poor, the ill, and those in all kinds of need. He gave them comfort. He healed them of their illnesses. He gave them hope for an eternal future, in a time when there was little hope and much confusion. Jesus provides that hope, even today, so many years after His death on the cross.

Jesus told His followers: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No man comes unto the Father except through me." (John 14:6) And as He placed Himself as an equal to God, the Father, they decided to kill Him. And as He hung upon the cross awaiting His imminent death, He even promised the criminal hanging next

to Him, eternal life...and, He asked His Father to forgive all those who had placed Him on the cross, because they truly didn't realize what they were doing.

And after He died as a man and was buried in a tomb, God did just what He had promised to do, and raised Him up to Heaven to be with Him, again. Was Jesus just a babe in a manger, or has He always been with us? The Gospel of John says: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Jesus is also known as the Word of God. And skeptics still wonder how all these things can be, and don't understand. But they will, someday. Thank you, Jesus.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen.

JESUS...“THE” MYSTERY OF GOD

Many things of God are a mystery to us, even those things that He has revealed in His Word, the Holy Bible. But the greatest mystery is the Son, Jesus Christ. This book has attempted to investigate The Mystery of God in several areas of interest, and I hope and pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal to you that which He desires you to know.

I truly hope that you enjoy this work that the Holy Spirit has led me to become involved with, and I will start this journey with an overview of a few selected New Testament Scriptures. Jesus often spoke in parables, which were confusing and a mystery to unbelievers in themselves. This He did intentionally because these mysteries (secrets/truths) of God are intended only for believers to understand:

“The disciples came to him and asked, ‘Why do you speak to the people in parables?’ He replied, ‘The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables: Though seeing, they do not see, though hearing, they do not understand.’”

Matthew 13:11 NIV

This thought He restated in the Gospel of Mark:

“He told them, “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that:

‘they may be ever seeing but never perceiving,
and ever hearing but never understanding;
otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!’ ”

Mark 4:11 NIV

And once again in the Gospel of Luke:

“He said, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, “Though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand,” ”

Luke 8:10 NIV

In these passages we see that not everyone will understand what the Kingdom of God is all about. As New Testament believers we have the company of the Holy

Spirit to guide us and direct us in understanding the secret(s) of the Kingdom of God, both the millennial kingdom which will gloriously be shown to us at the second coming of our Lord and Savior, and the kingdom of Jesus Christ that we presently experience on earth along with our fellow believers.

Our “kingdom on earth” (with Jesus in our lives) is a foreshadowing of the glorious kingdom that we will reside in when our time is fulfilled. Jesus explains beautifully to us that this kingdom is found in our hearts in the following passages and not of this “world” which is, of course, ruled by the evil one, Satan. Our earthly kingdom is only a temporary one which prepares us for the eternal kingdom, which awaits us:

“Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come,” Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.”

Luke 17:20-21 NIV

This Scripture may depart from some peoples’ belief that the kingdom is only a future place that we will experience at or after the second coming of our sweet Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus. I reaffirm a basic belief of mine, and many others, that the Holy Scripture is inerrant and infallible...meaning quite simply, that if God did not intend for it to be there, He wouldn’t have written it there. The following is a quote from the NIV version of the DISCIPLES’ STUDY BIBLE by Holman on this particular passage:

“17:20-21 THE CHURCH, God’s Kingdom-In Jesus, the kingdom of God is a present reality. Speculation about the coming of the kingdom may blind us to presence of the kingdom now. Only those who let Jesus control their lives now are ready for the kingdom to come in its fulfillment. See note on Mt. 3:2.”

We find as we go back to the Gospel of Matthew, this same subject of the kingdom” is discussed, but since those listening were a Jewish audience, John chose not to call the kingdom he was speaking about, the kingdom of God, but rather the kingdom of heaven. We know that the Jews were eager to accuse anyone of blasphemy if they associated themselves to God, (to put themselves on an equal level with God) as Jesus did, which ultimately was one of the main accusations the Jews had against Jesus. John’s choice of words was not a denial of the Lord, but rather a safeguard until a more appropriate time for that discussion:

“In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near.” This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

'A voice of one calling in the desert, prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.' "

Matthew 3:1,2 NIV

Now Jesus almost seems to contradict the above Scripture by His comments to Pilate in the Gospel of John as Pilate was questioning Him as to whether He was a king of the Jews, and wanting to know just what Jesus was supposed to have done wrong since Pilate didn't really want to deal with Him:

"Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."

John 18:36 NIV

Careful observation of the conversation in this passage will show you that Jesus was very specific in the words He chose to speak to Pilate. He said, "But now my kingdom is from another place." He had told us earlier that the kingdom was in our hearts, and we know that He represents the kingdom of God, but to those who chose to deny Him they cannot understand the kingdom nor will they be allowed into His kingdom. For His kingdom is in another place from wherever they are.

If you would like to hear more of what our Savior, Jesus Christ, had to say about the kingdom, specifically, please read chapter 13 of the Gospel of Matthew. The following passage from Romans is truly a mystery for many, in that it deals with the state of Israel at the end times. It speaks of the hardening (resistance to Christ) of Israel until the full number of Gentiles has come in (to the Church). Then the covenant that God had promised to the Patriarchs would be fulfilled when He shows mercy on the previously disobedient, and the body of Christ, or the Church, becomes truly unified in belief:

"I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:

"The deliverer will come from Zion;
he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.
And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

As far as the Gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account;

But as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the Patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.

Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience,

so they too have become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you.
For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all."

Romans 11:25-32 NIV

In Paul's doxology for Romans, chapter 16, he speaks of the mystery being revealed through Christ Jesus that had been hidden for years. The prophets had spoken of the coming Messiah and Jesus fulfilled those prophecies, revealing the mystery of God through Himself so that the people might come to Him and believe.

"Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him—to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ!
Amen."

Romans 16:25-27 NIV

In the beginning of this study, I quoted 1 Corinthians 2:6-10 from the King James Version of the Holy Bible. I will now quote from the NIV version including more of the context of this passage so we might see the wisdom that God gives us through His Spirit. This is truly a wonderful, mysterious gift that is available only to the believer. Paul illustrates well how previously he was not an eloquent speaker, but with the power of the Holy Spirit he could minister with authority by the power of God:

"When I came to you brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power. We do however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. "No eye has seen, nor ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him." But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment:

"For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we do have the mind of Christ."

I Corinthians 2:1-16 NIV

In chapter four of 1 Corinthians, Paul speaks in reference to the Apostles. He reminds us that they are servants of God and have been entrusted with the "secret things" of God. This is a very special entrusting by God and those blessed with these "secrets" will be held accountable to God, and not to man, for God knows the heart, or motives of each man:

"So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God."

I Corinthians 4:1-5 NIV

Chapter thirteen of I Corinthians speaks of love, primarily, but Paul mentions that it is a gift of prophecy to understand all the mysteries but even with this gift and with all knowledge and even speaking in tongues, they are worthless if one is without love:

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."

I Corinthians 13:1-3 NIV

Now that we've stumbled onto the gifts of prophecy and speaking in tongues, let's see which is more important, and why:

“Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. For anyone who speak in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit. But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.”

I Corinthians 14:1-5 NIV.

Another mystery is the mystery of the resurrection body. This is explained in chapter 15 of I Corinthians, and the fact that some of us may still be alive when the rapture, or second coming occurs, while the others (believers) will be “sleeping.” Our bodies will become new and imperishable, since we will experience heaven in a spiritual state rather than a mortal state. As Christians and followers of Jesus Christ, we know and believe that Jesus died and was resurrected from the dead. He did have a body that others saw, especially Thomas, as Jesus revealed the wounds He had received during the crucifixion. He was transfigured before the Apostles’ eyes so that they might get a glimpse of His glorified body. I believe this was also done so that even we might have some sort of idea of what is in store for us when we receive our glorified, or “spiritual body.”:

“But someone may ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?” How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another, and star differs from star in splendor. So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power, it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those of who are of the earth; and as the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven. I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood

cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true:

“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”
“Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?”

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”

I Corinthians 15:35-58 NIV.

The mystery of God’s will is accomplished through the Son, Jesus Christ. Which, as the following Scriptures advise, when the times have reached their fulfillment, all things in heaven and on earth will come together under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. As other Scripture tells us:

“Every knee shall bow...every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”

Philippians 2:10,11 NIV

“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.”

Ephesians 1:4-10 NIV.

“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace, that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and

prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence."

Ephesians 3:1-12 NIV.

"After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church-for we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his mother and be united to his wife, and the two become one flesh." This is a profound mystery-but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each of you must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband."

Ephesians 5:29-33 NIV.

WHEN JESUS SPOKE

-The Journey Begins-

As eager students of the Word of God, we study the great works of men and women led by God. But we must never lose sight of the source of their inspiration...that which is of God. And God walked upon our earth alongside men and women and shared His earthly life and love with them. God in man's clothing. Oh, to share a meal with our Lord and Savior or sit at His feet as He taught...as He spoke.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And also in the beginning, was the Word. And the Word was with God and the Word was God. Before God created anything, He first spoke. We also know from Holy Scripture that the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us.

It is my intent with this particular study, to recount the biblical passages where Jesus, Himself, spoke. Hence, the title of this work. I also believe that it may be the intent of the Holy Spirit to provide us, the readers, with a fresh insight into the power and glory and majesty of our Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus, as He spoke these words to us...His little children.

Aside from the times when Jesus verbally spoke, we will also review the many marvelous and miraculous ways in which He ministered on earth without saying a single word. The multitudes were blessed in His presence just by His being there or merely passing by. People were somehow miraculously healed by only touching the garments He wore.

As we begin our study of the life and continuing ministry of Jesus, we must realize that He had to have had a mission, or Divine Plan, to accomplish during His time with us before He would return to His Father in heaven. We know that our Savior provided the atoning sacrifice for our sins, as only the Perfect Lamb of God could do. We also know that He is the Way, the Truth and the Life; and that no one comes to the Father except through Him.

Jesus provided the spiritual route we will take to the Father after our existence on earth is completed, thus also providing for our eternal salvation. And He has promised to prepare a place for us, in advance. This place is already reserved. So what was this Divine Plan for Jesus? Jesus briefly quoted a portion of it in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 4, verses 16-22. This portion is a quote from the larger mission that the prophet Isaiah wrote of Him, so many years in advance of His first coming, and we can find it in the book of Isaiah, chapter 61.

These passages allow us insight into the Father's Divine Plan for His Son, the Messiah. The entire Old Testament foreshadows the coming of the Messiah, the Chosen One, and these references are a fitting place to begin our journey:

"And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD." And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, "Is this not Joseph's son?"

Luke 4:16-22. NASB

What a beautiful picture this is of our Lord and Savior. Of His humble and unassuming posture before others, yet with such power behind the words that He spoke. In this passage we realize that it was commonplace for Jesus to come into the synagogues on the Sabbath and read to those who were assembled.

What was obviously different about this particular Sabbath, was that the passage that Jesus read was about Himself and He spoke with a boldness and certainty as if He were not just the person whom He had always appeared to the others, but was indeed much more than that. He was the Person that the prophet Isaiah had prophesied would come. The Messiah.

What relevance could this incident in Jesus' life play in our own lives as modern-day Christians? The truth is, when we were born again, we probably appeared outwardly as the same person that our families and friends have known for our whole lives, but when we speak, especially when we speak the words of God, others probably wonder what has changed. Aren't we still the same person though we may speak and act somehow differently? No! We are new creations! Praise the Lord!

And those in the Synagogue who witnessed Jesus saying these words of the prophecy and telling them that in their hearing, this Scripture was fulfilled, were likewise surprised that someone they thought they knew could say that He was more, much more than just an ordinary man. Jesus continued to speak to them, and they continued to increase in their unwillingness to learn from the lesson He was ultimately trying to teach them:

"And He said to them, "No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.'" And He said, "Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown. "But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, *in the land* of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. "And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." And all *the people* in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; and they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, He went His way."

Luke 4:23-30. NASB

The congregation refused to listen to Jesus' message so that they might realize that, 1) with His coming, things would change; that 2) more than just a few people would be healed, and that 3) the old ways had passed with His coming, and that 4) all of the events and miracles that had been promised about the Messiah were about to happen, very soon. Not only did they refuse to listen to His message, they were so much in their fleshly thinking that they thoroughly intended to kill their own Messiah, immediately! But Jesus merely passed through the midst of an angry mob, and went on about His Father's business. They represented no real obstacle in His path.

When Jesus made reference to even a portion of this passage in Isaiah, it was common knowledge that He also was referring to all of the passage in the same way that is Jewish custom when speaking of a person's hand, in actuality reference is made to the whole arm. Let us review the context of this passage in the Book of Isaiah, the Prophet of God, so that we might better understand the circumstances and emotions of Jesus' reading in the Synagogue on that particular Sabbath:

"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners; To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, To grant those who mourn *in Zion*, Giving them a garland instead of ashes, The oil of gladness instead of mourning, The mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified. Then they will rebuild the ancient ruins, They will raise up the former devastations; And they will repair the ruined cities, The desolations of many generations. Strangers will stand and pasture your flocks, And foreigners will be your farmers and your vinedressers. But you will be called the priests of the LORD; You will be spoken of as ministers of our God. You will

eat the wealth of nations, And in their riches you will boast. Instead of your shame *you will have a double portion*, And *instead of* humiliation they will shout for joy over their portion. Therefore they will possess a double *portion* in their land, Everlasting joy will be theirs. For I, the LORD, love justice, I hate robbery in the burnt offering; And I will faithfully give them their recompense And make an everlasting covenant with them. Then their offspring will be known among the nations, And their descendants in the midst of the peoples. All who see them will recognize them Because they are the offspring *whom* the LORD has blessed. I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, My soul will exult in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, And as a garden causes the things sown in it to spring up, So the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise To spring up before all the nations.”

Isaiah 61:1-11. NASB

Surely, there is much in this chapter of Isaiah that upset those who listened to Jesus read in the Synagogue. He was referring to Himself as the promised Messiah, no longer a mortal man, yet they only knew Him as the son of Joseph, a Jewish carpenter. Obviously they had expected something much different from what they were seeing before them that Sabbath day. They had been expecting a king who would restore the nation of Israel, not a carpenter's son. In order to fulfill what God had asked of Jesus, He would face tremendous opposition and suffer in ways that no human being could be expected to survive. Isaiah prophesied about the kinds of opposition and suffering the Messiah would be subjected to, and in our efforts to come to a much more intimate, personal relationship with our Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus, let's review this famous Messianic passage:

“Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted. Just as many were astonished at you, *My people*, So His appearance was marred more than any man And His form more than the sons of men. Thus He will sprinkle many nations, Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him; For what had not been told them they will see, And what they had not heard they will understand. Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no *stately* form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But

the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke *was due*? His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting *Him* to grief; If He would render Himself *as* a guilt offering, He will see *His* offspring, He will prolong *His* days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see *it and* be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.”

Isaiah 52:13-53:12. NASB

The man pictured in this passage is certainly not what was expected. The people were expecting a king, while God told His prophet Isaiah, just how the Righteous One would appear. He would not appear in regal garments like those of a king, rather, “He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.” He would not be overly handsome nor homely. Probably more of an average appearance, in reality.

Over the years and centuries, artists have painted and sculpted a likeness of Jesus led by their inspirations since there were no tangible references for them to use as models. All the while, Jesus may have looked like every other man His age and from His region. We may now have a reference available to us, in the image upon the Shroud of Turin. Whether you believe the Shroud of Turin could be the burial cloth of Jesus, Himself, is not the point in this example. The image portrayed on the shroud is representative of a man from Jesus’ region and age-range that was a victim of scourging and crucifixion that is consistent with biblical references of this type of execution.

The image upon this shroud has withstood painstaking scientific investigations, and as yet, the scientists cannot rationalize a scientific explanation for the miraculous appearance of the face and figure of a man that could possibly be that of Jesus Christ. The only possible rational explanation for this miraculous transference of a photographic-type of image that is actually embedded in the linen that I can imagine, is via the release of the supernatural power and glory when our Lord and Savior was resurrected by God the Father three days after Jesus’ crucifixion and death on the cross at Calvary.

This sudden burst of power would no doubt rival any man-made form of energy, including radioactive or nuclear power because it must have been completely controlled to be manifest only so long as necessary to keep from destroying the fragile linen cloth upon which an image was placed that is truly visible when using the reverse-negative process as in developing photographs. This serves to remind me of the awesome power of our God, the Creator of all things. It seems the more that science tries to disprove the Truths about God, the more they actually prove His being. The more they prove the Truth to be fact, and not fiction.

In this passage of the suffering and glory of the Servant, the prophet forewarned that the Messiah would be “despised” and His own people would “esteem Him not.” But even though “He was crushed for our iniquities” it was “by His scourging (stripes) we are healed.” What an awesome picture of the Good Shepherd in the selfless gift of His own self to atone for all of our sins. For all time. And all we have to do is ask Him into our lives and our hearts, and He will gladly cover our sins with His own blood and also prepare a place for us in Heaven to dwell eternally with Him and His Father and His Holy Spirit.

Thank you, Jesus.

JESUS...THE HIGH PRIEST

In continuing my research, I am realizing that several things need to be considered about the New Testament, itself. Initially noting that the words Jesus spoke are not only quoted in the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; but also in the Acts of the Apostles and the Revelation to John. The first three Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke are known as the “Synoptic” Gospels, and there is a common thread between these three, even though each Gospel was written for and directed to a different group of people. Matthew was directed to the Jews, Mark to the Romans, and Luke to the Greeks.

Some scholars feel that since Mark was probably written first as far as the Gospels are concerned, that there may have been a common or foundational manuscript that was shared between the authors of these Holy books. This common manuscript is referred to as the “Mark-Q Documentary hypothesis.” Nevertheless, many theories abound, but the paramount reality is that all of these Gospels were divinely inspired, regardless also, whether their namesakes personally wrote them or one of their scribes. They are ultimately important contributions to the inerrant, infallible, authoritative Word of God.

It should come as no surprise that the Acts of the Apostles would include quotations from Christ since this book is also lovingly referred to as, “Luke-part two.” Saul at his conversion is only one example of Christ’s miraculous power and presence even after His ascension. (This passage, alone, has touched me deeply in my own spiritual life as you will see.)

The Gospel of John was referred to by one of my Bible College professors as “The most Jewish of the Gospels.” (This professor just happened to also be a Messianic Rabbi.) The Gospel of John along with the Revelation to John were obviously written by “the Disciple whom Jesus loved”, and the Gospel of John is uniquely set amongst the other Gospels in that it contains material which is unique from the Synoptic Gospels. Although John was written to the church, rather than to a specific group of individuals as were the Synoptic Gospels, it certainly retains a very “Jewish” flavor as the reader can truly become involved in the festivities and lifestyle of those whom Jesus ministered to and shared His life on earth.

Jesus was born and raised a Jew, as the Holy Bible tells us, and He was often called “Rabbi” or “Teacher.” Although these positions were well-regarded in the communities and regions where Jesus ministered, He was and is, much more than those titles imply. He is God. But even His closest followers had difficulty in comprehending this through their mortal understanding.

Jesus actually held a much loftier position than “Rabbi” or “Teacher” within the hierarchy of Jewish religious leaders. That position would be as “High Priest.” The people of His time had a High Priest in Caiaphas. He was the leader of the Council, or Sanhedrin. (Mt. 26:57; Lk. 3:2; Jn. 11:49 ff; Acts 4:6.) This is the same High Priest that was involved in the stoning of the martyr Stephen.

The Jews did not recognize Jesus as High Priest, probably because priests came from the Levitical priesthood and Jesus’ priesthood is from another. If the Jews had studied their own records, they would have realized that the prophetic foreshadowing of His eternal High Priesthood in the order of Melchizedek: Gen. 14:18 and Psalm 110:4. We read of this also from the New Testament in Hebrews 5:6,10; 6:20 and 7:1.

We will review these passages so that we might understand their implications toward Jesus’ eternal ministry, which is guaranteed by God, Himself, but for the best possible understanding of any teaching in the Holy Bible, we must always study any passages from the context in which they were written. For example, if we were to study only those direct references to Melchizedek listed above, we would be losing out on a much greater message that I believe was directed at those Jews who may still need to pull themselves away from the old traditions and customs and draw ever nearer to the New Covenant that was provided for them (and all believers) through Jesus Christ.

We need to start our contextual reading from at least a starting point of Hebrews, chapter 6, verse 1. Although there is much speculation on who the actual author of Hebrews is, the theologian, Origen, was known to have said in the third century, that only God knows who wrote Hebrews. Some even say it may have been written by a woman, i.e.) Priscilla, with her husband, Aquila. But this is actually of little significance beyond the fact that it was indeed inspired of God and was recorded for our benefit, because, after all, God knows what He wrote. We, just need to be reminded from time to time, that these are His words:

“Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. And this we will do, if God permits. For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and *then* have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned. But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. For

God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, "I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU." And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. For men swear by one greater *than themselves*, and with them an oath *given* as confirmation is an end of every dispute. In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a *hope* both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

Hebrews 6:1-20 NASB

Chapter six of Hebrews prepares the way for us to better understand Jesus' position as High Priest. When this passage said, "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil" this veil it refers to is the veil at the entrance to the Holy of Holies. This is the area of the Tabernacle which only the High Priest is allowed to enter. This is also the area where the Ark of the Covenant was placed before it disappeared, and the presence of God was known to dwell. This is also the same veil which was torn from the top to the bottom when Jesus was crucified:

"At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split."

Matthew 27:51 NIV.

A note to keep in mind, is that Jesus was always eligible for the priesthood since He was descended from the line of David through the lineage of both of His earthly parents, but God, Himself, ordained Him a High Priest through the order of Melchizedek for specific reasons as we will see while we review Hebrews, chapter seven, and the first seven verses of chapter eight. We will also see that the order of Melchizedek is superior to the Levitical order in the same way that Jesus' name is above all names and that He is superior to the angels. That He is Lord of all, Savior and God:

"For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all *the spoils*, was first of all,

by the translation of *his name*, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace. Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually. Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils. And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest's office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham. But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises. But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater. In this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one *receives them*, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on. And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him. Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need *was there* for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron? For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests. And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become *such* not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. For it is attested of Him, "YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK." For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. And inasmuch as *it was* not without an oath (for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him, "THE LORD HAS SWORN AND WILL NOT CHANGE HIS MIND, 'YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER'"); so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. The *former* priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the *sins* of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, *appoints* a Son, made perfect forever. Now the main point in what has been said *is this*: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. For every

high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this *high priest* also have something to offer. Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned *by God* when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "SEE," He says, "THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN." But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second."

Hebrews 7:1-8:7 NASB

Before we state our many observations from Hebrews, let's review the two Old Testament references to Melchizedek:

"And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. He blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." He gave him a tenth of all."

Genesis 14:18-20 NASB

The following passage contains the Psalm 110:4 reference to Melchizedek, but once again, context is crucial. Actually all of Psalm 110 is a Messianic prophecy and shows the direct relationship of Jesus to Melchizedek. Both were kings of righteousness. Both were directly appointed to priesthood by God Most High, to a priesthood separate from all others. Both Jesus' and Melchizedek's priesthoods are eternal or perpetual. Both served new wine and broke bread. Psalm 110 speaks directly to Christ's ascension after putting His enemies under His feet, and His position at the Father's right hand as Judge and Priest.

Hebrews confirms Christ's position as High Priest and His entering through the veil on our behalf. Hebrews is also confirmation of the fulfillment of the prophecies in Psalm 110. For Jesus said:

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill."

Matthew 5:17 NASB

As we review Psalm 110, please keep these observations in mind and pray also that the Holy Spirit might open your eyes and your heart to the message He was attempting to foretell His people Israel about the promised Messiah. It is likewise important to note that this Psalm was given to a shepherd boy who was to become a mighty king:

"A Psalm of David. The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet." The LORD will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, *saying*, "Rule in the midst of Your enemies." Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power; In holy array, from the womb of the dawn, Your youth are to You as the dew. The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek." The Lord is at Your right hand; He will shatter kings in the day of His wrath. He will judge among the nations, He will fill *them* with corpses, He will shatter the chief men over a broad country. He will drink from the brook by the wayside; Therefore He will lift up *His* head."

Psalm 110:1-7 NASB

Now that we have established Christ's eternal priesthood, we can be certain that as a High Priest, He is certainly equipped to teach His apostles and disciples. Also knowing that this is an eternal or perpetual priesthood, He, Christ, will always be our High Priest. Going back to Hebrews 13:8, we also find this assurance: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." Therefore, how do we apply the knowledge of Christ's High Priesthood to our lives as followers of Him? Let's open our Bibles to the First Letter of the Apostle Peter, chapter 2:

"Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For *this* is contained in Scripture: "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER *stone*, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER *stone*," and, "A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this *doom* they were also appointed. But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God's* OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY. Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation. Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human

institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. *Act* as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but *use it* as bondslaves of God. Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king. Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this *finds* favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.”

1 Peter 2:1-25 NASB

JESUS...THE TEACHER

“Whom Do I Follow”

Many people might believe that since they are essentially good, and that they go about their lives doing good for others that surely they would be welcome in heaven. But unfortunately for them, this is not the case. Jesus was very specific in His teaching on who will go to heaven in the passage that follows:

“Jesus *said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”

John 14:6 NASB

Those that follow Jesus are guaranteed a place in heaven, and we have that assurance from Jesus' own words found in the Gospel of John:

"Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, *there* you may be also.”

John 14:1-3 NASB

Jesus began His instruction to the Apostles while they were yet in the early stages of their discipleship, as we read in the Gospel of Matthew:

“From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He *said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.”

Matthew 4:17-20 NASB

Jesus again reinforced His command to follow Him as He spoke particularly toward Peter's remarks in Matthew, chapter 16. Peter just couldn't accept what Jesus was telling His disciples about His imminent death and resurrection:

“From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid *it*, Lord! This shall never happen to You." But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.”

Matthew 16:21-23 NASB

Then Jesus turned His attention back to all of the disciples who were gathered together with Him, and He explained that each of them would need to make a personal sacrifice to follow Him. This present sacrifice would pale in the rewards they would receive when Christ returned in all His glory:

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.”

Matthew 15:24-27 NASB

Of course there were many more followers of Jesus than the original twelve disciples. On one occasion, Jesus was teaching a group of followers along with the Twelve after He had waited to get away from the huge crowd that had gathered by the sea. Jesus had been teaching this large crowd using parables, and had done so from a boat because He needed to distance Himself enough to be able to teach. It had gotten too crowded due to the large numbers of people who had gathered to hear Him. This more private teaching began with Jesus explaining why He was teaching the masses by using parables. We read about this incident from the Gospel of Mark:

“And He was saying, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." As soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, *began* asking Him *about* the parables. And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, so that WHILE SEEING, THEY MAY SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE, AND WHILE HEARING, THEY MAY HEAR AND NOT UNDERSTAND, OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT RETURN AND BE FORGIVEN."

Mark 4:9-12 NASB

You see, the masses were taught in parables, which might have seemed a true mystery to them, and not as easily understood as the direct teaching that Jesus was administering to His chosen students:

“With many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it; and He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples.”

Mark 4:33-34 NASB

The passage that Jesus used to illustrate His teaching on the use of parables refers back to Isaiah, chapter 6, and by His quoting this passage, He was also fulfilling the prophecy within it:

“Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I. Send me!” He said, “Go, and tell this people: ‘Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.’”

Isaiah 6:8-9 NASB

And again, this prophecy can be even more beautifully confirmed in Isaiah, chapter 43, so that more of the Divine plan for our Savior might be better understood:

“Bring out the people who are blind, even though they have eyes, And the deaf, even though they have ears. All the nations have gathered together So that the peoples may be assembled. Who among them can declare this And proclaim to us the former things? Let them present their witnesses that they may be justified, Or let them hear and say, “It is true.” “You are My witnesses,” declares the LORD, “And My servant whom I have chosen, So that you may know and believe Me And understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, And there will be none after Me. “I, even I, am the LORD, And there is no savior besides Me. “It is I who have declared and saved and proclaimed, And there was no strange *god* among you; So you are My witnesses,” declares the LORD, “And I am God. “Even from eternity I am He, And there is none who can deliver out of My hand; I act and who can reverse it?”

Isaiah 43:8-13 NASB

Sometimes when the Spirit leads me to a particular passage or group of passages, I find myself nearly speechless. The beauty of God’s eternal plan for our salvation simply overwhelms my meager, mortal mind; and I am taken back to quietly ponder the true message in God’s Holy Word.

We will move on now with this train of thought, and listen to our Lord teaching at the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, found in the Gospel of John, chapter 10. This particular passage is pivotal in Jesus’ life and ministry because the Jews were very upset with the great following that Jesus had acquired. They, the Jews, had plotted to kill Jesus, but needed a reason that would be acceptable according to Mosaic Law.

In as far as I have been taught, when the people began to wonder if Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Messiah, this was one thing that did upset the religious leaders; but if Jesus were to actually say that He is God or equal to God, then He would have committed a crime that was punishable by death. And this is what they so desperately wanted. But, He had to actually say the words. Jesus obviously was aware of their plans, and also of all of the stipulations in the Law,

but this proved not to be a deterrent to His actions, in the least. To see this illustrated, lets return to the Gospel of John:

“At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem; it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon. The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. "But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. "My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand. "I and the Father are one." The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, "I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?" The Jews answered Him, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out *to be* God." Jesus answered them, "Has it not been written in your Law, 'I SAID, YOU ARE GODS'? "If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father." Therefore they were seeking again to seize Him, and He eluded their grasp.”

John 10:22-39 NASB

We originally began this study in John 14, and I would like to return to Jesus' discussion with His disciples as they were all reclining at the table. This was a very personal and private time that Jesus spoke to His closest friends and followers. They were having difficulty comprehending the things that Jesus was saying were about to happen, so He was personally addressing each of their concerns. This conversation transpired directly after Jesus had sent Judas Isacariot out of the house so that the prophecies of Judas' betrayal could begin their fulfillment. After Jesus had addressed Thomas' question, Philip spoke up:

“Philip *said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus *said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and *yet* you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how *can* you say, 'Show us the Father'? "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves. "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do; because I go to the Father. "Whatever you

ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.
"If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do *it*."

John 14:8-14 NASB

What a glorious thing it must have been to be taught on a one-to-one basis by the Teacher of teachers! Jesus continues in this discourse to teach many more important matters to His disciples, and perhaps the most important subject would be that dealing with the Comforter, or Holy Spirit, that Jesus would ask the Father to send to be with His followers forever, once He had returned to be with His Father.

Further on in this discussion with His disciples, Judas (not Iscariot) wondered why Jesus was not revealing these things (the mysteries) to the world in the same way He had revealed them to His disciples. This passage will follow up with the teaching on parables we reviewed in the Gospel of Mark and in the Book of Isaiah the prophet. I believe that Jesus planned to share all of His teachings with the entire world, but as we learn in the Holy Word, He concentrated on personally teaching those who would then become teachers themselves, especially with the assistance of the Holy Spirit:

"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; *that is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. "After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you *will* see Me; because I live, you will live also. "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him." Judas (not Iscariot) *said to Him, "Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?" Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. "He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me. "These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you."

John 14:15-26 NASB

As the disciples-turned Apostles, after Jesus' ascension, were dispersed to the regions and peoples where they would train and teach, we soon see the appearance of favorites among them. Some people preferred to stay under the teaching of one Apostle, while others favored their allegiance to another Apostle. This became a serious problem. So serious, that the Apostle Paul was compelled to personally address the issue.

This illustration does not imply that there were denominational lines drawn in the early church, but it does show how the people tended to gravitate toward individual teachers even though they were each taught by the One, true Teacher, Himself. This may be indicative of our basic human nature, representing an age-old problem that existed then as it also exists in our modern churches. Today many people within the body of Christ, which is His church, seem more concerned with following a man (their pastor) than in following Jesus (God). This troubles me, because we each should follow the Lord, first and foremost. His earthly messengers, are precisely that: messengers and vessels to serve in His ministry. Our rewards are beyond our greatest imagining when we place Christ before all men:

"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

Matthew 6:33 NASB

JESUS...THE MIRACLE WORKER

The greatest tool that a teacher has at their disposal is called, "Teaching by example", and Jesus demonstrated this to those He taught, time and time again:

"For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you."

John 13:15 NASB

This verse is from the Gospel of John, and when taken in context, we see a perfect example of our Teacher, Christ Jesus, as He taught His disciples by example:

"So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined *at the table* again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? "You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you."

John 13:12-15 NASB

Simply put, Jesus not only talked the talk, but He surely walked the walk. Even as Jesus performed so many great signs and wonders, He never personally took the credit for what was accomplished. He always gave all the glory and honor to the One who sent Him:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor *is* one who is sent greater than the one who sent him."

John 13:16 NASB

Jesus told us that He can only do as He has seen the Father do, and say what the Father has told Him to say. Therefore, Jesus Himself learned from the examples that His Father set before Him:

And Jesus cried out and said, "He who believes in Me, does not believe in Me but in Him who sent Me. "He who sees Me sees the One who sent Me. "I have come *as* Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness. "If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. "He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day. "For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment *as to* what to

say and what to speak. "I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me."

John 12:44-50 NASB

Jesus did perform many miracles, or signs and wonders as John called them, and He actually did more than were recorded in the Holy Word of God:

"And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they *were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself *would not contain the books that *would be written."

John 21:25 NASB

The main reason I have illustrated that Jesus led by example is to further emphasize His teaching about what He said that we, His followers, would do once He had ascended to the Father. We have already reviewed some of Jesus' teachings in John 12 and 13, so I would like to now go to chapter 14 where He explains how we also can do the things that He has done, and even more. Meaning that since Jesus would be with the Father, we, His followers, would carry on with His ministry on earth:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do; because I go to the Father. "Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. "If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do *it*."

John 14:12-14 NASB

We know from our previous studies that these things would be accomplished through the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and the Great Commission that Jesus left with us explains the types of things that we would be capable of doing:

"And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:18-20 NASB

"And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. "These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly *poison*, it will not

hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

Mark 16:15-18 NASB

There are 7 Sign-Miracles in the Gospel of John, and we will review those and after our review I would like to share with you a special study I compiled, entitled, "And He Healed Them". This study quotes numerous biblical accounts of healing from the Gospels that Jesus performed and also the miracles performed by the Apostles in the Acts of the Apostles, 1 Corinthians, Colossians, Titus, Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1 John and the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

This serves to illustrate the special purpose that our Lord and Savior has placed in us, His followers, to carry on with His ministry as He is seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven. We can only hope to hear Him say to us someday:

"His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

Matthew 25:23 NASB

The 7 Sign-Miracles that Jesus performed and found in the Gospel of John are as follow:

- 2:1-11 Turning water to wine.
- 4:46-54 Healing the royal official's son.
- 5:1-9 Healing the invalid at Bethesda.
- 6:1-14 The feeding of the 5,000.
- 6:15-21 Walking on the sea.
- 9:1-41 Sight restored.
- 11:1-44 Raising of Lazarus.
- 21:1-14 The catch of fish.

(Special thanks to the Ryrie Study Bible, Expanded Edition, by the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago for their study-help on this subject.)

At the wedding in Cana, Jesus was present along with His mother, Mary, and many others who were attending this joyous occasion. It was at this celebration that Jesus performed His first miracle, the turning of ordinary water into wine. Jesus seemed a bit reluctant when His mother asked Him to perform a miracle in their own personal code, between a mother and son. Mary was obviously very proud of her firstborn, and her request of Jesus to do something special before her friends seemed very reminiscent of the situations my own mother used to place me in.

I am also the firstborn, and my mother was proud of me and what she considered my good voice for a young boy. When my parents had guests over to our house she would ask me to sit in front of the stereo and sing for her friends. Needless to say, I was a bit reluctant, but I knew that she would be persistent. I would say, "Do I have to, mother?" And she would just smile, and of course I would oblige her. Perhaps you can read this passage of Jesus' first miracle and consider it in the same warm and loving mother and son relationship:

"On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; and both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus *said to Him, "They have no wine." And Jesus *said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come." His mother *said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it." Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each. Jesus *said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." So they filled them up to the brim. And He *said to them, "Draw *some* out now and take it to the headwaiter." So they took it *to him*. When the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter *called the bridegroom, and *said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first, and when *the people* have drunk freely, *then he serves* the poorer *wine*; but you have kept the good wine until now." This beginning of *His* signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him."

John 2:1-11 NASB

Jesus second miracle also happened to occur in Cana, but this time the success of this miracle depended on faith in a much larger portion than was exhibited in His first miracle. Mother Mary had faith in her Son of course, but she also knew that Jesus was the Chosen One of God. She already believed.

In this account of Jesus' second miracle a stranger was compelled to seek out Jesus and beg Him to heal his son for the stranger was fearing for his son's life. This stranger was a man of power and authority in the area, but he was not a believer, as yet. At that moment in time, he was simply a very worried father that would do whatever was necessary to save his little boy's life, so he searched until he found this man, Jesus of Nazareth:

"Therefore He came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a royal official whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and was imploring *Him* to come down and heal his son; for he was at the point of death. So Jesus said to him, "Unless you *people* see signs and wonders, you *simply* will not believe." The royal official *said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies." Jesus *said to him, "Go; your son lives." The man believed the word that

Jesus spoke to him and started off. As he was now going down, *his* slaves met him, saying that his son was living. So he inquired of them the hour when he began to get better. Then they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." So the father knew that *it was* at that hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives"; and he himself believed and his whole household. This is again a second sign that Jesus performed when He had come out of Judea into Galilee."

John 4:46-54 NASB

After Jesus had healed the official's son, he left Cana to travel to Jerusalem for a Jewish feast. Although many others were celebrating this feast, Jesus had His heart and His mind on more important matters. In Jerusalem there was a pool called Bethesda near the sheep gate, and this pool was known to have miraculous water that can heal.

This pool at Bethesda was the scene where Jesus performed another miracle healing. People would wait at this pool until the water was stirred by an angel of God, and the first person into the water after the stirring would be healed. On this particular occasion, there was a man waiting by the pool who had been ill for many years, but there was no one to carry the man into the pool so that he might be healed. This man found out that he did not need to have someone carry him, nor did he even have to wait for an angel to appear. That day he would be healed for the Commander of the Heavenly Host was actually there, in person. This man was about to be healed merely by the words that Jesus spoke in his presence, and the simple faith the man had in Him:

"After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep *gate* a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes. In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered, [waiting for the moving of the waters; for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted.] A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying *there*, and knew that he had already been a long time *in that condition*, He *said to him, "Do you wish to get well?" The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me." Jesus *said to him, "Get up, pick up your pallet and walk." Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and *began* to walk. Now it was the Sabbath on that day."

John 5:1-9 NASB

Obviously Jesus performed this miracle in the sick man's life without hesitation and without regard for any negative repercussions He might encounter. The

Jews who became aware of the man's healing were very upset with Jesus for two reasons: He performed this miracle on the Sabbath, which might be considered work, and work was not allowed on the Sabbath; and secondly, He made Himself equal with God:

"So the Jews were saying to the man who was cured, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet." But he answered them, "He who made me well was the one who said to me, 'Pick up your pallet and walk.'" They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Pick up *your pallet* and walk'?" But the man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away while there was a crowd in *that* place. Afterward Jesus *found him in the temple and said to him, "Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you." The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working." For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God."

John 5:10-18 NASB

None of this would deter Jesus from doing His Father's work, and since early childhood, Jesus had always been about His Father's business:

"The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He became twelve, they went up *there* according to the custom of the Feast; and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But His parents were unaware of it, but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they *began* looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him. Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. When they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You." And He said to them, "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's *house*?" But they did not understand the statement which He had made to them. And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all *these* things in her heart. And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."

Luke 2:40-52 NASB

In the next passage of sign-miracles in the Gospel of John, Jesus showed His disciples that He is the Good Shepherd, and He was able to feed all of His sheep from whatever meager amount of food there was available. He spread one child's meal among 5,000 men who had gathered near Jesus, and that did not include the numbers of women and children who were also present. He actually fed them in abundance so that there was even food left over. Jesus always provides for our needs, and if we are wise enough to realize, our supply is always sufficient and usually is also in abundance:

"After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias). A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick. Then Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat down with His disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was near. Therefore Jesus, lifting up His eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming to Him, *said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?" This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do. Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little." One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, *said to Him, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?" Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. Jesus then took the loaves, and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted. When they were filled, He *said to His disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost." So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."

John 6:1-13 NASB

God did the same thing with the manna in the wilderness. He provided His people with the food of angels when they were in need and there was no other food suitable for them to eat. The entire creation initially came about from what was already in existence: God the Father, God's Word (Jesus) and the Holy Spirit. (The water didn't come about until verse 2.)

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters."

Genesis 1:1, 2 NASB

After Jesus had fed the multitudes, they were astonished. They were so impressed with Jesus, believing that He must be the One that the prophets spoke of, that Jesus had to retreat from them before the crowds overtook Him to make Him the King. Jesus left everyone and waited on the mountain until that evening. The disciples set out to sea without Him and consequently came upon some rough water and high winds when they had rowed out 3 or 4 miles from shore. Jesus came to their rescue as He walked on top of the water to their boat, and after reassuring them, He boarded the boat and it was miraculously transported to the distant shore:

“So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone. Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, and after getting into a boat, they *started to* cross the sea to Capernaum. It had already become dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea *began* to be stirred up because a strong wind was blowing. Then, when they had rowed about three or four miles, they **saw* Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat; and they were frightened. But He **said* to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." So they were willing to receive Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.”

John 6:15-21 NASB

Jesus is always ready to come to our rescue, even when we are sure that we are doing things correctly on our own and in our own strength. Jesus can and does transcend the laws of nature to come to the aid of His sheep (us) just as He did when He walked atop the water. When Jesus is in charge, His presence can miraculously seem to make all things right, and even our greatest fears can disappear; just as He did when His presence suddenly caused the boat to arrive at its destination across the rough seas. The crowd that had been with Jesus just the day before when He fed the multitudes, now realized that He had somehow crossed to the opposite side of the sea without coming over with His disciples. Since there were no other boats at that location, the masses had to have sensed that something amazing, miraculous and possibly unexplainable had just occurred:

“The next day the crowd that stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other small boat there, except one, and that Jesus had not entered with His disciples into the boat, but *that* His disciples had gone away alone.”

John 6:22 NASB

I believe much more in the mildly miraculous than in coincidence as I draw ever nearer to my Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus. I pray that you also realize that things left to chance and coincidence are not things turned over to the authority and guidance of Jesus. The following passage is so beautiful in its lesson that it

is hard for a mortal man to truly appreciate the compassion that Jesus has for the sick and also the compassion that He has in teaching us the lessons about Himself that we need to learn. Jesus was capable of healing a man who was born blind and had never seen anything with his own eyes, while also through this miracle He was able to figuratively open the eyes of those who had no understanding of what He had just done.

Jesus was also able to create a true disciple in this man whom He had just healed, even though the man did not know who it was that had just healed him. Jesus discounted the Pharisees' belief that this man was blind because he was a sinner, and in the absence of his sin, Jesus also discounted the possibility that it must have been the sins of this man's parents that had blinded him from birth. The man's parents were afraid of the Pharisees who were questioning their son's miraculous healing, so they had the son speak for himself. The Pharisees got absolutely no satisfaction from this young man for he was convinced that Jesus must be from God, or He couldn't have done what He did. Jesus met with the young man afterward and revealed who He truly is while some Pharisees were present. Jesus explained to those who had accused Jesus, the young man and his parents of being sinful, that in fact, they were the ones who were sinful for they were the ones who could not see what was just before their eyes:

"As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" Jesus answered, "*It was neither that* this man sinned, nor his parents; but *it was* so that the works of God might be displayed in him. "We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work. "While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world." When He had said this, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and applied the clay to his eyes, and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went away and washed, and came *back* seeing. Therefore the neighbors, and those who previously saw him as a beggar, were saying, "Is not this the one who used to sit and beg?" Others were saying, "This is he," *still* others were saying, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the one." So they were saying to him, "How then were your eyes opened?" He answered, "The man who is called Jesus made clay, and anointed my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash'; so I went away and washed, and I received sight." They said to him, "Where is He?" He *said*, "I do not know." They *brought* to the Pharisees the man who was formerly blind. Now it was a Sabbath on the day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also were asking him again how he received his sight. And he said to them, "He applied clay to my eyes, and I washed, and I see." Therefore some of the Pharisees were saying, "This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." But others were saying, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And there was a division among them. So they *said* to the blind man again, "What do you say about Him, since He opened your eyes?" And he said, "He is a prophet." The Jews then did not believe *it* of him, that he had been blind and had received sight, until they

called the parents of the very one who had received his sight, and questioned them, saying, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? Then how does he now see?" His parents answered them and said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but how he now sees, we do not know; or who opened his eyes, we do not know. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. For this reason his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." So a second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, "Give glory to God; we know that this man is a sinner." He then answered, "Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." So they said to him, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?" He answered them, "I told you already and you did not listen; why do you want to hear *it* again? You do not want to become His disciples too, do you?" They reviled him and said, "You are His disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. "We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where He is from." The man answered and said to them, "Well, here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He opened my eyes. "We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him. "Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. "If this man were not from God, He could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?" So they put him out. Jesus heard that they had put him out, and finding him, He said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you." And he said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped Him. And Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind." Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, "We are not blind too, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

John 9:1-41 NASB

In the next passage, there is much to consider. Jesus was a close personal friend of a man called Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha. Lazarus became gravely ill and his sisters sent word to the Lord so that He might know of Lazarus' condition. It came as a surprise, I imagine, in how Jesus reacted to this sad news about his friend. Jesus decided not to go immediately to his friend's sick bed as one might imagine of our loving and compassionate Savior, but rather He decided to wait where He was for two days before departing to Bethany to see His friend. When Jesus did arrive, He was greeted by Lazarus' sisters and was told by both of these distraught women that Lazarus had already died. They also told Jesus that if He had come sooner, He could have prevented their brother's death.

Jesus was very moved by this situation, and He actually wept before those who were gathered to mourn for their loss. Jesus went on to explain that He waited so that by the glory of the Father, the Son would be glorified. This must truly have been a test for Mary and Martha's love for Jesus as well as for the faith of all who were present. Normally when someone receives bad news about a close friend, their first impulse is to quickly go to that friend, but Jesus was faithful to His leading in this situation so that not only would the Son be glorified, but many lives would be greatly moved by this miracle that was about to happen to Lazarus. We will also follow-up after this passage with the continued blessings and teachings that occurred after this the sixth of seven sign-miracles from the Gospel of John.

"Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. So the sisters sent *word* to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." But when Jesus heard *this*, He said, "This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when He heard that he was sick, He then stayed two days *longer* in the place where He was. Then after this He *said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." The disciples *said to Him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone You, and are You going there again?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. "But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." This He said, and after that He *said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep." The disciples then said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep. So Jesus then said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him." Therefore Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to *his* fellow disciples, "Let us also go, so that we may die with Him." So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off; and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning *their* brother. Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house. Martha then said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. "Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You." Jesus *said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha *said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" She *said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, *even* He who comes into the world." When she had said this, she went away and called Mary her sister, saying secretly, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she *got up quickly and was coming to Him. Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the

place where Martha met Him. Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and consoling her, when they saw that Mary got up quickly and went out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. Therefore, when Mary came where Jesus was, she saw Him, and fell at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her *also* weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, and said, "Where have you laid him?" They *said to Him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. So the Jews were saying, "See how He loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind man, have kept this man also from dying?" So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, *came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus *said, "Remove the stone." Martha, the sister of the deceased, *said to Him, "Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been *dead* four days." Jesus *said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. "I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me." When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus *said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

John 11:1-44 NASB

Many Jews were drawn to the Lord through the testimony of Mary, but by Jesus performing this miracle for His friend Lazarus, He placed Himself once again in a precarious position because the Chief Priests and Pharisees convened a council and plotted how they were to rid themselves of this problem they saw in Christ Jesus. They feared that He would unite the nation and cause them to lose their positions, especially if what Caiaphas, the High Priest, prophesied about Jesus came true. Caiaphas knew that Jesus would die for the nation, but He did not truly know what was planned so that Jesus would take His rightful place of honor as He sat next to the Father in heaven as Lord and Savior over all:

"Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done. Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. "If we let Him *go on* like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish." Now he did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. So from that day on they planned together to kill Him. Therefore Jesus

no longer continued to walk publicly among the Jews, but went away from there to the country near the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim; and there He stayed with the disciples. Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up to Jerusalem out of the country before the Passover to purify themselves. So they were seeking for Jesus, and were saying to one another as they stood in the temple, "What do you think; that He will not come to the feast at all?" Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where He was, he was to report it, so that they might seize Him."

John 11:45-57 NASB

After Lazarus had been raised from the dead and reunited with his sisters, the women held a supper in Jesus' honor. We will also learn in this passage that there are those who are chosen to serve and those who are called to learn. This passage also shows the true heart of Judas Iscariot, the traitor and the thief. Lazarus went on to provide testimony of his friend, Jesus Christ, whereupon many were converted to the faith. This supper occurred on the evening before Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem:

"Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining *at the table* with Him. Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, *said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor *people*?" Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it. Therefore Jesus said, "Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial. "For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me." The large crowd of the Jews then learned that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead. But the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death also; because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus.

John 12:1-11 NASB

After Jesus died upon the cross and was resurrected, He appeared several times to His disciples. On the third occasion, Simon Peter, John and several others were fishing, and had been very unproductive. They had fished all night and caught absolutely nothing. At daybreak, they were returning when a man on the beach spoke up and told them if they were to cast their net on the right side of the boat (which, I suppose, was the opposite side from where they had been fishing) they would make a catch of fish. It was at that time that Peter realized that the man on the beach was Jesus.

He was so excited that he dove into the water and swam to shore as the others followed in the boat, dragging the net filled with a huge catch of fish. On the shore Jesus had already started a charcoal fire (which normally takes longer than a normal fire) and was already preparing fish, although the men had not as yet brought any of the catch to Him. He invited them to breakfast and also shared bread with them.

Jesus needed to remind them, just as He needs to remind us all, that sometimes we need to fish on the other side of the boat. That perhaps our ways may be close, but not very productive, if they are productive at all. If we listen to what He has to say for guidance, we will always prosper, and if we make a real effort to stay on the narrow path, rather than stepping off of it to the left or the right, we might be able to more easily reach our destination:

“After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested *Himself* in this way. Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the *sons* of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. Simon Peter *said to them, "I am going fishing." They *said to him, "We will also come with you." They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing. But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. So Jesus *said to them, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" They answered Him, "No." And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find *a catch*." So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved *said to Peter, "It is the Lord." So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped *for work*), and threw himself into the sea. But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net *full* of fish. So when they got out on the land, they *saw a charcoal fire *already* laid and fish placed on it, and bread. Jesus *said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught." Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus *said to them, "Come *and* have breakfast." None of the disciples ventured to question Him, "Who are You?" knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus *came and *took the bread and *gave *it* to them, and the fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead.

John 21:1-14 NASB

This concludes our review of the seven sign-miracles from the Gospel of John and please realize that this is only a cursory review. As we grow in our walk with the Lord, we will always continue to learn from the teachings of our Lord and

Savior. I pray that I never stop being taught, for how can I teach if He does not teach me?

I hope you enjoy the enclosure of the following study entitled, "And He Healed Them." I will not be adding commentary to each of the passages in this section because I would like for you to pray on each passage and practice preparing material that you might use to teach those who would come to you for scriptural insight. You may be someone who is led by the Lord Almighty to teach His sheep or surely you wouldn't have come this far in your search to draw ever nearer to our Lord and Savior: The King of kings, the Prince of peace, the Messiah, the Chosen One of God, the Son of God Almighty, Jesus Christ.

To Him be all the glory and honor and praise, amen.

JESUS AND THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Beginning with the Lord's Ascension-Acts 1:1-11.

In the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, we see the words of Jesus quoted several times. We will also notice the words that the Risen Lord imparted to the Apostle Paul in person and in visions. How powerful and magnificent a man must be that even after His life on earth has passed, the words He spoke carry a timeless importance in their profound teachings! Such a man was, and is, Jesus Christ, our Risen and Living Lord and Savior. But He was and also is, God.

Acts was written by Luke, and many lovingly call it, Luke-part two. From the very beginning of Acts, the emphasis is ultimately upon Jesus Christ, rather than on the apostles, themselves, and this illustrates the powerful leadership that Jesus had over His closest followers. He is the Good Shepherd and Pastor of pastors. The apostles were taught in a way that only Christ, Himself, could have taught them, and we are very fortunate, indeed, to have His ministry and wisdom collected in a book of Holy Scripture that we can study:

"The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up *to heaven*, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them *over a period of forty days* and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," *He said*, "you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

Acts 1:1-11 NASB

In this account the Lord foretold of the coming of the promised Holy Spirit, and His coming in power. This is confirmation of Jesus, the Prophet. What I mean by

this statement is, that Jesus, Himself, represented all five of the offices of the five-fold ministry: Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor and Teacher.

The Gospels of Mark and Luke briefly mention the ascension of Christ while Matthew and John make no mention of it. The Acts of the Apostles is the only book that gives a more detailed account of the ascension and also mentions the two angels who remained after Jesus was received up into a cloud. These angels spoke to the witnesses and provided comfort and closure by explaining and reassuring that Jesus would indeed return in the same way that He was taken up from them.

Jesus is the Commander of the Heavenly Host as we read in the Old Testament account of Joshua speaking to Him prior to arriving at Jericho. The Lord commanded Joshua to take off his shoes (sandals) because the land he was standing on was holy ground. All other accounts of angels in the Bible illustrate their humility and servant-attitude when they appear before people. It is only fitting that we remember Jesus being attended to by angels while He spent forty days in the wilderness (after Satan's temptations), and also the presence of angels at Jesus' ascension and the announcement of His birth by angels. These examples alone testify to Jesus' place in the heavens.

In further clarifying this point of Jesus' superiority, let's review the first verses of that book written by an unknown author, Hebrews:

"God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels did He ever say, "YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU"? And again, "I WILL BE A FATHER TO HIM AND HE SHALL BE A SON TO ME"? And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, "AND LET ALL THE ANGELS OF GOD WORSHIP HIM." And of the angels He says, "WHO MAKES HIS ANGELS WINDS, AND HIS MINISTERS A FLAME OF FIRE." But of the Son *He says*, "YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM. "YOU HAVE LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATED LAWLESSNESS; THEREFORE GOD, YOUR GOD, HAS ANOINTED YOU WITH THE OIL OF GLADNESS ABOVE YOUR COMPANIONS." And, "YOU, LORD, IN THE BEGINNING LAID THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH, AND THE HEAVENS ARE THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS; THEY WILL PERISH, BUT YOU REMAIN; AND THEY ALL WILL BECOME OLD LIKE A GARMENT, AND LIKE A MANTLE YOU WILL ROLL THEM UP; LIKE A GARMENT THEY WILL ALSO BE CHANGED. BUT YOU ARE THE SAME, AND YOUR YEARS

WILL NOT COME TO AN END." But to which of the angels has He ever said, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET"?

Hebrews 1:1-13 NASB

Let us continue a bit more with this thought as we are reminded that Jesus left all that He was in Heaven, temporarily, so that He might come to earth as a man; tempted in all ways, yet remaining sinless, so that we might receive the reward He has bought and paid for with His own blood:

"For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking. But one has testified somewhere, saying, "WHAT IS MAN, THAT YOU REMEMBER HIM? OR THE SON OF MAN, THAT YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT HIM? "YOU HAVE MADE HIM FOR A LITTLE WHILE LOWER THAN THE ANGELS; YOU HAVE CROWNED HIM WITH GLORY AND HONOR, AND HAVE APPOINTED HIM OVER THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS; YOU HAVE PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET." For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him. But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, *namely*, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one *Father*; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, "I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE." And again, "I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM." And again, "BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME."

Hebrews 2:5-13 NASB

This same Jesus spoke to the Apostle Paul in person and in visions. We will study how the Risen Lord spoke to Paul on the road to Damascus, and review the accounts of Christ's direction and encouragement to the Apostle as he traveled in service to the Lord on his many missionary journeys.

The Apostle Paul, a former enemy of the church, was especially called out by the Risen Lord to become the special emissary, or minister, to the very people he had been busy persecuting. Once we witness the transformation of this man, Saul of Tarsus (Paul), we can truly appreciate the sincerity in the apostle's voice as he describes the character of Jesus Christ. First, let's lead up to Saul's conversion after the death of the Martyr, Stephen.

THE MARTYR, STEPHEN AND THE APOSTLE PAUL:

In Acts, chapter six, Stephen was chosen as one of the first seven Elders of the early church. Stephen loved the Lord so much that he died in defense of Christ after he reprimanded the Sanhedrin's failure to recognize the Messiah. The Holy Bible speaks of Stephen as follows:

"The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith. And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people."

Acts 6:7, 8 NASB

Stephen had upset many religious leaders of his time as he followed his Divine calling. The Freedmen argued with him and the Council also became involved in the discussion up to the point where Caiaphus, the high priest, questioned him:

"But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, *including* both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen. But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and *against* God." And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him away and brought him before the Council. They put forward false witnesses who said, "This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law; for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us." And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel."

Acts 6:9-15 NASB

Caiaphus, the high priest of the Council, or Sanhedrin, asked Stephen if the accusations brought against him were true? What follows is the longest recorded sermon in the Book of Acts: Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin. In this sermon, he recounts the history of the Israelites from the appearance of God to Abraham while he was in Mesopotamia, throughout the Patriarchs and Moses' history, Joshua's conquests and David's request to build a house for God while it was Solomon who was actually given the task of building the Temple:

"The high priest said, "Are these things so?" And he said, "Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, 'LEAVE YOUR COUNTRY AND YOUR RELATIVES, AND COME INTO THE LAND THAT I

WILL SHOW YOU.' "Then he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. From there, after his father died, *God* had him move to this country in which you are now living. "But He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground, and *yet*, even when he had no child, He promised that HE WOULD GIVE IT TO HIM AS A POSSESSION, AND TO HIS DESCENDANTS AFTER HIM. "But God spoke to this effect, that his DESCENDANTS WOULD BE ALIENS IN A FOREIGN LAND, AND THAT THEY WOULD BE ENSLAVED AND MISTREATED FOR FOUR HUNDRED YEARS. " 'AND WHATEVER NATION TO WHICH THEY WILL BE IN BONDAGE I MYSELF WILL JUDGE,' said God, 'AND AFTER THAT THEY WILL COME OUT AND SERVE ME IN THIS PLACE.' "And He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so *Abraham* became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac *became the father of Jacob*, and Jacob *of the twelve patriarchs*. "The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. *Yet God* was with him, and rescued him from all his afflictions, and granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he made him governor over Egypt and all his household. "Now a famine came over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction *with it*, and our fathers could find no food. "But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers *there* the first time. "On the second *visit* Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family was disclosed to Pharaoh. "Then Joseph sent *word* and invited Jacob his father and all his relatives to come to him, seventy-five persons *in all*. "And Jacob went down to Egypt and *there* he and our fathers died. "*From there* they were removed to Shechem and laid in the tomb which Abraham had purchased for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in Shechem. "But as the time of the promise was approaching which God had assured to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt, until THERE AROSE ANOTHER KING OVER EGYPT WHO KNEW NOTHING ABOUT JOSEPH. "It was he who took shrewd advantage of our race and mistreated our fathers so that they would expose their infants and they would not survive. "It was at this time that Moses was born; and he was lovely in the sight of God, and he was nurtured three months in his father's home. "And after he had been set outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and nurtured him as her own son. "Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds. "But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel. "And when he saw one *of them* being treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian. "And he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him, but they did not understand. "On the following day he appeared to them as they were fighting together, and he tried to reconcile them in peace, saying, 'Men, you are brethren, why do you injure one another?' "But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him away, saying, 'WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND JUDGE OVER US? 'YOU DO NOT MEAN TO KILL ME AS YOU KILLED THE EGYPTIAN YESTERDAY, DO YOU?' "At this remark, MOSES FLED AND BECAME AN ALIEN IN THE LAND OF MIDIAN, where he became the father of two sons. "After forty years had passed, AN ANGEL APPEARED TO

HIM IN THE WILDERNESS OF MOUNT Sinai, IN THE FLAME OF A BURNING THORN BUSH. "When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he approached to look *more* closely, there came the voice of the Lord: 'I AM THE GOD OF YOUR FATHERS, THE GOD OF ABRAHAM AND ISAAC AND JACOB.' Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look. "BUT THE LORD SAID TO HIM, 'TAKE OFF THE SANDALS FROM YOUR FEET, FOR THE PLACE ON WHICH YOU ARE STANDING IS HOLY GROUND. 'I HAVE CERTAINLY SEEN THE OPPRESSION OF MY PEOPLE IN EGYPT AND HAVE HEARD THEIR GROANS, AND I HAVE COME DOWN TO RESCUE THEM; COME NOW, AND I WILL SEND YOU TO EGYPT.' "This Moses whom they disowned, saying, 'WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND A JUDGE?' is the one whom God sent *to be* both a ruler and a deliverer with the help of the angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush. "This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. "This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, 'GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN.' "This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and *who was* with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you. "Our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him, but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt, SAYING TO AARON, 'MAKE FOR US GODS WHO WILL GO BEFORE US; FOR THIS MOSES WHO LED US OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT--WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM.' "At that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. "But God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, 'IT WAS NOT TO ME THAT YOU OFFERED VICTIMS AND SACRIFICES FORTY YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS, WAS IT, O HOUSE OF ISRAEL? 'YOU ALSO TOOK ALONG THE TABERNACLE OF MOLOCH AND THE STAR OF THE GOD ROMPHA, THE IMAGES WHICH YOU MADE TO WORSHIP. I ALSO WILL REMOVE YOU BEYOND BABYLON.' "Our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, just as He who spoke to Moses directed *him* to make it according to the pattern which he had seen. "And having received it in their turn, our fathers brought it in with Joshua upon dispossessing the nations whom God drove out before our fathers, until the time of David. "*David* found favor in God's sight, and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. "But it was Solomon who built a house for Him. "However, the Most High does not dwell in *houses* made by *human* hands; as the prophet says: 'HEAVEN IS MY THRONE, AND EARTH IS THE FOOTSTOOL OF MY FEET; WHAT KIND OF HOUSE WILL YOU BUILD FOR ME?' says the Lord, 'OR WHAT PLACE IS THERE FOR MY REPOSE? 'WAS IT NOT MY HAND WHICH MADE ALL THESE THINGS?' "

Acts 7:1-50 NASB

As Stephen was concluding his sermon, he boldly stood before the greatest gathering of religious experts of his time and spoke from the words that God, through His Holy Spirit, had laid upon his heart:

"You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it."

Acts 7:51-53 NASB

All those in attendance were utterly shocked at what Stephen had just said. This man who was elected to wait on tables, now stood before this high and mighty, all-powerful, religious gathering of scholars, priests and scribes, and had the audacity to reprimand them! What is to follow is highly indicative of men led by their flesh and full of pride, levied against one man, full of the Holy Spirit:

"Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they *began* gnashing their teeth at him. But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse. When they had driven him out of the city, they *began* stoning *him*; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. They went on stoning Stephen as he called on *the Lord* and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" Having said this, he fell asleep. Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. *Some* devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. But Saul *began* ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison."

Acts 7:54-8:3 NASB

Now this man, Saul of Tarsus, was a Pharisee...a religious scholar and a Jew by birth, also now an accessory to murder. He probably had the clout to stop this event from happening if he had wanted to, but he continued on, ravaging and persecuting the church and its members, relentlessly.

NOTE: In illustrating the method of stoning a person to death, I will refer to some historical footnotes in the Ryrie Study Bible, NASB:

“7:58 The mention of witnesses suggests that they went through the motions of a legal execution (Lev. 24:14), though probably without securing the official approval of Pilate.

7:58-59 In stoning, the first official witness pushed the naked victim off a nine ft. (2.75m) scaffold. Then the second official witness dropped a large stone on his head or chest, and others pelted the dying man.”

This method of execution is not as severe as the grievous torture that our Lord and Savior was subjected to, but this illustration of the historical procedures involved in stoning a person might help the reader to imagine the brevity of this incident and to what lengths the martyr Stephen was willing to submit to the Lord, while it appears that he made no effort whatsoever to retract any of the statements he made that brought this punishment upon himself.

I must admit that in my early studies, I became very upset with this passage of the martyrdom of Stephen. I am the eldest of four children, and we each have names that are biblically-based, though the spelling may differ slightly. My sisters are Debra and Tamra, and my brother's name is Timothy. My name is Steven, and I've always felt somehow attached to my namesake, the martyr Stephen.

Many years ago I began reading this passage and pondering over it, as I was also finding myself eager to return to the Lord after straying from that narrow path. I was feeling a bit like the Prodigal Son, as my mother so lovingly referred to me. This was during a time in my younger years when I was under heavy conviction from the Holy Spirit. I had given my life to the Lord as a child in Sunday School as did so many of my little friends at that time, but I knew I had strayed...perhaps too far, I felt. I felt unworthy of the Lord's love and there was just no way that He could possibly forgive me for the sins that I had committed in my life. I also felt angered at what this man, Saul, had done to Stephen, especially since he almost seemed proud to do his part in watching over everyone's coats while this Man of God was being brutally murdered.

Saul was being prominently mentioned in this passage as an enemy of the church and appeared called out as the key figure in the persecution of God's people and His church. I just knew in my heart that as I continued to follow this Saul character, the Lord would no doubt place some Divine wrath upon him for going against God. I believe that I was inwardly afraid that I too, would somehow suffer from some of God's Divine wrath. Little did I know, that the Lord would use this particular situation to open Saul's eyes as well as my own while I continued to study the Word:

“Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he was traveling, it happened that

he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He *said*, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do." The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." And the Lord *said* to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight." But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name."

Acts 9:1-14 NASB

Now at this point, Ananias had some serious doubts about this man Saul who had done such horrible things to the first Christians. I felt the same way about Saul as I was reading these passages, and I must admit that I was feeling that there had been some justice served on Saul when the Risen Savior had come down from heaven to pay a personal visit to this persecutor and had cast him to the ground and blinded him, and to top it off, commanded him to go see a man who was a representative of the very people that Saul had been so rigorous in persecuting for their beliefs. Little did I imagine what was to follow, and how much the actions of our merciful Lord and Savior would change my own spiritual life as He changed the direction of Saul's life, forever. His command to Ananias continues:

"But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake." So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized; and he took food and was strengthened. Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus, and immediately he *began* to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, "Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and *who* had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?" But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by

proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ.”

Acts 9:15-22 NASB

When Saul had studied for many years under his new piers he was called by his comrade in Christ, Barnabas, to go to Antioch on his first missionary journey. In this place, the Lord specifically called out Saul and Barnabas: “Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was *there*, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.”

Acts 13:1-3 NASB

Now when Saul was called to his missionary work, it was with power and he was to become a tremendous minister to the Gentiles. When I had studied about Saul and what the Lord had done to forgive him and to use him in such a mighty way, I realized that perhaps Christ could indeed do the same thing for me in my life.

Saul was sent from Antioch to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. Saul was about to become an instrument of the Lord in a manner that must have seemed reminiscent of what the Lord Jesus had done to Saul in his conversion. Also at this time, we see Saul referred to by the name we have all come to call him, Paul:

“When they reached Salamis, they *began* to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper. When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. But Saul, who was also *known as* Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him, and said, “You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? “Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time.” And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord.”

Acts 13:5-12 NASB

Here we see an example of the man, Saul, whom we have come to know as the mighty Apostle Paul, move in the power and strength of the Holy Spirit. He

continued to move in this power as he traveled throughout his many missionary journeys and was ultimately responsible for writing the majority of the material in the New Testament. All of this glorious work in service unto the Lord stemmed from Jesus' personal intervention in Paul's life and turning him completely around to set him on a journey down the less traveled, straight and narrow path.

THE APOSTLE PETER AND THE RISEN LORD:

The following depicts the Lord's impression upon Peter and His leading of Peter after His resurrection and ascension. We will study the personal relationship Jesus and Peter had as Jesus walked upon this earth as we recount the events in the Gospels at a later point in this work.

The incident that now follows, describes Peter's love for the Lord and his obedience in following the leading of the Holy Spirit. It more specifically speaks to Peter's plea to convince Jewish believers that Gentiles are likewise eligible, on an equal basis, to be allowed into the church because of their belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter also shows us by his actions, that although he operates in the power of the Holy Spirit, he is still only a man...a human being, and not Divine.

Several days before Peter met with Cornelius to discuss the eligibility of Gentiles, he had raised a paralyzed man, Aeneas, to his feet and after that, he raised Tabitha (Dorcas), from death through the power of the Holy Spirit. Remember, this Holy Spirit is the same Spirit or Comforter, that Jesus asked the Father to send in His place so that His followers would not be left as orphans once He sat at the right hand of the Father.

Cornelius then saw a vision of an angel sent from God who instructed Cornelius to send some men to Joppa to bring Simon Peter back to him. Simon Peter, himself, then had a vision also, as he rested on a rooftop while they had stopped on their way to see Cornelius. In the vision, Peter saw many animals that he had previously been taught from the Law to be regarded as unclean, and he would not be allowed to eat them. God convinced him that this was no longer the case:

Again a voice *came* to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, no *longer* consider unholy."

Acts 10:15 NASB

A footnote on this passage helps to explain the deeper meaning of this passage:

"10:14,15 unholy and unclean. The Mosaic Law prohibited the eating of certain unclean animals (Lev.11). God was teaching Peter a lesson about people."

That lesson would be, that God has cleansed and purified an entire nation of believers in the Gentiles. We learn in Scripture that Gentiles are also co-heirs in Christ Jesus. Now that we have summarized the events prior to Peter's message at Cornelius' home, lets continue on in God's Holy Word:

"Opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand *now* that God is not

one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him. "The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)--you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. " *You know of* Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and *how* He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. "We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. "God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, *that is*, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. "And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. "Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins." While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *did*, can he?" And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days."

Acts 10:34-48 NASB

We will continue as Peter explains to those in Jerusalem about what has just transpired, and he will include Christ's words which are a promise about the gift of the Holy Spirit. We must realize that even as miraculous as the power that the Apostles acted with, they are merely acting as vessels for Jesus' ministry, for before Jesus came into their lives they were mere men...ordinary people from all walks of life. Just as you and I are. And they, as well as you and I, can do nothing apart from Christ Jesus, for we too operate as vessels for His ministry because our own righteousness is as filthy rags before God.

We know that the Apostle Paul and Barnabas were set apart by God to minister to the Gentiles, and in the following passage we will see Peter confirm that the Gentiles are as eligible for salvation as is anyone:

"Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him, saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them." But Peter began *speaking* and *proceeded* to explain to them in orderly sequence, saying, "I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object coming down like a great sheet lowered by four corners from the sky; and it came right down to me, and

when I had fixed my gaze on it and was observing it I saw the four-footed animals of the earth and the wild beasts and the crawling creatures and the birds of the air. "I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.'" "But I said, 'By no means, Lord, for nothing unholy or unclean has ever entered my mouth.'" "But a voice from heaven answered a second time, 'What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.'" "This happened three times, and everything was drawn back up into the sky. "And behold, at that moment three men appeared at the house in which we were *staying*, having been sent to me from Caesarea. "The Spirit told me to go with them without misgivings. These six brethren also went with me and we entered the man's house. "And he reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, and saying, 'Send to Joppa and have Simon, who is also called Peter, brought here; and he will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household.'" "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as *He did* upon us at the beginning. "And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'" "Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as *He gave* to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance *that leads to life*."

Acts 11:1-18 NASB

Here we see a beautiful example of the messages and lessons taught through the words that Jesus spoke. Jesus' words don't apply only to the time that He walked and ministered on earth...they are timeless. Do you remember how Isaiah explained that His Priesthood is eternal and perpetual? Jesus spoke to His children then, and He speaks to them now and forevermore.

The words of the above passage from the Acts of the Apostles, come as confirmation to Peter and the others that even the Gentiles, who were not highly regarded, had indeed been baptized by the Holy Spirit and were equally eligible for the promises of the New Covenant that belief in Christ Jesus provides.

These promises are available to every child of God. All we have to do is ask our Lord and Savior into our lives. If you have not asked Jesus to be in your life, there is no better time than right now. He loves you just the way you are, and He is willing to help make you into the person that you can be and only He can forgive you of your sins and He is the only way to the Father.

God bless you. Thank you, Jesus for all of our many blessings...too numerous to mention.