Let’s Read the Gospels!

International edition

T. Pandit

This book is the International version of a college level textbook prepared a few years ago for a Bible college in South India.

It can also be used for Bible study groups in local churches and for individual students of the Bible. It was written it with the South Indian Christian context in mind. But with minor adaptions it should be useful in any cultural context.

The Bible quotations are based on the World English Bible (WEB) translation.

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## Twelve studies on the coming of Jesus

### Introduction

This unit contains twelve studies from the gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John about what happened before Jesus began his public ministry:

1. The promise of John the Baptist, Luke 1:5–25 ([Go to the study](#Study1ThePromiseOfJohnTheBaptist))
2. Mary receives news about the birth of Jesus, Luke 1:26–38 ([Go to the study](#Study2MaryReceivesNewsAboutTheBirthOfJes))
3. Mary visits Elizabeth, Luke 1:39–56 ([Go to the study](#Study3MaryVisitsElizabeth))
4. The birth of John the Baptist, Luke 1:57–80 ([Go to the study](#Study4TheBirthOfJohnTheBaptist))
5. Two genealogies, Matt 1:1–17 and Luke 3:23–38 ([Go to the study](#Study5TwoGenealogies))
6. The birth of Jesus, Matt 1:18–25 and Luke 2:1–7 ([Go to the study](#Study6TheBirthOfJesus))
7. The shepherds and the angels, Luke 2:8–20 ([Go to the study](#Study7TheShepherdsAndTheAngels))
8. Jesus brought to the Jerusalem temple, Luke 2:21–40 ([Go to the study](#Study8JesusBroughtToTheJerusalemTemple))
9. The wise men from the east, Matt 2:1–12 ([Go to the study](#Study9TheWiseMenFromTheEast))
10. Escape to Egypt and return to Nazareth, Matt 2:13–23 ([Go to the study](#Study10EscapeToEgyptAndReturnToNazareth))
11. The Word became flesh, John 1:1–18 ([Go to the study](#Study11TheWordBecameFlesh))
12. Jesus at the age of twelve, Luke 2:41–52 ([Go to the study](#Study12JesusAtTheAgeOfTwelve))

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### Study 1: The promise of John the Baptist, Luke 1:5–25

Introduction and comments

Four hundred years of prophetic silence are now over. In the last book of the Old Testament, God promised through Malachi that the prophet Elijah would return before the arrival of the day of God’s dreadful judgment (Mal 4:5). In this passage this promise is beginning to be fulfilled. The angel Gabriel has a message from God to Zechariah the priest, who is on duty in the Jerusalem temple. Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth, who are upright in the sight of God but childless, are about to get a son, in spite of their old age. Their son will be this “Elijah.” He will be called John, and he will become “John the Baptist,” the forerunner of Jesus Christ, God’s promised Messiah.

Herod, the king of Judea (v 5): King Herod the Great ruled Palestine 37–4 BC under the sovereignty of the Roman emperor.

the priestly division of Abijah (v 5): King David had organized the priests into 24 divisions for their ministering in the Jerusalem temple (1 Chron 24:1, 3, 10). A priest had to serve at the temple for one week every six months.

no child (v 7): The lack of children in those days was difficult. First, the parents would not experience the joy of raising children. Second, they might face difficulties when they became too old and weak to support themselves. Finally, their neighbors would look down on them as childlessness was considered a disgrace and a sign of God’s punishment.

the altar of incense (v 11): This altar was situated in front of the curtain that separated the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place. The priest on duty supplied it with fresh incense every day before the morning sacrifice and after the evening sacrifice (Ex 30:6–8).

John (v 13): This Hebrew name means “the Lord has been gracious.”

he will drink no wine nor strong drink (v 15): This was one of the Nazirite vows (see Num 6:2–12).

Elijah (v 17): John the Baptist was the spiritual fulfillment of the prophecy in Malachi 4:5–6 about the return of Elijah (compare John 1:21; Matt 11:14).

Gabriel (v 19): Also mentioned by name in Dan 8:16 and 9:21. This Hebrew name means “man of God” or “God is my warrior.”

Questions

1. What do we learn about Zechariah and Elizabeth (v 5–7)?
2. What was Zechariah’s duty in the temple and how was he chosen to perform this duty (v 8–10)?
3. What did the angel tell Zechariah about John? Make a list (v 11–17).
4. Why was Zechariah not able to speak after his experience in the temple (v 18–22)?
5. How did Elizabeth react when she understood that she was pregnant (v 23–25)?

Think and discuss

1. In which part of Palestine was Jerusalem situated? Find this information on Map of the Roman Province of Judaea.
2. What happened to Palestine at the death of king Herod the Great? Find this information in New Testament chronology.
3. Zechariah and Elizabeth are described as “righteous before God” (v 6). How does Luke explain this expression?
4. Compare the reactions of Zechariah and Elizabeth when they found out that they were going to have a baby.
5. What do we learn about the reasons for childlessness in this passage?

Reflect and prepare

This passage touches on several important biblical themes, for example:

* God’s faithfulness to his promises (John as the “spiritual Elijah”)
* God is a prayer-answering God (v 13)
* Good news (v 19), perhaps in more than one sense
* The important role of the Holy Spirit (v 15)
* The believer’s attitude to God’s message (compare Zechariah and Elizabeth)

Reflect on these themes. Then prepare an outline for a devotion or a simple Bible study based on this passage and this study.

([Go to Answers 1: The promise of John the Baptist](#Answers1ThePromiseOfJohnTheBaptist))

### Study 2: Mary receives news about the birth of Jesus, Luke 1:26–38

Introduction and comments

Six months later, the angel Gabriel again pays a visit to Palestine with a similar message. But this time he comes to a young woman in the small town of Nazareth in Galilee. And his message is even more astonishing: God himself is about to establish his kingship through his Son. His reign will last forever and of his kingdom there will be no end.

In the sixth month (v 26): This refers to the sixth month after Gabriel’s message to Zechariah in the temple (compare v 36).

pledged to be married to (v 27): A Jewish engagement was legally binding and could only be canceled through divorce or death. Sexual intercourse was not permitted until marriage.

Jesus (v 31): This is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means “the Lord saves.”

Most High (v 32): A name for God first found in Gen 14:18. In the Old Testament it normally occurs in the combination “God the Most High”, El Elyon in Hebrew.

his father David (v 32): The Old Testament word “father” means “male descendant.” Both Mary and Joseph belonged to the family line of king David.

the house of Jacob (v 33): Jacob, who was also called Israel, was the forefather of all the Israelites.

your relative Elizabeth (v 36): Nothing is known about how they were related. But we can note that Mary belonged to the tribe of Judah (king David’s tribe) while Elizabeth was a Levite (v 5).

Questions

1. What do we learn about Joseph (v 26–28)?
2. What did Gabriel tell Mary about Jesus? Make a list (v 29–38).
3. How did Mary react to Gabriel’s visit and message? Make a list (v 26–38).

Think and discuss

1. Find Galilee and Nazareth on Map of the Roman Province of Judaea.
2. Compare Mary’s question to Gabriel (v 34) with Zechariah’s (v 18). The text gives us a clue to the main difference. Explain.
3. What do you think is the most amazing thing in this story? Explain why.

Reflect and prepare

This passage has two main characters (apart from the angel): Mary who is to become a mother, and Jesus who will be her son (but also the son of God). Mary can be seen as a role-model for a servant of God. In addition, the angel explains to her about the son she will give birth to.

Reflect on these two main characters of the passage. Then prepare outlines for two devotions or simple Bible studies based on this passage and this study.

([Go to Answers 2: Mary receives news about the birth of Jesus](#Answers2MaryReceivesNewsAboutTheBirthOfJ))

### Study 3: Mary visits Elizabeth, Luke 1:39–56

Introduction and comments

Soon after the visit of the angel Gabriel, Mary decides to embark on the long journey from Nazareth in Galilee to the hill country of Judea and the home of her relatives Zechariah and Elizabeth. The angel Gabriel had told her that Elizabeth is pregnant with John (the Baptist) and now she probably wants to share her own good news about Jesus with her. The meeting between the young girl and the old woman and their two unborn sons is absolutely amazing.

Mary then bursts out in praise to God in a song that begins with the words, “My soul glorifies the Lord.” This song is often called Magnificat in the history of the Christian church, because in the Latin Bible translation it begins with the word “Magnificat.” Mary expresses herself in the poetic style of the Old Testament. Her song strongly reminds us of Hannah’s prayer song in 1 Sam 2:1–10, when she left her little son Samuel with the priest at the house of the Lord at Shiloh.

those who fear him (v 50): To “fear God” means to love him and obey him – and to follow his will for one’s life.

his arm (v 51): Metaphor that means “God’s mighty acts”

that he might remember mercy, the promise he made to our fathers, to Abraham and his seed forever (v 54–55): This is a reference to God’s promise to Abraham in Gen 22:16–18.

Questions

1. This passage consists of two parts. Which are they?
2. Find Judea on Map of the Roman Province of Judaea.
3. How did Elizabeth’s unborn baby react when Mary entered her house and greeted her (v 39–45)?
4. How did Elizabeth describe the baby that Mary was carrying (v 39–45)?
5. How long did Mary’s visit last?

Think and discuss

1. Why does Mary glorify the Lord (v 46–49)?
2. Why will all future generations call Mary blessed (v 46–49)?
3. How does Mary describe God in her song? Make a list (v 46–55).

Reflect and prepare

Reflect on the relationship between the two unborn boys, John who will become John the Baptist and Jesus who will become the Savior of the world, as it is seen in the story about the meeting between Mary and Elizabeth. Then prepare an outline for a devotion or a simple Bible study based on Luke 1:39–45 called John and Jesus.

Reflect on Mary’s descriptions of herself and God in her song (Luke 1:46–55). Then prepare an outline for a devotion or a simple Bible study called Mary and her God.

([Go to Answers 3: Mary visits Elizabeth](#Answers3MaryVisitsElizabeth))

### Study 4: The birth of John the Baptist, Luke 1:57–80

Introduction and comments

In accordance with Jewish custom, John was circumcised eight days after his birth. That was also the occasion for name-giving. He was finally given the name “John,” the name that the angel Gabriel had told Zechariah to give him. As soon as this was settled, Zechariah was able to speak again after nine months of dumbness.

Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit, and he prophesied about God and his salvation plan for his people. In the history of the Christian church, this prophecy is often called Benedictus (which means “blessed,” its first word in the Latin Bible translation). It is composed in the style of Old Testament prophetic oracles.

On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child (v 59): This practice was to fulfill the covenant commandment first given to Abraham in Gen 17:9–14.

name him after his father (v 59): This was a common practice among the Jews at that time.

a writing tablet (v 63): A small wooden board covered with wax, used for writing

horn (v 69): This is a metaphor for strength and power. Here it refers to Jesus and his power to save.

the dawn (v 78): This is a reference to the coming of the Messiah (in fulfillment of prophecies like Isaiah 9:2; 60:1, and Malachi 4:2). Verses 78–79 echo Isaiah 60:1–3: “your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen on you … the Lord will arise on you, and his glory shall be seen on you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.”

in darkness (v 79): This is a metaphor for an ungodly life, a life that will result in God’s judgment. So it is a life in the “shadow of death” (v 79).

Questions

1. This passage consists of two parts. Explain how.
2. How did Elizabeth’s neighbors and relatives react to the birth of John (v 57–58)?
3. Why did Zechariah praise the Lord (v 68)?
4. What did Zechariah prophesy about his son John the Baptist (v 76–77)?
5. What did Zechariah prophesy about Jesus (v 76–79)?
6. What do we learn about John the Baptist’s childhood and youth?

Think and discuss

1. Describe in your own words what happened at the name-giving of Zechariah’s and Elizabeth’s son. How did John get his name? And how did the people react?
2. Zechariah praises the Lord because “he has come and redeemed his people” (v 68). What do we understand about this redemption from the verses that follow?
3. Zechariah’s prophecy (v 76–79) can be divided into two (or three) parts. Explain how.

Reflect and prepare

1. Reflect on your answer to Think and discuss 2. Then prepare a devotion or a simple Bible study called He has come and redeemed his people. Remember that the expression “horn of salvation” in verse 69 refers to Jesus.
2. Reflect on your answers to Questions 4 and 5. Also read again the comments on verses 78–79 in the Introduction to this study. Then prepare a devotion or a simple Bible study based on this material. Your heading can be The tender mercy of our God.

([Go to Answers 4: The birth of John the Baptist](#Answers4TheBirthOfJohnTheBaptist))

### Study 5: Two genealogies, Matt 1:1–17 and Luke 3:23–38

Introduction

Two of the four gospels, Matthew and Luke, contain genealogies of Jesus. The fact that they are different and don’t contain exactly the same names tells us two things:

1. Both Matthew and Luke have been selective in the names that they have included. So both lists are incomplete in the sense that they don’t include every generation of Jesus’ ancestry.
2. This selectiveness shows that Matthew and Luke had a specific reason for including a genealogy in their gospels. This reason is theological. So as readers we need to discover this reason. What message does Matthew have for his readers through his genealogy in Matt 1:1–17? And what message does Luke have for his readers through his genealogy in Luke 3:23–38?

Matthew’s purpose with his genealogy is to show Jesus’ legal descent from Abraham and David. So he emphasizes Jesus’ legal claim to the throne of David: Jesus is truly the son of David. God’s Old Testament promises were truly fulfilled in him.

Luke’s purpose with his genealogy is to show Jesus’ biological descent from Adam and David. So Luke wants to show his readers that Jesus, the son of man, represents the whole human race. Jesus is the fulfillment of the hopes of all nations.

Comments

son of David (Matt 1:1): This phrase should be understood as a Messianic title. Note that Matthew is presenting “the genealogy of Jesus Christ” (Christ is the Greek word for Messiah). In his gospel, Matthew makes it clear to his readers that Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s covenant with David (see 2 Sam 7:5–16).

son of Abraham (1:1): By using this expression, Matthew makes it clear to his readers that Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s covenant with Abraham (see Gen 12:1–3; 15:9–21;17:1–27; 22:18). Abraham was the founding father of the Israelite nation.

Tamar (v 3), Rahab (v 5), Ruth (v 5), Bathsheba (v 6, but not mentioned by name): So Matthew included four women (five with Mary) in Jesus’ genealogy. At least three of them (Tamar, Rahab and Ruth) were Gentiles, and the fourth (Bathsheba) had been married to a Gentile. In addition, one of the women (Rahab) had been a prostitute and two of them (Tamar and Bathsheba) adulteresses. Matthew’s point by doing so must have been to show that God’s work and salvation plan is not limited to men or to the people of Israel or to “good people.” No, Jesus will be the Savior of all.

Joseph, the husband of Mary, from whom Jesus was born (v 16): Matthew shows that, even if Jesus was not the physical son of Joseph, he was his legal son and therefore a descendant of David.

fourteen generations … fourteen … fourteen (v 17): Matthew uses the number fourteen three times to show that Jesus truly was the son of David. In ancient Hebrew the numerical value for the three letters in David’s name (DVD) added up to the number fourteen (D stands for 4 and V stands for 6: 4+6+4=14). David is also the fourteenth name on the list. Here is another way of understanding the numbers: 7 stands for fullness and fulfillment; after 6 times seven generations (4 x 7 = 14 three times) comes Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of the whole history of Israel, which began with Abraham.

He was the son (as was supposed) of Joseph (Luke 3:23): Luke reminds his readers of his account of the virgin birth of Jesus in Luke 1:34–35. So here again he makes it clear that Joseph was not Jesus’ physical father.

Questions

1. Compare the chronological order of the two genealogies and give your comments.
2. How far back does Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus go?
3. How far back does Luke’s genealogy of Jesus go?
4. Matthew mentions five women in his genealogy of Jesus. Who are they?

Think and discuss

1. Explain in your own words why the two genealogies of Jesus in Matthew and Luke are different.
2. Explain in your own words why Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus includes women, even Gentile women and women of bad reputation.

([Go to Answers 5: Two genealogies](#Answers5TwoGenealogies))

### Study 6: The birth of Jesus, Matt 1:18–25 and Luke 2:1–7

Introduction and comments

Matthew’s record of the birth of Jesus focuses on Joseph. God revealed to him in a dream the divine conception of Jesus and what was to be the boy’s name. Matthew pictures Joseph as a righteous and God-fearing man, willing to submit to God’s plan for him and his family. At this point in his narrative, Matthew chooses not to inform his readers about the time or the place for Jesus’ birth.

Luke, however, records several details about when and where Jesus was born He also gives the background to why Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea.

Joseph, her husband (Matt1:19, not shown in Kannada pavitra grantha): In the previous verse Matthew uses “pledged to be married” to describe the relationship between Joseph and Mary at this time. So they were not yet married. Even then the words “husband” and “wife” (compare verses 21 and 24) were used by the Israelites about the betrothed couple (compare Deut 22:23–24, which is about how to punish a betrothed woman who has been unfaithful).

send her away quietly (v 19): This means that Joseph, who was a good and righteous man, would sign the divorce/dismissal papers without making a big fuss. He would not make a public display of Mary’s condition or take her to court and have her sentenced to death.

be fulfilled (v 22): The fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies is a recurring theme in Matthew’s gospel. Matthew quotes the Old Testament almost 50 times. Most of these quotations are Messianic prophecies.

Immanuel (v 23): Matthew quotes a prophetic oracle in Isaiah 7:14 and adds a translation of the Hebrew name “Immanuel.” The historical context of the Immanuel prophecy is God assuring king Ahaz through the prophet Isaiah that God would deliver the nation of Judah from the ongoing enemy attacks. The Holy Spirit inspired Matthew to interpret this prophecy as a prophecy about Jesus: Jesus is “God with us.”

Caesar Augustus (Luke 2:1): His original name was Gaius Octavius. He received the name Caesar when he was adopted by his great-uncle Julius Caesar. Augustus (“the exalted”) was a title that he was given when he became the first emperor of Rome in 31 BC. He ruled until his death in AD 14.

be registered (v 1): The Romans took census of the inhabitants of their provinces quite regularly. A census was used for drafting men into military service and for taxation. Jews were exempt from Roman military service, but they had to pay taxes.

Quirinius was governor of Syria (v 1): Historical records show that Quirinius was governor of the Roman province of Syria AD 6–9 and that a census was taken at that time. So Luke’s statement here must refer to an earlier census, probably when the same Quirinius was in charge of Roman foreign affairs in Syria around 6 BC.

Judea … Bethlehem (v 4): When Archelaus (son of Herod the Great) was dethroned by the Romans in AD 6, Judea (the southern part of Palestine) became a sub-province of the Roman province of Syria. Judea was ruled by a procurator appointed by the Roman emperor. This procurator was subordinate to the proconsul of Syria, who was stationed in Antioch. Bethlehem was the town in which king David was born, so it was the ancestral town of both Joseph and Mary.

with Mary (v 5): Also Mary was of the family line of king David. In the Roman province of Syria, adult women had to pay a citizen tax. So Mary had to be enrolled in the census in spite of her advanced pregnancy.

Questions

1. What was Joseph’s reason for wanting to divorce Mary quietly (Matt 1:18–19)?
2. The angel told Joseph to call Mary’s son “Jesus” (Matt 1:20–21). Why?
3. What other name for Jesus does Matthew mention, and what does this name mean (Matt 1:22–23)?
4. Why did Joseph travel with Mary from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea (Luke 2:4–5)?

Think and discuss

1. Explain in your own words the relationship (legal as well as sexual) between Joseph and Mary before and after Joseph’s dream in Matt 1:20.
2. Compare the accounts of Jesus’ birth in Matt 1:18–25 and Luke 2:1–7. Your comments?

Reflect and prepare

1. Reflect on Joseph as he is described in Matt 1:18–25. Also consider the information given in this study. Then prepare a devotion or a simple Bible study called Joseph – an example to us.
2. Reflect on the birth of Jesus as it is described in Luke 2:1–7. Also consider the information given in this study. Then prepare a devotion or a simple Bible study called An emperor and a baby.

([Go to Answers 6: The birth of Jesus](#Answers6TheBirthOfJesus))

### Study 7: The shepherds and the angels, Luke 2:8–20

Introduction and comments

The first group of people to hear the good news about Jesus and to acknowledge his birth were some shepherds, who were watching their sheep at night in the fields near Bethlehem. It was brought to them by an angel of the Lord and accompanied by song from a multitude of angel voices. The shepherds hurried to see the baby in the manger. They glorified and praised God for what they had experienced that wonderful night.

In the history of the Christian church, the song of the angels (v 14) is often called Gloria (which means “glory”) from its first word in the Latin Bible translation. It is used in many church services even today.

an angel of the Lord (v 9): The same expression is used several times in the narratives of the births of John the Baptist and Jesus (compare Luke 1:11 and Matt 1:20, 24; 2:13, 19). This angel is identified as Gabriel in Luke 1:19, 26.

the glory of the Lord (v 9): This expression refers to the glorious presence of God himself.

Don’t be afraid (v 9): This word of assurance is given many times in the Bible. The appearance of an angel would make people afraid (compare Mary in Luke 1:13) and they needed encouragement.

city of David (v 11): Bethlehem (compare v 15)

Savior (v 11): In those days, many Jews were looking for a political leader who would deliver them from the Roman occupation of Palestine. Others were waiting for a savior to deliver them from sickness and difficulties. But here the angel is announcing the birth of a different kind of savior, one who would deliver them from sin and death (see Matt 1:21, Luke 1:77 and John 1:29).

Christ the Lord (v 11): Christ is the Greek translation of Hebrew Messiah, “the Anointed One.” The Lord is God’s covenant name in the Old Testament. In the New Testament it is also used about Jesus, the incarnate Lord of the Covenant. So the shepherds were told that this Messiah who had been born as a baby is also the Lord God himself.

heavenly host (v 13): Angels

in the highest (v 14): This is a reference to heaven, where God dwells.

peace, good will toward men (v 14): The Roman Empire was proud of its Pax Romana (Latin for “Roman peace”) which referred to the absence of war within the borders of the empire. But here the angels sing of a different kind of peace. This peace is for those whom God favors. This peace is the result of the forgiveness of sins that God gives to all those who accept Jesus as their personal Savior. He is the Savior of the world, and only his salvation will give us true peace.

the Lord has made known to us (v 15): This expression shows that the shepherds realized that it was God who had spoken through the angel.

Questions

1. What was the sign that the shepherds were given that a Savior had been born?
2. What did the shepherds do after they had seen the baby in the manger?
3. What do we learn about Mary in this passage?

Think and discuss

1. The shepherds decided to go to Bethlehem v 15). Why? Your answer should have two points.
2. “Joy” is a key word in Luke’s gospel. What role does “joy” play in this passage?

Reflect and prepare

1. Reflect on the information that the angels had for the shepherds about Jesus (v 10–14). Also consider the information given in the Introduction to this study. Then prepare a devotion or a simple Bible study called The angels’ message to the shep-herds.
2. Mary stored in her memory and reflected on all the things that she had seen and heard that night. What things could this have been? Make two lists, one of the things that she could have stored in her memory and one of the things that she could have reflected on.

Reflect and prepare

1. Reflect on the information that the angels had for the shepherds about Jesus (v 10–14). Also consider the information given in the Introduction to this study. Then prepare a devotion or a simple Bible study called The angels’ message to the shepherds.
2. Mary stored in her memory and reflected on all the things that she had seen and heard that night. What things could this have been? Make two lists, one of the things that she could have stored in her memory and one of the things that she could have reflected on.

([Go to Answers 7: The shepherds and the angels](#Answers7TheShepherdsAndTheAngels))

### Study 8: Jesus brought to the Jerusalem temple, Luke 2:21–40

Introduction and comments

About six weeks later, Joseph and Mary brought baby Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem in accordance with the law. There they met two old and devout persons, Simeon and Anna, who praised God when they saw Jesus. Joseph and Mary were surprised at what Simeon and Anna told them about their child.

the time of their purification (v 22): After the birth of a son, a Jewish mother was unclean for 40 days. Then she went to the temple with her child to offer sacrifice for her purification.

brought him up to Jerusalem (v 22): The distance between Bethlehem and Jerusalem is less than 10 km.

to present him to the Lord (v 22): According to the law, the firstborn male and male animal had to be dedicated to God (see Ex 13:2–13, which Luke partly quotes in verse 23). The animal was sacrificed or redeemed, and the boy was always redeemed (Num 18:14–16). The Levites were ordained by God to serve in the place of all firstborn males in Israel (see Num 3:11–13, 45–47).

A pair of doves or two young pigeons (v 24): This shows that Joseph and Mary were poor. They offered the sacrifice of the poor (two birds) instead of the normal sacrifice of one lamb and one bird (see Lev 12:2–8, partly quoted by Luke).

the consolation of Israel (v 25): This expression refers to the Messiah who would bring comfort and consolation to the people of God (see Is 40:1–2).

the child’s father (v 33): Joseph was Jesus’ legal father.

a sword will pierce through your own heart (v 35): This is a metaphor for the suffering that Mary would experience at the time of Jesus’ crucifixion.

Jerusalem (v 38): Here the city of Jerusalem represents the whole nation of Israel.

they returned to Galilee (v 39): Note that Matthew has information about Jesus’ family at his time that Luke has omitted: The visit of the magi from the east, Herod’s killing of the small boys of Bethlehem, the escape to Egypt, and the return to Nazareth.

Questions

1. What happened when Jesus was eight days old (v 21)?
2. Why did Joseph and Mary take Jesus to the Jerusalem temple (v 22–24)?
3. What do we learn about Simeon (v 25–35)?
4. What do we learn about Anna (v 36–38)?
5. Where did Joseph and his family go after their visit to the temple (v 39)?
6. How is Jesus’ development described at the end of this passage?

Think and discuss

1. Explain why Simeon’s prophecy about Jesus is so important for us who live in South India today?
2. What general impression does Luke give his readers about the four adults (Joseph, Mary, Simeon, and Anna) in this passage? Use your own words.
3. What additional information about Jesus and his ministry does this passage give the readers of Luke’s gospel?

Reflect and prepare

1. In this passage we meet four godly people (Joseph, Mary, Simeon, and Anna). Reflect on how Luke describes them. Also reflect on the comments given in Introduction and on your answers to Question 1–4. Then prepare a devotion or a simple Bible study based on this material. Your answer to Think and discuss 2 can be your outline.
2. In this passage Luke gives his readers some important additional information about Jesus and his ministry. Reflect on this information (including your answers to Think and discuss 3) and on the con-sequences for your own life and ministry. Then prepare a devotion or a simple Bible study based on this material. Your answer to Think and discuss 3 can be your outline.

([Go to Answers 8: Jesus brought to the Jerusalem temple](#Answers8JesusBroughtToTheJerusalemTemple))

### Study 9: The wise men from the east, Matt 2:1–12

Introduction and comments

Luke tells his readers about the simple shepherds from Bethlehem and how God through his angels gave them the good news about the birth of Jesus. They were the first to see and worship him. Matthew instead records how God led some wise astrologers from the east by a star to the newborn king of Palestine. They thought that they would find him in the royal palace of king Herod the Great, but instead they found him in a humble home in Bethlehem. They presented baby Jesus with their valuable gifts and worshiped him.

king Herod (v 1): Herod the Great belonged to a noble Idumean family (Idumea was the area just south of Palestine, see Map of the Roman Province of Judaea). His forefathers had converted to the Jewish faith, but he was still considered an outsider by the Jewish leaders. Herod was appointed king of Judea by the Romans and took control of his country in 37 BC. He died in 4 BC. He was a strong and ruthless ruler, who murdered one of his wives and several of his sons. But he was also a great builder, who restored the Jerusalem temple and built many theaters, cities, palaces, and fortresses, including his palace at Jericho (which was his residence and where he died), the fortress of Herodium near Jerusalem (where he was buried), and the harbor and city of Caesarea on the Mediterranean Sea (later the residence of the Roman governors, see Acts 23:23–26).

wise men from the east (v 1): They probably came from Persia or southern Arabia. We do not know their names or how many they were.

the king of the Jews (v 2): This expression indicates the the astrologers were Gentiles. Matthew wants to show that people from all nations came to worship Jesus and acknowledge him as king.

his star (v 2): There are many theories and speculations about the nature of the star that first appeared to and then guided the astrologers. There is, of course, no way for us to know what it really was. The astrologers were star-gazers who must have known about the oracle uttered 1400 years earlier by the Mesopotamian diviner Balaam over the Israelites as they were about to enter the Promised Land: “A star will come out of Jacob, a scepter will rise out of Israel” (Num 24:17). The Jews interpreted this utterance as a prophecy about the the Messiah.

chief priests (v 4): The Sadducees were in charge of the administration of the Jerusalem temple and the temple worship.

teachers of the law (v 4): These were the Jewish scholars of those days. Most of them were Pharisees.

the prophet has written (5): This prophecy about a future king from Bethlehem in Judah was uttered by Micah seven hundred years earlier (Micah 5:2).

shepherd (v 6): This was a common metaphor for ruler and king.

gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh (v 11): These were very valuable gifts. Gold was a suitable gift for a king. Incense was used by the priests in the temple, and myrrh was used for expensive perfumes and for embalming the dead.

Questions

1. Why did the astrologers from the east come to Jerusalem?
2. How did king Herod find out where the king of the Jews was to be born?
3. What instruction did king Herod give the astrologers as he sent them to Bethlehem?
4. How did the astrologers find the house where Jesus was staying?
5. Why did the astrologers not return to Jerusalem to report to king Herod what they had found about the birth of the king of the Jews?

Think and discuss

1. Why do you think that the visit of astrologers made king Herod so upset?
2. One Bible scholar has read four important themes into this story:
   1. The Gentile theme
   2. The fulfillment theme
   3. The contrast theme
   4. The astrological theme

How do you understand these themes?

Reflect and prepare

Reflect on the various aspects of this story, including the information given in the Introduction and your answers to the questions. Then prepare a devotion or a simple Bible study called The visit of the wise men.

([Go to Answers 9: The wise men from the east](#Answers9TheWiseMenFromTheEast))

### Study 10: Escape to Egypt and return to Nazareth, Matt 2:13–23

Introduction and comments

After the wise men had left Bethlehem, an angel told Joseph in a dream to escape to Egypt. Only after the death of Herod the Great were they able to return to Palestine. Through a dream Joseph was guided to settle with his family in Nazareth in Galilee.

Egypt (v 13): The border to Egypt was about 150 km southwest of Bethlehem. It is knot known where in Egypt Jesus and his parents stayed. Nor how long. they were there.

the death of Herod (v 15): King Herod the Great died in 4 BC.

Out of Egypt I called my son (v 15): This quotation is from Hosea 11:1, where God (with reference to his calling the Israelites out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses) says, “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.” Here Matthew, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, applies this statement to Jesus. Just as Israel as a “child nation” went down to Egypt, so the child Jesus went there. And just as Israel was led by God out of Egypt, so also God led Jesus out of there. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God’s OT promises and his plans for his people.

killed all the boys … two years old and under (v 16): We do not know how many innocent boys that were murdered in the area of the small village of Bethlehem, probably less than 30.

Verse 18 is a quotation from Jeremiah 31:15. The context of that prophetic oracle is the Babylonian exile and the Lord’s promises to his people. He would redeem them from their enemies, bring them back from exile among the nations, and establish a new covenant with them. Ramah was situated about 8 km north of Jerusalem. On their way to exile in Babylonia, the Israelites of the Southern Kingdom must have walked through this town. Rachel, Jacob’s favorite wife, is weeping for her lost and exiled children (the Israelites), because “they are no more.” So we can see how Matthew draws a parallel between the Babylonian exile and Jesus’ escape to Egypt to get away from Herod’s murderous attempt. But Matthew also reminds his readers of the other half of the context of the Jeremiah passage: God’s promise of salvation for his people and of making a new covenant with his people. These Old Testament promises would be fulfilled through Jesus.

Archelaus (v 22): He was a son of Herod the Great. At his father’s death in 4 BC, he became the ruler of Idumea, Samaria, and Judea. He was cruel and tyrannical, so the Roman government dethroned him in AD 6.

the region of Galilee … in a city called Nazareth … “He will be called a Nazarene” (v 22–23): Galilee was situated in the northern part of Palestine. Nazareth was a very insignificant place, not even mentioned in the Old Testament. So Matthew’s statement that the Messiah would “be called a Nazarene” is not a quotation from the prophets. It should instead be understood as reference to the Old Testament view that the Messiah would be despised (see for example Ps 22:6; Isaiah 53:3). In Jesus’ day the word “Nazarene” was almost synonymous with “despised” (compare Nathanael’s question to Philip, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?,” John 1:46).

Questions

1. Why did the angel tell Joseph to escape with his family to Egypt?
2. How long did Joseph’s family stay in Egypt?
3. How did Joseph find out that the time had come for them to return to Palestine?
4. Where did Joseph settle with his family after their return to Palestine?
5. Find these five names on Map of the Roman Province of Judaea: Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Judea, Nazareth, and Galilee.

Think and discuss

1. Why did Herod not kill the boys who were older than two years?
2. How does Matthew show that Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah?

Reflect and prepare

Reflect on what you have learnt in this study. Then prepare a devotion or a simple Bible study called Jesus the promised Messiah. Make use of information from the Introduction and your answer to Think and discuss 2.

([Go to Answers 10: Escape to Egypt and return to Nazareth](#Answers10EscapeToEgyptAndReturnToNazaret))

### Study 11: The Word became flesh, John 1:1–18

Introduction and comments

John’s gospel was written later than the first three gospels.So there was no need for the author to repeat the stories about the births of John the Baptist and Jesus that we have read in the previous studies of this textbook. These accounts in Matthew and Luke must have been well known to John’s readers. So instead John begins his gospel in a more theological way by stating Jesus’ divinity and introducing John the Baptist’s role in testifying to Jesus’ identity.

You will study this passage more thoroughly in a later course about John’s gospel.

the Word (v 1): John uses this word about Jesus in this passage. The Greeks used this word (logos) with reference not only to the spoken word, but also to the unspoken word, the word that it still in the mind of the speaker. So for the Greeks logos could also mean “reason” and “the principle that governs the universe.” The Jews used “the word” both with reference to “the word through which God created everything and governs everything” and with reference to “the word of God, the Law.”

He was (v 2): In Greek the gender of “word” (logos) is masculine. So the pronoun “he” is used with it. A modern translator must choose “he” (thereby openly stating to the reader that Jesus is this word) or “it” (thereby risking that the reader will think that the translator denies the divinity of Jesus).

John (v 6): John the Baptist

dwelt/lived (v 14): The Greek word comes from the word for “tent, tabernacle.” So it would have reminded John’s readers of the Old Testament “tent of meeting,” which God filled with his glory (Ex 40:34–35).

Questions

1. What do we learn about the Word in verses 1–4? Make a list.
2. What do we learn about John the Baptist in verses 6–8? Make a list.
3. What is contrasted in verse 17?
4. Who has made God known (v 18)?

Think and discuss

1. Rephrase verses 9–13 in your own words.
2. What can we understand about the author of John’s gospel from verse 14?
3. Rephrase John’s testimony about Jesus (v 15) in your own words.

([Go to Answers 11: The Word became flesh](#Answers11TheWordBecameFlesh))

### Study 12: Jesus at the age of twelve, Luke 2:41–52

Introduction and comments

In Luke we find the lovely story about Jesus’ in the Jerusalem temple at the age of twelve. It is the only account of Jesus as a young boy found in the gospels.

the Feast of the Passover (v 41): According to the law all men should travel to Jerusalem for the three annual holidays (the Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles). They were usually accompanied by their families. Those who lived far away tried to go at least for the Passover.

twelve years old (v 42): A Jewish boy became a “son of the covenant” at the age of thirteen and started preparing for that ceremony when he was twelve.

the teachers (v 46): These were the rabbis, who where experts on the law of Moses.

Verse 52: Compare Luke’s description of Jesus in verse 40. Also compare the description of young Samuel in 1 Sam 2:26.

Questions

1. Where did Jesus’ family celebrate the Passover festival?
2. How long did Joseph and Mary travel before they realized that they had left Jesus behind?
3. Why were the Jewish teachers amazed about Jesus?
4. What do we learn about Mary at the end of this passage?

Think and discuss

1. Why do you think Joseph and Mary were astonished when they found Jesus in the temple?
2. Explain the contrast between Mary’s question and Jesus answer (v 48–49).
3. We can also find a tension between Jesus’ words in verse 49 and his behavior as described in verse 51. Explain how.

([Go to Answers 12: Jesus at the age of twelve](#Answers12JesusAtTheAgeOfTwelve))

## Twelve studies on the coming of Jesus – answers

### Answers 1: The promise of John the Baptist, Luke 1:5–25

Answers to Questions

1. We learn these four things about Zechariah and Elizabeth (v 5–7):
   1. They were of priestly descent (the family line of Aaron).
   2. They were devout followers of the Jewish faith.
   3. They were childless.
   4. They were old.
2. Zechariah’s duty in the temple was to be responsible for the altar of incense during the week that he served in the temple. He was chosen for this duty by lot (v 8–10).
3. The angel Gabriel told Zechariah these things about John (v 11–17):
   1. The birth of their child would be God’s answer to their prayers.
   2. Elizabeth was to give birth to a son and that he was to be called John.
   3. John would become a source of great joy to his parents and blessing to many people.
   4. John would become great in the eyes of God: From the day he was born he would be separated for God and filled with the Holy Spirit.
   5. He would be used by God to bring many Israelites back to the Lord.
   6. He would be the promised “Elijah” and be a forerunner of God himself as he turned the hearts of the Israelites and prepared them for the coming of the Lord.
4. Zechariah was not able to speak after his experience in the temple (v 18–22).
   1. It was a sign that Gabriel really had a message from God.
   2. It was a punishment for Zechariah’s lack of faith.
5. When Elizabeth found out that she was pregnant, she realized that it was God who had heard their prayers and removed her disgrace (v 23–25). She acknowledged God’s miraculous grace.

Comments on Think and discuss

1. –
2. –
3. Zechariah and Elizabeth are described as “upright in the sight of God” (v 6). Luke explains this expression through the words that follow his statement: They lived blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord.
4. The reactions of Zechariah and Elizabeth when they found out that they were going to have a baby:
   1. Zechariah reacted with doubt. He even questioned God’s message through Gabriel (v 18).
   2. Elizabeth reacted with thanksgiving. She acknowledged that God had answered their prayers and graciously intervened in their situation.
5. In this passage we see that childlessness is not caused by sin, at least not always. Zechariah and Elizabeth had been faithful followers of God’s commandments. Yet they were childless. But ultimately God is in control of human life. So we can turn to him, even when we suffer from childlessness, and ask him to intervene on our behalf. He answered the prayers of Zechariah and Elizabeth, in spite of her being beyond normal child-bearing age.

Comments on Reflect and prepare

1. This could be an outline for a simple study on God’s faithfulness:

* God is faithful to his promises
* God is a prayer-answering God
* God will fulfill his promises and answer our prayers in his own time

1. This could be an outline for a simple study on Good news:

* Zechariah received good news about a son
* Israel received good news about the Messiah
* Mankind received good news about the coming of the Savior of the world

1. This could be an outline for a simple study on The role of the Holy Spirit:

* The Holy Spirit speaks through God’s prophets (Malachi)
* The Holy Spirit works through God’s servants (John the Baptist):
  + A Spirit-filled life as an example to God’s people
  + A Spirit-filled life that brings joy and delight to God’s people
  + A Spirit-filled life that helps God’s people to find their way back to God
  + A Spirit-filled life that points to Jesus the Savior of the world

([Go to Study 2: Mary recevies news about the birth of Jesus](#Study2MaryReceivesNewsAboutTheBirthOfJes))

### Answers 2: Mary receives news about the birth of Jesus, Luke 1:26–38

Answers to Questions

1. We learn two things about Joseph (v 26–28):
   1. He was Mary’s fiancé.
   2. He belonged to the family line of king David.
2. Gabriel told Mary these things about Jesus (v 29–38):
   1. That his name must be “Jesus” (which means “the Lord saves”)
   2. That he would be a great man: He would become king over all the Israelites and his kingdom would be everlasting
   3. That he would be called the Son of the Most High and the Son of God (“the Most High” is one of the Old Testament names for God)
   4. That he would not be conceived by a man (as Mary was a virgin) but by the Holy Spirit of God (“the Holy Spirit will come on you” and “the power of the Most High will overshadow you”)
3. Mary reacted in these three ways to Gabriel’s visit and message (v 26–38):
   1. At first she was really confused and worried about the reason for the angel’s visit. She must also have been afraid, because the angel told her not to be afraid.
   2. Then she wondered how she would be able to have a son, as she was still a virgin.
   3. Finally she accepted the angel’s explanation and submitted to God’s plan for her life, “I am the Lord’s servant.”

Comments on Think and discuss

1. –
2. Mary’s question to Gabriel (v 34) compared with Zechariah’s (v 18):
   1. Superficially, their questions are very similar. They both wonder how the angel’s message could become true. Mary was a virgin so how could she have a son? Zechariah was old and his wife Elizabeth was beyond child-bearing age, so how could they have a son?
   2. But the wider contexts of these questions reveal that they were asked with different attitudes. Zechariah asked his question with an attitude of doubt (v 20). So he was given a sign that was also a punishment: He lost his ability to speak. Mary asked her question with an attitude of wonderment and curiosity, but she believed in the message (v 45). So she was blessed.
3. There are several amazing things in this story, for example:
   1. The mystery of the identity of Jesus: He is the son of Mary, so he is truly human. But he is also the Son of God (conceived by the Holy Spirit of the Most High), so he is truly God. We cannot fully understand this mystery with our minds, but we can accept this truth in faith.
   2. The scope of Jesus’ kingdom: The phrases “forever” and “no end” mainly indicate time, God’s Kingdom through the reign of his Son will be eternal. But we should also remember God’s promise to his Son in Ps 2:7–8:

“You are my son.   
 Today I have become your father.

Ask of me, and I will give the nations for your inheritance,  
 and the ends of the earth for your possession.”

* 1. God choosing Mary as a vessel for his incarnation: God’s ways are mysterious. Mary was not a powerful queen in the royal palace but an ordinary young girl in a simple home in a small town. So God can choose even us today for the expansion of his kingdom.
  2. Mary’s humility and acceptance of God’s calling: Her servanthood is a great example to us.

Comments on Reflect and prepare

1. This could be an outline for a simple study on Mary – the Lord’s servant:

* Mary’s background
* The visit of the angel: Mary’s surprise, confusion, fear, questions, acceptance
* Mary’s willingness to accept God’s will for her, to be a true servant
* What about us? Are we willing to be God’s servants?

1. This could be an outline for a simple study on Jesus – son of Mary and Son of God:

* Jesus – the son of Mary
* Jesus – the Son of God
* Jesus – the Savior
* Jesus – his kingdom
* How do we relate to Jesus (Son of Man, Son of God, Savior, and King)?

([Go to Study 3: Mary visits Elizabeth](#Study3MaryVisitsElizabeth))

### Answers 3: Mary visits Elizabeth, Luke 1:39–56

Answers to Questions

1. This passage consists of two parts, like this:
   1. Verses 39–45: Mary’s visit to Elizabeth, with whom she stayed for three months (v 56).
   2. Verses 46–55: Mary’s song of praise to God
2. –
3. Elizabeth’s unborn baby (a fetus of about six months) leaped for joy in her womb when Mary entered her house and greeted her (v 39–45). And Elizabeth herself was filled with the Holy Spirit and cried out in a blessing over Mary.
4. Elizabeth described the baby that Mary was carrying like this (v 39–45):
   1. As a blessed child
   2. As her Lord, a name that the Jews used for God
   3. As God’s work in Mary’s life
5. Mary’s visit lasted for three months (v 56). So she must have stayed with Elizabeth until John (the Baptist) was born before she returned to Nazareth in Galilee.

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Mary glorifies the Lord, because God has looked with favor on her, his lowly servant (v 46–47).
2. All future generations will call Mary blessed, because the great miracle that the Mighty and Holy God has done in her life (v 48–49)?
3. Mary describes God like this in her song (v 46–55):
   1. God looks with favor on even a lowly person like Mary.
   2. God is able to do mighty things, even with Mary.
   3. God is merciful, and his mercy extends from generation to generation.
   4. God scatters the proud.
   5. God overturns powerful rulers, but he exalts the humble.
   6. God feeds the hungry (particularly those who hunger for his kingdom and his righteousness) and sends away the rich (particularly those who do not acknowledge their need for him and his salvation).
   7. God is merciful and faithful to his promises to his people.

Comments on Reflect and prepare

1. This could be an outline for a study on John and Jesus:

* Summary of what Gabriel told Zechariah about John (Luke 1:11–17)
* Summary of what Gabriel told Mary about Jesus (Luke 1:29–38)
* Summary of what happened at the meeting between Mary and Elizabeth (Luke 1:39–45)
* A few concluding reflections:
  + John acknowledged his Master already in his mother’s womb.
  + The Holy Spirit was working through John and preparing him for his future ministry even from before his birth.
  + God had great plans for John and Jesus, and these plans were set in motion even before they had been born.
  + So what about us? Are we like Mary and Elizabeth? They were willing to be used by God. They acknowledged that God was at work through their lives. They also acknowledged that God had plans for their sons even from the days of their conception. Do we allow God to use even children to glorify him and his mighty works?

1. This could be an outline for a simple study on Mary and her God:

* Mary’s understanding of herself and her servanthood
* Mary’s understanding of God and his ways with people
* Mary’s attitude to God: She glorified him. She praised him. She thanked him. She acknowledged his supremacy.

([Go to Study 4: The birth of John the Baptist](#Study4TheBirthOfJohnTheBaptist))

### Answers 4: The birth of John the Baptist, Luke 1:57–80

Answers to Questions

1. This passage consists of two parts:
   1. Verses 57–66: The birth, circumcision, and naming of John the Baptist.
   2. Verses 67–79: A poetic utterance by Zechariah, John the Baptist’s father. This utterance contains a blessing of God (v 68–75) and a prophecy about John and Jesus (v 76–79).

Verse 80 is a conclusion to the whole passage.

1. Elizabeth’s neighbors and relatives reacted in two ways to the birth of John (v 57–58):
   1. They were very happy. So they could truly share Elizabeth’s joy.
   2. But they also realized that it was God who was behind this miraculous birth, and they interpreted this miracle as God’s mercy on Elizabeth.
2. Zechariah praised the Lord, because God had set in motion his salvation plan for Israel (v 68). The Lord was now about to come and redeem his people.
3. Zechariah prophesied three things about his son John the Baptist (v 76–77):
   1. John would become God’s prophet.
   2. John would be the one who prepared the way for the Lord God the Most High (in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, Isaiah 40:3). He would be the “Elijah” of Malachi 4:5.
   3. He would give God’s people the knowledge of salvation (through Jesus Christ, as indicated by the following verses) so that they would receive the forgiveness of their sins.
4. Zechariah prophesied five things about Jesus (v 76–79):
   1. John the Baptist would prepare his way.
   2. John the Baptist would point to him as God’s salvation through whom they would experience the forgiveness of their sins.
   3. Jesus would be the expression of God’s tender mercy.
   4. Jesus would be the Messiah (the “dawn” or the “rising sun”) in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.
   5. Jesus would guide God’s people into the way of peace. So Jesus would be the Savior, as he shows people the way from “the shadow of death” (referring to God’s impending judgment) into the light of God’s salvation, God’s peace.
5. In verse 80, we learn two things about John the Baptist’s childhood and youth:
   1. His growth into manhood was both physical and spiritual.
   2. He lived in the desert until he was about 30 years old (compare Luke 3:23 – John was six months older than Jesus) and his public ministry was about to begin. His parents were both old when he was born, so he probably lived by himself in his home area of Judea, which was hilly and largely consisted of desert.

Comments on Think and discuss

1. –
2. Zechariah praises the Lord because “he has come and redeemed his people” (v 68). We can understand this about this redemption from the verses that follow:
   1. One level of this redemption is deliverance from physical enemies and from people who oppose God’s people (v 71). This deliverance is an act of mercy from God and shows that God honors his covenant with the Israelite patriarchs (v 72–73).
   2. But this deliverance has religious consequences. Deliverance from physical enemies makes it possible for God’s people to live in peace so that they can serve him and live holy lives in accordance with God’s will for his people. It makes it possible for them to keep the covenant stipulations (v 74–75).
   3. Finally, there is a spiritual side to God’s redemption. When God in his mercy redeems his people, he saves them: He forgives them their sins and gives them eternal life. This is the work of God’s Messiah (v 77–79).
3. Zechariah’s prophecy (v 76–79) can be divided into two or three parts, like this:
   1. The focus is on John the Baptist (v 76).
   2. Verse 77 links John the Baptist with Jesus.
   3. The focus is on Jesus (v 78–79).

([Go to Study 5: Two genealogies](#Study5TwoGenealogies))

### Answers 5: Two genealogies, Matt 1:1–17 and Luke 3:23–38

Answers to Questions

1. A comparison of the chronological order of the two genealogies in Matthew and Luke:
   1. Matthew begins with the earliest person (Abraham) and ends with the latest person (Joseph).
   2. Luke begins with the latest person (Joseph) and end with the earliest person (Adam).
2. Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus goes back to Abraham, the founding father of the Israelite nation.
3. Luke’s genealogy of Jesus goes all the way back to Adam, the first man.
4. Matthew mentions five women in his genealogy of Jesus. They are:
   1. Tamar (v 3): She seems to have been a Canaanite woman. She married Judah’s two sons (one after the other). But they both died before she had any son. So she seduced her father-in-law in order to get a son (Gen 38).
   2. Rahab (v 4): She was a Canaanite prostitute in Jericho, who hid the two Israelites spies at the time of the conquest of Canaan under Joshua (Joshua 2).
   3. Ruth (v 5): She was a Moabite wmen who settled in Bethlehem with her mother-in-law Naomi and became David’s great-grandmother.
   4. Uriah’s wife (v 6): Uriah was a Hittite soldier who had a beautiful wife called Bathsheba. King David committed adultery with her and arranged for her husband to be killed (2 Sam 11). David then married her and she became Solomon’s mother.
   5. Mary (v 16): Jesus’ mother

Comments on Think and discuss

The answers to the two questions can easily be found in the Introduction and Comments sections of this lesson.

([Go to Study 6: The birth of Jesus](#Study6TheBirthOfJesus))

### Answers 6: The birth of Jesus, Matt 1:18–25 and Luke 2:1–7

Answers to Questions

1. Joseph’s reason for wanting to divorce Mary quietly (Matt 1:18–19) was that he was a good and merciful man. He did not want see Mary disgraced publicly or sentenced (perhaps by being stoned to death) in a Jewish court.
2. The angel told Joseph to call Mary’s son “Jesus” (Matt 1:21) (which in Hebrew means “the Lord saves”), because this name would describe him and his mission: Jesus would be the Lord God himself coming to save his people from their sins.
3. Matthew mentions one other name for Jesus, “Immanuel” (Matt 1:23). This name means “God with us” and comes from a prophecy in the book of Isaiah (7:14), which Matthew interprets as a Messianic prophecy about Jesus.
4. Joseph traveled with Mary from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea (Luke 2:4–5), because they both had to be registered at a Roman tax census. This registration had to be done in one’s ancestral town. Both Joseph and Mary belonged to the family line of king David, who was born in Bethlehem. So their ancestral town was Bethlehem.

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Among the Jews of those days, an engagement was a written contract between a man and a woman. This contract had legal status, and often the words “husband” and “wife” were used about the betrothed couple. But there was no sexual union between them until the official wedding had taken place. So it was illegal for Mary to become pregnant during the period of betrothal. Joseph, therefore, assumed that Mary had been unfaithful to him and become pregnant by another man. He felt that it would be immoral for him continue with this engagement. He also had the legal right to indict her in a Jewish court, which (if it followed the Old Testament law) could sentence her to death by stoning. But when God told Joseph what had really happened to Mary, he changed his mind. He did not break the engagement. Instead he invited Mary to stay in his house (perhaps to protect her from gossip and slander), but he did not have sex with her until after Jesus had been born.
2. A comparison of the accounts of Jesus’ birth in Matt 1:18–25 and Luke 2:1–7:
   1. The focus of the accounts is very different. Matthew focuses on Joseph’s character and his understanding of Mary’s pregnancy and the child she is carrying. One aspect of that is that Jesus’ name and his “prophetic name” (Immanuel) are both explained. Luke’s focus is on the historical and geographical contexts of Jesus’ birth. One aspect of that is that he explains why Jesus was born in Bethlehem (and not in Nazareth).
   2. It is important to note that Matthew confirms the information given by Luke in an earlier passage (Luke 1:35) about Jesus’ conception as the work of God through his Holy Spirit and that Mary is a virgin. Jesus is truly the Son of God the Most High. But Luke’s language is more poetic (in an Old Testament way) than Matthew’s.
   3. There are, of course, many other differences between the two accounts that you may want to comment on.

Comments on Reflect and prepare

1. This could be the outline of a simple study based on Matt 1:18–25 and called Joseph – an example to us.
   1. Joseph’s character shown through his conduct:
      * He was righteous and wanted to fulfill the requirements of the law. So he planned to cancel his engagement to Mary when he found out that she was pregnant.
      * He was considerate and merciful. So he did not want to expose Mary, either to a spiteful society or to a harsh Jewish court. He also took care of Mary and let her stay in his house where she was protected. He did not use her vulnerable situation to force himself on her.
      * He was obedient to God. So he followed God’s instructions – in spite of his very awkward situation. He let Mary stay in his house. He treated her with respect. And he gave her child the name Jesus. All this required much spiritual courage.
   2. Joseph is an example to us in righteousness, consideration, obedience and spiritual courage. We should be true servants of God – like Joseph.
2. This could be the outline of a simple study based on Luke 2:1–7 and called An emperor and a baby.
   1. The account begins with a mighty ruler: the Roman emperor who lived in palaces and who was feared and respected by crores of people.
   2. The account ends with a small helpless baby in a manger. There was no room for him and his parents even in the inn of a small town in Judea. But this baby was God himself incarnate in our world. He was King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the Savior of the world.
   3. So appearances can be deceptive. What do we see? Worldly power and riches? Or the spiritual truth? Do we have room for Jesus in our lives?

([Go to Study 7: The shepherds and the angels](#Study7TheShepherdsAndTheAngels))

### Answers 7: The shepherds and the angels, Luke 2:8–20

Answers to Questions

1. The sign that the shepherds were given that a Savior had been born was that they would find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger (v 12).
2. After they had seen the baby in the manger, the shepherds did three things:
   1. They told others about what the angel had revealed to them about the baby (v 17).
   2. They glorified and praised God for what they had been told about the baby and what they had seen with their own eyes (v 20).
   3. They returned to their work which was taking care of their sheep (v 20).
3. We learn two things about Mary in this passage (v 19):
   1. She remembered what had happened that night.
   2. She reflected on what had happened that night.

Comments on Think and discuss

1. The shepherds decided to go to Bethlehem for two reasons (v 15):
   1. They wanted to see the newborn baby in the manger.
   2. The reason they hurried into Bethlehem was that the angel had told them marvelous things about this baby: He was the Messiah that the Jews had been looking forward to for generations. And this Messiah was God himself who was bringing his peace and his salvation.
2. “Joy” is a key word in Luke’s gospel. It is also a key expression in this passage:
   1. The angel said that the news that he was bringing the shepherds was good news of great joy (v 11).
   2. The song that the angels sang was a song of glory to God expressing their joy that God was now about to save the world through the baby lying in a manger (v 14).
   3. They shepherds expressed their joy as they were glorifying and praising God on their way back to their sheep (v 20).

Comments on Reflect and prepare

1. This could be an outline for a study on The angel’s message to the shepherds:
   1. A brief summary of the events of the night: the shepherds, the angels and their message about the newborn baby Jesus
   2. The gospel about Jesus is really good news: of peace, of hope, of salvation.
   3. Why? Because Jesus is not only the Messiah of the Jews: he is the Lord God coming to save, not only the Jews, but mankind.
   4. But what is “the condition” for this salvation?
   5. There is only one “condition”: That we believe in the good news. We must believe and accept Jesus as our personal Savior.
   6. Then our lives will be changed: We will glorify and praise God. And we will share the good news with other people – like the shepherds did.
2. Mary stored in her memory and reflected on all the things that she had seen and heard that night:
   1. Things that she probably remembered the rest of her life:
      * That night when she gave birth to her firstborn son in the most primitive circumstances
      * The amazing testimony of the shepherds of what the angels had told them.
      * The joy and the feeling of heavenly presence that night
   2. Things that she perhaps reflected on:
      * The testimony of the shepherds really confirmed the message about her baby she had received from the angel Gabriel nine months earlier.
      * How all this amazing information about her baby (his identity and his mission) would be fulfilled.
      * Why God had chosen her, a young and lowly woman, to fulfill his great salvation plan.

([Go to Study 8: Jesus brought to the Jerusalem temple](#Study8JesusBroughtToTheJerusalemTemple))

### Answers 8: Jesus brought to the Jerusalem temple, Luke 2:21–40

Answers to Questions

1. When Jesus was eight days old, he was circumcised and given his name, Jesus (v 21).
2. There were two purposes of Joseph and Mary taking Jesus to the Jerusalem temple (v 22–24):
   1. Mary’s purification. According to the Old Testament law, a woman was unclean for 40 days after the birth of a son. At the end of that period she went to the temple to offer a sacrifice for her purification. As she and her husband were poor they offered two birds.
   2. Jesus’ dedication. According to the Old Testament law, the firstborn male child was to be redeemed (by the payment of a fee) and dedicated to the Lord.
3. We learn these things about Simeon (v 25–35):
   1. He was a righteous and devout man.
   2. He was looking forward to the coming of the Messiah.
   3. He was a man filled with the spirit of prophecy:
      * He knew that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah.
      * He also recognized Jesus as the Messiah.
      * Finally, he spoke prophetic words about Jesus and his ministry, and about Mary.
   4. He was guided by the Holy Spirit to come to the Jerusalem temple at the right time.
4. We learn these things about Anna (v 36–38):
   1. She was a prophetess, like Simeon.
   2. She was very old and had been a widow for many years.
   3. She spent all her time in the temple, worshiping, fasting and praying.
   4. Like Simeon, she was looking forward to the consolation of Israel (the Messiah), the redeemer of the Israelites.
5. According to this passage, Joseph and his family went home to Nazareth in Galilee after their visit to the temple (v 39). But we know from Matthew that there must have been some time before that happened. First the magi from the east came to visit them in Bethlehem. Then they fled to Egypt to escape from king Herod’s attempt to kill baby Jesus. So they settled in their home town of Nazareth only after their return from Egypt.
6. Jesus’ development is described at the end of this passage with four expressions (v 40):
   1. He grew (just like most boys do).
   2. He became strong (also like most boys that grow up do).
   3. He was filled with wisdom, probably in an extraordinary and supernatural way.
   4. The favor of God was upon him, probably in a unique way as he was the Son of God.

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Simeon’s prophecy about Jesus is important for us who live in South India today, because it clearly mentions that Jesus is the Savior of all people, not only of the Israelites (v 31–32). Jesus is not only the Messiah of the Jewish people. He is also the Savior of the world.
2. The general impression Luke gives his readers about the four adults (Joseph, Mary, Simeon, and Anna) in this passage can be summarized in words like this:
   * Righteous, devout, God-fearing, obedient to God’s instruction and eager to keep the Old Testament law
   * Expectant, waiting for the Messiah to come
   * Guided by the Holy Spirit, used by the Holy Spirit
   * Faithful, trusting in God and his plans
   * Thankful, worshipful
3. This passage gives the readers of Luke’s gospel important additional information about Jesus and his ministry, for example:
   1. It makes it absolutely clear that Jesus is the Savior of Gentiles as well as Jews. That could have been one reason why Joseph and Mary were amazed at Simeon’s words (v 33).
   2. Jesus and his ministry would not be accepted by all the Jews. Instead it would cause deep conflicts between those who believed in him and those who rejected him (v 34).
   3. Jesus and his ministry would reveal the true nature of people’s spirituality. They would not be able hide from God any longer (v 35).
   4. Jesus’ life would be one of suffering. A sword would pierce the souls of both Mary and Jesus (v 36).

([Go to Study 9: The wise men from the east](#Study9TheWiseMenFromTheEast))

### Answers 9: The wise men from the east, Matt 2:1–12

Answers to Questions

1. The astrologers from the east came to Jerusalem to find and worship the king of the Jews. They had seen his star and followed it to Palestine (v 1–2). They must have assumed that they would find him in the capital city of Jerusalem.
2. King Herod found out where the king of the Jews was to be born by asking the Jewish priests and scholars. They quoted to him a prophecy from the book of Micah, where it says that a ruler was to come out of Bethlehem in Judah (v 4–6).
3. As king Herod sent the astrologers to Bethlehem, he instructed them to return to him with a report about the child. The reason he gave them was that he too wanted to worship him (v 8).
4. The star stopped over the house where Jesus was staying (v 9). So the astrologers knew which house to enter.
5. God told the astrologers through a dream not to return to Jerusalem to report to king Herod what they had found about the birth of the king of the Jews (v 12).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. The visit of astrologers must have made king Herod worried about the future for himself and his family. He knew that he did not have a newborn son. So a newborn king of the Jews would be a serious threat to his own kingship and his dynasty.
2. Four important themes in this story:
   1. The Gentile theme: The astrologers were Gentiles who came to worship and acknowledge Jesus. This indicates that Jesus’ kingdom is not limited to the Jews but that it includes all nations. When Matthew wrote his gospel this truth was very evident in the local churches. There were many more Gentile that Jewish believers.
   2. The fulfillment theme: Matthew refers to two Old Testament prophetic oracles about the king of the Jews:
      * That the star/scepter that was to rise out of Israel. This was foretold by the Mesopotamian diviner Balaam 1400 years earlier.
      * That Bethlehem in Judah was to be his birthplace. This was foretold by the prophet Micah 700 years earlier.
   3. The contrast theme: There are a least four contrasts in this story:
      * The contrast between the Gentile visitors and the local Jews: The astrologers came from afar to find the Messiah. The Jewish leaders, who knew the prophecies and who lived nearby did not bother to look for him.
      * The contrast between the rich/powerful and the poor little child: King Herod was rich and powerful. Baby Jesus had no worldly possessions and no worldly power. The astrologers from the east were rich and they came with very valuable gifts for a poor little child.
      * The contrast between kingships: Herod was an evil and ruthless king appointed by the Roman leaders and serving the Roman Empire. Jesus is a shepherd king appointed by God and the ruler of God’s kingdom.
      * The contrast between good and evil: The astrologers came with good intent to honor and worship the newborn king. King Herod wanted to find out about the child with evil intent (which becomes clear in the passage that follows).
   4. The astrological theme: In those days most people believed in astrology. When something new was seen in the night sky, it was understood as God breaking into his ordered world to make known some important news. Around the time of Jesus, there was a strong rumor among people in the Roman Empire that Judea would be the source of a new world empire. So Matthew’s account of the Gentile astrologers traveling to Judea to find a newborn king fits well into the worldview and expectation of those days.

Comments on Reflect and prepare

Your study The visit of the astrologers could have these three parts:

* A summary of the story
* The four important themes, but with focus on the “contrast theme”
* Mirror yourself in the story! Are you like Herod (ruthless, selfish, evil, opposing the Kingdom of God)? Or are your like the priests and scribes (knowing the truth but not pursuing it, not bothering about finding Jesus)? Or are you like the astrologers (searching for Jesus, finding Jesus, worshiping Jesus, presenting your resources as gifts to Jesus)?

([Go to Study 10: Escape to Egypt and return to Nazareth](#Study10EscapeToEgyptAndReturnToNazareth))

### Answers 10: Escape to Egypt and return to Nazareth, Matt 2:13–23

Answers to Questions

1. The angel told Joseph to escape with his family to Egypt, because king Herod was trying to find Jesus to kill him (v 13).
2. Joseph’s family stayed in Egypt until king Herod had died (v 19).
3. Joseph found out through an angel who appeared to him in a dream that the time had come for them to return to Palestine (v 19–20).
4. After their return to Palestine, Joseph settled with his family in a town called Nazareth in Galilee in northern Palestine (v 22–23).
5. –

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Herod did not kill the boys who were older than two years, because he calculated from the information that the astrologers had given him that Jesus must be less than two years old (compare v 16).
2. Matthew shows that Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah, like this:
   1. He quotes Hosea 11:1: The text in Hosea refers to God calling his people out of Egypt at the time of Moses. But the Holy Spirit has revealed to Matthew that the verse in Hosea also points forward to God calling Jesus out of his exile in Egypt. So God’s “newborn” nation of Israel (also called “child” and “my son”) in Hosea foreshadows God’s Son Jesus in Matthew. Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s purposes with Israel.
   2. He states that the oracle in Jeremiah 31:15 about Rachel in Ramah mourning and weeping for her children who are no more (referring to the national disaster of the Babylonian conquest of Judah, when many had been killed and others taken captive to Babylon) was “fulfilled” with the mothers of Bethlehem mourning and weeping for their children that had been murdered by king Herod. But God saved the nation of Israel and brought the Israelites back from exile in Babylon. He also promised to make a new covenant with them. God saved Jesus from Herod and brought him back from exile in Egypt. It was through Jesus and his sacrificial death on the cross that God fulfilled his promise of a new covenant.
   3. He makes the surprising statement that the prophets had foretold that the Messiah would be “called a Nazarene,” even if there is no such prophecy in the Old Testament. The solution to this mystery is found in the fact that in New Testament times the word Nazarene had two meanings. It could mean “a person from Nazareth” but also “a person who is a nobody, who is despised by others.” From Ps 22:6 and Isaiah 53:3 we can understand that the Messiah would be scorned, despised, and rejected by people, so in that sense he would be a “Nazarene-“ Matthew then uses this word in a more literal sense: Jesus was a Nazarene, because he grew up in Nazareth.

Comments on Reflect and prepare

Your study Jesus the promised Messiah could be structured like this:

* 1. Introduction: One point that Matthew makes in his gospel is that Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus. We find three examples of this is in Matt 2:13–23. Read the passage.
     + Hosea 11:1: Jesus is God’s true Son.
     + Jeremiah 31:15 (and the wider context of God’s promise of salvation through a new covenant, see for example verses 11, 31–34): No more weeping and mourning with Jesus. He is the Savior: “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt 26:28).
     + Psalm 22:6 and Isaiah 53:3: Jesus of Nazareth is the despised Messiah, rejected by people.
  2. Do you understand who Jesus is? Have you accepted him as your personal Savior?

([Go to Study 11: The Word became flesh](#Study11TheWordBecameFlesh))

### Answers 11: The Word became flesh, John 1:1–18

Answers to Questions

1. We learn these things about the Word in verses 1–4:
   1. He was from the very beginning.
   2. He was with God.
   3. He was God.
   4. Everything was created through him.
   5. In him was life so that people can find life and light (salvation) through him.
2. We learn these things about John the Baptist in verses 6–8:
   1. He was sent from God.
   2. His mission was to witness about the light of salvation so that people through him would believe in Jesus.
3. In verse 17 the old covenant and the new covenant are contrasted. Through the old covenant (Moses), God gave his people the law. But through the new covenant (Jesus), God gave grace and truth.
4. God, the one and only Son (referring to the divine Jesus), has made God (the Father) known to mankind (v 18).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Verses 9–13: The divine Jesus was coming to the world with God’s salvation. But people did not recognize him, even though he was God and even though the whole world had been created through him. He was even rejected by his own people. But all those who accepted him and believed in him became God’s children through a spiritual birth. They were born of God.
2. From verse 14, we can understand two things about the author of John’s gospel:
   1. He had met Jesus personally.
   2. He had understood who Jesus is: God incarnate.
3. John’s testimony about Jesus (v 15): Jesus, whose ministry began after John’s own, is greater than John and he existed before John.

([Go to Study 12: Jesus at the age of twelve](#Study12JesusAtTheAgeOfTwelve))

### Answers 12: Jesus at the age of twelve, Luke 2:41–52

Answers to Questions

1. Jesus’ family celebrated the Passover festival in Jerusalem, as they did every year (v 41). The Passover was one of the three “compulsory” annual pilgrimage festivals.
2. Joseph and Mary traveled for a whole day before they realized that they had left Jesus behind (44).
3. The Jewish teachers were amazed about Jesus because of his understanding of the Scriptures and the answers that he gave them (v 47).
4. At the end of this passage we learn that Mary (just as she had done when the shepherds visited baby Jesus in Bethlehem, Luke 2:19) reflected on what had happened (v 51).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. I think Joseph and Mary were astonished when they found Jesus in the temple (v 48), because they did not expect a twelve-year old boy to spend three days talking to Bible scholars.
2. The contrast between Mary’s question and Jesus’ answer (v 48–49):
   1. Mary is scolding Jesus for having given trouble and worry to his (earthly and legal) father Joseph.
   2. Jesus is criticizing his mother for not understanding that he wants to spend time with his (heavenly) Father.

So even at the young age of twelve, Jesus was aware of his unique relationship to God (compare v 47).

1. The tension between Jesus’ words in verse 49 and his behavior as described in verse 51:
   1. Jesus was not afraid of criticizing his mother for her lack of understanding.
   2. At the same time, he was obedient to his parents during his childhood.

So there is no need for boldness and honesty to result in disobedience.

([Go to Mark’s gospel](#MarksGospel))

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## Mark’s gospel

### How to study Mark’s gospel

This unit is based on a reading of the entire gospel of Mark. Mark’s style of writing is both fast-moving and concentrated. The result is a gospel full of action. In order not to disrupt the flow of Mark’s text too much, each of the studies that follow is based on a whole chapter – not on an individual passage. There are sixteen chapters in Mark, so there are sixteen studies in this unit.

I suggest that you work through each study like this:

1. Read the whole chapter in Mark, preferably in more than one translation.
2. Go through the Introduction and comments. The text comments will help you answer the questions, in particular the more difficult questions under Think and discuss.
3. Answer the Questions, individually or in small groups.
4. Work through Think and discuss, preferably in small groups. Make use of the text comments in the Introduction and comments.
5. Compare your answers to 3 and 4 above with Answer to Questions and Comments on Think and discuss in the answer section of this textbook.
6. The assignments under Reflect and prepare can be done now or later.

Some of these sixteen studies are long and will require much time. Don’t rush through the material!

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### Mark chapter 1

Introduction and comments

Mark begins his gospel with a brief account of John the Baptist’s ministry (v 1–8). Jesus are among all those who travel to the Desert of Judah to be baptized by John (v 9–11). The Spirit then sends Jesus out into the desert, where he is tempted by Satan (v 12–13). Jesus begins his public ministry in Galilee by preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God and calling four fishermen to follow him (v 14–20). In the rest of the chapter Jesus teaches with authority (in the Capernaum synagogue, v 21–28 and other synagogues, v 39) and manifests the power of the Kingdom of God by casting out evil spirits (v 23–26, 34, 39) and healing the sick (v 29–34, 40–42) throughout Galilee. The news about Jesus spreads and the crowds becomes unmanageable (v 37, 45).

The beginning (v 1): This word would have reminded Mark’s readers of the first words of Genesis about God creating heaven and earth. With Jesus, God is making a new beginning for mankind.

the gospel of Jesus Christ (v 1): The gospel (good news) is that God has provided salvation through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The corresponding Old Testament Hebrew word means “the coming of God’s rule, the coming of God’s salvation and judgment.” So the New Testament good news includes the truth that God is now establishing his Kingdom with the coming of Jesus, God’s Christ (the Messiah). Through Jesus, God is fulfilling his promises.

the Son of God (v 1): This is one of the most important titles of Jesus in the New Testament (compare God’s voice from heaven in verse 11). It must be understood both as a synonym for “Messiah” (compare Ps 2:7; Matt 16:16) and as implying Jesus’ deity through the unique relationship that he has with God the Father (compare John 5:18). Jesus’ claim to the title “Son of God” was the Jewish leaders’ main accusation against him (Mark 14:61–62).

It is written in Isaiah the prophet (v 2–3): Two quotations follow this statement, one from Malachi 3:1 (the first two lines) and one from Isaiah 40:3 (the lines found in v 3).

the Lord (v 3): Isaiah is referring to God, and Mark applies it to Jesus, God incarnate. We cannot fully understand Jesus and his ministry unless we consider the Old Testament background.

baptizing … baptism of repentance (v 4): The Old Testament background to John’s baptism can for example be found in Isaiah 1:16: “Wash and make yourselves clean. Remove your evil deeds from my sight!” In New Testament times, Gentiles who converted to Judaism were baptized. So the surprising thing about John the Baptist’s ministry was that he invited the Jews themselves to be baptized. By doing so, he showed them that their own religiosity would not make them ready to receive the Messiah, whom they were waiting for. They first needed to repent, to turn back to God and be baptized.

the whole … all (v 5): These two words should be understood as a figure of speech called “hyperbole” (purposeful exaggeration). So “the whole Judean countryside” means “from all over Judea” and “all those of Jerusalem” means “a lot of people from Jerusalem.”

clothed with camel’s hair and a leather belt around his loins (v 6): John’s dress would have reminded the Jews of the Old Testament prophet Elijah (2 Kings 1:8).

in those days (v 9): This was probably around AD 26, when Jesus was about 30 years old (compare Luke 3:23). See Life of Jesus for a chronology of Jesus’ life.

Nazareth of Galilee (v 9): This was Jesus’ hometown, where he must have spent most of his previous life.

Immediately (v 12): This Greek word (used more than forty times in Mark’s gospel) characterizes Mark’s way of writing. It gives the text a sense of speed and urgency and often introduces a new incident or a surprising turn of events within an incident.

tempted (v 13): The Greek grammar indicates that the temptations took place over the whole forty-day period. The Greek word for “tempt” can mean either “test” or “tempt.”

Satan (v 13): Satan is the chief of the fallen spirits (or angels) and the adversary of God and man. The name is Hebrew (but it is also used in Greek) and means “opponent, adversary.” In the New Testament other names are also used for Satan, for example the devil (which means “the slanderer”) and “the evil one.”

After John was taken into custody (v 14): According to the Jewish historian Josephus, John was imprisoned by king Herod Antipas in the fortress of Machaerus, east of the Dead Sea.

The time has come or The time is fulfilled (v 15): All the centuries of preparation and prophecy have reached their fulfillment. The time has come for God to act in history in a totally new way. Jesus’ ministry with its eternal significance has begun.

The Kingdom of God (v 15): The word “kingdom” carries different meanings in the Bible. It can refer to the country over which a king rules. But it can also refer to the people over whom a king has authority. It can, finally, refer to the actual reign or rule itself. The New Testament describes the Kingdom of God as the realm in which God’s rule and authority are experienced. This realm is sometimes pictured as present, sometimes as future. John the Baptist stands on its threshold pointing to Jesus, the King of the Kingdom of God. So with the coming of Jesus, this Kingdom has become present in a completely new way. But at the same time it is a future kingdom, which will be inaugurated by the return of Jesus Christ. This eternal Kingdom is the inheritance of the righteous.

is at hand (v 15): The coming of Jesus Christ brought the Kingdom of God near to the people. And the Kingdom of God is present in the person of its King, Jesus Christ. God’s rule over people’s hearts and lives is now being established with Jesus.

repent and believe in the good news (v 15): Jesus’ two exhortations show us what we must do to experience the coming of the Kingdom of God. First Jesus wants us to “repent” (the Greek word means “to change direction, to change one’s mind”). This means to have a “change of heart and mind.” Then Jesus wants us to believe in the gospel. This is not just a matter of faith, but also of commitment. So we must turn around and follow Jesus, just like his first disciples did.

the sea of Galilee (v 16): This beautiful lake was also called the Lake of Gennesaret and the Sea of Tiberias. It lies almost 700 feet below sea level and is about 20 km long and 10 km wide.

Simon … Andrew … James … John (v 16, 19): See Jesus’ twelve apostles in the reference unit of this textbook for lists of Jesus’ disciples.

fishers for men (v 17): Metaphor for “evangelists” (compare “you will catch men,” Luke 5:10)

Capernaum (v 21): This town, situated on the Sea of Galilee, is not mentioned in the Old Testament, but it seems to have been an important place at the time of Jesus, who made it his “headquarters.” It was situated between the cities of Tiberias and Bethsaida (which can be found on Map of the Roman province of Judaea).

Sabbath (v 21): In Judaism this is the seventh day of the week, the day when God rested after his work of creation (Gen 2:2–3). So it is a day of rest and worship.

synagogue (v 21): This is a place where Jews study the Scriptures and worship God. A synagogue can be formed in a town where there were at least ten married Jewish men. The synagogue leaders can invite visiting teachers to speak in the Sabbath service.

astonished (v 22): People’s amazement is an important theme in Mark’s gospel.

the scribes (v 22): These were Jewish scholars, professionally trained in the development, teaching and application of Old Testament law.

the Holy One of God (v 24): This title indicates Jesus’ divine origin.

At evening (v 32): People waited till the Sabbath was over before they helped the sick people to come to Jesus.

he didn’t allow the demons to speak, because they knew him (v 34): One of the characteristics of Mark’s gospel is the “Messianic secret.” Several times Jesus tells his disciples or others (in this case the demons) to keep silent about who he is or what he has done. The reason for this is that Mark wants his readers to understand that Jesus’ full identity can only be revealed at the cross. So when the Roman centurion saw Jesus die on the cross, he exclaimed, “Truly this man was the Son of God” (15:39).

throughout all Galilee (v 39): This is one (perhaps the first) of several preaching and healing tours of Galilee mentioned in the three first gospels (compare Luke 8:1, Mark 6:6 and Matt 11:1).

leper … make me clean (v 40): The Greek word was used for various skin diseases. Persons afflicted were regarded as unclean and were required to live apart from others (Lev 13–14). When Jesus touched him (v 41), he too became ritually unclean.

show yourself to the priest (v 44): The priest would inspect the man’s condition and declare him clean.

as a testimony to them (v 44): The man’s sacrifice would show the priests and the people that he really had been cured, but also that Jesus respected the law. In addition, since Jews believed that only God could cure leprosy, the healing miracle would witness to Jesus’ divine power.

Questions

1. How does Mark introduce his book (v 1)?
2. Who came to listen to John the Baptist (v 5)?
3. What did those who came to John the Baptist do (v 5)?
4. How does John the Baptist describe Jesus (v 7–8)?
5. Where was Jesus baptized (v 9)?
6. How were all three person of the Trinity present at Jesus’ baptism (v 9–11)?
7. What did Jesus experience during the forty days in the desert (v 13)?
8. Where did Jesus proclaim the gospel (v 14)? Find the area on the maps.
9. What was the occupation of the four men that Jesus called to be his followers (v 16–20)?
10. Find Galilee and Nazareth on Map of the Roman Province of Judaea.
11. Why were people in Capernaum amazed at Jesus teaching (v 21–22, 27)?
12. What understanding of Jesus did the evil spirit have (v 23–26)?
13. What was wrong with Simon’s mother-in-law (v 29–31)?
14. What did Jesus do in the evening of that day (v 32–34)?
15. Why did Jesus go to a deserted place the following morning (v 35)?
16. What did Jesus do as he traveled throughout Galilee (v 38–39)?
17. What did Jesus feel when the leper approached him for healing (v 40–42)?
18. Why could Jesus no longer go into a town openly (v 43–45)?

Think and discuss

1. Describe John the Baptist and his ministry in your own words (v 2–8).
2. How do you understand John the Baptist’s comparison between his baptism and Jesus’ baptism (v 7–8)?
3. Why do you think Jesus – the Messiah and the Son of God – went to Judea to be baptized by John (v 2–11)?
4. What could be the significance of “the Spirit descending on” Jesus at his baptism (v 10–11)?
5. Explain in your own words what Mark would have meant with Jesus “proclaiming the good news of God” (v 14).
6. What do you think is the main point that Mark is making in his account of Jesus and the four fishermen (v 16–20)?
7. What are your conclusions about Jesus and his ministry from Mark’s account of what happened during and after the synagogue service in Capernaum (v 21–28)?
8. Why did Jesus not let the demons speak (v 32–34, and the text comment to verse 34)? Explain the “Messianic secret” in your own words.
9. What inbuilt tension can we find in Mark’s account of Jesus going off early in the morning to pray (v 35–39)?
10. Explain why Jesus’ disciples must have been shocked when Jesus touched and healed the man with leprosy (v 40–45).
11. Summarize the first chapter of Mark’s gospel in a few sentences. Use your own words and try not to look in your Bible.

Reflect and prepare

Here are some themes found in the first chapter of Mark that would be useful for you to reflect on. The themes can also be used for devotions, Bible studies and sermons. Reflect on my questions below in the light of the Bible text and the material found in various parts of this study (Introduction, Answers to Questions, Comments on Think and discuss). Then structure your thoughts into points that can be used as outlines for Bible studies, devotions or sermons. You don’t have to do all the themes. You can also limit the number of outlines that you make.

1. John the Baptist and Jesus: Who is John? What is the relationship between John and Jesus? What is John’s testimony about Jesus? What can we learn from John for our own lives and ministries?
2. Jesus’ first disciples: Who were they? How did they respond to Jesus’ call? How would they have experienced and understood Jesus’ teaching/preaching at this early stage of Jesus’ ministry? How would they have reacted to the demonstrations of Jesus’ power over evil spirits and illnesses? How would they have responded to Jesus’ enormous popularity at this time? To what extent would they have understood Jesus’ identity at this early stage of Jesus’ ministry? What can we learn from the first disciples for our own lives?
3. The people who heard and saw Jesus in Galilee: Who were they? How did they come across (or hear about) Jesus? How did they react to Jesus’ teaching? How did they respond to Jesus’ ministry (delivering the demon-possessed and healing the sick)? To what extent did they understand Jesus’ identity? What about us? How do we respond to the growth of the Kingdom of God today?
4. Jesus’ identity: What do we as readers of Mark’s gospel learn about Jesus’ identity in the first chapter? What about us? To what extent do we understand Jesus’ identity?
5. The “Messianic secret”: What is it? How much do we find of it in the first chapter of Mark?
6. The Kingdom of God: What is it? What aspects of the Kingdom of God do we find in the first chapter of Mark?
7. Jesus in lonely places and among the crowds: Why did Jesus go off to a deserted place? Why was he not allowed to stay there? What conflict between privacy and public attention must Jesus have experienced? How do you think he handled that conflict? What can we learn from Jesus in this area for our own Christian lives?

([Go to Answers Mark chapter 1](#AnswersMarkChapter1))

### Mark chapter 2

Introduction and comments

In the second chapter of Mark we find these four accounts:

* 1. Jesus and a paralyzed man (v 1–12)
  2. Jesus calls Levi the tax collector (v 13–17)
  3. Jesus questioned about fasting (v 18–22)
  4. Jesus claims his lordship over the Sabbath (v 23–28)

they removed the roof (v 4): A typical house in Palestine had a flat roof, which could be reached by an outside staircase. The roof was often made of a thick layer of clay, supported by mats of branches across wood beams.

Why does this man speak blasphemies like that? Who can forgive sins but God alone (v 7): In Jewish theology not even the Messiah could forgive sins. So when Jesus said that he forgave the man’s sins, he actually claimed to be God. This was blasphemy.

the Son of Man (v 10): This is Jesus’ most common title for himself. Jesus used it together with Christ (see Mark 8:29–31), which shows that he meant it to be understood as a Messianic title. In Daniel 7:13–14 the Son of Man is pictured as a heavenly figure whom God in the end times gives “authority, glory and sovereign power.”

Levi the son of Alphaeus (v 14): This man is also called Matthew. His real name was probably Levi See Jesus’ twelve apostles for lists of Jesus’ disciples.

tax booth (v 14): Levi was a tax collector for king Herod Antipas, who ruled Galilee under the control of the Romans. The tax collectors were Jews, who were considered “sinners.” They collaborated with the Gentile government, and they were often greedy and sometimes dishonest. Levi’s tax booth was probably a toll booth on the international highway that led from Damascus in Syria through Capernaum to the Mediterranean coast and from there south to Egypt.

sinners (v 15): Sinners were evil and ungodly people, people who did not live according to the law of Moses. In the gospels they are often mentioned together with tax collectors.

eat with (v 15–16): To eat with a person was a sign of friendship. So Jesus is here accused of being a friend of sinners and tax collectors.

Pharisees (v 16): Not all scribes were Pharisees. The Pharisees were role models and spiritual leaders of the Jews at the time of Jesus. They were strict followers of the law of Moses, and they spent much time and energy studying and explaining the law. But as they interpreted the law, they also adapted and expanded it. They even added their own regulations. Their intention was to help the Jews to live “holy lives,” but as a result they became very legalistic. In the gospels they strongly oppose Jesus, who accuses them of hypocrisy, pride and religious legalism.

not the righteous, but sinners (v 17): Jesus’ distinction is between the self-righteous (here called “the righteous”), who do not realize that they are in need of his salvation (in spite of the fact that they too are sinners), and “sinners,” those who acknowledge that they are sinners in need of his salvation.

fasting (v 18): The law of Moses only required the Israelites to fast on the Day of Atonement (see Lev 16:29, 31 and Num 29:7). After the Babylonian exile additional yearly fasts were observed by the Jews (see Zechariah 7:5; 8:19). In New Testament times, the stricter groups among the Pharisees fasted twice a week, Monday and Thursday. Fasting was generally considered a sign of true piety.

Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? (v 19): A Jewish wedding was an occasion of joy and celebration, which often lasted a week. But fasting was associated with sadness and mourning. So to fast during a wedding would be unacceptable.

pluck the ears of grain (v 23): This was allowed in the law (see Deut 23:25), so the disciples were not accused of stealing.

not lawful on the Sabbath day (v 24): According to the Jewish tradition followed by the Pharisees harvesting was forbidden on the Sabbath day.

what David did … when Abiathar was high priest (v 25–26): Jesus is referring to a story in 1 Sam 21:1–6. Abiathar and his son Ahibelech, who who served together as high priests at the Tabernacle (at that time placed at Nob near Jerusalem), gave David and his starving men consecrated bread to eat.

house of God (v 26): The Tabernacle

bread, which is not lawful to eat except for the priests (v 26): Twelve loaves of fresh bread were placed on the Sabbath day on a table in the Tabernacle (and later in the temple). The old loaves were eaten by the priests (see Ex 25:30; Lev 24:5-9). It was against the law for others to eat this bread.

Questions

1. What did Jesus do at his home in Capernaum (v 1–5)?
2. Why did the men carry the paralyized man up on the roof of the house (v 1–5)?
3. What did Jesus tell the paralyzed man (v 1–5)?
4. What reason for healing the paralyzed man did Jesus give to the scribes (v 6–12)?
5. How did people react to the healing of the paralyzed man (v 8–12)?
6. What were the circumstances of Jesus’ meeting with Levi (v 13–14)?
7. What do we learn about the persons who had questions about Jesus’ social life (v 15–16)?
8. Verse 18 mentions three groups of disciples in connection with fasting. Who are they? Who fast and who don’t fast?
9. What does Jesus say about the bridegroom (v 19–20)?
10. Why is it foolish to sew a piece of new cloth on a garment made of old cloth (v 21)?
11. Why should a wise person only use new wineskins for new wine (v 22)?
12. What complaint did the Pharisees have about Jesus’ disciples (v 23–24)?
13. What did Jesus tell the Pharisees about the Sabbath day (v 27–28)?

Think and discuss

1. Why did some of the scribes think that Jesus was blaspheming (v 1–12)?
2. How did Jesus respond to the unspoken accusation of the scribes? And what point do you think he is making (v 1–12)?
3. Explain Jesus’ statement about doctors and sick people (v 13–17).
4. Explain Jesus’ statement about the bridegroom and his guests (v 18–22).
5. What could be the connection between the issue of fasting (v 18–20) and the two parables about “new cloth on old cloth” and “new wine in old wineskin” (v 21–22)?
6. How do you think Jesus reasons, when he draws a parallel between his disciples and David (v 23–28)?

Reflect and prepare

Here are some themes found in the second chapter of Mark that it would be useful for you to return to and think more about. Reflect on my questions below in the light of the Bible text and the material found in various parts of this study (Introduction, Answers to Questions, Comments on Think and discuss). Then structure your thoughts into points that can be used as outlines for Bible studies (or devotions or sermons). You don’t have to work through all the themes. You can also limit the number of outlines that you make.

1. Jesus heals a paralyzed man: What were the circumstances of this story? What can we understand about the men that brought the paralyzed man to Jesus? How do you think the paralyzed man felt when he was lowered down before Jesus? Why did the scribes think that Jesus was a blasphemer? Explain Jesus’ questions to the scribes? How do you think the scribes felt when the man got up and walked home? How do you think the man felt as he walked home. How did the people feel and react to what had happened? What can we learn from this story for our own lives and ministries?
2. Jesus came not to call the righteous, but sinners: Who was Levi and how did he become one of Jesus’ disciples? Why did the Pharisees complain about Jesus’ behavior? What did Jesus mean by “the righteous.” What advantage does a “sinner” have over “the righteous” when it comes to salvation? How did Jesus’ illustration about a doctor and his patients help his listeners understand his own role as the Savior? What can we learn from this story for our own lives and ministries?
3. The new and the old: Explain Jesus’ parables about the new cloth and the new wine. What do these parables have to do with Jesus’ ministry? Why did the disciples of John the Baptist and the Pharisees fast? Why did not Jesus want his disciples to fast? Explain Jesus’ point about fasting and the bridegroom’s guests. What does this illustration have to do with Jesus’ ministry? What can we learn from this passage for our own lives and ministries?
4. Jesus helps us understand the Sabbath day: Why did the Pharisees accuse Jesus’ disciples of behaving unlawfully? Why did not Jesus agree with the Pharisees? Why did Jesus bring up the Old Testament story about David and the consecrated bread? Explain what Jesus meant by saying that the Sabbath day was made for man – and not the other way around. Explain how the Pharisees had distorted God’s commandment about keeping the Sabbath day holy. What can we learn from this passage for our own lives and ministries?

([Go to Answers Mark chapter 2](#AnswersMarkChapter2))

### Mark chapter 3

Introduction and comments

In the third chapter of Mark we find these five accounts:

* 1. Jesus heals a man with a withered hand (v 1–6).
  2. Great crowds follow Jesus (v 7–12).
  3. Jesus appoints twelve apostles (v 13–19).
  4. Jesus and the prince of the demons (v 20–30).
  5. Who are Jesus’ mother and brothers? (v 31–35)

As a result of Jesus’ ministry, the Jewish leaders begin to plot how to kill him (v 6).

accuse (v 2): The Greek word means “to bring charges against, to take legal action against.”

Herodians (v 6): The word itself reveals that they were Jews who supported the dynasty of Herod and consequently the Roman rule of Palestine. The Herodians were not a religious sect or a political party.

Verse 8 shows that Jesus’ popularity was growing rapidly among the people. The regions mentioned in this verse includes practically all of Palestine and its neighbors in New Testament times.

the unclean spirits … fell down before him and cried, “You are the Son of God!” (v 11): So the evil spirits recognized who Jesus was and even submitted to him.

not make him known (v 12): The time for revealing Jesus’ identity had not yet come. In addition, demons would not have been the proper channel for making it known.

he also called them apostles (v 14): This phrase is not found in all Greek manuscripts (compare the Kannada translations satyavEdavu and pavitra grantha). The apostles were Jesus’ authorized representatives (see Heb 3:1). The Greek word “apostle” means “messenger.” In the New Testament the title “apostle” is also used about Paul and Barnabas (Rom 1:1; Acts 14:14), James the brother of Jesus (Gal 1:19), and perhaps Andronicus and Junias (Rom 16:7).

He appointed twelve … (v 16–19): See Jesus’ twelve apostles in the reference section of this textbook.

his family went to take restrain him (v 21): They probably came from Nazareth to Capernaum, a distance of about 40 km.

from Jerusalem (v 22): Their journey to Capernaum covered about 150 km (if the traveled the shortest way through Samaria) and must have taken several days.

Beelzebul (v 22): This is the Greek version of the Hebrew name Baal-Zebub (which means “lord of the flies”), the name under which Baal was worshiped by the Philistines of Ekron (2 Kings 1:2, 16).

parables (v 23): Here this word is used in the general sense of comparisons (compare 4:2 with comment).

enter into a strong man’s house to plunder (v 27): Jesus is referring to himself and his own ministry, as he is freeing people from Satan’s control. With the arrival of Jesus, Satan (“a strong man”) is bound. And as people accept the gospel of the Kingdom of God and are healed and delivered, Satan’s “house” is plundered and his “possessions” are carried off.

whoever may blaspheme against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin (v 29): Jesus himself explains the nature of this sin: To blaspheme against the Holy Spirit is to say (as the scribes in this passage just had done) that Jesus is ministering through the power of Satan and not through the power of God’s Holy Spirit. That sin cannot be forgiven, because as long as we reject Jesus (his divinity, his lordship, and his power to save) we cannot experience his salvation. That sin has eternal consequences, because it is only in this life that we can accept Jesus and experience him as our personal Savior. Once we are dead, it is too late. We have missed our opportunity.

Jesus’ mother and brothers (v 31): See 6:3 where the names of Jesus’ four brothers are listed. Jesus’ father is not mentioned, so he was probably dead by this time.

Questions

1. Who were looking for an opportunity to accuse Jesus (v 2)?
2. What did Jesus tell the man with the withered hand (v 3, 5)?
3. How did the Pharisees react to the healing of the man with the withered hand (v 6)?
4. Find the following places on Map of the Roman Province of Judaea: Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, Tyre, and Sidon.
5. What are the regions east of the Jordan River called on Map of the Roman Province of Judaea?
6. Why did Jesus need to have a small boat (v 9–10)?
7. How did the evil spirits behave when they saw Jesus (v 11–12)?
8. How did Jesus choose his twelve apostles (v 13)?
9. How does Mark describe the “work” of the disciples? Make a list (v 14–15).
10. What additional information does Mark give about Judas Iscariot (v 19)?
11. What did Jesus’ own family members think about him (v 20–21)?
12. What did the scribes say about Jesus’ ministry (v 23, 30)?
13. What did Jesus say would be the result of Satan opposing himself (v 26)?
14. What meaning of “brother, sister, and mother” did Jesus give to the crowd (v 31–35)?

Think and discuss

1. What point do you think Mark wants to make with his account of the healing of the man with the withered hand (v 1–6)?
2. Why do you think that the Jewish leaders came to the conclusion that Jesus had to be killed (v 1–6)?
3. Explain the irony of Jesus’ question to the Jewish leaders about doing good or doing evil on the Sabbath (v 4).
4. Why do you think Jesus became angry (v 5)?
5. In verses 11–12 we find another example of the “Messianic secret” in Mark’s gospel. Explain how.
6. What did Jesus say about his ministry (v 23–29)?
7. Explain why “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit” is the only sin that is eternal and can never be forgiven.
8. In the passage about Jesus’ family (v 31–35), the word “brothers” is used in two different ways. Explain how.

Reflect and prepare

1. In Mark chapters 2 and 3, we find six controversies between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. Which are they? Reflect on them. Then prepare a simple study called Jesus and the Jewish leaders.
2. Are you – or any of your friends – worried about having committed the sin of “blasphemy of the Holy Spirit”? Use the material in this study to explain this sin and what Jesus means by saying that it is the only sin that is eternal and can never be forgiven. Also explain what you – or your friends – must do to to be forgiven of this unforgivable and eternal sin. Then prepare a simple study called Forgiveness of the unforgivable sin.

([Go to Answers Mark chapter 3](#AnswersMarkChapter3))

### Mark chapter 4

Introduction and comments

The fourth chapter of Mark contains parables about the Kingdom of God and a story about Jesus rebuking the winds on the Sea of Galilee. It can be structured like this:

1. The sower (v 1–20)
2. The lamp (v 21–25)
3. The growing seed (v 26–29). This parable is not found in the other gospels.
4. The mustard seed (v 30–34)
5. Jesus calms the storm (v 35–41)

Mark says that Jesus taught the crowd many things in parables. Later, when he was alone with his disciples, he explained to them the meaning of these parables. The question why Jesus sometimes spoke to the people in parables is discussed more in detail in the study Parables about the Kingdom of God later in this textbook

sat down (v 1): Jewish teachers did not stand, but sat, when they taught (compare the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, Matt 5:1).

parables (v 2): In Greek this word is used about a comparison of two things for the purpose of teaching. So a parable has a message. It is usually in the form of a story. Most of Jesus’ parables have a single main point, and the details of the parable were added to give color to the story.

the mystery of the Kingdom of God (v 11): In the New Testament the word “mystery” (or “secret”) is used about something God reveals to his people. This mystery/secret was unknown in Old Testament times, and it is now openly proclaimed. But only those who have faith can understand it. In Mark’s gospel, this mystery/secret is that the Kingdom of God had drawn near (compare verse 26 and 1:15) in the coming of Jesus Christ, the King. The mystery/secret has been given to the disciples because they have responded in faith. But the whole significance of Jesus’ person and mission becomes “parables” (or “riddles”) to those who according to Jesus “are outside” (v 11). They are those who are hardened by unbelief, such as the Jewish leaders of chapter 3.

Verse 12: Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9–10 (Mark uses the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament), where the context is God calling and sending the prophet to the Israelites, whose hearts will be hardened even further by the message. In a similar way, Jesus’ teaching in parables exposed the hard-heartedness of the Jewish leaders.

the word (v 14, 33): The word is the message about the Kingdom of God (compare Matt 13:19).

he immediately uses his sickle, because the harvest has come (v 29): This could be an allusion to Joel 3:13, where harvest is used as a metaphor for the last judgment and the consummation of God’s Kingdom.

mustard seed … the smallest … the largest (v 31–32): The mustard seed is not the smallest seed, but it was the smallest seed used by farmers and gardeners in Palestine at that time. Under favorable conditions the plant could reach about ten feet in height.

shrubs… its shade (v 32): This is probably an allusion to Daniel 4:21, suggesting that the Kingdom of God will spread into the whole world and that people from all nations will find rest in it. Note that Matthew uses “tree” and “branches” (Matt 13:32).

without a parable (v 34): This is a figure of speech called hyperbole (“purposeful exaggeration”). The expression means that Jesus regularly included parables whenever he taught his disciples. It does not mean that he spoke only in parables.

over to the other side (v 35): Jesus and his disciples left the territory of Galilee by boat and crossed the Sea of Galilee to the “region of the Gerasenes” (5:1).

Questions

1. Describe the “classroom” that Jesus used on this occasion (v 1–2).
2. What happened to the seeds that fell on rocky ground (v 3–8)?
3. What happened to the seeds that fell into the good soil (v 3–8)?
4. What “seed” does the farmer sow (v 14–20)?
5. What does Jesus say about people who are like seed sown along the path (v 14–20)?
6. What does Jesus say about people who are like seed sown on rocky ground (v 14–20)?
7. What does Jesus say about people who are like seed sown among thorns (v 14–20)?
8. What does Jesus say about people who are like seed sown on good soil (v 14–20)?
9. What happens when the grain is ripe (v 26–29)?
10. What is the parable of the mustard seed about (v 30–32)?
11. What did Jesus do, when he was alone with his disciples (v 34)?
12. What was Jesus doing when the storm broke out (v 35–41)?
13. What did the disciples accuse Jesus of (v 35–41)?
14. Why did Jesus rebuke his disciples (v 35–41)?
15. How did the disciples react to the miracle on the Sea of Galilee (v 35–41)?

Think and discuss

1. What do you think Jesus meant by his statement in verse 9?
2. Why do you think Jesus’ disciples asked him about his parables (10)?
3. Why could Jesus say that “the secret of the Kingdom of God” had been given to his disciples but not “to those on the outside” (v 11)?
4. How do you understand Jesus’ questions to his disciples in verse 13?
5. In verses 21–25, Jesus speaks about three things: a lamp, something hidden, and a measure. How would these three things relate to the Kingdom of God, which is the context of Jesus’ words?
6. Explain Jesus’ message in the parable of the growing seed (v 26–29).
7. What do you think is Jesus’ main point in the parable of the mustard seed (v 30–32)?
8. How do you understand the tension between the disciples and Jesus in the story about Jesus calming the storm (v 35–41)?
9. Retell the story “Jesus calms the storm” (v 35–41) without looking in your Bible. Use your own words and make the story dramatic and exciting to listen to. Imagine that you are speaking to a group of villagers.

Reflect and prepare

1. Reflect on the parable of the sower by going through these points:
   1. Remind yourself of the parable. Try not to look in your Bible. Then remind yourself of Jesus’ explanation of the parable. Again, try not to look in your Bible.
   2. This parable can be read from two perspectives:
      * The reception of the gospel of the Kingdom of God: The four different soils and four different kinds of people who hear and respond to the gospel.
      * The spreading of the gospel of the Kingdom of God: The sower. The fact that the gospel is proclaimed in all kinds of situations. And the fruitfulness of the proclamation of the gospel.

Which perspective do you think dominates in the telling of the parable? And in Jesus’ explanation of the parable? State your reasons.

* 1. What can you as an individual South Indian believer today learn from this parable?
  2. What can you as a South Indian gospel worker today learn from this parable for your ministry?
  3. What can the church in South India today learn from this parable?

Use you answers (together with other material from this study) to prepare an outline for a Bible study (or a devotion or a sermon) called The sower and the seed. You may even find that you have material for more than one study.

1. Reflect on the parable of the growing seed by answering these questions:
   1. What is this parable about?
   2. How is the growth of the seed described? How is the time of harvest described?
   3. What aspects of the Kingdom of God does this parable illustrate?
   4. What can you as an individual South Indian believer today learn from this parable?
   5. What can you as a South Indian gospel worker today learn from this parable for your ministry?
   6. What can the church in South India today learn from this parable?

Use you answers (together with other material from this study) to prepare an outline for a Bible study (or a devotion or a sermon) called The growing seed.

1. Reflect on the passage Jesus calms the storm by answering these questions:
   1. How does Mark describe the journey across the lake? Who takes the initiative? Why are they traveling by boat? Are they alone? What happens after a while?
   2. How does Mark describe the disciples? How do you think they feel (in the beginning, during the storm, after the storm)? Why do they wake Jesus? What do they accuse Jesus of? How do they react to the miracle?
   3. How does Mark describe Jesus? Why do you think he is asleep in spite of the storm? How does he “solve” the problem that the disciples bring to him? How does he reproach his disciples?
   4. What can we learn about Jesus from this story?
   5. What can we learn about discipleship from this story?

Use you answers (together with other material from this study) to prepare an outline for a Bible study (or a devotion or a sermon)

([Go to Answers Mark chapter 4](#AnswersMarkChapter4))

### Mark chapter 5

Introduction and comments

The fifth chapter of Mark contains two main passages:

* 1. The healing of a man with an unclean spirit (v 1–20).
  2. A dead girl brought back to life and a sick woman healed (v 21–43).

In the first story, Jesus takes his ministry into Gentile territory east of the Sea of Galilee. He then returns to Galilee to minister among his own people, the Jews.. In this second passage, which probably takes place in Capernaum, Mark weaves together two miracle stories: As Jesus is on his way to see Jairus’ sick daughter, a woman suffering from bleeding since twelve years is healed as she touches Jesus’ clothes. Meanwhile the girl has died, but Jesus brings her back to life.

the other side … the country of the Gerasenes (v 1): The east side of the Sea of Galilee was a region mainly populated by Gentiles. The town of Gerasa, situated about 60 km southeast of the Sea of Galilee in the country of the Decapolis, seems to have had land on the eastern shore of the Sea, giving its name to a small village there now known as Khersa. About one mile south is a fairly steep slope about 40 meters from the shore, and not far away there are cave tombs that seems to have been used as dwellings.

had his dwelling among the tombs (v 3): In those days the same cave could be used for burying the dead and as a place of dwelling for the very poor.

My name is Legion, for we are many (v 9): A Roman legion was an army unit consisting of 6,000 men. Here the name indicates that the man was possessed by numerous demons.

not to send them away out of the country (v 10): The demons were afraid that Jesus would send them into eternal punishment (compare Luke’s account, “They begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss,” Luke 8:31. The Abyss is a place of confinement for evil spirits and Satan, compare Rev 9:1)

pigs (v 11): Pigs were unclean animals to Jews, so they were not allowed to eat them (see Lev 11:7–8). This story takes place in the Decapolis, which was mainly a Gentile region.

the Decapolis (v 20): Decapolis consisted of a union of free Greek cities, almost all of them situated east of the Jordan River. The name means “ten cities,” but in New Testament times the union consisted of more than ten cities. The Decapolis was predominantly a Greek-speaking region inhabited by Gentiles.

one of the rulers of the synagogue (v 22): A ruler of the synagogue was a layman, usually a Pharisee. He was the administrator of the synagogue. He looked after the building. But he also supervised and taught at the services. Most synagogues had only one ruler.

an issue of blood for twelve years (v 25): Her bleeding made her ceremonially unclean (see Lev 15:25–28). She was not permitted to be in public without making people aware of her condition. By touching Jesus’ clothes, she made him unclean.

Daughter (v 34): This was a term of respect among the Jews. But by using this expression Jesus also welcomed the woman into the family of God.

healed (v 34): The Greek expression means both “heal” and “save.” The woman’s faith in Jesus for physical healing at the same time became faith in him for salvation from sin (compare what happened to the paralytic, 2:1–12)

Peter, James, and John the brother of James (v 37): These three disciples had a particularly close relationship to Jesus. So only the inner circle of disciples were invited to join Jesus on this occasion.

weeping and wailing loudly (v 38): In those days, it was common to make use of professional mourners at the time of death. But as the girl had just died, it is unlikely that there had been sufficient time to arrange for mourners.

is not dead but is asleep (v 39): Jesus meant that the girl was not permanently dead. She would soon be alive again. But the people and the mourners thought that Jesus was joking (v 40).

taking the child by the hand (v 41): The Jewish law taught that touching a dead person would make you ceremonially unclean (Lev 22:4).

Talitha cum (v 41): Mark is the only gospel writer who had kept the original Aramaic expression. Aramaic was one of the languages of Palestine at this time. It must have been the mother tongue of Jesus and his disciples. But they probably also knew Hebrew and Greek.

He strictly ordered them that no one should know this (v 43): See comment on 1:34 about “the Messianic secret”

Questions

1. Find Galilee and Decapolis on Map of the Roman Province of Judaea.
2. How does Mark describe the pathetic condition of the demon-possessed man? Make a list (v 2–5).
3. What did the demon-possessed man do when he saw Jesus (v 6–7)?
4. What did the demons ask Jesus to do (v 10–12)?
5. What happened to the demons (v 11–13)?
6. How does Mark describe the condition of the man after Jesus had delivered him from the demons (v 15)?
7. How did the people of the region of the Gerasenes react to the healing of the demon-possessed man? Make a list (v 14–20).
8. What did Jesus tell the man who had been delivered to do (v 18–20)?
9. Who was Jairus and why did he approach Jesus (v 22–23)?
10. What do we learn about the woman who touched Jesus in the crowd? Make a list (v 25–33).
11. Why did Jesus ask the people who had touched his clothes (v 30)?
12. How did the disciples react to Jesus’ question (v 31)?
13. Why did Jairus’ people say that he shouldn’t bother Jesus any further (v 35)?
14. Which of Jesus’ disciples came with him to Jairus’ house and why did the other disciples stay behind (v 37–38)?
15. Why did the people laugh at Jesus (v 39–40)?
16. What does the Aramaic expression “Talitha cum” mean (v 41)?
17. How old was the girl (42)?
18. How did the girl’s parents react to the miracle (v 42)?
19. What did Jesus tell the girl’s family to do (v 43)?

Think and discuss

1. Describe the encounter between Jesus and the demon-possessed man in your own words without looking in your Bible.
2. Why do you think the people in the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave the area? Why didn’t they ask him to stay and perform more miracles? What do you think of their priorities?
3. Compare the three parallel accounts of Jesus delivering the demon-possessed man found in Matt 8:28–34, Mark 5:1–20, and Luke 8:26–37 and note down a few obvious differences. How would you explain these differences?
4. What do you think Jesus meant by his statement to the woman, “your faith has made you well” (v 34) and his exhortation to Jairus, “Do not fear, just believe” (v 36)?
5. What are the common factors in the two intertwined stories in verses 21–43?

Reflect and prepare

1. Reflect on the story about Jesus delivering the demon-possessed man (v 1–20) in the light of what you have learned in this study:

* The location and occasion of the story
* The pitiable condition of the demon-possessed man
* The encounter between Jesus and the demons
* The dramatic change that the man experienced through his deliverance
* The reactions of the local people: their fear when they saw the changed man, their anger with Jesus for what he had done, their amazement when they heard the man’s testimony

Then reflect on yourself and your life and ministry in the light of this story:

* Where do you find yourself in the story: Are you an onlooker to what Jesus does like the disciples? Are you a person in need of deliverance? Are you a person with wealth and possessions who is negatively affected by Jesus’ work of deliverance and who would rather see nothing happen? Do you ask Jesus to leave and work somewhere else? Are you a person who rejoices with those delivered and healed? Are you a person who testifies to what Jesus has done in your life?
* Where do you find your church and your ministry in this story: Have you experienced this kind of “power encounters”? Have you seen this kind of dramatic deliverances? Have you met this kind of fear as the Kingdom of God breaks forth? Have you come across this kind of “worldly” reactions and rejection of God’s work?

Finally prepare a Bible study (or a devotion or a sermon) based on this story and the material in this study.. Avoid speculations.

1. Reflect on the story about Jesus delivering the woman who suffered from bleeding (v 24–34) in the light of what you have learned in this study:

* The location and occasion of the story
* The pitiable condition of the woman: physically, financially, socially and spiritually
* Her boldness, the miracle and her faith
* Jesus restoring the woman

Then reflect on yourself and your life and your own situation in the light of this story.

Finally prepare a Bible study (or a devotion or a sermon) based on this story.

1. Reflect on the story about Jesus bringing back Jairus’ daughter to life (v 21–24 and 35–43) in the light of what you have learned in this study:

* The location and occasion of the story
* Jairus’ situation going from bad to worse
* Jesus’ exhortation about not being afraid but believing
* People laughing at Jesus
* The miracle
* Jesus “the resurrection and the life”
* Jesus’ concern for the girl

Then prepare a Bible study (or a devotion or a sermon) based on the story.

([Go to Answers Mark chapter 5](#AnswersMarkChapter5))

### Mark chapter 6

Introduction and comments

The sixth chapter of Mark contains six passages:

* 1. Jesus rejected at Nazareth, v 1–6
  2. Jesus sends out the twelve, v 7–13
  3. John the Baptist beheaded, v 14–29
  4. Jesus feeds five thousand men, v 30–44
  5. Jesus walks on the water, v 45–52
  6. Jesus heals the sick at Gennesaret, v 53–56

The chapter begins with the rejection of Jesus by those who knew him since his childhood. It closes with a summary of Jesus’ work in Galilee as a famous and popular healer. The story about the death of John the Baptist is placed within the account of the apostles’ successful ministry tour.

his hometown (v 1): Nazareth was Jesus’ hometown.

carpenter (v 3): The parallel account in Matthew has “carpenter’s son” (Matt 13:55). Only Mark refers to Jesus himself as a carpenter. The Greek word can also mean “mason, smith, or construction worker.” This is a rhetorical question, and it should be understood as a negative statement about Jesus, “He is just a common laborer like the rest of us, isn’t he!”

the son of Mary (v 3): This is an impolite and negative statement. Even if Joseph was dead by this time (which he probably was), people should have called Jesus “Josephs son.” By saying “the son of Mary” they were implying that Jesus was illegitimate.

brother of James, Joses, Judas and Simon (v 3): Jesus’ brothers and sisters were born to Mary and Joses (or Joseph). So they were his half-brothers and half-sisters. James later became a leader of the church in Jerusalem. He was the author of the epistle of James. His brother Judas was probably the author of the epistle of Jude. We know nothing about Joseph and Simon.

Verse 4: Jesus quotes a proverb that can found in both Hebrew and Greek literature.

Jesus could do no mighty work there except ... (v 5): The cold rejection of Jesus made it difficult for the people of Nazareth to experience the healing power of the Kingdom of God (compare Matt 13:48). God does not force his miracles or his salvation on unbelieving and hostile people, who reject his Kingdom and his Savior.

He called to himself the twelve and sent them out two by two (v 7): Compare the passage about the appointment of the twelve apostles: “He appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him and to be sent out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons” (Mark 3:14–15). The twelve had been with Jesus for some time and now they were ready to be sent out.

two by two (v 7): It seems to have been a Jewish custom to send out messengers “two by two” (compare 11:1; 14:3; Acts 13:2). The law of Moses required at least two witnesses for a testimony to be valid (Deut 17:6).

two tunics (v 9): The extra tunic would be used as a blanket during the night.

shake off the dust that is under your feet (v 11): The Pharisees practiced this symbolic act, when they left a ritually unclean Gentile area and returned to “the Holy Land.” In the New Testament, “shaking the dust off one’s feet” stands for an act of solemn warning to those who reject God’s message.

King Herod (v 14): Herod Antipas, one of many sons of Herod the Great, became tetrarch (“ruler of a fourth of a kingdom”) over Galilee and Perea at the death of his father in 4 BC. He ruled until AD 39.

It is Elijah (v 15): This is a reference to the prophecy in Malachi, “See I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes” (Mal 4:5).

Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife (v 17): Herodias was a granddaughter of Herod the Great. She was married to her uncle, Herod Philip, who lived in Rome. Herod Antipas persuaded her to leave her husband and marry him.

It is not lawful for you (v 18): Marriage to one’s brother’s wife, while the brother was still living, was forbidden by the law of Moses (Lev 18:6).

the daughter of Herodias (v 22): According to the Jewish historian Josephus, the daughter’s name was Salome. At this time she was a young woman. She later married one of her granduncles, a son of Herod the Great.

up to half of my kingdom (v 23): This was a proverbial expression of generosity and was not meant to be taken literally.

they went away in the boat (v 32): Luke has the information that they withdrew to Bethsaida, but he says nothing about how they traveled (Luke 9:10). So the feeding of the five thousand men took place not very far from Bethsaida on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee (compare v 45).

two hundred denarii (v 37): A laborer was paid one denarius per day. So this amount was the equivalent of eight month’s daily wages.

loaves (v 38): These were barley loaves. They were small and flat, and a man could easily eat several loaves at a single meal.

green grass (v 39): The grass around the Sea of Galilee is green after the late winter or early spring rains.

twelve baskets full (v 43): For Jews bread was God’s gift, and the pieces that fell on the ground during a meal had to be picked up. The twelve baskets were perhaps the small wicker lunch baskets of the twelve apostles.

five thousand men (v 44): The size of the crowd is amazing considering the fact that the nearby towns of Capernaum and Bethsaida probably only had a population of 2000 or 3000 each.

fourth watch of the night (v 48): This watch lasted from 3 am to 6 am.

a ghost (v 49): Many Jews were superstitious and thought that spirits who appeared during the night were bringing disaster. Here the disciples must have been so stressed by the dangerous situation that they mistook Jesus for an evil spirit trying to deceive them.

Gennesaret (v 53): This was a small but very fertile plain along the Sea of Galilee southwest of Capernaum. In this plain there was a town, also called Gennesaret.

Questions

1. What did Jesus do in his hometown (v 1–6)?
2. Why were people amazed (v 1–6)?
3. Why did people take offense at Jesus (v 1–6)?
4. Why was Jesus amazed at the people of Nazareth (v 1–6)?
5. What did Jesus do after he had visited Nazareth (v 6–13)?
6. How does Mark describe the ministry of the apostles (v 7–13)?
7. Who did king Herod think Jesus was (v 14–16)?
8. Why had king Herod put John the Baptist in prison (v 17–18)?
9. How does Mark describe king Herod’s relationship to John the Baptist (v 17–20)?
10. What happened on king Herod’s birthday (v 21–28)?
11. What happened to John the Baptist’s body (v 29)?
12. What is the context of verse 30?
13. Why did Jesus and his disciples take a boat (v 30–44)?
14. How did Jesus feel and what did he do, when he saw the large crowd of people (v 30–44)?
15. How did the disciples react, when Jesus told them to give food to the people (v 30–44)?
16. What did Jesus do with the five loaves of bread and the two fish (v 30–44)?
17. What happened to the leftover food (v 30–44)?
18. Find Bethsaida on Map of the Roman Province of Judaea.
19. What did Jesus tell his disciples to do and what was he doing himself after the five thousand men had been fed (v 45–46)?
20. Why were the disciples terrified, when they saw Jesus walking on the water (v 47–50)?
21. What happened when Jesus got into the boat (v 51)?
22. How did the people of Gennesaret react when they realized that Jesus had arrived (v 53–56)?
23. How does Mark summarize Jesus’ healing ministry (v 55–56)? Use your own words as much as possible.

Think and discuss

1. Do you think that Jesus was a “carpenter” (Mark 6:3) or “a carpenter’s son” (Matt 13:55)?
2. Describe in your own words what happened when Jesus visited his hometown of Nazareth (v 1–6). Don’t look in your Bible.
3. Why do you think Jesus sent our the apostles “two by two” (v 7–13)?
4. Why do you think Jesus told his apostles not bring food, money or extra clothes on their gospel tour (v 7–13)?
5. How do you think king Herod felt when he fulfilled the girl’s request (v 14–29)?
6. What impression of king Herod does Mark present to his readers through his description of the death of John the Baptist (v 14–29)?
7. Retell the story of the feeding of the five thousand men (v 30–44) in your own words. Make your story lively and interesting. Imagine that you are speaking to a group of villagers. Do not refer to the text in your Bible.
8. How do you think the disciples felt after the feeding of the five thousand men (v 30–44)?
9. Explain the connection that Mark makes between the amazement of the disciples (as the storm on the lake is calmed with the arrival of Jesus) and the miracle of Jesus feeding the five thousand men (v 51–52).
10. Why do you think Jesus so hurriedly sent off his disciples in the boat after the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand men (v 45)? Compare the parallel account in John’s gospel (John 6:14–15).
11. The story of Jesus walking on the water (v 45–52) is also found in Matthew (14:22–33) and John (6:16–21). Compare the three accounts and note down your main observations.
12. Consider the six stories found in chapter 6 from the perspective of Jesus’ disciples. What role do they play? How do you think they felt? How do you evaluate them in each of these stories?

Reflect and prepare

1. Reflect on how Jesus must have felt being rejected by the people of his hometown. Perhaps you have had similar experiences of rejection by your own family or in your own ministry. Perhaps your family and your neighbors missed out on the blessings of the Kingdom of God, because they rejected you and your testimony. Share in your groups and bring your concerns and disappointments before God in prayer. Then prepare a short devotion called Rejection, making use of Mark’s account in v 1–6 and your own experiences. End your devotion with an appeal to the listeners not to harden their hearts and reject the offer of the Kingdom of God.
2. Reflect on the story Jesus feeds the five thousand men (v 31–44). Note a few things about Jesus:
   1. His compassion on the people (v 34). He didn’t send them away but saw their needs.
      * Their need for instruction (v 34).
      * Their need for food.
   2. His dealing with his disciples:
      * He saw their need for rest (v 31).
      * He put them to the test (v 37).
      * He let them assist him in the miracle (v 38, 41, 43).
   3. Who is Jesus to you: Is he your teacher? Is he your provider? Are you used by him to the glory of the Kingdom of God?

Then prepare a devotion (or a Bible study or a sermon) based on this story and the material found in this study.

1. Reflect on the thin line between success and failure for men and women of God in the light of of the three passages in Mark chapter 6 where the disciples of Jesus play a key role:
   1. Jesus sends out the twelve, v 7–13
   2. Jesus feeds the five thousand, v 30–44
   3. Jesus walks on the water, v 45–52

Use you conclusions (together with the material from this study) to prepare an outline for a Bible study (or a devotion or a sermon) called Success and failure for the disciples.

([Go to Answers Mark chapter 6](#AnswersMarkChapter6))

### Mark chapter 7

Introduction and comments

The seventh chapter of Mark contains three passages:

* 1. Clean and unclean, v 1–23
  2. A Syrophoenician woman’s faith, v 24–30
  3. Jesus heals a deaf man, 31–37

The debate of the first passage can be summarized in one short sentence: A person’s fellowship with God is not broken by unclean hands or impure food, but by sin. Then follows two healing miracles that both take place in non-Jewish areas. The very descriptive story about the healing of the deaf man in the Decapolis is not found in any of the other gospels.

Pharisees … who had come from Jerusalem (v 1): Compare 3:22, where Mark mentions an earlier delegation of fact-finding Jewish religious leaders, who had come from Jerusalem to Galilee to find out about Jesus and his ministry.

Verses 3–4: Mark explains to his Gentile readers the Jewish custom of ceremonial washing of hands. This custom was based on the “tradition of the elders,” a huge mass of oral tradition commenting on the details of the law. Its purpose was to regulate a person’s life completely, and it was passed on from one generation to the next one as binding regulations. For example, Jews became ceremonially defiled during much of normal daily life and were purified by pouring water over the hands.

Isaiah prophesied (v 6–7): In order to describe the tradition of the elders as “rules taught by men,” Jesus quotes Isaiah 29:13, where the Lord condemns the religious leaders at the time of the prophet.

hypocrite (v 6): This is a person whose worship is only outward and not from the heart. The outward appearance of piety of the Pharisees was not matched by a life of sincere commitment to God. In verses 8–9, Jesus then accuses the Pharisees of having replaced God’s commandment with human tradition (see also verse 13).

Verse 10: Jesus quotes the fifth commandment in both its positive and negative forms.

Corban (v 11): This Hebrew/Aramaic word means “offering.” An irresponsible Jewish son could use this word in a religious vow to dedicate to God (“to the temple”) money that otherwise would have gone for the support of his parents. There was, however, no need for this money to be used for religious purposes. The Corban formula became a way of avoiding the clear responsibility of children toward their parents as prescribed in the law. The Pharisees claimed that the Corban oath was binding, even when it was uttered rashly. This practice was one of many traditions that obeyed the letter of the law while ignoring its spirit (see also verse 13).

Verse 16 is not found in the best Greek manuscripts.

Thus he declared all foods clean (v 19): Mark adds this comment to help his readers see the significance of Jesus’ pronouncement for them.

defiles him (v 20): Jesus replaces the normal Jewish understanding of impurity with the truth that impurity comes from an impure heart, not from the violation of external rules. Fellowship with God is not affected by unclean hands or unclean food, but by sin (see v 21–23).

Tyre (v 24): A Gentile city situated in Phoenicia, the area on the Mediterranean coast northwest of Galilee. The distance from Capernaum to Tyre was about 50 km.

Greek (v 26): This words was often used as a synonym for “Gentile.”

of Syriophoenician origin (v 26): At that time Phoenicia was part of the Roman province of Syria. Perhaps Mark uses the expression to distinguish this woman from the Libyan Phoenicians of North Africa.

children (v 27): Jesus is referring to the Israelites as God’s children. In the parallel account found in Matthew, Jesus first tells his disciples (and the woman must be listening to his words), “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” and then he tells the woman directly, “It is not right to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs” (Matt 15:24, 26).

bread … the dogs under the table … crumbs (v 27–28): Jesus uses “bread” as a metaphor for God’s covenantal blessings. Jesus’ point is that the gospel is to be given to the Jews, the people of God’s covenant. In her reply, the woman expands Jesus’ metaphor by using the expression “crumbs for dogs” referring to “God’s leftover blessings for those who are not Jews.”

went by Sidon to the Sea of Galilee (v 31): So Jesus went north from Tyre to Sidon (about 40 km) and then southeast through the territory of Herod Philip II (a brother of the Herod Philip who was the first husband of Herodias, see comment on 6:17) to the east side of the Sea of Galilee. This was a roundabout route. Perhaps Jesus wanted to avoid traveling through Galilee, where Herod Antipas was in power (see 6:14–29) and where many people wanted to make him king by force (see John 6:14–15).

Decapolis (v 31): See comment on 5:20.

Ephphatha! (v 34): This is an Aramaic word that Mark translates for the benefit of his Gentile readers.

his ears were opened, his tongue was released (v 35): Jesus was doing what God had promised to do when he came to redeem his people (see Isaiah 35:5–6). The people were amazed beyond measure (v 37). The Jews among them must have realized that Jesus was the promised Messiah, even if he did not appear to be the political liberator that they were expecting.

Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone (v 36): See comment on 1:34.

Questions

1. In the first passage (v 1–23), Jesus addresses (or discusses with) various groups of people. Who are they? Make a list.
2. Mark mentions some of the purity laws that the Pharisees wanted all Jews to follow. Which are they? (v 1–5)?
3. Why did the hypocrites in the days of the prophet Isaiah worship the Lord in vain (v 6–8)?
4. What does Jesus accuse the Pharisees of doing with the law of Moses (v 8–13)?
5. What does not make a person unclean, according to Jesus (v 14–23)?
6. What does make a person unclean, according to Jesus (v 14–23)?
7. Find Phoenicia, Tyre, Sidon, and Decapolis on Map of the Roman Province of Judaea.
8. What do we learn about the background of the woman that Jesus met in the area of Tyre? And what was her problem (v 24–26)?
9. What excuse did Jesus have for not helping the woman (v 26–27)?
10. Why did Jesus change his mind and cure the woman’s daughter (v 28–30)?
11. What was wrong with the man who was brought to Jesus in the region of the Decapolis (v 31–32)?
12. Where did Jesus heal the deaf man (v 31–33)?
13. How did the people react to the healing of the deaf man (v 36–37)?

Think and discuss

1. How can we understand from the text in the first passage (v 1–23) that Mark is addressing his gospel to Gentile readers?
2. Summarize the arguments about “Clean and unclean” (v 1–23). Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible.
3. Explain how the Gentile woman in the area of Tyre is as an example for us today (v 24–31).
4. Compare the parallel stories found in Mark and Matthew about the Gentile woman in the area of Tyre (v 24–30 and Matt 15:21–28). Your comments?
5. Retell the story about Jesus healing the deaf man (v 31–37) without looking in your Bible. Use your own words and make the story dramatic and exciting to listen to. Imagine that you are speaking to a group of villagers.

Reflect and prepare

1. Reflect on your own life and your understanding of holiness in the light of Jesus’ teachings in the first part of chapter 7 (v 1–23). Are you a hypocrite like the Pharisees? Why – why not? Try to be as honest as possible. Bring any concerns that you have in prayer before God. Use you conclusions (together with the material from this study) to prepare an outline for a Bible study (or a devotion or a sermon) called Purity and impurity.
2. Reflect on the story about the woman from Tyre as found in both Mark 7:24–31 and Matt 15:21–28. Also reflect on the information about the story available in this study. Then prepare a Bible study (or a devotion or a sermon) called A woman of persistent faith. You can use my answer to Think and discuss 3 as your outline.

([Go to Answers Mark chapter 7](#AnswersMarkChapter7))

### Mark chapter 8

Introduction and comments

The eighth chapter of Mark, which begins with a second feeding miracle, this time in the predominantly Greek-speaking area of the Decapolis, can be divided into seven passages, like this:

* 1. Jesus feeds four thousand men, v 1–10
  2. The Pharisees ask Jesus for a sign, v 11–13
  3. The yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod, v 14–21
  4. Jesus heals a blind man at Bethsaida, v 22–26. This story is not found in the other gospels.
  5. Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ, v 27–30
  6. Jesus speaks about his death, v 31–33
  7. The cost of following Christ, v 34–9:1

Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Christ (v 27–30) takes place near Caesarea Philippi at the northernmost end of Palestine. Mark has come halfway through his gospel and to a turning-point in his narrative. With Jesus’ first prediction of his death (v 31–33), his journey to the cross has begun in a more open and definite way.

a very great multitude (v 1): This story takes place in the region of the Decapolis (see 7:1), so the crowd probably consisted of both Jews and Gentiles.

compassion on the multitude (v 1): Compare the story about the feeding of the five thousand men. Then Jesus had compassion because the people “were like sheep without a shepherd” (6:34). Now he has compassion because they had been without food for three days. Jesus cared for the various needs of the people that came to him, physical needs as well spiritual needs.

seven baskets (v 8): Here Mark uses a different word for basket than he did in 6:43. The baskets of the first feeding miracle were small lunch baskets. Here we have bigger baskets. When Jesus later reminded his disciples of the two feeding miracles, Mark again uses the same two words (v 19–20).

Dalmanutha (v 10): This was a village on the west coast of the Sea of Galilee, next to Magdala (which is mentioned in this context by Matthew, 15:39).

The Pharisees (v 11): Compare the two earlier times when the Pharisees had come to check on Jesus (see 3:22 and 7:1).

a sign from heaven to test him (v 11): The context reveals that the request of a sign by the Pharisees was not sincere. Their objective was to tempt Jesus.

to the other side (v 13): Jesus and his disciples left Galilee (compare v 10) and again crossed the Sea of Galilee to its eastern shore.

yeast (v 15): Yeast symbolized evil influence. A small amount of yeast will leaven an entire loaf of bread. Similarly, the effect of evil will spread among people. Here Jesus uses the expression “the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod” about the Pharisees’ desire for a sign from God to prove the identity of Jesus and Herod’s confusion about Jesus’ identity (compare 6:16).

Herod (v 15): King Herod Antipas (see comment on 6:14).

hearts hardened (v 17): This expression means “lack of understanding.”

Bethsaida (v 22): A small town on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was the home of some of the apostles (see John 1:44, where Philip, Andrew and Peter are mentioned).

touch him (v 22): They wanted Jesus to heal him.

Caesarea Philippi (v 27): This was a town near Mount Hermon at the extreme northern boundary of Palestine. Herod Philip II the Tetrarch (he was a son of Herod the Great), founded the city, made it his capital, and named it Caesarea Philippi to distinguish it from the more famous Caesarea, the capital of the Roman province of Judea, situated on the Mediterranean Sea.

the Christ (v 29): This Greek word means “the Anointed One” and is a translation of the Hebrew word for “the Messiah.” Jews at the time of Jesus mainly associated this title with the coming of a political and national leader. That must have been the reason why Jesus hardly ever used it about himself. Mark, however, begins his gospel by identifying Jesus as the Christ (1:1). See also comment on Luke 2:11 in the study The shepherds and the angels.

charged them not to tell anyone about him (v 30): “The Messianic secret” – see comment on 1:34.

the Son of Man (v 31): See comment on 2:10.

must suffer (v 31): The first of three predictions of Jesus’ death mentioned by Mark (see also 9:31 and 10:33–34). The suffering of the servant of the Lord (the Messiah) was predicted by the prophet Isaiah (see Isaiah 52:13–53:12).

the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes (v 12): The elders were the lay member of the Sanhedrin (which was the council and high court of the Jews). The chief priests were the Sadducees in charge of the worship at the Jerusalem temple. The teachers of the law (or scribes) were mostly Pharisees, professionally trained to teach and apply the Old Testament law. The Sanhedrin consisted of representatives of these three groups.

Satan (v 33): See comment on 1:13. Peter’s attempt to talk Jesus out of going to the cross must have reminded Jesus of Satan’s temptation at the very beginning of his ministry (see Matt 4:8–10). So Jesus severely rebuked Peter.

take up his cross (v 34): At the time of Jesus, this expression did not mean “suffer” in a general way. For Jesus the cross was an execution tool. A person carried his cross on his way to his own execution. So when Jesus expects his followers and disciples to “take up their cross,” he wants them to unconditionally commit their lives to him. Crucifixion was a very cruel and disgraceful way of executing a person, and the Romans reserved it for foreigners who had committed serious crimes.

life (v 35–37): In these verses Jesus uses the word “life” in two ways: “physical life” and “spiritual/eternal life.” So verse 35 is a kind of wordplay: “For whoever wants to save his (physical) life will lose his (spiritual/eternal) life, and whoever loses his (physical) life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save his (spiritual/eternal) life.”

There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Kingdom of God come with power (9:1): This statement of Jesus has confused many Bible readers. But one thing is sure: Jesus is not referring to his second coming. So it cannot mean that some of those who listened to Jesus at that time will still be alive at his second coming. And it cannot mean that Jesus was confused and thought that his second coming would take place within the lifetime of some of his listeners. So what can it mean? Bible scholars have suggested five, more or less reasonable, interpretations:

* 1. It is a prediction of the transfiguration, which happened a week later (see 9:2) and which demonstrated that Jesus would return “in his Father’s glory” (8:38).
  2. Jesus’ resurrection
  3. The coming of the Spirit at Pentecost
  4. The spreading of the Kingdom of God through the ministry of the early church
  5. The destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70

Questions

1. Find Caesarea Philippi, Gaulanites (which was part of the Tetrarchy of Philip), the Mediterranean Sea, and Caesarea on Map of the Roman Province of Judaea.
2. Why did Jesus have compassion on the crowd (v 1–4)?
3. How much food did the disciples have before the feeding miracle and how much was left over (v 1–10)?
4. What request did the Pharisees bring to Jesus (v 11–13)?
5. What did Jesus do about the request of the Pharisees (v 11–13)?
6. How did the disciples and Jesus travel from Dalmanutha to Bethsaida, and what problem did that face on their journey (v 14–22)?
7. What did Jesus tell his disciples to be careful about (v 14–16)?
8. What did Jesus accuse his disciples of (v 17–21)?
9. Where did the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida take place (v 22–26)?
10. Describe the “two-stage” healing of the blind man at Bethsaida (v 22–26).
11. Who did people in the northernmost part of Palestine think Jesus was (v 27–30)?
12. Who did Peter (and Peter probably spoke for all the disciples) think Jesus was (v 27–30)?
13. What title did Jesus use about himself as he predicted his suffering and death (v 31)?
14. Why did Peter take Jesus aside to rebuke him (v 31–33)?
15. How did Jesus evaluate Peter’s rebuke (v 31–33)?
16. Who does Jesus address in 8:34–9:1?
17. What does Jesus require of his followers according to verse 34?
18. Who will save his life, according to Jesus’ statement in verse 35?
19. What will happen to those who are ashamed of Jesus and his words (v 38)?
20. What did Jesus say about some of the people who were listening to his words about discipleship (9:1)?

Think and discuss

1. Retell the story “Jesus feeds four thousand men” (v 1–10) without looking in your Bible. Use your own words and make the story dramatic and exciting to listen to. Imagine that you are speaking to a group of villagers.
2. Why did the Pharisees ask Jesus for “a sign from heaven”? And why do you think Jesus answered them in the way he did (v 11–13)?
3. Jesus uses the metaphor “yeast” five times in the gospels, twice in a positive way about the Kingdom of God (Matt 13:33 and Luke 13:21) and three times in a negative way in connection with the Pharisees (Matt 16:6–12; Mark 8:15; Luke 21:1). Explain what “yeast” stands for in these five passages.
4. Explain in your own words the message that Jesus had for his disciples in the passage “The yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod” (v 14–21).
5. Why do you think Jesus was so strict about telling the disciples not to reveal his identity as “the Messiah” (v 27–30)?
6. Why do you think Jesus rebuked Peter so harshly that he even called him “Satan” (v 31–33)?
7. What conclusion do you think Jesus expected his listeners to draw from his statement about “life” in verse 35?
8. Explain why Jesus’ two questions in verses 36–37 are rhetorical.
9. Explain Jesus’ statement in verse 38. Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible.
10. What can we learn about discipleship from Jesus’ words in verses 34–38?
11. Go through the comment on 9:1. Which interpretation of Jesus’ statement “There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the Kingdom of God has come with power” do you prefer? Explain why.

Reflect and prepare

Reflect on “discipleship” in the light of this study. Then prepare a Bible study (or a devotion or a sermon) called Discipleship. My answer to Think and discuss 10 can be used as an outline.

([Go to Answers Mark chapter 8](#AnswersMarkChapter8))

### Mark chapter 9

Introduction and comments

The ninth chapter of Mark contains six passages:

* 1. The transfiguration of Jesus, v 2–13
  2. The healing of a boy with an unclean spirit, v 14–29
  3. Jesus again speaks about his death, v 30–32
  4. About greatness, v 33–37
  5. For or against, v 38–41
  6. Stumbling blocks, v 42–50

Only Jesus’ closest disciples were allowed to come with him on the mountain to see him transfigured. Peter later remembered this day as he described Jesus: “We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitness of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’” (2 Peter 1:16–17). When Jesus returned from the area of Caesarea Philippi to Galilee, his public ministry was over. He no longer spoke to the crowds or performed any miracles. Instead he devoted his time to teaching his disciples and preparing them for his suffering, death and resurrection in Jerusalem.

a high mountain (v 2): There is no way of knowing for sure on what mountain the transfiguration took place, but Mount Hermon is a likely candidate. It is near Caesarea Philippi (where the previous event in Mark took place), and it is high. The traditional site of Mount Tabor is unlikely. It is in Galilee, far away from Caesarea Philippi, and occupied by a fortress. In biblical times mountains were places of solitude, prayer, and divine presence (for example Mount Sinai in the Old Testament. Compare 3:13 and 6:46 in Mark’s gospel).

he was transfigured (v 2): The three disciples saw Jesus in his glorified state (see John 17:5; 2 Peter 1:17, quoted above).

Moses and Elijah (v 4): Moses represented the Old Testament covenant and the law. He delivered the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, a foreshadowing of the salvation from the bondage of sin soon to be fulfilled in the death of Jesus. Elijah represented the prophets and appeared as the appointed restorer of all things (see Malachi 4:5-6 and Mark 9:11–13).

a cloud (v 7): In the Old Testament, the cloud stands for divine presence (see for example Ex 13:21; 19:9; 33:9; Num 9:15)

a voice (v 7): Compare the voice at Jesus’ baptism, 1:11.

he charged them not to tell anyone about what they had seen (v 9): On this occasion, Jesus added a time limit to “the Messianic secret” (compare comment on 1:34): “until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.” This addition tells us that “the secret” will be revealed with Jesus’ death and resurrection. Only through them is his true identity, and his full character as the Messiah, clearly revealed.

what this rising from the dead could mean (v 10): As most Jews the disciples accepted the doctrine of the bodily resurrection. But they were confused about the resurrection of the Son of Man, because their understanding of the Messiah did not include his suffering and death.

Elijah must come first (v 11): Traditional Jewish eschatology, based on Malachi 4:5–6, stated that Elijah must appear before the coming of the Messiah. The disciples reasoned that if Jesus really was the Messiah, as the transfiguration proved him to be, why had not Elijah appeared?

Elijah indeed comes first to restore all things. Why then is it written about the Son of Man that he must suffer much and be rejected? (v 12): Jesus said that Elijah appeared with John the Baptist who prepared the way (in fulfillment of Malachi 3:1) for the coming of the Messiah, “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17). In addition, the suffering and death of John the Baptist set a pattern for (and foreshadowed) the suffering and death of Jesus. Jesus made this point clear in Matt 17:12: “In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.”

Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they wanted to, as it is written about him (v 13): Jesus was referring to John the Baptist without mentioning his name. The Old Testament account about Elijah and his suffering under king Ahab and queen Jezebel (see 1 Kings 19:1–2) foreshadowed what happened to John the Baptist under king Herod and queen Herodias (Mark 6:14–28).

the scribes (v 14): If the transfiguration took place on Mount Hermon, the presence of the scribes so far north would show how concerned they were about Jesus and his ministry.

seizes him (v 18): Demonic possession was the reason for the boy’s illness. Not all seizures were the result of demon-possession, but this one was.

You unbelieving generation (v 19): With these words, Jesus expressed his bitter disappointment with his disciples and their lack of faith and understanding.

passed through Galilee (v 30): Jesus’ public ministry in and around Galilee was now completed (see note on 7:24), and he was on his way to Jerusalem to suffer and die

He sat down (v 35): Jesus took the posture of a Jewish rabbi as he taught his disciples important truths about the Kingdom of God.

Most assuredly I tell you (v 41): Jesus uses this solemn expression around 80 times in the gospels to emphasize the authority of his words (in Mark it is also found in 3:28; 8:12; 9:1; 10:15, 29; 11:23; 12:43; 13:30; 14:9, 18, 25, 30).

one of these little ones who believe in me (v 42): Jesus could either have referred to the “little children” in verse 37 or to the “little ones” in faith (new believers like the man whom John reported to Jesus, v 38–41).

millstone (v 42): A heavy stone slab used for grinding grain

cut it off (43): This is a figure of speech called hyperbole (a purposeful exaggeration to make a point). Jesus used it here to emphasize the need to do something drastic about sin in your life.

Verses 44 and 46 are not found in the best Hebrew manuscripts. These verses are identical with verse 48.

Verse 48 contains a quotation from Isaiah 66:24, which speaks of the punishment for rebellion against God. The passage was later used as a picture of endless destruction.

For everyone will be salted with fire (v 49): Bible scholars do not agree on how to understand this statement. But it probably means that every believer in this life can expect to undergo the fire of suffering and purification. Christian life is compared to the Old Testament sacrifice, which according to Lev 2:13 had to be offered with salt. Fire is a metaphor for suffering and trial (compare 1 Peter 1:6–7).

salt (v 50): Here salt is used in a different sense, as something good. Salt played an important role in the ancient world. It was necessary to life, and was also used as a preservative to keep food from spoiling. But salt could lose its saltiness. Jesus here warned his disciples not to lose their identity as his followers, but to live at peace with one another (compare their earlier argument about greatness in verse 34).

Questions

1. What is the context of the story of the transfiguration? Where did it takes place? And who were with Jesus? (v 2)
2. How was Jesus changed on the mountain (v 2–3)?
3. Who were the two men that Jesus talked with on the mountain (v 4 with comment)?
4. How did the disciples react to Jesus’ transfiguration (v 5–6)?
5. What was the message of the voice from heaven (v 7)?
6. What order did Jesus give his disciples on the way down the mountain (v 9)?
7. What two things were the disciples confused about as they came down from the mountain (v 10–13)?
8. Who were gathered around the boy with the unclean spirit (v 14–17)?
9. How did the unclean spirit trouble the boy (v 17–20) and how did Jesus address it (v 25)?
10. What happened when Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit (v 25–27)?
11. What question did the disciples ask Jesus after the healing of the boy, and what answer did Jesus give them (v 28–29)?
12. What do we learn about Jesus’ ministry as he passed through Galilee (v 30–32)?
13. Why didn’t the disciples ask Jesus what he meant by his teaching (v 30–32)?
14. What had the disciples been arguing about on the road to Capernaum (v 33–37)?
15. How does Jesus describe the greatest in the Kingdom of God (v 33–36)?
16. What complaint did John bring to Jesus (v 38–41)?
17. How did Jesus respond to John’s complaint (v 38–41)?
18. In verses 43–48, Jesus mentions parts of the body that can cause a believer to sin. Which are they?

Think and discuss

1. Mark says the Elijah and Moses were talking with Jesus (v 4) but what they were talking about? Find this information in Luke’s account of this event (Luke 9:29–36).
2. Why do you think Peter wanted to put up shelters for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah (v 5)?
3. Compare the accounts of the transfiguration (Mark 9:2–14; Matt 17:1–13; Luke 9:29–36). Note down the main differences and give your comments.
4. How do you understand the significance of the transfiguration account in the context of the gospel narrative?
5. Explain Jesus’ words about Elijah (v 11–13).
6. How do you understand Jesus’ statement, “All things are possible for him who believes” (v 23)?
7. Compare verse 29 in the Kannada pavitra grantha and satyavEdavu translations. How are they different? What do you think is the reason for this difference?
8. How do you understand Jesus’ explanation in verse 29?
9. What do we understand about true greatness in the Kingdom of God from verses 33–37? Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible.
10. Do you think that there is a contradiction between Jesus’ words in verse 40 (“Whoever is not against us is for us”) and his words in Matt 12:30 (“Whoever is not with me is against me”)? Explain.
11. Compare verses 43–48 in the Kannada pavitra grantha and satyavEdavu translations. Your observations?
12. Explain how Jesus uses the figure of speech called hyperbole in verse 47.
13. What do you think “salt” stands for in verse 49 and in verse 50?

Reflect and prepare

1. Reflect on the account of the transfiguration of Jesus (v 2–13) in the light of the material presented in this study. Make use of questions like these:
   1. What happened on the mountain? What did Moses and Elijah represent? What did they talk to Jesus about? What did the voice from heaven say?
   2. What did this experience signify for Jesus? How would it have prepared him for his suffering and death?
   3. How did the experience affect the three disciples, while they were still on the mountain? How would it have prepared them for Jesus’ death and resurrection? How would it have deepened their understanding of Jesus after his death and resurrection?
   4. The disciples’ questions on the way from the mountain: About Jesus’ death and resurrection? About the coming of Elijah? Jesus’ explanation about Elijah and John the Baptist.
   5. What can we learn from this account?

Then prepare a Bible study (or a devotion or a sermon) called The transfiguration. The five points above can be used as an outline.

1. Reflect on “faith” in the light of the material presented in this study. What do we learn about the faith of the disciples? What do we learn about the faith of the man with the demon-possessed son? How is your own faith? Bring any concerns that you have before God in prayer.

You can also prepare a devotion (based on the answers to Think and discuss 6 and 8) about the man with the demon-possessed son and his faith.

1. Reflect on truths about the Kingdom of God as found in verses 39–50 in the light of the material presented in this study. Here are some of the points:
   1. True greatness is shown through servanthood.
   2. True greatness is evaluated by how we treat the “little ones” and give a cup of water to thirsty person.
   3. The seriousness of sin as a hinderance for entry into life and the Kingdom of God
   4. Every believer will be “salted with fire”: about sufferings and trials.
   5. Salt: about the risk of losing our identity as true people of the Kingdom of God.

How is your own life when reflected in these five points? Bring any concerns that you have before God in prayer.

Then prepare a Bible study (or a devotion or a sermon) called Our lives as people of the Kingdom of God. The five points above can be used as an outline.

([Go to Answers Mark chapter 9](#AnswersMarkChapter9))

### Mark chapter 10

Introduction and comments

The tenth chapter of Mark contains six passages:

* 1. About divorce, v 1–15
  2. Jesus blesses children, v 13–16
  3. The rich man, v 17–31
  4. Jesus speaks about his death for the third time, v 32–34
  5. The request of James and John, v 35–45
  6. Jesus heals blind Bartimaeus, v 46–52

Again the Jewish leaders came to find fault with Jesus. This time they tried to catch him with a tricky question about the lawfulness of divorce, an issue on which the Jewish rabbis did not agree. Jesus’ answer takes us beyond the law of Moses, all the way back to God’s intention with marriage: “What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate” (v 9). But the main topic of this chapter is discipleship. In the story about the rich man we find that wealth can be an additional hinderance for a person to follow Jesus and enter into the Kingdom of God (v 23). The third prediction of Jesus’ death and resurrection is followed by teaching on true greatness through humble and sacrificial servanthood (v 43–44), culminating in Jesus’ affirmation of his own mission: “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (v 45). The healing of Bartimaeus is the last of the healing miracles recorded in Mark’s gospel.

the region of Judea (v 1): Judea consisted of the southern part of Palestine. Judea was the Roman name for the Old Testament land of Judah (the southern Israelite kingdom).

beyond the Jordan (v 1): Jesus’ journey took him south from Galilee, over the mountains of Samaria into Judea and then east across the Jordan River into Perea, where Herod Antipas ruled.

came to test him and they asked him (v 2): The question of the Pharisees was not sincere, but hostile. They were testing him and trying to catch him with some statement on a subject on which they themselves did not agree. And then use Jesus’ answer to trap him. John the Baptist had accused king Herod Antipas for his unlawful divorce and remarriage to Herodias (see 6:17–18). As a result he had been put in prison, and later killed. Jesus was now within king Herod’s jurisdiction, and the Pharisees perhaps hoped that Jesus’ reply would provoke the king to put an end to Jesus’ ministry as he had put an end to John’s.

Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife? (v 2): Jews of those days agreed in principle that divorce was lawful. But they did not agree on the grounds for divorce.

Because of your hardness of heart (v 5): Divorce had become necessary because of human weakness. It was used to regulate life in a Jewish society that no longer obeyed God’s will. But it was not the norm God had originally intended. The purpose of Deut 24:1–4 was to reduce the hardship of the consequences of divorce.

from the beginning of the creation (v 6): Jesus did not question the law of Moses. But he answered the Pharisees by reaching back to God’s original intent with marriage. Moses’ permission to divorce was an adjustment to human weakness. But divorce was not what God intended in marriage. His original design in creating man and woman was that marriage should be an unbroken lifelong union (see Gen 2:18–24). God did not intend marriage to be a temporary arrangement that could be terminated as one thinks fit.

touch them (v 13): Here Mark uses this expression as a synonym for “bless them.”

to inherit eternal life (v 17): In the gospels this expression means the same thing as “to enter the Kingdom of God” (v 24) and “to be saved” (v 26–27).

Do not defraud (v 19): Probably a reference to the tenth commandment (against covetousness). So Jesus mentioned all six commandments that prohibit wrong actions and attitudes against others (see Ex 20:12–17; Deut 5:16–21).

from my youth (v 20): The rich man probably thought of when he became a “son of the commandments” (bar mitzvah in Aramaic) at the age of 13.

have treasure in heaven (v 21): Another reference to “salvation” or “the gift of eternal life.”

easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye (v 25): This imagery means “impossible.” It is just as impossible for a rich person (or a poor man) to earn his salvation by keeping the commandments as it is for a camel to get through the eye of a needle.

who can be saved? … With men it is impossible, but not with God (v 26–27): Salvation is totally the work of God. To enter the Kingdom of God by human achievement or merit is impossible. Apart from the grace of God, no one can be saved (compare Eph 2:8–9).

this present age … the age to come (v 30): This present age covers the period from the fall of Adam and Eve to the consummation of God’s eternal Kingdom. The present age is evil (see Gal 1:4). But the age to come, which will begin with the second coming of Christ and continue forever, is God’s rule of righteousness.

a hundredfold (v 30): A description of the abundant fruitfulness of the word of the Kingdom of God (compare 4:8).

with persecutions (v 30): The life of discipleship is a combination of promise and persecution, of blessing and suffering.

eternal life (v 30): The eternal life with God in his Kingdom after this present evil age has been brought to an end

many who are first will be last (v 31): Jesus referred to the future when God will evaluate the lives of people and when human values will be reversed. Those who now have rank and position will not have them then. And those who do not have them now will have them then.

amazed (v 32): The disciples were probably amazed by the determination with which Jesus proceeded toward Jerusalem (compare Isaiah 50:7).

those who followed (v 32): These people were probably pilgrims on their way to celebrate the Passover Feast in Jerusalem.

Gentiles ... kill him (v 33–34): The word “crucify” does not occur in the passion predictions in Mark’s gospel. But the statement that Jesus would be handed over to Gentiles to be killed by them suggests crucifixion, the usual way by which the Roman rulers executed non-Roman criminals.

sit, one at your right hand and one at your left hand (v 37): These places symbolized positions of prestige and power.

drink the cup that I drink (v 38): This Jewish phrase expressed the sharing of the fate of another person. In addition, the Old Testament uses “cup of wine” as a metaphor for God’s wrath on human sin and rebellion (compare Jeremiah 25:15–16). So the cup Jesus had to drink refers to God’s punishment on the sin of mankind that Jesus bore for our redemption (compare v 45).

baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with (v 38): “Baptism” is a metaphor for suffering and death. The whole phrase is a parallel to the previous phrase about drinking another person’s cup.

the ten (v 41): The ten other disciples, apart from James and John

ransom (v 45): In those days, ransom was the price paid for the release of a slave. In the New Testament, the the word “ransom” signifies the price of redemption that Jesus offered on the cross for the salvation of mankind (compare 1 Tim 2:6).

As he went out from Jericho (v 46): The city of Jericho was located about eight km west of the Jordan River and about 25 km northeast of Jerusalem. There was an old Jericho (largely abandoned in New Testament times) and a new Jericho, built by king Herod the Great. This story probably took place somewhere between the old Israelite city and the new city: Luke writes that Jesus went into the city, while Matthew and Mark state that Jesus was leaving it.

Bartimaeus son of Timaeus (v 46): “Bartimaeus” means “son of Timaeus” in Hebrew/Aramaic, so here we find another case where Mark helps his Gentile readers by providing a translation (compare 7:34).

Son of David (v 47): This was a Messianic title.

Questions

1. Find Judea,the Jordan River, and Perea on Map of the Roman Province of Judaea.
2. Where do the events of this chapter take pace (v 1)?
3. Why did some Pharisees come to see Jesus (v 2)?
4. How did Jesus summarize his teaching on marriage in verses 5–12?
5. Why did people bring their small children to Jesus (v 13–16)?
6. How did the disciples react when they saw the small children (v 13–16)?
7. How did Jesus react to the way in which his disciples behaved (v 13–16)?
8. How did Jesus treat the small children (v 13–16)?
9. What question did the man want Jesus to help him find an answer to (v 17–18)?
10. What do we learn about the man’s observance of the Ten Commandments from his reply (v 18–21)?
11. What did Jesus ask the man to do (v 20–22)?
12. Why did the man leave Jesus (v 20–22)?
13. How did Jesus react to the man leaving him (v 22–25)?
14. What did Jesus mean by his statement about the camel and the eye of a needle (v 25)?
15. How did Jesus answer the question that the disciples had about salvation (v 23–27)?
16. How did Peter describe the commitment of Jesus’ first disciples (v 28–31)?
17. List the promises that Jesus made to his followers in verses 29–31.
18. Explain Jesus’ statement, “Many who are first will be last, and the last will be first” (v 31).
19. What did Jesus reveal to his disciples on the road to Jerusalem (v 33–34)?
20. What request did James and John bring to Jesus (v 35–37)?
21. How did Jesus challenge the request of James and John (v 35–38)?
22. Explain the figurative language that Jesus uses in verse 39 (see the comments on this verse).
23. Why was Jesus not able to grant the request of James and John (v 40)?
24. How did Jesus characterize the rulers of this present world (v 42)?
25. How did Jesus characterize greatness in the Kingdom of God (v 44–45)?
26. How did Jesus describe his own mission (v 45)?
27. Who was Bartimaeus (v 46–52)?
28. What did Bartimaeus do when people asked him to be quiet (v 46–52)?
29. What did Jesus do for Bartimaeus and what happened afterward (v 46–52)?

Think and discuss

1. Summarize the passage about divorce (v 2–12) in your own words, without looking in your Bible.
2. Explain in your own words the two lessons that Jesus gave his disciples in the passage about little children (v 13–16).
3. Explain in your own words Jesus’ teaching about salvation in the story about the man who came to him with the question about eternal life (v 17–27).
4. How do you understand Jesus’ statement that his followers will “receive a hundredfold now in this age – houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields – and with them, persecutions” (v 30)?
5. Compare Jesus three major passion predictions in Mark’s gospel (8:31–38; 9:31–37; 10:33–45). Make a table with three columns: Announcement of Jesus’ death – The disciples’ failure – Jesus teaches on discipleship.
6. Explain in your own words Jesus’ teaching on greatness in the Kingdom of God as found in verses 41–45.
7. Why do you think Jesus healed Bartimaeus (v 46–52)?

Reflect and prepare

1. Reflect on Jesus’ teaching about divorce in verses 2–12. What could be the practical implications of this passage for our own situation in the South Indian church today? Also take Paul’s teaching in 1 Cor 7:12–15 into consideration. Prepare a few points for a group of church leaders to reflect on.
2. Reflect on Jesus three predictions of his suffering, death and resurrection, the reaction of his disciples, and Jesus’ teaching on discipleship (see material in this study, particularly Think and discuss 5). Then prepare a Bible study (or a devotion or a sermon) called Jesus and his disciples. The filled-in table in your answer to Think and discuss 5 can be used as an outline.
3. Reflect on greatness in the Kingdom of God in the light of this study. Then prepare a Bible study (or a devotion or a sermon) called Greatness in the Kingdom of God

([Go to Answers Mark chapter 10](#AnswersMarkChapter10))

### Mark chapter 11

Introduction and comments

The eleventh chapter of Mark can be structured like this:

* 1. Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, v 1–11
  2. Jesus curses the fig tree, v 12–14
  3. Jesus clears out the temple, v 15–19
  4. The withered fig tree, v 20–27
  5. The Jewish leaders challenge Jesus’ authority, v 28–33

Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem took place on the Sunday of the week of his passion, death and resurrection. This was the week when the Jews celebrated the Passover, the festival commemorating the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. The large number of pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover festival must have been looking forward to the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies about a King, the Messiah, whom they expected would deliver them from the Roman control over Palestine. The story about the leafy fig tree that withered overnight has given interpreters much headache. It should perhaps be understood as a symbolic prophetic judgment on the city of Jerusalem, which was totally destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. By clearing the temple of buyers, sellers, money changers, and people taking shortcuts across the temple area, Jesus demonstrated his authority, an authority which the next day was questioned by the Jewish leaders.

Bethphage (v 1): The name means “house of figs.” It is mentioned in the Bible only in connection with Jesus’ triumphal entry, but its exact location is unknown. It is probably “the village ahead of you” that Jesus speaks about in verse 2.

Bethany (v 1): The name means “house of unripe dates or figs.” It was a village on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, about three km from Jerusalem and the final station on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem. It was the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus (see John 12:1–3).

Mount of Olives (v 1): From the top of this high hill east of Jerusalem, separated from the city by the deep Kidron Valley, there was a magnificent view of the city and especially of the temple.

the Lord (v 3): This word could refer to God, to Jesus, or to the owner of the colt.

Verse 7–10: For those of Mark’s readers who were familiar with the Old Testament these verses echoed the messianic prophecy found in Zechariah 9:9: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king comes to you. He is righteous and having salvation. Lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (compare Matt 21:4–5).

Hosanna (v 9): This Hebrew expression, used in Psalm 118:25, means “save now, we pray.” It was used by the Jews as an exclamation of praise. It was also used to express Jewish eschatological hopes.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord (v 9): This is a quotation from Psalm 118:26. Psalm 118 was one of the “Praise psalms” (Hallel psalms) sung during the celebration of the Passover meal.

Verse 10: The kingdom blessed is the “kingdom of our father David,” clearly the messianic kingdom promised to David’s son.

the temple (v 11): The temple, including the entire temple area, had been rebuilt by Herod the Great, and the courtyard had been enlarged. To accomplish this a huge platform had been erected to compensate for the sharp falling off of the land to the southeast. An enormous retaining wall made of massive stones was built to support the platform. On the platform stood the temple building, porches and courtyards flanked by beautiful colonnades.

the next day (v 12): This was the Monday of the Passion Week.

a fig tree having leaves … not the season for figs (v 13): Fig trees around Jerusalem normally got leaves in March or April and the fruit was not ripe until their leaves were all out in June. In the Old Testament, the fig tree sometimes represents the nation of Israel and its cities (see for example Jeremiah 8:13; Hosea 9:10, 16).

May no one ever eat fruit from you again (v 14): Bible scholars have struggled with how to understand the story about the fig tree. Some interpret it as a parable of judgment (the fig tree bore no fruit, it was cursed by Jesus, and it withered, v 20). This interpretation is supported by the fact that the account of the cleansing of the temple (v 12–19) is placed in the middle of the story. It can instead be understood as a symbolic prophecy about the downfall of the city of Jerusalem, which was totally destroyed by the Romans in AD 70.

the temple (v 15): The cleansing of the temple took place in the area called “the court of the Gentiles.” This was the only part which Gentiles could visit, worship God and gather for prayer (compare verse 17).

those who sold and those who bought … the tables of the money changers … sold doves (v 15): Pilgrims coming to the temple needed to buy animals for sacrifice. So the salesmen conveniently kept their animals in the court of the Gentiles. Pilgrims also needed to change their money into the local currency, because the annual temple tax could only be paid with local money. Doves were needed for several kinds of offering, for example the purification of women and the cleansing of those with certain skin diseases. Doves were also the usual offering of the poor.

allow anyone to carry anything through the temple (v 16): This must mean that people used the temple area as a shortcut between the city and the Mount of Olives.

My house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations … a den of robbers (v 17): The first part of the verse is a quotation from Isaiah 56:7. By allowing the court of Gentiles to become a noisy marketplace, the Jewish leaders disturbed the worship of God-fearing Gentiles. “Den of robbers” is a quotation from Jeremiah 7:11. The ongoing business activities robbed the temple of its sanctity.

in the morning (v 20): This was the Tuesday of the Passion Week.

tell this mountain … be thrown into the sea (v 23): Jesus was standing on the Mount of Olives, from where the Dead Sea can be seen on a clear day. Jesus was, of course, speaking figuratively and hyperbolically. Moving a mountain is a Jewish metaphor for doing what is seemingly impossible (compare Isaiah 40:4; 49:11; 54:10). Jesus’ point, which Mark has reminded his readers of repeatedly earlier in his gospel, is the need for the risky commitment of faith which most of the people we come across in the gospel story have been unwilling to make. But Jesus wants his followers to confidently believe that for God nothing is impossible.

Verse 26 is not found in the best Greek manuscripts. So it was probably not part of Mark’s original text.

authority (v 28): The Jewish leaders asked Jesus why he had performed what seemed to be an official act (the clearing of the temple court). He did not have official status to do so.

from heaven (v 30): This common Jewish expression means “from God.” Many Jews did not refer to God directly out of respect for his holiness.

Questions

1. Why did Jesus send two of his disciples into the village ahead of them (v 1–7)?
2. What did Jesus do with the colt (v 1–7)?
3. What did the people do when they saw Jesus coming into Jerusalem (v 7–10)?
4. What did Jesus do after he had arrived in Jerusalem (v 11)?
5. What did the disciples hear Jesus say about the fig tree (v 12–14)?
6. What did Jesus do in the temple (v 15–17)?
7. How did the Jewish leaders react when they heard about what Jesus had done in the temple (v 15–18)?
8. Why were the Jewish leaders afraid of Jesus (v 18)?
9. What had happened to the fig tree the following morning (v 20–21)?
10. What did Jesus say when Peter pointed out to him that the fig tree had withered (v 20–23)?
11. What are the key words in the last part of Jesus’ comment to his disciples after the withering of the fig tree (v 22–25)?
12. Why did the Jewish leaders question Jesus (v 28)?
13. What answer did the Jewish leaders give to Jesus’ question about John the Baptist’s ministry (v 29–33)?

Think and discuss

1. All four gospels have accounts of Jesus’ triumphal entry (see Matt 21:1–11; Mark 11:1–11; Luke 19:28–40; and John 12:12–16). Compare these four accounts and note down some of your observations.
2. Luke has not included the story of the fig tree in his gospel. In its place he has a unique account of Jesus weeping over the city of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41–44). How could this fact help us interpret the story of the fig tree in Mark’s gospel (11:12–14 and 20–21)?
3. Why did the Pharisees avoid answering Jesus’ question about John the Baptist’s ministry (v 29–33)?
4. Jesus taught his disciples about faith, prayer and forgiveness in connection with the story about the withered fig tree. What could be the link between these three spiritual concepts?

Reflect and prepare

1. Reflect on Jesus’ triumphal entry as it is recorded in the four gospels in the light of the material presented in this study. Reflect on the story from various perspectives:
   1. From the perspective of Jesus: How would Jesus have felt? How did it confirm him in his understanding of himself? How did the shadow of his approaching death on the cross affect him on this joyous occasion?
   2. From the perspective of the disciples: How much did they participate in the celebrations? How much did they understand (of Jesus identity and of what would happen to him within a couple of days)?
   3. From the perspective of the crowd: Who were they (local people? Jewish pilgrims? followers of Jesus?)? How much did they understand of what they were shouting and of what was happening? What did they expect from Jesus? How much did they remember of this day when Jesus had died on the cross a few days later?
   4. From our perspective as South Indian believers today: What can we learn from this story? How should our understanding of this event in the light of Jesus death and resurrection, his ascension and second coming shape the way in which we carry on our daily lives?

Then prepare a Bible study (or a devotion or a sermon) called Jesus’ triumphal entry.

1. Reflect on the account of Jesus clearing the temple in the light of the material presented in this study. Also reflect on these two questions:
   1. Why did Jesus clear the temple?
   2. What would Jesus “clear” if he visited our churches today?

Then prepare a Bible study (or a devotion or a sermon) called Jesus clears the temple. You can use the two points above as your outline.

([Go to Answers Mark chapter 11](#AnswersMarkChapter11))

### Mark chapter 12

Introduction and comments

The twelfth chapter of Mark can be structured like this:

* 1. The parable of the evil tenants, v 1–12
  2. Paying taxes to the emperor, v 13–17
  3. The resurrection and marriage, v 18–27
  4. The greatest commandment, v 28–34
  5. Beware of the scribes, v 35–40
  6. The poor widow’s offering, v 41–44

The parable of the tenants has allegorical features, but it would be wrong to search for a hidden meaning in every detail of the story. The vineyard is Israel. The owner is God. The tenants are the Jewish leaders, past and present. The servants are the prophets. And the only son and heir is Jesus. We must not look beyond these five keys. Jesus directed the parable at the Jewish leaders. It exposed their plans to have him killed. It also reveals God’s judgment on the planners. As Christian believers in this world we have obligations in two directions, but we must remember that our obligation to God and his Kingdom must come first. Jesus summarized the Old Testament in a double commandment about love: First we must love God our Covenant Lord. The commandment to love our fellow man originates in this love to God. This chapter also contains two important lessons on discipleship: Not to be proud, selfish and hypocritical like the scribes, but to be sacrificially generous like the poor widow.

A man planted a vineyard (v 1): Jesus’ description of the vineyard would have reminded his listeners of the “Song of the vineyard” (Isaiah 5:1–7), where the vineyard clearly symbolizes Israel.

a servant … another servant (v 2, 4): Jesus’ listeners would have been reminded of the Old Testament prophets that God repeatedly sent to warn the Israelites.

his beloved son (v 6): Compare the words of the heavenly voice on the mount of Jesus’ transfiguration (v 9:7).

the inheritance will be ours (v 7): According to Jewish law a piece of property unclaimed by an heir would be declared ownerless. So the tenants assumed that the son came as heir to claim his property, and if he was killed they would be able claim the land.

Verses 10–11 consist of a quotation of Ps 118:22–23. This is the psalm, with which the crowd in Mark’s previous chapter welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem (“Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,” Ps 118:26).

Herodians (v 13): See comment on 3:6.

pay taxes to the emperor, or not (v 14): Jews were required by the Romans to pay tribute money (a kind of tax) to the emperor’s treasury. The Pharisees paid it reluctantly and did not actively oppose it. The Herodians, on the other hand, had no objections at all to paying it. But many Jews (for example the Zealots) blankly refused to pay taxes to a government whose rule they did not accept. The purpose of this question was to force Jesus to a direct answer, identifying himself either with the Zealots or with the Herodians.

Sadducees ... no resurrection (v 18): They were a Jewish party that represented the wealthy and cultured classes. They were mostly found in Jerusalem and were much involved in the temple and its administration. They were few in number, but in New Testament times their political and religious influence was very strong. They denied the resurrection and only accepted the five books of Moses as authoritative. Their support of the Roman rule, their Greek lifestyle, and their beliefs made them unpopular with the Pharisees and Jewish general public.

Moses wrote to us (v 19): The Sadducees were referring to Deuteronomy 25:5–6, which required that if a man died without children, his brother had to marry his widow. The purpose of the law was to protect the widow and guarantee the continuation of the family line. The hypothetical case with a childless widow of seven husbands is so exaggerated that it may have been a joke that the Sadducees used about the Pharisees’ doctrine of the resurrection.

the book of Moses, in the story about the bush (v 26): “The book of Moses” is the Pentateuch, the first five books in our Old Testament. At the time of Jesus, the books of the Old Testament had not yet been divided into chapters and verses, so “the story about the bush” was a common way of referring to Exodus 3:1–6.

One of the scribes (v 28): He was probably a Pharisee and happy that Jesus had defended the doctrine of the resurrection so well against the Sadducees.

Which commandment is the greatest of all? (v 28): Jewish rabbis counted 613 individual statutes in the law. They tried to distinguish between important and less important commands.

Verses 29–31: Jesus answered the scribe’s question by quoting two passages from the Old Testament. First, Deuteronomy 6:4–5, which is a confession of faith, recited by pious Jews every morning and evening even today. It affirms two things: the unity of God and the covenant relationship of God with the Jewish people. God is to be loved completely and totally because he alone is God and because he has made a covenant of love with his people. In the covenant God gives himself totally in love to his people. Therefore he expects his people to give themselves totally in love to him. Second, Leviticus 19:18, which states that love of one’s neighbor is a natural and logical outgrowth of love for God (note that Lev 19:18 ends “I am the Lord”). These two commandments belong together; they cannot be separated.

the Christ is the son of David (v 35): The Jews, the leaders as well as people in general, knew that the Messiah (the Christ) was to be of the family line of king David. They understood the messianic title “the Son of David” in royal and political terms: The Messiah would be a king like king David and he would drive away all the enemies of the Israelites like king David did.

David himself said…, “The Lord said to my Lord …” (v 36–37): Jesus quoted Psalm 110:1. All his listeners agreed with him that Psalm 110 was written by king David. In addition, Jesus interpreted it as messianic, as he pointed out to them that king David calls the Messiah “my Lord” in this psalm. How could the Messiah at the same time be David’s son and David’s Lord? Jesus wants them to realize that the Messiah’s divine descent (he is the Lord) is more important than his royal descent. The Son of David is also, and primarily, the Son of God.

at my right hand (v 36): This was the place of honor.

long robes (v 38): The scribes wore long robes with fringes.

the best seats in the synagogues (v 39): These seats were in front of the “ark” that contained the scrolls of the Law and the Prophets. Those who sat there could be seen by all the synagogue worshipers.

They devour widows’ houses (v 40): The scribes were not paid a regular salary. So they depended on the generosity of supporters for their livelihood. Such a system was open to abuses, and widows were particularly vulnerable to exploitation.

These will receive the greater condemnation (v 40): A person who is highly respected by others should, of course, live up to people’s expectations of him as a person of integrity and justice. And the more of a hypocrite he turns out to be, the harsher people will condemn him.

the treasury (v 41): The temple treasury was located in the court of the women and contained thirteen trumpet-shaped receptacles for offerings brought by worshipers. Both men and women were allowed in this court, but women could not go further into the temple buildings.

small copper coins (v 42): These coins were the smallest coins in circulation in Palestine.

Questions

1. Why did the owner of the vineyard send servants to his tenants (v 1–12)?
2. What did the tenants do with the servants (v 1–12)?
3. Why did the owner of the vineyard decide to send his son (v 1–12)?
4. What happened to the owner’s son (v 1–12)?
5. What happened to the tenants (v 1–12)?
6. How did Jesus end his parable (v 1–12)?
7. How did the listeners react to the parable (v 1–12)?
8. How did the Pharisees and the Herodians flatter Jesus (v 13–17?
9. Why did Jesus answer the Pharisees and the Herodians the way he did (v 13–17)?
10. What was Jesus’ answer to the Pharisees and the Herodians, and how did they react to it (v 13–17)?
11. Who came to Jesus with a question about the resurrection (v 18–19)?
12. What “case story” did they present to Jesus, and what was their question (v 20–23)?
13. Jesus responded to the Sadducees with two accusations. Which were they (v 24)?
14. What story in the Old Testament did Jesus refer to in support of his statement that God is not the God of the dead, but of the living (v 24–27)?
15. Who came to Jesus with a question about the most important commandment (v 28)?
16. What answer did Jesus give to the question about the most important commandment (v 29–31)?
17. How did the scribe react to Jesus’ answer (v 32–33)?
18. What was Jesus “evaluation” of the scribe and his comments (v 34)?
19. How did the crowd respond to Jesus’ teaching in the temple about the identity of the Christ (v 35–37)?
20. Make a list of the criticism that Jesus had of the scribes in verses 38–40.
21. Where did the story about the widow’s offering take place (v 41–44)?
22. Why did Jesus praise the widow (v 41–44)?

Think and discuss

1. To whom did Jesus address the parable of the evil tenants and what do you think made them realize that it was about them (v 1–12)?
2. Explain how Jesus avoided the trap that the Jewish leaders set for him with their question about paying taxes to the Roman emperor (v 13–17).
3. Should South Indian believers today pay taxes to the government? Why – why not?
4. Retell in your own words the passage about the Sadducees and Jesus (v 18–27). Don’t look in your Bible. Also explain how Jesus proved that the Sadducees were wrong about the resurrection.
5. Explain how Jesus argues about the identity of the Messiah in verses 35–37.
6. Explain Jesus’ criticism of the scribes (v 38–40). Use your own words as much as possible. Also try to find modern South Indian equivalents to the negative points that Jesus makes about the scribes.
7. Explain the contrast found in the story about the widow’s offering (v 41–44).

Reflect and prepare

1. Reflect on Jesus’ teaching about the greatest commandment (v 28–34) in the light of the material found in this study. Then reflect on these questions: How do you show your love for God? How do you show your love for your fellow man? Where is the balance in your daily life between loving God and loving your fellow man? Note down a few thoughts that can be used for a devotion.
2. Reflect on verses 38–40 in the light of this study (particularly the answers to Question 18 and Think and discuss 6). Evaluate your own life and ministry. In what areas do you need to watch out for hypocrisy? Bring any concerns that you have before God in prayer.
3. Reflect on the story about the widow’s offering (v 41–44). What can we as South Indian Christian believers today learn from this story? Then prepare a a devotion (or a devotion or a short Bible study) called Our offering

([Go to Answers Mark chapter 12](#AnswersMarkChapter12))

### Mark chapter 13

Introduction and comments

The thirteenth chapter of Mark is difficult to structure. How you do it depends on how you interpret the different parts of Jesus’ long speech about future events. This is one way of doing it:

* 1. Warning about the temple, v 1–4
  2. The continuing experience of hardship by disciples, v 5–13
  3. The destruction of Jerusalem, v 14–23
  4. The end of all things, v 24–27
  5. Watchfulness during the entire end time (from Jesus to the very end), v 28–37

This chapter is often called the Olivet discourse, as it took place on the Mount of Olives. It begins with Jesus leaving the temple and the city to go up on the Mount of Olives. As he sat there looking at Jerusalem across the Kidron Valley, four of his disciples questioned him about the time and the signs of its future destruction (v 4). Jesus did not really answer their questions, at least not in a clear and systematic way, and what he said may not satisfy our curiosity about future events. Instead he gave his disciples, and in extension all future believers, practical and ethical teaching about how to live and witness in a hostile world – through the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70 and until we see the “the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory” (v 26). “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (v 32). Jesus began his speech with “Watch out that no one leads you astray!” (v 5) and ended it with four final exhortations “Be on guard, keep alert!” (v 33), “stay awake” and “Keep awake!” (v 37). Altogether the Greek text contains nineteen imperatives. So no reader should remain in doubt about the character of this chapter.

This discipleship attitude of watchfulness and carefulness is closely tied in with two major future events: the destruction of the city of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the end of this present age with the return of Jesus. Bible scholars have suggested a number of solutions on how to apply the various details of the text to one or the other of these two events. Many interpreters see a shift back and forth between an immediate and a remote future in the main part of the chapter (v 5–27). This could indicate a twofold fulfillment of these details, first at the destruction of Jerusalem, then at the very end of this present age.

the temple … what glorious stones and what glorious buildings (v 1): Herod’s temple was twice as large as Solomon’s original temple in Jerusalem. It consisted of a number of very magnificent structures. It was totally destroyed during the Jewish war in AD 70 by the Roman general Titus, son and successor of emperor Vespasian.

Mount of Olives (v 3): See comment on 11:1.

Verse 4: The disciples thought that the destruction of the temple would announce the end of this present age.

sign (v 4): A sign that would show the disciples that the destruction of the temple was about to take place and that the end of the age had arrived

“I am he!” (v 6): “I am the Messiah!”

the end (v 7): Not the destruction of Jerusalem but the end of the age (compare Matt 24:3).

birth pains (v 8): The Jewish rabbis at the time of Jesus used the expression “birth pains” for the sufferings that would precede the coming of the Messiah. They took it from the Old Testament prophets, who used it as a metaphor for the sufferings of judgment and war (see for example Isaiah 13:8).

councils (v 9): These were the lower courts that tried less serious cases and flogged those that they found guilty. These courts were connected with the synagogues.

first (v 10): Before the end of the age (compare Matt 24:14).

endures to the end (v 13): Compare Hebrews 3:6, 14; 6:11–12.

abomination of desolation (v 14): This expression means “the detestable thing that leads to the destruction of the holy place.” The primary reference in the book of Daniel (Dan 9:27; 11:31; 12:11) was to 168 BC, when the Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanes erected a pagan altar to Zeus on the sacred altar in the temple of Jerusalem. The New Testament sees that event as a foreshadowing of future events. One such future event would be the desecration and destruction of the temple by the Romans in AD 70. At that time the Romans brought their military standards (with pictures of the Roman eagle and the emperor) into the temple and offered sacrifices to them before they burned and destroyed the temple. A second such future event will take place the at the end of the age with the arrival of the man of lawlessness (the Antichrist) and his ultimate desecration of God’s temple (compare 2 Thess 2:4; Rev 13:14–15). Some Bible scholars understand this temple to be a literal, rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, while other Bible scholars understand this temple to be the people of God (compare Rom 9:4; 1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21).

let the reader understand (v 14): These are probably Jesus’ words (also found in Matt 24:15) of exhortation to the readers of Daniel’s prophecy to understand what they read.

flee to the mountains (v 14): During the Roman siege of Jerusalem shortly before AD 70, Christians fled from Jerusalem to the mountains east of the Jordan River.

winter (v 18): Winter was the rainy season in Palestine, when it became difficult or impossible to cross rivers and streams.

For in those days there will be suffering such as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now (v 19): The Jewish historian Josephus was present at the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. He uses similar expressions in his book “The wars of the Jews” written a few years later.

the elect, whom he has chosen (v 20): These expressions mean “God’s people” (see also v 22, 27).

But (v 24): This word separates verses 24–27 (which clearly are about Christ’s second coming) from the previous passage (which focuses more on the destruction of Jerusalem).

in those days (v 24): This was a common Old Testament expression with reference to the Messianic age and the time of the final redemption of the Israelites (see for example Jeremiah 3:16; Joel 3:1; Zechariah 8:23).

Verses 24–25: The imagery and language are based on Old Testament descriptions of the Day of the Lord (compare Isaiah 13:10; 24:23; 34:4; Ezekiel 32:7-8; Joel 2:10, 30-31; 3:15; Amos 8:9). It is difficult to know whether the poetic language is to be understood literally or figuratively (but compare 2 Peter 3:10, where the Day of the Lord is described with similar language).

the Son of Man coming in clouds (v 26): This is a quotation from Daniel 7:13. Compare Mark 9:7 with comment.

gather his elect (v 27): In the Old Testament, this expression is used about God gathering his scattered people (see for example Deuteronomy 30:3–4; Isaiah 43:6; Jeremiah 32:37; Ezekiel 34:13).

from the four winds (v 27): This expression means “from all directions.”

Verse 29: Compare the Kannada translations pavitra grantha (which has “the Son of Man is right at the door”) and satyavEdavu (which has “it is near, it is just at the door”). The Greek expression can be translated either as “it is near” (with reference to the “abomination that causes desolation” in verse 14, or to the Kingdom of God) or as “he is near” (with reference to the “Son of Man coming in clouds” in verse 26).

this generation (v 30): Bible scholars disagree on how to understand this expression. Jesus could have referred to “humankind in general,” to “the Jewish people,” to “Christian believers,” to “unbelievers,” to “my own generation,” to “a future generation alive at the beginning of ‘these things’ (v 29),” or to “every generation who is waiting for Jesus’ second coming” (compare 2 Peter 3:9–10).

that day (v 32): This expression is used in the Old Testament about the day of God’s judgment, “the Day of the Lord.” Here it clearly refers to the second coming of Jesus.

evening … midnight … cockcrow … dawn (v 35): These were the four watches of the night used by the Romans.

Questions

1. What is the occasion at the beginning of this chapter (v 1–2)?
2. What would be the fate of the Jerusalem temple, according to Jesus (v 1–2)?
3. What is the occasion of the main part of this chapter (v 3–37)?
4. How did Jesus answer his disciples’ questions about “signs and time” (v 4–6)?
5. What did Jesus tell his disciples to do when they heard rumors of war (v 7)?
6. How did Jesus describe the “beginning of the birth pains” (v 8)?
7. What did Jesus tell his disciples would happen to them (v 9–13)?
8. What did Jesus say must happen to the gospel (v 9–13)?
9. Explain the expression “the abomination of desolation” (v 14 and comment).
10. Why has God “cut short those days” (v 20)?
11. What did Jesus tell his disciples not to believe (v 21–22)?
12. How did Jesus describe his return (v 24–27)?
13. What do people know will happen when the fig tree sprouts (v 28)?
14. What do we learn about Jesus’ words in verse 31?
15. What did Jesus tell his disciples about his second coming (v 32–37)?
16. What was Jesus’ main exhortation to his disciples in connection with his second coming (v 32–37)?

Think and discuss

1. Summarize Mark chapter 13 in one or two sentences.
2. Summarize in your own words verses 14–19. Do not look in your Bible.
3. Explain the “lesson of the fig tree” (28–31).
4. What do you think Jesus referred to by “this generation” in verse 30?

Reflect and prepare

Reflect on Mark chapter 13 in the light of this study. Then prepare a Bible study called Keep awake! Don’t fall asleep! Watch! Limit yourself to the material found in this study and avoid speculations.

([Go to Answers Mark chapter 13](#AnswersMarkChapter13))

### Mark chapter 14

Introduction and comments

The fourteenth chapter of Mark can be structured like this:

* 1. Plot to kill Jesus, v 1–2
  2. Jesus anointed in Bethany, v 3–9
  3. Judas decides to betray Jesus, v 10–11
  4. Jesus eats the Passover meal with his disciples, v 12–26
  5. Jesus predicts Peter’s denial, v 27–31
  6. In Gethsemane, v 32–42
  7. Jesus is arrested, v 43–52
  8. Jesus before the Jewish council, v 53–65
  9. Peter denies Jesus, v 66–72

Mark and Matthew have placed the story about Jesus anointed in Bethany in the context of the plot against his life (v 1–2) and the betrayal (v 10–11). Thereby they contrast the hatred of the religious leaders and Judas’ betrayal with the love and devotion of the woman who anointed Jesus. John’s gospel (John 12:1–11) shows that this incident actually took place before the beginning of the Passion Week.

Jesus and his disciples celebrate the Passover meal in a friend’s upstairs room in Jerusalem. This meal (“the Lord’s Supper”) points forward to Jesus’ death on the cross, where he will pour out his blood of the covenant for the salvation of mankind. In the garden of Gethsemane later that night, he surrenders his life to God’s will. Then he is arrested by a crowd armed with swords and clubs.

Jesus is now left to face his death alone, abandoned by all his disciples. Judas has betrayed him. Peter has denied him. His disciples fell asleep in Gethsemane, and they all fled from the arrest party.

From Gethsemane Jesus is taken to his trial, which takes place in two stages, one Jewish and one Roman. Toward the end of this chapter, the Jewish council has come to the conclusion that Jesus is a blasphemer, worthy of death.

the Passover and the feast of the unleavened bread (v 1): The Passover was celebrated in commemoration of the night when the angel of the Lord passed over the homes of the Israelites as all the firstborn sons in Egypt were killed. (see Exodus 12:11). The lambs or kids used for the meal were slaughtered on the 14th of the Jewish month of Nisan (in March–April) and eaten that night. The Jewish day began at sundown, so the Passover Feast took place on the 15th of Nisan. The feast of the unleavened bread followed the Passover and lasted seven days (see Exodus 23:15).

Not during the feast, because the people may riot (v 2): During these Jewish festivals huge crowds of pilgrims came to Jerusalem, and its population increased from about 50 thousand to several lakh. So it would have been too risky to arrest Jesus with so many people present.

Bethany (v 3): See comment on 11:1.

lying down at the table (v 3): The guests in those days did not sit, but reclined, at the banquet table.

Simon the leper (v 3): Simon was a common name among the Jews. This Simon is only mentioned here and in the parallel story in Matthew (Matt 26:6). He must have been healed from his leprosy or he would not have been allowed to invite people to eat with him in his house. He may have been the father of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, or perhaps Martha’s husband.

a woman (v 3): John, who probably recounts the same event in chapter 12 of his gospel, tells us that this woman was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus (John 12:3).

alabaster jar … nard (v 3): Nard was a very expensive aromatic ointment from the roots and stems of a plant that mainly grew in the Himalayas. In Palestine it was used on special occasions, for example to anoint people of honor. It was often kept in a small sealed flask with a long neck that was broken off. As the flask could not be sealed again, the ointment was used immediately.

three hundred denarii (v 5): One denarius was the equivalent of one day’s wages for a laborer. This shows that the ointment used by the woman was very valuable.

given to the poor (v 5): It was a Jewish custom to give gifts to the poor on the evening of the Passover (compare John 13:29).

you always have the poor you with you (v 7): Jesus was just stating a fact, not showing any lack of concern for the poor. He actually quotes the beginning of Deuteronomy 15:11, which continues with a commandment for the Israelites to be generous to the poor and needy.

anointed my body before its burial (v 8): It was a Jewish custom to prepare a dead body for burial by anointing it with aromatic oils.

Judas Iscariot (v 10): His byname “Iscariot” probably means “the man from Kerioth,” probably with reference to the town of Kerioth Hezron in southern Judah.

money (v 11): We know from the parallel account in Matthew that the amount agreed on was “thirty silver coins” (Matt 26:15).

make the ready (v 12): The preparations included getting the food for the Passover meal, which consisted of unleavened bread, wine, bitter herbs, and a lamb.

two of his disciples (v 13): Luke tells us that the disciples were Peter and John (Luke 22:11).

The Teacher asks (v 14): This expression indicates that the owner of the room knew who Jesus was.

my guest room (v 14): It was a Jewish custom that anyone in Jerusalem who had a room available would let a pilgrim use it to celebrate the Passover meal. So Jesus must have made previous arrangements with the owner of the house.

evening (v 17): This was the Thursday evening of the Passion week.

who is dipping bread into the bowl with me (v 20): It was the custom in those days to take a piece of bread, or a piece of meat wrapped in bread, and dip it into a bowl of sauce, made of stewed fruit, on the table.

the Son of Man goes as it is written about him, but woe to that man (v 21): Jesus must have referred to the prophecy in Isaiah chapter 53. So behind Judas’s action God’s purpose was being carried out. But the woe that Jesus pronounced on the betrayer shows that Judas had a personal responsibility in his wicked deed.

took a loaf of bread and after blessing it he broke it, gave to them (v 22):The bread that Jesus took was the unleavened bread that was eaten during the Passover meal. The bread represented his body, his abiding presence. Jesus promised his disciples the night before his crucifixion that he would be truly present wherever and whenever his people celebrate the Lord’s Supper. The Jewish expression “to break bread” was used about sharing a meal, eating a meal together. So we should perhaps be careful not to read too much into that fact that Jesus “broke” the bread. His body was not “crushed” on the cross, even if it was “pierced/wounded,” so the prophecy in Isaiah 53:5 (“But he was pierced/wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed”) should probably be understood like this: Jesus’ physical and mental sufferings and death on the cross (the wounding of his body and the crushing of his spirit) brings bodily healing and mental peace to his people.

he took the cup (v 23): This was most likely the third of the four cups of wine of the Passover meal. This cup (called “the cup of blessing” or “the cup of redemption,” compare God’s promise in Exodus 6:6) was drunk after the meal had been eaten. When Jesus took this cup and gave it to his disciples to drink, the wine symbolized his blood which was about to be shed on the cross.

my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many (v 24): The phrase “blood of the covenant” echoes Exodus 24:8 (“Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, ‘This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these word’”). So the cup that Jesus gave to his disciples to drink from is placed in both a sacrificial and a covenantal context. The covenant signifies the relationship of God’s love for us and our response of obedience to him. This relationship is brought into existence by Christ’s blood. Jesus’ death inaugurated a new covenant, a new relationship between God and his people, a new era, just as Jeremiah had prophesied (Jeremiah 31:31–34). The blood that establishes the covenant was to be “poured out for many,” for all mankind (compare Isaiah 53:12, where we also find the word “many,” compare Rom 5:15) with Jesus’ death on the cross the very next day.

until that day when I drink it anew in the Kingdom of God (v 25): Jesus declared that this would be his last festival meal with his disciples until the consummation of the Kingdom of God and the “messianic banquet” (compare Isaiah 25:6; Matt 8:11; Luke 22:29–30; compare also Luke 14:15 and Rev 19:6–9).

sung the hymn (v 26): The Jewish Passover meal ends with the singing of the second group of the Hallelujah psalms (Ps 115–118).

Verse 27: Jesus quoted Zechariah 13:7 and interpreted it as a prophecy about the scattering of the disciples (“the sheep”) that would take place when he (“the shepherd”) was captured.

Gethsemane (v 32): The name of this garden is Aramaic and means “oil press” (a place where olive oil was extracted). It was probably situated on lower slopes of the Mount of Olives (where Jesus and his disciples went after their Passover meal, v 26).

Abba (v 36): This is an Aramaic word for “father.” It expresses intimacy.

this cup (v 36): “Cup” was a familiar Old Testament metaphor for God’s wrath, punishment and judgment (see for example Isaiah 51:17; Jeremiah 25:15–18; compare Revelation 14:10; 16:19). Jesus used it here about his suffering and death.

Simon (v 37): This was Peter’s Jewish name.

enter into temptation (v 38): The disciples would be tempted to be unfaithful as they faced the threatening circumstances of the immediate future.

The spirit indeed is willing (v 38): Jesus took this expression from Ps 51:12, where David asks God to uphold him with a willing spirit.

a multitide with swords and clubs (v 43): These were people assigned by the police or the court to maintain public order beyond the temple area. John’s account of the arrest reveals that this crowd included Roman soldiers and officers of the temple guard (John 18:3).

Rabbi (v 45): This Hebrew word means “(My) Teacher.”

kissed him (v 45): Disciples customarily greeted their rabbi with a kiss. So Judas’s prearranged way of identifying Jesus to his arresters could not be suspected to be an act of betrayal. Judas had to ensure that the crowd that came with him in the dark to arrest Jesus did not catch the wrong person.

one of those who stood near (v 47): John’s gospel reveals that this person is Peter (John 18:10).

the servant of the hight priest (v 47): John’s gospel reveals that this servant’s name is Malchus (John 18:10). From Matthew we know that Jesus rebuked Peter (Matt 26:52) and from Luke that he healed the servant (Luke 22:51).

let the scriptures be fulfilled (v 49): Jesus could be thinking of Zechariah 13:7, which he had quoted to his disciples a few hours earlier (see verse 27, compare verse 50) or perhaps to Isaiah chapter 53.

A certain young man (v 51): This incident is not mentioned in the other gospels. Mark does not identify him, but church tradition claims that he was John Mark himself, the author of Mark’s gospel.

the high priest (v 53): The high priest at this time was Caiaphas, appointed by the Romans. He was the son-in-law of Annas, the former high priest, who had been removed from his office by the Romans in AD 15 but who was still regarded by many Jews as the true high priest (compare Luke 3:2)

All the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes came together (v 53): So Jesus was tried before the Jewish council, the Sanhedrin.

the courtyard of the high priest (v 54): The Sanhedrin usually convened in one of the market halls. So the use of Caiaphas’s palace on this occasion may have been their need for secrecy.

their testimony did not agree (v 56, compare v 58): According to Jewish law, two or more witness were needed in order to condemn a person to death (Deut 17:7).

Verse 58: The false witnesses were probably referring to a statement by Jesus recorded in John 2:19–21, where Jesus spoke about the temple of his body, not the Jerusalem temple. Compare Jesus’ prediction of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple (Mark 13:1–2).

he stayed silent and did not answer (v 61): Compare Isaiah 53:7.

Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One? (v 61): The Jews used several expressions to avoid saying “God.” One such expression was ”the Blessed One” (another “the Mighty One,” which Jesus used in v 62). So “the Son of the Blessed One” is synonymous with “the Son of God,” which was one of many messianic titles (also used about Jesus in the gospels). The Jews and their leaders believed that the Messiah was to be a man in the family line of king David, not God, so the high priest did not ask if Jesus claimed to be God or equal to God.

Jesus said, “I am” (62): This statement echoed God’s revelation of his identity and name to Moses, “I am who I am” (Exodus 3:14) and was understood as a claim to divinity; this was considered a blasphemy by the Jews.

the Son of Man (v 62): See comment on 2:10.

Verse 62: Jesus continued to reveal his identity by quoting two Old Testament messianic texts, Psalm 110:1 (about his enthronement with God) and Daniel 7:13 (about his eschatological coming). Thereby Jesus openly declared that he is the Messiah, but he did this in such a way (having majesty and authority that only belonged to God) that this too was considered blasphemy. To be seated “at the right hand” was to be given a place of honor (compare 12:36 and 16:19).

tore his clothes (v 63): This was a symbolic gesture of great grief or shock. Here the high priest used it to demonstrate that in his opinion Jesus had committed the sin of blasphemy.

blasphemy (v 64): See the comment on verse 62 above. The punishment for blasphemy was death by stoning (Leviticus 24:16).

Verse 65: Compare Isaiah 50:6.

Prophesy! (v 65): They wanted Jesus to say who hit him and so make a mockery of his messianic claims (Some Jewish rabbis interpreted Isaiah 11:2–4 to mean that the Messiah could judge without using his eyes, compare Luke’s account which tells us that Jesus was blindfolded when this happened, 22:64).

Nazareth (v 67): See comment on Matt 2:22–23 in the study called Escape to Egypt and return to Nazareth.

a Galilean (v 70): Peter’s dialect revealed that he was from Galilee. The other people in the courtyard were from Judea and thought that Peter must be a follower of Jesus.

Jesus had said … you will deny me three times (v 72): See verse 30.

Questions

1. What time of the year did the events of this chapter take place (v 1 and comment)?
2. Why were the Jewish leaders afraid of arresting Jesus at this time of the year (v 1–2)?
3. What was Jesus doing in Bethany (v 3)?
4. What did the woman do with the alabaster jar (v 3)?
5. Why were some of the people present upset with the woman (v 4–5)?
6. How did Jesus evaluate the woman’s behavior (v 5–8)?
7. How would this woman be remembered, according to Jesus (v 9)?
8. Why did Judas Iscariot go to the chief priests and what agreement did he make with them (v 10–11)?
9. Where did Jesus and his disciples celebrate the Passover meal (v 12–16)?
10. Why were the disciples distressed (v 17–19)?
11. What three clues as to the identity of the betrayer did Jesus give (v 17–21)?
12. What did Jesus say about the bread (v 22)?
13. What did Jesus say about the cup (v 23–24)?
14. Compare verse 24 in the two Kannada pavitra grantha and satyavEdavu translations. What striking difference do you find?
15. What did Jesus say about the future (v 25)?
16. Where did Jesus and his disciples go after they had finished their meal (v 26)?
17. What did Jesus say would happen with his disciples at his capture (v 27 and comment)?
18. Where did Jesus say he would meet his disciples after his resurrection (v 28)?
19. What did Jesus say Peter would do that very night (v 29–31)?
20. What did all the disciples assure Jesus (v 29–31)?
21. Why did Jesus go to Gethsemane (v 32)?
22. How did Jesus feel as he walked away with Peter, James and John (v 32–34)?
23. What did Jesus tell the three disciples to do while he was praying (v 34)?
24. What did Jesus pray about (v 35–36)?
25. What happened to the three disciples as Jesus was praying (v 37)?
26. How many times did the same thing happen (v 37–41)?
27. What did Jesus say was going to happen to him (v 41–42)?
28. How did Judas Iscariot identify Jesus to those who had come to arrest him (v 43–46)?
29. What complaints did Jesus have about his arrest (v 48–49)?
30. What did the disciples do at Jesus’ arrest (v 50)?
31. How did the young man avoid arrest (v 51–52)?
32. Where was Jesus taken after his arrest (v 53–54)?
33. Where was Peter while Jesus was interrogated by the Jewish council (v 53–55)?
34. What problems did the Jewish council face when it tried to get Jesus sentenced to death (v 55–59)?
35. How did Jesus respond to the accusations against him (v 60–61)?
36. How did Jesus answer the hight priest’s question about his identity (v 61–62)?
37. Why did the Jewish council condemn Jesus to death (v 61–64)?
38. In what ways did some of Jesus’ accusers mock him (v 65)?
39. What did the servant girl first accuse Peter of and how did he react (v 67–68)?
40. What did the servant girl do a little later and how did Peter react (v 68–70)?
41. How did Peter react when the bystanders told him that he had to be a follower of Jesus because of his Galilean accent (v 70–71)?
42. What did Peter remember when he heard the cock crow the second time and what did he do (v 72)?

Think and discuss

1. Retell the story about the woman with the alabaster jar (v 3–9) in your own words. Don’t look in your Bible.
2. Do you agree with Jesus’ evaluation of the woman with the alabaster jar (v 3–9)? Why – why not?
3. Explain the two aspects of the betrayal of Jesus: God’s purpose being carried out and Judas Iscariot’s responsibility for this deed (v 17–21).
4. Read and compare the four New Testament accounts of the Lord’s Supper (Matt 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:14–20; 1 Cor 11:23–26). Note down some of your observations.
5. How do you understand the significance of the two elements (the bread and the cup) of the Lord’s Supper (v 22–25)?
6. How do you understand Jesus’ exclamation, “Enough!” in verse 41?
7. Retell the story about Jesus and his disciples in Gethsemane (v 32–42) in your own words. Don’t look in your Bible. Make your story lively so that it touches the hearts of those who listen to you.
8. Retell the story about Jesus’ arrest in Gethsemane (v 43–52) in your own words. Don’t look in your Bible. Make your story lively and interesting.
9. Explain what happened during the interrogation of Jesus by the Jewish council (v 53–65).
10. Retell the story about Peter’s denials of Jesus in the courtyard of the high priest’s palace (v 54, 66–72) in your own words. Don’t look in your Bible. Make your story lively and interesting.

Reflect and prepare

1. Reflect on the story about the woman with the alabaster jar (verses 3–9). In what way is she an example for believers today? Then use the material in this study to prepare a Bible study (or a devotion or a sermon) called The woman who anointed Jesus.
2. Reflect on Mark’s account of the Lord’s Supper (verses 22–26). Then compare this account with the three parallel accounts (see Think and discuss 4 with answers) and go through the relevant material in this study again. Finally prepare a Bible study for a church youth group. Be basic and avoid speculations. Call your study The Lord’s Supper.
3. Reflect on the story about Jesus in Gethsemane (verses 32–41):
   1. First from Jesus’ perspective (What was his struggle? How did he feel? In the beginning? During the struggle? At the end?)
   2. Then from the perspective of the three disciples (What did they see? What did they understand? Why did they fall asleep? How did they feel?)
   3. Finally write a poem (or a devotional monologue) capturing one aspect (or emotion) of this story.

([Go to Answers Mark chapter 14](#AnswersMarkChapter14))

### Mark chapter 15

Introduction and comments

The fifteenth chapter of Mark can be structured like this:

* 1. Jesus before Pilate, v 1–15
  2. Jesus is mocked, v 16–20
  3. Jesus is crucified, 21–32
  4. Jesus dies, 33–41
  5. Jesus is buried, v 42–47

In the previous study, Jesus was tried before the Jewish council (the Sanhedrin) and found guilty of blasphemy (14:63–64). They then decide to hand him over to the Roman governor Pontius Pilate to be executed (v 1). But Pilate is not convinced about the genuineness of the case and hopes that the mob would demand his release. But the mob, stirred up by the chief priests, instead wants a murderous revolter Barabbas released. And they want Jesus crucified (v 6–14).

Jesus’ trial took place in two stages. Each stage had three episodes (not recorded in all the gospels):

* 1. First a Jewish trial with three episodes:
     + The preliminary hearing before Annas, the former high priest, only reported by John (18:12–14, 19–23).
     + The trial before Caiaphas, the ruling high priest, and the Sanhedrin, reported in all the gospels (Mark 14:53–65; Matt 26:57–68; Luke 22:54–65; John 18:24).
     + The final action of the council, reported in the synoptic gospels (Mark 15:1; Matt 27:1; Luke 22:66–71).
  2. Then a Roman trial with three episodes:
     + The trial before Pilate, the Roman governor, reported in all the gospels (Mark 15:2–5; Matt 27:11–26; Luke 23:1–5; John 18: 28–19:16).
     + The trial before king Herod Antipas, only reported in Luke (23:6–12).
     + The trial before Pilate continued and concluded (Mark 15:6–15 and the other gospels). Matthew, Mark and John give no account of Jesus before Herod Antipas. So in these three gospels the trial before Pilate is one uninterrupted narrative.

Pilate sentences Jesus to flogging, a cruel punishment that usually killed the victim, and to crucifixion, a shameful death sentence that the Romans reserved for slaves and foreigners who had committed serious crimes. Jesus dies on the cross on Friday afternoon of the Passion week. He is buried in a rock tomb that very evening by Joseph of Arimathea, a devout member of the Jewish council.

Immediately in the morning (v 1): This was the Friday of the Passion week. The working day of a Roman official began already at daylight.

the whole council … delivered him up to Pilate (v 1): The Jewish council had found Jesus guilty of blasphemy (14:63–64). This was a serious offense that carried a death sentence according to the Jewish law, but not according to the Roman authorities. So the Jewish council told Pilate that Jesus was a threat to the Roman government (he subverted the nation, opposed taxes, and claimed to be king, see Luke 23:1–2) We are not sure if the Jewish council had the authority in New Testament times to carry out a death sentence (In John 18:31, the Jewish leaders tell Pilate, “But we have no right to execute anyone.” But in Acts 7:57–59, the Jewish council sentences Stephen to death by stoning, and they also carry out the execution). But whatever the case, it was safer for Jewish leaders to have an unpopular Roman official take responsibility for the execution of popular public figure like Jesus, than doing it themselves. John’s gospel (19:32) adds that this was to fulfill the prophecy about what kind of death Jesus would suffer (on a tree, and not by stoning, compare John 12:32–34; Deut 21:22–23).

Pilate (v 1): Pontius Pilate was Roman governor (or imperial procurator) of Judea AD 26–36. He had his headquarters in Caesarea but had come to Jerusalem to keep order during the Passover festival. Pilate was not popular with the Jewish leaders. The Jewish historian Josephus described him as a cruel outsider who did not respect local Jewish religious sentiments. Pilate represented the emperor and had judicial authority over Judea

“Are you the king of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “So you say” (v 2): In all four gospels, Pilate begins his interrogation of Jesus with this question about Jesus’ kingship (see John 18:33–38 for a more detailed account). Jesus’ answer is ambiguous: It can mean “Yes,” or it can mean “This is what you say.” This ambiguity has to do with the kind of kingdom that Jesus represents: Is it a kingdom of this world or is it another kind of kingdom (see John 18:36)?

accused him of many things (v 3): See comment on verse 1 above.

Have you no answer? (v 4): According to Roman law, an accused person had to speak in his defense or he would promptly be found guilty.

Jesus made no further answer (v 5): See comment on 14:61.

Barabbas (v 7): This man is described in the gospels as an insurgent and a murderer. So he was probably a member of the Zealots, a Jewish revolutionary group that violently opposed the Roman government. Uprisings against the Roman rule were common in Palestine (compare 13:1).

crucify (v 13): See comments on 8:34 and 10:33–34.

flogged (v 15): The Romans used a whip made of several strips of leather with pieces of bone and metal fixed near the ends. The victim was often flogged until he died, as there was no limit to the number of stripes. The Jewish law, however, limited flogging to 40 stripes (Deut 25:3), but in practice a maximum of 39 stripes were carried out .

the palace (v 16): The Greek text uses two words about the Roman governor’s residence, “palace” and “praetorium.” The residence was the governor’s temporary headquarters during his stays in Jerusalem. It was probably situated in the palace of king Herod the Great.

the whole cohort (v 16): In New Testament times, there were five Roman cohorts stationed in Judea. Each cohort consisted of around 600 soldiers. One cohort was regularly placed in Jerusalem, but during festivals additional military forces were brought to the city. The soldiers recruited were non-Jews.

purple cloak (v 17): This was probably an old military cloak whose red color looked “royal.”

Cyrene (v 21): This was a Greek city in Libya in North Africa. It was the capital of a Roman province. Many Jews had settled there.

Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus (v 21): Simon must have been a Jew who had come on pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. His sons Alexander and Rufus carry Greek/Roman names. Mark mentions them in a way that shows they were known to the first readers of the gospel.

to carry his cross (v 21): The man condemned to death often had to carry a beam of the cross to the place of his crucifixion.

Golgotha (v 22): This Aramaic name means “skull.” It implied that the place where Jesus was crucified was a bald, skull-like hillock. The English name Calvary, which means “bald skull,” comes from a Latin translation.

wine mixed with myrrh (v 23): Jewish literature mentions that incense mixed in wine was used as a painkiller. Myrrh is a spice made from a desert plant found in Arabia and parts of Africa.

they crucified him (v 24): Heavy iron nails were driven through the wrists and heel bones of the victim. Cicero, a famous Roman politician and writer, said that crucifixion was the cruelest and most hideous punishment possible. Sometimes it took days for the victim to die. In order to speed up the process the victim’s legs could be crushed, and he would suffocate to death (compare John 19:33).

divided his clothes (v 24): The execution team were allowed to keep the less valuable possessions of a victim. Jesus probably had an undergarment, an outer garment, a belt, sandals, and perhaps a head covering.

casting lots (v 24): This was in fulfillment of the prophecy of Psalm 22:18 (see also John 19:23–24).

the third hour (v 25): This was nine o’clock in the morning. John’s gospel seems to say that Jesus was crucified at about 12 noon (John 19:14). Bible scholars have offered various suggestions as how to harmonize these statements.

charge against him (v 26): Often the charge against a death victim was written on a wooden board and carried before him as he walked to the place of execution. Then the board was fixed to the cross above his head.

two robbers (v 27): The Greek word means both “robber” and “insurrectionist.” Robbery was not a capital offense according to Roman law.

Verse 28 is not found in the earliest and best Greek manuscripts. So it was probably added from Luke 22:37 at some later stage. It contains a quotation from Isaiah 53:12.

You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days (v 29): See note on 14:58.

Verse 34: Jesus quoted a part of the first verse of Psalm 22 but in Aramaic, which was his mother tongue and the main spoken language in Palestine in New Testament times. For the benefit of his non-Jewish readers Mark adds a translation of Jesus’ words into Greek.

Elijah (v 35): The bystanders thought that Jesus was crying for Elijah. Many people believed that Elijah helped those in trouble, that he would come to protect the innocent and rescue the righteous (see verse 36).

sour wine (v 36): This was the common drink of laborers and soldiers in those days.

the curtain of the temple (v 38): A curtain separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place in the Jerusalem temple (compare Exodus 26:31–35). That it was torn at the death of Jesus shows that Jesus opened the way for man to enter into God’s presence (see Hebrews 10:19–20).

Truly this man was the Son of God (v 39): This confession by a Roman non-Jewish officer becomes the climax of Mark’s account of Jesus’ passion. The “messianic secret” (see comment on 1:34; compare 5:43; 8:30; 9:9) is fully disclosed at the cross. Only now can the reader correctly understand Jesus’ identity as “Christ, the Son of God” (1:1).

Mary Magdalene (v 40): Jesus had delivered her from demon-possession (see 16:9; Luke 8:2).

Mary the mother of James the younger and Joses (v 40): Not much is known about this Mary and her sons. She was probably the wife of Clopas (mentioned in John 19:25). Mark mentions her sons as if they were well known in the early church. Matthew uses Joseph instead of Joses (Matt 27:56, not shown in the Kannada translations; these are variations of the same name).

Salome (v 40): She was probably the wife of Zebedee and the mother of James and John (compare Matt 27:56).

the day of Preparation (v 42): This was the name for the day before a festival or a Sabbath. It was was getting late on Friday afternoon. The Sabbath with its restrictions began at sunset, so Joseph was in a hurry to bury Jesus.

Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the council (v 43): Joseph, who was a rich man who had become a disciple of Jesus (see Matt 27:57), had probably not been present at the meeting of the Jewish council when Jesus was found guilty of blasphemy (as Mark mentions that the decision had been supported by “all” 14:64, compare 15:1). Arimathea was a village in the hill country about 30 km northwest of Jerusalem.

Pilate was surprised to find out that he was already dead (v 44): Crucified men often lived two or three days before dying, so Pilate was surprised to find out that Jesus had died so quickly.

a tomb cut out of rock (46): From Matt 27:60 we learn that the tomb belonged to Joseph and that it had not been used before. It was situated in a garden very near the place of crucifixion (John 19:41). This kind of tomb was closed by covering its opening with a large disc-shaped stone (compare 16:4) that rolled in a sloped channel.

Questions

1. At what time of the day did the Jewish leaders bring Jesus before the Roman governor (v 1)?
2. What was Pilate’s first question to Jesus, and why did he ask this question (v 2 and comment)?
3. What “many things” was Jesus accused of (v 3 and comment on verse 1)?
4. Who was Barabbas (v 7 and comment)?
5. Why did Pilate want to release Jesus (v 9–10)?
6. Why did the crowd insist on Pilate releasing Barabbas instead of Jesus (v 11–12)?
7. Why did Pilate finally let Barabbas go instead of Jesus (v 15)?
8. Make a list of the ways by which the soldiers mistreated and mocked Jesus (v 16–19).
9. What did the soldiers do with Jesus after they had mocked him (v 20)?
10. What was Simon of Cyrene forced to do (v 21)?
11. Where was Jesus brought (v 22)?
12. Why was Jesus offered wine mixed with myrrh (v 23 and comment)?
13. What happened to Jesus’ belongings (v 24)?
14. At what time of the day did Jesus’ crucifixion take place (v 25 and comment)?
15. What was the charge against Jesus (v 26)?
16. Jesus was mocked as he was hanging on the cross. How (v 29–32)?
17. How long did Jesus suffer on the cross (v 33–37)?
18. What Old Testament Psalm was Jesus quoting as he was dying on the cross (v 34 and comment)?
19. How did the bystanders misunderstand Jesus’ cry (v 34–36)?
20. What happened in the Jerusalem temple as Jesus died (v 37–38)?
21. What did the Roman officer realize as Jesus died (v 39)?
22. What does Mark tell his readers about the women that were present at Jesus’ crucifixion (v 40–41)?
23. What do we discover about Jesus’ followers from verse 41?
24. What do we know about Joseph of Arimathea (v 43–46 and comment on v 43)?
25. Where was Jesus buried (v 46)?

Think and discuss

1. Why do you think Pilate was amazed (v 5)?
2. Explain Pilate’s custom and how he used this custom to try to let Jesus go (v 6–15). Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible. Also explain the irony of Pilate’s failure.
3. Retell the story about the soldiers’ treatment of Jesus (v 16–20) in your own words. Don’t look in your Bible. Make your story lively and moving.
4. What does the information about Simon of Cyrene tell us about Jesus’ condition (v 21 and comment)?
5. Why do you think Jesus refused to take the wine mixed with myrrh that he was offered (v 23)?
6. Explain the tragic irony of the situation as Jesus was hanging on the cross (v 25–32).
7. In many churches, the service on Good Friday will focus on “Jesus’ seven words from the cross.” Find these “seven words in the gospel accounts (Matt 27:45–50: Mark 15:33–37; Luke 23:32–46; John 19:18–30) and list them.

Reflect and prepare

1. Reflect on Mark’s accounts of Jesus being mocked (Mark 15:16–20 and 25–32) in the light of the material found in this study. Choose one (or both) of the following assignments:
   1. Prepare a Bible study (or a devotion or a sermon) called He was despised and rejected (Isaiah 53:3a).
   2. Write a poem (or a devotional text) capturing one aspect (or emotion) of this story. You can for example call it Hail the King of the Jews! or He cannot save himself!
2. Reflect on Mark’s accounts of the good people at the crucifixion, the women (Mark 15:41, 47) and Joseph of Arimathea (Mark 15:42–46) in the light of the material found in this study. Choose one (or both) of the following assignments:
   1. Prepare a Bible study (or a devotion or a sermon) on either the women or on Joseph.
   2. Write a poem (or a devotional text) about either the women or Joseph of Arimathea capturing one aspect (or emotion) in connection with these people.
3. Reflect on “Jesus’ seven words from the cross” (see Think and discuss 7 with comments). Then prepare a Bible study (or a devotion or a sermon) based on these seven words.

([Go to Answers Mark chapter 15](#AnswersMarkChapter15))

### Mark chapter 16

Introduction and comments

The careful reader of chapter 16 of Mark will find a break in the narrative after verse 8. Most Bible scholars think that verses 9–20 did not originally belong to this gospel (as they are not found in the earliest Greek manuscripts, and as their literary style differs from the rest of the book; the Kannada satyavEdavu translation has indicated this by putting them in brackets). They think that they consist of a separate summary of post-resurrection appearances composed by another person. Most of these scholars also think that Mark must have ended his gospel less abruptly and more positively than with verse 8 (the trembling and confused women running away from the tomb, too afraid to say anything to anybody) and that Mark’s original ending has been lost.

The chapter can be structured like this:

* 1. Jesus’ resurrection, v 1–8
  2. Post-resurrection appearances and the ascension (v 9–20):
     1. Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene, v 9–11
     2. Jesus appears to two disciples, v 12–13
     3. Jesus appears to the eleven and the Great Commission, v 14–18
     4. Jesus’ ascension, 19–20

When the Sabbath was over (v 1): The Sabbath was over at about 6 o’clock Saturday evening. Only then could the women make their purchases. But they had to wait until daybreak on Sunday before they could go to the grave.

spices (v 1): The Jews did not embalm their dead. So the spices were not to be used for preserving Jesus’ body. The anointing of Jesus was an act of love and devotion.

Very early on the first day of the week (2): This was at dawn on Sunday morning.

to Galilee … just as he said to you (v 7): See 14:28.

he appeared first to Mary Magdalene (v 9): See John 20:11–18

Jesus appeared in another form to two of them (v 12): See Luke 24:13–32

Jesus appeared to the eleven (v 14): See Luke 24:36–43. There were eleven disciples remaining after Judas Iscariot had committed suicide (see 27:5).

they will cast out demons (v 17): Compare Acts 5:16; 8:7; 16:18; 19:12.

they will speak in new tongues (v 17): Compare Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6.

they will pick up snakes (v 18): Compare Acts 28:4–5.

if they drink any deadly thing, it will in no way hurt them (v 18): No occurrence of this kind is recorded in the New Testament.

they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover (v 18): Compare Acts 9:12, 17; 28:8.

at the right hand of God (v 19): Compare 12:36 and 14:62 with comments.

Questions

1. When and why did the women go to Jesus’ tomb (v 1–2 with comments)?
2. What were the women concerned about as they were walking to Jesus’ tomb (v 3)?
3. What did the women see when they came to the tomb and how did they react (v 4–5)?
4. What message did the women receive (v 5–7)?
5. How did the women feel as they ran away from the tomb (v 8)?
6. What do we learn about Mary Magdalene (v 9–10)?
7. How did the disciples react when they heard that Jesus was alive (v 11)?
8. What did Jesus do when he appeared to the eleven (v 14)?
9. What commission did Jesus give to his disciples (v 15)?
10. Who did Jesus say would be saved? And who would be condemned (v 15–16)?
11. How did Jesus describe the life and ministry of believers (v 17–18)? Make a list.
12. What did the disciples do after Jesus’ ascension (v 19–20)?
13. How did Jesus confirm the preaching of the gospel (v 20)?

Think and discuss

1. Why can we conclude that the young man in Jesus’ tomb was an angel (v 5–8)?
2. Do you think that the last part of the chapter (verses 9–20) was not part of Mark’s original text? Why – why not?
3. What is the key concept in verses 9–18? Explain how.
4. All four gospels have a “Great Commission” (Matt 28:18–20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46–49/Acts 1:8; John 20:21–23). Compare them and note down a few points.

Reflect and prepare

1. Reflect on the theme of “believing – not believing” in the light of Mark 16:9–18 and material found in this study. What should we believe? Why is it so important to believe?
2. Then prepare a gospel message called Believe and be saved! Focus on the gospel (the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus) and the need for us to believe in this gospel (to repent and to receive the forgiveness of our sins).
3. Reflect on the commission that Jesus gave his disciples in the four gospels in the light of Think and discuss 4 with comments. Then prepare Bible study (or a sermon) called Go into all the world and proclaim the good news about Jesus! Make sure that your listeners are challenged.

([Go to Answers Mark chapter 16](#AnswersMarkChapter16))

## Mark’s gospel – answers

### Answers Mark chapter 1

Answers to Questions

1. Mark introduces his book (v 1) with four statements (for comments on these statements see the notes in Introduction):
   1. It is the beginning of something.
   2. It is about good news (the gospel).
   3. The good news is about Jesus the Messiah (note that “Christ” and “Messiah” mean the same thing).
   4. This Jesus Christ is the Son of God.
2. Lots of people from Judea, both from the countryside and from the city of Jerusalem, came to listen to John the Baptist (v 5).
3. Those who came to John the Baptist confessed their sins and were baptized by him the Jordan River (v 5).
4. John the Baptist describes Jesus like this (v 7–8):
   1. He will be more powerful and more exalted that John himself.
   2. His ministry (his “baptism”) will be different from, and superior to, John’s.
5. Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River (v 9). To get there he had to travel from Galilee south to Judea, a journey of perhaps 100 km.
6. All the three persons of the Trinity were present at Jesus’ baptism (v 9–11):
   1. God the Father spoke from heaven.
   2. God the Son was baptized.
   3. God the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus.
7. According to Mark’s text, Jesus experienced three things during the forty days in the desert (v 13):
   1. Temptations by Satan
   2. Dangers from wild animals
   3. God’s protection through angels
8. Jesus proclaimed the gospel in Galilee, which was the part of Palestine from where he came (v 14).
9. The four men that Jesus called to be his followers were fishermen, engaged in their family businesses at the Sea of Galilee (v 16–20).
10. –
11. People in Capernaum were amazed at Jesus’ teaching (v 21–22, 27), because it was different from what they were used to hear from the scribes and teachers of the law. Jesus taught with authority.
12. The evil spirit’s understanding of Jesus (v 23–26):
    1. Jesus is God (“the Holy One of God”).
    2. Jesus has authority over evil spirits.
    3. Jesus has come to destroy evil spirits.
13. Simon’s mother-in-law was sick in bed with fever (v 30).
14. In the evening of that Sabbath day, Jesus healed many sick people. He also delivered many who were demon-possessed (v 32–34).
15. Jesus went to a deserted place the following morning in order to pray (v 35).
16. As Jesus traveled throughout Galilee, he preached in the synagogues and he delivered those who were demon-possessed (v 38–39). So there were two aspects to Jesus’ ministry:
    1. Teaching about the Kingdom of God
    2. Demonstrating through healing and deliverance the power of the Kingdom of God in people’s lives
17. When the leper approached Jesus for healing, Jesus was filled with pity and compassion (v 41).
18. After the healing of the leper, Jesus could no longer go into a town openly. The reason was that the leper had not obeyed Jesus and kept quiet about the miracle. So the news spread and the crowds that came to see Jesus became unmanageable (v 43–45).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. John the Baptist and his ministry can be described like this (v 2–8):
   1. John the Baptist:
      * His coming was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Mark shows this by quoting from Malachi and Isaiah.
      * He was dressed like the Old Testament prophet Elijah.
      * He lived a very simple life in the Desert of Judea. So he only ate local food.
      * He understood his own role. He was just the forerunner of someone much greater than he, of someone whose ministry would be far superior to his own.
   2. His ministry:
      * He prepared the way for the Lord.
      * He preached a baptism of repentance.
      * He baptized those who repented in the Jordan River.
      * He had a message about the difference between his own ministry and Jesus’ coming ministry.
2. John the Baptist’s comparison between his baptism and Jesus’ baptism? (v 7–8) could be understood like this:
   1. They would be different just as John and Jesus were different. Jesus was greater and more powerful than John. So Jesus’ baptism would be far superior to John’s baptism.
   2. They would be different kinds of baptism. John’s was a “water baptism.” Jesus’ would be a “Holy Spirit baptism.”

So how should this difference be understood?

It can be understood by the way Mark contrasts John the Baptist and Jesus, as he introduces one of the main themes of his gospel – the Kingdom of God (compare v 15). John’s role was to announce the Kingdom of God. His “water baptism of repentance” pointed forward to Jesus the King of the Kingdom of God. So the Old Testament background to John’s proclamation would be God’s promise through Ezekiel:

“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean. From all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you. I will take away the stony heart from you, and I will give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and you shall keep my ordinances and do them. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers. And you shall be my people, and I will be your God” (Ezek 36:25–28).

Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promise. He puts God’s Holy Spirit in us who accept him as their Savior and makes us citizens of the Kingdom of God.

John’s baptism is a baptism of repentance. Jesus’ baptism is a baptism of spiritual rebirth (compare John 3:3–8).

1. Jesus – the Messiah and the Son of God – went to Judea to be baptized by John (v 2–11). Why did he do that, when he himself did not need any repentance or any cleansing from sin?

Jesus’ baptism marked the beginning of his Messianic ministry. In the New Testament we find several reasons for his baptism:

* 1. Jesus himself said that he was baptized in order “to fulfill all righteous-ness” (Matt 3:15). All God’s righteous requirements for the Messiah were fully met in Jesus. The descent of the Holy Spirit and the words of the Father show that he was consecrated to God and officially approved by God.
  2. Jesus’ baptism was the occasion when John the Baptist publicly announced the arrival of the Messiah and the beginning of his ministry (compare John 1:31-34).
  3. By being baptized Jesus completely identified himself with the sin and failure of mankind. He became our substitute (compare 2 Cor 5:21).
  4. His baptism was an example to his followers.

1. The significance of “the Spirit descending on” Jesus at his baptism (v 10–11) was that the Spirit anointed him for his ministry: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free” (Jesus speaking in the synagogue in Nazareth quoting Isaiah 61:1–2; see Luke 4:16–22).
2. Mark said that Jesus was “proclaiming the good news of God” (v 14). The expression “of God” means that the gospel is both from God and about God. In my comments to verse 15 (see Introduction), I have presented some aspects of Jesus’ proclamation of the gospel:
   1. The time has come (or is fulfilled)
   2. The nature of the Kingdom of God
   3. The coming of the Kingdom of God with Jesus
   4. Our response to the proclamation of the Kingdom of God
3. The main points that Mark is making in his account of Jesus and the four fishermen (v 16–20) is that Jesus called them and that they immediately followed him.
4. Some conclusions about Jesus and his ministry from Mark’s account of what happened during and after the synagogue service in Capernaum (v 21–28):
   1. Jesus came to teach. His teaching is different, because it has divine authority. His teaching is the good news of God’s salvation (as shown in the healing of the demon-possessed man).
   2. Jesus is God. The evil spirits realize his divine authority, even when people don’t do so.
   3. Jesus has divine authority. He showed it by delivering and healing the man in the synagogue.
   4. Jesus came to save people and to deliver them from the power of Satan.
   5. When the good news is preached and when people are saved and delivered from evil, the result will be amazement and curiosity. What happened in the Capernaum synagogue (Jesus’ teaching as well as his miracle of deliverance) caused amazement, and the good news about Jesus spread throughout Galilee.
5. Jesus did not let the demons reveal his true identity (v 32–34). This is an example of the “Messianic secret” found in Mark’s gospel. You can find more about this “secret” in my text comment on verse 34.
6. The inbuilt tension in Mark’s account of Jesus going off early in the morning to pray (v 35–39):
   1. On the one hand we see the need that Jesus had for solitude. Jesus needed to spend time with his heavenly Father in prayer. To find that time he had to get up really early in the morning, while people were still asleep, and “hide” in a deserted place.
   2. On the other hand we see the need that people had to hear the good news preached to them and experience the power of the Kingdom of God in their lives through healing and deliverance. So some of Jesus’ disciples came to find him and inform him that people were waiting for him.

We as Christian believers (perhaps even more so for us who are full-time gospel workers) often face the same tension in our lives. So we need to find a healthy balance between time alone with God and time in the service of the needy.

1. Jesus’ disciples must have been shocked when Jesus touched and healed the man with leprosy (v 40–42). According to the law of Moses a man with leprosy was unclean and any person who touched him would also become unclean. But for Jesus it was more important to show the man compassion than to comply with the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament.
2. –

Comments on Reflect and prepare

If you answer the questions for each theme carefully making use of the material presented in this study, you should be able to prepare simple – and useful – outlines. Some of the themes are easier, others more difficult. Some of your studies will be shorter (perhaps more suitable for a devotion), others will be longer.

([Go to Mark chapter 2](#MarkChapter2))

### Answers Mark chapter 2

Answers to Questions

1. Jesus did two things at his home in Capernaum (v 1–5):
   1. He preached to all those that had gathered inside and in front of his house.
   2. He forgave the sins of a paralyzed man who was brought to Jesus by his friends. Later he also healed him.
2. The men carried the paralyzed man up on the roof of the house, because the crowd was so big that they could not bring the man to Jesus. So they made a hole in the roof and lowered the man down that way (v 1–5).
3. Jesus told the paralyzed man that his sins were forgiven (v 1–5).
4. Jesus told the scribes that the healing of the paralyzed man was to show them that he had authority on earth to forgive people their sins (v 6–12). He used the title the “Son of Man” about himself.
5. People reacted to the healing of the paralyzed man (v 8–12) like this:
   1. They were amazed.
   2. They praised God.
   3. They testified to the miracle.
6. These were the circumstances of Jesus’ meeting with Levi (v 13–14):
   1. He had been teaching to a large crowd of people beside the Sea of Galilee.
   2. He was walking on along the sea when he came to the tax booth where he found Levi at work.
7. The persons who had questions about Jesus’ social life (v 15–16) were scribes and Pharisees. They accused Jesus of associating with bad people, sinners and tax collectors. They must have thought that it was unsuitable for a pious person to be friends with the ungodly.
8. Verse 18 mentions three groups of disciples in connection with fasting:
   1. The disciples of John the Baptist. They fasted. Their reason for fasting could have been John’s imprisonment, compare Mark 1:14.
   2. The disciples of the Pharisees. They fasted. Their reason for fasting was perhaps their weekly religious routines.
   3. The disciples of Jesus. They did not fast. Their reason for not fasting, Jesus implies in his answer, is that Jesus’ presence is a time of celebration.
9. Jesus said that the bridegroom would not always be with his guests, but that he would be taken away from them (v 19–20).
10. It is foolish to sew a piece of new cloth on a garment made of old cloth because when the garment is washed the next time, the new piece will shrink and the garment will be torn (v 21). These two things don’t fit together.
11. A wise person should only use new wineskins for new wine, because new wine ferments as it matures. When that happens the wine will need more space. A new wineskin will stretch and make room for the wine, but an old wineskin will not stretch. It will crack and the wine will run out (v 22). These two things don’t fit together.
12. The Pharisees complained that Jesus’ disciples were breaking the law by working on the Sabbath. They considered plucking ears of grain as you were walking through a field to be “harvest work,” and it was not permitted to work on the Sabbath (v 23–24).
13. Jesus told the Pharisees that God had made the Sabbath day to be beneficial for man, and that man had not been made for the Sabbath day (v 27–28).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Some of the scribes thought that Jesus was blaspheming, when he told the paralyzed man that his sins were forgiven. According to their theology only God can forgive sins. So even if Jesus were the one he claimed to be, the expected Messiah, he would still not be able to forgive sins. Now – by forgiving the man his sins – Jesus was acting as if he were God. This was blasphemy (v 1–12).
2. Jesus responded to the silent accusation of the scribes by healing the paralyzed man. The point Jesus made was that he – the Son of God, the expected Messiah – is the incarnate God, who has power both to forgive sins and to heal the sick (v 1–12).
3. Jesus’ statement about doctors and sick people (v 13–17) can be explained like this:
   1. A doctor’s main duty is to help the sick. But only those who realize that they are in need of a doctor will come and accept the cure that the doctor has to offer.
   2. A Savior’s main duty is to save sinners. But only those who realize and acknowledge that they are sinners will come to the Savior and accept his salvation. So a person, who thinks that he is “righteous” (which means that he does not acknowledge that he is a sinner before God) is worse off than a “sinner,” who realizes and acknowledges his need of a Savior.
   3. Jesus came to save sinners. But his salvation has to be accepted. The “righteous” will not accept it. The “sinners” will accept it. Jesus expressed this truth like this: “I have come to call not the righteous but sinners (v 17).
4. Jesus’ statement about the bridegroom and his guests (v 18–22) can be explained like this:
   1. The context of the statement is the question why Jesus’ disciples are not fasting, while the disciples of both John the Baptist and the Pharisees are doing so.
   2. This question casts doubt upon the piety of Jesus’ disciples (and in extension also of Jesus himself): Fasting is an expression of piety. So are Jesus’ followers really pious Jews?
   3. Jesus responds with a kind of parable about a bridegroom and his guests. It is not right for people to fast at the joyous occasion of a wedding, at least not as long as the bridegroom is present. Those who heard Jesus would have understood that he was speaking of himself as a “bridegroom” who is present with his “guests” (his disciples). So while he is with his disciples, they would not fast.
   4. But Jesus includes a surprising statement about this bridegroom: He “will be taken away from them” (v 20). This seems to be a prophetic message about Jesus’ violent death on the cross (compare Isaiah 53:8, “he was cut off from the land of the living”).
   5. Jesus’ use of the metaphor “bridegroom” about himself perhaps reminded some of his listeners of Isaiah 62:5 (where God compares himself with a bridegroom) and Hosea 2:19–20 (where God betroths his people to himself forever). If the scribes and the Pharisees had noticed this, they would again have accused Jesus of blasphemy.
5. The connection between the issue of fasting (v 18–20) and the two parables about “new cloth on old cloth” and “new wine in old wineskin” (v 21–22) can be explained like this:
   1. Fasting at a wedding, new wine in old wineskins, and new cloth on old garments all illustrate some kind of incompatibility – two things that don’t fit together.
   2. New wine and new cloth symbolize the newness of the coming of Jesus. That newness cannot be confined to the old forms of Judaism. They are not compatible. They don’t fit together.
   3. Jesus brings in a wedding feast to answer the question about fasting. His point must be that the coming of the Kingdom of God through his ministry is a time of joy and celebration.
   4. So taken together, Jesus’ message could be paraphrased like this: The Kingdom of God which I proclaim to you is full of celebration and joy. It is the fulfillment of God’s promises through the Old Testament prophets of a new covenant that God will make with his people. Its newness will surpass the old religious forms and bring new joy and new freedom.
6. Jesus’ parallel between his disciples and David (v 23–28):
   1. When David and his men were hungry they ate the consecrated bread that only the priests were allowed to eat. This was against the law. But they were not condemned for it, because the situation was exceptional. Man’s need is more important than the strict observance of the law.
   2. Jesus’ disciples were accused of breaking the law by plucking heads of grain. Jesus does not react to the issue the Pharisees brought up: They claimed that the disciples were “harvesting,” which was “working,” and work was not permitted on the Sabbath day.
   3. Jesus must have followed the general Jewish understanding that this kind of plucking and eating could not be called “harvest work.” But he does not discuss this point with the Pharisees.
   4. Instead he again shows his authority. He does so in two ways:
      * Jesus explains (or reminds his listeners of) the true purpose of the Sabbath day: It is God’s gift to man. It is made for man, not the other way around.

In ancient times, the Sabbath day was associated with rest and worship, not with a lot of taboos. It was thought of as God’s favor to his people. During and after the Babylonian exile, the Sabbath day became a day for worship and the study of the Law, as well as a day of rest. But gradually the scribes formulated countless legal restrictions for how the Jews should live in obedience to the law. These rules also covered Sabbath day observance. The rabbis regarded the Sabbath day as an end in itself. But Jesus opposed them and taught that the Sabbath was made for man’s benefit, and that man’s needs must take precedence over the law of the Sabbath day.

* + - Jesus declares that he as the Son of Man (the Messiah) is the Lord also of the Sabbath day.

Comments on Reflect and prepare

1. –
2. Jesus came not to call the righteous, but sinners:

A note on “righteousness”: Only God is truly righteous and just. No man is righteous before God (Rom 3:10). So we are all sinners in need of salvation. God wants his people to live righteous lives. In Old Testament times this meant to “fear the Lord,” to love and obey him and follow his commandments. The New Testament teaches that our own righteousness cannot save us. God “saved us, not by any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). When we allow ourselves to be controlled by the Holy Spirit, we will “lead a life worthy of the Lord, pleasing him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:10).

1. The new and the old:

A note on fasting: Outside of the gospels, fasting is only mentioned a couple of times in the New Testament. The believers in Antioch in Syria “were worshiping the Lord and fasting,” when the Holy Spirit told them to set apart Barnabas and Saul for missionary service (Acts 13:2–3). And at the end of the first missionary journey, as they were returning home, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord (Acts 14:23). There is no teaching about fasting in the letters, but Jesus told his followers not to be like the hypocritical Pharisees: “When you fast, don’t look have sad faces like the hypocrites. For they disfigure their faces to show people that they are fasting” (Matt 6:16).

1. Jesus helps us understand the Sabbath:

A note on legalism: In many countries there are Bible-believing churches that teach a kind of legalism that reminds us of the Pharisees, who wanted to ensure that God’s people led “righteous” lives. So with good intentions they add to the law all kinds of rules and regulations that they think are helpful. The result is a legalism that obscures God’s will for his people. Jesus vigorously opposed this kind of legalism, and we should be careful so that we do not repeat the mistakes of the Pharisees.

([Go to Mark chapter 3](#MarkChapter3))

### Answers Mark chapter 3

Answers to Questions

1. The Pharisees were the persons looking for an opportunity to accuse Jesus (v 2). This is clear from the context (compare 2:24 and 3:6).
2. Jesus told the man with the withered hand two things (v 3, 5):
   1. First, to stand in front of the people in the synagogue. Jesus must have wanted everybody to see what was going to happen.
   2. Then, to stretch out his withered hand. Jesus healed the man instantly.
3. The Pharisees reacted very negatively to the healing of the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath day (v 6). Instead of praising Jesus for the good thing that he had done, they planned a good way to kill him.
4. –
5. The regions east of the Jordan River are called Decapolis and Perea on Map of the Roman Province of Judaea.
6. Jesus needed to have a small boat to protect him from the huge crowd (v 9–10). People were trying to touch him, and they were pushing at him, and he could have been crushed by the crowd.
7. When the evil spirits saw Jesus, they fell down before him and shouted that he was the Son of God (v 11–12). They submitted to him and they knew who he was.
8. Jesus chose his twelve apostles like this (v 13):
   1. He called those whom he wanted. So he made a selection among all the people/disciples that were following him.
   2. They came to him. So they responded positively to his call.

The calling of a servant of God always has these two sides: the call itself and the saying “yes” to the call.

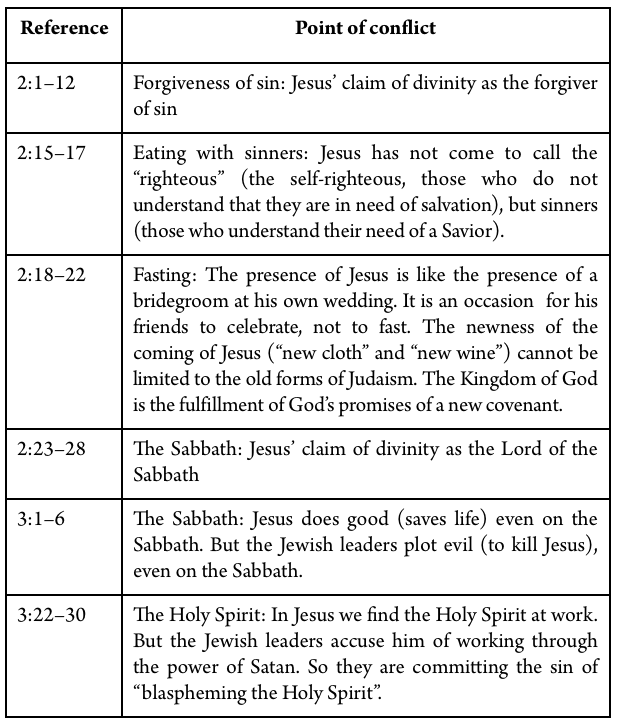
1. Mark describes the “work” of the disciples like this (v 14–15):
   1. To be with him: They were trained by Jesus, and they had intimate fellowship with him.
   2. To be sent out by him: They were his “apostles” (his messengers, his missionaries). This apostleship had two sides to it:
      * Proclamation: The apostles preached the gospel about the Kingdom of God and the good news about Jesus the Savior of mankind.
      * Spiritual authority: This preaching of the gospel came with authority over evil powers. When the Kingdom of God expands, the power of Satan has to retreat.
2. Mark gives his readers some additional information about Judas Iscariot (v 19): He was the one who would betray Jesus.
3. Jesus’ own family members thought that he had become mad (v 20–21). So they came from Nazareth to Capernaum in order to take care of him.
4. The scribes said that Jesus was possessed by an evil spirit and that he was doing Satan’s ministry (v 23, 30).
5. Jesus said that the result of Satan opposing himself would lead to Satan’s destruction. The power of Satan would then come to an end (v 26).
6. Jesus gave a wider meaning of “brother, sister, and mother” to the crowd (v 31–35): All those who do God’s will belong to Jesus’ “family.” They are his brothers, sisters and mothers.

Comments on Think and discuss

1. The point that Mark wants to make with his account of the healing of the man with the withered hand is that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath day(v 1–6).
2. The Jewish leaders came to the conclusion that Jesus had to be killed (v 1–6). The reason was not that Jesus healed sick people. They believed that Jesus could heal and they even expected to see him heal the man with the withered hand. The reason was the occasion of the healing, on the Sabbath day. The Jewish tradition that they followed (as if it were the law of Moses) prescribed that help could be given the sick on the Sabbath day only when the person’s life was endangered. This was obviously not the case with the man with the withered hand. But the decision to kill Jesus was not the result of only this incident, but had been built up by a series of incidents (see Reflect and prepare, the first point).
3. The irony of Jesus’ question to the Jewish leaders about doing good or doing evil on the Sabbath day (v 4): Jesus was ready to heal the man with the withered hand, while the Pharisees were ready to put Jesus to death. So for the observant reader it is obvious who was guilty of breaking the Sabbath day: the Jewish leaders, not Jesus.
4. Jesus became angry, because the Pharisees did not answer his question about what was lawful to do on the Sabbath day: to do good/to save life or to do evil/to kill (v 4–5). They would rather kill Jesus than have him break their traditions about what was lawful on the Sabbath day .
5. In verses 11–12, we find another example of the “Messianic secret” in Mark’s gospel. Jesus gives the evil spirits strict orders not to reveal Jesus’ identity to crowds (compare 1:23). Mark wants to show his readers that only through the sacrificial death of Jesus can we fully understand who he is. When the Roman officer sees Jesus die on the cross, he exclaims, “Truly this man was the Son of God!” (15:39).
6. Jesus said that his ministry (v 23–29) was from God and not from Satan, as the Jewish leaders claimed. This is how he argues:
   1. People being delivered from demons (which is a good thing) cannot be the work of Satan (who is evil). That would be Satan working against himself.
   2. But if delivering people from demons were the work of Satan, then Satan is opposing himself. He is divided, and his end will come soon.
   3. What is actually happening is that Jesus, through his ministry, is binding Satan and robbing Satan of his possessions. Every person whom Jesus delivers from demons is snatched away from Satan.
   4. This is the kind of work that Jesus is involved in through the power of the Holy Spirit.
   5. So by claiming that Jesus has an evil spirit and that Satan is working through him is a terrible sin. Jesus calls this sin “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.” It is a sin that cannot be forgiven and that will lead to eternal death.
7. “Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit” is the only sin that is eternal and can never be forgiven (v 28–29). We commit this sin, when we claim that Jesus is ministering through the power of Satan and not through the power of God’s Holy Spirit.
8. This sin cannot be forgiven, because as long as we believe that Jesus is from Satan we are unable to accept him as our personal Savior. But as soon as we accept Jesus as our personal Savior, we know that Jesus is from God and not from Satan. Then we no longer commit the sin of “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.” We are saved and our previous sin is forgiven.
9. This sin is eternal, because its consequence is eternal. It is only in this present life that we have the opportunity to accept Jesus as our personal Savior. Once we are dead, it is too late. Then we have missed our opportunity.
10. In the passage about Jesus’ family (v 31–35), the word “brothers” is used in two different ways:
    1. “Brothers” is used in a literal sense in verse 31. Jesus’ physical brothers have come to take care of him.
    2. “Brothers” is used in a metaphorical sense in verse 34. Jesus is speaking about his spiritual brothers.

The point that Jesus is making in this passage is that membership in God’s spiritual family (the Kingdom of God) is more important than membership in our human families. When we do God’s will in obedience to Jesus we demonstrate that we belong to Jesus’ family, that we are citizens of the Kingdom of God.

Comments on Reflect and prepare

1. These are the six controversies between Jesus and the Jewish leaders found in Mark chapters 2 and 3:
2. You can use these six points of conflict as an outline for for study called Jesus and the Jewish leaders.
3. –

([Go to Mark chapter 4](#MarkChapter4))

### Answers Mark chapter 4

Answers to Questions

1. The “classroom” that Jesus used on this occasion (v 1–2): Jesus sat in a fishing boat on the Sea of Galilee, while his listeners (a large crowd of people) were standing on the land beside the lake.
2. The seeds that fell on rocky ground sprouted quickly but withered in the scorching sun because the soil was not deep enough (v 5–6).
3. The seeds that fell into the good soil grew really well and produced a good harvest (v 8).
4. The “seed” that the farmer sows is the word (v 14). It is the good news about the Kingdom of God.
5. Jesus’ statement about people who are like seed sown along the path (v 15): They are those who hear the gospel, but Satan comes and confuses them.
6. Jesus’ statement about people who are like seed sown on rocky ground (v 16–17): They are those who happily accept the gospel, but they have no root and cannot withstand difficulties and persecution.
7. Jesus’ statement about people who are like seed sown among thorns (v 18–19): They are those who accept the gospel, but bear no fruit because they get caught up with money and other worldly matters.
8. Jesus’ statement about people who are like seed sown on good soil (v 20): They are those who accept the gospel and bear plentiful fruit for the Kingdom of God.
9. When the grain is ripe, it is immediately harvested (v 29).
10. The parable of the mustard seed is about the growth and expansion of the Kingdom of God (v 30–32).
11. When Jesus was alone with his disciples, he explained the meaning of the parables to them (v 34).
12. When the storm broke out, Jesus was asleep in the rearmost part of the boat (v 38).
13. The disciples accused Jesus of not caring about their dangerous situation (v 38).
14. Jesus rebuked his disciples for their fear and their lack of faith (v 40).
15. The disciples reacted to the miracle on the Sea of Galilee with great awe and fear (v 41). It also made them reconsider Jesus’ identity (as the Son of God, the Messiah) and divine powers (not only over sickness and demons, but also over nature).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Jesus’ statement in verse 9: It is a challenge for the listeners to understand the message and apply it to themselves. Note that the parable of the sower begins (v 3) and ends (v 9) with a call for careful attention, suggesting that its meaning may not be very evident. Attentive minds are needed to understand its truth. To have ear to hear involves surrender of proud self-reliance and submission to God (compare Isaiah 6:10).
2. There could have been various reasons why Jesus’ disciples asked him about his parables (10):
   1. Perhaps they didn’t understand them at all. So they asked Jesus to explain the parables to them. Many modern readers like ourselves will have problems understanding Jesus’ parables (or some of them). Study Bibles and Bible commentaries can then be very useful.
   2. Perhaps they thought they understood them (or most of them), but they were not quite sure if they had the correct interpretation. So they asked Jesus for clarifications. We too often experience this. Again study Bibles and Bible commentaries will help us avoid misinterpretations.
   3. Perhaps they understood them, but they were not satisfied with their understanding. They also wanted Jesus to explain to them the “deeper” or “hidden” meaning of the parables. I don’t think this was a big issue for Jesus’ disciples. They don’t seem to have been men devoted to speculation. But many of us in South India today enjoy speculation. Pastors excel in trying to find all kinds of “hidden” or “deeper” meanings in biblical texts, and most believers are fascinated by this kind of interpretations. They are, however, very risky and must be avoided. We must never fall into the trap of speculation. We must never go beyond the point that Jesus is making through a parable.
3. Jesus said that “the secret of the Kingdom of God” had been given to his disciples but not “to those on the outside” (v 11): The secret is the disclosure that the kingdom of God has drawn near in the person of Jesus Christ. The disciples had accepted this truth (even if their understanding at this point was limited). They believed in Jesus (not only because of his miracles, which seems to have been the case with the crowd). They followed him and they were with him (3:14). They were “on the inside” because they had faith in Jesus and were committed to discipleship. So the secret of the Kingdom of God had been given to them. But to those hardened by unbelief (like the Jewish leaders) or to those who came to Jesus just for his miracles (like the crowds of people) the entire significance of Jesus’ person and mission was hidden. They were “on the outside.”
4. Jesus’ questions to his disciples in verse 13 can be understood like this: There is some rebuke in Jesus’ questions. He implies that the meaning of the parable of the sower is clear and understandable. If the disciples could not understand this clear parable, how would they understand more difficult ones?
5. In verses 21–25, Jesus speaks about three things: a lamp, something hidden, and a measure. These three things relate to the Kingdom of God, which is the context of Jesus’ words, like this:
   1. A lamp: The proclamation of the Kingdom of God (present among people in a new way with the coming of Jesus) is like bringing an oil lamp into a dark room.
   2. Something hidden:
      * One interpretation: The light of the Kingdom of God and the coming of Jesus the Messiah reveals things that have been hidden until this time.
      * Another interpretation: The present hiddenness of Jesus will be replaced by disclosure (either at his death on the cross, or at his second coming).
   3. A measure: This measure is about receiving the Kingdom of God and Jesus, the King of the Kingdom. The more you listen to the word of Jesus with faith, the more you will understand him. The more you commit yourself to the Kingdom of God, the more this Kingdom will grow in you and spread through you. In addition, the more you accept God’s truth now, the more you will receive in the future. On the other hand, if you do not respond to what little truth you already have, you will not profit even from that.
6. Jesus’ message in the parable of the growing seed (v 26–29): Jesus emphasizes the mysterious power of growth of the seed (the Kingdom of God and the good news that it has arrived with Jesus). This power is the Holy Spirit working through the proclamation of the word of God and through the lives of all those who join the Kingdom by accepting Jesus as their personal Savior. This spiritual (hidden and somewhat mysterious) growth will continue until the return of Jesus, the day of God’s final judgment, and the arrival of the new heaven and the new earth.
7. Jesus’ main point in the parable of the mustard seed (v 30–32): The Kingdom of God apparently had an insignificant beginning. But a day will come when its true greatness and power will be seen by the whole world.
8. The tension between the disciples and Jesus in the story about Jesus calming the storm (v 35–41) can be understood like this:
   1. The disciples wanted Jesus to do things for them: take care of them and make sure that they didn’t drown. So they accuse him with a question, “Teacher, don’t you care that we are perishing?”
   2. Jesus wanted the disciples to trust in him. So he rebukes them with his questions, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”

So here we find the essence of Christian discipleship revealed: Is our relationship to Jesus characterized by faith and trust – or by demands and expectations?

1. –

([Go to Mark chapter 5](#MarkChapter5))

### Answers Mark chapter 5

Answers to Questions

1. –
2. Mark describes the pathetic condition of the demon-possessed man like this (v 2–5):
   1. He has an unclean spirit (Later we learn that the demon calls himself “Legion” because there are actually many evil spirits in the man, v 8–9).
   2. He spent all his time among the tombs. This shows how pitiable his condition was. Tombs were scary and unclean places, and only the very poorest and the most downtrodden people in society would even consider living among them.
   3. He was so wild that the people tried to keep him chained up. But he was too strong even for the chains.
   4. He was howling and cutting himself with stones. So he was really acting like a madman.
3. When the demon-possessed man saw Jesus, he did two things (v 6–7):
   1. He ran up to Jesus and bowed down before him.
   2. He shouted to Jesus to leave him alone. His demons knew that Jesus was “the Son of the Most Hight God” and that he had power over them.
4. The demons asked Jesus not to send them away from the region but to allow them to enter a herd of pigs (v 10–12).
5. Jesus allowed the demons to enter a herd of pigs. Then the two thousand pigs rushed into the water and were drowned in the Sea of Galilee (v 11–13).
6. Mark describes the condition of the man after Jesus had delivered him from the demons like this (v 15):
   1. He was no longer a madman. But he was dressed properly and behaving peacefully.
   2. He was no longer among the tombs, but sitting among people.
7. The people of the region of the Gerasenes reacted in three ways to the healing of the demon-possessed man (v 14–20):
   1. They were afraid, when they saw the change in the man (v 15).
   2. They asked Jesus to leave their region, when they realized that they had lost two thousand pigs (v 17).
   3. They were amazed, when they heard the man’s testimony (v 20).
8. Jesus did not allow the man who had been delivered to go with him to Galilee. Instead he told him to go to his own people with the testimony of what God had done for him through Jesus (v 18–20).
9. Jairus was one of the men in charge of the synagogue (probably at Capernaum). He approached Jesus, because his young daughter was seriously ill, and he hoped that Jesus would come and heal her (v 22–23).
10. We learn these things about the woman who touched Jesus in the crowd (v 25–33):
    1. She had been sick for twelve years.
    2. Her sickness (bleeding) made her ritually unclean. So she was deprived of a normal social life.
    3. She had done whatever possible to find a cure. She had spent all her money. And she had suffered a lot of painful treatments. But nothing had helped. Her condition had rather worsened than improved.
    4. She knew about Jesus – that he had power over sickness – and she was convinced that he would be able to heal her. So she followed Jesus in the crowd.
    5. But because of the social stigma of her ritual impurity, she must have hoped that Jesus would heal her “in secret,” without him or the crowd becoming aware of it. So she just touched his clothes without talking to him.
    6. But when Jesus realized what had happened, the woman became afraid. So she confessed everything: her faith in Jesus, how she had touched his clothes, and that she had been completely healed.
11. Jesus asked the people about who had touched his clothes, because he realized that something special had happened – he felt that power had gone out from him (v 30).
12. The disciples thought Jesus’ question was stupid: With lots of people crowding around Jesus, of course many persons must have touched him (v 31).
13. Jairus’ people told him not to bother Jesus any further, because his daughter was dead. So it had become too late for Jesus to heal her (v 35).
14. Only three of Jesus’ disciples came with him to Jairus’ house: Peter, James, and John. They belonged to his innermost circle of friends. The reason the other disciples stayed behind was that Jesus told them not to come (v 37–38).
15. The people laughed at Jesus, because they thought that it was stupid of him to say that the girl was sleeping, when it was evident that she was dead (v 39–40).
16. The Aramaic expression “Talitha cum” means “Little girl, get up” (v 41).
17. The girl was twelve years old (42).
18. The girl’s parents reacted to the miracle with amazement (v 42).
19. Jesus told the girl’s family to do two things (v 43):
    1. Not to tell others what had happened. This strange exhortation must be understood in the light of the “Messianic secret” in Mark’s gospel. Jesus revealed his divinity by bringing the girl back to life. But people would just see the miracle without understanding his true identity. Only when Jesus gives his life for us on the cross can we truly understand that he is the God who saves.
    2. To give food to the girl. This shows Jesus’ concern for the well-being of a young girl. He not only performed a miracle by bringing her back to life. He was also aware of of her everyday needs.

Comments on Think and discuss

1. –
2. The people in the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave the area (v 17). There could have been more than one reason for this:
   1. They were afraid when they saw that Jesus had delivered the man from the evil spirits (v 15). So they perhaps thought that it would be dangerous for them to have Jesus remain in the region.
   2. They had lost two thousand pigs, which probably was a considerable financial loss for them. This must have made them angry. So I think this was the main reason why they wanted to get rid of Jesus.

They didn’t ask him to stay and perform more miracles. There were probably many sick and demon-possessed people among them. So you would have expected them to ask Jesus to stay. But they had the wrong priorities. They were more concerned about money and property than about the needs of people. They were selfish and worldly.

1. A comparison of the three parallel accounts of Jesus delivering the demon-possessed man reveals a few obvious differences. They can be explained like this:
2. The different names of the region: Gadara and Gerasa were two cities in the Decapolis southeast of the Sea of Galilee. Gadara was the capital. Gerasa was a smaller town further away from the lake, but it included land and a small village (also called Gerasa) at the lake. So the gospel writers refer to the same geographical area, and the name difference need not trouble a Bible reader.
3. The different number of men: Matthew mentions two men, while Mark and Luke only mention one. So a discerning Bible reader will conclude that there must have been two men (just as Matthew, who most likely was an eyewitness, states), even if Mark and Luke (who were not personally present on this occasion) only mention one man. Perhaps their source only had one man, so they didn’t know about the second man.
4. The time of torment: Matthew has the fuller account. “Before the time” refers to the time when God will judge and destroy all satanic powers. Mark and Luke decided not to include (or their source had not included) this information.
5. The request of place to be sent to: Matthew decided not to include this part of the demons’ request at all, while Mark and Luke have different versions of it. So a discerning Bible reader can conclude that the demons said something like this: “Don’t send us out of the country into the Abyss!”

Conclusions:

* In spite of these obvious differences, Matthew, Mark and Luke must have written about the same event. This conclusion is supported by the fact that the account of Jesus calming the storm immediately precedes this story in all three gospels.
* The differences between the gospels can be explained and need not worry a Bible reader.
* The gospel writers had different sources (in this case Matthew was an eyewitness, while Mark and Luke had their information, written or oral, from other people).
* God (through the Holy Spirit) allowed the gospel writers the freedom to write their books. They could select and arrange their material with their own readers in mind. That is one reason why the Bible contains four gospel books instead of only one.

1. Jesus told the woman, “your faith has made you well” (v 34) and exhorted Jairus, “Do not fear, just believe” (v 36).

The Greek words used in these cases are the noun pistis (“faith, trust, belief”) and the verb pisteuo (“to believe in, to have faith in, to have confidence in, to trust”). When the disciples accused Jesus of not caring if they drowned in the storm (4:38), Jesus scolded them, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” He accused them of not trusting him with their lives in a dangerous situation. He accused them of not knowing him and the resources that he had in store for them.

The sick woman had confidence in Jesus (she had faith in him, she trusted him to take care of her problem) and was healed. It was not the greatness of her faith that healed her, but the greatness of Jesus. When she stretched our her hand in faith, power went out from Jesus and changed her life completely.

The situation in Jairus’ house was desperate. The girl had died, and her parents and the other mourners no longer hoped for her recovery though a healing miracle from Jesus. In that desperate situation Jesus tells them, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.” Jesus, the Lord of the living and the dead, had mercy on them and brought hope into their hopelessness. The miracle happen, and the dead girl was bought back to life – not because of the greatness of the parents’ faith, but because of the greatness of Jesus.

1. There are several common factors in the two intertwined stories in verses 21–43, for example:
   1. Both are miracles that Jesus performed in Capernaum.
   2. Both stories concern Jews: the sick woman must have been Jewish, and the leader of the synagogue was a Jewish leader, probably even a Pharisee.
   3. Both stories concern people in absolute hopeless situations: The sick woman had tried everything humanly possible without result, and Jairus and his wife were standing in front of their dead daughter.
   4. In both stories Jesus speaks about having faith/believing: Jesus told the woman that her faith had healed her. Jesus told the girls’ parents not to be afraid but to believe.
   5. Both stories touch on the aspect of Jesus ignoring the Jewish laws of ceremonial purity: She woman’s bleeding made her ritually unclean and her touching Jesus would have made him unclean as well. But instead of scolding the woman for the unlawful thing that she had done, he praised her for her faith. Dead people were ritually unclean according to the law of Moses. So when Jesus took the girl by the hand (v 41) he also became unclean. But he disregarded the law in order to demonstrate his love and concern for the girl and her parents.

But there are also differences between the two stories, for example:

* The sick woman was excluded from social life because of her ceremonial impurity. But the leader of the synagogue was a highly respected leader of the Jewish society.
* The healing of the woman took place in the midst of the crowd. But the bringing back of the girl to life took place within a very closed circle of people.
* The time perspective of “faith” is different: The woman took an initiative of faith by touching Jesus’ clothes. So she already had some faith. The parents of the dead girl were told by Jesus to have faith. So they didn’t already have faith in Jesus for that desperate situation.
* The healing of sick people was a common thing in Jesus’ ministry, and there are many such stories recorded in the gospels. But the bringing back of people from the dead seems to have happened very few times in Jesus ministry – in spite of the truth that Jesus is not only our Healer but also “the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25).

([Go to Mark chapter 6](#MarkChapter6))

### Answers Mark chapter 6

Answers to Questions

1. Jesus did two things in his hometown of Nazareth (v 1–6):
   1. He taught in the synagogue (v 2).
   2. He healed a few sick people (v 5).
2. People were amazed at the wisdom of Jesus’ teaching in the synagogue (v 2).
3. People took offense at Jesus, because they knew about his family background (v 3).
4. Jesus was amazed at the people of Nazareth, because of their unbelief and their lack of faith (v ).
5. After Jesus had visited Nazareth, he went to the surrounding villages to preach the gospel to the people there (v 6).
6. Mark describes the ministry of the apostles like this (v 12–13):
   1. They preached that people should repent.
   2. They cast out many demons.
   3. They anointed with oil many sick people and healed them.

We are reminded of 3:14–15 (the purpose of Jesus appointing twelve apostles), of 1:15 (the beginning of Jesus’ own ministry) and of 1:4 (John the Baptist’s ministry).

1. King Herod thought that Jesus was John the Baptist who had come back to life – perhaps to punish him for having him killed (v 14–16).
2. King Herod had put John the Baptist in prison, because he was angry with John for accusing him of living a life in sin. Herod had married his sister-in-law Herodias while her husband was still alive, a relationship which was against the law of Moses (v 17–18).
3. Mark describes king Herod’s relationship to John the Baptist (v 17–20) as one of contradictions:
   1. On the one hand, Herod really admired John for being a very interesting speaker. So Herod had protected John against the murderous plans of Herodias.
   2. On the other hand, Herod was afraid of John as an outspoken and righteous man, who had accused him of his illegal marriage alliance with Herodias.
4. On his birthday (v 21–28), king Herod had invited his officials and local leaders to a big party. The daughter of his wife Herodias danced before the guests. Herod was so happy that he promised to give her whatever she asked for. Her mother told her to ask for the head of John the Baptist. So the king ordered John to be killed and his head to be brought in on a platter.
5. John the Baptist’s disciples came to get his body. They buried him in a tomb (v 29).
6. The context of verse 30 is the story of Jesus sending out his apostles on a ministry tour (v 7–12). So verse 30 carries on from verse 7. Mark has placed his account of the death of John the Baptist between these two verses.
7. Jesus and his disciples took a boat so that they could get away from the large crowds of people. They needed to find a quiet place where they could rest (v 31–32).
8. When Jesus saw the large crowd of people, he did not become upset or disappointed as we probably would have done, if we were tired and in need of rest – and a big crowd of people came to us to ask for help. Instead Jesus had compassion on them, because they were confused and lost – just like sheep without a shepherd. So he began to teach them many things (v 34).
9. When Jesus told the disciples to give food to the people, they reacted with shock (v 37). Should they buy food for all these people (v 35–36)!
10. Jesus did with the five loaves of bread and the two fish what any pious Jew would have done before eating – he prayed (v 41). The usual form of the prayer was a thanksgiving: “Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.”
11. The leftover food was collected in baskets, probably the twelve lunch baskets of the disciples (v 43).
12. –
13. As soon as the five thousand men had been given food, Jesus told his disciples to get into the boat and leave for Bethsaida. Jesus himself first dismissed the crowd. Then he went up on the mountain to pray (v 45–46).
14. The disciples were terrified, when they saw Jesus walking on the water, because they thought that they were seeing a ghost (v 49–50).
15. When Jesus got into the boat, the wind stopped. When the disciples saw this, they were amazed (v 51).
16. The people of Gennesaret reacted with enthusiasm, when they realized that Jesus had arrived. They immediately ran away and brought sick people from all over the area to be healed by Jesus (v 53–56).
17. Mark summarizes Jesus’ healing ministry in verse 55–56. By this time Jesus had become an immensely popular and successful healer and miracle worker.

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Jesus was both a “carpenter” (Mark 6:3) and “a carpenter’s son” (Matt 13:55). It was common in those days that a son had the same job as his father. So we can be quite certain that Jesus supported himself as a carpenter before he started his ministry, beginning as his father’s assistant and later in charge of the workshop.
2. This is what happened when Jesus visited his hometown of Nazareth (v 1–6): As usual he taught in the local synagogue. At first people were very impressed by the wisdom of his teaching. They had also heard rumors about him as a miracle worker. But then they remembered Jesus’ family background. They knew his family well, his mother and his brothers and sisters. They knew that there was doubt about his legitimacy. They remembered that he was not a learned rabbi, but just a simple carpenter. So they lost all faith in him. Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith and their unwillingness to receive his message about the Kingdom of God and to accept the miracles he had in store for them. Consequently only a few people were healed.
3. I think there could have been two reasons why Jesus sent our the apostles “two by two” (v 7–13):
   1. Jewish law and tradition required at least two witnesses for a testimony to be valid.
   2. Two persons could provide support for one another during a difficult gospel tour.
4. I think Jesus told his apostles not bring food, money or extra clothes on their gospel tour (v 7–13), because he wanted them to be totally dependent on the people they ministered to. They would be staying in people’s homes and be provided with food, lodging and blankets.
5. I think king Herod must have had contradictory feelings, when he fulfilled the girl’s request and ordered the killing of John the Baptist (v 14–29):
   1. On the one hand, he must have felt relieved. Now he would get rid of his worst critic.
   2. On the other hand, he must have been worried and afraid. To kill a man of God could lead to all kinds of trouble.
6. Through Mark’s description of the death of John the Baptist his readers will get impressions like these of king Herod (v 14–29):
   1. He was a superstitious man, thinking that John the Baptist had returned from the dead in the shape of Jesus in order to torment him.
   2. He was a foolish man, giving a young dancing girl such an extravagant promise.
   3. He was a weak man. He was afraid of John the Baptist while alive. And he was afraid of displeasing his wife Herodias and his guests by not keeping a foolish promise.
   4. He was a man of worldly pleasures rather than of spiritual integrity. He had married Herodias against the Jewish law. He celebrated his birthday with a wild party.
7. –
8. The disciples must have been totally overwhelmed by the feeding of the five thousand men (v 30–44). They must have wondered how something like this could have happened. They must have realized that this was yet another miracle performed by their Lord Jesus. They must have been grateful to Jesus for letting them be part of this miracle: to arrange the people in groups, to distribute the food to the people, to pick up the leftovers. But they were perhaps also ashamed because their lack of faith in the beginning; ashamed that they, who had just returned from a successful gospel tour (v 30), had not lived up to the expectations of their Master.
9. Mark makes a connection between the amazement of the disciples (the storm on the lake is calmed with the arrival of Jesus) and the miracle of Jesus feeding the five thousand men (v 51–52): The multiplying of the loaves demonstrated Jesus’ true identity to them (compare 8:18–21), but neither that miracle nor the appearance of Jesus on the water had opened their hearts. If they had understood the feeding of the five thousand men, they would not have been amazed at Jesus’ walking on the water or his calming the waves. But they were showing themselves to be similar to Jesus’ opponents, who also had hardened hearts (compare 3:5).
10. Jesus hurriedly sent off his disciples in the boat after the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand men (v 45). A clue to the reason for this can be found in the parallel account in John’s gospel (John 6:14–15): People were trying to force Jesus to become king. Perhaps the disciples would join them in this effort. So Jesus had to send the disciples away, before this happened. Also, Jesus himself needed to get away from the crowd and spend time with his Father in prayer.
11. The story of Jesus walking on the water (v 45–52) is also found in Matthew (14:22–33) and John (6:16–21). A couple of observations:
    1. The context of the story it not quite the same, even if it comes after the feeding of the five thousand men in all three cases. But in John it is followed by a discussion on “the bread of God” based on this miracle, while in Matthew and Mark it is followed by a debate on purity between the Pharisees and Jesus.
    2. The accounts vary in length and detail. John has the shortest, Matthew has the longest.
    3. Mark and John have told the story in a similar way, but there are some interesting differences:
       * In Mark, Jesus takes the initiative: He makes the disciples leave immediately – but the readers are not told the reason for this urgency. In John, the disciples take the initiative, and the scene is more relaxed: Jesus has left for the mountain in order to avoid the people who wanted to make him king by force.
       * John does not mention that the disciples thought that they saw a ghost, only that they were terrified. Also, only Mark has the mysterious statement that Jesus “intended to pass them by.”
       * In Mark the wind dies down before they reach the shore. In John the boat immediately reaches the shore.
    4. Matthew’s story is quite different in that is contains an additional part about Peter, who wanted to know if it is really was Jesus walking on the water and not a ghost. So Jesus allowed him to step into the water to meet Jesus. But when Peter saw the wind he was afraid and began to sink. He cried out to Jesus to save him. Jesus took hold of him and blamed him for his lack of faith. They both stepped into the boat and the wind died down. Then the disciples worshiped Jesus saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”
12. The six stories found in chapter 6 from the perspective of Jesus’ disciples:
    1. Jesus rejected at Nazareth (v 1–69): The disciples do not take part in this story at all.
    2. Jesus sends out the twelve (v 7–13): The disciples are the main characters of this story. They must have been very proud and happy that Jesus saw them fit to go into ministry all by themselves. They must have felt pleased with the success of their ministry. My evaluation of the disciples is positive.
    3. John the Baptist beheaded (v 14–29): The disciples do not take part in this story at all.
    4. Jesus feeds the five thousand (v 30–44): The disciples play a very important role in the story. They seemed to be confused about what was happening. Jesus did not consider their proposal to send the people away to find food. Instead he gave them the impossible assignment to feed the people. They must have wondered what Jesus was up to, when he told the people to sit down and when he gave thanks for the tiny amount of food available, sufficient only for a meal for one person. They must have been shocked to see that the food was enough to satisfy all the people and that even the scraps filled their own lunch baskets. My evaluation of the disciples is negative: Even this amazing miracle failed to open their hearts to understanding Jesus’ divinity. Mark later says that their hearts were hardened (v 52).
    5. Jesus walks on the water, (v 45–52): The disciples play a very important role in the story. Perhaps they wondered why Jesus was in such a hurry for them to leave. They probably also wondered why Jesus did not come with them in the boat. They must have realized that their night crossing would become extremely dangerous as soon as the wind started blowing. They did not fully recognize Jesus as he came walking on the water. Instead they thought that he was a ghost – and were terrified. But when Jesus spoke to them, they must have understood that it was he. And when the wind died down as soon as he stepped into the boat, they were amazed. My evaluation of the disciples is very negative.
    6. Jesus heals the sick at Gennesaret (v 53–56): The disciples do not take part in this story at all.

([Go to Mark chapter 7](#MarkChapter7))

### Answers Mark chapter 7

Answers to Questions

1. In the first passage (v 1–23), Jesus addresses (or discusses with) three groups of people, like this:
   1. A group of Pharisees and teachers of the law that had come from Jerusalem to Galilee to investigate Jesus’ teachings and ministry, v 5–13
   2. A crowd of Jewish people, v 14–15
   3. His own disciples, v 17–23
2. Mark mentions some of the purity laws that the Pharisees wanted all Jews to follow (v 1–5). They were:
   1. Eating food without first washing your hands after having come home from the market (v 4)
   2. Washing household utensils (v 4)
3. The hypocrites in the days of the prophet Isaiah worshiped the Lord in vain, because their worship was insincere. Their hearts did not belong to God (v 6–8).
4. Jesus accuses the Pharisees of replacing the law of Moses with human tradition (v 8–9, 13).
5. What goes into a person (for example food) does not make a person unclean, according to Jesus. It does not go into the person’s heart (v 14–23).
6. But what comes out of a person’s heart, his evil intentions, makes him unclean, according to Jesus. They are things like “fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly” (v 14–23).
7. –
8. We learn these things about the woman that Jesus met in the area of Tyre and her problem (v 24–26):
   1. She was not Jewish, but a Greek-speaking Gentile woman from the area of Phoenicia in the Roman province of Syria.
   2. Her daughter was demon-possessed.
9. Jesus’ excuse for not helping the woman was that his priority was to minister among God’s people, the Israelites (v 27).
10. But Jesus changed his mind and cured the woman’s daughter, when he saw her persistent faith expressed in the way she responded to his excuse (v 29).
11. The man who was brought to Jesus in the region of the Decapolis was deaf, but (as most deaf people) he also had problems with his speech (v 32).
12. Jesus healed the deaf man in private. Mark says that Jesus took him away from the crowd (v 32). The reason for privacy is revealed later (v 36): Jesus did not want the general public to know what had happened. This story takes place in the predominantly Gentile area of the Decapolis, southeast of the Sea of Galilee (v 31).
13. The people reacted to the healing of the deaf man (v 36–37) in two ways:
    1. They spread the news to others.
    2. They were greatly amazed.

Comments on Think and discuss

1. We understand from the text in the first passage (v 1–23) that Mark is addressing his gospel to Gentile readers:
   1. He explains in verses 3–4 about some of the Jewish purity laws. If his readers were mainly Jews, this kind of explanation would be unnecessary.
   2. He translates the Aramaic/Hebrew word “Corban” (“an offering to God”) in verse 11. A Jewish reader would not need this information.
2. The arguments about “Clean and unclean” (v 1–23) can be summarized like this:
   1. The Pharisees and scribes accused Jesus’ disciples of not obeying the Jewish purity laws, because they did not wash their hands before eating.
   2. Jesus counters this accusation by accusing them of being hypocrites. Their hearts are far away from God, because they have replaced the law of Moses with their own human tradition. Jesus then gives them an example of this: The law of Moses says that a son must honor his parents, which includes his financial responsibility for them. But the tradition of the Pharisees has made a loophole called “Corban.” So by taking a “Corban vow” (which sounds very spiritual) a son can cheat his parents of his financial responsibility for them (which, of course, goes against the true spirit of the law).
   3. Then Jesus tells the Jewish crowd (and afterwards explains his statement to his disciples) that true purity has to do with the heart of a person. From an evil heart will come out impurity like evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, greed, envy, slander, arrogance, and foolishness. But things from the outside (for example food) will not make a person’s heart impure.
   4. In conclusion: A person’s fellowship with God is not broken by unclean hands or impure food, but by sin.
3. The Gentile woman in the area of Tyre (v 24–30) is as an example for us in several ways, for example:
   1. She got hold of Jesus. As soon she heard that Jesus had come to her area, she went to him for help. Similarly, we should always turn to Jesus for help when we are in need.
   2. She openly expressed her need for Jesus. She even begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. And she was persistent in her request for Jesus to help her. Similarly, we need to be open with our needs and persistent in our requests as we approach Jesus for help.
   3. She believed that the blessings of the Kingdom of God were hers to claim. She even reminded Jesus of the fact that God’s blessings are not limited to the Jews. Perhaps she had heard about God’s promises to Abraham, the founding father of the Israelite nation that all peoples on earth would be blessed through him and his offspring (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18). Perhaps she also knew about God’s promises through the Old Testament prophets that a day of blessing would come for all nations. Similarly, we need to understand that God’s blessings are not limited to a certain group of people and that citizenship in the Kingdom of God is not restricted to persons of a specific background.
   4. She had faith in Jesus. She was totally convinced that Jesus would be able to deliver her troubled daughter from the evil spirit that tormented her. And her faith was rewarded. This is the kind of faith that all believers should have!
4. A comparison of the parallel stories found in Mark and Matthew about the Gentile woman in the area of Tyre (v 24–30 and Matt 15:21–28):
   1. Matthew’s account is more detailed, for example:
      * The woman’s words are quoted, and she addresses Jesus as “Lord, you son of David.”
      * Jesus’ disciples are mentioned. They are troubled by the pleas of the woman so they ask Jesus to send her away.
      * Jesus describes the priority of his mission, “I only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”
      * Jesus openly praises the the woman’s faith, “Woman, great is your faith!”
   2. There are also some minor differences, for example:
      * Matthew begins his account by saying that Jesus “withdrew into the region of Tyre and Sidon.” Mark places the woman “in region of Tyre” and mentions Sidon only in connection with Jesus’ continued journey (v 31).
      * Matthew describes the woman as “Canaanite.” Mark states that she was “Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia.” But there is no contradiction in these two ways of describing her.
      * Mark ends his story in a more descriptive way, while Matthew just states that the girl was healed instantly.
5. –

([Go to Mark chapter 8](#MarkChapter8))

### Answers Mark chapter 8

Answers to Questions

1. –
2. Jesus had compassion on the crowd, because they were hungry. They had been with him in the desert for three days with no access to food (v 2).
3. The disciples had seven loaves of bread and a few small fish when the feeding miracle was about to take place (v 5, 7). But afterward, the leftovers filled seven large baskets – even after four thousand men had had enough to eat (v 8).
4. The Pharisees asked Jesus for “a sign from heaven” (v 11).
5. Jesus refused to do anything at all about the request of the Pharisees (v 12–13).
6. The disciples and Jesus traveled by boat from Dalmanutha to Bethsaida (v 13). The problem they faced was that they had forgotten to bring any fresh food for their journey. So all they had was one loaf of old bread (v 14).
7. Jesus told his disciples to be careful about the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of king Herod (v 15).
8. Jesus accused his disciples of not understanding (v 17, 21).
9. The healing of the blind man at Bethsaida took place outside the town (v 23). It seems as if Jesus didn’t want the townsmen to witness the miracle or to know about it, because afterward he sent the man away and told him not to return to the town (v 26).
10. The “two-stage” healing of the blind man at Bethsaida (v 22–26):
    1. First, Jesus put saliva on the man’s eyes and asked him if he could see. The man answered that he could see, but everything was very blurred.
    2. Second, Jesus again laid his hands on the man’s eyes and healed him completely.
11. People in the northernmost part of Palestine thought Jesus was somebody who had returned from the dead (v 27–30). Some (like king Herod in 6:16) thought he was John the Baptist. Others thought he was Elijah (compare the prophecy in Malachi 4:5; and Mark 6:15). Yet others thought he was some other Old Testament prophet (compare 6:15).
12. Peter (and probably also the other disciples) were now convinced that Jesus was “the Christ,” the Messiah (the Anointed King) whom the Jews at that time were waiting and praying for (v 29).
13. Jesus used the title “the Son of Man” about himself as he predicted his suffering and death (v 31).
14. Peter took Jesus aside to rebuke Jesus for teaching that the Son of Man (Jesus himself) had to be rejected by the leaders, and be killed, and rise again after three days (v 31–32).
15. Jesus’ evaluation of Peter’s rebuke was very harsh. He even called him Satan, because his thoughts were ungodly and worldly (v 33).
16. In 8:34–9:1, Jesus addresses both his disciples and a larger group of people.
17. According to verse 34, Jesus requires his followers to deny themselves and take up their cross and follow him. Jesus means that those who follow him must totally commit their lives to him. Their lives are no longer their own. They die to themselves so that they can live for him.
18. According to Jesus’ statement in verse 35, those who lose their (physical) lives for his sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save their lives. This means that when they die, they will have eternal life.
19. Those who are ashamed of Jesus and his words will at the return of Jesus in glory (which will happen at his second coming) find that Jesus will be ashamed of them (v 38).
20. Jesus said about some of the people who were listening to his words about discipleship that they would not die until they saw that the Kingdom of God has come with power (9:1).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. –
2. The Pharisees asked Jesus for “a sign from heaven,” because they wanted to test him. I think that there could have been two reasons why Jesus answered them in the way he did and refused to fulfill their request (v 11–13):
   1. Jesus knew that the Pharisees were not serious about their request. They just wanted to give him trouble. They had not come to get to know him better and to understand who he was. But they had come with evil intentions.
   2. Jesus had already given the people plenty of “signs from heaven” to enable them to realize his identity and his mission: He had taught with divine authority in the synagogues. He had healed the sick. He had delivered the demon-possessed. He had rebuked the wind and the waves. He had walked on the water. He had multiplied the loaves and the fish. The need now was not for more signs, but for understanding the signs (compare v 17, 21). And for that they needed eyes to see and ears to hear (v 18) and hearts that were not hardened (v 17; compare 6:52).
3. Jesus uses the metaphor “yeast” five times in the gospels:
   1. Twice in a positive way about the spreading influence of the Kingdom of God in the parallel parables found in Matt 13:33 and Luke 13:21: Just as the yeast gradually works through the dough, so the Kingdom of God will gradually influence people in this world.
   2. Three times in a negative way in connection with the Pharisees:
      * Twice in the parallel texts in Matt 16:6–12 (where Matthew explains that Jesus was using “yeast” with reference to the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees, v 12) and Mark 8:15 (where the context shows that Jesus refers to the unwillingness to understand his identity). So although these stories are parallel, Jesus uses the “yeast” metaphor in two slightly different ways.
      * The third time in Luke 12:1, where Jesus himself explains how he wants the metaphor to be understood: “Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, that is, their hypocrisy.”
4. The message that Jesus had for his disciples in the passage “The yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod” (v 14–21) has two parts:
   1. First, Jesus warned his disciples of the “yeast” of the Pharisees and the “yeast” of king Herod. He wanted his disciples not be like those persons in their unwillingness to accept Jesus and his good news about the Kingdom of God. When the disciples didn’t understand what Jesus was talking about (they seem to have thought that he was blaming them for not bringing fresh bread on their journey to Bethsaida), he went to the next point of his message:
   2. Jesus then accused his disciples of being “hardhearted, “blind,” “deaf,” and “forgetful.” By these metaphors he meant that the disciples had become like the Pharisees and king Herod in the sense that they did not understand Jesus’ true identity and the real significance of the signs of the two feeding miracles that they themselves had been part of and witnessed.
5. Jesus was very strict telling the disciples not to reveal his identity as “the Messiah” (v 27–30), because they still didn’t fully understand what kind of Messiah he was. Jesus had not been born to become a political leader who would liberate the Jews from the oppression of the Roman emperors and establish himself in Jerusalem as an independent king of the Jews. No, he had come in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy: He was the suffering servant of the Lord, who had to suffer and die for the sins of his people (see Is 52:13–53:12).
6. Jesus rebuked Peter so harshly that he even called him “Satan” (v 33), because Peter (and the other apostles) wanted to stop him from fulfilling his mission: to suffer the rejection of the Jewish leaders, to be disgracefully executed on the cross, and to rise from the dead after three days (v 31–32).
7. I think Jesus expected his listeners to draw this kind of conclusion from his statement about “life” in verse 35: Our Christian spiritual life is so much more important than our physical life in this world. When we, who call ourselves Christian believers and followers of Christ, focus too much on our life in this world, we will forget about Jesus and the Kingdom of God – and we will lose our spiritual/eternal life. On the other hand, even if we are killed for the sake of Jesus and for his gospel, our life is not really lost – because we have gained eternal life.
8. Jesus’ two questions in verses 36–37 are rhetorical. A rhetorical question has no real answer (or the answer is obvious), so it is more like a statement or an exclamation in the grammatical form of a question. Instead of the first question, Jesus could have exclaimed, “Eternal life is so much more valuable than worldly riches!” And instead of the second question, Jesus could have exclaimed, “Of, course, you cannot buy eternal life with worldly possessions!”
9. Jesus’ statement in verse 38 can be explained like this: A follower and a disciple of Jesus in this sinful world must not be ashamed of Jesus or of the gospel of the Kingdom of God. If a Christian believer is ashamed of his Savior and his ministry now, he will find out that Jesus will be ashamed of him then – at his second coming.
10. We can learn these things about discipleship from Jesus’ words in verses 34–38:
    1. To be a disciple of Jesus is to be his follower (v 34), to walk after him, to walk in his footsteps. So Jesus expects us as Christian believers to become more and more like him. One way to do that, is to read about him in the New Testament texts. When we study and meditate on Jesus – on how he is described in the four gospels and on how he is presented by the writers of the epistles – we get to know him better. Another way is to spend time with him in prayer and allow the Holy Spirit to paint his picture clearer and more vividly in our hearts. We must know him to be able to become more like him.
    2. To be a disciple of Jesus is to deny oneself (v 34). This does not mean that Jesus expects all Christian believers to become sadhus or hermits. But it means that we must no longer have our own self in the center of our universe. Jesus must be the center of our lives. Our focus changes from ourselves to him and his Kingdom.
    3. To be a disciple of Jesus is to take up one’s cross for the sake of Jesus and the gospel of the Kingdom of God (v 34–35). This means that we as Christian believers must realize that a life with Jesus and a life for his Kingdom may be a life of suffering and death. Jesus our Lord and Savior underwent rejection, great suffering, and death (v 31), and we should not be surprised if our lives in his footsteps become like his. Our lives are no longer our own. They have been totally committed to Jesus and his Kingdom.
    4. To be a disciple of Jesus is to have the right priorities (v 35–36). See the answer to questions 7 and 8 above.
    5. A disciple of Jesus is not ashamed of Jesus and his gospel about the Kingdom of God (v 38). See the answer to question 9 above.
11. Evaluation of Jesus’ statement “There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Kingdom of God come with power”:

* Most Bible scholar prefer alternative 1. It is supported by the context of Jesus’ transfiguration in all three synoptic gospels. It is also supported by 2 Peter 1:16–18, where Peter uses the word “glory” about Jesus’ trans-figuration.
* Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 are also good, for they are all cases where Jesus “came” and powerfully advanced his kingdom, which was partially but not yet fully realized. Perhaps Jesus had these three alternatives in combination in mind: the breaking forth of the Kingdom of God with his death/resurrection, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the powerful ministry of the early church in which some of his disciples played a key role.
* But the last alternative (the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70) is not at all convincing, because the judgment on Jerusalem does not demonstrate the positive growth of the Kingdom of God.

([Go to Mark chapter 9](#MarkChapter9))

### Answers Mark chapter 9

Answers to Questions

1. The context of the story of the transfiguration: It is preceded by a passage (8:31–9:1), in which Jesus predicts his death and suffering and teaches about the cost of discipleship, ending with a statement that some of his disciples would not die until they had seen the kingdom of God come with power. The story is followed by an account of the healing of a boy with an evil spirit (9:14–27). The transfiguration took place on a high mountain and only three of the disciples were present: Peter, James and John (v 2).
2. Jesus was changed on the mountain: His clothes became supernaturally white and dazzling (v 2–3).
3. The two men that Jesus talked with on the mountain were Moses representing the Old Testament covenant and the law and Elijah representing the Old Testament prophets (v 4 with comment).
4. The disciples reacted to Jesus’ transfiguration with confusion and fright (v 5–6).
5. The message of the voice from heaven (v 7):
   1. It proclaimed Jesus as God’s Son and God’s Beloved.
   2. It told the disciples to listen to Jesus.
6. On the way down the mountain, Jesus ordered his disciples not to let anybody know about their experience with Jesus on the mountain – not until his resurrection (v 9).
7. As they came down from the mountain, the disciples were confused about two things (v 10–13):
   1. What did Jesus mean about “the Son of Man rising from the dead”?
   2. If Jesus was the Messiah, why had the Old Testament prophets said that Elijah must come first?
8. These people were gathered around the boy with the unclean spirit (v 14–17):
   1. The nine disciples who had not been with Jesus at his transfiguration
   2. Some scribes (who must have come to check on Jesus)
   3. A large crowd of people
   4. The father of the boy who suffered from an unclean spirit
9. The unclean spirit had troubled the boy ever since his childhood (v 17–21), like this:

* It made him mute.
* It caused severe seizures (foaming at the mouth, gnashing of teeth, rigidness, convulsions, rolling on the ground)
* Jesus addressed the unclean spirit, “You mute and deaf spirit” (v 25), which indicates that the boy was also deaf.

1. When Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit it came out, while the boy shrieked, convulsed, fell down, and looked like dead (v 25–27).
2. After the healing of the boy, the disciples asked Jesus why they had been unable to drive out the demon. Jesus answered them that demons like this could only be driven out by prayer (v 28–29).
3. Jesus’ ministry as he passed through Galilee (v 30–32):
   1. His public ministry seems to have been over: He did not speak to the crowds and the did not perform any miracles. He did not even want people to know that he was around.
   2. Instead, his ministry consisted of teaching his disciples. And his teaching focused on his suffering, death and resurrection.
4. The disciples didn’t ask Jesus what he meant by his teaching because they were afraid to reveal that they didn’t understand what he was talking about (v 32).
5. On the road to Capernaum, the disciples had been arguing about who was the greatest among them (v 33–34).
6. Jesus explained that the greatest in the Kingdom of God is the person who is the servant of everybody else (v 35).
7. The complaint John brought to Jesus was that he had seen a man who did not belong to the group of Jesus’ twelve disciples drive out demons in Jesus’ name (v 38–41).
8. Jesus did not agree with John. In fact, he said, anyone who has accepted Jesus and ministers in his name – even if this “ministry” only consists of giving a cup of water to a thirsty person – is for Jesus, not against him (v 38–41).
9. Jesus mentions three parts of the body in verses 43–48 that can cause a believer to sin:
   1. Your hand: things you do
   2. Your foot: places you go
   3. Your eye: things you watch

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Mark says the Elijah and Moses were talking with Jesus (v 4). Luke’s account of this event (Luke 9:29–36) tells us that the topic of their talk was Jesus’ “departure, which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31). Luke probably chose the word “departure” (“exodus” in Greek, instead of the word “death”) to make the link between Moses (who delivered the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt) and Jesus, our Savior and Deliverer, more obvious. The Old Testament Exodus event foreshadows the salvation that Jesus brought through his death and resurrection.
2. We cannot know for certain why Peter wanted to put up shelters for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah (v 5): Perhaps he wanted to erect new tents of meeting where God could again communicate with his people (compare Ex 29:42). Or he may have been thinking of the booths used at the Feast of Tabernacles (see Lev 23:42). Or, most probably, he just wanted to prolong the wonderful experience on the mountain. This is implied by Luke’s account: “Just as the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him…” (Luke 9:33).
3. A comparison of the accounts of the transfiguration (Mark 9:2–14; Matt 17:1–13; Luke 9:29–36):
   1. The context of the three accounts are the same (see answer to question 1).
   2. One unexpected difference is the time of the event: Matthew and Mark have “After six days,” but Luke has “About eight days…” This difference can easily be explained by the two ways of calculating time in those days. One way was to count only full days (“After six full days”). The other way was to include part of a day. So we would have written, “After seven days…” or “After a week…”
   3. Mark’s account is the briefest. It does not include some of the information found in the other accounts:
      * Jesus went to the mountain to pray, and his transfiguration took place while he was praying (only in Luke).
      * His face shone like the sun (in Matthew). The appearance of his face changed (in Luke).
      * Moses and Elijah are described: They appeared in glorious splendor (only in Luke).
      * The topic of the conversation was Jesus’ death (“departure”) that would soon take place in Jerusalem (only in Luke).
      * The sleepiness of the disciples (only in Luke).
      * The disciples’ reaction to the voice by falling facedown to the ground, and Jesus comforting them (only in Matthew).
   4. A small variation in the order of events on the mountain: The disciples became frightened before the voice in Mark, but after the voice in Matthew and Luke.
   5. Information not included in Luke and Matthew:
      * The fright of the disciples (not mentioned in Luke)
      * Jesus’ order to the disciples not to talk about their experience (not mentioned in Luke)
      * The disciples’ questions about the resurrection of the Son of Man (mentioned neither in Matthew nor in Luke) and about the coming of Elijah (not mentioned in Luke)

There are also some other minor differences.

1. The significance of the transfiguration account in the context of the gospel narrative can be understood like this:
   1. Significance for Jesus: The experience gave him encouragement before his suffering and death on the cross.
   2. Significance for the disciples: It helped them understand (at least later) the necessity of the cross (Luke states that the topic of the conversation between Jesus, Moses and Elijah was Jesus’ death). It also helped them (and the readers of the gospels) see the link between Jesus’ suffering and Jesus’ glory.
   3. Finally, it can be seen as an entry for Jesus into the glory in which he would later reign (Matt 16:28 and my comment on Think and discuss 11 in the previous study).
2. Jesus’ words about Elijah are explained in the comments on verses 11–13.
3. Jesus’ statement, “All things are possible for him who believes” (v 23) can grammatically be understood in three different ways, like this:
   1. “I, Jesus, can do anything because my faith is so great.” If this was what Jesus meant, the man evidently did not understand it – and Jesus did not bother to correct him.
   2. “Everything is possible for you if only you have sufficient faith.” If this was what Jesus meant, then the man’s reaction throughout the story makes no sense.
   3. “Everything is possible if you have faith in what I, Jesus, can do for you.” This must be what Jesus meant. It places the emphasis on the relationship of trust (“faith”) between the man and Jesus. It also explains the struggle that the man had with his faith throughout the story: The man came with his son to the disciples believing that they would heal him – but they could not. So when Jesus arrived, the man’s faith had taken a beating and he wondered if Jesus would be able to heal his son (“if you can”). Finally, the man cried out to Jesus to help him put his trust in him. Jesus heard his prayer and delivered his son. The man’s trust in Jesus was rewarded.
4. A comparison of verse 29 in the Kannada pavitra grantha and satyavEdavu translations shows an important difference: pavitra grantha has “with prayer and fasting,” satyavEdavu only has “with prayer.” The reason for the difference is that they reflect different versions of the Greek text. Modern Bible scholars agree that the version “with prayer” reflects the original text and the “and fasting” was added later.
5. Jesus’ explanation in verse 29 can be understood like this: The disciples had taken for granted that the authority over evil spirits that Jesus had given them (see 6:7) was their own and that it belonged to them. So they no longer depended on God for it. Their failure to heal the boy showed their lack of dependence on God (lack of “faith,” lack of trust in God) – it showed their lack of prayer: “Casting out of demons like this requires prayer dependence on God, which is true faith, and it doesn’t have to be bigger than a mustard seed” (compare the parallel text in Matt 17:19–21).
6. We understand these things about true greatness in the Kingdom of God from verses 33–37:
   1. True greatness in the Kingdom of God is totally different from greatness in this world.
   2. It is actually a complete reversal of worldly greatness. In this world, the one who serves others is considered “last.” But that “last” person is really the “first” person in the Kingdom of God. In the Kingdom of God serving others is the mark of true greatness.
   3. To demonstrate this truth Jesus took a little child – children held a very lowly place in ancient society – and said that if we welcome such a lowly person in Jesus’ name we actually welcome Jesus himself. But we not only welcome Jesus, we also welcome his Father, God who sent Jesus to this world.
7. There is no contradiction between Jesus’ words in verse 40 (“Whoever is not against us is for us”) and his words in Matt 12:30 (“Whoever is not with me is against me”). In Matthew, Jesus is referring to those who vehemently opposed him. Here in Mark, Jesus is referring to those who sympathized with Jesus and his ministry.
8. A comparison of verses 43–48 in the Kannada pavitra grantha and satyavEdavu translations:
   1. The Kannada pavitra grantha translation has included v 44 and v 46.
   2. The Kannada satyavEdavu translation doesn’t have v 44 and v 46.

My conclusion: The translations have followed different Greek manuscripts. Modern Bible scholars agree that v 44 and v 46 were not part of Mark’s original manuscript, but were included by early copyists. This was easily done as the verses are identical with v 48 (which is a quotation from Isaiah).

1. Jesus uses the figure of speech called hyperbole in verse 47: Jesus is not demanding that his followers must literally remove a hand, a foot, or an eye. But he wants them to cease with the sinful activities that these bodily members are involved in. To get his point across to his listeners Jesus uses hyperbole (“cut off your hand and your foot,” “pluck out your eye”). He purposefully exaggerates in order to show that it is so important to enter into eternal life that extreme measures must be taken to remove whatever will prevent it (for example sin).
2. “Salt” stands for different things in verse 49 and in verse 50:
   1. In verse 49 salt stands for the sacrificial suffering that believers can expect from life in this world as they look forward to the consummation of the Kingdom of God.
   2. In verse 50 salt stands for the Kingdom of God identity that Jesus expects from his followers. As salt can become useless, so Christian believers run a risk of losing their identity as true followers of Christ.

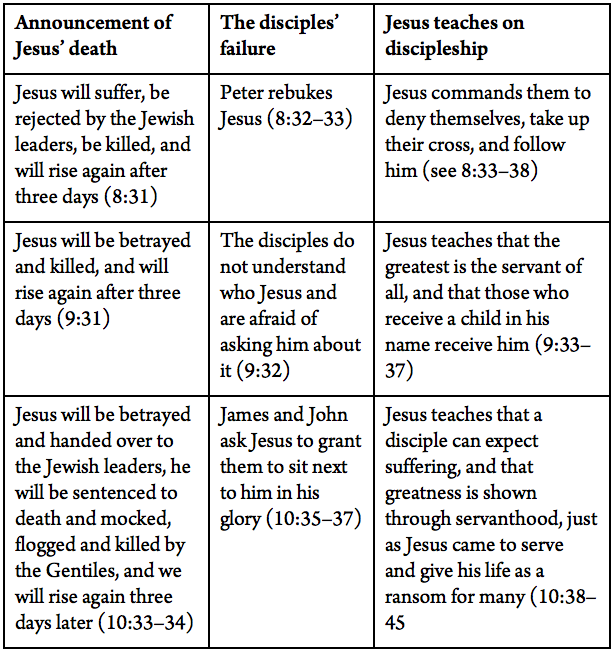
([Go to Mark chapter 10](#MarkChapter10))

### Answers Mark chapter 10

Answers to Questions

1. –
2. The events of this chapter take pace east of the Jordan river (v 1). This was Perea and belonged to the kingdom of Herod Antipas.
3. Some Pharisees come to see Jesus to test and trap him (v 2). They probably wanted to find some good reason to accuse him before king Herod Antipas.
4. Jesus summarized his teaching on marriage in verses 5–12 by the statement, “Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate” (v 9).
5. People brought their small children to Jesus so that he would bless them (v 13).
6. The disciples became upset when they saw the small children, so they scolded the parents (v 13).
7. Jesus became angry when he saw the way in which his disciples behaved with the children’s parents (v 14).
8. Jesus took up the small children in his arms and blessed them (v 16).
9. The man wanted Jesus to help him find an answer to his question what a person needs to do to inherit eternal life (v 17). So he wanted to know what he should do to be saved (or to enter the Kingdom of God).
10. From the man’s reply we understand that he had carefully observed the Ten Commandments ever since his youth (v 19–20). From the perspective of the Jewish law he was a good man.
11. Jesus then asked the man to give away all his possessions to the poor and then become his disciple (v 21).
12. The man left Jesus because his wealth made him unwilling to obey Jesus’ command (v 22).
13. Jesus must have been disappointed when the man left him. We can understand that from Jesus’ comment to his disciples about the difficulty of the wealthy to be saved (v 23–25).
14. Jesus made his statement about a camel going through the eye of a needle to illustrate that it is impossible for man to achieve salvation through his own efforts (see comment on verse 25).
15. Jesus answered the question that the disciples had about salvation by stating that only God can save a person (v 27).
16. Peter described the commitment of Jesus’ first disciples like this: “We have left everything and followed you” (v 28).
17. The promises that Jesus made to his followers in verses 29–31:
    1. They would be abundantly rewarded in this world.
    2. They would experience persecutions in this world.
    3. They would receive eternal life in the coming age.
18. Jesus’ statement, “Many who are first will be last, and the last will be first” (v 31) means that those who are generally considered to be the most important people in this present world may not be important from the perspective of the Kingdom of God. And those who are generally looked down upon in this present world may be really important from the perspective of the Kingdom of God. With the coming of the future age the truth about each person will become evident (see also comment on verse 31).
19. Jesus revealed these things to his disciples on the road to Jerusalem (v 33–34):
    1. He would be betrayed and handed over to the Jewish leaders.
    2. The Jewish leaders would condemn Jesus to death but hand him over to the Gentiles and have them execute him.
    3. The Gentiles would mock him, flog him, and kill him.
    4. He would rise from death three days later.
20. James and John requested Jesus to let them have the most honorable places in the Kingdom of God (v 35–37).
21. Jesus challenged the request of James and John. How could they ask for these places of honor in Jesus “glory,” unless they were willing to follow him along the whole road to his glory – a road that would take them through suffering and death (v 35–38)?
22. The figurative language that Jesus uses in verse 39 (see the comments on this verse):
    1. To drink another person’s cup means to be willing to go through what he has to go through, and to suffer what he has to suffer. In the case of Jesus, his suffering would also include God’s judgment (a “cup of wine with God’s wrath”) that Jesus was to suffer for the redemption of mankind.
    2. To be baptized with another person’s baptism means to go through what he goes through, and to suffer what he has to suffer. In the case of Jesus, his suffering also included death (and resurrection).
23. Jesus was not able to grant the request of James and John, because these highest places of honor in the Kingdom of God were reserved for those whom God the Father had prepared them for (v 40).
24. Jesus characterized the rulers of this present world as tyrants who lords over their people (v 42).
25. Jesus characterized greatness in the Kingdom of God by “servanthood” and “being the slave of all” (v 44–45).
26. Jesus described his own mission as one of servanthood and of death as a ransom for many (v 45).
27. Bartimaeus was a blind beggar who sat by the roadside just outside the city of Jericho, when Jesus passed by on his way from Galilee to Jerusalem (v 46).
28. Bartimaeus shouted even more loudly, when people asked him to be quiet (v 48).
29. Jesus commended Bartimaeus for his faith and gave him his sight back. Bartimaeus then followed Jesus on the way (v 52).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. The passage about divorce (v 2–12) can be summarized like this: The Pharisees came to Jesus with a tricky question: “Is divorce lawful or not?” Jesus avoided a direct answer to the question. Instead he reminded them that God originally intended marriage to be a life-long union between husband and wife. But the fall of man resulted in a society where people turned away from God and his will for mankind. That is why the law of Moses had to allow divorce under certain conditions (the purpose of this divorce law, Deut 24:1–4, was to reduce the hardship of the consequences of divorce). Jesus closed this reply to the Pharisees with a clear statement: “What God has joined together, man should not separate.” Later he privately explained to his disciples that it is adultery to divorce and then marry another person’s husband or wife.
2. The two lessons that Jesus gave his disciples in the passage about little children (v 13–16):
   1. “Don’t exclude the children!” Jesus wanted children to come to him and was upset when his disciples hindered them.
   2. “You must become childlike!” The kingdom of God belongs to those who, like children, are prepared to totally trust God. A child is completely dependent on his parents for everything. In the same way, we must be completely dependent on God, our heavenly Father, for all our needs. We cannot earn the right to (or deserve the privilege of) citizenship in the Kingdom of God. We can only – in a childlike way – thankfully accept the Kingdom of God as a wonderful gift from God.
3. Jesus’ answer to the man’s question about salvation/eternal life (v 17–27) can be explained like this:
   1. Only God is truly good. So the goodness we as human beings can achieve by being faithful followers of the law (which makes us good in the eyes of our fellow beings) cannot make us good in God’s eyes. Obedience to the law can never save us. We cannot inherit eternal life (or “enter into the Kingdom of God”) through any effort of our own.
   2. Only God can save us. So we must accept God’s salvation.
   3. We demonstrate that we have accepted God’s salvation as we turn away from the things that bind us in this present world (in the case of the man in this passage it was his love for wealth, for us it could be other things) and become sincere followers of Jesus.
4. Jesus’ statement that his followers will “receive a hundredfold now in this age – houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields – and with them, persecutions” (v 30) can be understood like this:
   1. This statement came as a response to Peter’s proclamation that the first disciples had left everything to follow Jesus. So Peter implied that they had sacrificed everything for the sake of the Kingdom of God (v 28).
   2. Jesus claimed that what may seem to be a sacrifice in this this world (the loss of everything – family and property) is not really a sacrifice. The followers of Jesus will be abundantly blessed not only spiritually, but also with family and property even in this present world – and even in the midst of persecution and suffering. Jesus probably referred to the fellowship of believers (the church) that would become the family and the security of those who followed him (v 29–30).
   3. In addition, the followers of Jesus have their time perspective changed as the result of knowing that after this present evil world there will be eternal life in the coming age. They can look forward to eternal salvation with the consummation of the Kingdom of God.
5. Jesus three major passion predictions in Mark’s gospel (8:31–38; 9:31–37; 10:33–45) compared:
6. Jesus’ teaching on greatness in the Kingdom of God as found in verses 41–45:
   1. Greatness in the Kingdom of God is a complete opposite to greatness in this present world.
   2. To be great in this present world means to rule and lord over others, even to be their tyrant.
   3. To be great in the Kingdom of God means to serve others, even to be the slave of others.
   4. Jesus personifies this Kingdom of God greatness as he suffers death on the cross for the salvation of others.
7. I think Jesus healed Bartimaeus (v 46–52) because he had compassion on this poor blind man (v 47, 48), who had complete trust in him. Jesus describes this trust with the words “your faith has made you well” (v 52).

Comments on Reflect and prepare

1. Jesus’ teaching about divorce in verses 2–12 and the practical implications of this passage for our own situation in the South Indian church today (also taking Paul’s teaching in 1 Cor 7:12–15 into consideration).

These could be your points for a group of South Indian church leaders to reflect on:

* 1. God’s original plan for husband and wife did not need any provision for divorce. Explain and discuss this statement.
  2. After the Fall, God saw that the Israelites needed some provision for divorce. Explain and discuss this statement.
  3. Why was divorce accepted in the Jewish society? Under what circumstances was it accepted?
  4. What does Paul teach about divorce in 1 Cor 7:12–15? Can his teaching be applied to our own situation? If so, how and to what extent?
  5. Finally, in the light of the four previous points, is there any situation in which we should allow a couple to divorce? If so, what would such a situation look like? What should be our primary concerns when we decide on matters like this?

1. –
2. –

([Go to Mark chapter 11](#MarkChapter11))

### Answers Mark chapter 11

Answers to Questions

1. Jesus sent two of his disciples into the village ahead of them in order to bring a colt. He wanted to ride on this colt as he entered Jerusalem. This was to fulfill the messianic prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 (v 1–7).
2. Jesus sat up on the colt and rode into Jerusalem (v 7).
3. When the people saw Jesus coming into Jerusalem, they spread their clothes and leafy branches on the ground in front of him. Then they shouted and sang a verse from Psalm 118, which was a blessing on the messianic king (v 8–10).
4. After Jesus had arrived in Jerusalem, he went to the temple and looked around in it. In the evening he went to Bethany where he spent the night with his disciples, probably in the house of his friends Lazarus, Martha and Mary, John 12:1 (v 11).
5. The disciples heard Jesus say about the fig tree that it would never again bear fruit (v 14).
6. When Jesus entered the temple, he chased out all those who were selling and buying and changing money – and overturned their tables. He also stopped those who were using the temple courts as a shortcut. In support of his actions, he quoted the Old Testament prophets about God’s purpose with the temple: It was to be a house of prayer for all the nations and not a “den of robbers” (v 15–17).
7. When the Jewish leaders heard about what Jesus had done in the temple, they intensified their efforts to stop him. They were even looking for a way to kill him (v 18).
8. The Jewish leaders were afraid of Jesus, because the crowds of people were fascinated by his teaching (v 18).
9. The following morning, the fig tree had withered, all the way down to its roots (v 20).
10. When Peter pointed out to Jesus that the fig tree had withered, Jesus said nothing about the fig tree. Instead he spoke about faith in God (v 22).
11. The key words in the last part of Jesus’ comment to his disciples after the withering of the fig tree are “prayer” and “forgiveness” (v 24–25).
12. The Jewish leaders questioned Jesus’ authority (v 28) to clear out the temple court, which they had heard him do the previous day (v 15–18).
13. The Jewish leaders did not answer Jesus’ question about John the Baptist’s ministry – if it was from God, or if it was his own. Instead they just told him that they didn’t know (v 29–33).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. All four gospels have accounts of Jesus’ triumphal entry (see Matt 21:1–11; Mark 11:1–11; Luke 19:28–40; and John 12:12–16). A comparison of the four accounts:
   1. All four gospels describe the joyous festival mood of the occasion. All four gospels quote Ps 118:26 (“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord”). But they differ in what surrounds this quotation. Matthew precedes it with “Hosanna to the Son of David” (the “hosanna” is found several times in the Old Testament, for example Ps 118:25; but the crowd adds the messianic title “to the Son of David”) and closes with “Hosanna in the highest.” Mark precedes it with “Hosanna” (from Ps 118:5) and closes with “Hosanna in the highest.” Luke has nothing before it and closes with “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.” John precedes it with “Hosanna” (from Ps 118:25) and closes it with “Blessed is the King of Israel.” These differences can easily be accounted for, as the jubilant crowd – and the disciples – must have shouted many things, a variety of which the gospel writers included in their accounts.
   2. Matthew: His account is preceded by the story of the healing of two blind men. Only Matthew has two animals (a donkey and its colt). He quotes Zech 9:9 (“Behold, your king comes to you, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey”) as being fulfilled in connection with the two disciples bringing the two animals. He uses the expressions “a very large crowd” and “the crowds” about the crowd. His account ends with Jesus entering Jerusalem and the whole city being stirred. They ask, “Who is this?” And the crowds answer, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”
   3. Mark: His account is preceded by the story about the healing of blind Bartimaeus. He has more details about how the two disciples bring the colt. He uses the expression “many people” about the crowd. His account ends with Jesus entering Jerusalem and going to the temple.
   4. Luke: His account is preceded by the parable of the ten minas. His details are similar to Mark’s about how the two disciples bring the colt. He uses the expressions “people” and “the whole crowd of disciples” about the crowd. He adds that the crowd praise God for all the miracles they have seen. He does not mention any branches. He does not mention (or allude to) the Zechariah 9:9 prophecy. His account ends with some of the Pharisees telling Jesus to rebuke his disciples, but Jesus answers, “If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.” Then follows Jesus’ prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem.
   5. John: His account is preceded by the story about Mary anointing Jesus in their home at Bethania. He does not mention Bethphage, the two disciples and the colt. Instead Jesus obtains the colt in the middle of the story, and Zechariah 9:9 (“see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt”) is quoted in that connection. He uses the expression “the great crowd” about the crowd. He mentions that the branches were “palm branches.” His account ends with the information that the disciples did not understand what was happening, but they did so after Jesus was glorified.
   6. We can conclude that the gospel writers used their source material with some freedom. They included details and made remarks that fit their overall themes and messages. For example: Matthew has a theme throughout his gospel of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. This can be seen also in his account of the triumphal entry.
2. Luke has not included the story of the fig tree in his gospel. In its place he has a unique account of Jesus weeping over the city of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41–44). This fact would strengthen the interpretation that the story of the fig tree in Mark’s gospel (11:12–14 and 20–21) is a prophecy (Jesus predicting what is going to happen to Jerusalem and its temple) and not a curse (neither of the fig tree nor of the sinful city of Jerusalem and its temple).
3. The Pharisees avoided answering Jesus’ question about the origin of John the Baptist’s ministry (v 29–33). Jesus’ question trapped them. If they answered “from God,” then why had they opposed him? If they answered “from himself,” then they would have had to face opposition from all the people who had believed in John. They would also have disqualified themselves as judges of spiritual matters. John’s ministry was evidently from God, and John and his ministry pointed to Jesus. So already their opening question about Jesus’ authority revealed their spiritual blindness.
4. Jesus taught his disciples about faith, prayer and forgiveness in connection with the story about the withered fig tree. This is the link between these three spiritual concepts:
   1. To believe that a leafy fig tree could wither all the way to its roots within one day, of course, required faith in Jesus and his word. That this incident prophetically pointed forward to the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple also required faith in God and in the fulfillment of his word through Jesus. So this is the link between the fig tree and “faith.”
   2. Jesus connects this statement about faith (verse 23) with prayer as he says, “Therefore I tell you” (the beginning of verse 24). The reason is that in our Christian lives nothing can be achieved without prayer. Jesus himself had demonstrated this truth earlier in the gospel (see 1:35; 6:46) and he would demonstrate it again a couple of days later in the garden of Gethsemane (14:32–40). To pray is actually the best way to show that you have faith in God and that you trust him with your life. So prayer is an absolutely crucial part of discipleship.
   3. But prayer exists in a specific environment. This environment is forgiveness. We can say that forgiveness is the “culture” of prayer. If we lack forgiveness in our hearts when we approach God in prayer, then we have destroyed the atmosphere in which prayer should be offered and can be answered.
   4. So in these few verses (Mark 11:22–25), Jesus touches on – and connects – three essential aspects of Christian discipleship: faith, prayer, and forgiveness.

([Go to Mark chapter 12](#MarkChapter12))

### Answers Mark chapter 12

Answers to Questions

1. The owner of the vineyard sent servants to his tenants to collect his share of the harvest from them (v 2).
2. The tenants mishandled the servants and sent them back empty-handed. They even killed some of them. This happened year after year (v 3–5).
3. The owner of the vineyard finally decided to send his son, because he thought that they would respect him (v 6).
4. The tenants killed the owner’s son and threw his dead body out of the vineyard, because they thought that with him dead they would be able to claim the property for themselves (v 7–8).
5. The owner came and destroyed the tenants and gave his vineyard to others to manage (v 9).
6. Jesus ended his parable with a quotation from Psalm 118:22–23 about how the stone that the builders rejected became the cornerstone (v 10–11).
7. The listeners (the Jewish leaders) reacted to the parable in three ways (v 12):
   1. They understood that it was about them and that it was a judgment on them.
   2. They became even more determined to have Jesus removed (arrested and then killed).
   3. But they left the temple and did not do anything right away, because they were afraid of how the people would react.
8. The Pharisees and the Herodians flattered Jesus like this (v 13–14):
   1. They called him “teacher,” although he was no qualified scribe or teacher of the law.
   2. They praised him for his sincerity, integrity, piety, and truthfulness, although they hated him and they themselves were hypocrites and were trying to trap him with their question.
9. Jesus answered the Pharisees and the Herodians the way he did, becasue he knew that they were hypocrites who were not genuinely interested in his answer, but only to trap him (v 13–17).
10. Jesus’ told the Pharisees and the Herodians that they should give the emperor what belonged to him and to God what belonged to him. They were utterly amazed at how Jesus had answered (v 17).
11. Some of the Sadducees came to Jesus with a question about the resurrection. They themselves did not believe in the resurrection of the body. Their intention was not to get an answer but to embarrass Jesus and to ridicule those who believed in the resurrection (v 18–19).
12. The Sadducees presented a “case story” to Jesus (v 19–22): A woman had been married to seven brothers in succession without any children. Now they were all dead, including the widow. So their question was: Whose wife would this woman be in their resurrected life? (v 23)
13. Jesus responded to the Sadducees with two accusations (v 24):
    1. They did not know the scriptures properly (not even the Pentateuch, which was the only part of the Old Testament texts accepted by the Sadducees).
    2. They did not know the power of God.
14. Jesus referred to the story about God revealing himself to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3:1–6) in support of his statement that God is not the God of the dead, but of the living (v 26–27).
15. One of the scribes (he was probably a Pharisee because most of the scribes belonged to that religious party) came to Jesus with a question about the most important commandment (v 28).
16. Jesus answered the question about the most important commandment by quoting two passages about love from the Old Testament (v 29–31), the first one (Deuteronomy 6:4–5) about loving God the covenant Lord, the second one (Leviticus 19:18) about loving one’s fellow man. By doing so, Jesus showed that these two aspects of love belong together and must not be separated.
17. The scribe was very happy with Jesus’ answer. He fully agreed with Jesus and even added that these commandments about love were more important than the offerings and sacrifices of the temple (v 32–33).
18. Jesus made a positive “evaluation” of the scribe and his comments (v 34): He had understood the message of the old covenant. But he had not yet entered the Kingdom of God, because he had not yet accepted Jesus and his claims.
19. The crowd responded to Jesus’ teaching in the temple about the identity of the Christ with delight (v 35–37). Perhaps they enjoyed finding their teachers outwitted by Jesus and his question.
20. A list of the criticism that Jesus had of the scribes in verses 38–40:
    1. They liked to show off in in public places dressed in their religious outfits.
    2. They enjoyed the attention of people as they visited the marketplaces.
    3. They expected to have the best seats in the synagogues and to be given the places of honor at parties.
    4. They were more concerned about their private income than the wellbeing of a poor and suffering widow. They didn’t mind seeing a poor widow lose her property as long as she paid her tithes and offerings to them.
    5. They showed off by saying long prayers. They wanted the listeners to be impressed by their many pious and beautiful words.

In other words: They were pompous, selfish, and hardhearted hypocrites.

1. The story about the widow’s offering took place in the temple, in the court of women, which was accessible to all Jews, both men and women. The temple treasury, containing boxes for contributions brought by the worshipers, was found there. (v 41).
2. Jesus praised the widow, because she had – even out of her poverty – given everything she had (v 43–44).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Jesus addressed the Jewish leaders in the parable of the evil tenants (v 1–12). “Them” in verse 1 points back to “the chief priests, the scribes and the elders” in 11:27. They were probably members of the Sanhedrin (the Jewish council or court), which consisted of more than 70 men representing the chief priests (who belonged to the party of the Sadducees), the scribes (most of whom belonged to the party of the Pharisees) and some other leaders. They were powerful enough (in spite of their country being under the rule of the Roman Empire and the kings that reigned under the Romans) to arrange for Jesus to be arrested and executed (compare verse 12).

These Jewish leaders were well acquainted with the song of the vineyard in Isaiah (5:1–7), which speaks about the nation of Israel as God’s vineyard. They would immediately have made the connection between the tenants of the parable and the leadership of the Jewish people. They were the present leaders of the Jews. They knew about Jesus’ reputation as the Son of David and the Son of God, and must have realized whom Jesus referred to by the owners son. They had rejected him (just as the builders ad rejected the stone that became a cornerstone). And they had been plotting his death.

1. Jesus avoided the trap that the Jewish leaders set for him with their question about paying taxes to the Roman emperor (v 13–17). He knew that they were insincere hypocrites who wanted trap him in a sensitive and political issue that they themselves did not agree on. So Jesus asked them for a Roman coin. By showing Jesus that they used such a coin, they revealed that they had acknowledged the emperor’s authority. So they had already answered their own question. Without openly stating so, they had admitted that they should pay the taxes required by the emperor, whom they acknowledged. Jesus’ final point was that our obedience to God does not do away with our obedience to the government. But note that Jesus did not say that the claims of God and the claims of the emperor are equally important for us. God must always come first in our lives.
2. Should South Indian believers today pay taxes to the government? Yes, I think so. If we acknowledge the need for a government, we should pay the required taxes to that government. And as long as we receive any kind of benefit or services from a government (for example education, infrastructure, police and courts and laws that regulate people’s lives) we should faithfully and honestly pay our taxes to that government. We should “give to the emperor what belongs to the emperor.”
3. The passage about the Sadducees and Jesus (v 18–27). Jesus proved that the Sadducees were wrong about the resurrection:
   1. They were wrong about their understanding of God’s power. In the resurrection there will be a new kind of existence through the power of God. Marriage will not exist as it does now, but all life will be like that of the angels (Jesus probably mentioned angels on purpose, because the Sadducees denied the existence of angels).
   2. They were wrong about their use of the Bible (which in their case was limited to the Pentateuch). They used one passages (Deut 25:5–6, about the duty of a man to marry his brother’s childless widow to ensure that brother’s family line did not die out) out of context to support their doctrine that there is no resurrection. They had failed to draw the correct conclusion from God’s statement about himself in Exodus 3:6 (he is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). God is God not of the dead, but of the living. So the power of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be evident when he raises their bodies in the resurrection.
4. Jesus argued like this (in verses 35–37) about the identity of the Messiah based on Ps 110:1. David, the author of the psalm, called the Messiah “my Lord." How could he at the same time be David’s son and David’s Lord? So although the Messiah is a descendant of David (he is the Son of David), he is also the Son of God and therefore senior in rank to David. That is why David calls him “my Lord.”
5. Jesus’ criticism of the scribes (v 38–40) – see my answer to question 20 above.

Here are some South Indian church life features (mainly concerning pastors and other church leaders), which at least in some cases could become modern equivalents to the negative points that Jesus makes about the scribes:

* 1. Pride and “respect”: Pastors insisting on being called “pastor.” Expecting to be seated in the front of the church. Expecting to be asked to speak or pray. Always expecting respect and special treatment.
  2. Selfish worldliness: Pastors insisting on good non-vegetarian food when visiting other churches or people’s homes. Mostly visiting homes where they can expect good offerings. Being friendly mostly with wealthy and educated church members. Showing poor and uneducated believers disrespect and negligence. Spending more money on personal comforts than on the ministry. Seeing their own needs, but forgetting about the need of others.
  3. Hypocritical religiosity: Using big words when talking. Saying unnecessarily long prayers in an unnecessarily loud voice. Always trying to sound and look “spiritual” in the company of people.
  4. Double standards: Worldly thoughts and ambitions, but appearing devout and spiritual among people. Admonishing others for mistakes and sins, but doing the same things themselves in secret.

1. Contrasts in the story about the widow’s offering (v 41–44):
   1. Contrast between many rich people putting in large sums and one poor widow putting in two small copper coins.
   2. Contrast between the rich giving out of their abundance and the poor widow giving out of their total lack of resources.
   3. Contrast in Jesus’ unspoken evaluation of the givers: Only the poor widow can be praised for her offering, not those who have given much.

([Go to Mark chapter 13](#MarkChapter13))

### Answers Mark chapter 13

Answers to Questions

1. The occasion at the beginning of this chapter (v 1–2): Jesus is leaving the Jerusalem temple together with his disciples.
2. According to Jesus, the fate of the Jerusalem temple would be total destruction (v 1–2).
3. The occasion of the main part of this chapter (v 3–37): Jesus and his disciples are sitting on the Mount of Olives looking down on the city of Jerusalem and its temple (v 3).
4. Jesus did not immediately answer his disciples’ questions about “signs and time.” Instead he told them to be watchful and careful so that they would not be led astray by people who claim to be the Messiah (v 5–6).
5. Jesus told his disciples not to be alarmed when they hear rumors of war (v 7).
6. Jesus described the “beginning of the birth pains” (v 8) like this:
   1. There will be wars between nations.
   2. There will be earthquakes.
   3. There will be famines.
7. Jesus told his disciples that these six things would happen to them (v 9–13):
   1. They would be taken to court, accused, found guilty and sentenced to be flogged.
   2. They would be taken before high officials and kings because of their faith in Jesus.
   3. They would be guided by the Holy Spirit as they defended themselves in the courts.
   4. They would be betrayed and accused by their own family members, even unto death.
   5. They would be hated by everybody because of the faith in Jesus.
   6. But they would be saved if they endured and did not deny Jesus.
8. Jesus said that in spite of all these difficulties and persecutions the gospel must be preached to all nations (v 9–13).
9. The expression “the abomination of desolation” (v 14) can be explained like this:
   1. An “abomination” causes disgust and violates things that are sacred. Here it is used about something that profanes the Jerusalem temple.
   2. This profanation of the temple will bring about its destruction.
10. God has “cut short those days” for the sake of his people, so that their salvation would not be put at risk (v 20).
11. Jesus told his disciples not to believe in those who claim to be the Messiah , even if they perform all kinds of miracles (v 21–22).
12. Jesus described his return like this (v 24–27):
    1. It will come after the sufferings that he had just described.
    2. The heavenly bodies (the sun, the moon, and the stars) will be disturbed.
    3. After that the Son of Man will come with great power and glory.
    4. He will instruct angels to gather God’s people from all over the world.
13. When the fig tree sprouts, people know that summer is about to arrive (v 28).
14. Verse 31 tells us that Jesus’ words are completely trustworthy.
15. Jesus told his disciples three things about his second coming (v 32–36):
    1. Nobody, except God the Father, knows when it will take place, not even the angels or Jesus while he was still on this earth.
    2. They must alway be expecting and be prepared for his second coming, because he can come at any time.
    3. They must be faithful and do their job, while they are waiting for his second coming.
16. Jesus’ main exhortation to his disciples in connection with his second coming was, “Keep awake! Don’t fall asleep! Watch!” (v 37).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Mark chapter 13 can be summarized like this: When Jesus’ disciples asked him about the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and the end of the age, his main message to them was to be faithful to him and his gospel in spite of difficulties and accusations. Nobody knows when “the Son of Man” will come in glory, but they must always watchfully expect it to happen and not listen to false Christs or false prophets even if they perform miracles.
2. A summary of verses 14–19: When those who live in Judah see the Jerusalem temple defiled, they must immediately leave the area and flee to the mountains in order to avoid the terrible sufferings that are about to take place.
3. The “lesson of the fig tree” (28–31): Fig trees were common in Palestine. So everybody knew that when their leaves started to sprout the summer season would soon come. In the same way, when people see the things happen that Jesus had described earlier in his speech, they will know that Jesus’ return is about to take place.
4. There are many opinions about what Jesus referred to by “this generation” in verse 30 (see my comment on this verse). One scholar has a suggestion which I find appealing: In Mark chapter 13, Jesus speaks about two events that both were future at that time (the destruction of Jerusalem with its temple in 70 AD and the end of the age at a later point in history). So perhaps also “this generation” should be understood to refer to both these events, like this: The generation of Jesus’ disciples (“this generation”) experienced the first future event (which happened in 70 AD). That generation figuratively represents (or foreshadows) the generation that will experience the second future event (the end of the age).
5. In any case, Jesus could not have meant that the generation of his disciples would experience his second coming and the end of the age. If he had done so, he would have been mistaken. But we, of course, believe that Jesus’ words are true and “will never pass away” (v 31).

(G[o to Mark chapter 14](#MarkChapter14))

### Answers Mark chapter 14

Answers to Questions

1. The events of Mark chapter 14 took place in Jerusalem in March/April at the very beginning of the annual pilgrim festivals of the Passover and the Unleavened Bread (v 1 and comment).
2. The Jewish leaders were afraid of arresting Jesus at this time of the year because so many people had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. The leaders were afraid of riots (v 1–2).
3. Jesus had been invited to a meal in the house of Simon the leper in Bethany (v 3).
4. The woman with the alabaster jar broke the jar open and poured the very valuable nard ointment that it contained on Jesus’ head (v 3).
5. Some of the people present were upset with the woman, because she had wasted such expensive ointment on Jesus. They thought that it would have been better if it had been sold and the money given to the poor (v 4–5).
6. Jesus evaluated the woman’s behavior very positively. He praised her for what she had done to him and said that she would be remembered for her deed (v 6, 8–9).
7. Jesus said that the woman would be remembered as long as the gospel is proclaimed (v 9).
8. Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests, because he wanted to betray Jesus, and they promised to pay him for his betrayal (v 10–11).
9. Jesus and his disciples celebrated the Passover meal in the upstairs guest room that belonged to an unnamed man who knew Jesus (v 12–16).
10. The disciples were distressed, because Jesus told them that one of them was going to betray him (v 17–19).
11. Jesus gave these three clues as to the identity of the betrayer (v 17–21):
    1. He would be one of the twelve.
    2. He would be one who was eating with Jesus.
    3. He would be one who was dipping bread in the bowl with Jesus.

But among the twelve only Judas Iscariot knew for sure the identity of the betrayer.

1. Jesus said that the bread was his body (v 22). The significance of this is that it represented Jesus’ presence with his followers (see also my comment on this verse).
2. Jesus said that the cup was his blood of the covenant poured out for many (v 24). The significance of this is that it represented Jesus’ death, which was a sacrifice that established a new covenant between God and his people (see also my comment on this verse).
3. When we compare verse 24 in the two Kannada pavitra grantha and satyavEdavu translations, we find that the first one has “the new covenant” while the second one has “the covenant.” The reason is that the translations are based on different Greek manuscripts. The word “new” is not found in the best manuscripts, so in this case satyavEdavu is the better Kannada translation. Two of the Lord’s Supper accounts have “new covenant” (Luke 22:20 and 1 Cor 11:25), while the other two only have “covenant” in the best Greek manuscripts (Matt 26:28 and Mark 14:24).
4. Jesus said that he would not again celebrate a festival meal like this with his disciples, not until the consummation of the Kingdom of God (v 25).
5. After they had finished their meal, Jesus and his disciples went to the Mount of Olives (v 26).
6. Jesus said that his disciples would all desert him at his capture. In support of this he quoted a sentence from the Old Testament prophet Zechariah (v 27 and comment).
7. Jesus said that he would meet his disciples in Galilee after his resurrection (v 28).
8. Jesus said Peter would deny him three times that very night (v 30).
9. All the disciples assured Jesus that they would rather die than deny him (v 31).
10. Jesus went to Gethsemane to pray (v 32).
11. As he walked away with Peter, James and John, Jesus was very distressed and troubled. He was in deep agony and felt like dying (v 33–34).
12. Jesus told the three disciples to stay awake while he went away to pray (v 34).
13. Jesus prayed about two things (v 35–36):
    1. That he would not have to go through his suffering and death
    2. That God’s will would be done, not his own
14. As Jesus was praying, the three disciples fell asleep (v 37).
15. The same thing happened three times (v 41).
16. Jesus told the three disciples that the time had come for him to be betrayed into the hands of sinners (v 41–42).
17. Judas Iscariot identified Jesus to those who had come to arrest him with the traditional kiss that a disciple used to greet his rabbi (teacher). This greeting was a prearranged sign to ensure that the crowd arrested the right person (v 43–46).
18. Jesus complained about the way in which he was arrested (v 48–49). He was no bandit, so there was no need for them to come with swords and clubs in the middle of the night. They could have arrested him during daytime as he was teaching in the temple.
19. The disciples all deserted Jesus and ran away at his arrest (v 50).
20. The young man avoided arrest by leaving his linen garment in the grabbing hands of his arresters. And he fled naked (v 51–52).
21. After his arrest, Jesus was first taken to the palace of the high priest. From parallel texts we know that his name was Caiaphas (v 53–54).
22. Peter was sitting in the courtyard of the high priest’s palace, while Jesus was interrogated by the Jewish council (v 54).
23. The Jewish council faced two problems, when it tried to get Jesus sentenced to death (v 55–59):
    1. They did not have any reliable persons who could witness against Jesus.
    2. The witnesses that they had found offered contradictory testimonies. But the Jewish law required at least two witnesses to be in agreement for a death sentence to be pronounced.
24. Jesus responded to the accusations against him by not giving any answer at all. He remained silent (v 60–61).
25. Jesus answered the hight priest’s question about his identity (v 61–62) with two statements:
    1. First, he used the longer expression “I am” (instead of a simple “Yes”) to confirm that he was the Messiah. The “I am” expression reminded the Jews of God’s name (“I am who I am,” Exodus 3:14) and could be considered a blasphemy.
    2. Second, he quoted, in support of his identity, a combination of two messianic Old Testament phrases (Ps 110:1 and Daniel 7:13) in such a way that the Jewish council considered it blasphemous.
26. The members of the Jewish council condemned Jesus to death because they had themselves heard his blasphemy (v 63–64). So they no longer needed the support of any outside witnesses.
27. Some of Jesus’ accusers mocked him by spitting at him, beating him, and making joke of his messianic claim by telling him to prophesy (v 65).
28. The servant girl first accused Peter of being a follower of Jesus from Nazareth. Peter reacted by claiming that he did not understand what she was talking about. So this was his first denial of Jesus (v 67–68).
29. A little later. the servant girl saw Peter again. She told the bystanders that Peter belonged to the “Jesus group.” Peter overheard her statement and denied Jesus a second time (v 69–70).
30. When the bystanders told Peter that he had to be a follower of Jesus because of his Galilean accent, he reacted very strongly. He cursed and swore that he did not know Jesus. So this was Peter’s third denial of Jesus (v 70–71).
31. When Peter heard the cock crow the second time, he remembered that Jesus had told him the previous evening that he would deny Jesus three times during that night. So he broke down and wept (v 72).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. –
2. Jesus’ evaluation of the woman with the alabaster jar (v 3–9):
   1. If you disagree with Jesus’ evaluation, you may have raised points like these:
      * Why waste so much money on a symbolic ceremony?
      * To help the poor is more important than to honor a religious leader.
      * Couldn’t the woman have used less ointment (or a cheaper kind of ointment)? Then the poor could also have been benefited.
      * Couldn’t the woman have honored Jesus without using ointment at all? Isn’t it the attitude of our heart that counts, not outward things?
   2. If you agree with Jesus’ evaluation, you may have raised points like these:
      * We must always put Jesus in the center of our lives. Everything else comes second. To spend money and resources on Jesus is never a waste.
      * This was a one-time occasion. This was the last opportunity for anybody to honor Jesus.
      * What the woman did was prophetic. Her act pointed to Jesus’ death and burial.
      * There are so many poor people in this world, so it is really impossible to help them. Why spend money on something futile?
3. The two aspects of the betrayal of Jesus (v 17–21):
   1. God’s purpose was carried out as the prophecies about the suffering Messiah were being fulfilled through Judas Iscariot’s betrayal of Jesus.
   2. In spite of this, Judas Iscariot was responsible for this deed. He was not just a puppet in God’s hands. He had the choice to not to betray his Lord. But the chose to do so – and he heard Jesus utter his “Woe” over him. God’s plan would have been fulfilled even without the participation of Judas.
4. A comparison of the four New Testament accounts of the Lord’s Supper (Matt 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:14–20; 1 Cor 11:23–26):
   1. General: The accounts in Matthew and Mark are similar. The accounts in Luke and 1 Corinthians have some similarities.
   2. The context:
      * Matthew and Mark have the same context: Their accounts are preceded by Judas Iscariot’s plan to betray Jesus and succeeded by Jesus’ prediction of Peter’s denial of Jesus.
      * The account in Luke is preceded by Judas Iscariot’s plan to betray Jesus and succeeded by a dispute among the disciples about who is the greatest of them.
      * The account in 1 Corinthians is presented in the context of proper church worship.
   3. The order of events:
      * Matthew and Mark and have this order: the bread, the cup, the fulfillment in the Kingdom of God.
      * 1 Corinthians has this order: the bread, the cup. There is nothing about the fulfillment in the Kingdom of God, but Paul’s interprets the whole meal as a proclamation of Jesus’ death until his second coming.
      * Luke has this order: the fulfillment of the Passover meal in the Kingdom of God, the first cup, the bread, the second cup after the meal.
   4. Other differences:
      * The covenant is described as “new” only in Luke and 1 Corinthians (see also my answer to question 14 above).
      * In remembrance of Jesus: only mentioned in Luke and 1 Corinthians (where it is even repeated).
      * Jesus tells his disciples to take the bread in Matthew (where he adds “eat”) and in Mark, and then he explains that it is his body. This information is not found in the other two accounts.
      * The accounts in Mark and Luke don’t include the word “drink” in connection with Jesus sharing the cup.
      * Luke begins his account with Jesus saying that he has earnestly desired to celebrate the Passover meal with his disciples before his suffering.
5. The significance of the two elements (the bread and the cup) of the Lord’s Supper (v 22–25): See my comments on verses 23–25.
6. Jesus’ exclamation, “Enough!” in verse 41:
   1. Jesus could have meant that the three disciples had had enough of sleep and that the time had come for them to wake up. I personally don’t think Jesus had this in mind.
   2. Jesus could have meant that “the account is closed” (meaning that the end had come) or “it is settled” (meaning that Jesus was now clear about God’s will for him to die on the cross). Both these interpretations are supported by Jesus’ next statement, that the time of his betrayal and death had come.
7. –
8. –
9. These things happened during the interrogation of Jesus by the Jewish council (v 53–65):
   1. The council convened at the high priest’s palace (instead of in one of the market halls) and in the middle of the night (instead of during “office hours”). So the high priest must have been in a hurry to have Jesus sentenced. He probably also wanted to have it done in secret, perhaps in order to avoid a riot (compare verses 1–2).
   2. The council first tried to convict Jesus by having false witnesses present their testimonies. But the witnesses gave contradictory statements – and the law required at least two testimonies to be in agreement – so the first scheme failed.
   3. Then the high priest tried to provoke Jesus by asking him to comment on the accusations that the false witnesses had brought against him. But Jesus kept his mouth shut. So the second scheme failed.
   4. Instead the high priest decided to see if Jesus in his arrogance perhaps would say something compromising about himself. So he asked Jesus if he was the Messiah. For the first time Jesus spoke out about his identity. His “hour” had come (compare verse 41). He claimed to be not only a political Messiah, but even a divine Messiah (provokingly using the “I am” in is answer) or at least a Messiah enthroned with God (Ps 110:1) coming to fulfill God’s eschatological promises (Daniel 7:13).
   5. The high priest and the Jewish council now had enough evidence. They had themselves heard Jesus’ blasphemous claims, and they all agreed that he deserved to die.
   6. So now some of them felt free to manhandle and mock Jesus. And also allow the guard to beat him.
10. –

([Go to Mark chapter 15](#MarkChapter15))

### Answers Mark chapter 15

Answers to Questions

1. The Jewish leaders brought Jesus before the Roman governor early in the morning of the Friday of the Passion week (v 1).
2. Pilate’s first question to Jesus was if he really claimed to be the king of Jews. He must have asked this question, because of the nature of the accusations of the Jewish leaders. They knew the Roman government did not care if Jesus was a blasphemer, but the Roman authorities were really concerned about Jewish rebels (v 2 and comment).
3. The “many things” Jesus was accused of (v 3 and comment on verse 1):
   1. Jesus was a terrorist.
   2. Jesus claimed to be the real king of Palestine.
   3. Jesus opposed the payment of taxes to the Roman government.
4. Barabbas was a Jewish rebel and a murderer (v 7 and comment).
5. Pilate wanted to release Jesus, because he did not believe the accusations of the Jewish leaders against Jesus. Pilate thought they were jealous of Jesus because of his popularity with the crowds (v 9–10).
6. The crowd insisted on Pilate releasing Barabbas instead of Jesus, because they had been stirred up by the chief priests. (v 11).
7. Pilate finally let Barabbas go instead of Jesus, because he wanted to please the Jewish crowd (v 15).
8. A list of the ways by which the soldiers mistreated and mocked Jesus (v 17–19):
   1. They put “royal clothes” on him.
   2. They put a “royal” crown of thorns on his head.
   3. They saluted him “Hail, king of the Jews” and knelt down before him.
   4. They hit him on his head with a staff and spat on him.
9. After the soldiers had mocked Jesus they dressed him in his own clothes and took him away to be crucified (v 20).
10. Simon from Cyrene was forced to carry Jesus’ cross (v 21).
11. Jesus was brought to a place of execution called The Place of the Skull (v 22).
12. Jesus was probably offered wine mixed with myrrh as a painkiller and a sedative so that he would suffer less pain and agony (v 23 and comment).
13. Jesus’ belongings consisted only of the clothes that he wore. They had very little value, so the soldiers that assisted in the crucifixion were allowed to divide them among themselves. They cast lots to decide what each person should get (v 24 and comment).
14. Jesus’ crucifixion took place at nine o’clock in the morning according to Mark’s account (v 25 and comment).
15. The charge against Jesus was written on the cross. It said that he was the King of the Jews (v 26).
16. Mark describes how Jesus was mocked by three groups of people as he was hanging on the cross (v 29–32):
    1. The passers-by joked and said that he who had claimed to have the powers to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days should be able to save himself and step down from the cross.
    2. The chief priests and the scribes mockingly talked among themselves and wondered how they could believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the King of Israel, when he who had claimed to be the people’s Savior was unable to even save himself. But if he stepped down from the cross, they would believe in him.
    3. The two men who were crucified along with Jesus also insulted him. But we know from Luke’s account that one of them later repented (read Luke 23:39–43).
17. According to Mark’s account, Jesus suffered six hours on the cross. He was crucified at nine in morning and breathed his last at three in the afternoon (v 33–37).
18. Jesus was quoting the beginning of Psalm 22 (“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”), as he was dying on the cross. But he did not quote the Hebrew text, but he translated it into his mother tongue Aramaic (v 34 and comment).
19. The bystanders misunderstood Jesus’ cry and thought that he was crying out to Elijah for help. Perhaps they did not hear him clearly, or perhaps they did not fully understand the language he was using (v 34–36).
20. As Jesus died, the curtain that separated the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place in the Jerusalem temple was torn from top to bottom (v 37–38).
21. As Jesus died, the Roman officer, who was a Gentile, realized that Jesus was truly the Son of God, something most of the Jewish spiritual leaders did not realize (v 39).
22. Mark told his readers four things about the women that were present at Jesus’ crucifixion (v 40–41):
    1. There were several women present, and they were watching Jesus die on the cross from a distance.
    2. Mark mentions three of them by name (Mary Magdalene, one more Mary, and Salome).
    3. These women had followed Jesus all the way from Galilee to Jerusalem, so they were regular followers of Jesus.
    4. They had also provided for Jesus during his gospel tours in Galilee. So they belonged to his “support team.”
23. We discover from verse 41 that many of Jesus’ followers/disciples were women (even if we don’t find very much written about them in the gospels).
24. We can understand several things about Joseph from Arimathea (v 43–46 and comment on v 43):
    1. He was a rich man.
    2. He was a member of the Jewish council. Perhaps he was a Pharisee.
    3. He was of Arimathea (a village in hill tract of Ephraim 30 km northwest of Jerusalem).
    4. He was not only a devout man, but he also believed in Jesus and was one of his disciples.
    5. He must have been a bold man, because he approached Pilate for Jesus’ body in spite of not being a relative.
    6. He was a considerate person, because he wanted to give Jesus a decent burial as soon as possible (so that Jesus would not be kept hanging disgracefully on the cross over the Sabbath), and he put Jesus in a very fine grave.
25. Jesus was buried in a rock grave very near the place of crucifixion (v 46).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Pilate must have been amazed at Jesus’ silence (v 5). The silence of an accused man in a Roman court of law meant that he accepted his guilt and that he would be found guilty without further ado.
2. Pilate’s custom was to release a prisoner during the Passover festival and to let the crowd choose the prisoner. Pilate did not believe that Jesus was guilty of being an insurgent and a threat to Roman rule in Palestine. So he picked the most notorious and dangerous of all his prisoners and let the crowd choose between him (Barabbas) and Jesus. But to his frustration the crowd insisted on choosing Barabbas. Pilate wanted to please the Jewish crowd so he let them have their way. So his plan had failed. The irony of Pilate’s failure is that he let Barabbas, the rebel who was a real threat to the Roman government, free and sentenced Jesus, who at that time was no threat at all to the Roman government, to be crucified (v 6–15).
3. –
4. The fact that Simon of Cyrene was made to carry Jesus’ cross tells us that Jesus was in very poor physical condition by this time. The flogging must have almost killed him, and he was no longer able to carry the beam of the cross, which perhaps weighed 15 kg, to his own execution at The Place of the Skull (v 21 and comment).
5. Jesus refused to take the wine mixed with myrrh that he was offered. It would have reduced his suffering, and he would perhaps even have become unaware of his situation. But he didn’t want his sufferings for us sinners to be reduced. And he didn’t want to be sedated as the was carrying the sins of mankind in is dying body on the cross (v 23).
6. “Tragic irony” means that the reader knows more about what is going on than a person who participates in a story or a drama. We find tragic irony of the situation as Jesus was hanging on the cross (v 25–32) like this:
   1. The inscription on the cross accused him of claiming to be “The King of the Jews.” Those who had written it didn’t believe it to be true. But it was true. This can be called “tragic irony.”
   2. The passers-by mocked him for having made a claim which he had never really made (that he would destroy the temple and build it up in three days) and told him to prove his power by stepping down from the cross. Jesus could have stepped down from the cross and proved his power but then what he had really said (that he would die and rise from the dead after three days) would not have taken place. The passers-by had no understanding of the situation. This can be called tragic irony.
   3. The chief priests and the scribes joked among themselves about Jesus not being able to save, not himself nor others, in spite of his claim to be the Messiah, the King of Israel. The tragic irony of the situation is that he who was hanging there on the cross was in fact the Messiah, the King of Israel, and the Savior of the world. And he was proving it by dying on the cross instead of stepping down from it.
   4. Two men were crucified along with Jesus. To people passing by they must have all looked the same. But two men were rebels and robbers being justly punished for their own sins, while Jesus was innocent and wrongly punished, dying for the sins of others, including the sins of the two men hanging next to him. And they mocked him, the only person that could save their souls and give them eternal life. This is tragic irony.
7. “Jesus’ seven words from the cross” (see the accounts in Matt 27:45–50: Mark 15:33–37; Luke 23:32–46; and John 19:18–30) were probably uttered in the following order:
   1. Three words before the darkness at noon:
      1. Jesus speaks to his crucifiers: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing!” (Luke 23:35).
      2. Jesus speaks to the robber: “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise!” (Luke 23:43).
      3. Jesus speaks to his mother Mary and to his disciple John: “Woman, here is your son!” and “Here is your mother!” (John 19:26).
   2. One word (recorded in two gospels) during the darkness:
      1. Jesus crying out to his heavenly Father with a quotation from Psalm 22 verse 1: “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani!” (Mark 15:34; Matt 27:46).
   3. Three words after the darkness:
      1. Jesus speaking about his thirst in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies: “I am thirsty!” (John 19:28; compare Ps 69:21 and Ps 22:15).
      2. Jesus proclaiming the completion of his heavenly assignment: “It is finished!” (John 19:30).
      3. Jesus crying out to his heavenly Father: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” (Luke 23:46).

([Go to Mark chapter 16](#MarkChapter16))

### Answers Mark chapter 16

Answers to Questions

1. The women went to Jesus’ tomb at dawn on the first day of the week (Sunday). They went there to pay respect to Jesus by anointing his body with spicy ointment (v 1–2 with comments).
2. As the women were walking to Jesus’ tomb, they were concerned about how to get into it. Its opening was covered with a very large disc-like stone, which had to be rolled back (v 3).
3. When the women came to the tomb, they saw that the stone had already been rolled back. They also saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting in the tomb. When they saw this, they were alarmed (v 4–5).
4. The young man told the women not to be alarmed. Then he had a message in two parts for them (v 5–7):
   1. Jesus was no longer in the tomb. He had risen.
   2. The women must let the disciples know that he had risen and also tell them that he would meet them in Galilee as he had told them earlier.
5. The women were both amazed and terrified, as they ran away from the tomb (v 8).
6. We learn these things about Mary Magdalene (v 9–10):
   1. She was the first person Jesus showed himself to after his resurrection.
   2. One thing about her background: Jesus had delivered her from seven demons.
   3. She was the person who informed the disciples about Jesus’ resurrection.
7. When the disciples heard that Jesus was alive, they reacted with unbelief (v 11).
8. When Jesus appeared to the eleven while they were eating, he rebuked them for their stubborn lack of faith (v 14).
9. Jesus’ commission to his disciples (v 15): Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation!
10. Jesus said that those who believed the gospel and were baptized would be saved. But those who did not believe the gospel would be condemned (v 15–16).
11. Jesus described the life and ministry of believers like this (v 17–18):
    1. They would cast out demons in Jesus’ name.
    2. They would speak in new tongues.
    3. They would not be harmed by poisonous snakes or drink. Jesus did not command his disciples to put God to the test by handling poisonous snakes (or drinking poison) during the church service, as some Christian pastors in America and Africa do. Jesus’ point is that God protects his servants from all kinds of dangers as they go out into the world to proclaim the gospel about Jesus Christ.
    4. They would heal the sick.
12. After Jesus’ ascension, the disciples went out and proclaimed the gospel everywhere (v 19–20).
13. Jesus confirmed the preaching of the gospel by signs (v 20).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. We can conclude that the young man in Jesus’ tomb was an angel (v 5–8):
   1. He was dressed in white. This how the Bible usually describes angels.
   2. The women were alarmed when they saw him. Angel appearances in the Bible usually alarm people.
   3. He had a divine message to the women. Angels in the Bible usually have messages from God to people.
2. Most Bible scholars think that the last part of the chapter (verses 9–20) was not part of Mark’s original text. Here are some of their reasons:
   1. These verses are not found in the oldest and most reliable Greek manuscripts. They are also not included in many very early translations of Mark’s gospel.
   2. The literary style of these verses is quite different from the rest of the gospel.
   3. The text does not seem to fit in with what comes before:
      * There is an abrupt gap in the flow of the narrative.
      * Verse 9 has a “he” that does not connect with the previous verse (the Kannada translations have solved this by substituting “Jesus” for this “he”).
      * Verses 9–10 are only about Mary Magdalene and they seem awkward in the context of the account of the three women at the tomb in the previous verses. Instead the passage seems to be a summary of John’s account of Mary Magdalene meeting Jesus (see John 20:10–18).
      * Verses 11–12 seem to be a summary of Luke’s account of the two disciples meeting Jesus on the road to Emmaus (see Luke 24:13–35).
      * Jesus’ commission to his disciples (v 15–18) reminds us of a summary of some of the events recorded in the book of Acts.

You may find the above reasons convincing or not. But ultimately it does not really matter if verses 9–20 were written by Mark to be his original ending of his gospel or if they were written by another person a few years later. The important thing is that God through the Holy Spirit during the canonization process of the New Testament scriptures included these verses in our Bibles. This means that they are God’s words to his people, whoever wrote them.

1. The key concept in verses 9–18 is “believing”:
   1. Verse 11: The disciples did not believe that Jesus was alive and that Mary Magdalene had met him.
   2. Verse 13: The disciples did not believe the testimony of the two men who had met the risen Jesus on the road.
   3. Verse 14: When Jesus appeared to his disciples during a meal, he rebuked them for their stubborn unbelief in the resurrection testimonies.
   4. Verse 16: Salvation depends on believing the gospel. Condemnation depends on not believing the gospel.
   5. Verses 17–18 contains a list of signs that will accompany those who believe and preach the gospel.
2. All four gospels have a “Great Commission” (Matt 28:18–20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46–49/Acts 1:8; John 20:21–23). A few points in comparison:
   1. Going/sending is a key concept in all four accounts. Jesus sends, and his disciples go.
   2. Jesus is the reason for going/sending. In John, Jesus sends his disciples just as his Father has sent him (so that the world can hear the gospel about Jesus and receive salvation). In Luke, the gospel (about Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection) and the necessity for people to receive this gospel (to repent and to be forgiven of their sins) are what the disciples are commissioned to do. In Mark, they are told to proclaim the good news about Jesus. In Matthew, their commission is to lead all nations to discipleship under Jesus.
   3. Luke and John mention the key role of the Holy Spirit for the enabling of the disciples to fulfill the Great Commission.
   4. Matthew focuses on discipleship: baptizing and teaching. He also mentions Jesus’ authority over and presence with his disciples.
   5. Mark shows that belief in the gospel is a condition for salvation and that unbelief will lead to condemnation.

([Go to Eight studies on Jesus’ resurrection and ascension](#EightStudiesOnJesusResurrectionAndAscens))

([Go to Table of contents](#TableOfContents))

## Eight studies on Jesus’ resurrection and ascension

### Introduction

This unit contains eight studies from the gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John about Jesus and his disciples after his resurrection. These events took place in Judea (in and near Jerusalem) and in Galilee on several occasions during the forty days between the resurrection and the ascension.

Sunday morning in Jerusalem, the day of the resurrection:

* + 1. The resurrection and the guards, Matt 28:1–15 ([Go to the study](#Study1TheResurrectionAndTheGuards))
    2. Mary Magdalene and Jesus in the garden, John 20:1–18 ([Go to the study](#Study2MaryMagdaleneAndJesusInTheGarden))

Sunday evening in Judea, the day of the resurrection:

* + 1. The walk to Emmaus, Luke 24:13–35 ([Go to the study](#Study3TheWalkToEmmaus))
    2. Sunday evening in Jerusalem, Luke 24:36–49 and John 20:19–25 ([Go to the study](#Study4SundayEveningInJerusalem))

One week later in Jerusalem:

* + 1. Thomas and Jesus, John 20:26–29 ([Go to the study](#Answers5ThomasAndJesus))

Later in Galilee:

* + 1. By the Sea of Galilee, John 21:1–24 ([Go to the study](#Study6ByTheSeaOfGalilee))
    2. The Great Commission, Matt 28:16–20 ([Go to the study](#Study7TheGreatCommission))

The ascension near Jerusalem forty days after the resurrection:

* + 1. Jesus carried up into heaven, Luke 24:50–53 ([Go to the study](#Answers8JesusCarriedUpIntoHeaven))

([Go to Table of contents](#TableOfContents))

### Study 1: The resurrection and the guards, Matt 28:1–15

Introduction and comments

All four gospels mention that women followers of Jesus were the first persons to see the empty tomb early in the morning of Jesus’ resurrection. But the details of the accounts vary. Luke also mentions a visit by Peter. And John adds that Peter was accompanied by one more disciple (John himself).

In this study we will look at Matthew’s account.

the first day of the week (v 1): This was Sunday, the day after the Sabbath.

the guards (v 4, 11): Only Matthew mentions that the Jewish leaders posted guards at Jesus’ tomb (see 27:62–66).

the other Mary (v 1): She was probably the mother of James and Joses (compare 27:56 and Mark 16:1).

Questions

1. What caused the earthquake (v 1–2)?
2. What happened as a result of the earthquake (v 2–4)?
3. What message did the angel have for the women (v 5–7)?
4. How did the women react to the angel’s message (v 8)?
5. What message did Jesus have for the women (v 9–10)?
6. How did the Jewish leaders find out about the empty grave (v 11)?
7. What agreement did the Jewish leaders make with the guards (v 12–15)?
8. What story was still told among the Jews at the time of Matthew writing his gospel (v 15)?

Think and discuss

1. Retell Matthew’s story about the women at the empty tomb in your own words without looking in your Bible. Be dramatic and exciting. Imagine that you are speaking to a group of villagers.
2. How do you evaluate the way in which the Jewish leaders dealt with the problem of the empty grave?

([Go to Answers 1: The resurrection and the guards](#Answers1TheResurrectionAndTheGuards))

### Study 2: Mary Magdalene and Jesus in the garden, John 20:1–18

Introduction and comments

In his account of the events of the morning of Jesus’ resurrection, John focuses on Mary Magdalene and her meeting with the risen Lord. But he also reports the visit of Peter and “the disciple who Jesus loved” to the empty tomb.

Mary Magdalene (v 1): She was one of Jesus’ faithful followers from Galilee. Jesus had delivered her from seven demons.

whom Jesus loved (v 2): John describes himself with these words in the second part of his gospel. It should not be understood to mean that Jesus loved John more than he loved any of the other disciples.

weeping (v 11): The Greek word means “wailing,” a loud expression of grief.

Rabbouni (v 16): This Aramaic word is a stronger form of the more common word “Rabbi.” Both mean “(my) teacher.”

my brothers (v 17): Jesus was probably referring to his disciples.

Questions

1. When did Mary Magdalene go to Jesus’ tomb (v 1)?
2. What did Mary do when she saw that the tomb was open (v 2)?
3. What was Mary’s message to the two disciples (v 2)?
4. Why did Peter reach the tomb after the other disciple (v 3–4)?
5. Who was the first man to enter the tomb (6–8)?
6. What did the two disciples find in the tomb (v 5–7)?
7. What had the disciples failed to understand from the scripture (v 9)?
8. What was Mary doing after the two disciples had left Jesus’ tomb (v 11)?
9. What did Mary see when she looked into the tomb (v 11–12)?
10. What reason did Mary give for her weeping (v 13)?
11. Who did Mary think Jesus was when she saw him standing near the tomb (v 14–15)?
12. What made Mary recognize Jesus (v 16)?
13. Why did Jesus not allow Mary to hold on to him (v 17)?
14. What message did Mary have for the disciples (v 17–18)?

Think and discuss

1. John writes that the disciple saw and believed (v 8). What do you think he believed – and why?
2. Why do you think Mary Magdalene was confused about the identity of the person that she met in the garden (v 11–16)?
3. Why do you think Jesus told Mary not to hold on to him (v 17)?
4. Retell John’s story about Mary Magdalene and the two disciples at the empty tomb (v 1–18). Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible. Be dramatic and exciting. Imagine that you are speaking to a group of villagers.

Reflect and prepare

1. Reflect on John 20:1–18 from the perspective of “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” What did he experience that morning? How did he feel when he heard Mary’s report about the open tomb? When he looked into it? What did he understand? What did he believe? How was his life changed?

Then choose one of the following:

* Prepare a devotion (or a Bible study or a sermon) called He saw and believed.
* Write a monologue called I saw and believed.
* Write a poem from the perspective of this disciple.

1. Reflect on John 20:1–18 from the perspective of Mary Magdalene. How did she feel, and what did she think, when she saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb? When she sat weeping outside the tomb? When she saw the two angels? When she saw the “gardener” standing near the tomb? When she realized that he was Jesus? When she heard Jesus’ words? When she reported what she had experienced and heard to the disciples?

Then choose one of the following:

* Prepare a devotion (or a Bible study or a sermon) called Mary Magdalene and her Lord.
* Write a monologue called What a morning!
* Write a poem from the perspective of Mary Magdalene.

([Go to Answers 2: Mary Magdalene and Jesus in the garden](#Answers2MaryMagdaleneAndJesusInTheGarden))

### Study 3: The walk to Emmaus, Luke 24:13–35

Introduction and comments

Mary Magdalene did not recognize the risen Jesus, when she first saw him in the garden. She had not expected to see him alive again, and perhaps he looked different from what she remembered. Two of Jesus’ followers on their way home from Jerusalem that same afternoon had the same problem. Jesus came up and walked with them along the road. But they did not recognize him, not until their eyes were opened at the evening meal, as Jesus broke the bread and began giving it to them. The name of one of the two disciples was Cleopas (v 18). Perhaps the other person was his wife. Only Luke has included this beautiful story in his gospel.

two of them (v 13): One of these persons was called Cleopas (see v 18). They were not among the twelve but they were Jesus’ disciples in a wider sense (compare “we were hoping,” “our group,” “some of us,” and “our company” in verses 21–24).

a village named Emmaus (v 13): The location of this village is not known today.

redeem Israel (v 21): The two persons probably referred to the deliverance of the Jewish people from their bondage under Rome and thereby ushering in the Kingdom of God (compare Luke 1:68; 2:38; 21:28, 31).

from Moses and from all the prophets (v 27): This phrase was one way of referring to the entire collection of the Old Testament books.

Questions

1. What were the two persons talking about as they were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus (v 14)?
2. What did Jesus ask the two persons (v 17)?
3. Why were they surprised at Jesus’ question (v 18)?
4. How did they describe Jesus to Jesus (v 19)?
5. What did they say had happened to Jesus (v 20)?
6. What hopes had they had on Jesus (v 21)?
7. What had made them amazed earlier that day (v 22–24)?
8. Why did Jesus call them “foolish” and “slow of heart” (v 25–26)?
9. How did Jesus describe the Messiah to the two persons (v 26)?
10. How did Jesus prove to them that the “prophet” who had been killed by the Jewish leaders really was the Messiah (v 26–27)?
11. Why did they insist on Jesus spending the night in their village (v 28–29)?
12. When were their eyes opened so that they realized that the man they had invited to their house was Jesus (v 30–31)?
13. How did they describe their experience on the road earlier that day (v 32)?
14. What did they do as soon as Jesus had left them (v 33)?
15. What did they find out from their friends (v 33–34)?
16. What testimony did they give to their friends in Jerusalem (v 35)?

Think and discuss

1. How do you understand the expression “their eyes were kept from recognizing him” (v 16)?
2. Why do you think the two persons used the title “prophet” about Jesus (v 19)?
3. How do you understand the phrase “their eyes were opened” (v 31)?
4. Retell Luke’s story about the two persons and Jesus (v 13–35). Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible. Be dramatic and exciting. Imagine that you are speaking to a group of villagers.

Reflect and prepare

Reflect on Luke 24:13–35 in the light of the material in this study. What happened on the road to Emmaus? What happened in Emmaus at the evening meal? How did the two persons feel before Jesus came along? What does it mean that “their eyes were kept from recognizing him”? How did they feel as Jesus was interpreting the Old Testament prophecies? How did they feel as Jesus broke the bread? What does it mean that “their eyes were opened”? What did they do later that evening? How was their life changed?

Then choose one of the following:

* Prepare a devotion (or a Bible study/sermon) called Their eyes were opened.
* Write a monologue called My eyes were opened. The monologue must be from the perspective of one of the two persons.
* Write a poem from the perspective of one of the two persons.

([Go to Answers 3: The walk to Emmaus](#Answers3TheWalkToEmmaus))

### Study 4: Sunday evening in Jerusalem, Luke 24:36–49 and John 20:19–25

Introduction and comments

Luke and John both record that Jesus appeared to his disciples in the evening of the day of his resurrection. John adds that Thomas was not present. There are also other differences between the two accounts, for example how the disciples reacted to his appearance and how Jesus responded to their reaction. But both accounts point forward to the coming ministry of the disciples – to proclaim the gospel of salvation through Jesus and the forgiveness of sins.

they (Luke 24:36): These are the two persons of the previous story (v 13–35), Cleopas and one unnamed person, perhaps his wife.

Peace be to you (Luke 24:36): This was a normal way for Jews to greet one another.

in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms (Luke 24:44): “The psalms”was the most important part of (and it was often used to represent) the “writings,” the third section of the Hebrew Bible. Jesus said that the Old Testament prophecies about the suffering Messiah were fulfilled in him.

he opened their minds (Luke 24:45): Jesus did so by explaining the Old Testament scriptures to those present.

the promise of my Father on you… clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:49): The promise of the Holy Spirit poured out over God’s people (compare Joel 2:28–29).

the disciples (John 20:19): We don’t know who all these disciples were. But of Jesus’ eleven remaining disciples John tells us that Thomas was absent (v 24), and from Luke we know that two additional followers of Jesus were present, Cleopas and his companion (see Luke 24:35–36). Some others, for example the women that had followed Jesus from Galilee, could also have been present.

the Jews (John 20:19): This is how John usually refers to the Jewish leaders.

John 20:23: The Greek text has an unusual grammatical construction, something like this: “Those whose sins you forgive have already been forgiven. Those whose sins you do not forgive have not been forgiven.” God does not forgive sins because believers decide to do so. But we announce God’s forgiveness as we proclaim the gospel about Jesus Christ the Savior of the world. Wherever the gospel is accepted, sins are forgiven. Wherever the gospel is refused, sins are not forgiven.

Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus (John 20:24): The Hebrew word which the name Thomas comes from means “twin.” Didymus is the Greek word for twin.

Questions

1. What is the occasion of Luke’s account (Luke 24:36 and comment)?
2. How did Jesus greet his disciples (Luke 24:36)?
3. Why were the disciples terrified (Luke 24:37)?
4. How did Jesus try to convince his disciples that he was real (Luke 24:38–39)?
5. The disciples had mixed feelings when they saw Jesus (Luke 24:41). In what way ?
6. Why did Jesus ask for food (Luke 24:41–42)?
7. What did Jesus say that his disciples were witnesses to (Luke 24:44–48 and comment on verse 44)?
8. What did Jesus say would begin in Jerusalem (Luke 24:46–47)?
9. Why did Jesus tell his disciples to wait in Jerusalem (Luke 24:49 with comment)?
10. What is the occasion of John’s account (John 20:19)?
11. Why were the doors to the room locked (John 20:19)?
12. How did the disciples react when they saw Jesus (John 20:20)?
13. What words did Jesus use as he commissioned his disciples (John 20:21)?
14. How did Thomas react when the other disciples told him that they had seen Jesus (John 20:24–25)?

Think and discuss

1. Compare the two accounts (Luke 24:36–49 and John 20:19–25) and note down some observations.
2. How do you understand John 20:22 about Jesus breathing on his disciples?
3. Explain in your own words Jesus’ statement about his disciples forgiving people’s sins (John 20:21–23).
4. Retell John’s story about Jesus appearing to his disciples and combine the two accounts (Luke 24:36–49 and John 20:19–25) into one. Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible. Be dramatic and exciting. Imagine that you are speaking to a group of villagers.

([Go to Answers 4: Sunday evening in Jerusalem](#Answers4SundayEveningInJerusalem))

### Study 5: Thomas and Jesus, John 20:26–29

Introduction and comment

One week later, Thomas gets what he has asked for – the physical proof that Jesus is alive. This account of John’s ties in with the previous story about Jesus appearing to a group of disciples in the evening of the day of his resurrection (v 19–25). Then Thomas was absent, now he is present.

My Lord and my God! (v 28): Thomas made a very strong statement, when he called Jesus “my God.” This was a blasphemy that justified death by stoning in the Jewish context (compare John 10:33).

Questions

1. What is the occasion of this account (v 26)?
2. What was supernatural about Jesus’ appearance (v 26)?
3. How did Jesus greet his disciples (v 26)?
4. What did Jesus ask Thomas to do (v 27)?
5. How did Thomas respond to Jesus’ request (v 28)?
6. Who do Jesus call “blessed” at the end of this passage (v 29)?

Think and discuss

1. Thomas is often called “Doubting Thomas,” but it would be more appropriate to call him “Believing Thomas.” Do you agree with this statement? Why – why not?
2. Retell John’s story about Jesus appearing to Thomas (John 20:24–29). How did he feel before and after this experience? Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible. Be dramatic and exciting. Imagine that you are speaking to a group of villagers.

Reflect and prepare

Reflect on the accounts (Luke 24:36–39 and John 20:19–29) of Jesus appearing to his disciples on the two occasions covered in this and the previous study. Do this in the light of the material found in these studies. Then choose one of the following assignments:

1. Prepare a devotion (or a Bible study or a sermon) based on parts of this material. Use one of the following headings:
   * My Lord and my God!
   * Peace be with you!
   * We have not seen, yet we believe!
2. Write a monologue from the perspective of Thomas called My Lord and my God!
3. Write a poem from the perspective of one of the disciples who were present when Jesus appeared to them on the first occasion.

([Go to Answers 5: Thomas and Jesus](#Answers5ThomasAndJesus))

### Study 6: By the Sea of Galilee, John 21:1–24

Introduction and comments

After his resurrection, Jesus had instructed his disciples to go to Galilee where he would meet them (see Matt 28:10; Mark 16:7). John records how Jesus met seven of them one early morning by the Sea of Galilee. The account ends with Jesus reinstating Peter, who had earlier disowned him (see for example Mark 14:72).

the Sea of Tiberias (v 1): This was another name for the Sea of Galilee. Tiberias was an important town on the western shore of the lake. It was built by king Herod Antipas and was the capital of Galilee.

Nathanael of Cana in Galilee (v 2): See John 1:45–49. He was one of Jesus’ twelve apostles and is called Bartholomew in the other gospels.

the sons of Zebedee (v 2): James and John (see Matt 4:21), two of Jesus’ twelve apostles.

that night (v 3): In ancient times fishing was often done during the night hours.

the disciples didn’t know that it was Jesus (v 4): Compare Mary Magdalene in the garden of the tomb (John 20:14) and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:115–16).

the disciple whom Jesus loved (v 7): This is how John describes himself in his gospel.

he put on his coat (v 7): Peter probably wanted to be dressed properly when he greeted his Lord.

full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three (v 11): There have been many attempts to interpret this figure symbolically, none very convincing. Most likely it just stands for the number of fish actually caught. Fishermen in those days routinely counted the number of fish before they took them to the market to be sold. The point of the story is that the catch was miraculously large.

the third time (v 14): It was the third time that Jesus appeared to a group of disciples, but he had also made other appearances, for example to Mary Magdalene and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

love (v 15–17): Many interpreters have made a point of the fact that two different Greek words for “love” are used in these verses, claiming that it is a story about two levels of love and consequently two levels of commitment. This interpretation is not very convincing for two reasons: First, it does not make any sense in the story about Jesus finally reinstating Peter with the words, “Follow me.” Second, no such distinction is made between these two words for “love” elsewhere in John’s gospel.

more than these (v 15): This expression can either mean “more than these men love me” or “more than you love these things.” Considering Peter’s earlier claim of devotion (see Mark 14:29), the second option seems best.

stretch out your hands (v 18): The early church understood this as a prophecy of crucifixion (compare the following verse “the kind of death”). According to tradition, Peter was crucified in Rome during the persecutions of emperor Nero around AD 65.

at the supper (v 20): See John 13:23–25.

these things (v 24): This expression refers to the whole gospel of John.

Questions

1. What was the occasion of this resurrection appearance (v 1–4)?
2. Who took the initiative for the fishing activity that night (v 1–4)?
3. What happened during the night (v 3)?
4. Where was Jesus as the fishermen were returning the next morning (v 4)?
5. What question did Jesus ask them and what did he tell them to do (v 5–6)?
6. What problem did the fishermen have to face (v 6)?
7. Why did Peter leave the boat (v 7)?
8. What did the other fishermen do (v 8)?
9. What was Jesus doing on the shore (v 9)?
10. Why did Peter return to the boat (v 10–11)?
11. Why was it surprising that the fishing net was not torn (v 11)?
12. What did Jesus tell the disciples to do (v 12)?
13. What did Jesus do with the bread and the fish (v 13)?
14. After breakfast, Jesus had three questions for Peter. What did he ask him (v 15–17)?
15. What were Peter’s answers to Jesus’ questions (v 15–17)?
16. What assignments did Jesus have for Peter (v 15–17)?
17. What did Jesus tell Peter about his future (v 18–19)?
18. What information does John give about himself in verse 20?
19. What words did Jesus use to reinstate Peter (v 19, 22)?
20. What did Jesus tell Peter about John (v 21–23)?
21. What was the rumor that spread about John in the early church (v 23)?

Think and discuss

1. What do you think made John realize that the man on the shore was Jesus (v 4–7)?
2. How do you think Peter felt during the different phases of the story about the catch of fish (v 1–14)?
3. Why did you think Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved him? Wouldn’t one time have been enough?
4. Explain why there was a rumor in the early church that John would not die.

Reflect and prepare

Reflect on this passage (John 21:1–24) in the light of the material found in this study. Then choose one of the following assignments:

1. Write a monologue (based on verses 1–14) from the perspective of John called Breakfast with Jesus.
2. Write a monologue (based on verses 15–22) from the perspective of Peter called Back in business!

([Go to Answers 6: By the Sea of Galilee](#Answers6ByTheSeaOfGalilee))

### Study 7: The Great Commission, Matt 28:16–20

Introduction and comments

Matthew’s account of the events of the day of Jesus’ resurrection closes with the guards and the Jewish leaders coming to an agreement about the official explanation of the empty tomb: The disciples had come during the night and stolen away Jesus’ body (Matt 28:15). In the passages that follows, Matthew concludes his gospel with the Great Commission. The setting is a mountain in Galilee where Jesus had told his disciples to meet him.

the mountain (v 16): Matthew never mentions the name of this mountain.

the eleven disciples (v 16): These were the eleven remaining apostles after Judas Iscariot had committed suicide (see Matt 27:5).

where Jesus had directed them (v 16): Compare Matt 26:32; 28:7, 10.

authority (v 18): Compare Matt 10:1 and John 17:2.

Questions

1. Where does this story take place (v 16)?
2. How did the disciples react when they saw Jesus on the mountain (v 17)?
3. What did Jesus tell his disciples about himself (v 18)?
4. What did Jesus tell his disciples to do (v 19)?
5. How is God referred to in the Great Commission (v 19)?
6. What did Jesus promise his disciples (v 20)?

Think and discuss

1. Some of Jesus’ disciples doubted (v 17). What do you think their doubt was about?
2. What is discipleship about, according to the Great Commission (v 18–20)?
3. How could Jesus promise that he would always be with his disciples (v 20), when he was soon going to leave them and ascend to his Father in heaven (see Luke 24:50–51)?
4. To what extent – and how – does your church fulfill the Great Commission? Share in your group.

([Go to Answers 7: The Great Commission](#Answers7TheGreatCommission))

### Study 8: Jesus carried up into heaven, Luke 24:50–53

Introduction and comments

Luke has given his readers two accounts of Jesus’ ascension, one in his gospel and one in the book of Acts (Acts 1:9–11). Mark’s “longer ending” also has summary of this event (Mark 16:19).

Bethany (v 50): This was a village on the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem. It was the home of Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary.

he withdrew from them (v 51): In Acts, Luke adds that the disciples saw Jesus ascend into a cloud (Acts 1:9).

Questions

1. What happened as Jesus was blessing his disciples (v 50–51)?
2. What did the disciples do before they returned to Jerusalem (v 52)?
3. What did the disciples do in Jerusalem (v 52)?

Think and discuss

Compare the two gospel accounts of Jesus’ ascension (Luke 24:50–52 and Mark 16:19). Note down your observations.

([Go to Answers 8: Jesus carried up into heaven](#Answers8JesusCarriedUpIntoHeaven))

## Eight studies ... – answers

### Answers 1: The resurrection and the guards, Matt 28:1–15

Answers to Questions

1. The earthquake was caused by an angel of the Lord who came down from heaven to remove the large stone that covered the opening to Jesus’ tomb (v 1–2).
2. As a result of the earthquake two things happened (v 2–4):
   1. Jesus’ tomb was opened so that the women who had come to honor Jesus could enter it.
   2. The guards that the Jewish leaders had placed to watch the tomb fainted with fear.
3. The angel’s message for the women consisted of three parts (v 5–7):
   1. First, he told them not to be afraid.
   2. Then, he announced that Jesus had been raised from the dead and invited them into the empty tomb to see for themselves.
   3. Finally, he told them to hurry to Jesus’ disciples and tell them that Jesus had been raised from the dead and that he would meet them in Galilee.
4. The women reacted to the angel’s message with great joy and hurried away to deliver his message to the disciples (v 8).
5. As the women were rushing away from the empty tomb, Jesus appeared to them. They fell down at his feet and worshiped him. Jesus repeated the message of the angel and told them to tell the disciples to meet him in Galilee (v 9–10).
6. The Jewish leaders found out about the empty grave through the report of some of the guards (v 11).
7. The Jewish leaders made an agreement with the guards (v 12–15):
   1. They paid them handsomely to spread a lie about why Jesus’ tomb was empty: The disciples had stolen his body during the night, while the guards were asleep.
   2. They also promised to satisfy the governor in case he made an enquiry into what had happened.
8. The lie that Jesus’ disciples had stolen his body was still told among the Jews at the time of Matthew writing his gospel (v 15).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. –
2. The Jewish leaders dealt with the problem of the empty grave in a way that was totally unworthy of spiritual leaders:
   1. They paid large bribes to the guards if they told a lie about what had happened to Jesus’ body.
   2. They agreed with the guards to misguide (and perhaps even bribe) the Roman governor in case he tired to find out what had really happened.
   3. They must themselves have spread this lie about Jesus’ body, because it was widely spread – and the Jews believed it even many years later.

([Go to Study 2: Mary Magdalene and Jesus in the garden](#Study2MaryMagdaleneAndJesusInTheGarden))

### Answers 2: Mary Magdalene and Jesus in the garden, John 20:1–18

Answers to Questions

1. Mary Magdalene went to Jesus’ tomb very early in the morning, while it was still dark (v 1). This means that it was dark when she left her home, because we know from Mark 16.:2 that she and her friends reached the garden tomb just after sunrise.
2. When Mary saw that the tomb was open, she ran back into the city (v 2).
3. Mary’s message to the two disciples was that somebody had removed Jesus’ body from the tomb and placed it in some unknown place (v 2).
4. Peter reached the tomb after the other disciple, because he was the slower runner (v 4).
5. In spite of his slower running, Peter was the first man to enter the tomb (6–8).
6. In the tomb, the two disciples found the linen wrappings that had contained Jesus’ body and the cloth that had covered Jesus’ head (v 5–7). The cloth was lying separately and it was rolled up, a fact which must have made the disciples realize that Jesus’ tomb had not been broken into and plundered by grave robbers.
7. The disciples had failed to understand from the scripture that Jesus was to rise from the dead (v 9).
8. After the two disciples had left Jesus’ tomb, Mary was standing outside the tomb looking into it. And she was weeping vehemently (v 11).
9. When Mary looked into the tomb, she saw two angels. They were sitting where Jesus’ body had been lying (v 12).
10. Mary told the angels that she was weeping, because somebody had removed Jesus’ body and she didn’t know where to find it (v 13).
11. When Mary saw Jesus standing near the tomb, she thought that he was the gardener. So she asked him where Jesus’ body had been placed (v 14–15).
12. Mary recognized Jesus as soon as he addressed her with her name (v 16).
13. Jesus did not allow Mary to hold on to him, because he had not yet ascended to his heavenly Father (v 17). See my comment on Think and discuss 3 for what Jesus probably meant by this.
14. Jesus gave Mary a message for the disciples: He would ascend to God, his and their heavenly Father (v 17–18).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. John writes that the disciple saw and believed (v 8). The disciple saw the empty linen wrappings. Then he must have remembered what Jesus had told his disciples about his death and resurrection (see for example John 2:22; 11:25: 16:22). So he believed that Jesus had risen from the dead.
2. I think Mary Magdalene was confused about the identity of the person that she met in the garden (v 11–16), because she had no expectations of meeting Jesus again. She thought that he was dead and that his body had been placed somewhere else (v 2, 12). She was full of grief (v 11), and her mind was occupied with trying to find Jesus’ dead body (v 13). She wanted to see it and honor it with her ointments. Perhaps she did not even look at the “gardener” properly.
3. Jesus told Mary not to hold on to him, because he had not yet ascended to heaven (v 17). This cannot mean that Jesus refused to let Mary touch him (compare John 20:27, where he tells Thomas to touch his wounds). He was telling her that she should not detain him, and that he had not yet ascended to the Father. He would remain with his disciples until then (a period of forty days). So Mary would have opportunity to see him again, and there was no need for her to cling to him.
4. –

([Go to Study 3: The walk to Emmaus](#Study3TheWalkToEmmaus))

### Answers 3: The walk to Emmaus, Luke 24:13–35

Answers to Questions

1. As the two persons were walking home to Emmaus, they talked about what had happened in Jerusalem during the Passover festival (v 14).
2. Jesus asked them what they were talking about (v 17).
3. They were surprised at Jesus’ question, because they expected everybody to know that Jesus had been arrested and crucified during the Passover (v 18).
4. They described Jesus as a mighty prophet of God in both words and deeds (v 19).
5. They explained that Jesus had been caught by the Jewish leaders who had handed him over to the Roman authorities to be killed (v 20).
6. They had hoped Jesus to be the Messiah who would deliver the Jewish nation from the Roman occupation and rule as king over God’s kingdom (v 21).
7. The fact that Jesus’ tomb was empty and that angels had said that Jesus was alive had made them amazed earlier that day. They had heard these astounding things from eyewitnesses, both from some of the women and from some of Jesus’ disciples (v 22–24).
8. Jesus called them “foolish” and “slow of heart,” because they had not understood and believed the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah (v 25–26).
9. Jesus described the Messiah like this to them (v 26): The Messiah would have to suffer and die before entering his glory.
10. Jesus used the Old Testament books to prove to them that the “prophet” who had been killed by the Jewish leaders really was the Messiah (v 26–27). So if they had understood and interpreted God’s word correctly, they would never have doubted Jesus’ identity as the Messiah foretold by the Old Testament prophets.
11. They insisted on Jesus spending the night in their village, because it was already getting dark (v 28–29).
12. Their eyes were opened so that they realized that the man they had invited to their house was Jesus. This happened when he took the bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them to eat (v 30–31). As disciples of Jesus, they must have shared many meals with him, even if they had not been present when Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with the Twelve.
13. They described their experience on the road earlier that day like this (v 32): When Jesus walked with them along the road explaining the Old Testament prophecies to them, their “hearts had been burning.”
14. As soon as Jesus had left them, they hurried back to Jerusalem (v 33).
15. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they found out from their friends that Jesus’ resurrection had been confirmed. Simon Peter had seen him (v 33–34).
16. They testified to their friends in Jerusalem that they too had met the risen Jesus, and that he had revealed himself through the breaking of the bread (v 35).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. The expression “their eyes were kept from recognizing him (v 16) could be understood in three ways:
   1. It was God who dimmed their eyes and made them not recognize Jesus. I find it difficult to see why God would do that, unless he wanted the story to unfold the way Luke describes it!
   2. It was their own lack of understanding of the identity of Jesus as the Messiah of the Old Testament prophets that had dimmed their eyes. This is in line with the theme of the story: Not until Jesus had interpreted the prophecies to them during their journey and not until Jesus had reminded them of his death for them, breaking and handing out the bread just as he had done when he fed the multitudes, were their eyes opened so that they recognized him.
   3. It is Luke’s way of emphasizing that they didn’t recognize Jesus. We find that people (for example Mary Magdalene in the previous study) sometimes had difficulty recognizing him. The resurrected Jesus was somehow different from the Jesus who had suffered and died a few days earlier.
2. The two persons used “prophet” about Jesus (v 19), but they didn’t use the title “the Messiah.” They must have respected Jesus as a great man of God, a man who spoke with divine authority just like the Old Testament prophets, a man whose miracles demonstrated divine power. But Jesus had died in Jerusalem a few days earlier, so he had evidently not been the Messiah they were waiting for – a liberator of the Jewish nation from the Roman occupation and a king in the family line of David.
3. The phrase “their eyes were opened” (v 31) evidently means that the two persons suddenly realized the identity of the man who had been walking with them that afternoon. This realization occurred with Jesus breaking the bread and giving it to them to eat. The phrase is, of course, a follow-up of Luke’s earlier statement that “their eyes were kept from recognizing him” (v 16, see my comment on Think and discuss 1 above and the three ways in which can be understood). So again we have three possible ways of understanding how their eyes were opened:
   1. God opened their eyes.
   2. The two persons had finally understood that the Messiah must suffer and die before entering his glory (compare verses 25–27) so now they realized that Jesus must be this Messiah, that he had risen from the dead, and that he was sitting with them at the table. This was, of course, the work of the Holy Spirit (compare John 14:26; 15:26).
   3. The way that Jesus performed the breaking of the bread at the evening meal made them recognize the resurrected Jesus, even though he had changed and now looked different. This was, of course, also the work of the Holy Spirit (compare the previous point).
4. –

([Go to Study 4: Sunday evening in Jerusalem](#Study4SundayEveningInJerusalem))

### Answers 4: Sunday evening in Jerusalem, Luke 24:36–49 and John 20:19–25

Answer to Questions

1. The occasion of Luke’s account is the evening meal of the disciples, probably in the “large upper room” in Jerusalem (compare Luke 22:12). Cleopas and his companion from Emmaus have just reported that they have met the risen Jesus (Luke 24:36 and comment). This was in the evening of the day of Jesus’ resurrection.
2. Jesus had a greeting of peace for his disciples (Luke 24:36).
3. The disciples were terrified, because they thought Jesus was a ghost (Luke 24:37). John in his account of this event adds the information that the doors to the room were locked (John 20:19).
4. Jesus tried to convince his disciples that he was real by telling them to touch him (Luke 24:38–39). A ghost does not have flesh and bones!
5. The disciples had mixed feelings when they saw Jesus. They were happy to see him again, but they still doubted that he was a real person (Luke 24:41). Perhaps they had been too afraid to touch him.
6. Jesus asked for food, not because he was hungry, but because he wanted to convince his disciples that he was alive (Luke 24:41–42). A ghost does not need food!
7. Jesus said that his disciples were witnesses to his death and resurrection, which is the foundation of the proclamation to all nations of the gospel of repentance and forgiveness of sins in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies about Jesus, the suffering Messiah (Luke 24:44–48 and comment on verse 44).
8. Jesus said that the proclamation of the gospel would begin in Jerusalem (Luke 24:46–47).
9. Jesus told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they had received the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49 with comment).
10. The occasion of John’s account is a gathering of the disciples in the evening of the day of Jesus’ resurrection (John 20:19).
11. The doors to the room were locked, because the disciples were afraid of the Jewish leaders who had been behind Jesus’ execution (John 20:19). So they had good reasons to keep the doors locked and bolted.
12. The disciples reacted with joy when they saw Jesus (John 20:20). John does not mention at all that they also were afraid (compare Luke’s account).
13. As Jesus commissioned his disciples, he compared his sending of his disciples with God’s sending of himself (John 20:21).
14. Thomas reacted with total unbelief, when the other disciples told him that they had seen Jesus (John 20:24–25).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. A comparison of the two accounts of Jesus appearing to his disciples in the evening of the day of his resurrection (Luke 24:36–49 and John 20:19–25):
   1. The accounts are quite different, but we can still conclude that they must describe the same occasion – Jesus’ first appearance to a larger group of disciples and it took place in the evening of the day of his resurrection.
   2. Both accounts are in the wider context of the future ministry of the disciples and their proclamation of the gospel of the forgiveness of sins.
   3. Both Luke and John mention the Holy Spirit, but in different ways.
   4. Information that only Luke has:
      * The fear of the disciples at Jesus’ appearance. They thought that he was a ghost.
      * Jesus telling them to touch him and convince themselves that he was a real person and not a ghost
      * Jesus asking for food
      * The emphasis on the prophetic fulfillment of Jesus’ death and resurrection
      * Jesus’ exhortation to the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they had received the power of the Holy Spirit
      * The commissioning of the disciples as “witnessing”
   5. Information that only John has:
      * That the doors of the room were locked, because the disciples were afraid of the Jewish leaders
      * The commissioning of the disciples as “sending”
      * Jesus breathing on the disciples and saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit!”
      * That Thomas was absent and wanted stronger evidence before he would believe that Jesus had risen from the dead.
2. John 20:22 about Jesus breathing on his disciples is best understood as an anticipation (a “prophetic enactment”) of what would happen fifty days later on the Day of Pentecost (see Acts chapter 2).
3. Jesus’ statement about his disciples forgiving people’s sins (John 20:21–23): See my comment on John 20:23.
4. –

([Go to Study 5: Thomas and Jesus](#Study5ThomasAndJesus))

### Answers 5: Thomas and Jesus, John 20:26–29

Answers to Questions

1. The occasion of this account (v 26): Jesus’ disciples are once again gathered behind locked doors. It is one week later, and this time Thomas is also present.
2. Jesus supernaturally appeared in the room in spite of the locked doors (v 26).
3. Jesus again greeted his disciples with “Peace!” (v 26).
4. Jesus asked Thomas two things (v 27):
   1. To put his finger and his hand in Jesus’ wounds
   2. To believe instead of doubting
5. Thomas responded to Jesus’ request by worshiping him as his Lord and God (v 28).
6. At the end of this passage, Jesus calls those who believe without having seen “blessed” (v 29). So Jesus calls all us who believe in Jesus today “blessed.”

Comments on Think and discuss

1. –
2. –

([Go to Study 6: By the Sea of Galilee](#Study6ByTheSeaOfGalilee))

### Answers 6: By the Sea of Galilee, John 21:1–24

Answers to Questions

1. This resurrection appearance took place by the Sea of Galilee. Seven of Jesus’ disciples went out fishing during the night, and Jesus appeared to them as they were returning to the shore early the following morning (v 1–4).
2. Simon Peter was the one who took the initiative for the fishing activity that night (v 3).
3. The seven disciples caught no fish at all that night (v 3).
4. As the fishermen were returning the next morning, Jesus was standing on the shore (v 4).
5. Jesus asked them if they had caught any fish that night, and when they said no, he told them to cast out their net on the right side of the boat (v 5–6).
6. The problem the fishermen faced was that they caught so many fish that they were unable to haul the net in (v 6).
7. Peter left the boat, because John had said that the man standing on shore must be Jesus (v 7).
8. The other fishermen were trying to bring the boat to the shore dragging the heavy net (v 8).
9. Jesus was standing on the shore by a fire cooking fish and bread (v 9).
10. Peter returned to the boat to help his comrades get the net ashore so that he could bring some of their newly caught fish to Jesus (v 10–11).
11. It was surprising that the fishing net was not torn. The catch of fish was so huge that you would have expected the net to tear (v 11).
12. Jesus told the disciples to come and have some breakfast (v 12).
13. Jesus handed out the bread and the fish to the disciples to eat (v 13).
14. After breakfast, Jesus had three questions for Peter. Each time he asked Peter if he loved him. The question was the same even if John used two different Greek words. But Jesus, of course, spoke Aramaic with his disciples, not Greek (v 15–17).
15. Each time Peter confirmed his love for Jesus (v 15–17).
16. The assignment Jesus had for Peter was to take care of the church. Jesus expresses this with the metaphors “feed my lambs,” “tend my sheep,” and “feed my sheep” (v 15–17).
17. Jesus told Peter that his future would be to suffer and die for the church. Jesus expressed this with metaphors (“someone else will fasten a belt around you,” “take you where you do not wish to go,” and “you will stretch out your hands”). John adds that Peter would glorify God by becoming a martyr (v 18–19).
18. John, calling himself “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” gives some information about himself in verse 20: He was the one who had asked Jesus during the Last Supper about the identity of the betrayer.
19. Jesus used the words “Follow me” twice to reinstate Peter (v 19, 22).
20. Jesus told Peter not to bother about John. Instead, his should focus on his own business – to follow Jesus (v 21–22).
21. The rumor that spread about John in the early church was that he would not die but he would be alive when Jesus returned (v 23).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. There could be more than one reason why John realized that the man on the shore must be Jesus (v 4–7):
   1. This miracle perhaps reminded John of another miraculous catch of fish a few years earlier, when Jesus had called him and his companions to follow him and become fishers of men (see Luke 5:1–11).
   2. The miracle of the huge catch of fish perhaps reminded John of the times Jesus had fed the multitudes (see Mark 6:30–44 and Mark 8:1–9).
   3. The way in which Jesus expressed his concern for them perhaps reminded John of how Jesus used to interact with people and show his concern for them.
   4. The way in which Jesus addressed them (“Children”) perhaps reminded John of how Jesus used to speak to them (compare John 13:33).
2. Peter perhaps felt like this during the different phases of the story about the catch of fish (v 1–14):
   1. Lack of direction (v 2–3): They were back in Galilee. Jesus was gone. The ministry was over. So Peter decided to go back to fishing.
   2. Frustration (v 3): They caught no fish in spite of all the work during the whole night.
   3. Curiosity (v 5–4): Who was this man standing on the shore at daybreak asking them if they had caught any fish and then telling them to try again on the right side of the boat?
   4. Shock and amazement (v 6): The catch of fish was absolutely astounding.
   5. Excitement (v 7): John told the others that the man on the shore must be Jesus. Peter was in a hurry to meet him so he jumped into the water to swim ashore.
   6. Expectation (v 9–11): Jesus was standing at the fire preparing breakfast – and he asked Peter to get some more fresh fish.
   7. Shyness (v 12): How do you eat breakfast with a man that has risen from the dead? Is he really Jesus, or are we dealing with his spirit?
   8. Hope (v 13): Jesus invited them for breakfast. Perhaps everything will be alright again – in spite of Peter disowning Jesus on the day of crucifixion?
3. Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved him. Jesus knew that one time would not have been enough for Peter. Peter had previously disowned Jesus three times. He now needed to profess his love for Jesus three times.
4. There was a rumor in the early church that John would not die. This rumor had started with somebody overhearing and over-interpreting a conversation between Jesus and Peter. Jesus had just told Peter that his future would be one of suffering and martyrdom. John was standing nearby, so Peter asked Jesus about John’s future. Jesus told Peter to mind his own business. If Jesus wanted John be alive when he returned, that was no concern of Peter’s. So Jesus really never said that John would be alive at his return. But the false rumor spread.

([Go to Study 7: The Great Commission](#Study7TheGreatCommission))

### Answers 7: The Great Commission, Matt 28:16–20

Answers to Questions

1. This story takes place on an unnamed mountain in Galilee (v 16).
2. When the disciples saw Jesus on the mountain, they all worshiped him. But Matthew points out that some of them doubted (v 17).
3. Jesus told his disciples that God had given him all authority, in heaven as well as on earth (v 18).
4. Jesus told his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations (v 19). So the ministry of the church is worldwide. Compare John’s vision in the book of Revelation. He sees a great multitude that no one can count, from every nation, tribe, people and language (Rev 7:9).
5. In the Great Commission, Jesus refers to God the Trinity (even if he does not use this term): The church is commissioned to baptize people in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (v 19).
6. Jesus promised his disciples that he would always be with them (v 20).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Some of Jesus’ disciples doubted (v 17):
   1. Perhaps they doubted that Jesus had really risen from the dead, even though they all had met him at least once in Jerusalem soon after his resurrection. But it still seemed so unreal. Was Jesus a real person, or was he a ghost or a spirit?
   2. Perhaps they had doubts about his identity. Was he really God? Was it really right for them to worship him in this way?
   3. Perhaps they had doubts about his kingdom and wondering what was now going to happen to their country. Was Jesus going to throw out the Roman occupants from Palestine and establish a Jewish kingdom on the pattern of king David’s kingdom? Or was Jesus’ kingdom of a different kind? If so, what kind of kingdom should they expect?
2. According to the Great Commission, discipleship involves two steps (v 18–20):
   1. To baptize those who have repented and accepted the gospel
   2. To teach those who have been baptized about Christian faith and life. How should we live in this world as citizens of the Kingdom of God?
3. Jesus promised that he would always be with his disciples (v 20), in spite of the fact that he was soon going to leave them and ascend to his Father in heaven (see Luke 24:50–51). Jesus was referring to his presence with them through the Holy Spirit.
4. Does your church fulfill the Great Commission? How do you answer questions like these:
   1. What social groups do you reach? Castes? Tribes? Rich–poor? Educated–uneducated? Young–old? Villagers–city people?
   2. What language groups do you reach?
   3. How far does your outreach ministry stretch? How far away (and to which cultural areas) have you sent gospel workers?
   4. What is the social and linguistic composition of your church? Does your church welcome all kinds of people?
   5. Does your church teach and preach about the Great Commission?

([Go to Study 8: Jesus carried up into heaven](#Study8JesusCarriedUpIntoHeaven))

### Answers 8: Jesus carried up into heaven, Luke 24:50–53

Answers to Questions

1. As Jesus was blessing his disciples, he left them and he was carried up into heaven (v 50–51).
2. Before the disciples returned to Jerusalem, they worshiped Jesus who had just been taken away from them (v 52).
3. When the disciples came to Jerusalem, they spent much time worshiping God in the temple (v 52).

Comments on Think and discuss

A comparison between Luke’s account of Jesus’ ascension (Luke 24:50–52) and the one found in the longer ending of Mark’s gospel (Mark 16:19):

* Luke’s account is very brief, but Mark’s is even briefer.
* Only Luke mentions that the ascension took place near Bethany.
* Only Luke mentions that Jesus was blessing his disciples as he left them.
* Both mention that Jesus was taken up into heaven.
* Only Mark has included that Jesus sat down at the right hand of God (an expression that Jesus is recorded using in the three synoptic gospels when he was questioned before the Jewish council, see Matt 26:64; Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69).
* Only Luke mentions that the disciples worshiped Jesus and that they afterwards returned to Jerusalem.
* Mark’s gospel ends with the disciples going out, proclaiming the gospel everywhere.

([Go to Thirty studies from Matthew and Luke](#ThirtyStudiesFromMatthewAndLuke))

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## Thirty studies from Matthew and Luke

### Introduction

This unit consists of thirty studies from the gospels of Matthew and Luke about Jesus and his ministry. It only includes material not found in the previous units of the book, nor in parallel accounts in Mark’s gospel. I have also excluded the Sermon on the Mount (Matt chapters 5–7, with parallels in Luke), as these texts are dealt with in another textbook – The Kingdom of God – in this series.

The studies are more or less in chronological order, beginning with Jesus’ ministry in Galilee and ending with four parables and a “scene of separation.” Jesus taught these parables, all with perspectives on the Kingdom of God in the light of Jesus’ second coming, soon before his arrest and crucifixion in Jerusalem. In the “separation scene,” the Son of Man, seated on his throne of glory, separates people as “a shepherd separates his sheep from his goats.”

The texts studied have unavoidably been taken out of their original gospel contexts. My introductory comments and some of my questions partly compensate for that weakness.

Here is a list of the thirty studies and the texts that they are based on:

* 1. The faith of a Roman centurion, Matt 8:5–13 ([Go to the study](#Study1TheFaithOfARomanCenturion))
  2. Jesus raises a widow’s son at Nain, Luke 7:11–17 ([Go to the study](#Study2JesusRaisesAWidowsSonAtNain))
  3. John the Baptist and Jesus, Matt 11:2–19 ([Go to the study](#Study3JohnTheBaptistAndJesus))
  4. Jesus anointed by a sinful woman, Luke 7:36–50 ([Go to the study](#Study4JesusAnointedByASinfulWoman))
  5. Woe and rest, Matt 11:20–30 ([Go to the study](#Study5WoeAndRest))
  6. The sign of Jonah, Matt 12:38–42 [(Go to the study](#Study6TheSignOfJonah))
  7. Parables about the Kingdom of God, Matthew chapter 13 ([Go to the study](#Study7ParablesAboutTheKingdomOfGod))
  8. Five healing miracles ([Go to the study](#Study8FiveHealingMiracles))
  9. Payming temple tax, Matt 17:24–27 ([Go to the study](#Study9PayingTempleTax))
  10. The wicked servant, Matt 18:21–35 ([Go to the study](#Study10TheWickedServant))
  11. To follow Jesus, Luke 9:57–62 ([Go to the study](#Study11ToFollowJesus))
  12. Jesus sends out the seventy, Luke 10:1–20 ([Go to the study](#Study12JesusSendsOutTheSeventy))
  13. The cost of discipleship Luke 14:25–33 ([Go to the study](#Study13TheCostOfDiscipleship))
  14. Shortage of workers, Matt 9:35–38 ([Go to the study](#Study14ShortageOfWorkers))
  15. The good Samaritan, Luke 10:25–37 ([Go to the study](#Study15TheGoodSamaritan))
  16. Martha and Mary, Luke 10:38–42 ([Go to the study](#Study16MarthaAndMary))
  17. Six woes on the Jewish leaders, Luke 11:37–54 ([Go to the study](#Study17SixWoesOnTheJewishLeaders))
  18. The rich fool, Luke 12:13–21 ([Go to the study](#Study18TheRichFool))
  19. The narrow door, Luke 13:22–30 ([Go to the study](#Study19TheNarrowDoor))
  20. Three parables about lost and found, Luke chapter 15 ([Go to the study](#Study20ThreeParablesAboutLostAndFound))
  21. The dishonest manager, Luke 16:1–9 ([Go to the study](#Study21TheDishonestManager))
  22. The rich man and Lazarus the beggar, Luke 16:19–31 ([Go to the study](#Study22TheRichManAndLazarusTheBeggar))
  23. The coming of the Kingdom of God, Luke 17:20–37 ([Go to the study](#Study23TheComingOfTheKingdomOfGod))
  24. Two parables about prayer, Luke 18:1–14 ([Go to the study](#Study24TwoParablesAboutPrayer))
  25. Zacchaeus the chief tax collector, Luke 19:1–10 ([Go to the study](#Study25ZacchaeusTheChiefTaxCollector))
  26. The laborers in the vineyard, Matt 20:1–16 ([Go to the study](#Study26TheLaborersInTheVineyard))
  27. The marriage feast, Matt 22:1–14 ([Go to the study](#Study27TheMarriageFeast))
  28. The ten virgins, Matt 25:1–13 ([Go to the study](#Study28TheTenVirgins))
  29. The talents, Matt 25:14–30 ([Go to the study](#Study29TheTalents))
  30. The sheep and the goats, Matt 25:31–46 ([Go to the study](#Study30TheSheepAndTheGoats))

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### Study 1: The faith of a Roman centurion, Matt 8:5–13

Introduction and comments

In this story about the healing of the servant of a Roman officer, Jesus contrasts the faith of a Gentile with the lack of faith of the Jews, who saw themselves as the heirs of the Kingdom of God. But we also find that our faith has serious consequences for our eternity. This story is also found in Luke 7:1–10.

Capernaum … centurion (v 5): Capernaum was an important military city in Galilee in those days. A centurion was a Roman military officer usually in charge of 80 soldiers (not always 100 soldiers which is the literal meaning of the title).

recline at the table with… in the kingdom of heaven (v 11): Jesus is referring to the Old Testament prophecy about the eschatological messianic banquet that symbolizes the blessings of the future fellowship between God and his people (see Isaiah 25:6–9). Matthew often follows the Jewish tradition (out of respect for God’s name) of using “Heaven” instead of “God,” here in the expression “kingdom of heaven.”

the sons of the kingdom (v 12): Jesus is referring to the Jews, who called themselves sons of Abraham and who thought that their Judaism would automatically qualify them for entrance into the Kingdom of God.

Questions

1. Where did this event take place (v 5)?
2. What need did the centurion present to Jesus (v 5–6)?
3. Why did the centurion not want Jesus to come to his house (v 7–8)?
4. Why was Jesus amazed at the centurion’s words (v 9–10)?
5. What did Jesus say about the banquet in the kingdom of heaven (v 11)?
6. How did Jesus describe “hell,” the destination of those who will not be allowed to enter the future Kingdom of God (v 12)?
7. What happened to the centurion’s servant (v 13)?

Think and discuss

1. What do you think we as Christian believers today can learn from this story?
2. Compare the parallel accounts of this event in Matthew (8:5–13) and Luke (7:1–10) and note down three main differences.
3. Compare the two accounts of Jesus healing an officer’s servant in Matthew and Luke with the account of Jesus healing an official’s son in John 4:46–54. Do you think that they describe the same event? Why – why not?

([Go to Answers 1: The faith of a Roman centurion](#Answers1TheFaithOfARomanCenturion))

### Study 2: Jesus raises a widow’s son at Nain, Luke 7:11–17

Introduction and comments

This story, in which Jesus shows compassion on a poor widow, is only found in Luke’s gospel. It takes place in southern Galilee.

Nain (v 11): This is the only time that Nain, a small town situated 9 km south of Nazareth in southern Galilee, is mentioned in the gospels.

touched the bier (v 14): By doing so, Jesus risked becoming ritually unclean.

Questions

1. What is the context of this story (Luke chapter 7)?
2. Where does this story take place (v 11)? Find the place on Map of the Roman Province of Judaea.
3. What do we learn about the condition of the woman whose son had died (v 12)?
4. How did Jesus react to the woman’s situation (v 13)?
5. What did Jesus do about the woman’s situation (v 14–15)?
6. How did the crowd react to the miracle (v 16)?
7. What understanding did the people have of Jesus as a result of this miracle (v 16)?
8. What was the consequence of this miracle (v 17)?

Think and discuss

1. How would you describe the emotions in the different parts of this story?
2. Retell the story about the widow’s son in Nain (Luke 7:11–17). Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible. Be dramatic and exciting. Imagine that you are speaking to a group of villagers.

([Go to Answers 2: Jesus raises a widow’s son at Nain](#Answers2JesusRaisesAWidowsSonAtNain))

### Study 3: John the Baptist and Jesus, Matt 11:2–19

Introduction and comments

This account is also found in Luke 7:18–35. John the Baptist’s has a question about Jesus’ identity as the Messiah. Jesus has a good reply for him: “See what is happening through my ministry!” Jesus then goes on to comment on the identity and ministry of John the Baptist.

John … in prison (v 2): John the Baptist had been imprisoned by king Herod Antipas (see comment on Mark 1:14), who later beheaded him (see Mark 6: 14–29 with comments).

he who is to come (v 3): John the Baptist wanted to know if Jesus really was the Messiah.

who finds no occasion for stumbling in me (v 6): Jesus did not want discouragement and doubt to make John the Baptist lose his faith in him.

more than a prophet (v 9): John the Baptist was the prophet that in a unique way prepared the way for the Messiah.

Verse 10 is a quotation from Malachi 3:1.

he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater that he (v 11): John the Baptist belonged to the old covenant, in which he was the greatest prophet. But the new covenant is a superior covenant. So even the least person in the Kingdom of God, is greater than John.

Verse 12: Bible scholars struggle with the meaning of this verse. This is one way of understanding it: From the beginning of Jesus’ ministry (“the days of John the Baptist”) the Kingdom of God has advanced forcefully. But this advance has been under constant attacks from violent people (“forceful men,” “taken by force”). So the reason why John wondered if Jesus really could be the Messiah was this ongoing persecution of the people of the Kingdom of God.

he is Elijah who is to come (v 14): Jesus was referring to Malachi 4:5, which says that Elijah will return before the day of the Lord. When the people asked John directly if he was Elijah, he denied it (see John 1:21). John was, of course, not a reincarnation of Elijah, but he fulfilled the function and role of the prophet Elijah (see Mark 9:11–13 with comments).

like children sitting in the marketplaces ... played the flute … we wailed (v 16–19): People had rejected both John and Jesus, but for different reasons. People were like children who refused to dance to the flute (as at a wedding) or to wail (as at a funeral). They would neither accept John (his lifestyle was too strict, because he did not eat or drink) nor Jesus (his lifestyle was too slack, because he associated with tax collectors and sinners).

wisdom is vindicated by her deeds (v 19): God’s wisdom has been vindicated by both John the Baptist and by Jesus, in spite of their different lifestyles.

Questions

1. What question did John the Baptist have about Jesus (v 2–3)?
2. How did Jesus answer John’s question (v 4–5)?
3. What picture of John the Baptist do we get from Jesus’ words in verses 7–9?
4. What statement about John the Baptist did Jesus make in verse 10 and comment?
5. What statement about John the Baptist did Jesus make in verse 11 and comment?
6. What did people say about John the Baptist, and why did they say this (v 18)?
7. What did people say about the Son of Man (Jesus), and why did they say this (v 19)?
8. How did Jesus end his speech about John the Baptist and himself (v 19)?

Think and discuss

1. Explain verse 12 in your own words.
2. Is John the Baptist the prophet Elijah or not (v 14 with comment)?
3. Explain Jesus’ statement about wisdom at the end of this passage.

([Go to Answers 3: John the Baptist and Jesus](#Answers3JohnTheBaptistAndJesus))

### Study 4: Jesus anointed by a sinful woman, Luke 7:36–50

Introduction and comments

In the gospels we find two occasions when Jesus was anointed by a woman. The first time was in Galilee, when a sinful woman interrupted the meal that Jesus was enjoying in the house of a Pharisee called Simon. This story, recorded only in Luke’s gospel, is the topic of our present study.

Jesus was anointed a second time just three days before his crucifixion. This happened in Bethany near Jerusalem in the house of Simon the leper. Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha, poured expensive nard over Jesus’ head. That story is recorded in three of the gospels – John, Matthew, and Mark (see Mark 14:3–9 with comments).

alabaster jar of ointment (v 37): See Mark 14:3 with comment.

Standing behind at his feet (v 38): Jesus was reclining with his feet extended away from the table in accordance with the custom of those days. So it was possible for the woman to wipe his feet with her hair without disturbing his meal.

Simon (v 40): This was a common name at that time. There are nine persons called Simon in the New Testament.

five hundred denarii (v 41): One denarius was the equivalent of one day’s wages for a laborer.

no water for my feet (v 44): Hospitality demanded that water was provided for the guests to wash their feet.

no kiss (v 45): Hospitality also demanded that an honored guest was greeted with a kiss of welcome.

anoint my head with oil (v 46): In ancient times, important guests were often anointed as a sign of respect.

Questions

1. Why was Jesus visiting the house of a Pharisee on this occasion (v 36)?
2. What do we learn about the woman at the beginning of the story (v 37–38)?
3. What thoughts did Simon have about Jesus (v 39)?
4. How did Jesus deal with Simon’s thoughts (v 40–42)?
5. How did Simon answer Jesus’ question (v 44)?
6. In what ways had Simon not respectfully welcomed Jesus to his home (v 44–46)?
7. What signs of love had the women showed Jesus (v 44–46)?
8. What point did Jesus make about love and forgiveness in verse 47?
9. Why were the other guests surprised at Jesus’ words to the woman (v 48–49)?
10. How did the woman experience salvation (v 50)?
11. What final blessing did Jesus have for the woman (v 50)?

Think and discuss

1. How did Jesus reveal that Simon was wrong when he thought that Jesus was no prophet?
2. How do you understand the connection between love and forgiveness as found in the story about the woman who anointed Jesus?
3. Retell the story about the woman who anointed Jesus (Luke 7:11–17). Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible. Be dramatic and exciting. Imagine that you are speaking to a group of villagers.

Reflect and prepare

Reflect on the story about Jesus being anointed by a sinful woman (Luke 7:36–50) in the light of the material found in this study. Then prepare a devotion (or a Bible study or a sermon) called Your faith has saved you; go in peace!

([Go to Answers 4: Jesus anointed by a sinful woman](#Answers4JesusAnointedByASinfulWoman))

### Study 5: Woe and rest, Matt 11:20–30

Introduction and comments

This text can be structured like this:

* 1. Jesus denounces unrepentant cities in Galilee, v 20–24
  2. Jesus praises his heavenly Father, v 25–27
  3. Jesus promises rest for the weary and burdened, v 28–30

Luke 10:13–22 has parallels to the first two points, but Jesus’ promise of rest for the weary and burdened is only found in Matthew.

Woe (v 21): An expression of both doom and pity

Chorazin (v 21): This city was situated a few kilometers north of Capernaum. It is only mentioned in this context.

Bethsaida (v 21): This city was situated on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee.

repented … in sackcloth and ashes (v 21): It was an expression of grief and repentance to dress in sackcloth and to spread ashes over oneself (compare Esther 4:1, 3; Jeremiah 6:26; Daniel 9:3).

Tyre and Sidon ( 22): These were important Phoenician cities on the Mediterranean coast north of Palestine. Old Testament prophets often pronounced God’s judgment over them, because of their Baal worship and their enmity to the people of Israel.

Sodom (v 23–24): This city was destroyed by God during the time of Abraham because of its sinfulness (see Genesis chapter 19).

infants (v 25): This word can be used metaphorically about innocent and simple people. So in this verse it refers to those who are not “wise and intelligent.”

All things (v 27): Jesus is here referring to the full revelation of God (compare v 25).

weary and burdened (v 28): Jesus is probably referring to the “heavy loads” that the Pharisees put “on men’s shoulders” by insisting on a legalistic interpretation of the Old Testament law (compare Matt 23:4).

yoke (v 29–30): This everyday word was often used metaphorically in ancient times. It could for example symbolize political oppression or spiritual servitude. But it could also be used in a positive way about God’s authority over his people through his covenant and his word. In this passage both the negative and positive aspects of the metaphor are implied: The yoke of the Pharisees (their legalistic and burdensome interpretation of the Old Testament law) is heavy and suppressive. But Jesus’ yoke (life in the Kingdom of God under the rule of Jesus Christ) is easy and light. When we come to Jesus (“take his yoke upon us”),we find rest for our souls.

Questions

1. Find Galilee, Bethsaida Tyre and Sidon on Map of the Roman Province of Judaea.
2. Why did Jesus denounce the three Galilean cities of Capernaum, Bethsaida and Korazin (v 21–24)?
3. Why did Jesus praise his heavenly Father in verses 25–26?
4. What did Jesus mean by “all things” (v 27 with comment)?
5. What do we learn about getting to know our heavenly Father in verse 27?
6. What does the metaphor “yoke” imply (v 28–30 with comments)?

Think and discuss

1. Explain what Jesus meant by his statement that on the day of judgment the city of Sodom will do better than the city of Capernaum (v 23–24).
2. Evaluate yourself and the believers of your church in the light of Jesus’ words in verses 25–27.
3. Explain Jesus’ invitation in verses 28–30. Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible.

Reflect and prepare

Reflect on Jesus’ invitation to come to him and to take upon oneself his yoke (Matt 11:28–30) in the light of material found in this study. Then prepare a devotion (or a Bible study or a sermon) called Rest for our souls.

([Go to Answers 5: Woe and rest](#Answers5WoeAndRest))

### Study 6: The sign of Jonah, Matt 12:38–42

Introduction and comments

Matthew has placed the passage about the Pharisees and scribes asking Jesus for a “miraculous sign” between the dispute about the authority by which Jesus delivered the demon-possessed (see Mark 3:20–30 and comments) and the question about Jesus’ true mother and brothers (see Mark 3:31–35 and comment).

Jesus is evidently frustrated about this request for a “miraculous sign” – as if the deliverance of the demon-possessed and the healing of the sick hadn’t been good enough signs. So he calls the Jewish leaders “a wicked and adulterous generation.” Then he tells them that the only sign they will get is the “sign of the prophet Jonah.” Later in Matthew, Jesus again makes a reference to this “sign of Jonah” (see 16:4).

Luke also a included a speech of Jesus about “the sign of Jonah” (see 11:29–32), but Mark and John do not mention it.

miraculous sign (v 38): The Pharisees probably wanted to see a spectacular miracle in the sky (compare Luke 11:16).

adulterous (v 39): Jesus used this word in a spiritual sense: The Jewish leaders were unfaithful to God and his covenant by the way they interpreted the Old Testament law.

Jonah the prophet (v 39): Jonah is the main character of the Old Testament book of Jonah. God sent Jonah to Nineveh to proclaim God’s judgment over the people of Nineveh. But they listened to Jonah and repented from their sins. So God pardoned them and spared their city.

three days and three nights (v 40): This Jewish expression was synonymous with “three days.” And since the Jews called even a part of a day “a day,” there is no conflict between this statement and the fact that Jesus only was in the grave from Friday afternoon until Sunday morning.

sea monster/fish (v 40): The Greek word means “sea creature” and could be used of a large fish.

the Son of Man (v 40): The most common title that Jesus uses about himself in the gospels.

in the heart of the earth (v 40): Jesus referred to the time he would spend in his tomb and compared it with the time Jonah spent in the belly of the fish.

Nineveh (v 41): This was the capital of the Old Testament Assyrian Empire. It was destroyed by the Babylonians in 612 BC.

the Queen of the south (v 42): In 1 Kings chapter 10, we read about the visit of the queen of Sheba (a country in southwest Arabia, present-day Yemen) to king Solomon.

Solomon (v 42): Solomon was king of the undivided Israelite kingdom 970–930 BC.

Questions

1. What request did the Jewish leaders have for Jesus (v 38)?
2. How did Jesus respond to the request of the Jewish leaders (v 39 with comment)?
3. What comparison does Jesus make between Jonah and the Son of Man in verse 40?
4. Why will the Jewish leaders be condemned by the people of Nineveh at the judgment, according to Jesus (v 41)?
5. What comparison does Jesus make between Jonah and himself in verse 41?
6. Why will the Jewish leaders be condemned by the Queen of the South at the judgment, according to Jesus (v 42)?
7. What comparison does Jesus make between Solomon and himself in verse 42?

Think and discuss

1. Explain the “sign of Jonah.”
2. Compare the parallel accounts of the “sign of Jonah” (Matt 12:38–42 and Luke 11:29–32). What is the main difference between them?
3. What is remarkable about fact that Jesus contrasted the Jewish leaders of his own generation (calling them “a wicked and adulterous generation”) with “Nineveh” and “the Queen of the South”?
4. What lessons does the “sign of Jonah” have for Christian believers today?

([Go to Answers 6: The sign of Jonah](#Answers6TheSignOfJonah))

### Study 7: Parables about the Kingdom of God, Matthew chapter 13

Introduction and comments

Chapter 13 of Matthew’s gospel contains several parables about the Kingdom of God. We have already studied two of them (“the sower” and “the mustard seed”), which Mark included in his gospel (see Mark 4:1–20, 30–32 with comments).

In Matthew chapter 13, Jesus teaches the first of these parables of the Kingdom of God to a large crowd of people gathered on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus himself gets into a boat and sits down in it, while all the people stand on the shore listening to him (Matt 13:1–2). He later moves into a house with his disciples to instruct them more in private (v 36).

In this study we will look at five parables about the Kingdom of God. But first we will discuss an issue that sometimes confuses readers of the gospels:

* 1. Why Jesus spoke in parables, v 10–17, 34–36, 51–52
  2. The parable of the weeds, v 24–30 and 36–43
  3. The parable of the yeast, v 33
  4. The parable of the hidden treasure, v 44
  5. The parable of the pearl, v 45–46
  6. The parable of the net, v 47–50

The Greek word for “parable” has a wider meaning than the English word “parable.” It can also mean “proverb, fable, figure of speech, symbol,” but it always involves a comparison of two objects for the purpose of teaching, often in the form of a story and usually with one main point of reference. Bible scholars have defined a “parable” in various ways. So depending on your definition, the total number of New Testament parables is between 33 and 79. For a list of parabels in the gospels see the reference section of this textbook.

The use of parables as a teaching method has two sides: It can either be a way of clarifying a point so that people easily catch it and remember it. Or it can be a way of “hiding” a point so that only people with inside knowledge will understand it. Jesus used parables in both these ways. The Kingdom of God parables in this study belong to this second category.

As Jesus’ ministry progressed and the opposition from the Jewish leadership increased, Jesus seems to have used more parables in his teaching. In verse 10, even his disciples asked him why he did so. Jesus came as the Messiah, the promised king of Israel. Only after the Jewish leaders had rejected his claims did he make use of the “parable method” of imparting truths about the Kingdom of God (v 11).

speak to the them in parables (v 10): See the explanations above.

Verse 13 contains a quotation from Deuteronomy 29:4.

Verse 14 contains a quotation from Isaiah 6:9–10.

Verses 24–30: The parable of the weeds has many points of reference (compare verses 37–43) so it should perhaps be classified as an allegory. A true parable has only one main point of reference.

weed (v 25): This kind of weed resembles wheat when it is young, but it looks different from wheat when it matures.

harvest (v 30): Harvest is a metaphor for God’s final judgment both in the Old Testament (for example in Joel 3:13) and in the New Testament (for example in Rev 14:14–20). In his own explanation to the parable of the weeds, Jesus said that “the harvest is the end of the age” (v 39).

yeast (v 33): In the Bible, yeast is usually a metaphor for something evil or unclean (see comment on Mark 8:15). But here Jesus uses it as a symbol of growth and positive influence.

Verse 35 contains a quotation from Psalm 78:2. The “hidden things” that Jesus was now revealing can be understood as the righteous acts of God in the redemption of his people through Jesus (his teaching, his miracles, his death and resurrection).

furnace of fire (v 42): In apocalyptic literature, fire is often mentioned in connection with the final judgment (compare Rev 19:20; 20:14).

the righteous will shine forth like the sun (v 43): This is an allusion to Daniel 12:3.

Questions

1. After Jesus had told the crowds the parable of the sower (Matt 13:3–9), the disciples had a question for him. What question was that (v 10)?
2. In his answer to his disciples, Jesus mentioned two categories of people. Which were they (v 11)?
3. What reason for speaking in parables did Jesus present in verses 13–14 (see also the introduction)?
4. What do we learn from verse 34 about Jesus’ way of teaching at this point in his ministry?
5. What change of scene do we find in verse 36? And what is the implication of that change of scene?
6. What question did Jesus have for his disciples in verse 51? And what was their answer?
7. Compare the parable of the weeds (v 24–30) with Jesus’ explanation of it (v 37–43) and make a list of the points of reference.
8. What role does the Son of Man play in Jesus’ explanation of the parable of the weeds (v 37–43)?
9. How did Jesus describe the destinies of “the evildoers” and “the righteous” in his explanation to the parable of the weeds (v 37–43)?
10. What does “yeast” symbolize in the parable of the yeast (v 33 with comment)?
11. In the parable of the hidden treasure, what did the man do to get hold of this treasure (v 44)?
12. In the parable of the pearl, what did the man do to get hold of this pearl (v 45–46)?
13. How is the fish described in the parable of the net (v 47–48)?

Think and discuss

1. How would you answer the question: “Why did Jesus use parables?”
2. How do you understand Jesus’ point in verses 51–52?
3. How do you understand the message of the parable of the weeds (v 24–30, 37–43)?
4. How do you understand the message of the parable of the yeast (v 33)?
5. How do you understand the message of the parable of the hidden treasure (v 44)?
6. How do you understand the message of the parable of the pearl (v 45–46)?
7. Make a list of the implied points of reference in the parable of the net (v 47–48) and Jesus’ interpretation of the parable (v 49–50). How do you understand the message of this parable?

([Go to Answers 7: Parables about the Kingdom of God](#Answers7ParablesAboutTheKingdomOfGod))

### Study 8: Five healing miracles

Matt 9:27–34; Luke 13:10–17; 14:1–6; 17:11–19

Introduction and comments

This study briefly touches on five healing miracles found in Matthew and Luke, but not in Mark:

* 1. Jesus heals two blind men, Matt 9:27–31
  2. Jesus heals a mute and demon-possessed man, Matt 9:32–34
  3. Jesus heals a woman suffering from a crippling spirit, Luke 13:10–17
  4. Jesus heals a man suffering from dropsy, Luke 14:1–6
  5. Jesus heals ten men suffering from leprosy, Luke 17:11–19

from there (Matt 9:27): Matthew’s previous accounts (the raising of the dead girl and the healing of the woman with bleeding) took place in Capernaum in Galilee.

son of David (Matt 9:27): This was a popular Jewish title for the coming Messiah, the king who was to fulfill God’s covenant with David (see 2 Sam 7:5–16). This is the first time people call Jesus “the Son of David” in Matthew’s gospel. So it is evident that the two blind men were confessing Jesus as the Messiah.

According to your faith (Matt 9:29): This means “Because you have faith…” So Jesus did not heal the blind men according to the greatness of their faith, but because they had faith in him, the One who could heal them.

set free (Luke 13:12): The woman was set free from both the evil spirit and her physical handicap.

healed on the Sabbath (Luke 13:14): The controversy over Jesus’ activities on the Sabbath is an important theme in the gospels. The Jewish leaders accused Jesus of not keeping the Sabbath law.

There are six days for work … (Luke 13:14): The leader of the synagogue quoted the Old Testament Sabbath law (Exodus 20:9–10).

hypocrites (Luke 13:15): The Greek word means “play-actor.” Jesus used this word about those who pretended to be pious. In this case, the leaders had more regard for the needs of an animal than for the far greater need of a crippled woman. They pretended to be zealous for the law, but their motive was to attack Jesus.

a daughter of Abraham (Luke 13:16): This means that the woman was Jewish.

to eat a meal on the Sabbath (Luke 14:1): Preparing meals was not allowed on the Sabbath, so the food in the Pharisee’s house had been prepared the day before.

dropsy (Luke 14:2): The man had an excessive accumulation of water in his body. The Greek word is a medical term only used here in the New Testament. Luke, who wrote the gospel of Luke, was a doctor.

Is it lawful to heal people on the Sabbath or not? (Luke 14:3): The law of Moses did not forbid this, but the Jewish scribes and lawyers had interpreted the law in such a way that they had made it “illegal.” So Jesus’ question was a difficult one for the lawyers and Pharisees to answer. They chose to remain silent (v 4).

son/donkey (Luke 14:5): Some Greek manuscripts have “son,” others “donkey.” Compare the Kannada translations: pavitra grantha has “donkey," satyavEdavu has “son.” In a similar discussion in Matthew between Jesus and the Pharisees, also on a Sabbath, Jesus used the same argument with a “sheep” (Matt 12:11).

men with leprosy (Luke 17:12): In biblical times, the term “leprosy” was used about all kinds of skin diseases.

They stood at a distance (Luke 17:12): Skin diseases were contagious, so people suffering from leprosy were separated from other people. They were literally the “untouchables” of those days.

show yourselves to the priests (Luke 17:14): The law of Moses said that the priests decided if a person suffering from skin disease was healed or not (see Leviticus 13:2–3; 14:2–32).

Samaritan (Luke 17:16): Ever since the return of the Jews from exile in Babylon hundreds of years earlier, there had been conflicts and enmity between the Jews and the people of Samaria. The Jews looked down on the Samaritans because of their mixed heritage and their non-Jewish religious practices. In New Testament times, Jews and Samaritans did not socialize.

made you well (Luke 17:19): The Greek verb means both “save” and “make well.”

Questions

1. What did the two blind men call out as they were following Jesus (Matt 9:27)?
2. What question did Jesus put to the two blind men (Matt 9:28)?
3. Did the two men obey Jesus’ instruction (Matt 9:30–31)?
4. How did the mute and demon-possessed man come to Jesus (Matt 9:32)?
5. How did the crowds react to the healing of the mute and demon-possessed man (Matt 9:33)?
6. How did the Pharisees react to the healing of the mute and demon-possessed man (Matt 9:33)?
7. What was Jesus doing in the synagogue on a Sabbath (Luke 13:10)?
8. What information does Luke give his readers about the woman in the synagogue (Luke 13:11)?
9. How did Jesus heal the crippled woman (Luke 13:12–13)?
10. Why was the leader of the synagogue upset with Jesus (Luke 13:14)?
11. Why did Jesus call the Jewish leaders “hypocrites” (Luke 13:15–16)?
12. What was the outcome of the discussion about the healing of the crippled woman (Luke 13:17)?
13. When and where did the healing of the man suffering from dropsy take place (Luke 14:1–2)?
14. List the order of events in the account of the healing of the man suffering from dropsy (Luke 14:1–6).
15. Where did the story about Jesus healing the ten lepers take place (Luke 17:11–12)?
16. Why did Jesus tell the ten lepers to go and show themselves to the priests (Luke 17:14 and comment)?
17. What does Luke tell his readers about the man who came back to Jesus after he had been healed (Luke 17:15–16)?
18. How did Jesus describe the man (Luke 17:18)?

Think and discuss

1. Retell the story about the healing of the two blind men (Matt 9:27–31). Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible. Be dramatic and exciting. Imagine that you are speaking to a group of villagers.
2. Retell the story about the healing of the mute and demon-possessed man (Matt 9:32–34). Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible. Be dramatic and exciting. Imagine that you are speaking to a group of villagers.
3. Retell the story about the healing of the crippled woman (Luke 13:10–17). Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible. Be dramatic and exciting. Imagine that you are speaking to a group of villagers.
4. Retell the story about the healing of the man suffering from dropsy (Luke 14:1–6). Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible. Be dramatic and exciting. Imagine that you are speaking to a group of villagers.
5. Retell the story about the healing of the ten men suffering from leprosy (Luke 17:11–19). Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible. Be dramatic and exciting. Imagine that you are speaking to a group of villagers.
6. What role does faith play in these five stories about healing? What can we learn about faith from them for our own life and ministry?

Reflect and prepare

Reflect on the five healing miracles and the information found in this study. Then use the comments on Think and discuss 6 for a devotion (or a Bible study or a sermon) called Go, your faith has made you well!

([Go to Answers 8: Five healing miracles](#Answers8FiveHealingMiracles))

### Study 9: Paying temple tax, Matt 17:24–27

Introduction and comments

This story, which is only found in Matthew’s gospel, is not easy to understand. It is evidently about freedom and not using your freedom to give offense. But whose freedom is Jesus referring to? And freedom from what?

two-drachma tax … temple tax … stater coin (v 24, 27): This was the annual temple tax that adult Jewish men had to pay. It was worth half a shekel (about two days’ wages for a laborer) and was used for the upkeep of the temple (compare Exodus 30:11–16). The Greek drachma was the equivalent of a Roman denarius. The two Greek coins mentioned in this text is first a “didrachma” (a two-drachma coin, enough for one person’s tax) and then a “stater” (a four-drachma coin, enough for two persons’ tax). The payment of this temple tax was an important expression of solidarity with the Jewish community.

unless we cause them to stumble (v 27): Compare Paul’s examples (1 Cor 8:13; 9:12, 22).

Questions

1. What question did the collectors of the temple tax have for Peter, and how did Peter answer them (v 24–25)?
2. What difference between “the sons of kings” and “others” do we find in verses 25–26?
3. Why did Jesus tell Peter to go to the lake and catch a fish that had a coin in its mouth (v 27)?

Think and discuss

1. Why would there be a difference between “the sons of kings” and “others” with reference to paying duty and taxes (verses 25–26)?
2. Explain the “offense” that Jesus mentioned in verse 27.
3. What do you think is the message of this passage?

([Go to Answers 9: Paying temple tax](#Answers9PayingTempleTax))

### Study 10: The wicked servant, Matt 18:21–35

Introduction and comments

The parable of the unmerciful servant is about forgiveness and the Kingdom of God.

seven times … seventy-seven times (v 21–22): The Jewish teachers thought that it was enough to forgive a person three times. So Peter must have felt big-hearted, when he suggested seven times. But Jesus told him “seventy-seven times.” The parable that follows shows that Jesus did not have a specific number of forgivenesses in mind: In the Kingdom of God forgiveness is unlimited. We have all been forgiven more that we can ever forgive.

ten thousand talents (v 24): The equivalent of many crores of Rupees.

one hundred denarii (v 28): The equivalent three months’ wages.

Questions

1. What is the occasion of the parable about the unmerciful servant (v 21–23)?
2. What is the parable of the unmerciful servant about (v 23)?
3. Why was the first servant brought to his master’s house (v 24)?
4. Why did the master order the first servant and his family to be sold (v 25)?
5. Why did the master cancel the first servant’s debt (v 27)?
6. Explain the difference between the debts of the two servants (v 24 and 28 with comments)?
7. How did the master find out about the behavior of the first servant (v 31)?
8. Why did the master call the first servant “wicked” (v 32–33)?
9. What warning did Jesus give Peter (v 35)?

Think and discuss

1. Retell the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matt 18:21–35). Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible. Be dramatic and exciting. Imagine that you are speaking to a group of villagers.
2. How do you understand the message of the parable of the unmerciful servant?

Reflect and prepare

Reflect on the parable of the unmerciful servant in the light of material found in this study. Then prepare a devotion (or a Bible study or a sermon) called Forgiveness in the Kingdom of God.

([Go to Answers 10: The wicked servant](#Answers10TheWickedServant))

### Study 11: To follow Jesus, Luke 9:57–62

Introduction and comments

In this passage we learn important truths about Christian discipleship from the way Jesus confronts three men on his journey from Galilee through Samaria toward Jerusalem.

along the road (v 57): Jesus and his disciples were traveling through Samaria to Jerusalem. For Jesus this road would end with his crucifixion.

I want to follow you wherever you go (v 57): The man told Jesus that he wanted to become his disciple.

bury my father (v 59): The man meant that he wanted to wait until his father had died, before he could commit himself to following Jesus. If his father had just died, the man would have been occupied with the burial.

having put his hand to the plow and looking back (v 62): A person who looks back as he is plowing will immediate go off course.

Questions

1. What is the occasion of this passage (v 57)?
2. What did the man tell Jesus (v 57)?
3. How did Jesus describe his life (v 58)?
4. What excuse did the second man have for not following Jesus (v 59)?
5. What did Jesus tell the second man to do (v 60)?
6. What excuse did the third man have for not following Jesus (v 61)?
7. What did Jesus tell the third man (v 62)?

Think and discuss

1. What is the key expression in this passage (Luke 9:57–62)? Explain why.
2. Compare Luke 9:57–62 and Matt 8:19–22. Note down your observations.
3. How do you understand the message in Luke 9:57–62 for Christian believers today?

Reflect and prepare

Reflect on Luke 9:57–62 in the light of the material presented in this study. Then prepare a devotion (or a Bible study or a sermon) called Fit for service in the Kingdom of God.

([Go to Answers 11: To follow Jesus](#Answers11ToFollowJesus))

### Study 12: Jesus sends out the seventy, Luke 10:1–20

Introduction and comments

All three synoptic gospels have included an account of Jesus appointing and sending out the twelve apostles (Matt 10:1–16; 11:1; Mark 3:14–19; 6:7–13; Luke 6:13–16; 9:1–6). But only Luke has given us the additional account of Jesus appointing and sending of seventy (or seventy-two) “others.” These “others” must have been other disciples of Jesus, other than the twelve.

seventy/seventy-two (v 1): The best Greek manuscripts have “seventy-two.” Perhaps this figure symbolizes all the people of the world (compare the list in Genesis chapter 10, which has 72 names in the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament and 70 names in standard Hebrew Old Testament text). These “others” were sent before Jesus “to every town and place where he himself intended to go,” which in the wider context of the mission of the church of course would refer to the whole world and to all nations. Bible scholars have also noted that the figure 70 occurs twice in the Old Testament account of the history of the Israelites: Seventy was the total number of persons in Jacob’s family who settled in Egypt (Genesis 46:27). Seventy was also the number of elders appointed by Moses to assist him during the wilderness wanderings (Numbers 11:16–17). So these scholars prefer to understand the twelve apostles to stand for the twelve Israelite patriarchs or the leadership of the New Testament church, and the seventy other disciples to stand for the whole nation of Israel or the whole New Testament church.

two by two (v 1): Compare Jesus sending out the twelve apostles “two by two” (Mark 6:7). The first “missionaries,” set apart and sent out by the church in Antioch, were also two, Barnabas and Saul/Paul (Acts 13:2).

lambs among wolves (v 3): Wolves were the natural enemies of sheep in ancient Palestine. Paul used the same simile in his speech to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:29).

Greet no one on the way (v 4): Jesus’ point is not rudeness, but urgency.

the laborer is worthy of his wages (v 7): Paul seems to refer to this statement in two of his letters (1 Cor 9:3–12; 1 Tim 5:18).

dust … wipe off (v 11): You shook the dust off your feet as a sign that you had no longer any responsibility for the area where the dust was picked up. You left that area to God’s judgment.

Verses 13–15: Jesus’ woes on the cities of Korazin, Bethaida and Capernaum are discussed in connection with our study of the parallel text in Matt 11:20–24 (see the chapter called Woe and rest).

I saw Satan fall (v 18): Jesus’ words echo Isaiah 14:12, a verse from a prophecy depicting the fall of the king of Babylon. When the disciples cast out the demons, the forces of evil were shaken and Satan himself was being defeated – Jesus saw him falling like a flash of lightning from heaven.

your names are written in heaven (v 20): Jesus told his disciples to rejoice over their salvation. The idea that the names of God’s faithful people are written down in a book in heaven is found several times in the Bible (see for example Exodus 32:32–33; Ps 69:28; Daniel 12:1; Malachi 3:16; Rev 20:12–15).

Questions

1. Where did Jesus send the seventy other disciples (v 1)?
2. What did Jesus tell his disciples to pray about (v 2)?
3. What simile did Jesus use to describe the dangers of their journey (v 3)?
4. What did Jesus tell his disciples not to bring on their journey and not to do as they were traveling (v 4)?
5. How did Jesus tell his disciples to greet people when they visited a house (v 5)?
6. How did Jesus tell his disciples to behave when they stayed in people’s homes (v 7)?
7. What did Jesus tell his disciples to do during their stay in a town (v 8–9)?
8. What did Jesus tell his disciples to do if they were not welcome to stay in a town (v 10–11)?
9. What did Jesus say about people rejecting his disciples in verse 16?
10. How did the seventy disciples feel about their ministry tour (v 17)?
11. How did Jesus describe the success of the disciples’ ministry tour (v 18)?
12. What authority did Jesus say that he had given to his disciples (v 19)?
13. What did Jesus tell his disciples to be happy about (v 20)?

Think and discuss

1. Explain the following imagery in your own words:
   1. The harvest is plentiful (v 2)
   2. Like lambs among wolves (v 2):
   3. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals (v 4):
   4. Greet no one on the road (v 4):
   5. To wipe the dust off one’s feet (v 11):
   6. I saw Satan fall like a flash of lightning from heaven (v 18):
   7. Your names are written in heaven (v 20):
2. Describe the ministry of the church from the point of view of this story about Jesus commissioning the seventy disciples (Luke 10:1–20).
3. Evaluate your own ministry and the ministry of your church in the light your answer to the previous question.

Reflect and prepare

Reflect on Luke 10:1–20 in the light of the material presented in this study. Then prepare a devotion (or a Bible study or a sermon) based on this material. It can be called The commissioning of the church.

([Go to Answers 12: Jesus sends out the seventy](#Answers12JesusSendsOutTheSeventy))

### Study 13: The cost of discipleship, Luke 14:25–33

Introduction and comments

Large crowds of people are walking along with Jesus on his continued journey toward Jerusalem. He uses this opportunity to teach them additional truths about the implications of true Christian discipleship.

hate his own father … (v 26): This is an example of a figure of speech found several times in the Bible (see for example Malachi 1:2–3; Matt 5:29–30). It is called “hyperbole” and can be described as “a purposeful exaggeration for poetic or oratory reasons." A hyperbole is not meant to be taken literally. Jesus’ point was that his disciples must love him even more than they love their families and their own lives.

bear his cross (v 27): When a convict was taken by the Romans to his crucifixion he often had to carry the crossbeam himself. This metaphorical expression means “to be willing to undergo hardships, suffering, and even death.”

Questions

1. Who does Jesus address in this passage (v 25)?
2. What was the first “cost” of discipleship that Jesus mentioned (v 26)?
3. What was the second “cost” of discipleship that Jesus mentioned (v 27)?
4. Jesus presented two examples of the necessity of calculating the costs before launching on an enterprise. What were these examples (v 28–32)
5. What was the third “cost” of discipleship that Jesus mentioned (v 33)?

Think and discuss

1. Explain Jesus’ three “costs of discipleship” (Luke 14:25–33) briefly in your own words:
   1. To hate your own family and yourself:
   2. To carry your cross:
   3. To give up all that you have:
2. Evaluate your own discipleship in the light of your answers to the previous question.

([Go to Answers 13: The cost of discipleship](#Answers13TheCostOfDiscipleship))

### Study 14: Shortage of workers, Matt 9:35–38

Introduction and comments

This short passage about Jesus and his ministry has challenged believers throughout the history of the Christian church. The miserable condition of people in this world should fill us with compassion and inspire us to share the good news of the Kingdom of God with them.

compassion (v 36): Jesus’ compassion for people is often noted in the gospels (see for example Matt 14:14; 20:34; Mark 1:41; 8:2). We also find it in Mark 6:34: “Jesus … saw a great multitude, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.”

like sheep without a shepherd (v 36): The Old Testament prophets used the imagery of “sheep and shepherd” (see for example Ezekiel 34:5; Zechariah 10:2; 13:1) about the people of Israel and their leaders. In is also used in the New Testament.

Questions

1. How does Matthew describe Jesus’ ministry in verse 35? Make a list.
2. When and why was Jesus filled with compassion for the crowds (v 36)?
3. What simile does Matthew use to describe the condition of the crowds (v 36)?
4. Whom did Jesus address in the last verses of this passage?
5. What metaphors does Jesus use to describe the situation (v 37–38)? Make a list.
6. What did Jesus tell his disciples to do (v 38)?

Think and discuss

1. In his gospel, Matthew sometimes summarizes Jesus’ ministry in one verse, for example in 4:23 and in 9:35. Compare these two verses and note down your comments.
2. In what way is this passage (Matt 9:35–38) a challenge to yourself and to your church? Note down your conclusions.

Reflect and prepare

Reflect on Matt 9:35–38 in the light of the material presented in this study. Then prepare a devotion (or a Bible study or a sermon) based on this material. It can be called The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.

([Go to Answers 14: Shortage of workers](#Answers14ShortageOfWorkers))

### Study 15: The good Samaritan, Luke 10:25–37

Introduction and comments

This passage contains one of the most famous stories in world literature, Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan. It was told in reply to a question from a Jewish lawyer: “Who is my neighbor?”

a lawyer (v 25): This man was a “scribe” and an “expert in the law.” He was a rabbi, probably a Pharisee, who had specialized in the law of Moses and the Jewish traditions of how the law should be interpreted.

tested (v 25): This Greek word can be used both positively (“to find out if Jesus had a good answer to this important question”) or negatively (“to try to trap Jesus into saying something controversial about this issue”). Questions about “eternal life” and the most central commandments in the law were common in the discussions between the Jewish teachers of those days.

You shall love the Lord your God … and your neighbor as yourself (v 27): The lawyer’s answer consists of a combination of two Old Testament commandments (Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18). Jesus used the same texts in his reply to a question about the greatest commandment in the law (see Matt 22:35–40; Mark 12:28–31).

will live (v 28): This phrase is short for “will live eternally,” “will have eternal life.” Jesus’ reply to the lawyer should not be understood to mean that Jesus said that a person could earn eternal life by keeping the law (see Comment 3 on page 404).

desiring to justify himself (v 29): The lawyer wanted to prove himself righteous, that he was a man who lived according to the two quotations that summarized the Old Testament law. He wanted to demonstrate his righteousness to everybody present. So he asked Jesus a follow-up question (“And who is my neighbor?”), convinced that Jesus’ answer to that question would make this clear.

priest (v 31): The priests served in the Jerusalem temple, particularly with the temple services and the sacrifices. This priest could have been on his way to Jerusalem temple. The strict Jewish purity laws would have prohibited him from touching a dead person. So one reason for not stopping could have been that he was afraid that the man at the roadside was dead, or that he might die.

Levite (v 32): The Levites assisted the priest with various tasks in the Jerusalem temple. So this traveling Levite faced the same purity concerns as the priest.

Samaritan (v 33): The Jews looked down on the Samaritans because of their mixed heritage and their non-Jewish religious practices. In New Testament times, Jews and Samaritans did not socialize. There was even open hostility between these two communities.

poured oil and wine on his wounds (v 34): This is how injuries were treated in those days.

two denarii (v 35): This was the equivalent of two days’ wages for a laborer. The money would be enough for keeping the injured man two months at the inn.

Questions

1. What question did the lawyer have for Jesus (v 25)?
2. How did Jesus respond to the lawyer’s question (v 26)?
3. The lawyer’s reply consisted of two verses from the Old Testament. Which books did he quote (comment on verse 27)?
4. What did Jesus think of the lawyer’s summary of the Old Testament law, and what did he then tell him to do (v 28)?
5. What did the lawyer do to “justify himself,” to show the people present that he was a righteous man who fulfilled the Old Testament law (v 29 with comment)?
6. Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan was told in reply to a question that the Jewish lawyer had asked him. What was this question (v 29–30)?
7. What happened to the man who was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho (v 30)?
8. Two men passed by the injured man. Who were they (v 31–32)?
9. The third man did not pass by the injured man, but stopped. Who was he (v 33)?
10. How did the third man help the injured man (v 34–35)?
11. How did the lawyer answer Jesus’ question about the injured man’s “neighbor” (v 36–37)?
12. What did Jesus tell the lawyer to do (v 37)?

Think and discuss

1. Explain the connection between Jesus’ exhortation to the lawyer (v 37) and the lawyer’s desire to justify himself/to prove himself righteous (v 29).
2. How do you think the lawyer felt about Jesus’ exhortation, “Go and do likewise”? Why would he have felt like this?
3. Explain why the parable of the Good Samaritan is better suited as a text for a Bible study in the church than as a text for proclaiming the gospel.
4. Retell the whole passage (Luke 10:25–37), including the parable of the Good Samaritan. Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible. Be dramatic and exciting. Imagine that you are speaking to a group of village believers.

([Go to Answers 15: The good Samaritan](#Answers15TheGoodSamaritan))

### Study 16: Martha and Mary, Luke 10:38–42

Introduction and comment

This is a story about discipleship. Jesus reminds us who claim to follow him that only one thing is absolutely essential.

village (v 38): This village was Bethany on the eastern slopes of Mount Olives about tree kilometers from Jerusalem. It was the home of Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary (see John 12:1–3).

Questions

1. Who was the hostess on this occasion?
2. What did Mary do (v 38)?
3. Why was Martha so busy (v 40)?
4. What was Martha’s complaint to Jesus, and what did she want Jesus to do (v 40)?
5. How did Jesus describe Martha (v 41)?
6. What did Jesus tell Martha (v 42)?

Think and discuss

1. What do you think Jesus meant by “only one thing is needed” and “Mary has chosen the better part” (v 42)?
2. Evaluate yourself in the light of this story.

([Go to Answers 16: Martha and Mary](#Answers16MarthaAndMary))

### Study 17: Six woes on the Jewish leaders, Luke 11:37–54

Introduction and comments

This passage describes a clash between Jesus and the Jewish leaders during a meal in the house of a Pharisee. Chapter 23 of Matthew contains similar material with more detail and in a different setting: Jesus warning the crowds and his disciples about the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees.

had not first washed himself before dinner (v 38): Ritual washing before a meal was not a stipulation in the law, but a rule added later in the tradition of the Pharisees.

give a tenth/to tithe (v 42): The Old Testament law required a family to give a tenth of all agricultural produce to God (see Deuteronomy 14:22–29).

unmarked graves (v 44): Any contact, even indirectly, with a dead body brought ritual impurity. Jesus used this simile about the Pharisees ironically: Coming in contact with a Pharisee made a person spiritually dirty.

God in his wisdom said (v 49): Jesus did not quote any Old Testament passage. So we can understand this verse as Jesus presenting a historical truth in the form of a quotation: God decided to send prophets and apostles even though he knew they would be rejected.

from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah (v 51): The murder of Abel (Genesis 4:8) is found in the first book of the Hebrew Bible, and the murder of Zechariah is found in the last book of the Hebrew Bible (2 Chronicles 24:21). So Jesus was summing up the history of Old Testament martyrdom “from the beginning to the end.”

you took away the key of knowledge (v 52): The Jewish leaders should have opened people’s mind to the law. Instead their interpretation of the law misled the people. The leaders kept themselves and their people in darkness about the way of salvation. In the parallel text in Matthew, Jesus tells them, “You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor do you allow those to enter who are trying to” (Matt 23:13).

Questions

1. What is the occasion of this passage (v 37)?
2. Why was the Pharisee surprised about Jesus (v 38)?
3. What did Jesus accuse the Pharisees of (v 39–41)
4. What did Jesus tell the Pharisees to do (v 39–41)?
5. Who did Jesus address in the first three woes (v 38–44)?
6. What is the first woe about (v 42)?
7. What is the second woe about (v 43)?
8. What is the third woe about (v 44)?
9. What did the experts in the law accuse Jesus of (v 45)?
10. Who did Jesus address in the last three woes (v 46–52)?
11. What is the fourth woe about (v 46)?
12. What is the fifth woe about (v 47–51)?
13. What is the sixth woe about (v 52)?
14. What was the outcome of this confrontation between Jesus and the Jewish leaders (v 53–54)?

Think and discuss

1. In this passage (v 37–54), Jesus exposes some of the most common sins characteristic of strictly religious persons. List these sins and add your comments.
2. Evaluate yourself in the light of this passage? Are you like the Jewish leaders in any of these areas? If so, what do you plan to do about it?

([Go to Answers 17: Six woes on the Jewish leaders](#Answers17SixWoesOnTheJewishLeaders))

### Study 18: The rich fool, Luke 12:13–21

Introduction and comments

God called the rich man “You foolish one!” This was God’s evaluation of a man, who was not only rich but greedy, a man who thought that his life consisted in the abundance of his possessions.

divide the inheritance (v 13): The Old Testament law ruled that the elder son received a double share of his father’s property (see Deuteronomy 21:17). Inheritance disputes were normally settled by rabbis.

Relax, eat drink, be merry (v 19): This is how God described people’s attitude at a time when they should have mourned (see Isaiah 22:13).

Verse 21: The Greek text strongly contrasts the two expressions “for himself” and “toward God.” Compare Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 6:19–20).

Questions

1. What request did the man bring to Jesus (v 13)?
2. How did Jesus handle the man’s request (v 14)?
3. What did Jesus tell the people to watch out for (v 15)?
4. What literary genre do we find in this passage (v 16)?
5. What problem did the rich man face, and what did he do about his problem (v 17–18)?
6. How did the rich man evaluate his situation (v 19)?
7. What message did God have for the rich man (v 20)?

Think and discuss

1. What spiritual truth does the parable of the rich fool (v 16–21) address?
2. Evaluate the rich man. Be fair with him.
3. Evaluate yourself in the light of this passage.

([Go to Answers 18: The rich fool](#Answers18TheRichFool))

### Study 19: The narrow door, Luke 13:22–30

Introduction and comments

Jesus described the door into the Kingdom of God as “narrow.” This does not necessarily mean that it is “difficult” to experience salvation. But it means that conditions apply to when and how a person can be saved.

the towns and villages ( v 22): At this time, Jesus was probably traveling through Perea, the country east of the Jordan River (see Map of the Roman Province of Judaea).

Lord, will only a few be saved? (v 22): This was a question that the Jewish rabbis of those days had different opinions about. Perhaps the man who asked the question on this occasion was wondering why – in spite of the large crowds following Jesus and in spite of the many healing miracles that Jesus performed – only so few committed themselves to becoming sincere followers of Jesus.

the narrow door (v 24): “Door” is often used in the New Testament in a metaphorical sense. In John’s gospel, Jesus refers to himself as “the door/the gate” (John 10:1, 2, 7). The present context is the man’s question about the number of people who will be saved. Jesus answered that the door to salvation is “narrow” (or limited) in two ways. First, it is limited in time, because it can only be entered “now” (in this present age). Second, it is also limited with respect to how it can be entered. The only way by which to enter into the Kingdom of God is through Jesus, who himself is the door.

I don’t know you (v 25, 27): Compare Matt 7:23 and Matt 25:12.

People will come from east, west, north, and south, and will recline at the table in the Kingdom of God (v 29): People from all over the world (compare Psalm 107:3) will take part in the eschatological messianic banquet that symbolizes the blessings of the future fellowship between God and his people (compare 14:15 and Matt 8:11).

Questions

1. What is the occasion of this passage (v 22)?
2. What question will Jesus address in this passage (v 23)?
3. How did Jesus describe the door (v 24)?
4. What will happen to this door (v 25)?
5. Why will the master refuse to open the door (v 25–27)?
6. Why do the people at the closed door think that they should be let in (v 26)?
7. How does the master describe the people who are trying to get through the door after it has been closed (v 27)?
8. Which two groups of people are contrasted in verse 28?
9. How are the partakers in the heavenly banquet described (29)?
10. What happens to those who are supposed to be first (v 30)?

Think and discuss

1. How did Jesus answer the man’s question about the number of people who would be saved?
2. Explain in what ways the door of salvation (the door into the Kingdom of God) is “narrow.”
3. Who are the “you yourselves” that Jesus referred to in verse 29? Explain.

Reflect and prepare

Reflect on Luke 13:22–30 in the light of the material presented in this study. Then prepare a devotion (or a Bible study or a sermon) called The narrow door.

([Go to Answers 19: The narrow door](#Answers19TheNarrowDoor))

### Study 20: Three parables about lost and found, Luke chapter 15

Introduction and comments

Jesus addressed the three parables in this chapter to the Pharisees and the scribes, who were accusing him of associating with sinners. The parables are on the same theme of “lost and found”:

* 1. The parable of the lost sheep, v 3–7 (Matthew has included this parable in his gospel, 18:12–14)
  2. The parable of the lost coin, v 8–10
  3. The parable of the lost son, v 11–32

tax collectors and sinners (v 1): The tax collectors were regarded as traitors by the Jewish community. Their work, collecting tax from their own people on behalf of the Roman occupants, was seen as dishonest and immoral. The Jewish leaders grouped them with “the sinners,” people whose lifestyle was not in accordance with the Old Testament commandments.

eats with them (v 2): To eat with somebody meant that you associated with and accepted that person, that you were friends.

who need bo repentance (v 7): The Pharisees considered themselves righteous and in no need of repentance. But before God no person is righteous (see Romans 3:10), so they, too, needed repentance, just as much as the tax collectors and sinners.

search carefully (v 8): Most homes in those days had no windows and the floors were of mud. So finding a coin that had been dropped on the floor could be difficult.

He divided his property between them (v 12): The father might divide his property (the older son received a double share). But he would keep the income from his estate until his death. To give a younger son his portion of the inheritance on request would have been very unusual.

the younger son gathered all that he had and traveled into a far country (v 13): He wanted to be free from his father’s authority and spend his share of the family wealth as he pleased. His actions revealed his selfish motives and his careless personality. As he left, he would have nothing to come back to.

feed pigs (v 15): This job shows how desperate the son had become. Pigs were ritually unclean animals to the Jews (see Leviticus 11:7).

the best robe … a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet … the fattened calf (v 22–23): These were signs of position and acceptance (compare how Pharaoh recognized Joseph, Genesis 41:42): The long robe was a sign of distinction. The signet ring was a sign of authority. The sandals were a sign of sonship (slaves walked barefoot). The fattened calf was kept to celebrate a special occasion.

a young goat (v 29): Mutton was simpler food in those days than fattened beef.

this son of yours … this brother of yours (v 30, 32): The older brother was so bitter and hateful that he even refused to call the man who had returned “my brother.” But their father reminded him of their brotherhood.

Questions

1. What kind of people came to listen to Jesus and his teaching (v 1)?
2. Why were the Jewish leaders upset with Jesus (v 2)?
3. What is the occasion of the parable of the lost sheep (v 2)?
4. Why did the man with the hundred sheep gather his friends and neighbors (v 4–6)?
5. What point of comparison does Jesus make in the parable of the lost sheep (v 4–7).
6. What does the woman who has lost one of her coins do to find her coin (v 8)?
7. What point of comparison does Jesus make in the parable of the lost coin (v 8–10).
8. What did the younger son request of his father (v 12)?
9. What did the younger son do with his inheritance (v 13–14)?
10. Why did the younger son end up taking care of pigs (v 14–15)?
11. Why did the younger son decide to return to his father (v 17–18)?
12. How did the father react when he saw his younger son walking toward the house (v 20)?
13. How did the younger son express his repentance (v 21)?
14. How did the father honor his younger son (v 22–24)?
15. What surprised the older brother as he was coming home from the fields that evening (v 25–26)?
16. How did the older brother show his anger (v 28–30)?
17. What reason did the father give for the celebration (v 32)?

Think and discuss

1. The parable of the lost sheep (v 3–7):
   1. Where do the “bad” people (the tax collectors and sinners) fit into the parable?
   2. Where do the “good” people (the Pharisees and the scribes) fit into it?
   3. What kind of Old Testament associations would “sheep” and “shepherd” have for the people who listened to Jesus’ teaching?
   4. Why is a “lost sheep” an appropriate metaphor for a “sinner”?
   5. How do you understand Jesus’ phrase “righteous persons who need no repentance”?
2. Retell the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin (Luke 15:1–10). Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible. Be dramatic and exciting. Imagine that you are speaking to a mixed group of villagers.
3. The parable of the lost son (v 1–3, 11–32):
   1. In what way is the structure of this parable different from the structure of the two previous parables?
   2. In what way is the “initiative” different in this parable compared with the two previous parables?
   3. Where do the “bad” people (the tax collectors and sinners) fit into the parable?
   4. Where do the “good” people (the Pharisees and the scribes) fit into the parable?
   5. What kind of associations would “father” have for the people who listened to Jesus’ teaching?
4. Retell the parable of the lost son (Luke 15:11–32). Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible. Be dramatic and exciting. Imagine that you are speaking to a mixed group of villagers.
5. Comment on verses 1–2 in the light of the three “lost and found” parables.

Reflect and prepare

Reflect on Luke 15:1–3, 11–32 in the light of the material presented in this study. Then prepare a devotion (or a Bible study or a sermon) called The lost son.

([Go to Answers 20: Three parables about lost and found](#Answers20ThreeParablesOfLostAndFound))

### Study 21: The dishonest manager, Luke 16:1–9

Introduction and comments

Chapter 16 of Luke contains two parables. In the first one, the shrewd manager (verses 1–9), Jesus addressed his disciples (v 1). In the second one, the rich man and Lazarus (verses 19–31), Jesus addressed the Pharisees (v 14). We will devote two studies to these difficult and confusing parables. Our focus will be on the point of comparison of each parable, the message that Jesus wanted to convey to each of his two groups of addressees.

disciples (v 1): Luke probably refers to the larger group of Jesus’ followers.

manager (v 1): He was a steward in charge of all the business affairs of his rich employer.

the sons of light (v 8): A metaphor for God’s people (Eph 5:8; 1 Thess 5:5).

unrighteous wealth (v 9): This expression cannot mean that wealth (the Greek word is mammon) in itself is unrighteous. The Bible does not support that view. It is better to understand it as an abbreviation for “wealth in this unrighteous world.” Jesus wants us to use our worldly resources so that they give fruit for eternity.

Questions

1. Which group of people did Jesus address with this parable (v 1)?
2. What was the manager accused of (v 1)?
3. What did the rich man ask the manager to do (v 2)?
4. What was going to happen to the manager (v 3)?
5. What did the manager do to safeguard his future (v 4–7)?
6. How did the rich man evaluate his manager’s actions (v 8)?
7. What two groups of people does Jesus contrast in verse 8?
8. What recommendation did Jesus give his disciples (v 9)?

Think and discuss

1. The parable of the shrewd manager contains contrasts that would help us understand Jesus’ message to his disciples. Which are these contrasts?
2. What point of comparison does Jesus make in this parable?
3. Explain the message of the parable of the shrewd manager.

([Go to Answers 21: The dishonest manager](#Answers21TheDishonestManager))

### Study 22: The rich man and Lazarus the beggar, Luke 16:19–31

Introduction and comments

The Pharisees loved money. So they ridiculed Jesus, when he told his listeners that they could not serve both God and wealth (v 13–14). The Pharisees lived a double life. Their religious life, their beliefs and practices, made them Pharisees (“separated and holy and righteous people”) and guaranteed them a good standing before God. They claimed that love of money could not affect their religious status. So when Jesus said that the way they handled their possessions now would affect their life in eternity, they made fun of him. Jesus then addressed them with this parable, illustrating the truth that he had already taught them.

purple and fine linen (v 19): The rich man wore costly clothes. “Purple” was a dyed cloth worn by the wealthy.

Lazarus (v 20): This is the Greek version of the the Hebrew name Eleazar (“God helps”). There are two people with this name in the gospels: Jesus’ friend in Bethany (whose sisters were Martha and Mary) and the poor beggar in this parable.

the dogs (v 21): Dogs were considered unclean animals in Biblical times. Lazarus’ situation was indeed very pitiable.

carried away by the angels to Abraham’s side (v 22): The Jewish rabbinic writings mention both “paradise” and “Abraham’s side” as the final home of the righteous. It is a place of blessedness and bliss.

hell (v 23): The Greek text uses Hades, the Greek name for the underworld, the realm of the dead. In this story, Hades stands in contrast to the place and state of Lazarus’s blessing.

listen to (v 29): This expression means “read, understand, and obey.”

Moses and the prophets (v 29): This was one way of saying “The Old Testament scriptures.”

Questions

1. How is the rich man described (v 19)?
2. How is Lazarus described (v 20–21)?
3. What happens to the two men (v 22)?
4. What is the rich man’s request to Abraham (v 24)?
5. Why is it impossible for Abraham to grant the rich man’s request (v 25–26)?
6. What concern does the rich man have (v 27–28)?
7. How does Abraham respond to the rich man’s concern (v 29)?
8. What argument does the rich man give Abraham (v 30)?
9. What final statement does Abraham have for the rich man (v 31)?

Think and discuss

1. Who is the main character in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus? Explain why.
2. What message does Jesus have for the Pharisees through this parable?
3. What pitfalls for inexperienced Bible readers do you see in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus?
4. Evaluate yourself in the light of Jesus’ two parables in Luke chapter 16.

([Go to Answers 22: The rich man and Lazarus the beggar](#Answers22TheRichManAndLazarusTheBeggar))

### Study 23: The coming of the Kingdom of God, Luke 17:20–37

Introduction and comments

The second coming of Jesus is a topic that has fascinated believers all through the history of the Christian church. Bible teachers and preachers have presented their personal theories and speculations to eager and often confused listeners. In this study we will look at some of Jesus’ own teaching on this subject – without any speculations.

the Kingdom of God is within you/in the midst of you (v 21): The Greek expression can either mean “within you” (this is how it is most commonly translated, see for example the Kannada pavitra grantha and satyavEdavu translations) or “in the midst of you, among you.” So Jesus’ statement can be understood either as “the Kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom” (so that is why it cannot be seen here or there with our physical eyes) or as “the Kingdom of God is with you because I, the king of this Kingdom, am in the midst of you” (so you Pharisees must be spiritually blind: Can’t you see that I have brought you the Kingdom of God!).

desire to see (v 22): This expression implies that the disciples would be facing difficulties during which they would be longing for consummation of the Kingdom of God with the second coming of Jesus. But the Kingdom of God would not come then, only later.

one of the days of the Son of Man (v 22): This means either “the very day when the son of Man comes back” or “the time when the Son of Man will rule.”

But first he must suffer many things (v 25): Jesus would suffer and die before he would come back in glory to establish the Kingdom of God.

the days of Noah … the ark … the flood (v 26–27): The story about Noah and the flood is found in Genesis chapters 6–8.

the days of Lot … Sodom (v 28–29): The story about the destruction of the city of Sodom in the days of Lot is found in Genesis 18:16–19:28.

the Son of Man is revealed (v 30): At Jesus’ second coming he will be plainly visible to everybody.

on the roof of his house (v 31): Houses in those days usually had flat roofs, where people could relax.

Remember Lot’s wife (v 32): Lot’s wife was turned into a pillar of salt as the looked back on the burning city of Sodom (Genesis 19:26).

Verse 33: In the Bible the word “life” has two meanings. It means both “soul, spirit” and “physical life.” So in his statement Jesus played with this double meaning of the word “life”: If you try to preserve the life that belongs to this present evil age, then you will lose your spiritual and eternal life. So your life must be of the right “Kingdom of God kind” in order for you to enter the Kingdom of God.

Verse 36: This verse is not found in the best Greek manuscripts. A copyist has probably inserted it from Matt 24:40.

Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather (v 37): Jesus quoted this proverb in response to the disciples’ question about where the events of his second coming would take place. These things will take place wherever there are people, just as vultures will gather wherever there are corpses. The second coming of Jesus will concern everybody.

Questions

1. Who are addressed in Jesus’ speech about the coming of the Kingdom of God (v 20, 22)?
2. What question did the Pharisees ask Jesus (v 20)?
3. What information did Jesus give his listeners about the Kingdom of God (v 20–21)?
4. What will people say about the Kingdom of God during a period when Jesus’ followers are eagerly hoping for Jesus’ second coming (v 23)?
5. What simile did Jesus use to describe his second coming (v 24)?
6. What did Jesus say must happen before his second coming (v 25)?
7. What Old Testament stories did Jesus use to describe human life at the time of his second coming (v 26–30)?
8. What was Jesus’ point of comparison between these Old Testament stories and his second coming (v 26–30)?
9. Whose fate did Jesus remind his listeners of (v 32)?
10. What is the similarity between Jesus’ two examples in verses 34–35?
11. What question did the disciples ask Jesus (v 37)?
12. How did Jesus reply to his disciples’ question (v 37)?
13. In this passage, Jesus used various expressions for the consummation of the Kingdom of God with his second coming (v 22–35). List these expressions.

Think and discuss

1. What do you think is the best way of understanding the Greek expression in verse 21 (translated by some Bible scholars as “within you” and by others as “among you, in the midst of you”). Why?
2. Explain Jesus’ point about keeping and losing one’s life in verses 31–33.
3. Explain Jesus’ reply to his disciples’ question (v 37).
4. Summarize this passage about the coming of the Kingdom of God (v 20–37). Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible.

Reflect and prepare

Reflect on Luke 17:20–37 in the light of the material presented in this study. Then prepare a devotion (or a Bible study or a sermon) called The second coming of Jesus.

Don’t be speculative, and don’t include other Bible references or material from other sources.

But close with an appeal to the listeners, something like this:

* Be ready!
* How to be ready?
  + Accept Jesus as your personal Savior! Then the Kingdom of God will be “within you.”
  + Remember Lot’s wife! Choose her life, and you will lose your eternal life in the Kingdom of God! Live a “Kingdom of God life” now, and you will live in the Kingdom of God forever!

([Go to Answers 23: The coming of the Kingdom of God](#Answers23TheComingOfTheKingdomOfGod))

### Study 24: Two parables about prayer, Luke 18:1–14

Introduction and comments

The first parable encourages Christian believers to pray faithfully and boldly. It also contrasts God with an unjust judge. The second parable reminds us of the proper attitude as we approach God in prayer.

into the temple to pray (v 10): Official prayers were conducted in the Jerusalem temple at the morning and evening sacrifices. In addition, people could go there any time of the day for private prayer.

fast twice a week (v 12): Fasting was only commanded in the Old Testament law on the Day of Atonement. But the Pharisees also fasted on Mondays and Tuesdays.

give tithes of all that I get (v 12): A Jew was required to give tithes of all that he produced. But the Pharisees also gave tithes of all that they purchased.

beat his breast (v 13): This was a sign of grief and repentance.

Questions

1. Who are addressed in these two parables about prayer (v 1, 9)?
2. What was the purpose of the parable of the widow and the judge (v 1)?
3. What do we learn about the judge (v 2, 4, 6)?
4. What do we learn about the widow (v 3, 5)?
5. Why did the judge finally grant justice to the widow (v 5)?
6. What do we learn about God (v 7–8)?
7. How does Luke describe the group of people to whom Jesus addressed the second parable (v 9)?
8. Why did the two men go to the temple and who were they (v 10)?
9. How did the Pharisee pray (v 11–12)?
10. How did the tax collector pray (v 13)?
11. How did Jesus evaluate the two men’s prayers (v 14)?

Think and discuss

1. What point did Jesus make about the unjust judge and God (6–8)?
2. How do you understand Jesus’ question to his disciples in verse 8?
3. Evaluate your prayer life in the light of the second parable (v 9–14).

([Go to Answers 24: Two parables about prayer](#Answers24TwoParablesAboutPrayer))

### Study 25: Zacchaeus the chief tax collector, Luke 19:1–10

Introduction and comments

The story about Jesus and Zacchaeus is about a man who met Jesus, experienced salvation, and had his life completely changed.

Jericho (v 1): This ancient city was situated 8 km west of the Jordan River and about 25 km northeast of Jerusalem. In Jesus’ time the old city was largely abandoned. A new city a little to the south had been built by king Herod the Great.

chief tax collector (v 2): Zacchaeus was probably in charge of the tax collection of the whole district, with other tax collectors under him. The Jericho region was prosperous, so we can understand why he had become a rich man. Tax collectors cooperated with the Romans, so they were considered to be traitors and sinners. They were often excluded from the Jewish community.

sycamore tree (v 4): This was a sturdy tree with a short trunk and wide branches.

I must stay at your house (v 5): This expression implies that it was God’s plan for Jesus to visit Zacchaeus.

four times (v 8): This was the strictest level of fines for theft in the Old Testament law.

a son of Abraham (v 9): In the eyes of the Jewish community, Zacchaeus was a rejected “sinner,” because he was a tax collector. But Jesus called him a true Jew, a man not only in the family line of Abraham but a man who had also experienced salvation through his faith in Jesus.

Questions

1. Find Jericho on Map of the Roman Province of Judaea.
2. How is Zacchaeus described (v 2–3)?
3. Why did Zacchaeus climb up in a tree (v 5)?
4. What message did Jesus have for Zacchaeus (v 5)?
5. How did Zacchaeus receive Jesus’ message (v 6)?
6. How did the people around react to Jesus’ message (v 7)?
7. What did Zacchaeus say he would do about the poor (v 8)?
8. How would Zacchaeus compensate those he might have cheated (v 8)?
9. How did Jesus describe his mission in this world (v 10)?

Think and discuss

1. How would you describe Zacchaeus’ life before he met Jesus?
2. How would you describe Zacchaeus’ life after he had met Jesus?
3. Retell the story about Zacchaeus (Luke 19:11–10). Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible. Be dramatic and exciting. Imagine that you are speaking to a group of villagers.

Reflect and prepare

Reflect on Luke 19:1–10 in the light of the material presented in this study. Then prepare a gospel message called Zacchaeus – a man who met Jesus. Remember that Zacchaeus was not saved because of his good needs or his changed life, but because he met Jesus and believed in him.

([Go to Answers 25: Zacchaeus the chief tax collector](#Answers25ZacchaeusTheChiefTaxCollector))

### Study 26: The laborers in the vineyard, Matt 20:1–16

Introduction and comments

This parable is about the unreasonable generosity of the Lord of the Kingdom of God.

a denarius a day (v 2): This was the usual daily wage. A Roman soldier was also paid one denarius a day.

When evening had come (v 8): The Old Testament law taught that a worker must be paid after each day of work (Deuteronomy 24:14–15).

Friend (v 13): This word was often used to to express mild disapproval of a person’s words or actions (compare Matt 22:12; 26:50).

Questions

1. What is the parable about (v 1)?
2. What did the landowner do early in the morning (v 1)?
3. How much did he agree to pay his workers for a full day’s work (v 2)?
4. What did the landowner do with the unemployed people he came across later that same day (v 3–7)?
5. At what time did the landowner hire the last workers for that day (v 6–7)?
6. What instruction about payment did the landowner give his foreman (v 8)?
7. How much were the workers paid (9–10)?
8. Why did some of the workers complain about the payment (v 11–12)?
9. How did the landowner respond to the complaint (v 13–15)?
10. How did Jesus end this parable (v 16)?

Think and discuss

1. What do you feel about the unfair treatment of the workers? Explain.
2. What is the message of this parable?
3. Explain Jesus’ conclusion in verse 16.
4. Retell the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matt 20:1–16). Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible. Be dramatic and exciting. Imagine that you are speaking to a group of villagers.

([Go to Answers 26: The laborers in the vineyard](#Answers26TheLaborersInTheVineyard))

### Study 27: The marriage feast, Matt 22:1–14

Introduction and comments

This parable is about the Kingdom of God. It is not an allegory, where the reader is expected to look for – and find – points of reference in every detail of this story about a king and his invitation to wedding banquet for his son. That could lead to absurdities.

But I think Jesus expected his listeners to find important Old Testament echoes in this parable: The feast itself, of course, echoes the messianic banquet of Isaiah 25:6 (several times alluded to in the gospels; see also comment on Mark 14:25). The killing of the king’s servants echoes the fate of some of the Old Testament prophets. And, most importantly, the unresponsive attitude of the wedding guests echoes the unfaithfulness of the Israelites to God and the covenant throughout much of their history. This historical unresponsiveness was repeated by the Pharisees with their rejection of Jesus and his ministry.

The kingdom of Heaven (v 2): This expression is used, mostly in Matthew’s gospel, as a synonym for “the Kingdom of God.”

those who had been invited (v 3): The custom was to send a preliminary invitation well in advance of the wedding. So these guests already knew that they were expected to come to the wedding banquet.

without wedding clothes (v 11): Sometimes the host provided his guests with wedding clothes. This would have been necessary at this banquet, because the guests had been brought in directly from the streets.

Friend (v 12): See my comment on verse 9 in the previous study.

outer darkness (v 13): A metaphor for an eternity without God.

gnashing of teeth (v 13): Jesus uses this metaphor several times in the gospel of Matthew about those who have been condemned (see 8:12; 13:42; 13:50; 24:51; 25:30). “Weeping and gnashing of teeth” are expressions of misery and remorse.

For many are called, but few are chosen (v 14): In Aramaic (the language that Jesus spoke), “many” and “all” can be used as synonyms. All have been invited to the great banquet in heaven. But only those respond to the invitation (“the few who are chosen”) will actually participate.

Questions

1. What is this parable about (v 2)?
2. What happened the first time the king’s servants went to tell the guests that it was time for them to come to the wedding banquet (v 3)?
3. What happened the second time the king’s servants went to tell the guests that it was time for them to come to the wedding banquet (v 4–6)?
4. How did the king express his anger (v 7)?
5. What opinion did the king have of those who had originally been invited to the wedding banquet (v 8)?
6. Where did the king send his servants to find new guests for the banquet (v 9–10)?
7. How are these new guests described (v 10)?
8. What was wrong with one man in the banquet hall (v 11–12)?
9. What happened to this man (v 13)?
10. How did Jesus conclude his parable (v 14)?

Think and discuss

1. There seem to be two (or three) points of comparison in this parable, one (or two) in the first part (about those invited to the wedding banquet, verses 2–10) and one in the second part (about the man not wearing a wedding garment, verses 11–13). Explain these points of comparison.
2. Jesus said that the Kingdom of God is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son (v 2). Explain how.
3. Luke has included a similar (or perhaps the same) parable in his gospel. Compare the two parables (Matt 22:1–14 and Luke 14:15–24) and note down a few observations.

([Go to Answers 27: The marriage feast](#Answers27TheMarriageFeast))

### Study 28: The ten virgins, Matt 25:1–13

Introduction and comments

This parable is about the importance of being ready for Jesus’ second coming.

At that time/Then (v 1): At the time of Jesus’ second coming.

kingdom of Heaven (v 1): This expression is synonymous with “Kingdom of God.”

ten virgins (v 1): They were bridesmaids, who prepared the bride to meet the bridegroom and who accompanied her to the bridegroom’s house.

lamps (v 2): These lamps were probably torches that consisted of a wooden pole with oil-drenched rags at the top. They did not burn very long. Then the rags had to be replaced and more oil added.

at midnight (v 6): The bridegroom with friends and the bride with maids would have spent the whole day dancing and celebrating at separate places. The bridegroom and his party would then come to fetch the bride at any time in the evening or during the night. So it was essential that the torches were ready for use during the nightly wedding procession.

trimmed (v 7): The charred ends of the partly used rags were cut off, more oil was added, and the torches were relighted.

Questions

1. What is this parable about (v 1)?
2. What do we learn about the bridesmaids (v 1–4)?
3. Why did the bridesmaids fall asleep (v 5)?
4. What happened when the bridegroom finally arrived at midnight (v 6–9)?
5. What happened to the five foolish bridesmaids (v 10–12)?
6. How did Jesus end this parable (v 13)?

Think and discuss

1. What is the point of comparison in this parable?
2. Why do you think pastors are tempted to allegorize this story and consequently read too much into its details?

([Go to Answers 28: The ten virgins](#Answers28TheTenVirgins))

### Study 29: The talents, Matt 25:14–30

Introduction and comments

The key word in this parable about talents is “faithful.” Two servants are faithful, one is unfaithful.

It will be like (v 14): This expression could refer to the kingdom of heaven (the Kannada pavitra grantha translation has made this clear), which is the topic of the previous parable – or perhaps to Jesus’ second coming (see his closing exhortation in the previous verse: “Stay awake, you don’t know the day or hour!”).

talent (v 15): A talent was originally a unit of weight (about 34 kg of silver). In New Testament times it was used as a unit of money: one talent was about 6000 denarii, equivalent to 20 years’ wages for a laborer.

the bankers (v 27): A basic kind of banking could be found in New Testament times among both Jews and Gentiles. Jews were not permitted to charge each other interest (see Exodus 22:25), but they could lend money with interest to Gentiles (Deuteronomy 23:20).

the outer darkness … gnashing of teeth (v 30): See comments on Matt 22:13 in the study The wedding banquet.

Questions

1. Why did the man entrust his property to his servants (v 14)?
2. What did the two servants who had received the larger amounts do with the money they had been entrusted (v 16–17)?
3. What did the servant who had received the smallest amount do with the money he had been entrusted (v 18)?
4. What happened to the first two servants at the return of their master (v 19–24)?
5. What reason did the third servant give for his failure (v 24–25)?
6. What did the master call the third servant? And why did he use such harsh words about him (v 26)?
7. What happened to the third servant (v 28–30)?

Think and discuss

1. What is the point of comparison in this parable?
2. What would your comments be on this kind of message:

A pastor in a church preaches a sermon based on the parable of the talents. He says that the master in the parable is Jesus, who at his ascension to heaven entrusted the ministry of the church to all believers. To some believers he gave much responsibility, to other believers less responsibility, all according to each one’s ability. When Jesus comes back he will ask each believer to give account for how they have managed their responsibilities. He will praise those believers who have managed well and invite them into his joy in heaven. But he will scold those believers who have not been faithful and not done well, and he will condemn them to eternal punishment in hell.

1. Luke has a different version of this parable (see Luke 19:12–27). What are the main differences? Note down a few points.

([Go to Answers 29: The talents](#Answers29TheTalents))

### Study 30: The sheep and the goats, Matt 25:31–46

Introduction and comments

This account is only found in Matthew’s gospel. It is not really a parable, even if the imagery “as a shepherd separates his sheep from his goats” may lead the readers’ thoughts in that direction. It is also not really a judgment scene, but rather a “scene of separation.” When the Son of Man comes in his glory, he will sit on his throne of glory and separate people one from another, as a shepherd separates his sheep from his goats. Those who are blessed by the Father will inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. But those who are cursed will go into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

Bible scholars have interpreted this passage and its details in various ways, often trying to find support for their preferred doctrines on the vital importance of Christian social work, or on the end times. I have mentioned some of these interpretations in my comments. I base my own reading of this passage on two basic assumptions: First, the context of this passage (seen in the parables that precede it) tells us that it refers to Jesus’ second coming. Second, the New Testament is absolutely clear about the doctrine of “salvation by grace only.” So any suggestion that the “sheep” are saved by what they have done to “one of the least of Jesus’ brothers” must be wrong.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory (v 31): The most natural way of interpreting this phrase is “At Jesus’ second coming” (compare Matt 16:27 and 24:30).

the throne of glory (v 31): The throne is a symbol of authority, exalted position, and royal majesty.

All the nations (v 32): That this expression refers to both Jews and Gentiles is more convincing than the interpretation that we here find a judgment scene involving only the Gentile nations. The apostles understood the “all nations” in that way when they, in obedience to the Great Commission (Matt 28:19) preached the gospel first in Jerusalem, then in Judea and Samaria, and then throughout the Roman Empire. “First for the Jew, then for the Gentiles," as Paul said about the the gospel, which is “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16).

separate (v 32): Compare Matthew’s two earlier accounts of separation of people in 7:21–23 and 13:40–43.

the sheep from the goats (v 32): In the countryside of ancient Palestine, sheep and goats mingled during the day. But at night they were often separated. The sheep could stand the cool air well. But the goats had to be herded together to keep warm. Sheep were more valuable than goats.

on his right hand (v 33): The right hand was the place of power and honor.

the King (v 34): Jesus sitting on his glorious throne (compare verse 31)

receive/inherit (v 34): Compare Eph 1:14, 18; Col 1:12; Heb 9:15; 1 Peter 1:4.

I was hungry and you gave me food to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you took me in, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to see me (v 35–36): This is a summary of good Jewish ethics in New Testament times. These were good deeds (stipulated in the Old Testament, except visiting prisoners) that all decent Jews were expected to do. So to claim that involvement in this kind of social work would merit a person a place among the blessed in the eternal Kingdom of God does not seem reasonable.

of the least of these my brothers (v 40): This phrase has been interpreted in at least five ways: 1. All who are poor and needy, 2. Christian gospel workers and missionaries (those who bring the gospel to the nations), 3. Jesus’ disciples (compare Matt 12:46–50 and 28:8–10), 4. All Christian believers, the church, and 5. The Jewish nation. In the context of the whole New Testament, number 5 makes no sense, number 1 seems too wide, number 2 seems too narrow, and number 3 seems too limited. So Jesus was probably referring to his fellow-brothers in the Kingdom of God, to all Christian believers, the church (number 4).

the eternal fire, which is prepared for the devil and his angels (v 41): Compare Revelation 19:20; 20:10, 15; Jude 7.

eternal punishment … eternal life (v 46): Compare Daniel 12:2; John 5:24, 28–29; Gal 6:8.

Questions

1. What is the setting of the account of “separation of people” (v 31)?
2. What simile is used to describe this “separation” (v 32–33)?
3. Who will invite people into the kingdom (v 34)?
4. How is this kingdom described (v 34)?
5. How are “the blessed” described (v 35–37)?
6. Why will the righteous be surprised (v 37–39)?
7. What confirmation will the King give to the righteous (v 40)?
8. What will happen to the cursed (v 41)?
9. How are the cursed described (v 42–43, 46)?
10. Why will the cursed surprised (v 44)?
11. What confirmation will the King give to the cursed (v 45)?
12. How did Jesus end his account of “separation of people” (v 46)?

Think and discuss

1. Why do you think believers argue so much about how this passage should be interpreted?
2. How would you explain the connection between the righteous and the list of good deeds without adopting a theology of “salvation by works”?

Reflect and prepare

Reflect on Matt 25:31–46 in the light of the material in this study. Then prepare an explanation of this passage about “separation of people” to a group of young people in your church. Avoid speculations, “mysteries," and “deep truths.” Your explanation can be based on answers to these questions (you can expand my very brief answers):

* When will this separation take place? Answer: At Jesus’ second coming.
* Who will be concerned by this separation? All people, both Jews and Gentiles.
* What two groups will people be separated into? Answer: The blessed and the cursed.
* What will happen to the blessed? Answer: They will enter into the Kingdom of God.
* Why are they blessed? Answer: This is not clearly stated in the passage, but we know from Jesus’ and Paul’s teaching that those who accept Jesus as their personal Savior are blessed and inherit the Kingdom of God.
* What will happen to the cursed? Answer: They will be condemned to the eternal fire.
* Why are they cursed? Answer: This is not clearly stated in the passage, but we know from Jesus’ and Paul’s teaching that those who don’t accept Jesus as their personal Savior will not inherit eternal life and will not be part of the Kingdom of God.
* How are the blessed and the cursed described? Answer: The blessed have revealed that they belong to Jesus by the way the fruits of the Spirit have been seen in their lives and by the way they have allowed the Holy Spirit to work through them. The attitude of the cursed will have revealed that they do not belong to Jesus and his Kingdom.
* Where does this “separation” actually take place? Answer: The “separation” is implemented at the return of Jesus. But in one way it has already taken place in this present age. It actually takes place whenever people accept or refuse Jesus. Those who accept him are blessed. Those who refuse him will be cursed. So our decisions in the present age will decide our eternity.

([Go to Answers 30: The sheep and the goats](#Answers30TheSheepAndTheGoats))

## Thirty studies from Matthew and Luke – Answers

### Answers 1: The faith of a Roman centurion, Matt 8:5–13

Answers to Questions

1. This event took place at Capernaum in Galilee (v 5). It cannot be found on Map of the Roman Province of Judaea but it was situated between Tiberias and Bethsaida.
2. The centurion came to Jesus to ask him to heal his servant who was suffering terribly from paralysis (v 5–6).
3. The centurion didn’t want Jesus to come to his house, because he felt that he didn’t deserve the honor of such a visitor (v 8).
4. Jesus was amazed at the centurion’s words, because they conveyed a complete trust in Jesus’ authority and a strong faith that Jesus would heal his servant (v 9–10).
5. Jesus said that people from the whole world (“from east and west”) would participate in the banquet in the kingdom of heaven (v 11).
6. Jesus described “hell,” the destination of those who will not be allowed to enter the future Kingdom of God, as a place of great suffering, of “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (v 12).
7. The centurion’s servant was healed that very moment (v 13).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Three important things that we as Christian believers today can learn from this story:
   1. The Kingdom of God is inherited by those who believe, irrespective of cultural background. The universality of the gospel is an important theme in Matthew’s gospel. Compare the words of the Great Commission “make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19).
   2. Our faith in this present world has eternal consequences. Only those who believe in Jesus (accept him as their personal Savior) will be invited to take part in the great banquet in the Kingdom of God. Those who do not believe in Jesus will end up in miserable darkness outside, where there will be suffering (“weeping and gnashing of teeth”).
   3. Jesus has both power and will to heal those who approach him in faith.
2. Three main differences found in the parallel accounts of this event (Matt 8:5–13 and Luke 7:1–10):
   1. Luke has more information about the centurion (even if he does not mention the nature of the servant’s sickness) and how he contacted Jesus himself: He did not approach Jesus initially, but sent Jewish leaders to present his case to Jesus. And when Jesus was arriving at his house, he sent friends to tell Jesus not to come any further.
   2. Matthew includes Jesus’ words about the great banquet in the Kingdom of God (and that “many will come from east and west”). So Matthew emphasizes the international character of the Kingdom of God.
   3. Only Matthew mentions the destiny of unbelievers: They will not take part in the heavenly banquet, but they will be thrown outside.
3. Most Bible scholars think that the two accounts of Jesus healing an officer’s servant in Matthew and Luke describe a different event than the account of Jesus healing an official’s son in John 4:46–54, in spite of some similarities:
   1. Similarities:
      * Both miracles take place in Galilee. Capernaum is mentioned in both stories.
      * Both miracles involve a person of authority: A Roman centurion and a royal official.
   2. Important differences:
      * The officials are not the same: The Roman centurion must have been a Gentile. The royal official in John was probably working for king Herod and could have been either a Gentile or a Jew.
      * The persons healed are perhaps different: A servant and a son. But note that the Greek word in Matt 8:6 means both “child” and “servant.”
      * The places are not the same: The centurion is from Capernaum. But the royal official is from Cana, which is quite far from Capernaum.
      * Jesus’ attitude to the person in authority is different: He praises his faith in Matthew/Luke, but he seems irritated with his request in John.
      * The stories develop differently: In Luke, Jesus comes close to the centurion’s house. But in John, the official leaves Jesus behind to return to his hometown.

([Go to Study 2: Jesus raises a widow’s son at Nain](#Study2JesusRaisesAWidowsSonAtNain))

### Answers 2: Jesus raises a widow’s son at Nain, Luke 7:11–17

Answers to Questions

1. The context of this story is Jesus’ ministry in Galilee. Luke places it immediately after the story about the faith of a Roman officer and the healing of his servant.
2. The story takes place outside the village of Nain in southern Galilee (v 11).
3. We understand that the condition of the woman whose son had died must have been miserable: She was already a widow and now her only son had died (v 12). But she must have been a respected person in her community, because the funeral procession was a large one (v 11–12).
4. Jesus reacted with compassion to the woman’s situation (v 13). He even touched the funeral bier – without considering the risk of becoming ritually unclean (v 14).
5. Jesus intervened in the woman’s situation. He totally changed her life as he raised her son from the dead and gave him back to her (v 14–15).
6. The crowd reacted to the miracle with fear. But they also praised God for Jesus (v 16).
7. As a result of this miracle, people realized that Jesus was a great prophet favored by God (v 16).
8. As a consequences of this miracle, Jesus’ reputation spread not only in that part of Galilee but also throughout Judea further to the south (v 17).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. The emotions in the different parts of this story can be described like this:
   1. Desperate grief: The widow had lost her only son and was walking in his funeral procession on the way to the cemetery (v 11–12).
   2. Deep compassion: Jesus met the funeral procession and understood the woman’s miserable situation (v 13).
   3. Determination: Jesus decided to intervene on behalf of the woman (v 13–14).
   4. Fearful amazement: The people in the funeral procession witnessed the miracle of a dead man being brought back to life (v 14–16).
   5. Joyful and worshipful realization: The people glorified God for what he had done through his great prophet Jesus (v 16).
2. –

([Go to Study 3: John the Baptist and Jesus](#Study3JohnTheBaptistAndJesus))

### Answers 3: John the Baptist and Jesus, Matt 11:2–19

Answers to Questions

1. John the Baptist wanted to know if Jesus really was the Messiah (v 2–3).
2. Jesus did not answer John’s question directly. Instead he reminded John of the fruit of his Messiahship: The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news brought to them (v 4–5). He wanted John to understand that through Jesus’ ministry God’s Old Testament messianic promises were being fulfilled (see Isaiah 35:5–6; 61:1). Jesus was evidently performing the work of God’s Messiah.
3. We get this picture of John the Baptist from Jesus’ words in verses 7–9:
   1. He was a strong man living in the desert unswayed by the wind.
   2. He was a man dressed in simple clothes.
   3. He was a prophet even greater than any of the Old Testament prophets.
4. Jesus made this statement about John the Baptist: He was the messenger, who prepared the way for the Lord in fulfillment of the prophecy in Malachi 3:1 (v 10 and comment).
5. Jesus also made this statement about John the Baptist: He was the greatest person of the old covenant (v 11 and comment).
6. People said that John the Baptist had a demon, because of his lifestyle – he did not eat good food and he did not drink wine (v 18).
7. People said about the Son of Man (Jesus) that he was glutton and a drunkard, because of his lifestyle – he associated with tax collectors and sinners (v 19).
8. Jesus ended his speech about John the Baptist and himself with a proverb type of statement: “But wisdom is vindicated by her deeds” (v 19).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. See my comment on verse 12. But there are also other ways of understanding this verse.
2. John the Baptist is the prophet Elijah in a symbolic (and prophetic sense). So in him the prophecy of Malachi 4:5 is fulfilled. This is what Jesus clearly says several times in the synoptic gospels.
3. But John the Baptist is not the prophet Elijah in a physical sense, so he is not Elijah reincarnated. This is what he himself says in John’s gospel (v 14 with comment).
4. Jesus’ statement about wisdom at the end of this passage is explained in my comment on verse 19.

([Go to Study 4: Jesus anointed by a sinful woman](#Study4JesusAnointedByASinfulWoman))

### Answers 4: Jesus anointed by a sinful woman, Luke 7:36–50

Answers to Questions

1. On this occasion, Jesus was visiting the house of a Pharisee because he had been invited there for a meal (v 36).
2. In the beginning of the story, we learn at least six things about the woman (v 37–38):
   1. She was known in her town as a sinner. Perhaps she was a prostitute.
   2. She knew that Jesus was visiting Simon’s house, so she took the liberty to meet him there.
   3. She must have been very upset, because she was weeping profusely.
   4. She wanted to express her love for Jesus. So she kept on kissing his feet.
   5. She came prepared to honor Jesus, because she brought an alabaster jar of valuable ointment.
   6. She did not want to disturb the meal. So she did not talk to Jesus, but placed herself behind him. And she anointed his feet instead of his head.
3. Simon thought that Jesus could not be a prophet, because he did not realize that the woman who was touching him was leading a sinful life (v 39).
4. Jesus dealt with Simon’s thoughts (v 40–42) in an indirect way, like this:
   1. First he told Simon a story about two debtors, one who owed much, the other who owed less. But the creditor canceled both their debts.
   2. Then Jesus asked Simon a question: Which of these two debtors would love their creditor more?
5. Simon answered Jesus’ question as expected: The person who had benefited more would, of course, love his creditor more (v 44).
6. Simon had not respectfully welcomed Jesus to his home (v 44–46):
   1. He had not provided water for Jesus to wash his feet
   2. He had not welcomed Jesus with a kiss.
   3. He had not anointed Jesus’ head with oil.
7. But the woman had shown Jesus these signs of love (v 44–46):
   1. She had bathed Jesus’ feet with her tears and dried them with her hair.
   2. She had not ceased to kiss Jesus’ feet since her she came in.
   3. She had anointed Jesus’ feet with oil.
8. Jesus made this point about love and forgiveness in verse 47: The person who has been forgiven much will love more than the person who has been forgiven only little.
9. The other guests were surprised at Jesus’ words to the woman, because he had told her that her sins were forgiven (v 48–49). No man could forgive sins, only God.
10. The woman experienced salvation by her faith in Jesus (v 50). She had expressed her love for him. But she was not saved by these expressions of love. She was saved by her faith.
11. Jesus gave the woman a final blessing by telling her to go in peace (v 50).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Simon the Pharisee thought that Jesus could not be a prophet, because he seemed unaware of the sinfulness of the woman by allowing her to touch him. But Jesus’ story about the two debtors revealed to Simon that he was wrong. Jesus clearly knew his deepest thoughts. This only a prophet could do.
2. The connection between love and forgiveness in the story about the woman who anointed Jesus can be understood like this:
   1. The woman had faith in Jesus. That was why she came to the house in the first place.
   2. She wanted to express her faith in Jesus through acts of love: She bought the perfume. Her tears showed that she repented of her sinful life. She dried Jesus’ wet feet with her hair. Then she lovingly rubbed his feet with the fragrant oil.
   3. Jesus saw her faith in him and her acts of love toward him. And he told her that her sins were forgiven. This shocked the other guests: Only God can forgive sins. So who is this Jesus?
   4. Jesus then confirmed her salvation as he sent her away with a blessing, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace!”
   5. Jesus’ story about the two debtors explained why the woman loved him so much: Her many sins had been forgiven (v 47).
3. –

([Go to Study 5: Woe and rest](#Study5WoeAndRest))

### Answers 5: Woe and rest, Matt 11:20–30

Answers to Questions

1. –
2. –Jesus denounced the three Galilean cities of Capernaum, Bethsaida and Korazin, because they had not accepted Jesus’ ministry and repented from their sins (v 21–24).
3. Jesus praised his heavenly Father in verses 25–26, because he has revealed the Kingdom of God (“these things”) those who accepted Jesus and his ministry, even to ordinary people (“children”).
4. By “all things” Jesus referred to God’s full revelation of the Kingdom of God (v 27 with comment).
5. Jesus teaches us in verse 27 that the only way to get to know our heavenly Father is through Jesus. God has revealed “all things” to him and we can only know God to the extent that Jesus reveals him to us.
6. The metaphor “yoke” implies “to be under something.” Negatively, it could refer to oppression or servitude under a religious system, for example the legalistic teachings of the Pharisees. Positively, it could refer to the “yoke under Jesus,” which is the refreshing and restful life in the Kingdom of God (v 28–30 with comments).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Jesus’ statement that on the day of judgment the city of Sodom will do better than the city of Capernaum (v 23–24) can be explained like this:
   1. Sodom was destroyed by God during the time of Abraham because of its great sinfulness.
   2. But God considers the sin of Capernaum greater that the sin of Sodom. Why? Because Capernaum rejected Jesus and his ministry and so turned its back on the Kingdom of God and God’s offer of grace and salvation. But Sodom never had this opportunity, as it did not exist during New Testament times.
   3. So we can conclude that on the day of judgment, the way in which we have responded to God’s offer of grace and salvation will somehow be taken into consideration.
2. Evaluate yourself and the believers of your church in the light of Jesus’ words in verses 25–27. Ask yourself questions like these:
   1. What kind of people do we have in our church?
      * Why are so many of our believers ordinary, simple, poor, and uneducated people?
      * Why does it seem to be so difficult for people who are rich, highly educated, and upper-class to accept the gospel and turn to Christ?
   2. Do we, as individuals and as a church body of believers, grow spiritually?
      * By allowing Jesus to reveal more and more about God?
      * By committing ourselves more and more wholeheartedly to Jesus and his Kingdom?
3. Jesus’ invitation in verses 28–30:
   1. We must avoid the “yoke” of legalistic religion. It puts heavy burdens on men’s shoulders. It may seem “spiritual,” and it perhaps satisfies the desire of human nature (what the New Testament calls “the flesh”). But it does not lead to salvation
   2. Instead we must come to Jesus. Only in him can we find rest for our souls. Only through him can we find salvation. His “yoke” (life in the Kingdom of God under his gentle and benevolent rule) is easy and light: It refreshes our souls and our minds. It gives rest to our spirit.

([Go to Study 6: The sign of Jonah](#Study6TheSignOfJonah))

### Answers 6: The sign of Jonah, Matt 12:38–42

Answers to Questions

1. The Jewish leaders asked Jesus to give them a “miraculous sign.” They seem to have wanted something more spectacular than the healing miracles and the deliverance of the demon-possessed that they had already witnessed (v 38).
2. Jesus responded to the request of the Jewish leaders with frustration. He called them “a wicked and adulterous generation.” He then told them that the only sign they would get would be the “sign of Jonah” (v 39 with comment).
3. Jesus’ comparison between Jonah and the Son of Man in verse 40: Just as Jonah had been in the belly of the fish for three days, so Jesus would be in the grave for three days.
4. Jesus said that the Jewish leaders would be condemned by the people of Nineveh at the judgment, because the people of Nineveh repented when God spoke to them through the prophet Jonah. But the Jewish leaders had not repented when God spoke to them through Jesus (v 41).
5. The comparison Jesus makes between Jonah and himself in verse 41: Jesus is greater that Jonah, so God has even higher expectations for the repentance of the Jewish leaders than he had for the repentance of the people of Nineveh at the time of Jonah.
6. Jesus said that the Jewish leaders would be condemned by the Queen of the South at the judgment, because she came from a distant country to listen to Solomon’s wisdom. But the Jewish leaders had not listened when Jesus proclaimed the good news of the Kingdom of God (v 42).
7. The comparison Jesus makes between Solomon and himself in verse 42: Jesus is greater than Solomon, so God expected the Jewish leaders to listen to Jesus and his teachings even more attentively than the queen of Sheba listened to the wisdom of Solomon.

Comments on Think and discuss

1. There seems to be two “signs of Jonah” in this text:
   1. First, the three days:
      * Jonah spent three days in the belly of the fish before he was thrown up on land.
      * So Jesus will spend three days in the grave before he is raised from the dead.
   2. Second, the repentance at the proclamation of God’s word:
      * The people of Nineveh repented, when Jonah proclaimed God’s judgment on their city.
      * So the Jewish leaders should have repented and accepted God’s salvation, when Jesus proclaimed the good news of the Kingdom of God.
   3. In addition, we find a “sign of the Queen of the South” or a “sign of Solomon”: The queen of Sheba came to listen to Solomon’s wisdom. But the Jewish leaders had not bothered to listen to God’s wisdom though Jesus.
2. When we compare the parallel accounts of the “sign of Jonah” (Matt 12:38–42 and Luke 11:29–32), we find one main difference between them:
   1. In Matthew there are two “signs of Jonah” – see my answer to the previous question.
   2. In Luke there is only one “sign of Jonah”: The repentance of the people of Nineveh at the proclamation of God’s word.
3. It is remarkable that Jesus contrasted the Jewish leaders of his own generation (calling them “a wicked and adulterous generation”) with “Nineveh” and “the Queen of the South”: “Nineveh” was a Gentile city and “the Queen of the South” was a Gentile ruler. So Jesus here puts people who did not belong to God’s “chosen people” in a better light than the Pharisees and scribes who considered themselves to be “God’s chosen leaders for God’s chosen people.” So, once again, we find that the Kingdom of God belongs to all those who accept Jesus, irrespective of social and religious background.
4. Here are lessons that the “sign of Jonah” has for Christian believers today:
   1. It is important to listen to and respond to the proclamation of the gospel. We must never turn our back on God’s messenger. We must never reject God’s offer of grace and salvation.
   2. Consequently, we as individual believers and as a church body must be obedient to the Great Commission: To go everywhere and to proclaim the gospel to everybody.
   3. The importance of a correct understanding of the word of God. Jesus called the Jewish leaders “a wicked and adulterous generation,” because they misinterpreted God’s word and consequently misguided God’s people. This must be a warning to us. We should instead strive for good leadership so that our Lord at the end of our ministry can say, “Well done, you good and faithful servant!”

([Go to Study 7: Parables about the Kingdom of God](#Study7ParablesAboutTheKingdomOfGod))

### Answers 7: Parables about the Kingdom of God, Matthew chapter 13

Answers to Questions

1. After Jesus had told the crowds the parable of the sower (Matt 13:3–9), the disciples asked him why he spoke to the people in parables (v 10).
2. In his answer to his disciples, Jesus mentioned two categories of people (v 11):
   1. Those who knew the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven. They were those who had accepted the gospel of the Kingdom of God.
   2. Those who had not been given the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven. They were those who had not accepted the gospel of the Kingdom of God.
3. Jesus quoted (in v 13–14) two verses from the Old Testament in answer to his disciples’ question why he spoke to the people in parables: The people heard God’s word. But they did not understand it, because they had hardened their hearts. But if their hearts had been open to God’s message, they would have turned to him and experienced God’s salvation.
4. So the sad truth is that those who are not willing to receive Jesus’ message will find the truth hidden from them. And as a consequence, they will not enter into the Kingdom of God.
5. From verse 34, we learn that at this point in his ministry, Jesus only spoke to the people (but not to the disciples) in parables. Earlier he had, of course, also used other teaching methods with the general public, and later he would do so again.
6. In verse 36, we find a change of scene – from a public place at the Sea of Galilee (see v 1–2) to a private place where only the disciples were present with Jesus. Now the time had come for Jesus to explain to his disciples the meaning of the parables.
7. Jesus asked his disciples (in v 51) if they had understood his teaching in parables. And they answered him that they had done so.
8. The points of reference in the parable of the weeds (v 24–30 and 37–43):

* The sower and the owner – The Son of Man (Jesus)
* The good seed/the wheat – The sons of the kingdom (the citizens of the Kingdom of God)
* The field – The world
* The enemy – The devil
* The weeds – The sons of the evil one/the devil (they are those who cause sin and do evil)
* The servants – ?
* The harvest – The end of the age (the day of God’s final judgment)
* The harvesters – The angels of the Son of Man
* (To be burned) – The fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth
* The owner’s barn – The Kingdom of the Father

1. The Son of Man (Jesus) plays a key role in Jesus’ explanation of the parable of the weeds (v 37–43): He is the sower of the good seed (the wheat). He is the “owner of the field” (the world). And the harvesters of the field are his angels.
2. Jesus describes the destinies of “the evildoers” and “the righteous” in his explanation to the parable of the weeds like this (v 37–43):
   1. The evildoers will be thrown in the furnace of fire, where there till be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
   2. The righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father.
3. In the parable of the yeast, “yeast” symbolizes the positive influence of the Kingdom of God (v 33 with comment). As yeast transforms the dough, so the Kingdom of God gradually and completely transforms people lives (and perhaps also life in general in this world).
4. In the parable of the hidden treasure, the man sold everything he had so that he could buy the field and get hold of this treasure (v 44).
5. In the parable of the pearl, the man sold everything he had to get enough money so that he could buy this valuable pearl (v 45–46).
6. The fish described in the parable of the net are “of every kind” (v 47–48).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. The question: “Why did Jesus use parables?” – See Introduction to this study.
2. Jesus’ point in verses 51–52: Bible scholars don’t agree on how to interpret these verses. This is perhaps the best way of understanding Jesus’ exhortation:
3. The “old treasures” are the Old Testament promises of the Messiah and his kingdom. The “new treasures” are their fulfillment in Jesus’ person and ministry as described in the New Testament. So the teacher of the law who has become a disciple of the Kingdom of God must use this double storeroom of treasures (his knowledge of both the old and the new) as he teaches and preaches in the church.
4. Jesus’ point in the parable of the weeds (v 24–30, 37–43): As long as this present world stands, the wheat (the righteous people of the Kingdom of God) and the weeds (the evildoing sons of the devil) will grow together. Separation will only take place on the day of God’s judgment.
5. Jesus’ point in the parable of the yeast (v 33): The Kingdom of God grows, transforms and spreads through this world in invisible ways.
6. Jesus’ point in the parable of the hidden treasure (v 44): The value of the Kingdom of God is so high that to obtain it is worth every sacrifice.
7. Jesus’ point in the parable of the pearl (v 45–46): The worth of the Kingdom of God is supreme and it surpasses everything else.
8. The implied points of reference in the parable of the net (v 47–48) and Jesus’ interpretation of the parable (v 49–50):
   * The net that is let down into the sea represents the Kingdom of God at the time of God’s final judgment.
   * The sea represent the world.
   * The fish of every kind represents all kinds of people, both good and bad. Both “evil” and “righteous” have been caught in the net of the Kingdom of God.
   * The full net represents all the people at the end time, the time of God’s final judgment.
   * The baskets represents the salvation of the righteous.
   * The throwing out represents God’s rejection of the evildoers.

This parable describes the situation at hand when the day of God’s final judgment takes place: The Kingdom of God has impacted both “good” fish (the righteous) and “bad” fish (the evildoers), and only the final sweep of the net will separate them.

([Go to Study 8: Five healing miracles](#Study8FiveHealingMiracles))

### Answers 8: Five healing miracles

Answers to Questions

Jesus heals two blind men, Matt 9:27–31

1. As they were following Jesus, the two blind men called out (Matt 9:27), “Have mercy on us, Son of David!” They wanted Jesus to give them their sight, and they recognized that he was the Messiah. They must have known that the opening of the eyes of the blind was one of God’s messianic promises (see Isaiah 35:5).
2. Jesus asked the two blind men if they believed that Jesus would give them their sight (Matt 9:28). They, of course, answered “yes.” Their faith in Jesus was the very reason why they had been following him and crying out for his mercy.
3. The two men did not obey Jesus’ instruction (Matt 9:30–31). He had asked them to keep quiet about what had happened to them, but instead they spread the news of their healing throughout the district.

Jesus heals a mute and demon-possessed man, Matt 9:32–34

1. The mute and demon-possessed man was brought to Jesus (Matt 9:32).So he was probably unable to get to Jesus on his own.
2. The crowds reacted to the healing of the mute and demon-possessed man with amazement (Matt 9:33). They had never seen anything like this before. And they must have realized that Jesus was the Messiah, because one of God’s messianic promises was the joyful singing of the mute (see Isaiah 35:6).
3. The Pharisees reacted to the healing of the mute and demon-possessed man with suspicion. They even claimed that Jesus was performing his miracles through the power of Satan (Matt 9:33).

Jesus heals a woman suffering from a crippling spirit, Luke 13:10–17

1. Jesus was teaching in the synagogue on a Sabbath (Luke 13:10).
2. Luke gives his readers three pieces of information about the woman in the synagogue (Luke 13:11):
   * She had been suffering for eighteen years.
   * Her back was bent over so she was unable to stand straight.
   * The reason for her disease was demon-possession.
3. Jesus healed the crippled woman (Luke 13:12–13) like this:
   * First, he asked her to come up to him to the front of the synagogue.
   * Then, he told her that he had set her free from her ailment.
   * Finally, he laid his hands on her.
4. The leader of the synagogue was upset with Jesus, because he had healed the crippled woman on a Sabbath (Luke 13:14).
5. Jesus called the Jewish leaders “hypocrites” (Luke 13:15–16), because they pretended to be the protectors of the Old Testament law and to be zealous keeping its stipulations. But they lacked concern for the suffering of a poor woman. They also had an ulterior motive: to find cause to accuse Jesus.
6. The outcome of the discussion about healing of the crippled woman was twofold (Luke 13:17):
   1. The Jewish leaders (Jesus’ opponents) were humiliated.
   2. The crowd of people rejoiced at Jesus’ wonderful ministry.

Jesus heals a man suffering from dropsy, Luke 14:1–6

1. The healing of the man suffering from dropsy took place on a Sabbath in the house of a leader of the Pharisees (Luke 14:1–2).
2. The order of events in the account of the healing of the man suffering from dropsy (Luke 14:1–6):

* The host and his friends, who were lawyers and Pharisees, carefully watched Jesus to see if he was going to do anything “illegal” on this Sabbath.
* Jesus saw that a man suffering from dropsy was standing in front of him.
* Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees if the law allowed healing on a Sabbath.
* The Jewish leaders did not answer Jesus’ question (see my comment on Luke 14:3).
* Jesus touched the man and healed him.
* Jesus sent the man away.
* Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees a second question: Would they do the emergency work of saving the life of a person or an animal on a Sabbath?
* The Jewish leaders again did not answer Jesus’ question. They had nothing to say, because the situation that Jesus presented was allowed even according to their own interpretation of the law.

Jesus heals ten men suffering from leprosy, Luke 17:11–19

1. The story about Jesus healing the ten lepers took place near a village in the region between Samaria and Galilee (Luke 17:11–12).
2. Jesus told the ten lepers to go and show themselves to the priests, because according to the law of Moses the priests decided if a person had been healed from a skin disease (Luke 17:14 and comment).
3. Luke tells his readers four things about the man who came back to Jesus after he had been healed (Luke 17:15–16):
   1. He was very happy that he had been healed.
   2. He praised God for his healing.
   3. He fell down on the ground before Jesus and thanked him for his healing.
   4. He was not a Jew, but a Samaritan.
4. Jesus described the man as a “foreigner” (Luke 17:18).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. –
2. –
3. –
4. –
5. –
6. The role that faith plays in these five stories about healing:
   1. “Faith” is only mentioned in two of the five stories:
      * The healing of the two blind men (Matt 9:29): Jesus asked the two men if they believed that he could heal them. And when they said “yes,” Jesus told them that he would heal them because they had faith in him.
      * The healing of the ten lepers (Luke 17:19): Jesus told the Samaritan who came back to thank him to stand up and go, and that his faith had made him well (or saved him, see my comment on this verse).
   2. An open declaration of “faith” did not seem to be a condition for a healing miracle to take place in these stories:
      * The mute demon-possessed man had been brought to Jesus by others (Matt 9:22). This was, of course, an expression of these people’s faith that Jesus could deliver the poor man.
      * The crippled woman obeyed when Jesus told her to come up to him at the front of the synagogue (Luke 13:12). This obedience was perhaps an expression of her faith in Jesus.
      * The man suffering from dropsy was standing before Jesus in the house of the prominent Pharisee (Luke 14:2). Perhaps this was an expression of faith, or at least a hope that Jesus would do something about his miserable situation.
   3. In all these stories, the focus is more on the greatness of Jesus than on the greatness or strength of the faith of the people Jesus healed. Jesus showed mercy on these suffering people (compare Matt 9:27; Luke 17:13), he loved them with compassion – so he healed them. These healing miracles also proved that he was the promised Messiah, the One who was to come to heal and to save. These healings revealed the transforming power of Kingdom of God, the power to heal and to save.

I think that Christian believers today should focus more on Jesus than on our own faith. We believe in Jesus and his power to heal us from any oppression and infirmity, because we know him as our God, our loving and merciful Savior and Healer.

([Go to Study 9: Paying temple tax](#Study9PayingTempleTax))

### Answers 9: Paying temple tax, Matt 17:24–27

Answers to Questions

1. The collectors of the temple tax asked Peter if Jesus paid the Jewish temple tax. Peter said that he did (v 24–25).
2. The difference between “the sons of kings” and “others” (v 25–26): Kings demand duties and taxes from their subjects (“others”), but not from their own children.
3. Jesus told Peter to go to the lake and catch a fish that had a coin in its mouth. Then Peter should satisfy the expectations of the Jewish community (so that the Jews would not be offended) and use the coin from the fish to pay the temple tax for Jesus and himself (v 27).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. There would be a difference between “the sons of kings” and “others” with reference to paying duty and taxes (verses 25–26): Duty and taxes were used to maintain the royal household. But the king’s children belonged to the household so it did not make any sense for them to pay any duty and taxes.
2. The “offense” that Jesus referred to (v 27): The Jews in those days expressed their solidarity with their Jewish community by paying an annual tax for the maintenance of the Jerusalem temple. Jesus and his disciples were Jews. So in order not to offend their fellow-Jews, Jesus told Peter how to get hold of the money needed for the two of them to pay this temple tax.
3. Three comments on the message of this passage:

* Because the temple is God the Father’s own house, the Son and those he has brought into the Father’s family are exempt from the temple tax, signaling that, with the coming of the Kingdom of God, believers are no longer under the Old Testament law but the law of Christ (compare Gal 6:2) – from ESV Study Bible
* There is also a lesson about not giving offense to our fellow-man (see my comment on the previous question). It is good for Christian believers even today to express their solidarity to society – as long as it is compatible with the lifestyle of the Kingdom of God.
* In addition, Jesus gives us a lesson on humility. Jesus, who is the Son of God in a unique sense and who was absolutely free of the law, submitted himself to the law even unto death on the cross. Peter learnt this lesson of submission and humility: “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men” (1 Peter 2:13).

([Go to Study 10: The wicked servant)](#Study10TheWickedServant)

### Answers 10: The wicked servant, Matt 18:21–35

Answers to Questions

1. The occasion of the parable about the unmerciful servant (v 21–23): Peter, one of Jesus’ twelve disciples, came to Jesus with a question about forgiveness. He wanted to know if it was a enough to forgive a fellow-believer seven times.
2. The parable of the unmerciful servant is about the Kingdom of God (v 23).
3. The first servant was brought to his master’s house to have his account settled (v 24).
4. The master ordered the first servant and his family to be sold as a compensation for the enormous debt that the servant owed his master (v 25).
5. The master canceled the first servant’s debt, as he felt sorry for him (v 27).
6. The difference between the debts of the two servants was almost unimaginable (v 24 and 28 with comments): The second servant owed the first servant the equivalent of three months’ wages for a laborer. But the first servant owed his master the equivalent of 15 thousand years of hard work! Jesus’ point was that these two debts cannot be compared, and consequently the master’s forgiveness cannot truly be compared with any servant’s forgiveness of his fellow-servant.
7. The master found out about the behavior of the first servant through his other servants (v 31).
8. The master called the first servant “wicked,” because he who himself just had experienced his master’s mercy did not show any mercy on his fellow-servant (v 32–33).
9. Jesus ended his parable with a warning to Peter (v 35): If we don’t show mercy on a fellow-believer, we cannot expect God to show mercy on us.

Comments on Think and discuss

1. –
2. The message of the parable of the unmerciful servant is the importance of forgiveness. God, our Master, had mercy on us and forgave us all our sins, when we did not deserve any forgiveness at all. So we should mirror him in our lives together as citizens of the Kingdom of God.

([Go to Study 11: To follow Jesus](#Study11ToFollowJesus))

### Answers 11: To follow Jesus, Luke 9:57–62

Answers to Questions

1. The incidents recorded in this passage took place as Jesus and his disciples were traveling along the road (v 57). The previous passage (v 51–56), gives us the background: Jesus knew that the time had come for him to go to Jerusalem to fulfill his work of salvation. He “intently” set out on this journey. It took them through parts of Samaria, where they met opposition.
2. The man told Jesus that he wanted to follow him wherever he went (v 57). So he wanted to become a disciple of Jesus.
3. Jesus (the Son of Man) described his life as a life of homelessness (v 58).
4. The second man‘s excuse for not following Jesus was that he first wanted bury his father (v 59). This meant that he wanted to wait until he had fulfilled all his social obligations to his family – which probably would have taken several years – before he was ready to become a disciple of Jesus.
5. Jesus told the second man to go and proclaim the Kingdom of God (v 60). So Jesus wanted him to make the right choice between his social obligations to his family and discipleship.
6. The third man’s excuse for not following Jesus was that he first wanted to go back and say farewell to his family (v 61).
7. Jesus told the third man that to be fit for the Kingdom of God you must resolutely look forward, not backward (v 62).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. The key expression in this passage (Luke 9:57–62) is “to follow.” In a very brief manner, the passage presents three meetings between a man and Jesus. Each meeting is about following Jesus.:
   1. The first man declares that he wants to follow Jesus wherever he goes.
   2. The second man gets an invitation from Jesus to follow him.
   3. The third man says that he wants to follow Jesus on a certain condition.

In those days the expression “to follow somebody” meant that you wanted to become a disciple of that person. So this passage is about Christian discipleship.

1. A comparison of Luke 9:57–62 and Matt 8:19–22:
   * Matthew’s account is much shorter than Luke’s. It only mentions the first two of the three meetings that Luke has.
   * Matthew describes the first person as “a teacher of the law.” So the first man was probably a Pharisee. Luke just calls him “a man.”
   * Matthew describes the second man as “another disciple," which shows that he was already a follower of Jesus. Luke just calls him “another man.” Matthew’s account of the second meeting is incomplete: The man gives his excuse, but Jesus’ invitation to him is not mentioned (perhaps because he was already “a follower”).
   * In Luke, Jesus mentions “the Kingdom of God” in the second and third meeting. In Matthew, Jesus does not mention “the Kingdom of God” at all.
   * Luke’s account serves better as a text for a Bible study/sermon for three reasons: First, it contains more details. Second, it contrasts the options that Jesus puts before the three men more clearly. Third, it brings in the perspective of the Kingdom of God.
2. The message in Luke 9:57–62 for Christian believers today can be understood like this:
   1. A disciple of Jesus will sometimes have to make difficult choices. This text illustrates three kinds of choices:
      * The choice between a “good” life (with home, food, friends, comfort, security and so on) and a life of difficulties and suffering. What will we choose if we have to make that choice?
      * The choice between a “normal” life (where we do what is socially and culturally expected of us) and “abnormal” (where we break social and cultural conventions). What will we choose if we have to make that choice?
      * The choice between a “considerate” life (considering the feelings and expectations of family and friends) and an “inconsiderate” life (doing things that our family and friends do not understand or want or expect, and when we perhaps even hurt their feelings). What will we choose if we have to make that choice?
   2. Most times in the life of a Christian believer these choices are not required. God wants his people in this world to have a good and normal life (home, family, friends, jobs and so on). He wants us to fulfill our social and family responsibilities (take care of children and parents, have good relationships with friends and neighbors). That is not the issue here. The issue is: What will we choose when we have to make the difficult choice? Will we choose the life of suffering with Jesus? Will we choose to be despised and rejected like he was? Will we put the Kingdom of God before even our own family like he did? Will we look forward, keep our eyes on him, and follow him? Only then are we truly his disciples. Only then are we really fit for service in the Kingdom of God.

([Go to Study 12: Jesus sends out the seventy](#Study12JesusSendsOutTheSeventy))

### Answers 12: Jesus sends out the seventy, Luke 10:1–20

Answers to Questions

1. Jesus sent the seventy other disciples to all the places that he was planning to visit (v 1).
2. Jesus told his disciples to pray to God for more workers to his harvest field (v 2). Many people are in need of salvation so there is a great need for more people to proclaim the gospel.
3. Jesus used the simile “lambs among wolves” to describe the dangers of their journey (v 3). The disciples would be like defenseless lambs among the people they were going to, who would be like dangerous wolves.
4. Jesus told his disciples not to bring purse, bag or sandals on their journey. And they were not to greet people as they were traveling along the roads (v 4). So he wanted them to travel light and not waste time with casual talk to the strangers they met along the way.
5. Jesus said that as the disciples visited a house, they should greet the people there with “Peace” (v 5).
6. Jesus told his disciples to eat and drink whatever they were served in people’s homes. They need not pay for this. And they should not move from house to house (v 7).
7. Jesus told his disciples to do like this during their stay in a town (v 8–9):
   1. They should eat and drink whatever they were served.
   2. They should heal the sick.
   3. They should proclaim the good news about the Kingdom of God.
8. Jesus told the disciples that if they were not welcome to stay in a town, they should warn the people: The gospel had been proclaimed to them, but they had rejected it. Now they were left to God’s judgment. The disciples would take no more responsibility for them (v 10–11).
9. Jesus said that the people who rejected his disciples had rejected Jesus who had sent them. But they had also rejected God who had sent Jesus (v 16).
10. The seventy disciples were very happy about their ministry tour, especially about the deliverance of the demon-possessed (v 17).
11. Jesus described the success of the disciples’ ministry tour as a defeat of Satan (He saw “Satan falling like a flash of lightning from heaven”) by echoing an old prophecy from Isaiah about the defeat of the king of Babylon (v 18).
12. Jesus said that he had given his disciples the authority to step on snakes and scorpions and on all the power of the enemy (v 19).
13. Jesus told his disciples to be happy that they were saved, “that their names were written in heaven.” This salvation was more important for them than to have power over the evil spirits (v 20).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Explain the following imagery in your own words:
   1. The harvest is plentiful (v 2): There are many people in this world who are ready to accept the gospel of the Kingdom of God. They are waiting for the good news to be preached to them.
   2. Like lambs among wolves (v 2): You will be facing very difficult and dangerous circumstances.
   3. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals (v 4): You must travel light. Don’t be burdened with unnecessary things as you go out to proclaim the gospel.
   4. Greet no one on the road (v 4): Your assignment is urgent, so don’t waste your time.
   5. I wipe the dust off my feet (v 11): Now it’s up to you! I will no longer take any responsibility for you! Now you have to face God’s judgment!
   6. I saw Satan fall like a flash of lightning from heaven (v 18): Each time you delivered a demon-possessed person, Satan lost some of his power.
   7. Your names are written in heaven (v 20): You are saved. You belong to the people of God. You are a citizen of the Kingdom of God.
2. The ministry of the church from the point of view of this story about Jesus commissioning the seventy disciples (Luke 10:1–20):
   1. There is a great need for the gospel to be proclaimed. People are eagerly waiting for something to change their lives, something that can give them peace and hope. They need Jesus.
   2. So the church must face this need. We must have outreach. We must send and go. We must proclaim. We must pray for – and prepare – more gospel workers. The church must have a strategy for all this.
   3. The task to reach people with the gospel will not always be easy. We will often face difficulties and suffering. We will sometimes feel vulnerable and defenseless. We may even perish.
   4. The task to reach people with the gospel is urgent. We have to stay focused. We must not get diverted. We must not do wrong or unnecessary things. We must not waste our time.
   5. We must be willing to adjust to the conditions of the people we want to reach, eat and drink what we are offered, sleep in the beds that are available, associate with the people of that house or that town. We must not bring our own cultural expressions or expect people to give us our kind of food and serve us our kind of drink.
   6. We must be proud of what we are doing. We should not bribe or pay people to allow us to work. We should understand and appreciate the value of our ministry. We should encourage people to support the ministry, also financially.
   7. We must understand the two-fold nature of our ministry. The “power-ministry” of healing the sick and delivering the demon-possessed. And the “peace-ministry” of proclaiming salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Only healing and delivering is not enough. Only talking is not enough. We need to do both.
   8. We must understand the seriousness of our ministry. The things we do – and the response of the people – have eternal consequences. The positive consequence is salvation. The negative consequence is condemnation. We are working for God. But we are also working against Satan. Each time the power of the Kingdom of God is manifested – through the healing of the sick, the deliverance of the oppressed, and the salvation of sinners – Satan is losing some of his control over people and their circumstances.
   9. We must understand the dignity of our assignment. We are not our own entrepreneurs. We are not pursuing our own agendas. No, we have been sent by the Father and his Son. We are the ambassadors of heaven. When people reject us, they reject Jesus and our Father in heaven.
   10. We must always remember that the most important thing is not any visible success of our ministry. We must not pride ourselves of the miraculous things that are happening through our church. Our greatest joy must always be that we have our names recorded in heaven. We are saved. We are citizens of the Kingdom of God.
   11. Finally, we hope and pray that many more people would accept the good news of the Kingdom of God. We want their names too to be recorded in heaven. We want them too to become citizens of the Kingdom of God.
3. –

([Go to Study 13: The cost of discipleship](#Study13TheCostOfDiscipleship))

### Answers 13: The cost of discipleship, Luke 14:25–33

Answers to Questions

1. In this passage, Jesus addresses the crowds of people, who were walking together with him along the road on his journey to Jerusalem (v 25).
2. The first “cost” of discipleship that Jesus mentioned. To hate your family and yourself (v 26).
3. The second “cost” of discipleship that Jesus mentioned: To carry your cross (v 27).
4. Jesus presented two examples of the necessity of calculating the costs before launching on an enterprise (v 28–32):
   1. A person who plans to build a tower
   2. A king who plans to go to war
5. The third “cost” of discipleship that Jesus mentioned: To give up all that you have (v 33).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Jesus’ three “costs of discipleship” (Luke 14:25–33) briefly explained:
   1. To hate your own family and yourself: You must love Jesus more than you love your family or your own life.
   2. To carry your cross: You must be willing to suffer, even die, for Jesus.
   3. To give up all that you have: You must be willing to give up everything for Jesus. The Kingdom of God must be your first priority (compare Matt 6:33).
2. –

([Go to Study 14: Shortage of workers](#Study14ShortageOfWorkers))

### Answers 14: Shortage of workers, Matt 9:35–38

Answers to Questions

1. Matthew describes Jesus’ ministry like this in verse 35:
   1. It covered the whole area. So Jesus did not limit his ministry geographically.
   2. He taught in the synagogues. This was where the Jews gathered every week to pray to God and listen to teaching from the Old Testament texts.
   3. He proclaimed the good news of the Kingdom of God all over the area. So he shared the gospel with everybody.
   4. He healed the sick from all kinds of diseases.

Jesus’ ministry in a nutshell: Teaching, preaching/proclamation, healing – everywhere and to everybody.

1. Jesus was filled with compassion for the crowds when he saw their situation. They were harassed and helpless. They were confused and without direction for their lives (v 36).
2. Matthew uses a simile to describe the condition of the crowds: They were like sheep without a shepherd. So the people did not have good leaders to guide them (v 36).
3. In the last verses of this passage, Jesus addressed “his disciples” (v 37). Matthew probably had a larger group of disciples in mind, not only his twelve apostles, because then he goes on to report that Jesus “called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority” before he sent them out to proclaim the gospel.
4. Jesus uses these four agricultural metaphors to describe the situation (v 37–38):
   1. The harvest: The people who are ready to hear the gospel and become citizens of the Kingdom of God.
   2. The workers: The disciples of Jesus who must go out and proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom of God.
   3. The Lord of the harvest: God, who is the Lord of all people, in particular of the citizens of the Kingdom of God.
   4. His harvest field: The world, which belongs to God, and where the people who are ready to hear the gospel and become citizens of the Kingdom of God live.
5. Jesus told his disciples to pray to God for people who are willing to proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom of God to all the suffering and confused people in this world (v 38).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. In his gospel, Matthew sometimes summarizes Jesus’ ministry in one verse, for example in 4:23 and in 9:35. A comparison of these two verses shows that they are very similar:
   * Jesus taught, preached/proclaimed, and healed in both verses.
   * Both verses mention that his preaching/teaching was the good news of the Kingdom of God.
   * His ministry is “limitless”: He ministered throughout Galilee; he went to all the cities and villages. He healed every disease and sickness.
2. –

Comments on Reflect and prepare

Your study The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few (Matt 9:3–38) can be structured like this:

* 1. The situation of the people at Jesus’ time:
     + They were suffering.
     + They were spiritually confused.
     + They were leaderless.
  2. Jesus’ reaction:
     + He saw the situation of the people.
     + His heart was filled with compassion for their situation.
     + He did something about their situation.
  3. Jesus’ ministry:
     + He taught the people
     + He proclaimed the good news about the Kingdom of God to the people.
     + He healed the people from their diseases.
     + His ministry was “everywhere” and unlimited.
  4. What about our ministry today?
     + Do we see the people and their needs?
     + Are our hearts filled with compassion for the people so that we do something for them?
     + Do we teach, proclaim, heal, comfort, guide… the people?
     + Is our ministry unlimited: geographically, socially, culturally… ?

([Go to Study 15: The good Samaritan](#Study15TheGoodSamaritan))

### Answers 15: The good Samaritan, Luke 10:25–37

Answers to Questions

1. The lawyer’s question for Jesus was how to obtain eternal life (v 25).
2. Jesus responded to the lawyer’s question by asking him to find the answer to this question in the Old Testament law (v 26).
3. The lawyer’s reply consisted of two verses from the Old Testament. He quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 (comment on verse 27).
4. Jesus said that the lawyer had given a correct summary of the Old Testament law. Then he told the lawyer to live in accordance with the answer he had just given (v 28).
5. In order to “justify himself” (this means “to show the people present that he was a righteous man who fulfilled the Old Testament law”) the lawyer asked another question: “Who is my neighbor” (v 29 with comment). He must have expected the traditional answer to this question – see comment on Think and discuss 2 below.
6. See answer 5 above.
7. The man who was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho was attacked and seriously injured by robbers (v 30).
8. Two men passed by the injured man, first a priest, then a Levite (v 31–32).
9. The third man did not pass by the injured man, but stopped. He was not a Jew (like the previous two men), but a Samaritan (v 33), a despised enemy of a righteous Jew.
10. The third man, the Samaritan, helped the injured man like this (v 34–35):
    1. He took care of the injured man’s wounds.
    2. He brought him to a nearby inn.
    3. He paid for all the expenses at the inn and told the inn-keeper to take good care of the injured man.
    4. He promised to check in on the injured man on his return journey.
11. In his answer to Jesus’ question about the injured man’s “neighbor” he called the Samaritan ”the one who had showed him mercy” (v 36–37). The lawyer was unwilling even to take the word “Samaritan” in his mouth!
12. Jesus told the lawyer to be like the “good Samaritan” (v 37).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. The connection between Jesus’ exhortation to the lawyer (v 37) and the lawyer’s desire to justify himself/to prove himself righteous (v 29):

* Jesus told the lawyer to be like the good Samaritan (v 37).
* The parable of the Good Samaritan was told to answer the lawyer’s question about who his “neighbor” was (v 29–30).
* The lawyer asked this question about his “neighbor” in order to “justify himself” (v 29). He wanted to prove that he fulfilled the requirements of the Old Testament law (as summarized by himself in verse 27).

1. The lawyer must have been totally chocked when he heard Jesus’ exhortation, “Go and do likewise!” How could Jesus have the rudeness to expect him, a Pharisee and a rabbi and an expert of the Old Testament law, to be like a Samaritan. The Samaritans were not even proper Jews, and they certainly did not obey the Old Testament laws. They were surely not righteous by any definition of the word.

But the lawyer must have received his first shock already halfway into the parable, when the third man entered the story. He probably reacted like this:

* The first man: A priest – sure, what can we expect of a priest? They are more concerned about the temple rituals than righteousness.
* The second man: A Levite – sure, what can we expect of an uneducated Levite? They just follow orders and know nothing about righteousness.
* The third man: Good! Finally a righteous Pharisee will enter the scene, help the poor man, and show everybody how good and righteous we Pharisees are! Oh no! This is terrible! How can Jesus come with a Samaritan, an unrighteous non-Jew and make him the hero of the story?

1. The parable of the Good Samaritan is better suited as a text for a Bible study in the church than as a text for proclaiming the gospel:

* It has a message for believers. It is a story about how God’s people must understand that a “neighbor” is not limited to our own people. No, any person in need – in spiritual need or in social need or in physical need - is our “neighbor,” and a person whom we must love as much as we love God.
* It does not have a message for non-believers. It is not a story about how to enter the Kingdom of God, or how to inherit eternal life. No act of righteousness or mercy will earn us salvation. There is only one way to eternal life: To accept Jesus Christ as our personal Savior. He is the One who fulfilled all the requirements of the law. Only through him and the power of his Holy Spirit can we truly love God with all our heart, our soul, our strength and our mind – and our neighbor as ourselves.

1. –

([Go to Study 16: Martha and Mary](#Study16MarthaAndMary))

### Answers 16: Martha and Mary, Luke 10:38–42

Answers to Questions

1. Martha was evidently the hostess on this occasion. She had invited Jesus to “her” home, and she was in charge of the preparations for the meal.
2. Mary sat at Jesus’ feet, listening to his teaching (v 38). She had taken the place of a disciple at the feet of her teacher. It was unusual of women in those days to be accepted by a teacher as a disciple.
3. Martha was busy with house work, preparing for Jesus’ meal and stay (v 40).
4. Martha complained to Jesus that he let Mary sit and do nothing, while she had to work so hard. She wanted Jesus to tell Mary to help her (v 40).
5. Jesus described Martha as a person who was worried about and distracted by many things (v 41).
6. Jesus told Martha that only one thing is necessary, and that thing must not be taken away from Mary (v 42).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Jesus words to Martha (v 42):
   1. “Only one thing is needed”: I think Jesus referred to the Kingdom of God. The only thing that is absolutely necessary is to accept Jesus as your personal Savior and so become a citizen of the Kingdom of God and a disciple of Jesus.
   2. “Mary has chosen the better part”: Mary showed that she had made this essential choice. She was a disciple sitting at Jesus’ feet, listening to his words. She had chosen the only important thing, something far better than the “Christian service” Martha was involved in.
   3. I think that this story is more about Mary having chosen the right thing (the Kingdom of God, which would not be taken from her) than Martha doing the wrong thing (household work). In all her worries and business, Martha had forgotten the very basics – to first seek God’s Kingdom and righteousness (Matt 6:33). Only then should she have served Jesus. First we must love God, then will we be able to love our neighbors as ourselves (see the previous lesson on Luke 10:25–37).
2. –

([Go to Study 17: Six woes on the Jewish leaders](#Study17SixWoesOnTheJewishLeaders))

### Answers 17: Six woes on the Jewish leaders, Luke 11:37–54

Answers to Questions

1. The occasion of this passage: A Pharisee has invited Jesus for a meal in his house (v 37).
2. The Pharisee was surprised, because Jesus did not perform the expected ritual washing before the meal (v 38).
3. Jesus accused the Pharisees of being concerned about a clean outside and not about the condition of their own hearts, which were full of greed and wickedness (v 39–41).
4. Jesus told the Pharisees to be generous and give to the poor. Then they would be ritually clean (v 39–41).
5. Jesus addressed the Pharisees in the first three woes (v 38–44).
6. The first woe is about giving tithes while neglecting justice and love (v 42).
7. The second woe is about desiring places of honor (v 43).
8. The third woe is about the Pharisees being like unmarked graves (v 44). If a person came in contact with a grave he would become ritually unclean, even if the grave was unmarked and he was unaware of what had happened.
9. The experts in the law accused Jesus of insulting them indirectly (v 45). Jesus’ woes on the Pharisees also affected the lawyers/scribes. Most of them were probably Pharisees.
10. Jesus addressed the lawyers/scribes directly in the last three woes (v 46–52).
11. The fourth woe is about the scribes putting unreasonable burdens on the people (v 46).
12. The fifth woe is about the scribes approving of the misdeeds of their forefathers who had murdered the prophets. The scribes did so by building tombs for the murdered prophets. As a consequence, God would hold the scribes responsible for the sins of their forefathers (v 47–51).
13. The sixth woe is about the scribes misguiding the people so that it had become impossible for them to find knowledge about how to enter the Kingdom of God (v 52).
14. The outcome of this confrontation between Jesus and the Jewish leaders was increased hostility. The Jewish leaders became even more eager to catch Jesus and stop his ministry (v 53–54).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. The sins characteristic of strictly religious persons and exposed by Jesus in this passage (v 37–54):
   1. Hypocrisy (v 39–41): The Pharisees were hypocrites. They had lots of rules about ritual purity, rules not based on the Old Testament law but on their own legalistic tradition. They strictly kept these rules. But at the same time, they were greedy and wicked. Jesus told them to be good and generous to the poor and needy. That would make them “ritually clean.”
   2. Imbalance in spiritual matters ( 42): The Pharisees gave tithes on income and produce that went beyond the requirements of the Old Testament law. They were, of course, free to do so. But the problem was that this concern about legalistic details made them forget about really important spiritual matters, things like justice for the people and wholehearted love for God. This imbalance in their theology was the sin that Jesus condemned.
   3. Showing off in public (v 43): The Pharisees wanted people to give them recognition and respect in every sphere of public life, in the synagogues as well as in the marketplaces. They were also dressed is a way that demonstrated their religious affiliation: they wore long robes with tassels and so on. Jesus condemned this kind of spiritual pride and religious ostentation.
   4. Impossible demands (v 46): The scribes had developed all kinds of complicated rules which they expected people to keep. This had become a real burden for the common man, and it complicated daily life. The scribes did not even care that some of the rules were impossible for ordinary people to keep. Jesus condemned this kind of impossible demands.
   5. Wrong focus (v 47–51): The scribes thought they were honoring the Old Testament prophets by building grand monuments over their tombs. But their lives revealed that they had not accepted the teachings of these prophets. So the scribes were actually continuing along the same sinful paths as their forefathers (those who had rejected and killed the prophets). They had even rejected the Messiah foretold and proclaimed by these prophets. They had turned their backs on Jesus and his offer of salvation in the Kingdom of God.
   6. Leading people astray (v 52): See my comment on verse 52.
2. –

([Go to Study 18: The rich fool](#Study18TheRichFool))

### Answers 18: The rich fool, Luke 12:13–21

Answers to Questions

1. The man wanted Jesus to tell his brother to agree to a division of the family inheritance (v 13).
2. Jesus refused the man’s request. He didn’t want to decide between the brothers (v 14).
3. Jesus told the people to watch out for all kinds of greed (v 15).
4. In this passage we find a parable, one of the literary genres used by Jesus (v 16).
5. The problem the rich man faced was that his crop that year was so good that he didn’t have sufficient room in his barns. He solved his problem by replacing his old barn with new – and bigger – barns (v 17–18).
6. The rich man was very happy with his situation. He had acquired sufficient possessions for him to retire (v 19).
7. God had a message of judgment for the rich man: He had been a fool not to prepare himself for death (v 20).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. It is clear from the context that the parable of the rich fool (v 16–21) addresses the issue of greed. Jesus wanted to illustrate the spiritual truth that a person’s life does not consist of the abundance of his possession (v 15).
2. An evaluation of the rich man:
   1. Positive things:
      * He must have been a good and successful farmer.
      * He was a good manager of his crop: He planned and built bigger barns so that he could accommodate all this grain.
      * He was a man who planned his future as a pensioner well.
      * He was a man who enjoyed life.
      * In conclusion: He was a wise man in the eyes of the world.
   2. Negative thing:
      * He had neglected to take spiritual truths into consideration. He was “not rich before God”: He did not first seek God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness.
   3. In summary:
      * The rich man neglected the only thing that must never be neglected, the Kingdom of God.
      * So the rich man did not choose “what is better," like Mary did (Luke 10:42).
3. –

([Go to Study 19: The narrow door](#Study19TheNarrowDoor))

### Answers 19: The narrow door, Luke 13:22–30

Answers to Questions

1. The occasion of this passage is Jesus journeying to Jerusalem. As he did so, he taught the people about salvation and the Kingdom of God (v 22).
2. Jesus addressed the question of salvation in this passage, even if he did not directly answer the man’s question about the number of people who would be saved (v 23).
3. Jesus described the door like this (v 24–25):
   1. The door is “narrow.” This means that there are limitations to how it can be entered.
   2. The door will not be open to everybody who tries to enter it.
   3. The door will be closed. Then it will be too late to enter it.
4. The master (Jesus) will refuse to open the door (v 25–27):
   1. Because it has already been locked.
   2. Because the master (Jesus) does not know the people who are knocking on the closed door.
5. The people at the closed door think that they should be let in (v 26):
   1. Because they have been eating and drinking with the master. They associated with Jesus as he was traveling through their towns and villages.
   2. Because the master has taught in their streets. Jesus lived among them and ministered to them.
6. The master describes the people who are trying to get through the door after it has been closed like this (v 27):
   1. The master (Jesus) does not know them, who they are or where they come from.
   2. They are evildoers.
7. Two groups of people are contrasted in verse 28:
   1. Those who take part in the heavenly banquet.
   2. Those who are thrown outside.
8. The partakers in the heavenly banquet are described as coming from the whole world (29).
9. Those who are throug to be first (or think that they are first), will be the last (v 30).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Jesus did not directly answer the man’s question about the number of people who would be saved. Instead he described who the people in the Kingdom of God (the people who are saved) would be:
   1. Only those who know Jesus/the Master – and are known by him – will be saved.
   2. Only those who accept Jesus as their Savior in this present time, those who enter the door while it is still open, will be saved.
2. The door of salvation (the door into the Kingdom of God) is “narrow”:
   1. It is “narrow” because it can only be entered in this present age. Once this age is over with the second coming of Jesus, the door will be closed. Then it no longer can be entered.
   2. It is “narrow” because only people who are known by Jesus (those who have accepted him as their personal Savior in this present life) can go through it and enter the Kingdom of God.
   3. It is not “narrow” because it requires great human efforts (like fasting prayer, or a holy life, or a certain amount of good deeds) to get through it and enter the Kingdom of God.
   4. It is not “narrow” because only people from a certain country, or culture, or background can get through it and enter the Kingdom of God.
3. The “you yourselves” that Jesus referred to in verse 29 were the Jewish people to whom Jesus was speaking at this time. Every Jew expected to sit with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the great messianic banquet, foretold by the Old Testament prophets. The Jews regarded themselves as “the first.” They thought that their heritage would guarantee them a place in the Kingdom of God. Instead, Jesus said, those among them whom the Master didn’t know (those who had not accepted Jesus as their Savior in this present age) would find themselves thrown out from the fellowship of God’s people in heaven. Their places would be taken by others from all over the world (even Gentiles, who were considered “the last”) who had accepted Jesus as their Savior in this present age, and who had thereby qualified to take part in the heavenly banquet. So “some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last” (v 30).

([Go to Study 20: Three parables about lost and found](#Study20ThreeParablesAboutLostAndFound))

### Answers 20: Three parables of lost and found, Luke chapter 15

Answers to Questions

1. Many of those who came to listen to Jesus and his teaching were tax collectors and sinners, people who were despised in the Jewish society (v 1).
2. The Jewish leaders were upset with Jesus, because he associated with tax collectors and sinners, who were considered “bad” people and who “good” people should avoid (v 2).
3. The occasion of the parable of the lost sheep is the grumbling of the Pharisees and scribes about Jesus being friendly with “bad” people (v 2).
4. The man with the hundred sheep gathered his friends and neighbors, because he wanted to share his happiness with them (v 6).
5. Jesus only makes one point of comparison in the parable of the lost sheep (v 4–7): The joy in heaven over one sinner who repents – The joy of the sheep-owner who has found his one sheep that was lost.
6. The woman who has lost one of her coins searches with all her resources available until she finds the lost coin (v 8).
7. Jesus makes only one point of comparison in the parable of the lost coin (v 8–10): The joy in heaven over one sinner who repents – The joy of the woman who has found her one coin that was lost.
8. The younger son wanted his father to give him his share of the property (v 12).
9. The younger son cashed in his inheritance (probably by selling his share of the family property) and left his home for a distant country. There he wasted all his money on wild living (v 13–14).
10. The younger son ended up taking care of pigs, because there was no other way for him to survive. All his money was spent, and there was famine in the country, so no good jobs were available (v 14–15). In spite of all his humiliation he didn’t have enough to eat (v 16).
11. The younger son decided to return to his father, because he realized his pitiable situation. His life was even much worse than that of his father’s servants (v 17–18).
12. The father, who must have been standing outside his house every day hoping that his lost son would return, reacted like this, when he saw his younger son walking toward the house (v 20):
    1. He was filled with compassion.
    2. He ran up to him.
    3. He embraced him and kissed him.
13. The younger son expressed his repentance like this (v 21):
    1. He confessed his sin.
    2. He realized his unworthiness and his dependence on his father’s grace.
14. The father honored his younger son like this (v 22–24):
    1. He gave him his best robe to wear as a sign of distinction.
    2. He put a signet ring of authority on his finger.
    3. He put sandals on his feet, showing everybody that he really was his son and not a servant.
    4. He had his fattened calf butchered and prepared a banquet to celebrate the happy occasion.
15. As the older brother was coming home from the fields that evening, he was surprised to hear the sound of music and dancing (v 25–26).
16. The older brother showed his anger like this (v 28–30):
    1. He refused to join the banquet and festivities.
    2. He complained to his father about being discriminated and neglected.
    3. He accused his younger brother of having wasted their father’s property through a life in sin and shame.
    4. He criticized his father for celebrating his younger son’s return.
17. The father’s reason for the celebration (v 32): The younger brother had returned from death to life. He who was lost had been found.

Comments on Think and discuss

1. The parable of the lost sheep (v 3–7):
   1. The lost sheep of the parable would have been understood as a reference to “bad” people (the tax collectors and sinners).
   2. The ninety-nine other sheep of the parable would have been understood as a reference to “good” people (the Pharisees and the scribes).
   3. The people who listened to Jesus’ teaching would have associated “sheep” with the people of Israel (God’s own people). This was a common Old Testament metaphor. “Shepherd” was often used in the Old Testament about kings and other leaders of the people. God was, of course, the superior “shepherd” of the Israelites, the one who would gather his scattered people (Jeremiah 31:10). The listeners would, of course, also have remembered Psalm 23, in which David calls the Lord “my shepherd” (Ps 23:1).
   4. A “lost sheep” is an appropriate metaphor for a “sinner”: If “sheep” stands for “God’s people," then “lost sheep” would stand for Israelites who were disobedient to the stipulations of the Covenant. They were the “sinners” of the Jewish community.
   5. I understand Jesus’ phrase “righteous persons who need no repentance” as ironic. The Pharisees and the scribes considered themselves to be righteous (although no person has any righteousness before God), and not in need of repentance. But in this parable, Jesus said that the repentant sinner brings more joy to heaven than the self-righteous Jewish leaders.
2. –
3. The parable of the lost son (v 1–3, 11–32):
   1. The structure of this parable is different from the structure of the two previous parables in two ways:
      * It has two parts to it: The part about the younger son (v 12–24), which is a story about “lost and found," and the part about the reaction of the older son (v 13–31), which is a story about jealousy and self-righteousness. The whole parable is tied together by the father’s acts of love, generosity, mercy, and forgiveness. The first two “lost and found” parables only have one part, even if ninety-nine other sheep and the nine coins that were not lost parallel the older son.
      * It seems to have more points of reference than the previous two parables: The father obviously represents God. The younger son obviously represents sinners. The law-abiding older son seems to represent “good” people who are faithful to the covenant. The home-coming banquet reminds a listener of the great future banquet in heaven. But even with these points of reference, I hesitate to call this story an allegory. This means that I think that we should not look for points of reference in every detail of the story.
   2. The “initiative” is different in this parable compared with the two previous parables. The lost sheep and the lost coin take no initiative for their being found. The sheep-owner and the woman have all the initiative. But the lost son realizes his situation and understands his own folly and sinfulness. He then takes the initiative to return home to his father. The father is patiently and lovingly waiting for him, but he takes no initiative to find him.

I think that Jesus told three parables about “lost and found," and not only one, as a way of deepening his listeners’ understanding of salvation. A sinner could have been “lost” in different ways: Perhaps he just followed his sinful nature (like a sheep getting away from its flock). Perhaps he just became a victim of life’s circumstances (like a coin being dropped by mistake). Perhaps he actively pursues a life of sin (like the younger son). Our Savior also acts in various ways: Jesus came to search, find, and save the lost (like the sheep-owner). God patiently waits for the sinner to come to his senses and accept divine love, mercy, and forgiveness (like the father waited for his lost son).

* 1. The “bad” people (the tax collectors and sinners) can be seen as the younger son of the parable. A person who walks away from his father to lead a sinful life is a good metaphor for people who have rejected the Old Testament covenant.
  2. The “good” people (the Pharisees and the scribes) can be seen as the older son of the parable. A person who stays home with his father is a good metaphor for people who remain faithful to the Covenant.
  3. Probably all those who listened to Jesus’ teaching would have associated “father” with God, the Father of all creation and the Father of the Israelites (compare Deuteronomy 32:6; Isaiah 63:16; 64:8; Malachi 2:10).

1. –
2. Verses 1–2 illustrate Luke’s “lost and found” message in this chapter: The “sinners” came to Jesus, where they would find salvation; they were “found.” The “good” people rejected Jesus, so they would be “lost” and not found.

([Go to Study 21: The dishonest manager](#Study21TheDishonestManager))

### Answers 21: The dishonest manager, Luke 16:1–9

Answers to Questions

1. Jesus addressed this parable to his followers, his disciples (v 1).
2. The manager was accused of not handling his job responsibly. He was suspected of squandering his rich employer’s property (v 1).
3. The rich employer asked his manager to settle all accounts (v 2).
4. The rich employer was going to fire his manager (v 3).
5. The manager made financial agreements with all his employer’s debtors. He told them to make changes in the loan documents so that their debts were reduced. He hoped that they would be grateful to him and support him in the future (v 4–7).
6. The rich man evaluated his manager’s actions very positively. He praised him for his shrewdness (v 8).
7. Jesus contrasts two groups of people in verse 8: “The sons of this age” and “The sons of light.”
8. Jesus told his disciples “make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth” (v 9). Jesus did not mean that we should gain our wealth in dishonest ways, but that all our wealth is part of this dishonest world (see my comment on v 9). So Jesus wants his followers to use all their material resources in a godly way, in a way that brings blessing – both now and for eternity.

Comments on Think and discuss

1. The parable of the shrewd manager contains contrasts that would help us understand Jesus’ message to his disciples:
   1. The present (this age) and the future (the age to come): This present age is unrighteous but one day it will be gone. In the future age, righteousness and justice will shine like the noonday sun. This is the future of God’s people.
   2. Life in this world and life in eternity: What we do in this present evil age has consequences for eternity. Our wise actions in this present world will bring blessings in the future eternal world.
   3. The sons of this age and the sons of light: God’s people must handle their material resource just as shrewdly as the evil people handle their material resources.
   4. Shrewdness and lack of shrewdness: The people in this world handle their material resources more shrewdly than God’s people do.
2. The point of comparison that Jesus makes in this parable (see verses 8–9): In this present age, worldly and dishonest people (“the sons of this age”) handle their possessions more shrewdly than God’s people do (“the sons of light”).
3. The message of the parable of the shrewd manager: Godly people (“the sons of light”) must handle their worldly possession wisely and shrewdly. This means that we must use what we have in such a way that it produces results for eternity.

Here are two examples of how to be shrewd about possessions in the present unrighteous age:

* 1. We can use our possessions (money, property, vehicles, and so on) for God’s work: to spread the gospel to new people in new places, to support the ministry of our local church, to plant new churches, to support gospel workers, to send missionaries, and so on.
  2. We can use our possessions (money, property, vehicles, and so on) to help the poor and needy: the widows, the orphans, the oppressed, the persecuted, the sick, the unemployed, and so on.

([Go to Study 22: The rich man and Lazarus the beggar](#Study22TheRichManAndLazarusTheBeggar))

### Answers 22: The rich man and Lazarus the beggar, Luke 16:19–31

Answers to Questions

1. The rich man described like this (v 19):

* He is rich.
* He dresses expensively.
* He eats good food every day.

1. Lazarus is described like this (v 20–21):

* He is a beggar.
* One of his begging stations is the rich man’s gate.
* He is always hungry.
* His body is covered with sores.
* He has lost all strength and dignity: He even allows the dogs to lick his sores.

1. Both men die, but they end up in different places (v 22).
2. The rich man requests Abraham to show mercy by sending Lazarus to him to relieve his terrible thirst (v 24).
3. Abraham presents two reason why it is impossible for him to grant the rich man’s request (v 25–26):
   1. Their lives in the world has resulted in their present situations. Now it’s too late to change anything.
   2. It is impossible to cross the divide between the two places now occupied by Lazarus and the rich man.
4. The rich man then shows concern for the fate of his five brothers who are still alive (v 27–28).
5. Abraham responds to the rich man’s concern by reminding him of the fact that the brothers have the Old Testament scriptures. They will give them sufficient guidance (v 29).
6. The rich man then tells Abraham that the testimony of the Old Testament is not enough. His brothers need the testimony of a person who comes back from the dead (v 30).
7. Abraham has a final statement for the rich man: Those who refuse to listen to the testimony of the Old Testimony will also refuse to listen to the testimony of a person who has come back from the dead (v 31).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. The rich man is the main character in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Jesus used this parable to point out to the Pharisees that the way in which they lived their lives in this present world had serious consequences on their eternal future. The rich man in the parable represents the Pharisees. Lazarus plays no real part in the parable. He is needed as a striking contrast to the rich man, but also to illustrate the sad consequences of the beliefs and practices of the Pharisees.
2. Jesus’ message for the Pharisees through this parable: The way in which you live your life today will decide how your eternal future will be.

But the message is not only about handling our wealth wisely. The message is about stewardship in general. We must handle everything wisely: our time, our talents, our opportunities, and everything else that God has entrusted to us.

1. Two pitfalls for inexperienced Bible readers in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus:
   1. The first pitfall: To read it as an actual account of something that happened to two Jewish men. Such a reading will result in creating false doctrines, for examples about the dwelling place of the dead (“Hades” and “Abraham’s side”), about the nature of the divide, about the possibility of communication between the two sides of the divide, about sending people back from the dead to testify to the living, about Abraham’s role in the afterlife, and so on.
   2. The second pitfall: To read it as an allegory where every single detail carries significance or some “spiritual/secret” message. Such a reading may result in all kinds of absurdities.
2. –

([Go to Study 23: The coming of the Kingdom of God](#Study23TheComingOfTheKingdomOfGod))

### Answers 23: The coming of the Kingdom of God, Luke 17:20–37

Answers to Questions

1. Two groups of people are addressed in Jesus’ speech about the coming of the Kingdom of God, first some Pharisees (v 20–21), then his disciples (v 37).
2. The Pharisees asked Jesus when the Kingdom of God would arrive (v 20).
3. Jesus told his listeners that the Kingdom of God could not be observed because it was within them (v 20–21). It was a spiritual kingdom, the rule of God in the lives of people. For an alternative understanding of these verses, see my comment on verse 21.
4. During a period when Jesus’ followers are eagerly hoping for Jesus’ second coming, people will say that the Kingdom of God has come in this way or in that place (v 23). But Jesus told his disciples to be careful about such so called “prophets” and not listen to them or follow them.
5. Jesus used a simile to describe his second coming: It will be like the light from a flash of lightning (v 24). The point of comparison is probably “seen by all” (everybody will know that he is arriving) rather than “sudden and surprising arrival” (he will come suddenly when nobody expects it).
6. Jesus said his suffering (his death on the cross) must happen before his second coming (v 25).
7. Jesus used two Old Testament stories to describe human life at the time of his second coming (v 26–30):
   1. Noah and the flood.
   2. Lot and the destruction of Sodom.
8. Jesus’ point of comparison between these Old Testament stories and his second coming (v 26–30) was that human life will go on as usual (eating, drinking, raising families) until the day he comes back.
9. Jesus reminded his listeners of the fate of Lot’s wife (v 32). Lot and his family were fleeing from God’s destruction of the city of Sodom. They had been told not to look back. But Lot’s wife could not resist the temptation to do so, and she was turned into a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:26).
10. The similarity between Jesus’ two examples in verses 34–35 is that different fate awaits two persons that are occupied with the same thing. Two men are sleeping, only one of them is saved. Two women are grinding, only one of them is saved.
11. The disciples asked Jesus where his second coming would take place (v 37).
12. Jesus replied to his disciples’ question with a proverb about a corpse and vultures (v 37). He did not explain what he meant by this proverb, but see my comment on verse 37 for an explanation.
13. In this passage, Jesus used various expressions for the consummation of the Kingdom of God with his second coming (v 22–35):

* One of the days of the Son of Man, v 22
* In his day (with reference to the Son of Man), v 24
* The day when the Son of Man is revealed, v 30
* On that day (with reference to the day when the Son of Man is revealed), v 31

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Understanding the Greek expression in verse 21:
   1. Argument for the translation “within you”: It fits better in the immediate context, which is the question from the Pharisees about when the Kingdom of God would come. The Kingdom of God had already come with Jesus but it was not visible. It was in people’s spiritual and internal life. If we go for this understanding, we must also interpret “within you” in a general sense, because the Kingdom of God certainly was not within the Pharisees.
   2. Argument for the translation “among you, in the midst of you”: The Kingdom of God had come with Jesus. So it was present among the people (including the Pharisees, “among you,” even if they were blind to this truth, so they asked an irrelevant question about “when”).

Both arguments are supported by Bible scholars. Most Bible translations have chosen the first option.

1. Jesus’ point about keeping and losing one’s life in verses 31–33 is found in the third bullet point below. Jesus argues like this in these verses:

* Lot’s wife (v 32) was so attached to her old life in the sinful city of Sodom that she disobeyed God, looked back at its destruction, and was turned into a pillar of salt. So she lost her life. Jesus warned his disciples not to be like Lot’s wife.
* On the day of Jesus’ second coming, there will be people like Lot’s wife. They are so attached to their worldly possessions (their things in their houses, v 31) and to their physical life in this present age (their work in their fields, v 31) that they will lose their spiritual life.
* Those who cling on to their life in this world will lose their life in the Kingdom of God. (For an explanation of the two meanings of the word “life” in verse 33, see my comment on this verse.)

1. Jesus’ reply to is disciples’ question in verse 37: See my comment on this verse in the Studies section of this textbook.
2. –

([Go to Study 24: Two parables about prayer](#Study24TwoParablesAboutPrayer))

### Answers 24: Two parables about prayer, Luke 18:1–14

Answers to Questions

1. Jesus addressed the first parable about prayer to his disciples (v 1) and the the second parable about prayer to the self-righteous, probably the Pharisees (9).
2. Luke states that Jesus’ purpose with the parable of the widow and the judge was to show his disciples that they must alway pray and not become discouraged (v 1).
3. We learn these things about the judge (v 2, 4, 6):

* He did not fear God.
* He did not have any respect for people.
* He refused to give justice even to a widow. Widows were among the most vulnerable and needy in the ancient Jewish world.
* He gave in to her request for selfish reasons, just to get rid of her.
* He was unjust.

1. We learn these things about the widow (v 3, 5):

* She kept coming, so she was insistent.
* She didn’t care if the powerful judge were inconvenienced or became angry by her repeated requests.

1. The judge finally granted justice to the widow because he was fed up with her and wanted to be left in peace (v 5). So he didn’t grant her justice because he wanted to do the right thing for her.
2. We learn these things about God (v 7–8):

* God brings justice to his people (“his chosen ones”).
* God will not put his people off when they approach him.
* God will give his people justice quickly. He will not delay his justice.

1. Luke describes the group of people to whom Jesus addressed the second parable like this: They were convinced that they were righteous, so they looked down on “ordinary” people (v 9).
2. Two men went to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other man was a tax collector (v 10).
3. The Pharisee said a long prayer thanking God for his own numerous and righteous deeds (v 11–12).
4. The tax collector said a short prayer asking God for mercy (v 13).
5. Jesus’ evaluation of the two men’s prayers (v 14): God listened to the humble prayer of the tax collector and blessed him with righteousness. But the self-righteous Pharisee would be humbled because of his pride.

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Jesus’ point about the unjust judge and God is that God is not like the unjust judge (6–8):

* The judge did not grant the widow justice at first. But God will always grant his people justice.
* The judge kept putting off the widow. But God never puts off his people. he always listens to their prayers.
* The judge delayed his justice. But God does not delay his justice.

1. Jesus’ question to his disciples in verse 8: A faithful disciple resembles the widow in his steadfast and bold prayer life. He knows that God brings justice to his people, that he is always approachable, that he listens to their prayers, and that he does not delay his justice. Will Jesus find this kind of “faith," this kind of faithful and trusting prayer life among his disciples when he comes back in glory?
2. –

([Go to Study 25: Zacchaeus the chief tax collector](#Study25ZacchaeusTheChiefTaxCollector))

### Answers 25: Zacchaeus the chief tax collector, Luke 19:1–10

Answers to Questions

1. –
2. Zacchaeus is described like this (v 2–3):

* He was the chief tax collector, probably in charge of the Jericho region.
* He was very rich, perhaps not as a result of cheating people.
* He longed to meet Jesus, and he was willing even to climb a tree to see him better.
* He was a short man, but we don’t know if he was embarrassed about or suffered from his shortness.

1. Zacchaeus climbed up in a tree so that he could see Jesus. He was a short man, so it was difficult for him to see Jesus in a crowd of people (v 5).
2. Jesus had a surprising message for Zacchaeus (v 5). God wanted Jesus to visit Zacchaeus’ house.
3. Zacchaeus received Jesus’ message with joy and welcomed Jesus to his home (v 6).
4. But the people around reacted negatively to Jesus’ message (v 7). They thought that it was improper from him to visit the house of a tax collector, a “sinner.”
5. Zacchaeus said he would give half his possessions to the poor (v 8). That was a very generous offer!
6. Zacchaeus promised to compensate those he might have cheated in accordance with the strictest Old Testament law about theft: He would pay back four times the amount (v 8). This shows that he must have been a fairly honest man. He would not have been able to keep his promise otherwise.
7. Jesus described his mission in this world as one of seeking and saving the lost (v 10).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Zacchaeus’ life before he met Jesus was perhaps like this:

* Comfortable: He was a very rich man, so he must have had a nice house and owned many good things. He always ate delicious food and drank good wine. He probably had many servants.
* Lonely: He was an outcast. His profession made him despised by his fellow-Jews. They considered him a “sinner” and a traitor, because he was collaborating with the Romans who were occupying Palestine.
* Decent: He must have been a reasonably honest tax collector, who had accumulated his wealth without cheating too many people. We can draw that conclusion from the fact that he was able to compensate four-fold those he might have cheated – even after having given half his possessions to the poor.
* Bold and independent: Not every chief tax collector would have come up with the idea of climbing a tree to get a good view of Jesus of Nazareth. This shows that he was a man of initiative who did not much consider if people thought he made a fool of himself. His boldness led him to Jesus and salvation.

1. Zacchaeus’ life after he had met Jesus was perhaps like this:

* Full of joy: He happily welcomed Jesus to his home, but also into his life and his heart. The joy he felt that day would have remained with him throughout his life.
* Full of peace: When he invited Jesus into his life, he experienced salvation and the peace of God that passes all understanding. This peace would have remained with him throughout his life.
* A sense of belonging: Salvation made him a citizen of the Kingdom of God and brought him into the fellowship of the people of God. He would now be a disciple, a follower of Jesus, a member of the family of God, the church. Wherever life brought him, he would find “family and friends," people who would help, support, and encourage him, whom he belonged to.
* A life of generosity and righteousness: Perhaps Zacchaeus – before he met Jesus – had been a self-centered man who lived to amass wealth and build up his financial position. But now his life was changed. He shared his resources with the poor and needy. And he did so with a happy and generous heart. If he had been reasonably honest before he met Jesus, he was now a man whose lifestyle was truly righteous. No more bribes. No more questionable or dishonest deals.
* A hope for the future: His perspective on life was totally changed. He no longer lived only for this present life. As a citizen of the Kingdom of God he belonged to the future. He knew that he would spend his eternity with God’s people in the new heavens and the new earth (Isaiah 65:17).

1. –

([Go to Study 26: The laborers in the vineyard](#Study26TheLaborersInTheVineyard))

### Answers 26: The laborers in the vineyard, Matt 20:1–16

Answers to Questions

1. Jesus said that he told this parable about the Kingdom of God (v 1).
2. Early in the morning, the landowner went to hire laborers for his vineyard (v 1).
3. The landowner agreed to pay his workers one denarius for a full day’s work (v 2). That was the normal wage in those days.
4. The landowner employed all the unemployed people he came across later that same day (v 3–7). I wonder if he really needed them, or if he hired them because he felt pity for them – even for the lazy ones who had been idle the whole day.
5. The landowner hired the last workers for that day only one hour before the end of the working day (v 6–7).
6. The landowner instructed his foreman to pay the workers in reverse order, beginning with those who has only worked one hour and ending with those who had worked the whole day (v 8).
7. All the workers were paid the same wage, one denarius (9–10).
8. The workers who had worked the whole day complained about the unfairness of the wage. They thought that the landowner should pay more to those who had worked longer and harder (v 11–12).
9. The landowner told those who complained that they had no reason for their complaint, because they had been paid their contracted wage. Couldn’t he do whatever he wanted with his own money? Why should they be angry with him for his generosity (v 13–15)?
10. Jesus ended this parable with a statement that he used more than once in the gospels (v 16): “The last will be first, and the first will be last” (see Matt 19:30; Mark 10:31; Luke 13:30; compare Mark 9:35).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. I think most honest readers feel that the payment the workers received was unfair. It goes against our normal principles in this world. We want those who work a long time to be paid more that those who work a short time, those who work hard to be paid more than those who have light work, those who are more qualified to be paid more than those who are less qualified. And so on.
2. The message of this parable is the unreasonable generosity of the Kingdom of God. This generosity contradicts normal human principles. It is not based on our own merit (on how good we are, or on how hard we work), but on the generous heart of the Lord of the Kingdom of God.
3. Jesus’ conclusion in verse 16 can be understood like this:
4. The values of the Kingdom of God are different from the values that normally govern life in this world. The generosity and grace of the Lord of the Kingdom of God is the same for everybody. We may think that some should be first (perhaps because of their family background, or their hard work, or their qualifications). And we may think that some should be last (perhaps because they haven’t worked hard enough, or they are less smart, or they have a “low” social background). But that is not how it works in the Kingdom of God.
5. –

([Go to Study 27: The marriage feast](#Study27TheMarriageFeast))

### Answers 27: The marriage feast, Matt 22:1–14

Answers to Questions

1. This parable is about the Kingdom of God. Jesus said that the Kingdom of God is like a king who arranged a wedding banquet for his son (v 2).
2. But this does not mean that the parable is an allegory about the eschatological feast in the Kingdom of God and that a reader should look for points of reference in every detail of the parable. See the Introduction to this study and my comments on Think and discuss 1 below.
3. The first time the king’s servants told the guests that it was time for them to come to the wedding banquet, they all refused to come (v 3).
4. The second time the king’s servants told the guests that it was time for them to come to the wedding banquet, they rudely neglected to come. Some walked away to their daily occupations. Others seized the servants, beat them, and killed them (v 4–6).
5. The king expressed his anger by killing the murderers and destroying their city (v 7).
6. The king found those who had originally been invited to the wedding banquet “unworthy.” They did not deserve to attend the banquet (v 8).
7. The king sent his servants to find new guests for the banquet in the main streets of the city (v 9–10).
8. These new guests consisted of all kinds of people, both good and bad (v 10).
9. One man in the banquet hall was strikingly different from all the other people there: He was the only one without a wedding garment (v 11–12).
10. The man without a wedding garment was “arrested” by the servants. He was bound hand and foot, and thrown out into the darkness (v 13)?
11. Jesus concluded his parable with this statement: “For many are called/invited, but few are chosen” (v 14). See my comment on verse 14 for an explanation of this statement.

Comments on Think and discuss

1. I think we can see three points of comparison in this parable:
   1. The first point of comparison is found in the first part of the parable (v 2–10):
      * The original wedding guests rejected the invitation to the king’s wedding banquet.
      * The Pharisees and the other Jewish leaders (whom Jesus sometimes called “the first”) rejected the Kingdom of God as embodied in the person and ministry of Jesus.
   2. The second point of comparison is also found in the first part of the parable (v 2–10):
      * A new group people, “both good and bad," were then invited to the wedding banquet and they were happy to come
      * The Pharisees opposed the Kingdom of God, but the tax collectors and sinners (and even Samaritans and other foreigners, people “from east and west and north and south,” Matt 8:11; Luke 13:29; people whom Jesus sometimes called “the last”) believed in Jesus and his ministry.
   3. The point of comparison in the second part of the parable (v 11–13):
      * The man was not dressed correctly for the wedding banquet so he was thrown out of the wedding hall.
      * If we do not accept Jesus and his salvation, we will not be allowed into the Kingdom of God.
2. Jesus said that the Kingdom of God is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son (v 2). I think Jesus referred to “the big picture” of an invitation. Like the king of the parable invited guests to a wedding banquet for his son so God the King of heaven invites people to the Kingdom of God.
3. Luke’s parable (Luke 14:15–24) compared with Matthew’s parable (Matt 22:1–14:

* Luke’s setting is more specific: Jesus is responding to an exclamation from a Pharisee about being present at the feast in the Kingdom of God.
* Luke is shorter and simpler: No king. No son. No wedding. Only one invitation. No murderers. No revenge. Nothing about the man who was not dressed in a wedding garment.
* But two things are more elaborate in Luke: The excuses from the original guests. The description of the new guests.
* Luke’s parable is more clearly structured: Three excuses from the original guests. Two invitations to new guests until the banquet hall is full.
* Luke has only one point of comparison: The original guests (represented by the Jewish leaders who did not accept Jesus) will not be present at the banquet in the Kingdom of God. The heavenly banquet hall will be filled with new guests (all those who accept Jesus’ invitation to the Kingdom of God).

([Go to Study 28: The ten virgins](#Study28TheTenVirgins))

### Answers 28: The ten virgins, Matt 25:1–13

Answers to Questions

1. Jesus said that this parable was about the Kingdom of God (v 1).
2. We learn these things about the bridesmaids (v 1–4):

* They were ten in number.
* Half of them were wise, half of them were foolish.
* Those who were wise had brought sufficient oil for their torches to last them all night.
* Those who were foolish had brought their torches, but not sufficient oil.

1. The bridesmaids fell asleep, because the bridegroom delayed his arrival and they became very sleepy (v 5).
2. When the bridegroom finally arrived at midnight, the foolish bridesmaids suddenly realized that they hadn’t brought sufficient oil. So they asked their wise friends if they could borrow some oil from them. But their friends didn’t have sufficient oil for all of them (v 6–9).
3. The five foolish bridesmaids had to run to the shop and buy more oil. When they returned, the wedding party had already left. So they went on to the bridegroom’s house. But when they arrived there, the door had already been closed and the bridegroom refused to let them in (v 10–12).
4. Jesus ends this parable with an exhortation to his listeners (v 13): “Keep watch, because you do not know when I will come back!”

Comments on Think and discuss

1. The point of comparison of this parable is “to be ready”:

* Only the five wise bridesmaids were ready, and only these five were allowed to accompany the bride into the bridegroom’s house.
* Only those who have accepted Jesus as their personal Savior are ready, and only they will be allowed to enter into God’s eternal glory in the Kingdom of God.

1. Many pastors have fallen into the temptation to allegorize the parable about the ten virgins, and consequently they read too much into its details. These could be some of the reasons for that:

* They feel that the parable is too simple. So they want to read as many things as possible into it to make their sermon longer and more exciting for the believers to listen to. This kind of preacher’s vanity must be avoided.
* Some of the features that Jesus included in his parable can be seen as what some people think are biblical “parallels,” two examples:
  + “The bridegroom stands for Jesus”: Some Old Testament passages speak of God and the Israelites in husband-wife metaphors (for example Hosea 2:2: Ezekiel 16:8–13). In the New Testament, Paul uses the “bride of Christ” imagery (2 Cor 11:2) and Revelation proclaims the wedding of the Lamb and his bride who has made herself ready (Rev 19:7).
  + “The oil in the lamps stands for the Holy Spirit”: In the Old Testament, Samuel anointed David and from that day God’s Spirit was on David in power (1 Samuel 16:13) and the messianic prophecy in Isaiah 61:1, which Jesus quoted about himself says, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me…” (Luke 4:18).

If this method of interpretation is pressed further, we will soon run into problems, for example:

* + If Jesus is the bridegroom of the parable, who is his wife/the church? The bride (who is not even mentioned)? Or all the virgins? Or only the wise virgins? Why any of these three?
  + If the oil is the Holy Spirit, how do we understand that all the virgins had some oil? Or that oil was not enough for everybody? Or that the foolish virgins could buy more oil in the shop?
* Some pastors feel it is the job of a good preacher to find “hidden secrets” and “deeper meanings.” This is, of course, nonsense – and very dangerous.

([Got to Study 29: The talents](#Study29TheTalents))

### Answers 29: The talents, Matt 25:14–30

Answers to Questions

1. The man entrusted his property to his servants, because he was going away on a journey (v 14).
2. The two servants, who had been entrusted the larger amounts, invested the money in thriving business enterprises (v 16–17).
3. The servant who had received the smallest amount hid his money in the ground (v 18).
4. At the return of their master, the first two servants returned the money together with substantial profits. Their master praised them for their faithfulness and entrusted them with bigger responsibilities (v 19–24).
5. The third servant blamed his failure on his fear of his master’s harshness and greed (v 24–25).
6. The master called the third servant, the one who had not faithfully fulfilled his duties, “wicked and lazy.” He should at least have deposited the money with bankers and earned some interest on the huge capital (v 26).
7. The third servant was thrown outside into the darkness, “where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (v 28–30).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. The point of comparison in this parable is “faithfulness”:

* The master who came back from a journey expected his servants to have handled his possessions faithfully during his absence.
* When Jesus comes back from heaven at the end of this present age he will expect his followers to have been faithful to him and in their work for the expansion of the Kingdom of God.

1. A few comments on the pastor’s message:

* The pastor has misunderstood the nature of this parable and interpreted it more as if it were an allegory. An allegory has many points of comparison. It is like a coded message. A true parable has only one point of comparison (or perhaps two). The point of comparison of the parable of the talents is “faithful/faithfulness” (see point 1 above).
* Because of his allegorical interpretation of the parable, the pastor’s theology becomes strange (or even wrong). Two examples:
  + His understanding of Jesus: The master of the parable is not a very nice person. The third servant calls him a “harsh man.” And the master even agrees that he is a man who “wants to reap where he doesn’t sow.” And his punishment of the third servant is very cruel considering the man’s crime. My conclusion is that the pastor is wrong to say that Jesus is the master of the parable. But there are, of course, some aspects of the master that can be applied to Jesus: his going and coming back, and his expectation on his servants to be faithful.
  + His understanding of salvation: The New Testament clearly teaches that we are not saved because of our own efforts or achievements. So the pastor is wrong to say that Jesus sent the third servant to hell because he had not managed his responsibility well and not given Jesus enough “profit on his investments” in this servant.

1. Luke has a different version of this parable (see Luke 19:12–27). A few comments on the main differences:’

* The parables are similar in the way they are constructed (going way – entrusting money to servants – coming back – settling accounts – expecting faithfulness) and the point of comparison (“faithful/faithfulness”).
* Luke’s ending is quite different. The king executes all citizens who have not supported his claim to kingship. The readers are reminded of a “judgment day.” In Matthew, only the unfaithful servant is punished.
* Luke’s parable is placed after the salvation of Zacchaeus and in the context of the wrong expectation that those traveling with Jesus had on him. They thought that he was going to Jerusalem in order to establish the Kingdom of God there right at that time. So the “going away and coming back” aspect becomes more emphasized in Luke. The “judgment day” ending fits well with this emphasis.
* In Luke the man who goes away is described more in detail: He is a man of noble birth. He is going away to be appointed king, and he plans to return as “king.” A delegation files a complaint against him with the emperor But he is also (like in Matthew) described as a harsh man who wants to reap where he has not sown.
* Some other differences: In Luke, ten servants get a much smaller amount each (one “mina” was the equivalent of three months’ wages for a laborer), and they all get the same amount. Those who have been faithful are put in charge of cities. The unfaithful servant puts his money in a cloth, not in a hole in the ground.

([Go to Study 30: The sheep and the goats](#Study30TheSheepAndTheGoats))

### Answers 30: The sheep and the goats, Matt 25:31–46

Answers to Questions

1. The setting of the account of “separation of people” is the second coming of Jesus (v 31 with comment).
2. To describe this “separation," Jesus used the simile of a shepherd separating his sheep from his goats at their return home after a day of grazing (v 32–33).
3. The King (Jesus seated on his glorious throne) will be the one who invites people into the kingdom (v 34).
4. This kingdom is described like this (v 34):

* It is the inheritance of those who are blessed (the believers).
* Is was prepared for the blessed (the believers) from the foundation of the world.

1. “The blessed” are described like this (v 35–37):
   1. Who they are: They are the righteous (v 37).
   2. What they have done: All kinds of good deeds to Jesus when he was poor and needy (v 35–36).
2. The righteous will be surprised, because they will not realize that they have done these good deeds to Jesus (v 37–39).
3. The King will then give this confirmation to the righteous (v 40): Whatever they have done to the least of Jesus’ brothers they have done to him. This means that the righteous are characterized by their love and concern for any believer who is poor and suffering (see also comment on v 40).
4. The cursed will be sent away into the eternal fire (v 41).
5. The cursed are described like this (v 42–43, 46):
   1. Who they are: They are unrighteous. This can be concluded from how Jesus contrasted them with the righteous in the final verse (v 46).
   2. What they have not done: No good deeds to Jesus when he was poor and needy (v 42–43).
6. The cursed will be surprised, because they have never seen Jesus poor and needy (v 44).
7. The King will then give this confirmation to the cursed (v 45): Whatever they have not done to the least of Jesus’ brothers they have not done to him (see also my answer to question 7 above).
8. Jesus ended his account of “separation of people” with a summary of the “separation” (v 46): The cursed/the unrighteous will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous/the blessed will go into eternal life.

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Three reasons why believers argue so much about how this passage should be interpreted (you may have come up with additional good reasons):
   1. Temptation to speculate: This is a difficult text, and it is open to alternative interpretations. So people are tempted to speculate.
   2. Forgetting the big picture, for example: If you claim that Jesus here teaches that you will be saved by what you have done to the poor and needy, then you have forgotten the overriding New Testament doctrine of “salvation by grace only.”
   3. Desiring to find support for your favorite doctrines (for example in support of the importance of Christian social work for the church, or in support of specific views on the end times).
2. The connection between the righteous and the list of good deeds can be explained like this without adopting a theology of “salvation by works”:

The description of the life of the righteous (v 35–36, 40) is not the cause for their salvation (the reason why they have been saved – because your can only be saved if you believe in Jesus), but it is the result of their salvation (“the fruit of the Spirit,” “life in imitation of Christ,” “the holy life that Jesus has called us to,” 2 Tim 1:9).

The opposite, of course, applies to the cursed/the unrighteous: They are cursed/unrighteous because they have not accepted Jesus as their personal Savior. The fruit of their unrighteousness is seen in their unloving and uncaring way of life (v 42–45).

([Go to Eight studies from John’s gospel](#EightStudiesFromJohnsGospel))

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## Eight studies from John’s gospel

### Introduction

This unit consists of eight studies from the gospel of John about Jesus and his ministry. It only includes material not found in the previous units of the book. The focus is on events and stories, as John’s gospel and its message will be studied more in detail in a separate course.

* 1. Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael, John 1:43–51 ([Go to the study](#Study1JesusCallsPhilipAndNathanael))
  2. The wedding at Cana in Galilee, John 2:1–12 ([Go to the study](#Study2TheWeddingAtCanaInGalilee))
  3. Jesus and Nicodemus, John 3:1–18 ([Go to the study](#Study3JesusAndNicodemus))
  4. Jesus and a Samaritan woman, John 4:3–42 ([Go to the study](#Study4JesusAndTheSamaritanWoman))
  5. A healing at Bethesda, John 5:1–15 ([Go to the study](#Study5AHealingAtBethesda))
  6. A woman caught in adultery, John 8:2–11 ([Go to the study](#Study6AWomanCaughtInAdultery))
  7. Jesus heals a man born blind, John 9:1–41 ([Go to the study](#Study7JesusHealsAManBornBlind))
  8. Jesus brings Lazarus back to life, John 11:1–44 ([Go to the study](#Study8JesusBringsLazarusBackToLife))

([Go to Table of contents](#TableOfContents))

### Study 1: Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael, John 1:43–51

Introduction and comments

In John’s first chapter, we find John the Baptist ministering on the eastern bank of the Jordan River (John 1:28). Jesus came to be baptized by him. He was then led into the desert for forty days, where he was tempted by Satan (Mark 1:9–13). When Jesus returned to the Jordan, John the Baptist saw him and proclaimed, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! … this is the Son of God” (John 1:29–34). Two of John’s disciples heard John’s testimony and decided to follow Jesus. They in their turn brought more disciples to Jesus.

Philip… Andrew and Peter (v 43–44): Three of Jesus’ twelve apostles. They came from Bethsaida on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. They must have left their homes in order to join John the Baptist, who was ministering in Judea.

Nathanael (v 45): He also became one of the twelve (compare 21:2, where we are told that he came from Cana in Galilee). He is called Bartholomew in the synoptic gospels (see Matt 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14).

Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph (v 45): Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, but he grew up in Nazareth in Galilee, which became his home town. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, but Joseph, his mother Mary’s husband, was his legal father.

fig tree (v 48): The shade of a fig tree was a good place for study and prayer during the hot season in ancient Palestine.

you will see heaven opened …on the Son of Man (v 51): Jesus’ words echo Jacob’s dream (see Genesis 28:12). In Jewish tradition, Jacob’s ladder symbolized the link between heaven and earth. Jesus, the Son of Man, would bring together heaven and earth in a new way through his work of redemption.

Questions

1. Find Judea, Galilee, River Jordan, Bethsaida, and Nazareth on Map of the Roman Province of Judaea.
2. Where did Jesus decide to go (v 43)?
3. Who did Jesus ask to come with him (v 43)?
4. What did Philip tell Nathanael about Jesus (v 45)?
5. Why did Nathanael have doubts about Jesus (v 46)?
6. What did Philip do to convince Nathanael (v 46)?
7. How did Jesus describe Nathanael (v 47)?
8. Where had Jesus seen Nathanael before (v 48)?
9. What titles did Nathanael use about Jesus (v 49)?
10. What did Jesus call himself (v 51)?
11. What did Jesus promise Nathanael (v 50–51)?

Think and discuss

1. John’s account of how the first disciples joined Jesus (John 1:35–42) is different from what we find in the synoptic gospels (see Mark 1:14–20). How would you explain this difference?
2. What can we learn about bringing people to Jesus from John 1:40–49?

([Go to Answers 1: Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael](#Answers1JesusCallsPhilipAndNathanael))

### Study 2: The wedding at Cana in Galilee, John 2:1–12

Introduction and comments

Soon after Jesus had arrived in Galilee after his visit to John the Baptist in Judea, Jesus with family and friends attended a wedding. There, John writes, Jesus performed his first sign, his first miracle.

The third day (v 1): Probably after Jesus had returned from Judea (compare 1:43).

wedding (v 1): The weddings of those days usually lasted several days. So lots of food and drink had to be provided for the guests.

water jars … for the Jewish purification rites (v 6): Jews became ritually unclean during the activities of daily life. They were cleansed by pouring water over the hands. For a lengthy feast with many guests a large amount of water was needed for this. So the six jars were big vessels, each with a holding capacity of about 100 liters.

sign (v 11): See my answer to question 6.

Questions

1. What crisis happened during the wedding at Cana (v 3)?
2. How did Jesus react when his mother Many told him about the crisis (v 3–4)?
3. What instructions did Mary give the servants (v 5)?
4. What instructions did Jesus give the servants (v 7–8)?
5. Why was the chief steward surprised about the wine (v 10)?
6. How does John describe what happened in Cana in Galilee (v 11)?
7. Where did Jesus go after he had been at the wedding (v 12)?

Think and discuss

Retell the story about the wedding at Cana in Galilee. Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible. Be dramatic and exciting. Imagine that you are speaking to a group of villagers.

([Go to Answers 2: The wedding at Cana in Galilee](#Answers2TheWeddingAtCanaInGalilee))

### Study 3: Jesus and Nicodemus, John 3:1–18

Introduction and comments

After having spent some time in Galilee, Jesus returned to Judea in order to take part in the Passover celebrations in Jerusalem (2:13). While there, he met a very distinguished leader of the Jews, a Pharisee called Nicodemus. This passage contains the most well-known verse in the Bible – verse 16 summarizes the gospel in a nutshell.

born again (v 3, 7): The Greek word “again” means primarily “from above” (compare “from God” in 1:13), but it can also mean “again.”

born of water and the Spirit (v 5): This expression should probably be understood as an expanded variation of “born of the Spirit” (something like “born of water, which means of the Spirit”). Compare Paul’s words “He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by his Holy Spirit," Titus 3:5. Compare also Jesus’ words to the Samaritan woman about “living water,” which gives eternal life, John 4:10, 13. Note also that “water” is sometimes used figuratively in the Old Testament about the Spirit of God (see for example Isaiah 44:3–4; Ezekiel 36:25–26; Joel 2:23, 28).

You … you (v 7): The first “you” is singular (Jesus speaking to Nicodemus), the second “you” is plural (Jesus making a general statement applicable to everybody).

Moses lifted up the snake (v 14): See Numbers 21:4–9 about Moses and the bronze snake that God instructed him to make during the wilderness wanderings. Compare John 8:28; 12:32, where Jesus also uses the expression “lift up” about his crucifixion.

Questions

1. What do we learn about Nicodemus (v 1–2)?
2. What metaphor did Jesus use in verse 3 about seeing the Kingdom of God?
3. How did Nicodemus react to Jesus’ metaphor (v 4)?
4. How did Jesus explain his metaphor (v 5–6)?
5. What follow-up question did Nicodemus ask Jesus (v 9)?
6. What comparison did Jesus make between the bronze snake and his own death on the cross (v 14–15)?
7. Why did God send Jesus into the world (v 16)?

Think and discuss

1. Why do you think Nicodemus came to see Jesus? And why do you think he came at night?
2. Retell the story about Jesus and Nicodemus. Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible. Be dramatic and exciting. Imagine that you are speaking to a group of villagers.

([Go to Answers 3: Jesus and Nicodemus](#Answers3JesusAndNicodemus))

### Study 4: Jesus and the Samaritan woman, John 4:3–42

Introduction and comments

As Jesus journeyed back from Jerusalem to Galilee, he felt led by God to take the route though Samaria. This route was the shortest, but it was avoided by the Jews because of the tensions between the Jews and the Samaritans.

This passage can be structured like this:

* 1. Jesus and the Samaritan woman meet at Jacob’s well, v 5–26
  2. The disciples return, and the woman witnesses to her townspeople about Jesus, v 27–38
  3. Many Samaritans believe in Jesus, because of the woman’s testimony, v 39–42

In our previous study, Nicodemus misunderstood Jesus’ metaphor “to be born again.” This misunderstanding made Jesus explain to him (and to us!) important truths about salvation. In this study, Jesus uses the same teaching method with a Samaritan woman, who misunderstands his metaphor “living water.” Jesus gives all us who believe in him the “living water” of eternal life.

Sychar near the property that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there (v 5–6): Bible scholars are not sure about the identification of Sychar. Perhaps it was another name for Shechem, an ancient city about 10 km southeast of Samaria, the capital of the region also called Samaria. Jacob bought a piece of land near Shechem (see Genesis 33:18–19), which must have been the land he later gave to his son Joseph (compare Genesis 48:21–22). Jacob’s well is not mentioned in the Old Testament, but tradition links it to a deep well (see v 11 with comment) at the foot of Mount Gerizim (compare “this mountain,” v 21).

Jews have no dealings with Samaritans (v 9): There were both historical and religious reasons for the conflicts between Jews and Pharisees in New Testament times. The woman’s point here was probably that Jesus, a Jew, would have become ceremonially unclean if he used a drinking vessel handled by her, a Samaritan, because the Jews thought of the Samaritans as ritually unclean.

living water (v 10): This phrase meant “running water” or “water from a spring,” in contrast to “stagnant water” or “water kept in a cistern.” Here Jesus used it as a metaphor for “life-giving water” or “water that gives spiritual life,” but the woman did not catch his metaphor.

deep (v 11): “Jacob’s well” was cleaned out in 1935 and was found to be 42 meters deep.

five husbands (v 18): The Jews allowed a woman to be divorced up to three times, so they would have considered this Samaritan woman very immoral. In addition, she was now living with a man that she hadn’t officially married.

this mountain (v 20): The woman referred to Mount Gerizim, which the Samaritans considered sacred. They had built a temple on this mountain about 400 BC. It was later destroyed by the Jews. The building of the temple and its destruction were two of the the reasons for the animosity between Jews and Samaritans.

You worship what you don’t know (v 22): The Samaritans only accepted the Pentateuch as their canon. They worshiped the true God. But because they did not accept much of his revelation as recorded in the remaining Old Testament books, they did not know much about him.

salvation is from the Jews (v 22): The Messiah would come from God’s historic people, the Jews.

Messiah … When he comes, he will tell us all things (v 25): The Samaritans expected the Messiah. But they did not know much about him, because they did not accept the Psalms and the prophetic books as God’s word. So they thought of him mainly as a teacher.

They were astonished that he was talking with a woman (v 27): Jewish religious teachers avoided speaking with women in public.

There are still four months to the harvest (v 35): Jesus was probably quoting a proverb that meant something like “Crops will take their own time to get ready.” But here Jesus was speaking metaphorically about a “spiritual harvest.” The crop is the people who are harvested by being brought into the Kingdom of God. They are harvested for eternity (v 36). The fields refer to the people living in this world. They have already become ripe for harvest. So they are ready to accept the gospel.

He who reaps … he who sows … One sows and another reaps … Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor (v 36–38): The “sowers” and the “others” that Jesus had in mind were perhaps the Old Testament prophets and John the Baptist. But, of course, Jesus expected his disciples to be both sowers and reapers.

the Savior of the world (v 42): This is the only time this expression is used in the gospels. We also find it in 1 John 4:14. Paul has a similar phrase about God (“the Savior of all men”) in 1 Tim 4:1.

Questions

1. Find Samaria on Map of the Roman Province of Judaea.
2. Why did Jesus sit down by the well at Sychar (v 6)?
3. What time of day did a Samaritan woman come to the well to draw water (v 6–7)?
4. Why were not the disciples present at this time (v 8)?
5. Why was the woman surprised when Jesus asked for some water to drink (7–9)?
6. What shows that the woman misunderstood Jesus’ offer of “living water” (v 11–12)?
7. How did Jesus describe his “living water” (v 13–14)?
8. What shows that the woman still misunderstood Jesus’ explanation about “living water” (v 15)?
9. What do we find out about the woman’s family situation (v 16–18)?
10. How did the woman realize that Jesus was a prophet (v 17–19)?
11. What religious difference between the Samaritans and the Jews did the woman bring up (v 20)?
12. What did Jesus tell the woman about salvation (v 22)?
13. What did Jesus tell the woman about worship (v 21–24)?
14. What did the woman say about the Messiah (v 25)?
15. How did Jesus respond to the woman’s statement (v 26)?
16. Why were the disciples surprised, when they returned with the food that they had bought (v 27)?
17. Why did the townspeople come to see Jesus (v 28–30)?
18. What did Jesus mean by “his food” (v 34)?
19. What did Jesus mean by “the fields are ripe for harvesting” (v 35 with comment)?
20. Why did many of the Samaritans from Sychar believe in Jesus (v 39)?
21. What happened in Sychar during the next two days (v 40–41)?
22. What had the Samaritans of Sychar come to realize at the end of Jesus’ stay with them (v 42)?

Think and discuss

1. Explain the misunderstanding between the Samaritan woman and Jesus about “living water” (v 7–15). Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible.
2. Explain the misunderstanding between the disciples and Jesus about “food” (v 31–34). Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible.
3. In what ways do you think that the Samaritan woman can be a role model for believers in South India today? Make a list.
4. How would you summarize the main lessons of this passage (John 4:3–42) for the Christian church in South India today? Make a list.

([Go to Answers 4: Jesus and the Samaritan woman](#Answers4JesusAndTheSamaritanWoman))

### Study 5: A healing at Bethesda, John 5:1–15

Introduction and comments

Jesus again journeyed to Jerusalem to celebrate one of the main Jewish festivals. The story of Jesus healing a man at the Bethesda pool is not found in the synoptic gospels. This man had been ill for thirty-eight years.

Sheep Gate … Bethesda (v 2): The Sheep Gate was situated north of the temple. The name of the pool varies in the Greek manuscripts. The Kannada Bibles have chosen the reading “Bethzatha” (which means “house of olives”), while most modern translations prefer the reading “Bethesda” (which means either “house of mercy” or “house of flowing water”).

Verses 3–4: The early Greek manuscripts do not have the end of verse 3 and the whole of verse 4 (“and they waited for the moving of the waters. From time to time an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the waters. The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease he had”). These words were not part of John’s original text, but added later. Of the Kannada translations, pavitra grantha has chosen the longer version, satyavEdavu the shorter.

It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat (v 10): This was not forbidden in the law of Moses, but by the traditional interpretations that the Jewish scribes had made of the law.

Questions

1. Why did Jesus go to Jerusalem (v 1)?
2. What kind of people did Jesus find at Bethesda (v 3)?
3. What did Jesus ask the man who had been ill for thirty-eight years (v 6)?
4. What was the man’s answer to Jesus’ question (v 7)?
5. What did Jesus tell the man to do (v 8)?
6. Why did the Jewish leaders scold the man (9–10)?
7. What excuse did the man give the Jewish leaders (v 11)?
8. Why did the man not know the name of the person who had healed him (v 13)?
9. Where did Jesus meet the man a second time (v 14)?
10. How did the Jewish leaders find out that it was Jesus who had healed the man (v 15)?

Think and discuss

1. How do you understand Jesus’ exhortation to the man (v 14)?
2. Retell the story about Jesus and the man who was healed at the Bethesda pool. Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible. Be dramatic and exciting. Imagine that you are speaking to a group of villagers.

([Go to Answers 5: A healing at Bethesda](#Answers5AHealingAtBethesda))

### Study 6: A woman caught in adultery, John 8:2–11

Introduction and comments

The beautiful story about the woman caught in adultery and Jesus is not found in any of the oldest New Testament Greek manuscripts. So it did not originally belong to John’s gospel. That is why most modern Bible editions (like the Kannada satyavEdavu, but unlike Kannada pavitra grantha) have put it within brackets. When the New Testament canon was formed, it was placed where we find it today in John’s gospel. This means that we should considered it to be God’s inspired words for his people, just as much as any other part of the gospels. This story is not included in the synoptic gospels.

a woman caught in adultery (v 3): The sin of adultery cannot be committed alone. So the people present must have wondered why the Pharisees only brought the woman to Jesus, and not the man.

caught in the very act of adultery (v 4): Jewish law required witnesses to the act.

Moses commanded us to stone such women (v 5): The Pharisees did not present the law correctly. First, stoning was only required if the woman was a virgin betrothed to be married (Deuteronomy 22:23–24). Second, the law required the execution (not necessarily by stoning) of both the man and the woman in cases of adultery (Deut 22:22; Leviticus 20:10).

They said this to test him/trap him (v 6): If Jesus told the Pharisees to let the woman go, they would claim that Jesus did not uphold the law of Moses. If Jesus told them to go ahead with the stoning of the woman, the people in general would doubt Jesus’ compassion for the poor and the needy – and probably also wonder why the man involved had not been caught in adultery. In addition, Jesus could be blamed for opposing the Roman authorities, who had limited the right to impose the death penalty to themselves as rulers of Palestine (compare John 18:31).

wrote on the ground with his finger (v 6): Compare the two stone tablets, written with the finger of God (Exodus 31:18).

Let him who is without sin among you throw the first stone at her (v 7): Jewish law required the witnesses to begin the stoning of the person sentenced to death. So the Jewish leaders who had brought the woman to Jesus were almost certainly guilty of one or both of the following sins: using the woman to create a trap for Jesus, or condoning the act of adultery by letting the man involved go free. They knew that they were all guilty of sin.

Questions

1. Where did this story take place (v 2)?
2. Why had so many people gathered around Jesus (v 2)?
3. Who brought the woman to Jesus (v 3)?
4. What was the woman accused of (v 4)?
5. What did the Jewish leaders want Jesus to do (v 5)?
6. Why did Jesus finally respond to their request (v 7)?
7. What answer did Jesus give the Jewish leaders (v 7)?
8. What happened to the Jewish leaders (v 9)?
9. Jesus told the woman two things. What were they (v 11)?

Think and discuss

1. If you had been a witness to this event, what circumstances would have made you suspicious of the Jewish leaders and their intentions?
2. Describe the Jewish leaders’ attempt to test (or trap) Jesus.
3. Why do you think Jesus wrote with his finger on the ground?
4. Retell the story about Jesus and the woman caught in adultery. Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible. Be dramatic and exciting. Imagine that you are speaking to a group of villagers.

([Go to Answers 6: A woman caught in adultery](#Answers6AWomanCaughtInAdultery))

### Study 7: Jesus heals a man born blind, John 9:1–41

Introduction and comments

This long passage about the healing of a man born blind and its consequences will be studied more in detail in a separate course on John’s gospel. This miracle is not found in the synoptic gospels.

who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? (v 2): The disciples’ question reflects the teaching of the Jewish leaders at that time (compare v 34). But Jesus did not agree with them (v 3). There are various reason for sickness. Individual sin can, of course, be one of them. But the big picture of the Bible is that sickness and death are part of human existence in this present age; they are consequences of the Fall.

pool of Siloam (v 7): This was a rock-cut pool on the southern end of the main mountain ridge on which Jerusalem was built. The pool belonged to a major water system built by King Hezekiah before 700 BC.

put out of the synagogue (v 22): Excommunication of Jews probably began after the Babylonian Exile (see Ezra 10:8). Compare verses 34–35.

Give glory to God (v 24): This expression means, “Tell the truth!”

see … blind (v 39–41): These words are used in these verses both literally (about physical sight/blindness) and figuratively (about spiritual sight/blindness).

Questions

1. What reason did Jesus give his disciples for the man’s blindness (v 1–3)?
2. Describe the method Jesus used to heal the blind man (v 6–11).
3. What were the arguments for and against Jesus (v 13–16)?
4. How did the Jewish leaders verify that the man had really been born blind (v 18–20)?
5. Why did the man’s parents not mention that Jesus had healed him (v 21–23)?
6. What picture of Jesus did the man born blind present (v 17, 25–33)?
7. What do we find out about the man’s relationship with Jesus (v 27–39)?

Think and discuss

Why were the Jewish leaders so eager to verify the healing of the man born blind (see verses 22, 29–33; compare Isaiah 29:18; 35:5; 42:7)?

([Go to Answers 7: Jesus heals a man born blind](#Answers7JesusHealsAManBornBlind))

### Study 8: Jesus brings Lazarus back to life, John 11:1–44

Introduction and comments

This beautiful story (only found in John’s gospel) can be structured into three parts:

* 1. The sickness and death of Lazarus of Bethany, v 1–16
  2. The meetings with Martha and Mary and Jesus’ grief, v 17–37
  3. The raising of Lazarus from the dead, v 38–44

It is followed by the decision of the Jewish leaders to have Jesus killed (v 45–57).

Lazarus … Bethany (v 1): Lazarus in only mentioned in chapters 11 and 12 of John’s gospel. The name “Lazarus” (which is a Greek form for Hebrew Eleazar, “God helps”) is also found in one of Jesus’ parables (Luke 10:38–42). Bethany was a village about 3 km south-east of Jerusalem (see also v 18).

Mary … Martha (v 1–2): The story about Mary anointing Jesus’ feet is found in 12:1–8. The two sisters also appear in a story in Luke’s gospel (10:38–42).

in the place where he was (v 6): Jesus and his disciples were in Perea, east of the Jordan River (see 10:40).

the Jews were just now trying to stone you (v 8): In John’s gospel the expression “the Jews” usually refers to the Jewish leaders. The incident referred to is found in the previous chapter (see 10:31).

light (v 9–10): Jesus first uses “light” in a literal sense (v 9), then in a metaphorical sense (“because light is not in him," v 10, which is not seen clearly in the Kannada translations), compare Matt 6:22–23.

has fallen asleep (v 11): “Asleep” is a common euphemism for “dead” (compare comment on Mark 5:39 in the study on Mark chapter 5). It has been used in many cultures throughout history.

Thomas (v 16): He was one of Jesus’ twelve disciples. His name is Aramaic and means “twin.” Thomas plays a more prominent role in John that in the synoptic gospels.

four days (v 17): Many Jews believed that the soul remained near the body for three days after death in the hope of returning to it. But by the fourth day all hope was gone. So now Lazarus was dead beyond any doubt.

life/live (v 25–26): Jesus used the words “life” and “live” both literally (referring to “physical life”) and spiritually (referring to “eternal life in the Kingdom of God”).

a cave with a stone covering the entrance (v 38): This type of tomb was fairly common in ancient Palestine, particularly for the wealthy. Jesus was laid in such a tomb (see Mark 15:46 with comment; compare Isaiah 53:9).

Questions

1. What do we learn about Lazarus and his family at the beginning of this account (v 1–2, 5)?
2. How did Jesus respond when he received the message about Lazarus’s illness (v 3–4)?
3. Why were the disciples surprised when Jesus told them that he wanted to go back to Judea (v 7–8)?
4. What did Jesus tell his disciples about Lazarus, and how did they misunderstand his words (v 11–14)?
5. Why was Jesus glad that he hadn’t been present at Lazarus’s death (v 15)?
6. What did Thomas feel about returning to Judea (v 16)?
7. How long had Lazarus been dead when Jesus and his disciples arrived on the scene (v 17)?
8. What did Martha do when she found out that Jesus was coming (v 19–20)?
9. What did Jesus tell Martha about Lazarus, and how did she misunderstand his words (v 21–24)?
10. How did Martha confess her faith in Jesus (v 25–27)?
11. How did Mary find out that Jesus was waiting nearby (v 28–30)?
12. Mary accused Jesus of the present situation. How (v 32)?
13. How did Jesus react when he saw Mary’s grief (v 33–36)?
14. Some of the people also accused Jesus of the present situation. How (v 37)?
15. Why did Martha hesitate to remove the stone from the tomb opening (v 38–40)?
16. Describe how Jesus brought Lazarus back to life (v 41–44)?

Think and discuss

1. Explain the context in which Jesus utters his well-known statement, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”
2. Retell the story about Jesus bringing Lazarus back to life. Use your own words and don’t look in your Bible. Be dramatic and exciting. Imagine that you are speaking to a group of villagers.

([Go to Answers 8: Jesus brings Lazarus back to life](#Answers8JesusBringsLazarusBackToLife))

## Eight studies from John’s gospel – answers

### Answers 1: Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael, John 1:43–51

Answers to Questions

1. –
2. Jesus decided to go to Galilee (v 43). Galilee was his home state. But he had been to Judea to see John the Baptist and to be baptized by him in the Jordan River.
3. Jesus asked Philip to come with him to Galilee (v 43). Philip, like Jesus, was a native of Galilee.
4. Philip told Nathanael that Jesus was the one about whom the Old Testament had prophesied (v 45). So Philip must have realized that Jesus was the promised Messiah.
5. Nathanael had doubts about Jesus, because he was from Nazareth (v 46). Evidently Nazareth did not have a good reputation among people from the neighboring towns. Nathanael was from Cana, also in Galilee (21:2).
6. Philip did not try to convince Nathanael by giving him any explanations. Instead he told him to come and meet Jesus in person (v 46).
7. Jesus described Nathanael as a true Israelite without deceit (v 47).
8. Jesus had seen Nathanael earlier, sitting in the shade of a fig tree (v 48). Nathanael had probably been studying one of the Old Testament scrolls, perhaps Genesis (see my answer to question 12).
9. Nathanael used three titles about Jesus (v 49):

* Rabbi, which means “(my) teacher”: So the way in which Nathanael addressed Jesus, shows that he recognized him as a religious teacher.
* The Son of God: This title was used as a synonym for “Messiah.” But it also implied divinity, as it recognized the unique relationship that Jesus had with God as his Father (compare Ps 2:7).
* The King of Israel: This title recognized Jesus as the promised Messiah, the king in the family line of David (2 Samuel 7:16), the liberator of the Israelites from the Roman occupation.

1. Jesus called himself the Son of Man (v 51). This title was synonymous with “a male person," but it was also a messianic title (compare Daniel 7:13–14).
2. Jesus promised Nathanael that he would see “greater things than these” (v 50). Jesus probably referred to the things that Nathanael had been reading about in the Old Testament scroll under the fig tree, about Jacob’s wonderful dream. That would explain Jesus’ words in the following verse. See also my comment on verse 51.

Comments on Think and discuss

1. John’s account of how the first disciples joined Jesus (John 1:35–42) is different from what we find in the synoptic gospels (see Mark 1:14–20). But the two accounts can be harmonized, like this:

* Jesus leaves Galilee and travels to Judea to hear John the Baptist and to be baptized by him. John the Baptist has attracted followers from all over Palestine. Among them we find some men from Galilee (including Andrew and one more person, John 1:37 and 40; this person is perhaps John the author of the gospel), and Philip (v 43), and Nathanael (v 47).
* After some time all these Galileans, including Jesus, are back to their daily lives in Galilee. When Jesus is about to begin his Galilean ministry, he calls them to follow him. Those who have been fishing (Peter and his brother Andrew, James and his brother John) leave their boats and nets and become Jesus’ disciples (Mark 1:14–20).

1. We learn at least two important lessons about bringing people to Jesus from this passage:
   1. Personal contacts bring people to Jesus:
      * Andrew contacted his brother Simon Peter, v 41
      * Philip contacted Nathanael, v 45
   2. Invitation to find out and see and try for yourself:
      * Philip told Nathanael to come and see (v 46). Instead of giving a long explanation about Jesus, Philip just invited his friend to come and check out for himself.

([Go to Study 2: The wedding at Cana in Galilee](#Study2TheWeddingAtCanaInGalilee))

### Answers 2: The wedding at Cana in Galilee, John 2:1–12

Answers to Questions

1. During the wedding at Cana, a crisis happened. The bridegroom’s family had miscalculated the quantity of wine needed. So now the wine was all finished, and the family would be facing social disgrace (v 3).
2. Jesus responded negatively, when his mother Mary told him about the crisis. He did not want to be involved, because his time had not yet come (v 3–4). Similar expressions are found a few times in John’s gospel (see 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20). They show Jesus moving inevitably toward fulfilling his destiny, his sacrificial death on the cross.
3. But his mother Mary was not discouraged. She still hoped that Jesus would intervene in the embarrassing situation. So she instructed the servants to do whatever Jesus told them to do (v 5). This shows her confidence in Jesus.
4. Jesus gave these instructions to the servants (v 7–8):

* He told them first to fill the six huge water jars that were standing there with water up to the brim. These stone jars were used to store the water for the Jewish purification rites. Perhaps the jars happened to be empty at this time. Or perhaps the servants first emptied them and then filled them with fresh water.
* Then Jesus wanted the servants to draw some of the water out and have the chief steward taste it. But he did not tell them to let the chief steward know what had happened.

1. The chief steward was surprised when he tasted the wine, not because it was water that Jesus had turned into wine, but because the wine tasted so good. He had expected the bridegroom’s family to serve the best wine first, and save the simpler wine until the guest had become so intoxicated that they wouldn’t have tasted the difference between expensive and cheap wine. But the family had strangely enough kept the best wine until later (v 10).
2. John describes what happened in Cana in Galilee like this (v 11):

* It was Jesus’ first sign. John always refers to Jesus’ miracles as “signs.” This word emphasizes the significance of the miracles. They revealed Jesus’ glory (compare 1:14) and pointed forward to his work of redemption on the cross.
* This first sign echoes Old Testament prophecies of the abundant blessings that God had promised his people in the future (see for example Joel 3:18 and Amos 9:13).
* This sign revealed Jesus’ glory in a way that made his disciples understand who he was. And they believed in him.

1. After he had been at the wedding, Jesus went to Capernaum with his family and his disciples (v 12).

Comments on Think and discuss

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([Go to Study 3: Jesus and Nicodemus](#Study3JesusAndNicodemus))

### Answers 3: Jesus and Nicodemus, John 3:1–18

Answers to Questions

1. We learn these things about Nicodemus (v 1–2):

* He was a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council.
* He came to see Jesus at night.
* He acknowledged Jesus as a teacher from God because of the miracles that Jesus performed.

1. Jesus used the metaphor “to be born again” about seeing the Kingdom of God in verse 3. So in order to enter the Kingdom of God one must “be born again,” or “be born from above,” or “be born by God.”
2. Nicodemus did not catch the metaphor, but thought that Jesus was referring to a physical rebirth (v 4).
3. Jesus explained his metaphor (v 5–6): To be born again is to experience a spiritual birth, which is not the same as a physical birth. One must be born by the Spirit of God, “from above.”
4. Nicodemus had a follow-up question for Jesus (v 9): “How can this happen?” He probably wanted Jesus to tell him how he could experience this rebirth.
5. Jesus made this comparison between the bronze snake and his own death on the cross (v 14–15):

* God told Moses in the desert to make a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. When a person, who was dying from a snakebite, looked up at the bronze snake, God would let him live.
* Similarly, God had arranged for Jesus to be nailed to a cross so that those who “looked up at him” (and believed in him) would not die in their sins, but have eternal live.

1. God sent Jesus into the world to give all those who believe in him eternal life (v 16).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Nicodemus must have come to see Jesus, because he wanted to know more about the Kingdom of God (compare v 3). I think he came at night because that was the best time for both him and Jesus. They were busy during the day, and a discussion with Jesus required uninterrupted time. I find the idea that Nicodemus came “in secret” because he was afraid (or ashamed) less likely.
2. –

([Go to Study 4: Jesus and the Samaritan woman](#Study4JesusAndTheSamaritanWoman))

### Answers 4: Jesus and the Samaritan woman, John 4:3–42

Answers to Questions

1. –
2. Jesus was tired from his journey, so he sat down by the well at Sychar (v 6).
3. A Samaritan woman came to the well around noon to draw water (v 6–7). This was not the time when women usually went to the well. They would avoid the hot sun and come in coolness of the evening. So this woman was probably trying to avoid the other women. Perhaps she was ashamed of her family life.
4. The disciples had gone into the town to buy food, so they were not present during Jesus’ conversation with the woman (v 8).
5. The woman was surprised when Jesus asked for some water to drink, because she could see that he was a Jew, and Jews thought that this kind of contact with Samaritans would make them ritually unclean (7–9).
6. The woman misunderstood Jesus’ offer of “living water,” the “water” of salvation that would give her eternal life in the Kingdom of God. Instead she pointed out to him that he didn’t have a rope and a pot to draw the water out of the well (v 11–12).
7. Jesus described his “living water” like this (v 13–14):

* It will forever quench the thirst of the person who drinks it.
* It will become a gushing spring of eternal life within the person who receives it.

1. But the woman still misunderstood Jesus’ explanation about “living water,” because she asked him to give her that water so that she would not have to draw water from this well any more (v 15).
2. We find out three things about the woman’s family situation (v 16–18):

* She didn’t have a husband.
* She had been married five times.
* She was now living with a man without being married to him.

1. The woman realized that Jesus was a prophet, because he had told her about her family life, both past and present. Only a prophet could have that kind of inside knowledge (v 17–19).
2. The woman must have been embarrassed about Jesus revealing her private life. So she changed the subject and brought up a religious difference between the Samaritans and the Jews: Mount Gerizim was to the Samaritans what Jerusalem was to the Jews – the special place where God was worshiped (v 20).
3. Jesus told the woman that salvation would come from the Jews (v 22). He was probably referring to the fact that he, the Savior of the world, was a Jew.
4. Jesus told the woman these things about worship (v 21–24):

* In the future worship would not be restricted to a place, neither to Mount Gerizim nor to Jerusalem.
* God was worshiped by both Jews and Samaritans. But the Jews knew more about him and how to worship him, because they had all the Old Testament books, while the Samaritans only considered the Pentateuch to be God’s word.
* The time had already come when true worshipers would worship God in the way he wants to be worshiped – in spirit and truth.
* God is spirit, so he can only be worshiped in spirit and truth.

1. The woman said two things about the Messiah (v 25):

* She knew and believed that the Messiah really would come.
* And when the Messiah came, he would explain everything about God and how God should be worshiped.

1. Jesus responded to the woman’s statement about the Messiah with an affirmation: He, who was speaking to her, was the Messiah (v 26).
2. The disciples were surprised, when they returned with the food that they had bought, because Jesus was speaking to a woman. They must not have expected to see him – whom they respected as their rabbi and religious teacher – sit and talk with a woman like that in a public place. They were even to embarrassed to ask him about it (v 27).
3. The townspeople came to see Jesus because of the woman’s report. She told them she had met a prophet and that she was almost sure that this man was the Messiah whom they were waiting for (v 28–30).
4. When Jesus spoke to his disciples about “his food," he did not refer to ordinary food. He was speaking metaphorically about fulfilling God’s plan for his life (v 34).
5. When Jesus said that “the fields are ripe for harvesting,” he was speaking metaphorically about a spiritual crop ready to be harvested: people ready to accept the gospel and enter eternal life in the Kingdom of God (v 35 with comment).
6. Many of the Samaritans from Sychar believed in Jesus because of the woman’s testimony (v 39).
7. Jesus remained in Sychar during the next two days and many more Samaritans accepted Jesus’ teaching and became believers (v 40–41).
8. The Samaritans of Sychar had come to realize two things at the end of Jesus’ stay with them (v 42):

* That the woman’s testimony was reliable
* That Jesus really was the Savior of the world

Comments on Think and discuss

1. –
2. –
3. Three ways in which the Samaritan woman can be a role model for us:

* Her willingness to sit down and talk to Jesus and listen to his teaching in spite of her embarrassing personal circumstances
* Her boldness in questioning Jesus’ words, which led him to guide her to a life-changing understanding of him and his salvation
* Her eagerness to witness to the people of her hometown about Jesus and thereby lead them to Christ and his salvation

1. Some important lessons from this passage (John 4:3–42) for the Christian church in South India today (there are, of course, other lessons as well):

* The gospel must cross social and cultural barriers: Jesus spoke to a woman in public, even if the disciples considered it “improper.”
* The gospel must cross geographical and religious barriers: Jesus proclaimed salvation to the Samaritans, even if they were ritually unclean foreigners and enemies of his own people.
* The gospel has to be preached and explained until listeners understand it: Jesus took time challenging and explaining until the woman (and her fellow-Samaritans) understood and accepted the good news.
* The gospel must be shared with others: The woman could not keep quiet about her meeting with Jesus. She just had to share her experience with the people of her town.
* People must be brought into a personal relationship with Jesus: When the Samaritans heard for themselves, they knew.
* The gospel is for everybody and all nations: Jesus is the Savior of the whole world, of all those who believe in him.

([Go to Study 5: A healing at Bethesda](#Study5AHealingAtBethesda))

### Answers 5: A healing at Bethesda, John 5:1–15

Answers to Questions

1. Jesus went to Jerusalem to celebrate one of the Jewish festivals there (v 1).
2. At Bethesda, Jesus found all kinds of sick people (v 3).
3. Jesus asked the man who had been ill for thirty-eight years, if he wanted to be healed (v 6).
4. The man answered Jesus that he didn’t have anybody to help him get into the pool when the water was stirred up (v 7). People believed that the water was occasionally stirred up by an angel and that the first person who got into the water would be healed.
5. Jesus told the man to get up, take his mat and walk (v 8).
6. The Jewish leaders scolded the man, because he was carrying his mat on a Sabbath. According to their interpretation of the law, this was illegal (9–10).
7. The man’s excuse to the Jewish leaders was that he had only obeyed the orders of the man who healed him (v 11).
8. The man had no idea that it was Jesus who had healed him (v 13).
9. Jesus met the man a second time in the temple (v 14). Jesus seems to have been looking for him.
10. The Jewish leaders found out that it was Jesus who had healed the man, because the man went and told them (v 15).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Jesus told the man who had been healed to stop sinning so that nothing worse would happen to him (v 14). Two comments:

* Jesus’ exhortation indicates that this man’s illness had been caused by sin. In the Bible we find that sin can cause illness (as in this case) – but not all illness is caused by sin (compare John 9:1–3).
* Jesus was concerned about the man’s condition, physical as well as spiritual. He did not want the man to experience more suffering. But he also wanted the man to live a righteous live. So Jesus seems to have been looking for the man until he found him in the temple.

1. –

([Go to Study 6: A woman caught in adultery](#Study6AWomanCaughtInAdultery))

### Answers 6: A woman caught in adultery, John 8:2–11

Answers to Questions

1. This story took place in the Jerusalem temple (v 2).
2. Many people gathered around Jesus in order to listen to his teaching (v 2).
3. The Jewish leaders (the scribes and the Pharisees) where the ones who brought the woman to Jesus (v 3).
4. The Jewish leaders accused the woman of adultery (v 4).
5. The Jewish leaders wanted Jesus to decide what to do with the woman. Did Jesus recommend that she be executed (as the law of Moses stated), or did he recommend that she be pardoned (v 5)?
6. Because the Jewish leaders kept on asking Jesus for a reply, he finally responded to their request (v 7).
7. Jesus told the Jewish leaders that anyone without sin among them should throw the first stone (v 7).
8. The Jewish leaders gradually left the scene. Finally they were all gone (v 9).
9. Jesus told the woman two things (v 11):
   1. That he did not condemn her
   2. That her life of sin must be done away with

Comments on Think and discuss

1. If I had been a witness to this event, at least these four circumstances would have made me suspicious of the Jewish leaders and their intentions:

* Why did they embarrass and disgrace the woman by dragging her into the temple and accusing her before such a large group of people who had come to listen to Jesus’ teaching? Their motive was evidently not to uphold the law but to trap Jesus, using the poor woman as a tool.
* Why didn’t they also bring the man involved? Adultery is always committed by two people. So the adultery was evidently a set-up, and the man a was probably a willing assistant who was paid and then sent away.
* Why didn’t they present proper witnesses to the adultery as required by the law. Only then could a fair verdict be returned. If they were all witnesses, the whole story must have been arranged. How could a group of scribes and Pharisees be witnesses to an act of adultery, a sin which is always conducted in secrecy?
* Why did they stubbornly insist on a reply from Jesus? Of course, they expected him to be compromised by whatever option he chose! This was evidently a trap, and not a true case!

1. The Jewish leaders attempted to test (or trap) Jesus like this:

* They brought to Jesus a woman whom they claimed had been caught in the act of adultery.
* They insisted that Jesus tell them what should be done with the woman.:
  + Did Jesus want her to be stoned in accordance with the law of Moses?
  + Or did Jesus not want this to be done with her?
* They knew that Jesus would be trapped whatever he decided:
  + If Jesus said, “No, be merciful to her and don’t implement the Old Testament law in all its harshness!” – then they would say that Jesus was a heretic who denied the law and misled the people.
  + If Jesus said, “Yes, go ahead and have her stoned to death!” – then the people would be disappointed with Jesus’ lack of compassion. In addition, Jesus could be accused of undermining the authority of the Romans, who for political reasons had removed the right of the Jewish council to inflict the death penalty.

1. We don’t know why Jesus wrote with his finger on the ground (v 6, 8). Here are four, more or less speculative, suggestions:
   1. Jesus wanted to keep himself occupied and not watch the Jewish leaders while he gave them plenty of time to react to his exhortation.
   2. Jesus wanted to put some drama into the whole situation by writing some mysterious words of accusation or revelation, words in the sand that would soon be erased by the wind.
   3. Jesus wanted to remind the Jewish leaders of the seriousness of their own actions: God wrote the original version of the Ten Commandments by his finger on the stone tablets (Exodus 31:18; 32:16). God would be the judge of their evil intent.
   4. Jesus wanted to remind the people who were standing around him of his divine authority: He was the “finger of God” to judge and forgive both the Jewish leaders and the woman caught in adultery (compare Luke 11:20, where Jesus claimed to “drive out demons by the finger of God”).
2. –

([Go to Study 7: Jesus heals a man born blind](#Study7JesusHealsAManBornBlind))

### Answers 7: Jesus heals a man born blind, John 9:1–41

Answers to Questions

1. Jesus’ reason for the man’s blindness was that God would be glorified in his life (v 1–3). God was glorified through his healing, and God was glorified through Jesus, the Son of God and the Messiah, who healed him.
2. The method Jesus used to heal the blind man: Jesus spat on the ground and made some mud, which he put on the man’s eyes. Then he told him to go to the Siloam Pool and wash his eyes. The man obeyed and was healed (v 6–11). John does not record, if Jesus ever asked the man, if he wanted to be healed. And nothing is mentioned about Jesus promising the man that he would be healed if he followed Jesus’ instructions.
3. The arguments for and against Jesus (v 13–16):
   1. For Jesus: Jesus had healed the man born blind. No sinner could perform such a miracle. So Jesus must be a good man.
   2. Against Jesus: Jesus did not follow the Sabbath rules, because he had healed a man on the Sabbath. So Jesus must be a bad man, a sinner.
4. The Jewish leaders interrogated the man’s parents to verify that the man had really been born blind (v 18–20).
5. The man’s parents dared not mention that Jesus had healed him. They were afraid that the Jewish leaders would excommunicate them, if they thought that they were supporters of Jesus (v 21–23).
6. The picture that the man born blind had of Jesus (v 17, 25–33):

* That Jesus must be a prophet (because of his healing powers)
* That Jesus had really healed him
* That Jesus was a good man and not a sinner
* That God had listened to Jesus
* That Jesus obeyed God’s will
* That Jesus was from God
* That Jesus had received his miraculous powers from God

1. The man’s relationship with Jesus (v 27–39):

* He considered himself to be a disciple of Jesus (and the Jewish leaders identified him as such), even if he, at first, did not understand who Jesus was. But he realized that Jesus was a good man, used by God, because his life had been totally changed as a result of meeting Jesus and obeying his instructions for his healing. So Jesus must be a man from God.
* When Jesus found out that the man had been cast out of the synagogue, he went in search of him. Jesus wanted the man to have a better understanding of him.
* Jesus then brought the man into a closer relationship to him:
  + First, he asked the man if he believed in him as the Son of Man (the Messiah).
  + Then, the man confessed his faith and worshiped Jesus.
  + Finally, Jesus explained to the people who were there that now the man, who had previously been physically blind (but also spiritually blind, because he didn’t know Jesus) had become truly “seeing”: He was no longer a sinner (compare v 41).

Comments on Think and discuss

The Jewish leaders were eager to verify the healing of the man born blind (see verses 22, 29–33; compare Isaiah 29:18; 35:5; 42:7):

* Their whole understanding of their faith was being challenged: Jesus was evidently a bad man, a sinner, because he repeatedly broke the Sabbath rules. Now this happened again with his healing on a Sabbath of a man born blind. On the other hand, the people thought that healing a blind man was a good thing. So Jesus had many followers and supporters.
* The issue was very sensitive, because the opening of the eyes of the blind was one of the clearest signs of messiahship according to Isaiah’s prophecies (see the references above).
* So if the Jewish leaders could prove that the man had not really been blind it would be easier for them to convince the people that Jesus’ claims were unfounded. He was just a sinner and a man whom the people wrongly believed to be the Messiah.

([Go to Study 8: Jesus brings Lazarus back to life](#Study8JesusBringsLazarusBackToLife))

### Answers 8: Jesus brings Lazarus back to life, John 11:1–44

Answers to Questions

1. We learn these things about Lazarus and his family at the beginning of this account (v 1–2, 5):

* Lazarus was seriously ill.
* There were at least three people in the family: Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary.
* They lived in the village of Bethany about 3 km from Jerusalem.
* Jesus and Lazarus were very close friends.

1. When Jesus received the message about Lazarus’s illness, he did not seem to be worried at all. He said that Lazarus’s illness would not end in death but that it was for the glory of God and his Son (v 4). So he did not hurry to Bethany but stayed two more days where he was (v 5).
2. The disciples were surprised when Jesus told them that he wanted to go back to Judea, because Jesus’ life had been in danger there very recently (v 8).
3. Jesus told his disciples that Lazarus had fallen asleep and that he was going to wake him up. Jesus was saying that Lazarus had died, but they misunderstood his words and thought that Lazarus was sleeping – and he was on his way to recovery. So Jesus had to tell them plainly that Lazarus was dead (v 11–14).
4. Jesus told his disciples that he was glad for their sake that he hadn’t been present at Lazarus’s death, because he wanted them to believe (v 15).
5. Thomas felt that they would all die if they returned to Judea with Jesus (v 16).
6. Lazarus been buried for four days when Jesus arrived on the scene (v 17).
7. When Martha found out that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him (v 20). As the elder sister and the hostess, she perhaps wanted to welcome Jesus to their home, and explain the situation to him.
8. Jesus told Martha that Lazarus would rise again. But she misunderstand his words and thought he was referring to the Day of Resurrection at the end of this present age (v 21–24).
9. Martha confessed her faith in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, the one about whom the prophets had spoken (v 27).
10. Martha went back home and told Mary in private that Jesus (it is interesting that she used the title “the Teacher” about him) had arrived and was waiting nearby to see her (v 28).
11. Mary accused Jesus of the present situation as she repeated Martha’s words earlier, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died” (v 32).
12. Jesus reacted strongly when he saw Mary’s grief. He was greatly disturbed in his spirit and deeply moved. He asked to be shown Lazarus’s tomb. And he began to weep and wail (v 33–36).
13. Some of the people also accused Jesus of the present situation: It would have been just as easy for Jesus to heal Lazarus from his illness as giving a blind man his sight (v 37). So they blamed Jesus for not intervening in Lazarus’s case.
14. Martha hesitated to remove the stone from the tomb opening, because Lazarus had been dead so long that his body had started to decompose (v 38–40).
15. Jesus did two things as he brought Lazarus back to life (v 41–44):
    1. First, he publicly thanked God for answering his prayers. Jesus did this publicly in order to strengthen the faith of the onlookers.
    2. Then, he commanded Lazarus in a loud voice to come out. When Lazarus came out of his tomb, Jesus told the people to remove the linen strips and let him go.

Comments on Think and discuss

1. The context of Jesus’ well-known statement, “I am the resurrection and the life ...” (v 25) is the miracle of Jesus bringing Lazarus back to life. This miracle brought glory to God and his Son Jesus (v 4) and would make people believe in Jesus (v 27, 40, 42).
2. –

(Go to Reference)

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## Reference

### Introduction

Here follows a list of the documents included in this unit of the book:

1. Map of the Roman province of Judaea in the first century after Christ ([Go to the map](#MapOfTheRomanProvinceOfJudaea)), ([Go to the questions](#QuestionsOnTheMapTheRomanProvinceOfJudae))
2. New Testament chronology ([Go to the documen](#NewTestamentChronology)t), ([Go to the questions](#QuestionsOnNewTestamentChronology))
3. Life of Jesus – four chronologies ([Go to the document](#LifeOfJesusFourChronologies)), ([Go to the questions](#QuestionsOnLifeOfJesusFourChronologies))
4. Jesus’ twelve apostles ([Go to the document](#JesusTwelveApostles)), ([Go to the questions](#QuestionsOnJesusTwelveApostles))
5. Miracles of Jesus ([Go to the document](#MiraclesOfJesus)), ([Go to the question](#QuestionsOnMiraclesOfJesus)s)
6. Parables of Jesus ([Go to the document](#ParablesOfJesus)), ([Go to the questions](#QuestionsOnParablesOfJesus))
7. Four gospels ([Go to the document](#FourGospels)), ([Go to the questions](#QuestionsOnFourGospels))
8. Matthew’s gospel ([Go to the document](#MatthewsGospel)), ([Go to the questions](#QuestionsOnMatthewsGospel))
9. Mark’s gospel ([Go to the document](#MarksGospel2)), ([Go to the questions](#QuestionsOnMarksGospel))
10. Luke’s gospel ([Go to the document](#LukesGospel)), ([Go to the questions](#LukesGospel))
11. John’s gospel ([Go to the document](#JohnsGospel)), ([Go to the questions](#JohnsGospel))
12. The Roman Empire and Palestine ([Go to the document](#TheRomanEmpireAndPalestine)), ([Go to the questions](#QuestionsOnTheRomanEmpireAndPalestine))

As a help to the students to familiarize themselves with these documents (and the map), this reference section also includes sets of questions.

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([Go to For the teacher](#ForTheTeacher))

### Map of the Roman province of Judaea in the first century after Christ

([Go to Questions on the map](#QuestionsOnTheMapTheRomanProvinceOfJudae))

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### New Testament chronology

Bible scholars do not agree on all the details of this chronology, except on those in bold print. Some scholars prefer the period AD 30–33 for Jesus’ ministry.

37–4 BC Herod the Great (Luke 1:5; Matt 2:1–19) rules Palestine under the sovereignty of the Roman Emperor.

31 BC–AD 14 Augustus (Luke 2:1) rules the Roman Empire.

6 or 5 BC J esus is born in Bethlehem during the reign of king Herod the Great (Matt 2:1).

5 BC Jesus’ family flees to Egypt to escape from king Herod’s plan to kill Jesus (Matt 2:13–15).

4 BC Jesus’ family returns to Palestine and settles in Nazareth in southern Galilee (Matt 2:19–23) after the death of king Herod the Great in 4 BC. Herod’s kingdom is divided between three of his sons: Archelaus, Herod Philip II, and Herod Antipas.

4 BC–AD 6 Archelaus (Matt 2:22), son of Herod the Great, rules Judea until AD 6, when he is removed by the Romans and replaced by a Roman governor.

4 BC–AD 34 Herod Philip II (“Philip the tetrarch” in Luke 3:1), son of Herod the Great, rules the areas north and east of Galilee.

4 BC–AD 39 Herod Antipas (“Herod the tetrarch” in Luke 3:1, 19–20; 9:7–9 and Matt 14:1–12; “king Herod” in Mark 6:14–28; Luke 23:7–15), son of Herod the Great, rules Galilee and the area east of the Jordan River.

AD 6 Archelaus (Matt 2:22), son of Herod the Great, is removed by the Romans. He is replaced by a Roman governor in charge of Judea.

AD 14–36 Tiberius (Luke 3:1) rules the Roman Empire.

AD 18–36 Caiaphas (Matt 26:3) is high priest in Jerusalem.

Around AD 26 John the Baptist begins his ministry in the Desert of Judea, around the Jordan River (Matt 3:1).

AD 28 or 29 John the Baptist is killed by king Herod (Matt 14:1–12; Mark 6:14–29; Luke 9:7–9).

AD 26–36 Pontius Pilate (Matt 27:2) is Roman governor over Judea.

AD 26–30 Jesus’ ministry, ending with his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension

AD 34 or 35 Paul’s conversion

AD 37–41 Gaius Caligula rules the Roman Empire.

AD 41–54 Claudius (Acts 11:28; 18:2) rules the Roman Empire.

AD 54–68 Nero rules the Roman Empire.

Around AD 55 Mark’s Gospel is written.

Around AD 60 Matthew’s and Luke’s Gospels are written.

Around AD 66 Peter and Paul are martyred in Rome during the reign of Nero.

Before AD 70 John’s Gospel was written (some scholars date this gospel 10–20 years later).

AD 70 The Jerusalem temple is destroyed by the Romans.

([Go to Questions on New Testament chronology](#QuestionsOnNewTestamentChronology))

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### Life of Jesus – four chronologies

Bible scholars do not agree on the details of these four chronologies. They are, however, one way of describing the life of Jesus in time order. Other Bible scholars have done so differently. Note also that some scholars prefer the period AD 30–33 for Jesus’ ministry.

1. Jesus’ childhood

7 or 6 BC The promise of John the baptist (Luke 1:5–25).

The birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:57–80)

6 or 5 BC Mary receives news about the birth of Jesus (Matt 1:18–24; Luke 1:26–38).

Jesus is born in Bethlehem in Judea (Matt 1:25; Luke 2:1–7). Shepherds from the fields near Bethlehem come to see the newborn baby (Luke 2:8–20).

Jesus is brought to the temple in Jerusalem and presented to the Lord (Luke 2:21–40).

5 or 4 BC The wise men from the east visit Jesus in Bethlehem in order to worship him as the newborn king of the Jews (Matt 2:1–12). Jesus’ family escapes to Egypt (Matt 2:13–18).

4 or 3 BC Jesus family returns to Palestine from Egypt and settles in Nazareth in southern Galilee (Matt 2:19–23).

AD 7 or 8 Jesus visits the Jerusalem temple at the age of twelve for the Feast of the Passover (Luke 2:41–50).

AD 8 and later Jesus grows into adulthood (Luke 2:51–52).

2. Jesus’ ministry

AD 26 Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River (Matt 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–23; John 1:29–39).

Jesus is tempted by Satan in the desert (Matt 4:1–11; Mark 1:12–13; Luke 4:1–13).

Jesus’ first followers at the Jordan River (John 1:35–42) and in Galilee (John 1:43–51)

Jesus’ first miracle (turning water into wine) at Cana in Galilee (John 2:1–11)

AD 27 Jesus cleanses the Jerusalem temple for the first time at the Feast of the Passover (John 2:13–22)

Jesus meets Nicodemus in Jerusalem (John 3:1–21).

Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at Sychar in Samaria (John 4:5–22).

Jesus heals the son of a royal officer at Cana in Galilee (John 4:46–54).

The people of Nazareth, Jesus’ hometown, try to kill Jesus (Luke 4:16–31).

Four fishermen (the brothers Simon Peter and Andrew, and James and John, the sons of Zebedee) become Jesus’ disciples at Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee (Matt 4:18–22; Mark 1:16–20; Luke 5:1–11).

Jesus heals Peter’s mother-in-law in Capernaum (Matt 8:14–17; Mark 1:29–34; Luke 4:38–39).

Jesus begins his first preaching tour through Galilee (Matt 4:23–25; Mark 1:35–39; Luke 4:42–44).

Matthew the tax collector becomes Jesus’ disciple (Matt 9:9–13; Mark 2:13–17; Luke 5:27–32).

AD 28 Jesus appoints the twelve disciples (Matt 10:1–4; Mark 3:13–19; Luke 6:12–15).

Jesus teaches the “Sermon on the Mount” (Matt 5:1–7:29; Luke 6:20–49).

A sinful woman anoints Jesus in Capernaum (Luke 7:35–50).

Jesus travels again through Galilee (Luke 8:1–3).

Jesus teaches about the Kingdom of God with parables (Matt 13:1–52; Mark 4:35–41; Luke 8:22–25).

Jesus calms the storm on the Sea of Galilee (Matt 8:23–27; Mark 4:35–41; Luke 8:22–25).

Jesus brings back to life the daughter of Jairus, a ruler of the Capernaum synagogue (Matt 9:18–26; Mark 5:21–43; Luke 8:40–56).

Jesus sends out his twelve disciples with authority to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick (Matt 9:35–11:1; Mark 6:6–13; Luke 9:1–9).

AD 28 or 29 John the Baptist is killed by king Herod (Matt 14:1–12; Mark 6:14–29; Luke 9:7–9).

AD 29 Jesus feeds five thousand people near Bethsaida in Galilee (Matt 14:13–21; Mark 6:30–44; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1–14).

Jesus walks on water (Matt 14:22–33; Mark 6:45–52; John 6:16–21).

Jesus withdraws to Tyre and Sidon (Matt 15:21–28; Mark 7:24–30).

Jesus feeds four thousand people (Matt 15:32–39; Mark 8:1–9).

Peter says that Jesus is the Son of God (Matt 16:13–20; Mark 8:27–30; Luke 9:18–21).

Jesus tells his disciples at Caesarea Philippi that he is going to die soon (Matt 16:21–26; Mark 8:31–37; Luke 9:22–25).

Jesus is transfigured (Matt 17:1–13; Mark 9:2–13; Luke 9:28–36).

Jesus pays his temple taxes at Capernaum (Matt 17:24–27)

Jesus attends the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem (John 7:11–52) in October AD 29.

Jesus heals a man who was born blind in Jerusalem (John 9:1–41).

Jesus visits Mary and Martha at Bethany near Jerusalem (Luke 10:38–42).

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead at Bethany (John 11:1–44).

AD 30 Jesus starts his final journey to Jerusalem (Luke 17:11).

Jesus blesses small children on the other side of the Jordan River (Matt 19:13–15; Mark 10:13–16; Luke 18:15–17).

Jesus talks to a rich young man on the other side of the Jordan River (Matt 19:16–30; Mark 10:17–31; Luke 18:18–30).

Near the Jordan River, Jesus again tells his disciples about his death and resurrection (Matt 20:17–19; Mark 10:32–34; Luke 18:31–34).

Jesus heals blind Bartimaeus near Jericho (Mark 10:46–52; Luke 18:35–43).

Jesus and the chief tax collector Zacchaeus in Jericho (Luke 19:1–10).

Jesus returns to Jerusalem and stays with his friends in Bethany (John 11:55–12:1).

Jesus’ death and resurrection in Jerusalem during the Feast of the Passover in AD 30 (see below)

Jesus shows himself during 40 days after his resurrection (see Resurrection appearances below).

Jesus gives his disciples the Great Commission at a mountain in Galilee (Matt 28:16–20)

Jesus’ ascension at Bethany on the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem (Mark 16:19; Luke 24:44–53).

3. The Passion week

Sunday Jesus enters into Jerusalem in triumph (Matt 21:1–11; Mark 11:1–10; Luke 19:29–44; John 12:12–19).

Some Greeks seek Jesus (John12:20–36).

Monday Jesus curses the fig tree (Matt 21:18–19; Mark 11:12–14).

Jesus cleanses the temple for the second time (Matt 21:12–13; Mark 11:15–18).

Tuesday The withered fig tree (Matt 21:20–22; Mark 11:20–21).

The authority of Jesus is questioned (Matt 21:23–27; Mark 11:27–33; Luke 20:1–8).

Jesus teaches in the temple (Matt 21:28–23:39; Mark 12:1–44; Luke 20:9–21:4).

Jesus teaches on the Mount of Olives (Matt 24:1–25:46; Mark 13:1–37; Luke 21:5–36).

Jesus is anointed in Bethany (Matt 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9; John 12:2–11).

Wednesday The plot against Jesus (Matt 26:14–16; Mark 14:10–11; Luke 22:3–6).

Thursday Preparations for the Passover meal (Matt 26.17–19; Mark 14:12–16; Luke 22:7–13)

The Last Supper (Matt 26:17–29; Mark 14:12–25; Luke 22:7–20; John 13:1–38).

Jesus comforts his disciples (John 14:1–16:33).

Thursday night Jesus prays in Gethsemane and is arrested (Matt 26:36–56; Mark 14:32–52; Luke 22:40–65; John 18:1–12).

Friday Jesus’ trial (Matt 26:57–27:26; Mark 14:53–15:15; Luke 22:66–23:25; John 18:13–19:16)

Jesus’ crucifixion and death (Matt 27:27–56; Mark 15:16–41; Luke 23:26–49; John 19:17–30)

Jesus is buried (Matt 27:57–66; Mark 15:42–47; Luke 23:50–56; John 19:31–42).

4. Resurrection appearances

Sunday morning The empty tomb (Matt 28:1–10; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1–12; John 20:1–10)

Mary Magdalene meets Jesus in the garden (John 20:11–18; Mark 16:9–11).

Sunday evening Jesus appears to two diciples on their walk to Emmaus not far from Jerusalem (Luke 24:13–35; Mark 16:12–13).

Jesus appears to a group of disciples in Jerusalem (Luke 24:36–43; John 20:19–25; Mark 16:14).

One week later Jesus appears to the eleven disciples in Jerusalem (John 20:26–29).

Later Jesus appears to some of his disciples by the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1–24).

Later Jesus gives his disciples the Great Commission at a mountain in Galilee (Matt 28:16–20)

Later Ten days before the Feast of Pentecost, Jesus ascends to his Father in Heaven. This happens at Bethany on the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem (Luke 24:44–53; Mark 16:19).

([Go to Questions on Life of Jesus – four chronologies](#QuestionsOnLifeOfJesusFourChronologies))

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### Jesus’ twelve apostles

Lists of the twelve apostles are found in three of the gospels (Matthew 10:2–34, Mark 3:16–19, Luke 6:14–16) and in Acts (1:13). John’s gospel has no such list. In the table below, the names are numbered in accordance with Matthew's list.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Matt 10:2–4 | Mark 3:16–19 | Luke 6:14–16 | John | Acts 1:13 |
| 1. Simon, called Peter (Bar Jonah, 16:17) | 1. Simon (whom Jesus gave the name Peter) | 1. Simon (whom Jesus also called Peter) | Simon, the son of Jonah (also called Peter/Cephas Peter, 1:40–42) | 1. Peter |
| 2. Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother | 4. Andrew | 2. Andrew Simon Peter’s brother | Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother (1:40) | 4. Andrew |
| 3. James, the son of Zebedee | 2. James the son of Zebedee | 3. James | unnamed son of Zebedee (21:2) | 3. James |
| 4. John, James’ brother | 3. John the brother of James | 4. John | unnamed son of Zebedee (21:2) | 2. John |
| 5. Philip | 5. Philip | 5. Philip | Philip of Bethsaida (1:43–44) | 5. Philip |
| 6. Bartholomew | 6. Bartholomew | 6. Bartholomew | Nathanael of Cana (1:45–49; 21:2) [he is probably Bartholomew] | 7. Bartholomew |
| 7. Thomas | 8. Thomas | 8. Thomas | Thomas called the Twin/Didymus (11:16) | 6. Thomas |
| 8. Matthew, the tax collector | 7. Matthew (Levi, son of Alphaeus, a tax collector, 2:14) | 7. Matthew (Levi, tax collector, 5:27) |  | 8. Matthew |
| 9. James, the son of Alphaeus | 9. James the son of Alphaeus | 9. James the son of Alphaeus |  | 9. James the son of Alphaeus |
| 10. Thaddeus | 10. Thaddeus | 11. Judas the son of James | Judas (not Iscariot) (14:22) | 11. Judas the son of James |
| 11. Simon, the Cananaean (the Zealot) | 11. Simon the Zealot | 10. Simon the Zealot |  | 10. Simon the Zealot |
| 12. Judas Iscariot | 12. Judas Iscariot | 12. Judas Iscariot | Judas the son of Simon Iscariot (6:71) | 12. Matthias replaced Judas Iscariot (1:26) |

([Go to Questions on Jesus’ twelve apostles](#QuestionsOnJesusTwelveApostles))

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### Miracles of Jesus

Bible scholars do not agree on all the details of these lists.

1. Miracles of power over nature

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Miracle | Matthew | Mark | Luke | John |
| Calming the storm | 8:23–27 | 4:37–41 | 8:22–25 |  |
| Walking on water | 14:25 | 6:48–51 |  | 6:19–21 |
| Feeding of the five thousand | 14:15–21 | 6:35–44 | 9:12–17 | 6:6–13 |
| Feeding of the four thousand | 15:32–38 | 8:1–9 |  |  |
| Coin in fish | 17:24–27 |  |  |  |
| Fig tree withered | 21:18–22 | 11:12–14, 20–25 |  |  |
| Large catch of fish |  |  | 5:4–11 |  |
| Water turned into wine |  |  |  | 2:1–11 |
| Another large catch of fish |  |  |  | 21:1–11 |

2. Miracles of raising the dead

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Miracle | Matthew | Mark | Luke | John |
| Jairus’s daughter | 9:18–25 | 5:22–42 | 8:41–56 |  |
| Widow’s son at Nain |  |  | 7:11–15 |  |
| Lazarus |  |  |  | 11:1–44 |

3. Miracles of healing

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Miracle | Matthew | Mark | Luke | John |
| Leper | 8:1–4 | 1:40–45 | 5:12–14 |  |
| Centurion’s servant | 8:5–13 |  | 7:1–10 |  |
| Peter’s mother-in-law | 8:14–15 | 1:29–31 | 4:38–39 |  |
| Many people | 8:16–17 | 1:40–45 | 4:40–41 |  |
| Two men from Gadara | 8:28–33 | 5:1–20 | 8:26–39 |  |
| Paralyzed man | 9:2–7 | 2:3–12 | 5:18–25 |  |
| Woman with bleeding | 9:20–22 | 5:25–34 | 8:42–48 |  |
| Two blind men | 9:27–31 |  |  |  |
| Mute, demon-possessed man | 9:32–34 |  |  |  |
| Many people in Galilee | 9:35 |  |  |  |
| Man with a withered hand | 12:10–13 | 3:1–5 | 6:6–10 |  |
| Blind, mute, demon-possessed man | 12:22-23 |  | 11:14 |  |
| Many people in Gennesaret | 14:34–36 | 6:53–56 |  |  |
| Canaanite woman’s daughter | 15:21–28 | 7:24–30 |  |  |
| Boy with a demon | 17:14–20 | 9:14–29 | 9:37–43 |  |
| Two blind men (including Bartimaeus) | 20:29–34 | 10:46–52 | 18:35–43 |  |
| Deaf mute man in Decapolis |  | 7:31–37 |  |  |
| Possessed man in synagogue |  | 1:21–27 | 4:31–36 |  |
| Blind man at Bethsaida |  | 8:22–26 |  |  |
| Crippled woman |  |  | 13:10–17 |  |
| Man with dropsy |  |  | 14:1–6 |  |
| Ten lepers |  |  | 17:11–19 |  |
| The high priest’s servant |  |  | 22:50–51 |  |
| Official’s son at Capernaum |  |  |  | 4:43–54 |
| Man at pool of Bethesda |  |  |  | 5:1–15 |
| Man born blind |  |  |  | 9:1–12 |

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### Parables of Jesus

The Greek word parabole is used for various literary forms. So not all Bible scholars would classify every item below as true parables. John’s gospel does not contain any parables in the traditional sense. But it has other kinds of figurative speech called paroimia in Greek, for example “The parable of the sheepfold” (John 10:1–6).

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Parable | Matthew | Mark | Luke |
| Lamp under a basket | 5:14–15 | 4:21–22 | 8:16; 11:33 |
| Wise and foolish builders | 7:24–27 |  | 6:47–49 |
| Unshrunk cloth on old garment | 9:16 | 2:21 | 5:36 |
| New wine in old wineskin | 9:17 | 2:22 | 5:37–38 |
| The sower | 13:1–9, 18–23 | 4:1–9, 13–20 | 8:4–8, 11–15 |
| The weeds | 13:24–30, 36–43 |  |  |
| The mustard seed | 13:31–32 | 4:30–32 | 13:18–19 |
| The yeast | 13:33 |  | 13:20–21 |
| The hidden treasure | 13:44 |  |  |
| The valuable pearl | 13:45–46 |  |  |
| The net | 13:47–50 |  |  |
| Owner of a house | 13:52 |  |  |
| The lost sheep | 18:10–14 |  | 15:3–7 |
| The wicked servant | 18:23–35 |  |  |
| The vineyard labourers | 20:1–16 |  |  |
| The two sons | 21:28–32 |  |  |
| The tenants | 21:33–44 | 12:1–11 | 20:9–18 |
| The marriage feast | 22:1–14 |  |  |
| The fig tree | 24:32–35 | 13:28–29 | 21:29–31 |
| The faithful and wise servant | 24:45–51 |  | 12:42–48 |
| The ten virgins | 25:1–13 |  |  |
| The talents (minas) | 25:14–30 |  | 19:11–27 |
| The sheep and the goats | 25:31–46 |  |  |
| The growing seed |  | 4:26–29 |  |
| The watchful servants |  | 13:35–37 | 12:35–40 |
| The moneylender |  |  | 7:41–43 |
| The good Samaritan |  |  | 10:29–37 |
| Friend in need |  |  | 11:5–8 |
| The rich fool |  |  | 12:16–21 |
| The fruitless fig tree |  |  | 13:6–9 |
| The seat at the wedding |  |  | 14:7–14 |
| The great dinner |  |  | 14:16–24 |
| The cost of discipleship |  |  | 14:28–33 |
| The lost coin |  |  | 15:8–10 |
| The lost son |  |  | 15:11–32 |
| The dishonest manager |  |  | 16:1–9 |
| The rich man and Lazarus |  |  | 16:19–31 |
| Master and his servant |  |  | 17:7–10 |
| The widow and the judge |  |  | 18:1–8 |
| The Pharisee and the tax collector |  |  | 18:9–14 |

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### Four gospels

This and the following three chapters are partly based on A. Sjoberg’s guide to the gospels.

Gospel

The Greek word for gospel means “victory message” or “message with good news.” It was a general word in New Testament times and not connected with a certain type of book or literature.

The Greek terms (the noun and its verbal form) are used more than 130 times, mostly by Paul, in the New Testament. It is never used about a type of literature, but always about the Christian message and its proclamation. Paul defines it as “the gospel of God” (Rom 1;1), “the gospel of his Son” (Rom 1:9), and “the gospel of Christ” (Rom 15:19). He sees himself as a minister of this gospel (Rom 15:16) and summarizes it in four brief points (1 Cor 15:3–5):

1. Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures.
2. He was buried.
3. He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.
4. He appeared to Cephas (Peter) and the twelve apostles.

This, Paul says, is the only gospel. It is not from man, but from God.

The Greek term is used a few times in Matthew (defined as “the gospel of the kingdom” in 24:14) and Mark, who begins his gospel with the statement, “The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Mark uses it both about “the message about Jesus” and “the message that Jesus preached” (which is the good news that the Kingdom of God is near, Mark 1:15). Luke uses only the verbal form, “preaching the gospel.” John does not have it at all; instead he has “testimony” and “testify.”

Only later do we find the word “gospel” used about a certain kind of written text: One of the church fathers writes that the apostles’ written memoirs of Jesus’ life are called “gospels.”

So we can see how the meaning of the Greek word for “gospel” developed during the early history of the church:

1. First, it referred to Jesus’ own teachings on the Kingdom of God.
2. Then, it was used about the contents of the message of the early church. This message was not only a repetition of Jesus’ teachings on the Kingdom of God. It also included the good news about Jesus, his death and resurrection (see for example Rom 1:1–4).
3. Later, we find a combination of the previous two points: Jesus’ teachings on the Kingdom of God and his life and ministry in the light of his death and resurrection (compare Peter’s sermon in Acts 10:34–43).
4. Finally, it was also used about the texts that, in written form, contained the earlier oral teaching of the early church.

It is important to notice the close link between the early teaching of the church and the four gospel books found in our New Testament. The gospels were not written to impart knowledge and information to prospective readers. No, they were written to change the lives of the readers. The authors wanted the message about the fulfillment of God’s Old Testament promises through the life and ministry of Jesus, with focus on his death and resurrection, to become “good news” to all those who believed in him and received him as their personal Savior. This is God’s purpose with the four gospels even today.

The formation of the gospels

Now we will briefly look at the process that led to our four gospels. This process took place in four steps:

1. Oral tradition: The ancient Jewish culture was basically oral. Scrolls, much too expensive for common man, were mainly kept in the synagogues. So Jesus’ disciples would not have been able to write down Jesus’ exact words or the details of each of his miracles. Instead, they relied on their memories, reinforced by constant repetition. They had practiced this kind of memorizing in their youth, as they studied the Old Testament texts in the synagogue school. In addition, Jesus’ method of teaching, for example by using parables and proverbial types of statements in the traditional style of Jewish teachers, also made memorization easier. It is easy for a modern reader to see that the gospels contain a large number of smaller units (sayings, parables, miracles, episodes, situations), units that were preserved orally. We can also easily see that the gospel writers used these smaller units to shape the overall structure of their texts.

2. Written sources: Luke begins his gospel with a description of how he went about writing his books (1:1–4). First, important historical events had taken place with the ministry of Jesus (and the early church). Second, eyewitnesses had retained and passed on what they had seen and heard about these events; this is the oral tradition. Third, other people had then written down these accounts of the oral tradition. Finally, Luke has used this oral and written material to write his books (Luke’s gospel and Acts). So Luke testifies of his use of older written sources. But we know very little about these original written sources today. Only the four gospel books have survived. So we have to draw our conclusions from comparing their accounts. More about this in the section “Three synoptic gospels – and John” below.

3. Editors at work: The importance of the work of an editor becomes evident to us when we compare how two newspapers describe the same event, for example the election campaign of a politician. The historical fact is the same. But the way in which this fact is reported varies with the interest that the newspaper has in this fact. A local paper will have a long report, but a national paper will have a brief report. A paper that sympathizes with the politician will report more positively than a paper that is more neutral. Similarly, the gospel writers have purposely edited their material, depending on their overall purpose with their gospel and their intended readers. This is one important reason why there are differences between the gospel accounts of the same event in Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. A careful study of these differences will help a modern reader better to understand each gospel: its overall aim, its major themes, the type of readers the gospel writer had in mind, and so on. A comparison of similarities and differences is also one way for Bible scholars to see the relationship between the gospels, for example most scholars think that Mark’s gospel was one of Luke’s written sources and consequently Mark’s gospel is older than Luke’s gospel.

4. The finished literary text: We have already seen that the gospel writers were historians, theologians, and preachers. But they were also skillful authors. Consequently, each gospel is a finished literary composition. They all have the same main storyline: the development of the conflict between the Jewish leaders and Jesus which leads to Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross. But the four gospel writers have presented this main storyline in their personal way. This can, for example, be seen in how they describe the main characters and in the order by which they present the separate events. It can also be seen in the material (sayings, parables, events, and so on) which they have included or excluded. Some examples of this will be given in the presentation of each gospel.

Many modern readers fail to see this bigger literary picture of the gospels. One reason is that we rarely read a gospel book in the way its author intended it to be read: the whole book in one sitting. Instead we read a story here and a parable there – and consequently we miss both the context of our passage and the bigger picture of the book.

Some Bible commentators have, mistakenly, tried to create an even bigger picture of the life and ministry of Jesus by combining all the four gospels into one “harmony of the gospels.” But by doing so, more is lost than gained. Separately, the four gospels will give the best picture of Jesus: four sharp pictures that will help us understand him better. To force these four sharp pictures into one will result in a blur rather than in increased clarity.

Three synoptic gospels – and John

Even an inexperienced and casual reader can see that the four gospels in our New Testament can be divided into two groups:

* Three of them are similar: Matthew, Mark, and Luke.
* One of them is different: John.

The first three gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) present their material (both structure and contents) in a similar way. They look on Jesus’ life and ministry from a similar perspective. That is why they are called “the synoptics," which means “seeing together” or “having the same perspective.” They are so similar that there must be some kind of historical link between them: Either they have a common source (or common sources) or they depend on each other in some way (one gospel writer has made use of another gospel). So when Bible scholars work with “the synoptic problem," they try to solve the historical relationship between these three gospels.

John’s gospel, on the other hand, is structured quite differently, even if it shows some dependency on Mark’s gospel.

“The synoptic problem” is very complicated and Bible scholars have suggested several theories and variations of theories of how to understand the historical link between the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Most probably, however, Mark was the first gospel to be written. Both Matthew and Luke then made use of Mark as they wrote their gospels. A valid reason behind this view is that Matthew and Luke are more elaborate and “refined” (their language, their content, and their theology) than Mark. Matthew and Luke have some material in common, and it is possible that Luke also used Matthew’s gospel (or an earlier version of it) as one of his written sources.

Internal and external evidence shows that Luke must have written his gospel around AD 62. So Mark’s gospel must have been written in the 50’s, and probably also Matthew’s gospel. John’s gospel was probably written later.

The gospels and the biblical canon

We have only limited information about why only the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – and no other ancient book about Jesus’ life (for example The gospel of Peter) – were included in the Bible. But some conclusions about the canonization process can be drawn from the texts of Christian writers from the first two centuries.

The gospel books were originally written to meet local needs for evangelization and teaching. But soon they were circulated also in a wider church context. At that time, oral material from Jesus’ ministry was still in use in the churches (compare for example 1 Cor 7:10–11; 9:14; 11:23–26; 14:37). So the need arose to evaluate written texts in the light of the oral tradition (which was considered to be superior). Which of the several written accounts that were circulating in the churches where genuine and authoritative – and which were not? This issue became even more important with the growing influence of Gnostic heresies (resulting for example in The gospel of Thomas and The gospel of truth) in many churches.

Christian writers of the early second century used almost exclusively quotations from the four canonical gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). Around AD 170, the first “harmony of the gospels” was written. It only included these same four gospels, a fact that shows that no other “gospel” was considered authentic. At about the same time, these four gospels were compiled into one “volume” to be used together in the life of the Christian church.

So four gospels, about Jesus’ life were confirmed by the early church as authentic testimonies to Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. In spite of their differences they were accepted and used as God’s inspired word, all four of them.

It is true that these four books do not contain all the information that an inquisitive reader would like to have about Jesus. But their fourfold testimony contains all that any individual would need to understand Jesus’ good news about the Kingdom of God and his work of salvation on the cross for all of us who believe in him and accept him as our personal Savior.

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### Matthew’s gospel

Author

Matthew’s gospel is anonymous, as it does not state the name or the identity of its author. But the earliest traditions of the church attributes this gospel to Matthew, the former tax collector who followed Jesus and became one of this twelve disciples (Matt 9:9–10; 10:13).

Date and place of writing

Matthew’s gospel was probably written in the 50’s, after Mark but before Luke. Some scholars think that it was written in Palestine, others say Antioch in Syria.

Recipients

This gospel (just like the other gospels) was written in Greek, so Matthew’s readers must have been Greek-speaking. But they also seem to have been Jews, which these points show:

* Matthew is concerned with the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and includes many Old Testament quotations in his text, more than any other New Testament book.
* Matthew points out that Jesus is a descendant of Abraham.
* Matthew does not explain Jewish practices, and he prefers expressions that would not offend the Jews (for example “the Kingdom of Heaven” instead of “the Kingdom of God”).
* Matthew emphasizes Jesus’ role as the “Son of David.”

But his gospel also has a universal outlook (he has for example included the accounts of the astrologers from the East, and the Great Commission shows his concern for “all nations”).

Purpose and theology

Matthew’s main purpose is to show his Jewish readers that Jesus is their Messiah, in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies.

God’s presence is perhaps Matthew’s most important theological theme. God is with his people in the person of Jesus (who is Immanuel, “God with us”). God is even more present in Jesus than in the Jerusalem temple: “One greater than the temple is here” (12:6). Consequently, it is proper for people to worship Jesus. The astrologers from the East realized this (2:2, 8, 11), but also Jesus’ disciples who were devout Jews who would worship nobody but God (14:33; 28:9).

Structure

Enclosure: We should first note how Matthew binds together his book within three concepts that express important aspects of his theology. Each of these concepts are found in both the beginning and the end of his gospel. This common literary device is called “enclosure”:

* Immanuel/God with us (1:23) and “I am with you always” (28:20)
* “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?” (2:2) and “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews” (27:37)
* The Son of God (2:15 and 26:63–64)

Narrative structure: Matthew has followed Mark in making the events around Caesarea Philippi with Peter’s confession of Christ (16:13–20) a main turning point in his narrative: “From that time on” (16:21). The same phrase is found at a previous turning point (4:17). Based on this phrase, we can identify three parts in the narrative flow of Matthew’s account:

1. Jesus is introduced with narratives that take place in Bethlehem, Egypt, and Nazareth (1:1–4:16).
2. Jesus’ public ministry contains narratives that take place in Capernaum and Galilee (4:17–16:20).
3. Jesus’ suffering and death takes the reader from Galilee to Judea and Jerusalem (16:21–28:20).

Theological structure: Matthew has also structured his gospel around five speeches by Jesus. They can be understood as a manual on discipleship:

1. The Sermon on the Mount (ch 5–7)
2. The commissioning of the twelve apostles (ch 10)
3. Parables of the Kingdom of God (ch 13)
4. Life in the Kingdom of God (ch 18)
5. The end of the age (ch 24–25)

These five speeches also give the theological structure of the book:

* The present:
  + The commissioning of the church (ch 5–7)
  + The Kingdom of God on this earth (ch 10)
  + The discipleship life of the church (ch 18)
* The future (ch 24–25)

Through his five speeches Jesus becomes a new Moses (note that both Moses and Jesus were called “out of Egypt," Exodus 3:10–12; Matt 2:15). Jesus is a teacher like Moses, who gave the Israelites the five books of the law.

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### Mark’s gospel

Author

Mark’s gospel is anonymous, as it does not state the name or the identity of its author. But the earliest traditions of the church claim that it was written by John Mark, Peter’s co-worker in Rome (Peter even calls him “my son Mark” in 1 Pet 5:13), and that Mark’s gospel expresses Peter’s teachings on Jesus. John Mark is mentioned several times in the New Testament. His mother had a house in Jerusalem, where believers of the first church gathered for meetings (Acts 12:12). He accompanied his cousin Barnabas and Paul on the first missionary journey (Acts 12:25). He was the reason behind Barnabas and Paul parting ways; Mark went with Barnabas (Acts 15:37–39), while Paul chose Silas as his companion on the second missionary journey. Mark later again became a close associate of Paul’s (Col 4:10; Philemon 24; 2 Tim 4:11). Modern scholarship widely accepts that this Mark was the author of the gospel and that the apostle Peter was his source of information. The additional fact that Mark’s gospel reflects Paul’s theology also speaks in favor of Mark’s authorship. Mark, one of Paul’s co-workers, must have been very familiar with Paul’s teaching.

Date and place of writing

Mark’s gospel seems to be the earliest of the gospels and was probably written in the 50’s. Most scholars think that it was written in Rome.

Recipients

This gospel (just like the other gospels) was written in Greek, so Matthew’s readers must have been able to understand Greek. Mark evidently had Gentile readers in mind, because he explained Jewish customs (see 7:2–4; 15:42) and translated Aramaic words (see 3:17; 5:41; 7:11, 34; 15:22).

Purpose and theology

Mark has revealed his overall purpose through a literary device called enclosure. He does so by using the same Greek verb (“tear apart/tear in two”) and the same title for Jesus (“Son of God”) in his account of Jesus’ baptism (the heavens were torn apart and God said, “You are my Son," 1:9–11) at the beginning of his gospel and his account of Jesus’ death (the curtain of the temple, which according to Jewish theology separated heaven from earth, was torn in two and the Roman centurion said, “Truly this man was the Son of God," 15:37–39) at the end of his gospel. So Mark’s main message for his readers is that Jesus came to this earth to open the way to God by dying on the cross – and already the events surrounding his baptism testified to this truth.

Here are four theological themes that characterize Mark’s gospel:

1. The Kingdom of God is where God’s will is done. God’s will has become visible in a new way through Jesus and his ministry (1:15). The Kingdom of God is still a secret to people in general but has been revealed to Jesus’ followers (4:11). The Kingdom of God came in a small way (4:30–32) but it grows and will soon break forth with great power (9:1).
2. The Messianic secret (see 1:24-25, 34, 44; 3:12; 5:43; 7:36; 8:30; 9:9) points to the centrality of what happened at Jesus’ death on the cross. Only with his death, his identity – and the full meaning of his titles “the Messiah," “the Son of Man," and “the Son of God – was revealed. The cross is where the saving power of the Kingdom of God is disclosed. There Jesus gave “his life as a ransom for many” (10:45).
3. Discipleship: In the first half of Mark’s gospel there are three passages that show the key role that Jesus’ twelve disciples play in this book: 1. The calling of the first disciples (1:16–20), 2. The appointing of the twelve apostles (3:31–35), 3. The sending out of the twelve (6:7–13). We also find a larger group of disciples (see 2:15; 3:31–35; 5:18–20). In the second half of the gospel, Jesus’ twelve disciples are with him constantly until his arrest and Peter’s denial. In addition, the gospel originally seems to have ended with Jesus making an appointment with his disciples in Galilee (16:7). The picture of the disciples that Mark gives his readers is mixed: On the one hand it is negative (they don’t understand him, 4:13, 33–34; 7:17–18; 8:32–33; 9:9–13, 3210:10; nor some of his miracles, 4:35–41; 6:45–52; 8:14–21). On the other hand it is positive (they are eager to follow him, 1:16–20; 2:14; they are clearly chosen by him, 3:13–19; they are part of his family, 3:31–35; they are commissioned by him to preach, 6:7–13; they acknowledge him, 8:39; there is hope for them in spite of their failures, 16:7). This mixed picture reveals that Mark had a pastoral purpose with his gospel. He wanted to strengthen and encourage his initial readers, who just like Jesus’ disciples faced all kinds of difficulties.
4. Suffering: As we have seen earlier, Jesus’ way to his suffering and death on the cross is a central theme in Mark’s gospel. But Jesus also told his disciples that they would have to share the suffering of their master (see for example 10:39; 13:9–23). Consequently, a follower of Jesus must be prepared to lose his life in order to save it (8:34–38). So perhaps Mark wrote his gospel at a time when Christians were experiencing some kind of persecution.

Structure

Enclosure: See the previous section.

Sermon structure: Bible scholars have pointed out that Mark’s gospel follows the same basic fivefold structure as Peter’s sermon to the Gentiles gathered in Cornelius’s house in Acts 10:34–41, like this:

1. God chose and commissioned Jesus: Mark 1:1–13 and Acts 10:38a
2. Jesus’ powerful ministry in Galilee: Mark 1:14–9:50 and Acts 10:38b
3. Jesus ministry in Judea and Jerusalem: Mark 10:1–13:37 and Acts 10:39a
4. Jesus’ suffering and death: Mark 14:1–15:47 and Acts 10:39b
5. God raised Jesus, and he appeared to selected witnesses: Mark 16:1–8 (9–20) and Acts 10:40–41

Within this overall sermon-like structure, Mark has included a variety of material, usually in short, fast-moving units. It is clear that he intended his gospel to be read aloud, probably in a church context.

Narrative structure: Mark’s gospel consists of two main parts, before and after Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Christ at Caesarea Philippi (8:27–30). The first part (chapters 1–8), is filled with stories about Jesus’ mighty acts. These stories all take place in Galilee and its vicinity. Large crowds of people follow him. We also see how Jesus calls a group of people to be with him and to follow him. In the second part (chapters 9–16), the attention of the readers is turned toward the suffering and the death of Jesus on the cross.

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### Luke’s gospel

Author

The gospel of Luke and the book of Acts were written by the same person. They are both addressed to Theophilus. In addition, Acts begins with a reference to the author’s “first book” (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). He never mentions his name, but he must have been Luke, a Gentile doctor and a travel companion and close associate of Paul’s (Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11). Luke was not himself an eyewitness to the Jesus events, but he made use of a variety of oral and written sources (1:1–4) as he – very skillfully – composed his gospel. His command of the Greek language is outstanding, and his vocabulary is rich and varied.

Some Bible scholars think that Luke came from Antioch in Syria, others conclude that his home town was Philippi in Macedonia.

Date and place of writing

The book of Acts ends abruptly with Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome (AD 60–62). So it is very likely that both the gospel and the book of Acts were written not later than AD 62.

Recipients

Nothing is known about Theophilus, the person Luke addressed his books to. He could have been a key person is connection with Paul’s trial before the Roman emperor. Or, he could have been a God-fearing Gentile who wanted to know more about Jesus and the Christian faith.

But Luke must also have had a wider group of readers in mind as he wrote his two books, probably the many God-fearing Gentiles, who regularly attended the Jewish synagogue services throughout the Roman Empire.

Purpose and themes

Evangelization and the expansion of the gospel is a main theme in Luke’s two books. This expansion takes place in the context of the tension between Jews and Gentiles. Jesus opened a door to direct fellowship with God not only for Jews but also for Gentiles. So – in fulfillment of God’s Old Testament promises – there is now no longer any need for Gentiles to convert to Judaism in order to become part of the people of God.

Here is a list of other characteristic themes found in Luke’s gospel:

* God’s sovereign rule over history, seen in the fulfillment of the prophecies (see for example 22:22)
* Emphasis on prayer (1:10, 13; 2:37; 5:16; 9:18, 28–29; 11:1–2; 18:1), particularly Jesus praying before important occasions (3:21; 6:12; 22:32, 40–46)
* Special concern for the role of women (7:36–50; 8:2–3; 10:38–42; 13:10–13; 15:8–10)
* Special interest in the poor (4:18; 14:13, 21; 19:8).
* Concern for sinners (see for example chapter 15; 18:9–14; 19:1–10)
* Emphasis on the Holy Spirit (see for example 1:15, 17, 35, 41, 67; 2:25–27; 4:1, 14, 18; 10:21; 11.13; 12:12)

Structure

Narrative structure: Luke’s gospel is different from the other gospels, as it is the first part a two-volume literary work. So the structure of Luke must be seen together with the book of Acts. The focal point in Luke’s narrative is Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, which is found in the last chapter of the gospel and again in the first chapter of the book of Acts. So Luke closely tied his two books together. The geographical movement of both books is strikingly similar, even if they go in the opposite directions. Acts begins in Jerusalem and ends at the court of the emperor of Rome, the center of the ancient world (compare Acts 1:8). In the beginning of the gospel, two Roman emperors are mentioned in connection with the birth of Jesus (2:1) and the launching of his ministry (3:1). So here we find the chiastic (or X-type) narrative structure of Luke-Acts, like this:

Under Roman emperors (Augustus, Tiberius), Luke 1:5–4:13

In the area of the Gentiles (Galilee), Luke 4:14–9:40

In Judea and Samaria, Luke 9:51–19:44

In Jerusalem, Luke 19:45–24:52

In Jerusalem, Acts 1:2–8:1

In Judea and Samaria, Acts 8:1–12:1

In the area of the Gentiles (“to the ends of the earth”), Acts 13:1–28:15

Under Roman emperor (Paul appeals to Caesar), Acts 28:16–31

Enclosure: Just like Matthew and Mark, Luke makes use of the literary device called “enclosure.” In Luke’s case it is the concept of “temple worship” (compare 1:8 and 24:53) that ties his gospel together.

([Go to Questions on Luke’s gospel](#QuestionsOnLukesGospel))

([Go to Table of contents](#TableOfContents))

### John’s gospel

John’s gospel will be studied more in detail in a separate Kannada Satyaveda College course.

Author

John’s gospel, just as the other three gospels, is anonymous: It does not openly disclose the name of its author. Early church historians, however, ascribe it to John, the son of Zebedee and the brother of James (Matt 4:21), and one of Jesus twelve apostles (Mark 3:16–19). This authorship is supported by internal evidence (for example the use of the expression “the disciple whom Jesus loved” about a disciple who must have been John, 13:23, 35; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20).

Date and place of writing

Early church history – as well as most modern Bible scholars – maintain that John’s gospel was the last of the four gospels to be written, probably in Ephesus.

Purpose

John’s gospel clearly states why it was written: “These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (20:31). So the author’s purpose with his gospel was evangelistic.

Structure

John mentions that Jesus attended three Passover Feasts in Jerusalem (2:13; 6:4; 11:55). This shows that Jesus’ ministry must have covered at least three years – a conclusion that cannot be drawn from the narratives of the other gospels. Jesus also visited Jerusalem to celebrate other festivals (5:1; 7.2, 10).

([Go to Questions on John’s gospel](#QuestionsOnJohnsGospel))

([Go to Table of contents](#TableOfContents))

### The Roman Empire and Palestine

Greek and Roman culture

The dominant culture of the Roman Empire was Greek. It had its origins in the conquest around 330 BC by Alexander the Great of most of what we today call the Middle East, the vast area between Greece and Pakistan. Alexander and his successors firmly believed in the superiority of Greek language and culture. But they also assimilated elements from the cultures of the conquered nations. The result was a mixed culture that historians call “Hellenism.”

The nations that had been conquered by Alexander and that were ruled by the various Greek kingdoms that succeeded him reacted in two different ways. Most of them accepted the superiority of Greek language and culture and the inferiority of their own. For others, Hellenism constituted a threat to their traditional way of life and values, which they resisted in a variety of ways.

The Romans, who had dominated the areas around the western half of the Mediterranean Sea since more than a hundred years before Christ, adopted a “middle way” to Hellenistic influences: They used their own Latin language for legal and administrative purposes. Latin also continued as the everyday language of the Italian peninsula and was commonly used and skilfully developed by orators, poets, and historians. But the Greek cultural influences were strong. Upper-class Romans used Greek slaves as private teachers for their children, who studied the Greek poets, historians, and philosophers. And many Romans went to Greece for their higher education.

In Palestine the Jewish population – and in particular its leaders – reacted in the two ways mentioned above. Some became “Hellenists," who spoke Greek and adopted the Greek way of life – and who cooperated with and supported the foreign rulers. Others spoke Aramaic and held on to their Jewish traditions. In addition, the monotheistic religion of the Jews was not much influenced by the polytheistic and superstitious beliefs of their Greek and the Roman rulers.

The Greek language was widely understood and used in Palestine at the time of Jesus. Greek soon became the common language of the early church. This explains why all the New Testament authors wrote their books, including the four gospels, in Greek. But Aramaic was the first language of Jesus and his twelve apostles, and Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament, was the traditional language of the Jewish faith.

Roman administration and Herodian kings

The Roman government was strong and centralized. The “Roman Peace” with its law and order characterized the Mediterranean world during New Testament times.

The Romans constructed a network of excellent roads in order to bind together their vast empire. They also developed trade across the Mediterranean Sea so that goods and produce could be transported from the provinces to the ever-growing population of the city of Rome. Roads and ships made it relatively easy for people to travel – and for military units to be repositioned from one end of the empire to another. Roman colonies – cities populated with Roman, many them retired soldiers – were established throughout the empire and ensured both Roman presence and Roman control.

The Roman provinces were ruled by governors, called procurators or proconsuls, who were accountable to Rome. The “Senatorial provinces” were under the control of the Senate (the parliament) in Rome, while the “Imperial provinces” were under the direct control of the Roman emperor.

The Romans gradually crushed the political power of the Greek kingdoms in the areas around the eastern half of the Mediterranean Sea. Palestine was conquered in 63 BC by the Roman general Pompey.

Antipater, an Idumean nobleman, gradually made a political career under the Romans, and in 47 BC he became the procurator of Judea. When he was assassinated a few years later, his son Herod was able to gain the support of the Roman generals, and in 37 BC Herod became king of Judea. He ruled Palestine until his death in 4 BC. He was called Herod the Great and was famous for his many grand building projects, among them the temple in Jerusalem. He is the Herod mentioned in Matthew chapter 2. After his death, his kingdom was divided into four parts. Each part was ruled by a tetrarch (Matt 14:1; Luke 3:1).

Herod Antipas was one of the several sons that Herod the Great had through his five marriages. Antipas became the ruler of Galilee and Perea (east of the Jordan River) at the death of his father and ruled until AD 39. In the gospels he is sometimes called “Herod the tetrarch.” He is mentioned in connection with the beginning of the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus (Luke 3:1). And he was the king who had John the Baptist beheaded (Matt 14:1–12). He is sometimes called only “Herod,” and he was the king to whom Pilate sent Jesus (Luke 23:7).

The Herodian kings were not of Jewish origin. They came from Idumea, a country situated south of Judea. Herod's grandfather had converted to Judaism, so during New Testament times the family belonged to the Jewish faith, but they were never accepted by the Jewish leaders because of their non-Israelite background. The family had close links with the Roman emperors and received the power to rule from them.

During periods when the Roman emperors did not trust the Herodian kings with the rule of Judea, Samaria and Galilee, they appointed procurators (called “governors” in some translations) who ruled on behalf of the Roman emperor. Pontius Pilate was procurator of Judea AD 26–36. The procurators were responsible for maintaining law and order and were accountable directly to the emperor in Rome. Their official residence was Caesarea, which was situated on the Mediterranean Sea. As Palestine was considered a sensitive area with constant opposition from some of the Jewish religious leaders and with frequent revolts threatening the political stability, Roman military units were stationed in both Jerusalem and Caesarea.

Augustus was the first Roman emperor (31 BC – AD 14), and he ruled during the time when Jesus was born (Luke 2:1). Augustus was succeeded by his stepson and adopted son Tiberius (AD 14–37). So Tiberius was emperor at the time of the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus (Luke 3:1).

Jewish groups

As in other countries in the Greek-Roman world, there were different responses or reactions to the impact of Hellenistic culture and Roman political administration. During New Testament times there were four religious Jewish groups that illustrate this:

The Sadducees accepted the foreign influences. They were in favor of the Hellenizing movement that began with Alexander the Great. They were also the political party of the Jewish aristocratic priesthood. The high priests belonged to the this party, and they controlled the Sanhedrin (the Jewish council). But they did not have much support from people in general, mainly because they had joined hands with the foreign rulers. With the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, the Sadducean party disappeared.

The Pharisees opposed Hellenistic influences and foreign political rule. They were Jewish nationalists and they encouraged a strong national and religious awareness among the people. They only numbered a few thousand during New Testament times, but they were very popular and influential as the religious leaders of the Jews. Through them the law of Moses and the synagogue life became the cornerstones of Judaism. The Pharisees vigorously opposed all secularization of Judaism by foreign influences. They separated themselves from other people and obeyed their traditions, even in small details. In the Sanhedrin they strongly opposed the Sadducean party.

The Zealots were a Jewish patriotic party. It was started with the specific objective to actively resist the Roman occupation of Palestine. Some of the Zealots were like guerrilla warriors: they even resorted to assassination of Jews who supported the Romans.

The Essenes are not mentioned in the New Testament. They had a few thousand followers during the time of Christ. Their response to Hellenism and Roman occupation was to keep away from all outside influences. They lived a simple life of having everything in common. They practiced strict rules of conduct and were mostly unmarried. The majority of them lived together in settlements. The monastery at Qumran where the Dead Sea Scrolls were written could have belonged to the Essenes or a similar group of people. Some Bible scholars think that John the Baptist was influenced by the Essenes.

A majority of the people did not belong to any of these groups, even if they were in favor of some of their ideas.

([Go to Questions on The Roman Empire and Palestine](#QuestionsOnTheRomanEmpireAndPalestine))

([Go to Table of contents](#TableOfContents))

### Questions on the map The Roman province of Judaea

Here are some questions to help you become more familiar with the map used for this textbook. I have not provided any answers.

1. Find the following names of areas:
   1. Judea
   2. Samaria
   3. Galilee
   4. Decapolis
   5. Perea
   6. Gaulanitis
   7. Idumea
2. Find the following names of cities:
   1. Jerusalem
   2. Tiberias (Capernaum was situated between this city and Bethsaida, which is also found on the map)
   3. Bethlehem
   4. Nazareth
   5. Jericho
   6. Caesarea Philippi
   7. Caesarea
   8. Sychar
3. Find the following names of water bodies:
   1. The Sea of Galilee (the lake in Galilee; the name is not found on the map)
   2. The Jordan River
   3. The Dead Sea
   4. The Mediterranean Sea

([Go to the map](#MapOfTheRomanProvinceOfJudaea))

([Go to the introduction to Reference](#Reference))

### Questions on New Testament chronology

Here are some questions to help you become more familiar with the table on New Testament chronology. I have not provided any answers, as these can easily be found in the document itself.

1. Why are some dates marked with bold print?
2. How many years does this chronology cover?
3. When was Jesus born?
4. Who was emperor in Rome at the time of Jesus’ birth?
5. Who ruled Palestine at the time of Jesus’ birth?
6. What was the name of the Roman emperor that succeeded Augustus?
7. What happened with Palestine at the death of king Herod the Great?
8. Three sons of king Herod the Great are listed in the chronology. What are their names?
9. When did John the Baptist begin his ministry?
10. What are the years of Jesus’ ministry?
11. What was the name of the Roman governor over Judea at the time of the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus?
12. Who was king over Galilee at the time of the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus?
13. Who was high priest in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus’ death?
14. When was the Jerusalem temple destroyed?
15. How many years passed between Jesus’ death and Paul’s conversion?
16. Who became emperor in Rome after Claudius?
17. When were the four gospels probably written?

([Go to New Testament chronology](#NewTestamentChronology))

([Go to the introduction to Reference](#Reference))

### Questions on Life of Jesus – four chronologies

Here are some questions to help you become more familiar with the table on the life of Jesus. I have not provided any answers, as these can easily be found in the document itself.

1. List the four chronologies.
2. Who was older – John the Baptist or Jesus?
3. Which year did Jesus’ ministry begin?
4. Where did Jesus’ first miracle take place?
5. In which gospel can we read about Jesus’ first cleansing of the Jerusalem temple?
6. Where did Jesus meet Nicodemus?
7. What happened at Nazareth at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry?
8. What are the names of Jesus’ four fishermen disciples?
9. In which three gospels do we find accounts of Jesus appointing twelve disciples?
10. Which gospel has not included the story about Jesus walking on the water?
11. What happened at Caesarea Philippi?
12. In which gospel do we find the story about Jesus visiting Mary and Martha?
13. Which gospel has the story about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead?
14. What is the first event of the Passion week?
15. What happened on the Tuesday of the Passion week?
16. What happened on the Thursday of the Passion week?
17. List the events of the Friday of the Passion week.
18. On which two occasions did Jesus appear to disciples in the evening of his day of resurrection?
19. Where in Palestine did the Great Commission take place?
20. In which gospel do we find a more detailed account of Jesus ascension?

([Go to Life of Jesus – four chronologies](#LifeOfJesusFourChronologies))

([Go to the introduction to Reference](#Reference))

### Questions on Jesus’ twelve apostles

Here are some questions to help you become more familiar with the table on Jesus’ twelve apostles. I have not provided any answers, as these can easily be found in the document itself.

1. All five lists of the apostles contain two pairs of brothers. Who are they?
2. Bartholomew is not mentioned in John’s gospel. What name of an apostle (not mentioned in the other gospels) does he have instead?
3. Three other apostles (apart from Bartholomew) are not mentioned by John. Who are they?
4. The name of Thaddeus is found in only two of gospels. What name do we find in his place in Luke, John, and Acts?
5. There are two persons called James in the lists. How are they distinguished?
6. There are two persons called Simon in the lists. How are they distinguished?

([Go to Jesus’ twelve apostles](#JesusTwelveApostles))

([Go to the introduction to Reference](#Reference))

### Questions on Miracles of Jesus

Here are some questions to help you become more familiar with the table on the miracles of Jesus. I have not provided any answers, as these can easily be found in the document itself.

1. The miracles of Jesus are listed in three categories. What are these categories called?
2. Which of these three categories contains the largest number of miracles?
3. The gospels mention that Jesus raised a person from the dead on three occasions. In which gospels do we find accounts of these miracles?
4. Only one “miracle showing power over nature” is found in all four gospels. Which miracle is that?
5. John has two miracles showing power over nature not found in the other gospels. Which miracles are they?
6. Luke has one miracle showing power over nature not found in the other gospels. Which miracle is that?
7. Matthew has one miracle showing power over nature not found in the other gospels. Which miracle is that?
8. John has only included three healing miracles in his gospel. Which miracles are they?
9. List the eight healing miracles that have been included in all three synoptic gospels.
10. Mark has two healing miracles not included in Matthew and Luke. Which miracles are they?
11. Luke has four healing miracles not included in Matthew and Mark. Which miracles are they?

([Go to Miracles of Jesus](#MiraclesOfJesus))

([Go to the introduction to Reference](#Reference))

### Questions on Parables of Jesus

Here are some questions to help you become more familiar with the table on the parables of Jesus. I have not provided any answers, as these can easily be found in the document itself.

1. List the parables that are found in all the three synoptic gospels.
2. Mark has included one parable that we do not find in Matthew and Luke. Which parable is that?
3. The parable of the lost sheep is found in two gospels. Which?
4. There are two other parables about “the lost.” In which gospel do we find them?
5. List the parables only found in Matthew.
6. List the parables only found in Luke.
7. List the parables found in Matthew and Luke, but not in Mark.

([Go to Parables of Jesus](#ParablesOfJesus))

([Go to the introduction to Reference](#Reference))

### Questions on Four gospels

The purpose of these questions is to help you become more familiar with the reference article on the four gospels. I have not provided any answers, as these can easily be found in the article itself.

1. What was the original meaning of the Greek word for “gospel”?
2. Paul summarized his “gospel of Christ” in four points. List the four point without looking in your textbook.
3. Explain, in your own words and without looking in your textbook, how the meaning of the Greek word for “gospel” developed during the early history of the church (four points).
4. Explain the close connection between the teaching of the early church and the four gospel books that we have in our New Testament. Use you own words and don’t look in your textbook.
5. The process that led to the finished product of the four gospel books found in our New Testament can be summarized in four steps. List these steps.
6. Explain, in your own words and without looking in your textbook, the first step of the formation of the gospels, the step called “Oral traditions.”
7. Explain, in your own words and without looking in your textbook, the second step of the formation of the gospels, the step called “Written sources.”
8. Explain, in your own words and without looking in your textbook, the third step of the formation of the gospels, the step called “Editors at work.”
9. Explain, in your own words and without looking in your textbook, the fourth step of the formation of the gospels, the step called “The finished literary text.”
10. Why are the first three gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) called “the synoptics”?
11. Explain, in your own words and without looking in your textbook, “the synoptic problem” – and the most probable solution to it.
12. What is the most probable chronology of the four gospels?
13. Why did it become so important in the early church to decide which accounts of Jesus’ life and ministry were authoritative and which were not?
14. What historical evidence do we have that our four New Testament gospel books (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) were considered authentic very early?

([Go to Four gospels](#FourGospels))

([Go to the introduction to Reference](#Reference))

### Questions on Matthew’s gospel

The purpose of these questions is to help you become more familiar with the reference article on Matthew. I have not provided any answers, as these can easily be found in the article itself.

1. What does it mean that Matthew’s gospel is anonymous?
2. Who was the “Matthew” that the early church said had written Matthew’s gospel?
3. Explain, in your own words and without looking in your textbook, the reasons why the original readers of Matthew’s gospel most probably were Greek-speaking Jews.
4. Why would it be correct to claim that Matthew’s gospel also has a universal outlook?
5. What is the main purpose of Matthew’s gospel?
6. Explain, in your own words and without looking in your textbook, why it is reasonable to claim that Matthew’s most important theological theme is “God’s presence”?
7. List the three kinds of structure that can be used to describe Matthew’s gospel.
8. Explain the examples of “enclosure” that can be found in Matthew’s gospel.
9. Explain, in your own words and without looking in your textbook, the narrative structure of Matthew’s gospel.
10. Explain, in your own words and without looking in your textbook, the theological structure of Matthew’s gospel.
11. What comparison does Matthew make between Jesus and Moses?

([Go to Matthew’s gospel](#MatthewsGospel))

([Go to the introduction to Reference](#Reference))

### Questions on Mark’s gospel

The purpose of these questions is to help you become more familiar with the reference article on Mark. I have not provided any answers, as these can easily be found in the article itself.

1. Explain, in your own words and without looking in your textbook, why it is reasonable to claim that John Mark was the author of Mark’s gospel.
2. Where was perhaps Mark’s gospel written?
3. Explain why the original readers of Mark’s gospel most probably were of Gentile background.
4. What main purpose did Mark have with his gospel?
5. Explain, in your own words and without looking in your textbook, how Mark used “enclosure” to emphasize the overall purpose of his gospel.
6. List four theological themes that characterize Mark’s gospel.
7. Explain, in your own words and without looking in your textbook, the “Messianic secret” found in Mark’s gospel.
8. Explain, in your own words and without looking in your textbook, the “mixed picture” of discipleship found in Mark’s gospel.
9. What purpose did Mark have by presenting this mixed picture of discipleship?
10. Explain, in your own words and without looking in your textbook, Mark’s teaching on the suffering of believers.
11. Explain, in your own words and without looking in your textbook, the sermon structure of Mark’s gospel.
12. Explain, in your own words and without looking in your textbook, the narrative structure of Mark’s gospel.

([Go to Mark’s gospe](#MarksGospel2)l)

([Go to the introduction to Reference](#Reference))

### Questions on Luke’s gospel

The purpose of these questions is to help you become more familiar with the reference article on Luke. I have not provided any answers, as these can easily be found in the article itself.

1. Luke’s gospel is the first volume of a two-part literary work. Which is the second volume?
2. Explain, in your own words and without looking in your textbook, why we can be almost certain that Luke was the author of Luke’s gospel.
3. Explain, in your own words and without looking in your textbook, why it is possible to claim that Luke’s gospel must have been written in or before AD 62.
4. What can we conclude about the recipients of Luke’s gospel?
5. What is the main theme of Luke’s two books?
6. What is the context of this main theme?
7. List some other important themes found in Luke’s gospel.
8. Explain, in your own words and without looking in your textbook, the narrative structure of Luke-Acts.
9. How does Luke make use of the literary device called “enclosure” in his gospel?

([Go to Luke’s gospel](#LukesGospel))

([Go to the introduction to Reference](#Reference))

### Questions on John’s gospel

The purpose of these questions is to help you become more familiar with the reference article on John. I have not provided any answers, as these can easily be found in the article itself.

1. Who was most probably the author of John’s gospel?
2. How does John describe himself in John’s gospel?
3. Where was probably John’s gospel written?
4. What was John’s main purpose with his gospel?
5. How many Passover Feasts does John’s gospel mention in connection with Jesus’ visits to Jerusalem?
6. Explain, in your own words and without looking in your textbook, why the structure of John’s gospel is so important for our understanding of the length of Jesus’ ministry.

([Go to John’s gospel](#JohnsGospel))

([Go to the introduction to Reference](#Reference))

### Questions on The Roman Empire and Palestine

The purpose of these questions is to help you become more familiar with the reference article on the Roman Empire and Palestine. I have not provided any answers, as these can easily be found in the article itself.

Greek and Roman culture

1. What was the dominant culture of the Roman Empire?
2. Explain the term “Hellenism.”
3. What were the two reactions to Hellenism in the nations conquered by the Greek kingdoms?
4. Explain, in your own words and without looking in your textbook, the Roman “middle way” to Hellenistic influences.
5. How did the Jewish people react to Hellenism?
6. Explain, in your own words and without looking in your textbook, the language situation in Palestine at the time of Jesus.

Roman administration and Herodian kings

1. How can the Roman government be characterized?
2. Explain, in your own words and without looking in your textbook, what the Romans did to hold their vast empire together.
3. How were the Roman provinces ruled?
4. When – and how – did the Romans take control of Palestine?
5. What was the background of the Herodian kings?
6. Describe, in your own words and without looking in your textbook, the role played by the three Herodian rulers Antipater, Herod the Great, and Herod Antipas in the history of Palestine during the time of the gospels.
7. Why did the Romans periodically appoint procurators (“governors”) over Palestine?
8. Who were the two Roman emperors during the time of the gospels?

Jewish groups

1. List the four most important Jewish groups during New Testament times.
2. Describe how each of these four groups reacted to Hellenistic and Roman influences.
3. Which of these groups had the strongest support from people in general?
4. List the main differences between the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

([Go to The Roman Empire and Palestine](#TheRomanEmpireAndPalestine))

([Go to the introduction to Reference](#Reference))

([Go to Table of Contents](#TableOfContents))

## For the teacher

Introduction

This unit contists of four “chapters”:

1. Extremely important!
2. Are you a good teacher? ([Go go this chapter](#AreYouAGoodTeacher))
3. Plan your course! ([Go go this chapter](#PlanYourCourse))
4. How to cover a study in four steps ([Go go this chapter](#HowToCoverAStudyInFourSteps))
5. Additional suggestions and comments ([Go go this chapter](#AdditionalSuggestionsAndComments))

### 1. Extremely important!

Five student goals

1. The students should develop their reading and understanding skills.
2. The students should constantly be encouraged to think about what they have read and to draw conclusions from what they have understood.
3. The students should get to know the gospels (particularly the gospel of Mark) well.
4. The students should be challenged to apply what they have studied to their own South Indian contemporary situation.
5. The students should be encouraged to use texts from the gospels for devotions, Bible studies and sermons.

A few general suggestions for the teacher

1. Lecture and “teach” as little as possible.
2. Base your teaching on the dynamics of group work. This textbook has been designed to help you do so.
3. Make sure that all the students are active in class. Encourage those who are silent, shy, or weak.
4. Never ridicule a student. Always encourage.
5. Encourage questions, and don’t be embarrassed if you cannot answer all of them. No Bible teacher has all the answers.
6. Don’t let students sidetrack you and your class by silly or irrelevant questions. Class time is precious and should not be wasted.

### 2. Are you a good teacher?

Personal qualities

To be a good teacher you need some personal qualities, such as:

1. “Scholarship”:

* Do you have a habit of curiosity, wanting to know more and to learn more?
* Do you have a respect for evidence and logic?
* Do you have an ability to see things in context, relate details to general principles; relate facts to theories and theories to facts?

1. Integrity:

* Are you honest, fair and upright, not twisting facts, not being narrow-minded?
* Are you in control of yourself, not over-reacting, not blaming others?

1. Can you communicate?

* Are you able to explain and help students to understand?
* Are you willing to face – and encourage – questions from the students?
* Are you able to encourage, stimulate, and bring the best out of a student?
* Are you willing to listen and understand, to have sympathy for the students, to treat them with dignity?

You must be prepared!

A good teacher must be prepared – for the course as a whole as well as for each individual lesson. Don’t underestimate the difficulties and challenges of teaching the gospels. You must be well prepared to do a good job.

Make good use of library time and homework!

A good teacher will make good use of the time set aside for the students for “library” and “homework.”

If possible, library time should be supervised (but don’t take over and “teach”). Supervision puts pressure on the students to be efficient. Be clear about what you expect the students to do. Make sure to check what they have done.

The students should use their homework time in the evenings to review lessons and finish leftover work from the library time. Motivate students to use this time well. Encourage slow students and praise them when they have spent extra time to catch up with the others.

### 3. Plan your course!

This textbook has been written for a four-week course on the New Testament gospels during the first year of the Kannada Satyaveda College program.

But it has also been written as a resource for pastors and evangelists. Many of the studies include a section called “Reflect and prepare,” which is too difficult for most of your first-year students. So don’t plan on covering more than a few of them.

Prioritize!

It may not be possible for you to cover the whole book within the four-week course. So you may have to prioritize, like this:

*First priority*

* Twelve studies on the coming of Jesus
* A study of Mark’s gospel. Make sure that all the students have read through the whole gospel of Mark (all 16 chapters) in one or two sittings before you begin this part of the course!
* Eight studies on Jesus’ resurrection and ascension
* Make use of the following material in the Reference unit in connection with the studies:
  + New Testament chronology
  + Life of Jesus – four chronologies
  + Parables of Jesus
  + Miracles of Jesus
  + Mark’s gospel
  + Four gospels
  + Questions on the maps
  + Questions on the five tables
  + Questions on the Reference material listed above

*Second priority*

* Thirty studies from Matthew and Mark (there is no need to do all of them)
* Make additional use of the following material in the Reference unit in connection with the studies:
  + Matthew’s gospel
  + Luke’s gospel
  + The Roman Empire and Palestine
  + Questions on the Reference articles listed above

*If you still have time*

* Eight studies from John (there is no need to do all of them)
* Make additional use of the following material in the Reference unit material in connection with the studies:
  + Jesus’ twelve apostles
  + John’s gospel
  + Questions on the Reference articles listed above

### 4. How to cover a study in four steps

This is how you can cover a study in four simple steps:

1. You introduce the study (the first part of Introduction, and perhaps one or two additional comments taken from the second part of Introduction)
2. The students work in groups of three or four:

* First, they read the Bible text mentioned in the heading.
* Then, they work through Questions (answers to these questions should be easy to find in the Bible text). Tell them to make use of the comments in the second part of Introduction.
* Finally, they work through Think and discuss. Remind them to make use of the comments in the second part of Introduction.

1. Go through their answers in class:

* Don’t waste time.
* Don’t bother with the simplest questions. Instead focus on questions that the students have struggled with.
* Clarify misunderstandings.

At the end of the textbook, I have provided answers to both “Questions” and “Think and discuss.” Make sure the students don’t look at these answers until they have tried to answer the questions themselves. You are, of course, free to challenge my answers.

1. Encourage the students to complete unfinished work during library and homework time. They should also take time to review each study.

Additional work

Interested (and capable) students can be given additional work from Reflect and prepare for library time and homework. But be selective:

* Only select one or two suitable assignments – never all of them.
* Don’t make students do assignments that are too difficult for them.

More about this in the next chapter.

### 5. Additional suggestions and comments

The reference unit

Use the reference section wisely. It is a resource for both teacher and students. But it should not be “lectured” through by you. And don’t make the students “learn” all of it. Use your discretion.

The answer units

The answer unit will make life easier for you, as the teacher:

1. It will give you flexibility. The students can go through the answers on their own, and you can save valuable lesson time. Instead you can focus more on the difficult parts of a study. The students will also be able to cover studies (or parts of studies) in your absence (for example during library time). This will also save lesson time.
2. It will give you more confidence. There will be less reason for you to avoid letting the students do the questions, because you yourself are not sure of the answer. There will also be less temptation for you to come up with any random answer, just because you feel that you have so say something – even if you don’t have a clue about a correct or reasonable answer.
3. It will save preparation time for you. But my answers should not give you an excuse to come to class unprepared.

A warning: Even if I have provided answers to the questions, there may in some cases be other possible answers as well. Don’t be too categorical. If students suggest alternative answers, discuss them in class and see how valid they are. An answer may be more or less correct. And sometimes there can be more than one answer to a question.

Reflect and prepare

In many of the studies, I have included a section called Reflect and prepare. Here you will find suggestions for one or more topics for Bible studies, sermons, and devotions – or other types of creative assignments.

It is very important that the students learn to apply their study of a Bible passage to their own lives and ministries. That is why this section had been included.

You, as the teacher are responsible for the proper use of material from this section. Your course time is limited. The capacity of your students is also limited. Bright and fast students may manage several of these assignments. But slower students should only be given a few of the easier ones.

But don’t completely neglect this kind of creative work. You must also keep reminding your students that they will be able to use many of the assignments under Reflect and prepare in their future ministries. So there will be many occasions for them to come back to this resource of ideas as they preach and teach in the future.

Bible reading and Bible translations

This textbook must, of course, be used together with the Bible. It is much more important to read the actual Bible texts than just to read about them.

I have used World English Bible translation (often with modifications) with this International edition of the textbook. In order to help and challenge you, I have also often referred to two widely used Kannada Bible translations, the pavitra grantha and the satyavEdavu.

Exam

This course does not include an exam paper. But if you really want your students to sit an exam, there are many questions and assignments in this textbook that you can use to make your own exam paper. A piece of advice: Any college level exam should check if the students have understood the material in such a way that they can apply what they have learned. It must not only check if they have memorized a lot of facts.

A future resource

This textbook has been written so that it also can be used as a future resource for the students. They may not be able to cover – or to digest – all that it contains during a four-week course at a Bible college. But in the future, as they work as evangelists and pastors, they will be able to return to the lessons in this book and make use of the material for their own personal edification as well as in their various ministries.

The detailed table of contents at the beginning of the book will help the reader to orient himself about its layout and contents and enable him to easily find the story/passage he is looking for. I also hope that the indexes at the end of the book will prove useful.