



Johnny... who?

Plus:

*The Judgement and
Afterlife: a study*

Robby Charters

Johnny -- *Who?*

Plus: The Judgement and Afterlife: a study

by Robby Charters

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Johnny -- *Who?*

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The very last passage in the Old Testament states that Messiah's coming *could* be a curse instead of a blessing, but for the ministry of a very special person, someone we very rarely talk about. We sort of take him for granted. Very few have really considered what is the significance of his ministry. He's just *there!*

I'm speaking of John the Baptist. Well, okay, here he isn't called "John the Baptist", but Jesus said in Matthew 17:12 that John fulfilled this role.

What do we generally know about him?

He's a "forerunner." Well, what's a forerunner?

Someone who runs in front!

So why did Messiah need someone to run in front? What makes this ministry of running in front so important as to be prophesied in at least three Old Testament passages -- one of those passages saying that he makes all the difference between Messiah's coming being a blessing and being a curse?

Why is John such a significant personage as to be announced by an angelic visitation to one of his aged parents-to-be and a special healing from barrenness of the womb for the other?

And yet, why is he no more to us than a Sunday school story character (with even fewer stories about him than people like Gideon and Samson)?

Probably because we don't understand the essence of his message -- repentance.

We don't understand *repentance*, did I say?

We're *still* -- after all this time -- deficient in such a basic foundation, did I say?

Well, before you soak me in too much hot water for my over-rashness, let's look at some of the basic scriptures regarding Elijah who is to come. '

Repentance, basically, means to turn around. According to Malachi 4:4-6, Elijah's role will be to *turn* "the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I (Messiah) come and strike the earth with a curse."

The three previous chapters of Malachi have listed sin after sin in which the newly returned (from exile) Israelites have offended. Chapter 3 begins by mention of the "Elijah" messenger who will be followed suddenly by Messiah. The second verse asks: *...Who can endure the day of [Messiah's] coming? And who can stand when he appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like launderer's soap.*

This is quite a statement to make regarding our "gentle Jesus meek and mild."

So, then, who *is* to "stand when He appears?"

The over all context of Malachi indicates that it is those who respond in a positive way to "My messenger," who will "prepare the way before me" (vs. 1).

And how do we respond positively?

Chapter 4: 4-6 says that a positive response is, "the hearts of the fathers" *turning* "to the children," and "the hearts of the children" *turning* "to their fathers."

"Turning" is a key word which indicates *repentance*. "Fathers" and "children" are two more key words which indicate *relationship*. This means *repentance* to *right relationships*.

The prominent location of this passage at the end of Malachi -- indeed, at the end of the whole Old Testament (in the Christian Bible) -- shows us that a major part of the sins listed in Malachi can be summed up under the subheading, "relationship."

Indeed, this seems to be the focal point, as chapter 2 verse 10 sums up so concisely:

Have we not all one father? Has not God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another by profaning the covenant of the fathers?

- a very simple logical question that is timely even now, 2400 years later. Now that I think about it, I'm surprised I've never heard a sermon based on this text.

So we see that it is important that covenant relationships are restored in preparation for Messiah. Where relationship has been broken, there needs to be repentance.

All of this is confirmed as the role of John the Baptist in Luke 1. The angel speaking to his father-to-be, Zacharias, all but quotes from Malachi when he says, *He will turn away many of the children to the Lord their God. He will go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, "to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children" and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*

So why is John the Baptist so important to God's plan? We can now put together the key phrases we've gleaned and find out:

"To make ready a people prepared for the Lord..." "...lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."

To the question: "Who can endure the day of His coming?" or "Who won't be struck as though with a curse when He appears?" the answer is: "A people prepared for the Lord... whose hearts have been turned towards one another in renewed relationship, and in repentance from disobedience to the wisdom of the just."

In other words, for Messiah's coming to be a blessing and not a curse, there must be a humble repentant people among God's chosen people on the earth.

John's actual message when he began his career, was exactly that. A synthesis of Matt 3:1,2; Mark 1:2,3; Luke 3:5,6; Matt 3:4-7 and Luke 3:8-20 tells us:

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

As it is written in the Prophets: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You." "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.' Every valley shall be filled And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough ways smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

And John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptised by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham

from these stones. And even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?"

He answered and said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise."

Then tax collectors also came to be baptised, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?"

And he said to them, "Collect no more than what is appointed for you."

Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?"

So he said to them, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages."

Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not, John answered, saying to all, "I indeed baptise you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire."

And with many other exhortations he preached to the people. But Herod the tetrarch, being rebuked by him concerning Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, also added this, above all, that he shut John up in prison.

All this was in preparation for the coming of Messiah. So, Messiah has come already. What does the ministry of John have to do with us?

In fact, the ministry of Elijah is relevant to our time just as it was in theirs. Just as Messiah's coming is in two instalments -- once as the sacrificed lamb, in which the kingdom of God is sown as a seed, and then as King Messiah -- so is Elijah's ministry.

Jesus told Peter, James and John, *Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the son of man is also about to suffer at their hands.*

It sounds as though he was saying, "Elijah *will* come and he *has* come." Like many prophecies, there is a near future application and a distant future application.¹

He came once, before Jesus began His first ministry, and he will come again to restore all things -- to turn our hearts once again to the wisdom of the righteous and to restore relationships before Jesus' second coming.

So, what does John's message of repentance have to do with us? The above passage -- actually a synthesis of the various passages about John -- gives us a full detailed description of exactly what repentance is:

1. *humble attitude:* *Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'*

Don't go trusting in any religious self sufficiency. No matter where you stand, God requires faith and obedience. The warning to those who have any other sense of security other than being *in Him* is: *God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones* -- if they simply repent, believe and obey.

God has shown over and over again in history that He can and will lay peoples and whole movements aside -- no matter what their history or their calling -- and suddenly move on a previously rejected nation or an insignificant group. However, this laying aside is never permanent. Lest the new movement gloat over their new found prominence in God's purposes, Romans 11:18-21 serves as a warning:

You will say, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by your faith. Do not be haughty, but fear, for if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.

The "rock" warning is for the older established movements; the "branches" warning for the newer ones.

After many hundreds of years of blatantly disregarding Paul's warning here, regarding their attitude towards the Jews, this very church, addressed by Paul in this passage, was indeed laid aside for a season (that is -- as far as being generally on the cutting edge of God's plan). Again, that's no reason for Protestants to be haughty, but fear, for if God didn't spare the Roman Catholics -- the immediate successors of the apostles -- he may not spare you either (indeed, in this day and age, there are both Catholics who are moving with the fullness of what God has, as well as Jews who know their Messiah in a thoroughly Jewish context).

No one is exempt. We all must maintain an attitude of humility and daily repentance.

2. *confession:* *Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were... confessing their sins.*

Confession of sins and verbally admitting we aren't all we thought we were and that we need God's help is a vital part of repentance.

It's been said that the three hardest words to say are, "I -- was -- wrong."

But, you say, you're just supposed to confess it to God!

So, you've never wronged *people* before? Only God? Then you'd better say, "I was wrong" to the people to whom you were wrong.

Anybody can say it to God. You just close your eyes and say it without moving your lips or emitting any sound. Anyone can do that. But the problem is, how do you know it's God that you said it to, and not a figment of your imagination?

By faith?

Faith is a tangible thing. It requires action to follow it up. It means coming to God on *His* terms -- not yours. God requires humility and a repentant heart. Humility is something people will notice, not just some personal thing between you and God.

That's why James said, *Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed* (5:16)

In the case of John the Baptist, the people came "confessing their sins." In other words, John and anyone who stood there could notice it.

They came with a humble attitude, confessed their sins and...

3. *were baptized by him:*

For the new believer coming into God's kingdom, this of course means water baptism by whatever means your church prescribes.

For the rest of us, since baptism is based on the Jewish practice of ritual immersion for uncleanness prescribed by the Law of Moses (Lev 11:24-28; 14:8; 15:5,16; 17:15), it can be taken in the same context as Ephesians 5:26,27, "The washing of water by the Word."

I John 1:9 says that when we confess our sins, He will not only forgive us, but also, "cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Three verses earlier in that context says that as we are in fellowship with Him (our relationship having been restored), "the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin."

When we live humbly and repentant, and walk in relationship with Him, cleansing comes automatically. Our lives *change*. That, then, is the...

4. *fruits worthy of repentance:* Luke's version of the story says, *Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance..."* (Luke 3:7,8).

To the question that John so graciously and tactfully asks, there are two possible answers: "The Holy Spirit warned us by pricking our hearts", and "It seems the fashionable thing to do." Guess which was the right answer?

The people were coming by the droves to see this new thing. John had his moments of popularity, as did Jesus -- as do many great preachers to this day. However, Jesus and John didn't handle it same way many preachers do today. He could have said, "Please stop by the book table on the way out," or used the opportunity to expand his ministry even more, perhaps by launching a radio program ... no?

He *yelled* at them and called them *vipers*! Later, Jesus did something similar by intensifying his message on discipleship, and saying hard things that drove away everyone but the truly repentant.

Jesus and John, like countless preacher since, had their audience -- their fifteen minutes of fame -- and they used the opportunity to get across a very important message: *repentance*.

The crowds thought they knew what repentance was, but, to prepare the way for Messiah, it had to be real.

Real repentance will show visible fruit. It isn't a subjective thing -- it's *real*. However you interpret it, lives are changed. It bears fruit.

And it is okay to look for fruit. Jesus, in the same chapter that he said, "judge not", also said we'll know them by their fruits (Matthew 7).

For us, living in the time since Messiah's ascension, the fruits should be according to Gallatians 5:22. One is able to love those whom one found it impossible to love before. One finds a new store of patience. There's joy where there wasn't before. People will notice the difference in your life.

Of course, the people John preached to didn't have access to the fruits of the spirit as believers do under the New Covenant. That's what makes this whole repentance thing so much more applicable to us today.

I think we need a ministry like that now, don't you?

Those Pharisees!

When Jesus came the first time it appears that He gave Israel several options. The option they finally chose revealed their readiness (or lack of it) to receive Him as Messiah. Not only that, but it revealed the need of the whole world for the means of atonement that resulted from their decision.

But, you say, how did *their* choice reflect on the whole world's need?

Because, as Israel goes, so goes the rest of the world. God told Abraham that every family would be blessed through Israel, and any one who blesses Israel would in turn be blessed. Israel was to be a nation of priests. In other words, Israel was to represent God to all the peoples, and represent all the peoples to God.

In representing the nations to God, Israel epitomises humanity. In the Jewish people, we see human nature both at its best and at its worst.

One reason for anti-Semitism is that people see exaggerated in the Jewish nature what they hate in themselves. Every stereotype people draw of the Jews is what they know deep inside is what's wrong with themselves, but can't bring themselves to face it. Thus, in a perverse and unholy way, the Jew atones for the rest of the world ("unholy" because this "atonement" isn't actualised by repentance and acknowledgement of one's own failings). However, we fail to realise that by destroying the Jew, we destroy ourselves. If we ever succeed in ridding the world of Jews, we will have rid ourselves of any hope of survival. Hitler's "ultimate solution" was really another word for "ultimate self-destruction", because as Jesus said, "salvation is of the Jews."

In the same way, the choice Israel made was made on behalf of the human race. We all would have made the same choice. If the Jews are to be branded "Christ killers", they are that on behalf of the rest of us. We would have done exactly the same thing. We've proved that over and over again, by killing as many as we could of Christ's own nationality, the Jews.

So Israel's rejection of Messiah was proof that none of us were ready for him. Humanity's need of atonement resulted in Jesus' rejection as King Messiah, and instead, in his role as sacrificed lamb.

But how could God leave such an important choice up to humanity? In His wisdom He designed it to work that way. History is like a big machine that is designed to work at its best only if people are worthy of it. If humanity isn't worthy, our unworthiness will cause us to make just the decisions at the crucial points that will send history off in another direction. That direction will lead to the crisis that will compensate for humanity's unworthiness -- however, at great cost.²

An example of this: the children of Israel, on departing from Mt. Sinai were unprepared for the conquest of Canaan. God knew that, and yet, offered them the opportunity to go in immediately to take the land. However, by God's wise hand on circumstances, the people proved to themselves they weren't ready, and they themselves chose not to go in. Thus, the forty year trek.

In the same way, as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, the people of Israel and their leaders were granted the opportunity to crown him as King Messiah right then and

there. The Millennium could have started 2000 years ago! They didn't. Thus, the 2000 year trek.

Looking back on my own life, I can see that God deals with us the same way. He gives us opportunities we're unprepared for, and we botch it up ourselves. A potential blessing turns instead into a curse; or a thorn-in-the-flesh that we have to live with for a while. This, of course, teaches us to be wiser next time.

We saw in the last chapter that John the Baptist was sent for exactly that reason; so that the children of Israel would be duly warned to repent and receive Messiah in the right attitude, so that Messiah's coming wouldn't be a curse instead of the blessing everyone looked forward to.

A number did respond positively, and that resulted in the spiritual hunger that drew the crowds to Jesus. Many of those who hadn't been prepared were, never the less, looking forward to Messiah, but on their own terms. For those who responded only partially, or not at all, Jesus' ministry was a stone of stumbling, or a curse.

In the Gospels, we see a whole range of different levels of acceptance and rejection. The most interesting of the whole lot, for their diversity, were the Pharisees.

"Pharisee", you must understand, is not a synonym for "hypocrite" or "legalist", nor even "one with a religious spirit."

But, you say, didn't Jesus warn of the "leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy?" Didn't he often indicate they were legalistic and have what amounted to a religious spirit?

As a matter of fact, he did.

However, the only reason we know they were hypocrites and legalists is because Jesus said they were. Paul also seemed to indicate that as well, to an extent.

Isn't that enough to go on?

It *is* if you're looking at it from God's perspective.

But let me ask a different sort of question: were they hypocrites and legalists by *our* standards? Is it possible that we've confused *our* standards with God's standards?

This is an important question worth considering, because, for one thing, it's by our standards that we judge ourselves as *not* being hypocrites (or if by some fluke we *were*, we'd change our standards).

Let's take a closer look at what history says about the Pharisees -- viewed by *our* standards -- and see if they were a bunch of religious sticks-in-the-mud after all. Then, we'll look at all of us again by God's standards.

But am I not letting the Pharisees off the hook?

No. I'm simply borrowing the hook for a minute to try it out for size. I'll return it when I'm finished, maybe with *us* on it.

"Pharisee" is simply a name given to a stream of Judaism in which the Torah was taught and studied with emphasis on traditions passed down over the years. This whole stream got its push from Ezra, who wrote the Old Testament book named for him, and also helped to compile all the other Old Testament books of the Bible.³

Traditions in themselves aren't always bad (after all, we have plenty of our own!). Where there is no clear leading in the Word of God on an issue, it's often best to go according to the tradition. The only place Jesus condemned tradition was where it

contradicted a clear word from God found in the Scripture. The problem was, and often still is, in putting too much emphasis on the tradition.

Many of the traditions quite possibly were passed on from the time of Moses. Many were the results of various rulings by judicial councils regarding situations where the Law wasn't clear. The body of tradition that resulted is generally known as "Oral Torah."

Among these traditions were the belief in resurrection of the dead, life in the world to come, and in the activity of spirit beings including demons and angels⁴. Especially when it comes to these traditions, the New Testament is in general agreement with the Pharisees.

The Pharisees represented the grass roots, and were the teachers of the masses.

The Sadducees, on the other hand, represented the middle and upper classes. They rejected the traditions, as a whole, including that of resurrection and a world to come -- probably through influence of popular Greek philosophy. The High Priests in Jesus' time were Sadducees, who unfortunately, bought their office from the Roman governor.

The Sadducees were much more strict in their interpretation of various laws. For instance, the law calling for an "eye for an eye, and tooth for a tooth" was carried out quite literally by the Sadducees. The Pharisees, with their traditions and legal precedents would argue, "What if a one eyed man were to knock out the eye of one having two eyes? Should he be made totally blind for having made the other only half blind?" They therefore ruled that in such cases, forfeiture of something of equal value can be made in lieu of a limb or organ.

The Pharisees didn't compose a concise unified group, but rather a whole spectrum of emphases ranging from very strict to the more lenient. In Jerusalem there were two major schools; that of Hillel and Shammai. The school of Hillel was more lenient and emphasised study of the Torah. They held that the greatest two commandment were "Love God with all your heart ...etc. and love your neighbour as yourself." The "golden rule", quoted by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount was actually quoted some thirty or so years earlier by Hillel.⁵ Gamaliel, Paul's rabbi and the one who saved the necks of the early apostles by his advice, was the grandson of Hillel, and carried on his emphasis. The school of Shammai was the more strict, and emphasised action over study.

There were also, no doubt, regional differences, especially in the small towns. Each town had its own sanhedrin (judicial council) and house of study, composed of the village elders, the rabbis and their pupils. Many of these may have been more strict and less refined than their counterparts in Jerusalem (the one's in the region of Gallilee were especially thought of as rather backwards). Others, on the other hand, could have been more wise and compassionate.

The Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem had 72 members, and met in what was called the Chamber of Hewn Stone, which straddled one of the gates of the Temple. This was generally dominated by the more elite of the Pharisees⁶. This was not the Sanhedrin before which Jesus was tried. That was in the home of the High Priest before a smaller sanhedrin, which contained a Sadducee majority as well as a minority of Pharisees. In Jerusalem, there would have been many more Pharisees than could have sat in either Sanhedrin.

In the Gospels, we see the whole spectrum from those who were friendly to Jesus to

those who were openly hostile to him and tried to trap him. Often, Jesus was invited to dinner at their house -- though often with mixed intent. At least once, some Pharisees warned him to flee from King Harod. Nicodemus was definitely interested in what Jesus had to say, but was never directly outspoken in front of the others. One rabbi, after everyone had given up trying to trap him, simply asked him which was the greatest commandment, which led into a friendly discussion.

Also, more than once, Jesus was asked for a sign that he was indeed Messiah. Again, we can see a whole range of attitudes that motivated the question. Some wanted very badly to believe, or else wanted some tangible evidence to show to their colleagues, and said, "Please, show us a sign." In others, one can sense a note of sarcasm: "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are indeed Messiah, show us a sign!"

However, reading the Gospel text, it looks as though Jesus didn't know the difference between the sincere and the sarcastic. He simply boomed out, "An adulterous generation seeks a sign, and none shall be given it but the sign of Jonah!"

"B-but we just asked for a -- *sign*?"

Jesus saw the common dominator in both attitudes -- their unbelief, and lack of true repentance.

The Jews did know about repentance. Every *Yom Kippur* they repented. Everything the Old Testament says about repentance was theirs for the reading. Comments by the rabbis in the Talmud show that they understood repentance every bit as much as the Evangelicals do today.

Neither John the Baptist nor Jesus came teaching them things they didn't know. Rather, he came rebuking them for not doing the things they *did* know about.

The problem was all the things they knew inside were wrong, but kept doing anyway. Unfortunately, that's not just the problem of the first century Pharisees. I'm very much afraid that if Jesus had come some 2000 years later, and Luke had recorded it, chapter 11 from verse 37 would sound something like this (with bits of Matthew 23 stuck in):

And as He spoke, a certain big city pastor asked Him to dine at a restaurant with a few of the local ministers. So He went in and sat down to eat. When the pastor saw it, he marvelled that He did not first say grace before eating.

Then the Lord said to him, "Now you pastors make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness. You know all the proper Christian etiquette, but inside, your thoughts are not anywhere near to God. Foolish ones! Did not He who made the outside make the inside also?"

"But rather be a blessing to others with such things as you have, then, indeed all the food you eat will be blessed.

"But woe to you pastors! For you teach so strongly on tithing, and giving good offerings, and regular attendance. You think a good member is one who tithes faithfully and attends regularly, but you pass by justice and the love of God. Of course, tithing is important, so these you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.

"Woe to you pastors! For you love the best seats up on the platform during city-wide crusades and regional conferences, and greetings in the marketplaces, and dining with the mayor and chief of police and to be called by men, 'Oh Reverend! Pastor!'"

"But you, do not be called 'Pastor'. Your sheep aren't even yours for One is the Shepherd of your souls, the Christ, and you are all brethren.

"Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called MDiv or PhD; for One is your PHD, the Christ, who helps you to 'Preach, Heal and Deliver.' But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

"Woe to you, Bible teachers and pastors; hypocrites! For you have your wonderful ministerial exterior and lovely bedside manner, but really, you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

"Woe to you pastors! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You know there is revival in the church next door to yours. You did not go yourselves, and those who were about to go, you hindered, saying, 'Go not to hear those off-balance lunatics. Be faithful to your own church!'"

Then one of the travelling evangelists answered and said to Him, "Teacher, by saying these things You reproach us also."

And He said, "Woe to you also, evangelists! For you load new believers with burdens hard to bear, and expect people off the street to turn over night into sweet Sunday school children and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.

"Woe to you, evangelists and Pastors, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him say all the right words, and tow the party line, and become twice as sectarian as yourselves.

"Woe to you, Bible teachers, evangelists, and Pastors; hypocrites! For you devour widows' pensions to finance your expensive projects, and for a pretence make long prayers for their 'hundred-fold return'. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.

"Woe to you! For you build the tombs of earlier revival movements, martyrs of the past, and the Jewish victims of the holocaust, and the European programs and inquisitions; and your fathers killed them. You say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of our fellow believers and of the Jewish people,' and 'Had we lived in Germany in the days of Hitler, we would not have turned a blind eye as our neighbours, the Jews, were taken to the gas chambers.'" Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the Jews and your fellow believers. That part of your history you refuse to accept, you are doomed to repeat, so fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt."

And as He said these things to them, the evangelists and the local pastors began to assail Him vehemently, calling him a dangerous heretic, and a nutcase, and all kinds of other names.

Now, wait -- before you begin to assail *me* vehemently, calling me a dangerous heretic, and a nutcase -- did you *really* think that the object was to be able to read the above and find yourself entirely innocent of all of all charges? If so, then perhaps you've been reading the Gospels in the wrong light. It's not all about how certain religious Jews were

in the first century. It's all about how *we* tend to be when we forget about repentance.

There is one category Jesus *wasn't* talking about, as he dined with the Pharisees. That's those who humbly realise that they *do* in fact fit in somewhere -- that He *was* talking about *them*.

Dear me! Did I just make an illogical statement?

Maybe, but it's true just the same. The only group that's exempt from Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees are those that humbly acknowledge they *aren't* exempt.

Much earlier on -- in fact, in one of Jesus' first sermons -- Jesus began with something like this:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. (Matt 5:3)

It is more than probable that Jesus was referring to Isaiah 66:2, which says that God chooses the company of those with a "*poor* and contrite spirit". That means you *know* you don't measure up, and you're through with trying to hide it, and with maintaining your "cool" exterior.

According to Jesus, "Of these, is the kingdom..."- the kingdom everyone was expecting.

So who will stand when He appears? Who will be left when the winds of the Holy Spirit really begin to blow? Is it those who feel they're just fine as they are, and don't need to go around listening to any old crack-pot who calls himself a prophet? Mind you, I'm *not* saying that every crack-pot who comes around *is* a prophet. What I *am* saying is it's not up to *us* who's a crackpot and who is a prophet sent from God -- or even a crack-pot who may just have some truth to speak -- prophet or not. It is exactly for *that* reason, and for no other, that the Pharisees were not ready to receive Messiah, and his coming was a curse for them, and not a blessing.

We'll see that graphically in the next chapter...

The Big Question

So what happened on that day, 2000 years ago, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem? We do know, for several reasons that He was *supposed* to have been crowned King that day. But He wasn't.

First of all, Zachariah 9:9 was fulfilled. Israel's "King" came to them "having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey." Many of the people, including the "daughters of Jerusalem" recognised what was happening. Word spread all over town, "Messiah is here!" Synagogue schools let out. Shops closed. Crowds of people waving palm branches lined the road leading up to the Eastern Gate.

As He rode, they sang a portion from Psalm 118 -- verses 25 and 26 to be exact: "Save, now (*Hoshiah anna*, or as we tend to say it today, 'Hosanna')! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

They knew that verse 24 was being fulfilled before their very eyes. It was "the day the Lord had made", and they were "rejoicing and being glad in it".

Some of the other rabbis were embarrassed by the people's expression of praise, and shouted to Jesus, "Rabbi! This is going too far! Rebuke your followers!"

Jesus answered, "If they don't praise me, the rocks will all cry out!"

That was because this was the "day the Lord had made", or in the words of the prophets, the "day of the Lord".

It wasn't just any old day in which one sings in church, "This is the day -- this is the day that the Lord has made -- that the Lord has made -- let us rejoice..." That's true in a sense -- God made every day -- but this was a specific day that all creation had been groaning for in travail, as in Romans 8:32. Nor was it a case of your worship leader's favourite line, "if you don't start singing loudly, the rocks will cry out". I've seen many churches where no one was praising the Lord, but I've never seen any rocks cry out as a result. This, however, was *the* day that the Lord had made. A *specific* day -- the *day of the Lord*.

At least, it was *supposed* to have been the day of the Lord. One part of that Psalm failed to become fulfilled. That was the last line of verse 26, "We have blessed you from the House of the Lord." The chief priests and the elders of the people didn't receive Him. Instead, verse 23 became a reality. Jesus became the "stone that the builders rejected" that day.

Jesus knew He was rejected, and began to weep -- not for Himself, but for *them*. He said, *If you had known, even you especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surrounding you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.*

Jesus actually said Himself that they missed it, because they "didn't know the day of their visitation."

The kingdom of God could have been established that day, and the millennium could

have begun, but it didn't, because those in the "house of the Lord", the chief priests and the elders of the people, were not ready to receive Him.

After that, Jesus entered the temple, and Malachai 3:1-3 was partially fulfilled. The Lord, whom they sought, appeared "suddenly in the Temple," and like "a refiners fire, and like a launderer's soap" he made a whip and cast out the merchants and money changers. Those who had not repented at the preaching of John's baptism, but were in the house of the Lord for the purpose of merchandising the things of God, and for self gain, were cast out. Had Jesus shortly thereafter been crowned King Messiah, they would never have been allowed back in. Next time this happens, He *will* shortly thereafter be crowned King Messiah.

The Temple, this time, will be the Temple of His body, as the account in John 2:13-22 says. When asked to explain Himself, He said, "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up." It was generally recognised that Messiah, when He comes, will build a new temple. Jesus was not in the habit of saying so directly, but this was as good as saying, "I am Messiah."

A day or so later, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of Israel approached Jesus. Without rechecking the actual text, we tend to retell this story saying, "the Pharisees". While there most certainly were Pharisees among the scribes and the elders, what this is specifically speaking of are the leaders; members of the Sanhedrin; the ones that didn't simply teach, but made binding decisions. These were not just those who stood by during the procession into Jerusalem a couple days before, saying "Rabbi Jesus! This is going too far! You're bringing reproach on our profession! Rebuke your pupils for making such rash proclamations! No rabbi does this!"

These were those with the responsibility, if Messiah *did* appear, to recognise the fact, and duly proclaim Him as such. They were saying, "Is this *really* Messiah? If so, then it's our duty to find out, but let's hope, for our sakes, he *isn't*!"

With this attitude, they came to Jesus (Luke 20:1-8), and simply asked Him, "Tell us, by what authority you're doing these things? Who gave you the authority to do so?"

As we said, Jesus wasn't in the habit of answering such questions directly, especially when His words and actions made the facts quite plain already. He much preferred that the truth dawn on people's hearts, such as Peter, who when the Father revealed it to him, said, "You are Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:13-20).

But the priests and elders wanted Jesus to say, directly, where His authority came from.

But instead of telling them directly, Jesus went about it in a way that highlighted what would have been the key to understanding His authority.

"I'll ask you a question first, and you answer me. The baptism of John -- was it from God or from men?"

By understanding and accepting the baptism of John, they would have had no trouble understanding where Jesus' authority came from, nor in accepting it.

In fact, judging from Jesus' words to his disciples on other occasions, they would have even had access to that authority themselves (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 11:22-26; 16:17,18; Luke 10:19).

So what was it about the baptism of John that would give understanding and access to

Jesus' authority?

We spent the whole first chapter discussing it -- repentance, both as an act, and as an attitude. Through repentance, we become ready to receive the kingdom of God on *His* terms.

Many of the leaders and the rabbis were looking for the kingdom of God, but they were looking for it on *their* terms. That's why they clashed so often with Jesus throughout His three and a half years of ministry. That's why they were now searching frantically for reasons not to receive Him as Messiah.

The way they answered Jesus' question also tells us quite a lot. There were two ways to answer the question: John's baptism was from God; and John's baptism *wasn't* from God. Which was it?

Well, what did they really believe?

Quite obviously, they hadn't been baptised by John themselves. They hadn't repented of all the things John came preaching about. So, one would naturally assume they believed John's baptism *didn't* come from God -- right?

Well, it's not quite so simple as that. Popular opinion was that John was, indeed, a prophet. Why, look at the way he pointed the finger at King Harod! Look at the way he called a spade "a spade"! Look how he called the chief priests and elders a brood of v... -- well let's not get into that!

To say anything bad about John just wasn't politically correct! In fact, sometimes, it enhanced a fine sermon to actually put in a good word or two, now and then, about John (though, of course, there is a such a thing as over doing it).

So they couldn't very well say, out right, John's baptism *wasn't* from God.

And to say it *was* from God?

Well, the next natural question from Jesus would be, "Why didn't you get baptised? Why didn't you repent?"

What would they answer then?

The thing about non-repentance -- or *pride*, which is the actual term in the English language -- it won't think beyond that. It will always try to find a way to stop short of having to answer that question. There *is* a simple way to answer it, but we'll talk about that later.

So how did they answer?

They found a concise, simple, politically correct answer: "I don't know."

It was not an answer based on their actual opinion, or on what they firmly believed -- *if* they firmly believed *anything*. It was not the result of determining the truth of the matter, but rather, of determining all the possible consequences of every possible answer.

Such an answer may please most of the people, most of the time; it may help maintain hope of winning the next election; it may retain the favour of key people, without losing the favour of others; it may save one's face; but it won't open the door to understanding God's authority.

I'm not saying one must always speak one's mind in every situation. As we saw, Jesus didn't.

And, He didn't push *them* for an answer. He didn't force them to lose face. He simply said, "Okay, then neither will I tell you where my authority comes from."

Wouldn't it be sad to suddenly find that you missed your opportunity to know God's authority -- simply because you gave a convenient answer? That's what happened to the church of Laodicea. Jesus said of them, "I wish you were either hot or cold, but since you are lukewarm, I will spit you out of my mouth."

The chief priests and elders could have chosen to be cold, by saying, "We *don't* believe John's baptism came from God." God would have been more pleased with them for their honesty. By telling the truth, they would have taken the first step towards finding Him who *is* Truth. Many people in various religions who don't believe in Jesus, but are following their religions in a sincere search for *truth*, will eventually find it -- in *Jesus*. The problem is, the picture we see of the priests, the elders and the Pharisees in the Gospels, isn't that of Judaism as such, but of religions in general, including ours. Though obviously *not* a law of physics, it seems easier to heat up a cold heart than a lukewarm one.

Or, the elders could have chosen to be hot. They could have said, "John's baptism *was* from God."

Jesus would have said, "Why didn't you believe him?"

They could have answered, "Well, I guess we should have, but we didn't."

Jesus would have said, "It's not too late."

They could have said, "Can we get baptised then?"

Jesus would have said, "Sure! Let's go to the pool of Siloam."

Then they would have not only heard from Jesus' mouth where His authority came from, they would have experienced it for themselves.

However, their pride wouldn't allow them to do that. Along with pride, is fear -- fear of losing their comfortable position; fear of a hostile take-over the moment they let their guard down.

They, like many directors of big corporations today that become victims of a hostile take-over, had become comfortable in their cosy corners and their bloated budgets. They liked their benefits, their perks, their superannuation funds, the power and the prestige.

But really, what's all that compared to authority in God's kingdom?

In repenting, they would have had to turn away from quite a lot of filth and corruption -- the high priestly system during that time was very corrupt -- and they would have given up a lot, but then, in humbling themselves as children, they would have had just as much chance as Jesus' disciples of being great in God's kingdom.

They could have helped to usher in the millennium!

But God knew that would not happen. Before it could happen, they needed Jesus' ministry as the sacrificial lamb. Only through the blood that was to be shed through their refusal to repent and humble themselves, and through the grace that then becomes available, can healing take place in our hearts and minds that enables humility and repentance to completely take us over.

The High Priests and elders, in a way, *couldn't* humble themselves in the way necessary to enable them to be a part of the kingdom, because they lacked the grace, that only became available as the result of their refusal, and their betrayal of their Messiah.

Now, what about us? Are we going to miss our chance to be a part of the kingdom? That grace is there for us, now, like it wasn't for them then. We can do better, but only if

we humble ourselves, and accept His grace. If we don't we'll be just like them. In fact, we'll be judged worse than them, because that grace was available to us, where it wasn't for them.

Jesus once told them, they would be judged worse than Sodom and Gomorra, because they had the witness of Messiah. If that's so, we, who have the blood of Messiah shed for us, and the Holy Spirit, and his grace available to us, if we refuse, will we not be judged even worse?

The Breakthrough

"Repentance" is such a controversial word. There are those who say it shouldn't be used too much, as it turns people away from the gospel -- after all, this *is* the dispensation of grace, isn't it! Others feel it isn't emphasised enough, and thus, the church is full of "half way" Christians who won't take up the cross of Christ.

To others, it is simply the paradigm shift that occurs when one becomes born again -- and then, never again, because salvation is a "finished work".

I'll correct that last one quickly. Salvation isn't a finished work. Christ's death on the *cross* is a finished work. Of course, we're on our way to Heaven from the time we're initially born again, when the "paradigm shift" first occurs, but there's a lot more to it than that. Paul said in Philippians 2:12 "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." We're to continually apply Christ's finished work on the cross throughout our whole Christian life, and that's where we continually need to be living out repentance as a lifestyle, according to Matthew 5:3-12. That involves much more than a paradigm shift.

For that reason, we'll talk about repentance in this chapter, both in its use in bringing sinners into the kingdom of God through the initial born-again experience, and in its use in the believer's life, when one finds there is sin, bad habits, or situations that aren't pleasing to God. It's really the same thing. In both cases, we must humble ourselves before God. In both cases, we must admit that we've been going in the wrong direction -- whether in the complete opposite direction, or just a few degrees to the left, or to the right (which, in the end, can put us far away from our intended destination). In both cases, we must determine to do something about it -- to "go and sin no more"; to make the necessary adjustments; to become a disciple of Jesus.

With that in mind, here are a few more possible difficulties people may have with repentance.

Have you ever talked to someone about accepting the Lord, who answered you, "I could never become a Christian. I just wouldn't be able to follow through" (or "give up drinking, smoking or drugs" or other non-Christian habit -- meaning, of course, anything apart from caffeine²)? What is your standard pat answer? Now, try it on any of the following -- both Christians and non-Christians:

What about the business man whose only hope for success in business lies in taking unfair advantage of others; or else some form of corruption, such as giving or receiving of bribes, or extortion?

What about the theologian who has written book after book dedicated to one particular point of view, only to suddenly discover, one day, that there is a gaping hole in his logic -- and there's Jesus on the other side, peering through the hole?

What about the monarch of a kingdom or sultanate whose role as "protector of the faith" requires him to perform pagan rituals?

What about the Mafia hit man who is under obligation to bump off a few more of his boss's enemies -- or be bumped off himself?

...Or the member of a closely knit fellowship who would face intense psychological pressure from his or her group upon finding that what God is doing in the world and in

the church runs contrary to what the group believes is according to scripture?

...Or the fugitive from justice who would certainly be hanged if he so much as attempted to make restitution?

...Or the prostitute who is under the physical control of her pimp?

...Or a man who has taken on financial responsibility for a mistress in addition to his wife? Or takes his mistress to a church where everyone believes she is, in fact, his wife?

...Or a member of a sheikh's harem?

...Or the popular pastor who knows he needs to publicly repent of a hidden sin, but that such a startling revelation would result in hundreds of his parishioners losing hope and turning away from God?

Just "repent" all by itself, would obviously complicate all of the above situations -- at least for the one doing the repenting. That's why Jesus didn't just come saying, "repent", but rather, "Repent and *believe*".

These two words are found together or at least associated with one another in other New Testament passages as well.⁸ What do they mean?

We already said that repentance is humbling ourselves before God, confessing that we've done wrong, or have been going in the wrong direction, and making the decision to follow Him more closely as His disciple.

Is that something one can just decide to do anytime one likes? As the examples we've cited above tell us: no. And what's more, neither can you nor I. Truly following Jesus isn't something that can be done on one's own strength. That's why the command isn't simply, "repent" but "repent and *believe*."

Believe, first of all, that the sins that we have repented of, have been forgiven.

Secondly, believe that God will never expect anything of us that He won't also give us the grace (meaning the strength, the ability and the open door) to actually accomplish.

If this age is to be called the "dispensation of grace", it's because grace is available in a supernatural way, through faith, to those who repent. That grace is what saves us from our bad habits, wrong perceptions and even saves us in the midst of impossible situations (Eph 2:8).

Grace is a force. Literally, it means "favour".⁹ The Greek word for grace, (*charis*) also makes up part of the word for "spiritual gift" (*charismata*), or supernatural empowerment. The gifts listed in I Cor 12:8-10, and other passages are specific *kinds* of grace. Grace, in general, is made available when we *repent* and *believe*.

We noted in the previous chapter that grace would have been available to the religious leaders in Jerusalem in the form of understanding of Jesus' authority, had they accepted John's message of repentance, and believed in Jesus.

But we also noted that when Jesus first came, saying "Repent and Believe", that grace wasn't available in the same way it has been since He died and rose again from the dead, and sent us His Holy Spirit. However, it was demonstrated in his own person as He healed the sick, raised the dead, fed the 5000, told swindlers like Levi and Zaccias to follow Him, told the adulteress to "go and sin no more", and told Peter where to find his tax money.

While all this was going on, John the Baptist, who had prophesied the coming of the grace of God, was languishing in prison, where Herod had put him for being too

outspoken. Either his long hours in prison made him wonder about his calling, or else he simply wanted to redirect his own disciples attention to Jesus -- or perhaps a bit of both. Which ever the case, two of his pupils were dispatched on a mission to find out for themselves (or for him), if he were "the coming one".

The question could have just as well been worded, "Are you ushering in the kingdom of God?", as the two phrases would have been recognised in those days as synonymous. The "coming one" would, by everyone's understanding, usher in the kingdom of God.

Jesus' answer to them was informative without being direct. In essence, He just said, "See for yourself! -- *The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them ...*" (Matthew 11:6)

Grace was flowing to the sick and needy like a river. Jesus saw, and expected John and his disciples to recognise the miraculous manifestations of grace as a sign that the kingdom of God was indeed present.

After this, Jesus went into a long dissertation of where John fit in in the scheme of things (Matt 11:7-14):

What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.' Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come.

The one statement that should help us understand both John's role, and the kingdom of God, is verse 12, "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force."

What did Jesus mean by "violent"?

To understand that, we must remember that Jesus was probably teaching in Hebrew, but his words were translated into Greek later on. The use of the word "violent" and "violence" represents a literal Greek translation of Hebrew words meaning, "breached" or "breaking forth". In our own century, we could picture this as a dam breaking. However, in those days, before hydroelectric dams, these two words would have been a reference to Micah 2:12&13:

... I will put them together like sheep of the fold.

Like a flock in the midst of their pasture, they shall make a loud noise (or "get violent") because of so many people.

*The one who **breaks open** (or **breach-maker**) will come up before them:*

*They will **break out**, pass through the gate, and go out by it;*

Their king will pass before them, the Lord at their head

An ancient midrash (Radak to Micah 2:13) gives an interpretation that was likely the widely held opinion at that time. The "one who breaks open" and the "king" are treated as

two different people: Elijah as the "breach maker", and Messiah as the king. ¹⁰

Therefore, verse 12 could have probably been translated more clearly: *From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven is breached (suffers violence) and those who are breaking free (the violent) break free by forcing their way through.* Or else, as the parallel verse in Luke 16:6 says: *The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time, the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it.*

If you can imagine sheep that have been cooped up in their pen all night, and when morning comes, they look over the stone wall, and see the nice green wide pasture. How nice it would be to be out there, munching peacefully on some nice green grass in a wide peaceful meadow with no fences instead of being cramped in such a tiny corral with 99 other smelly sheep, with no food or water. Everybody is crying "Ba-a-a-a-a ba-a-a-a-a! Let me out! Ba-a-a-a-a-a! Get out of bed, Farmer Brown! Ba-a-a-a-a" Then, finally, Farmer Brown comes and begins to kick some of the stones away. As soon as there's just a little bit of space, before Farmer Brown is even finished, the sheep start their stampede, pushing and squeezing through the small aperture between the rock and Farmer Brown's foot that's still trying to shove another rock.

According to Jesus, John is the one who has begun shoving stones out of the way; and the message to all is: "Go for it!" "Go while the going's good!" The kingdom of God is the broad meadow that has no fences.

In the passages that follow, we see that there are some groups that just won't "go for it" no matter what you tell them. They're just fine right where they are, thank you. The idea of a broad meadow with no fences is just a bit too scary for them. In fact, a few of them who have got out -- because of the stampede, of course, not intentionally -- have already started building fences... -- well, that's a topic for a different book.

Jesus addresses several of these types. You can read it for yourself if you want, but we'll jump to verse 25 to 29, where Jesus says:

At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.

"Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

The babes are the ones who have the common sense to "go while the going's good". They know a breach when they see one! In other passages, we see that the babes included publicans, sinners and prostitutes whom the religious wouldn't have anything to do with. That probably included the whole list of impossible cases we mentioned earlier.

Whatever it takes to get through the breach, do it! If there's anything holding you back, repent of it! What you'll find on the other side of the breach will more than compensate for what you gave up to get through it -- by far!

So what is on the other side of the breach?

Jesus told us in the above passage -- *rest!*

But we were just talking about getting "violent" and breaking through!

Ah, but the place that we are breaking through to, is a place of rest. Mind you, it's a different kind of rest than that of the sheep who won't bother to go through the breach. That's more like laziness. In the grace of God that's available on the other side, there is the ability to both be "sober and vigilant", and at the same time, enjoying the Sabbath rest of God.

Jesus gets more specific about what this rest entails in verse 29, where He says, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me ..." This is a picture of the training of a young ox by yoking it with a stronger and more experienced ox. The older, stronger ox would bear the brunt of the weight, and at the same time, knew the master's commands. The younger ox would learn, by moving with the older ox, how to respond to the master's commands.

We learn, by being yoked to Jesus, how to be intimate with the Father. When we move when Jesus moves, we don't have to carry much weight. We just walk along with Him, and stop when He stops, turn when He turns, and speak when He speaks. Whoever Jesus has compassion on, we feel that same compassion, and we act with Him. We don't have to worry about anything. That is rest.

In the very next two passage, we see this rest as exemplified by Sabbath, which used to occur just once a week. Those still inside the sheep corral, were still trying to maintain Sabbath rest as being a once a week thing. Jesus was outside, saying, "Come to me you who are all tired out, and I will give you rest! I am the Lord of the Sabbath rest! Break through the breach in the wall and enjoy Sabbath rest every day of the week!

Moving to the very next verse, Matthew 12:1-14 says:

*At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!" But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple. But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. **For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.**"*

Now when He had departed from there, He went into their synagogue. And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" -- that they might accuse Him. Then He said to them, "What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." Then He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and it was restored as whole as the other. Then the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him.

There is so much in there, especially in regard to King David, who was the first *anointed one* in the kingly line of Messiah Jesus, and the *anointed* priests who minister in the Holy Temple, but we don't have the space to go into all that. Jesus, who is both anointed priest and king, said "The Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath." [11](#)

There's nothing like being yoked together with the Lord of Sabbath Rest! You don't have to worry about the outcome of any particular action, because it's not your work anyway! I Peter 5:6 and 7 become a reality. When you are humble before Him, there are suddenly no worries! You simply cast it all on the one you're yoked with, because ultimately, He's responsible.

So, what do we do once we're yoked with Him? Exactly what He does; just as Jesus always did what He saw the Father do (John 5:19). If you don't know what that is, then just wait, and commune with Him in His presence until you do. If you're not in His presence yet, then do what it takes to break through the breach until you get there. Repent of anything that doesn't belong in His presence. Shed any idea you might have of being a "somebody", and just go all out for Him!

The next part of the passage above gives us a hint of what we'll be doing during Sabbath rest. There, it says it's "lawful to do good on the Sabbath," or lawful to pull a sheep out of a pit on the Sabbath.

That means, while you are yoked to Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, you will be going around pulling sheep out of pits, just as Jesus healed the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath, and went around to have dinner with publicans and sinners, and helping them out of their pits.

All of those we mentioned before as "impossible situations" represent sheep that have fallen into a pit. The only way you can possibly help them out is to be in Sabbath Rest. Otherwise, their problems will overwhelm you!

How will those people get out of their pits? I have no idea! But the Lord of Sabbath Rest, the one sharing our yoke, knows.

Take a lesson from the profession that has the highest suicide rate -- psychiatrists, who take on the problems of impossible cases they council every day -- and remain in Sabbath Rest. Grace is available to you and all those with whom you will come into contact. Just do what it takes to break through into God's rest, and stay there.

Motives

Now, let's bring this whole subject a bit closer to home for all of us who thought we knew what repentance is. We'll start with "Robby's Paraphrase" of Matt 20:1-15

For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that was a householder, who went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And behold, he found members of Modern Pentecostal Churches and large Vineyard Churches and Word of Faith Churches, and behold, some were disciples of Peter Wagner, and others of Loren Cunningham and of Rick Joyner, yea some had been to Toronto, and others to Pensacola.

And when he had agreed with the labourers for a shilling a day, they said unto the householder, 'Surely, we shall bring in the whole of this great harvest from thy vineyard, for we have the strategy and thou hast given us apostolic authority and prophetic vision.'

And he said unto them, 'Good on ya, mate', and sent them into his vineyard.

And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing in the marketplace idle: some were Roman Catholics fathers and nuns and some Anglican vicars, and others from tradition churches; and he saith unto them, 'Why stand ye here all the day idle?'

They, answering, saith unto him, 'Behold, we are satisfied with the way things are, and want to just carry on with our religious observances'.

And he breathed on them, and said, 'Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you.'

And they went their way rejoicing that they had a part in the great harvest.

Again he went out about the sixth hour, and behold, he found Orthodox rabbies standing and discussing Torah, and he saith unto them, 'Why stand ye here all the day idle?'

They answered him, saying, 'We are waiting for Messiah to come'.

He said unto them, 'Behold, I am come.' And immediately, their eyes were open, and they, likewise, went rejoicing into the Vineyard.

And the ninth hour, he went again and behold, he found homeless street children, and drug addicts, pimps, prostitutes and men of the Mafia, and behold, among them were also Neo Nazis, and Fundamentalist Jihad warriors, even one who grieved for he had missed his flight to the World Trade Centre.

And he saith unto them, 'Why stand ye here all the day idle?'

They answered, saying, 'We are the poor and the downtrodden and have been robbed of our inheritance by the imperialistic western establishment.'

He said unto them, 'Behold, I am your inheritance'. Then, their eyes were opened, and they went rejoicing into the Vineyard.

And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing. Behold, these were paedophiles, and traffickers in child prostitution; also with them were former ministers of great churches and television ministries who had fallen into deep sin and had become a stumbling block to many by their fall; yea many others also, who ought to have had a millstone tied around their neck and thrown into the depths of the sea, but instead were standing idle in the market place.

And he saith unto them, 'Why stand ye here all the day idle?'

They say unto him, 'Because no man will hire us. Behold, we are despised even by the worst of sinners. We fain would go to prison lest they beat us to death! Surely we are not worthy to even look upon, let alone work in any man's vineyard.'

But as the householder looked upon them with compassion, they began to weep.

He said unto them, 'Behold your sins are forgiven. Go ye also into the vineyard, and sin no more.'

And they went rejoicing more than them all for they had been forgiven of much.

And when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, 'Call the labourers, and pay them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.'

And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a shilling.

And when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received every man a shilling. And when they received it, they murmured against the householder, saying, 'These last, that were the worst of sinners, and have spent but one hour, thou hast made equal unto us, who are the trailblazers and missionary statesmen who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat with our intercession and strategic level spiritual warfare, yea, we have both planted and watered but they only came for the harvest.'

But he answered and said to one of them, 'Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a shilling? Take up that which is thine, and go thy way; it is my will to give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? or is thine eye evil, because I am good?'

With a sermon text like that, are you sure you want to wait around for the sermon?

But maybe, knowing that this is just as much about me as about you, will embolden you to step out with me into the deep, troubled, uncharted waters of human motives. Also, we will start with a premise that should remove any temptation to be judgemental. That is this: No human, with the exception of Jesus, has ever had 100 percent pure motives about anything.

I am talking about 100 percent pure. That doesn't even leave room for half a percent that knows there may be something good in store for having made a right decision, or that people will gain a better opinion of you.

I think that if we reflect long enough, we can at least speak for ourselves that our motives are never quite 100 percent pure, or at least if they're relatively pure one day, they're a bit less pure the next.

Now please don't misunderstand me – I only said that it should stop us from judging *others* – no mention of examining ourselves. The maxim, 'Nobody's perfect', is about the other person, not a cover for you and me. Knowing that we have wrong motives – once we've pinpointed them – gives us a starting point in striving towards our ultimate goal of being like Jesus, who, if you remember, had 100 percent pure motives.

Not that the rest of us will ever achieve 100 percent purity while living in our earthly bodies. But, *looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith* (Heb 12:2), we move ever closer towards that goal, *working out our own salvation with fear and trembling*

(Phil 2:12). In doing so, we quickly find that motives are where the rubber meets the upward road.

wrong assumptions about motives

Now, starting with the premise that the rest of us have less than 100 percent pure motives, let's revisit a few commonly held assumptions. This will help unclutter our minds of judgemental attitudes. Believe me, this more than anything else, will speed us up towards the goal of Christlike purity.

Lets start with the one that says, 'Non Christians are incapable of doing good or performing charitable acts without ulterior motives.' That's probably based on the Calvinistic teaching on the total depravity of man without Christ – that man, on his own strength, can't so much as choose to follow Christ without God giving him the specific grace to do so.

The key word here is 'grace'. Let's expand on the above by adding that none of us is born, lives nor breaths without grace from God. Paul told the Athenians, *in Him we live and move and have our being* (Acts 17:28; in this context, he was referring to mankind in general, not the Christian life in particular). Even before coming to Christ, our life is full of choices, and there is grace from God in various forms and measures for each choice. In a way, people respond to grace in small measures throughout their whole lives until the day comes when they are faced with the big choice, whether or not to follow Christ.

One of the forms in which grace can be found, is love

Even though we make distinctions between various kinds of love, ie. *agape, phileo etc.*, love is still love, and ultimately comes from God. A mothers love for her child is God's gift to that child, regardless of whether that mother is a born again believer or not. It's through the love of the parents, however imperfect, that the child will one day come to understand God's love. We could go on with examples of other kinds of love, but let's just say that love, in what ever form we find it, is grace from God.

Government authority is another form of grace.

Secular human authority, even in an atheistic nation, is authority originating from God. We are told to honour those in authority (Rom 13), even those who may later turn around and persecute us, as they, in the mean time do help insure a peaceful and orderly society. That, also, is grace from God.

And what are the motives?

Where God's grace is present, especially as the result of Christians doing as they are told and praying for those in authority, some civic decisions are the result of the civic leader's conscience. Isn't that a proper motive?

Well, okay, suppose the civic leader also wanted to look good. So there's a mixture – say, 60 percent of one and 30 percent of the other, and the remaining 10 percent because he doesn't want to hear it from his wife when he gets home at the end of the day.

That's still not bad for an atheist.

What about us? If our own motives are less than 100 percent pure, why is it such a big deal that their motives are just a bit less pure than our own (if indeed they are)?

Another assumption we make is, any act of kindness or any show of goodness is without any value at all, if a false motive can be detected. Some people are made to feel

like Judas Iscariot if there was any financial remuneration to be gained from a good deed, or if one's act of kindness also just happened to place one in position to take advantage of a good business opportunity.

However, the fact that they feel good about having done the good deed shows that they do recognise goodness and mercy, and are therefore pleased that they had the opportunity to express it, even if it did require a bit of financial incentive, and even if it does involve the 'feel'in good' aspect. At least they feel good about the right thing. Why is that so hard for us to accept?

If there is indeed a mixture of good and bad motives, what keeps us from at least acknowledging the good? Why must we always be such party poopers? Of course, they need to come to Christ to receive His forgiveness and obtain His holiness, but again, holiness is also something *we're* still working on, isn't it. That's also the reason *we* need to abide and grow in Christ.

defining ministry

Now that we know that we're all far from perfect in our motives, and we all need His grace, either to get saved, or else to work out that salvation with fear and trembling, let's take this whole issue into the area of ministry.

First, what is ministry?

We could say, ministry is *what we do on behalf of God to expand His kingdom on earth*.

Or we could look at the root word, and call it *servanthood*. Paul often called himself a 'bondslave of Jesus Christ'. James, at the beginning of his epistle, called himself that without even bothering to say he was also known as an apostle, or that he was the leader of the church in Jerusalem, or that he was a close blood-relation of Jesus. Wouldn't that have been more impressive than 'bondslave'?

Or, we could refer to the above parable, and simply call ministry *working in the vineyard*.

What does all this have to do with motives? What can all this tell us about where we are in our journey to be like Jesus? Let's start with the first definition above:

expanding God's kingdom

This is probably the wider definition of ministry, which covers most of our expectations. To expand on this, I'll refer to what I'm doing at this very minute – writing.

I believe that writing is one of my ministries. I like to believe that through my writing, I'm helping to expand God's kingdom.

But what are my motives?

I tell myself that it's to impart intimacy with Jesus, and to encourage people to get real.

Is that my motive?

Er...yes.

100 percent?

Well ... er ... mmmf no

Despite being the proud writer of the following?

...Let's say I'm out shopping for some groceries. I'm wheeling my grocery trolley down an aisle trying to compare the price on two different brands of baked beans. Then, I hear two people just on the other side of the row of shelves having a conversation, and I realise they are friends of mine.

One of them is saying, 'You know, Robby just isn't as sharp as he thinks he is.'

'That's right,' says the other. 'Half of the stuff he writes -- it just bores me to death!'

'Yes, he's out of touch, somehow.'

'And that hair-doo of his. Why! He's just an over-grown hippie!'

As I carry my bag of baked beans home, I mutter to myself, 'Out of touch, am I? An over-grown hippie am I?'

That's all I can think of for all that day, and the rest of the week. The next time I see those two people in church, I just grunt and look the other way. 'Huh! What does the "over-grown hippie" have to say to you?'

When it's time to get down to some writing, I just sigh, and say, 'What's the use -- I'm just an out-of-touch over-grown hippie. My stuff just bores people.'

What has happened?

I've been hit with one of the enemy's arrows, and I was wounded because I didn't have my breastplate of righteousness on.

If I did, my focus wouldn't be on my writing ability, nor how in-touch I am, nor my smart hair-doo. It would be on who I am in God's eyes.

I would be so taken up with what the Creator of the universe thinks of me that it wouldn't make any difference to me that my friends think I'm less than top-notch.

That is, what the Creator of the universe thinks of me -- not my writing ability, or my looks. My writing ability is nice, of course, but I must realise that God doesn't love 'Robby, the great author', or 'Robby, the spell-binding Bible teacher'. He doesn't even love 'Robby the missionary' or 'Robby with oh-so-much potential'.

Who does God love? He loves just plain old Robby -- with or without any abilities and accomplishments. (from [Wearing the Whole Armour of God](#))

So tell me, was that a wonderful specimen of literary art or what?

And apart from wanting people to become intimate with Jesus, what's my motive?

To get people to love 'Robby the great author'.

And what happens when my reading audience fails me?

I get an arrow stuck in my chest, and have to go scrambling about trying to find my breastplate of righteousness and set it back in place.

So what's the answer? Should I just quit writing because my motives are all wrong in the first place?

If we keep going on like this, we fall into the trap of self condemnation, afraid to do anything because we're always detecting wrong motives all over the place. The trouble is, there are plenty to be detected – enough to drive one to a monastery.

What's the answer?

What I did was go before God, spend time with Him, and after a while say, 'Shall I erase everything I've done off of my hard drive, and delete all my websites?' and waited for His answer. I think I've sufficiently opened my ear to honestly hear whether or not the

answer would be 'yes', but each time, so far, it has been 'no'.

The secret is to get our eyes off of ourselves, and on to Jesus. In looking at Him, we embrace the reality that He loves us.

Impure motives are about ourselves, and what we can do.

Love is about the other person, in this case, Jesus.

'Robby the great author' is about me – the way I like to look at me. That is the source of all kinds of impure motives.

'Just Robby ', is the way Jesus sees me – the me that Jesus loves.

The more I can get my eyes off of myself, and onto Jesus, so that the love begins flowing between 'Just Robby' and Jesus, the purer my motives will be.

After basking in His presence, we're then in the position to obey when He does tell us to get rid of something, or to backtrack on some rash decision.

Isaac or Ishmael?

It's right about that point when God told Abraham to get rid of Ishmael.

Ishmael was the result of good motives and bad – but mostly bad – unbelief. It was an attempt to follow the vision God had given Abraham for his ministry, but on his own strength. Finally, Abraham came to grips with the issue, backtracked, and sent Ishmael away.

But that wasn't all. Next, God told Abraham to erase Isaac from his hard drive.

Isaac was the result of a right decision, but even there, God wanted to make sure his motives were right, and asked him to do something that would go completely contrary to everything that was less than the highest motive of all.

Isaac had to die. All motives had to die. In effect, Abraham died.

Then, Isaac was raised up again, and so was Abraham, but with much purer motives than earlier that week.

If one isn't quite sure whether one's project, or the ministry one has been spending half a lifetime on is an 'Isaac' or an 'Ishmael', there's one of two things one can do:

1. Simply place it (or him/her) on the alter, and see if the Lord takes it away or gives it back.

Sounds easy?

Unless one is really and truly sure that God's best is all one wants, over and above what one has spent all of one's sweat and tears on, it might not work. It's too easy to deceive oneself. *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?* (Jer 17:9) The way around that may be to just spend time with Him until you're sure that His presence is all you want. You may simply be honest with Him, and say, 'I don't know my heart. I don't know if I'm willing or not, but I *want* to be.' I believe He'll honour that.

Jesus called that, 'falling on the rock' (Matt 21:44).

2. The other option is, wait 'til the burning comes (what Jesus called 'the rock falling on you'):

Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be

revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Cor 3:12-15 NKJV)

Burning may take place on earth when all things are shaken (Heb 12:26-29), or else at the judgement seat of Christ after we've passed into the world to come. Based on our premise that no one has absolutely 100 percent pure motives, I think we can safely say that we all will have at least a few bits burned away. It's simply a matter of how much or how little, and how much gold *etc.* is left over.

If we're fortunate enough to go through an intense shaking *before* we pass into the world to come, that's God's mercy. As we sit, like Job, in midst of the ruins of our life's work, and everything we once considered precious, smarting from the intense pain, we can rejoice and thank God because now we have a chance to start over and build with gold, silver and precious stones.

LET THE FIRE FALL!

I can't guarantee that you'll still be physically alive on this earth after the burning's hit, but if you are, according to Jesus' parable of the labourers (see our text at the top) you'll have the same chance at your one shilling wage as Peter Wagner, Rick Joyner and the rest of us. But just remember, when that time comes, where to look: at Jesus, and not yourself or your circumstances.

being a bonds slave

The second definition of ministry we mentioned was 'servanthood'. As we pointed out, Paul, James and others referred to themselves as bonds slaves.

A bonds slave, in Jewish Law, was one who had spent the specified tenure as a slave, and decided he or she liked it better than freedom. There was a prescribed procedure of declaring one as a bonds slave, and placing a permanent mark on the body, so it would be official that this one was a bonds slave to that one for life. It was a voluntary relinquishing of one's freedom, and even ownership of oneself and all one's own possessions to the master.

That's how Paul, James and others saw themselves in relation to Jesus. They considered themselves as no longer having the right to make a decision to do, or not to do anything apart from what Jesus directed them to do.

For Paul, it was his whole motivation. He simply loved Jesus so much he had to obey him.

In an age where preaching the gospel was a risky occupation, he said, *woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!* (1 Cor 9:16)

It was not only a love for Jesus, but that love had also translated into a love for his fellow man, particularly the Jewish community:

I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites... (Rom 9:1-4 NKJV)

It's clear from this that not even rewards in the afterlife were a motive for Paul. If it were an option, he would even consider trading his eternal state for the salvation of his fellow countrymen.

If that's nearly 100 percent pure motivation, then that's yet another indicator of where the rest of us are. I don't think I'd ever consider wishing myself accursed from Christ for anyone. Fortunately, it's not a trade-able option.

We've traditionally thought of heavenly rewards as being the highest motive for making any decision. Paul considered love an even higher motive that could even veto the lesser one of heavenly rewards if given the option. Where does that place all other possible motives?

I just want to be in God's will

Lets look at another motive that we normally consider as very high on the list of pure motives: that of being in God's will.

Usually, the answer, 'I just want to be in God's will', is considered a good final answer to any question of why we'd make a particular decision

But what if someone ventures to ask, 'Why do you want to be in God's will?'

In Evangelical/Charismatic circles we've been taught so thoroughly about the importance of being in God's will, and even the difference between God's perfect will and His permissive will, that it wouldn't even make sense to us to ask such a question.

God's perfect will is the place to be! Why do you have to ask *why*?

If they press the point, we say...

- God's perfect will is where the *blessing* is
- God's perfect will is where we are truly *fulfilled*.
- In God's perfect will there is *safety*.
- Where God guides, God *provides*.
- In God's perfect will, there's an *open heaven*, and we can hear God's voice clearly.
- In God's perfect will there's no need to jump overboard and look for a whale to

swallow you.

But look at these answers very carefully. *They're all ulterior motives.*

Paul and James didn't preach the gospel because that's where the blessing was. Paul walked straight into places where it looked like the blessing *wasn't*, but where he was in God's will, simply because he was a bonds slave. At one point he was even *warned* about going to Jerusalem by prophets and others who felt it in the spirit, but he went anyway. Everything happened that he was warned about, but he went there in obedience, and was in the centre of God's will.

Gaining fulfilment in life wasn't the motive of John the Baptist, when he said, 'He must increase, I must decrease' (John 3:30).

That line may flow off of our lips easily today, as we think of Christ on the throne and His kingdom, but don't forget this: In the days John said those words, Jesus *wasn't* sitting at the right hand of the Father as the Head of the Church. He was what seemed to the casual observer, simply another human being with a ministry that was in competition with John's. It takes a lot more faith to recognise Christ in a colleague, or in another

ministry similar to ours (or dissimilar, as the case may be), than in the theological concept of Christ, the *de facto* boss of the church.

To paraphrase it, John said, 'My ministry must shrink, and become less and less prominent, while this other man's ministry, this Johnny-come-lately, must get so big that he totally eclipses me.' How many times have we said that about our fellow ministers? Before you jump to a conclusion, remember, Jesus said, what we do to the least of His brethren, we've done it to Him (Matt 10:40-42; 25:40).

What about Paul's instruction to the Philippians?

*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others **better than himself**. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.* (Phil 2:3-4 NKJV)

As for John, his ministry decreased so much that he ended up rotting in a prison, from which he sent some of his last remaining disciples to Jesus to find out if it was all worthwhile or not. Then he was beheaded as an attraction at someone's birthday party.

I don't think John felt very fulfilled, but he was in God's will.

Anyone who's studied the book of Jeremiah will tell you that Jeremiah rarely felt fulfilled either, but he was God's man for the hour in which he lived.

I think we can readily see that the desire to be in God's will *can* be a selfish, impure motive if we're not careful.

Now, let's apply all this to...

working in the vineyard

All the reasons we listed above for wanting to be in God's will centre around the word **I**. **I** want to receive full blessing; **I** want to be fulfilled in life; **I** want to be where **I'm** divinely protected; **I** want to be in the place of God's provision; **I** want to have an open heaven above me; and **I** don't want no whale swallowing **me**.

The examples we looked at, of Paul, John the Baptist, James and Abraham, their motive centred away from self, and around 'Jesus', 'God' or the people for whom God had given a burden, even if it were at the expense of '**me**', '**myself**' and '**I**'. Abraham's motivation was so centred around his covenant with God, he willingly sacrificed Isaac, the only hope his '**I**' had for future blessing and fulfilment. John the Baptist's motivation was so centred around that other minister's promotion, he accepted '**my**' own demotion and obscurity. Paul's was centred around the salvation of his brethren, the Jews, even at the expense of '**my**' own place in the world to come, if that were a trade-able commodity.

When we look at the parable of the labourers in the vineyard, we see the **I** quite clearly: **I** want to receive recognition for what I've accomplished for the kingdom. **I** think **I'm** entitled to more than that bloke over there.

Our examples in the Bible were much more interested in the harvest itself than in who got to bring it in, or who got credit for it.

Whenever Paul did something he ought to have received credit for, he chose to forget *those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.* (Phil

3:13,14) He chose not to keep a record of his past achievements, and strove only for his part in the resurrection.

John the Baptist knew that his part in the harvest was to decrease, and someone else's part was to both do it all, and get all the credit. He knew that was the only way the harvest would be brought in, so did all he could to see that that someone else got a good start.

Jeremiah was told from the start that he would see no harvest at all, and that his listeners moreover would resist him til the end. His ministry was to ... *root out and to pull down, To destroy and to throw down, To build and to plant.* (Jer 1:10) During his own life he literally did the first four, but the *building* and *planting* was that of an unseen kingdom of the future. He could only accept by faith that he was building and planting. The rooting out and pulling down part, he saw with his own eyes.

In fact, life got so boring for Jeremiah, at one point he decided he just wouldn't prophecy any more. But the fire raged in his heart so hot he just couldn't keep his mouth shut and he went at it some more (Jer 20:9ff).

As boring as it was, his life was one of those around which the entire history of Israel pivoted. The national life of Israel took on a whole different meaning as the result of his prophesying.

And, speaking of dodging the whale, what about Jonah, everybody's example of why not to disobey God? Was he really as far off the beam as we always picture him? What if he had obeyed God and gone straight to Nineveh? Where would such an important message embodied in that book be, without a whale to swallow Jonah? What lesson would we have learned?

And, was Jonah so stuck in the mud that he needed a special lesson from God? If so, what other prophets of his day would have got straight up and gone directly to Nineveh on God's command? According to Jewish tradition, Jonah was the son of the widow that Elijah went to live with in Zorath during the famine. Seeing the miracles of Elijah was a part of his growing up. He was even raised from the dead at one point. He may have even remembered glimpses of heaven.

But what God told Jonah to do was so radical for that day and age that Jonah probably had to write the book of Jonah just to explain to the other prophets why in the world he would do something so crazy as go to preach in Nineveh. It was probably a similar situation as Peter explaining to the apostles in Jerusalem why he went to eat and drink in the home of Cornelius, a gentile.

The prophetic community in those days probably thought they knew the mind of God. They probably did know it far better than the priests and elders of Israel. However, from God's point of view, there were still things they needed to learn about His plan for the world, and He very much desired to open their minds to it.

What better way than to find the most open and 'cutting edge' prophet, and tell him out of the blue, 'Go to Nineveh, and tell them to repent so they won't be destroyed.'

That would be the same as telling one of us, 'Go to Pakistan, and find Osama bin Laden, and tell him that the God of Israel loves him, and to please vacate this house and go to your alternative location, because the Navy Seals are coming for you.' That's exactly how the Israelites of that time viewed Nineveh, and the evil Assyrian empire.

God knew what a radical command this was, but it was so important to Him that His people get the message, that He prepared a storm and a fish to change Jonah's direction back towards Nineveh.

And what about Jonah? He ended up sitting in the scorching sun outside of Nineveh, wishing he were dead. Was that fulfilment?

God's will was done.

What about us? Do we want God's will done on earth as it is in Heaven so badly that we're willing for God to totally confuse us, spin us around, and finally leave us sitting in the hot blazing sun wishing we were dead? I'm not talking about our own version of God's will -- that's what Jonah started out with -- I'm talking about God's *pure* will, even if it catches us totally off our guard.

The secret to wanting it so badly is to look to Jesus, and learning to work *with* Him. The labourers in the vineyard were working *for* the Lord, so they had their minds on the reward. If we learn to work *with* the Lord, then we truly begin to share His concern for the *work*, so much so that we forget that there even is a reward.

As you set out to sort out your motives, look at Jesus, not at yourself.

As you try to figure out if your work is an Ishmael or an Isaac, look at Jesus, not at your work.

As you go out into the vineyard, look at Jesus, and work *with* Him, not just for Him.

As you sit in your prison cell, wondering if it was all worth while, look at Jesus, not at the fruit of your labours.

As you sit, confused, in the hot sun, wishing you were dead, look at Jesus, not at the crazy mixed up world you've found yourself in.

As you look at Jesus, your motives will sort themselves out. Only as He truly increases in your sight will you effectively decrease.

End Notes -

1 Just as John wasn't the person of Elijah, but rather only came in the spirit of Elijah, it's hard to tell what form the spirit of Elijah will take in the last days - whether one individual, or a large group, or perhaps Elijah himself! [return to text](#)

2 This doesn't mean God doesn't know the end from the beginning. He knows; and yet He is so wise, he doesn't have to control things all the time to make them turn out for the best. [return to text](#)

3 Unfortunately, much of what we believe about the Pharisees, and Judaism, comes from a certain group of German theologians around the turn of the last century. They made a study of the Talmud, and of other rabbinical literature, but treated it as though it were a compendium of systematic theology. Some of the off hand comments by rabbis, they treated as though they were points of a universal Jewish creed. Their conclusion was that Jewish religion was extremely dry and legalistic. Salvation is based on a system of merits and demerits. If the merits outweigh the demerits, you'll go to Heaven. Also, the Pharisees, according to their findings, were an elite group who shunned contact with the common people.

In actual fact, the Jews had neither a work of systematic theology nor a creed (Rambam produced these much later in response to the Christian creeds). Many of the comments recorded in the Talmud were only representative of various opinions that could be found, and some were only made to stress a point or give an illustration. Only by taking it all as a whole, and thoroughly understanding the context can any conclusions be based on the Talmud.

The German mind tends to be very well ordered, and has everything put in its place. The oriental Jewish mind of the rabbis is more what has been described as "organic thinking". To understand Jewish thinking with the German mind would be the same as trying to apply the principals of physics to biology, or to try to predict the path of a thunderstorm with simple mathematics. In actual fact, Judaism share a lot more in common with evangelical Christianity than one would have thought at first. A good reference is E.P.Sanders, *Paul and Palistinian Judiasm* 1977, SCM Press Ltd, London. The section on rabbinical literature gives a lot to think about. [return to text](#)

4 Surprisingly little is otherwise found in the Old Testament regarding resurrection and life in the world to come. The only direct references are found in Daniel (12:2) and in the Psalms (71:20). It's hard to say how early the book of Daniel was accepted as a part of the

cannon of Scripture, or which was accepted first, the doctrine of resurrection or the book of Daniel. However, the Pharisees played a big part in agreeing on the Old Testament cannon. Jesus' argument with the Sadducees (Matt 22:23-33) was an indirect reference based only on the Torah, and was typical of the way the Pharisees argued on this issue. [return to text](#)

5 In case anyone wants to quibble over who said it first, it's also found in the Apocrypha, in the book of Tobit, written long before either Jesus or Hillel. [return to text](#)

6 On some occasions the Sadducees apparently gained a majority here. When Paul was on trial, he, being familiar with the ropes, was never the less taken by surprise on finding that the president was actually none other than the High Priest. Noticing then that quite a number of Sadducees were present, he probably concluded that there had been a power struggle. He took advantage of the situation by saying, "I am a Pharisee...it is for the hope of resurrection that I stand here." All the Pharisees present, of course, jumped at the opportunity to vent their wrath at the Sadducees, and Paul saved his neck. [return to text](#)

7 ...which is okay for Christians -- well, it had better be -- well, it is, isn't it? [return to text](#)

8 These two words are found together in three significant passages which can be said to define New Testament doctrine: Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21 and Heb 6:1. Repentance as being a part of the New Testament doctrine of salvation, is found in Acts 2:38; 17:30; 26:20; Rom 2:4 and II Pet 3:9. While faith isn't specifically mentioned in these latter verses, it is certainly inferred.

In some instances where faith is mentioned, repentance isn't specifically mentioned, as in Acts 16:31, in the case of the Philippian jailor. However, if you notice carefully, there had been an earthquake in which the doors had been jarred open. The prisoners, instead of fleeing through the open doors, had stayed put, most likely out of heavy conviction of sin. The jailor came in, trembling, and falling at their feet - not a natural pose for a Roman guard - obviously, already in a state of repentance. In Romans 10:9&10, repentance is inferred by the declaration "Jesus is Lord" in all that this implies, both theologically and personally. [back to text](#)

9 Some say the definition of grace is "unmerited favour". In our case, it certainly is unmerited. However, if we are to put more emphasis on the word "unmerited", then "mercy" is probably a better word. Luke 2:40 says that the grace of God was on Jesus. If anyone *merited* God's favour, it was Jesus, so it couldn't have been called "unmerited" in His case. With the emphasis on favour, we get a more accurate understanding of what grace means. [return to text](#)

10 For a more thorough explanation, see: *Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus* by David Bivin & Roy Blizzard Jr.; Destiny Image Publishers, 1984 [return to text](#)

11 A fuller study of this whole two chapters is available in the Tishbyte Foundational Bible Study Series, the outline titled: *[The Kingdom Breaks Forth](#)*. [return to text](#)

The Judgement & Afterlife: a study

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The following is companion study to my novella, [Allegory](#)

For a simpler explanation of what the Kingdom of God is all about,
check out my illustrated e-book:

[The Happy Kingdom](#)

'Hell' is a dirty word. Some of us say it to our mates in the pub, and some of us, to our parishioners from the pulpit -- but either way it's dirty.

Maybe that's because there's too much about it we're afraid to ask, or let on we don't know about it. It might be because we look at it through a pair of lenses that we're afraid to shed in the presence of our fellow churchmen -- i.e. the ready made systematic theology that we've been told is the result of thorough study of all of what the Bible has to say about the subject, all the way down through church history by people better than you and I -- so we blindly accept that that's what the Bible has to say about the subject.

Just for the fun of it, let's pretend that that systematic theology hasn't been written yet. In fact, let's pretend that all we have are what the early believers had, even before Acts and Paul's epistles were written. All we have are the sayings of Yeshua.

That is what the church started with, after all. Acts is really just a record of how the churches were launched using that formula. Even Paul's epistles were written to churches that were built on the foundation of Yeshua's sayings, so whatever Paul said about Hell -- and anything else, for that matter -- would have been understood against a background of what Yeshua already said about it.

So, we'll start with Yeshua's sayings, and then, look briefly at how the preachers in Acts of the Apostles treated it. After that we'll look at what Paul's epistles and Revelation says. We'll take it in the order that our spiritual forefathers received it, and then re-ask some of the same questions: "Who, exactly, is a candidate for hell?"; "What about some of the indigestible sayings of Yeshua in the Gospels?" (without the filter of systematic theology, of course); "Are there only two destinations in the world to come, or is there room for belief in Purgatory as well?"; and not least (and probably not last either), "What about those who haven't heard?"

We might not answer all of these questions conclusively, but I think we may find that they do point to some facts of the Kingdom of God that we have generally tended to ignore, so this should be rewarding. If not -- if it ends up being too indigestible -- at least, we still have Augustine, Calvin, and Schofield to fall back on, okay?

Sermon on the Mt. -- Matthew 5:18-30 is a passage in the Sermon on the Mt. in which Yeshua speaks extensively of judgement and rewards. His references to the negative

rewards range from being least in the kingdom of God, punishment with hope of getting out, to *Gei-Hinnom*, which suggests eternal punishment in hell. It's a handy passage because it's a summary of everything we'll cover in this discussion.

In Matthew 5:18-20, one has a choice being greatest or least in the kingdom of heaven, depending on if one keeps and teaches the commandments; and not entering the kingdom of heaven at all if one's righteousness doesn't exceed that of the Pharisees. Is the latter synonymous with hell?

Matthew 5:21-22 is the first mention of *Gei-Hinnom*. It's the penalty for calling one's brother a fool. *Gei-Hinnom* was a term that the Rabbis used loosely to mean the place for dead souls rejected from God's kingdom. It was actually an area outside the city wall where rubbish was dumped, and there was usually a fire burning.

Was it Yeshua's intention to use this term to refer to the place of eternal punishment? Was it his purpose here to outline a doctrine of hell, or was he simply using relative terms? We'll talk more about *Gei-Hinnom* later.

Then, in Matthew 5:23-26, in the case of the one on their way to the court of law, we suddenly see punishment with the hope of coming out. The last phrase says *you will certainly not get out until you have paid the last penny*. We'll look at more of this in a moment.

So far in this passage, we've found the three categories of judgement sayings of Yeshua that will be the subject of our discussion: 1. *Gei-Hinnom*; 2. Prison; and 3. Exclusion from the kingdom. We'll look at the first two headings right off, and work our way to the third.

Gei-Hinnom -- The final section of the passage we've referred to, Matthew 5:27-30, brings us back to the concept of *Gei-Hinnom*. The key phrase is, *Better that you should lose one part of you than have your whole body thrown into Gei-Hinnom*.

The context for this over-all passage is in how to apply the Torah so as to be a candidate for the Kingdom of God. Here, there's the added impetus -- avoid being sent to *Gei-Hinnom*. Yeshua obviously doesn't recommend the literal cutting off one's body parts as that would in itself be a violation of the Torah. He's using a Jewish style superlative to say, 'Do what it takes. This is serious.'

This section was in reference to lust, which can lead to adultery. The previous section in which *Ge-Hinnom* was mentioned, verses 21-22, was regarding hatred, which is the potential for murder.

In Jewish tradition, the three capital offences are adultery, murder and idolatry. The mandatory penalty for these under the national covenant of Israel, was stoning.

Yeshua has equated the seeds with the final product. What Yeshua is saying is, deal with these sins even when they're in their infancy, as thoughts in the heart, hatred, lust; and I suppose we could add, whatever potentially leads to idol worship (that would be material for a different discussion).

In a parallel passage, Matthew 18:6-9, we find that Yeshua more clearly means "hell". He refers to the choices as obtaining eternal life, versus, being thrown into the fire of *Gei-Hinnom*.

Here, he also compares it to cutting off one's offending body part so as to avoid eternal

punishment. The context here is in the seriousness of being a stumbling block, or causing offence. The most vivid picture is that of offending a little one, destroying a child's life, or even that of a vulnerable adult. It's something that must be avoided at all costs, even if it means getting rid of something you value as much as your eye or your hand. The mention of 'everlasting fire' indicates that Yeshua is, indeed, referring to hell.

Taken together, we see that the sin of destroying someone else's life, whether by murder, by adultery (*sic.* destroying another person's marriage), by abuse, or even entertaining the option of doing so, is something we must be on our guard for. More on this later.

Prison -- Later in the same chapter, we again find mention of the judgement that lasts only until the transgressor has paid 'the last penny':

In Matthew 18:21-35, Yeshua tells Peter the story of the servant who was forgiven by the master, but wouldn't forgive his fellow servant. He was turned over to the jailer *for punishment until he paid back everything he owed*.

This fits in the same pattern as the saying in Matthew chapter 5, where one is advised to settle with the opponent on the way to court, or pay the 'last penny'. The judgement is similar, and so is the offence. In both cases, maintaining a good relationship with others is seen as a priority. Though the judgement isn't as severe as that of causing another to stumble, both can be seen as two aspects, or two degrees of the same problem -- failure to take care where other people, their spiritual, physical, social and psychological welfare is concerned.

We'll try to fit this into an understandable framework later on.

failure to show mercy -- In two more of Yeshua's parables, he obviously refers to hell in the same sense *Gei-Hinnom*, the place of fiery torment. In both of these, we see that one's deeds have a determining factor in one being assigned to heaven or hell -- especially showing, or failing to show mercy.

Matthew 25:31-46 is where the Son of Man judges the sheep from the goats. To the goats, He says, *Go off into the fire prepared for the Adversary and his angels!* Their offence: failing to show mercy when it was in their power to do so.

On the other hand, the sheep nations appear bewildered that they were allowed into the kingdom.

Luke 16:19-31 is the story of the rich man and Lazarus. The only distinction made between the two was that the rich man lived only for himself while Lazarus suffered all his life. Again, the rich man's offence was failure to show mercy.

It's interesting to note that there is no mention of Lazarus being a God fearing man, only that he got the wrong end of the stick. There is, however, the indication that heeding Moses and the prophets could have saved the rich man.

The point in both parables is that the rich man and the goat nations failed to show mercy and kindness when it's in their power to do so. According to Yeshua, elsewhere, that is the whole point of the Torah and the Prophets. The sheep nations did it, probably following their inner witness as described in Romans 2 (we'll get to that later), and Lazarus was one of those in need of mercy, and received it at Abraham's bosom.

wailing and grinding of teeth-- One phrase that recurs in Yeshua's sayings regarding judgement that of 'wailing and the grinding of teeth'. This phrase is used in a number of contexts. Are they all synonymous with just one place -- namely hell?

In the following two occurrences, both from Matthew 13, they seem to indicate a final and fiery destruction.

Matthew 13:39-43 gives us Yeshua's explanation of his parable of the wheat and the tares. The tares are finally gathered and thrown into a furnace, *where people will wail and grind their teeth*.

Among those said to be the tares are 'all things that *cause people to sin*.' This sounds close to causing others to stumble, which we discussed earlier, which saw was a damnable sin. A key concept in this passage, as also a few verses later in Matthew 13:47-50, is that of a fiery furnace.

Matthew 13:47-50 makes the distinction between the 'evil' and the 'righteous'. Both are strong terms. Is there any middle ground?

Both of these parables are about the end of the age, at which time, according to other passages, there seems to be a polarisation between good and evil to the extent that everyone will have been drawn to either one or the other.

In the two parables, both found in the same passages, we see 'wailing and grinding of teeth' accompanying destruction in the fiery furnace. Some rules of hermeneutics state that a term that has been used to clearly mean one thing in one passage, should always be taken to mean the same thing. Therefore, some say, 'wailing and grinding of teeth' is always indicative of being in hell, the final state of the wicked. I would rather wait and look at some of the other passages before making a judgement. The more indicative key words in both parables are, 'end of the age', and 'fiery furnace'.

Let's look at some passages that associate the 'wailing and the grinding' of teeth in relation with another term: 'outer darkness'.

Matthew 22:1-14 is the parable of the wedding feast. Here, there are two distinct groups, both to be excluded from the kingdom, but not in the same category.

First, we see that those who mistreated and killed the messengers were judged, killed and their cities destroyed. Then we see that the one who showed up inappropriately dressed for the wedding was tied up and thrown into outer darkness where he wailed and ground his teeth.

From this passage, does it look like the two forms of judgement are, in fact, the same thing? The murderers and persecutors, no doubt, ended up in the fiery furnace referred to in Matthew 13. In that context, they would have no doubt wailed and ground their teeth, as the inappropriately dressed wedding guest did in this context. However, the passage doesn't make it obvious that the two ended up in the same place. That can only be inferred by applying a conclusive, ready made doctrine of eternal judgement, which we're only in the process of developing here.

Let's look at 'wailing and grinding of teeth' from a slightly different angle before we solidify our conclusions.

Luke 13:24-30 talks about struggling to get in by the narrow door. Those who don't bother, will one day 'cry and grind their teeth' when they look and see the Patriarchs and

prophets, along with the gentile nations inside and them left outside, knocking at the door, trying to get in. There are dynamics here that we would be hard put to apply literally to the common 'heaven - hell' scenario, such as standing outside and knocking, or being able to see those inside. It looks like the offenders here are in the same place the five foolish virgins found themselves in, which we'll look at later.

In any case, it's looking more and more to me like 'wailing and grinding one's teeth' is not so much a reference to an exact place, be it a fiery furnace, outer darkness, or simply the wrong side of the door, but to how one reacts when one finds oneself in that position -- an expression of intense regret.

By now, we can start to see the direction we're moving in. We might be accused of giving people licence to sin by 'watering down' the Bible doctrine of hell. Really, we're only contemplating a slight shift away from an extreme and rather draconian position. Extremeness is not synonymous with truth. In any case, wailing and grinding one's teeth is not a pleasant experience no matter where one is doing it. I, for one, don't plan to rush headlong into outer darkness, nor plant myself on the wrong side of the door just because it doesn't happen to include fire and brimstone.

That's a good point to keep in mind when looking at the next category of passages.

judgement on Christians -- In Matthew 7:21-27, those who appear doctrinally correct are rejected, even those who seem to be operating in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They ask Him at the day of judgement, *Lord, Lord! Didn't we prophesy in your name? etc.* The answer they receive is, *I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness!* Again, it isn't clear that they are assigned to hell, but at least they're excluded from the kingdom of God.

In Matthew 24:45-25:30, we read a group of parables Yeshua related during his discourse on the end times: the parable of the Faithful Servant; the Ten Virgins; and the parable of the Talents. In these, Yeshua describes the various ones who will be excluded from the kingdom. Again, it is not obvious in each case that they will actually be thrown into hell.

To the five foolish virgins, he says, 'I don't know you.' The abusive servant and the one with the one talent are both relegated to a place where there will be weeping and the grinding of teeth.

three categories of judgement sayings -- When we look at all the sayings of Yeshua regarding judgement, we can place them in three general categories:

1. *Gei-Hinnom*, Sheol, the fire prepared for the Adversary and his angels -- where Yeshua obviously refers to 'hell', as we think of it. It's the place for those who have committed the more serious sins, have caused others to stumble, or have lived only for themselves, failing to show mercy or kindness when it was in their power to do so.

2. *Prison* -- where the unforgiving one will be held until they have paid 'the last penny'. It is the place for those who refuse to forgive, or won't prioritise relationships. The tenure seems to be conditional to however long it takes to resolve the conflict. It's possible that Yeshua was referring to a state of spiritual imprisonment while in this life, perhaps like the 40 years wandering in the wilderness. Perhaps it's a state suffered both in

this life and the next. We'll cover that possibility in a moment.

3. Excluded from the kingdom and/or cast into outer darkness (probably synonymous) -- those who claim Yeshua as Lord, but don't do his will, even if they demonstrate power in his name; those who don't make profitable use of resources they have been given; those who tire of watching for the Master's return and abuse their fellow servants, or otherwise fail to take their mandate seriously and are found not ready when the time comes to act. Perhaps we could include in this category the passages where Yeshua states the costs of discipleship (doesn't hate father and mother, looks back after putting ones hand to the plough, etc.).

Do the latter two indicate the possibility of there being other after-life states apart from dwelling in the heavenly kingdom, or burning in hell? What about the possibility of purgatory -- even if it's a modification of the modern Catholic version?

Despite universal rejection by Protestants, early church fathers such as Tertullian, Origen, Eusebius, Jerome, Augustine and a host of others believed in an intermediate state after death. Martin Luther believed in purgatory at first, and only changed his mind about it some ten years into the reformation because it couldn't be proven directly from scripture. The rest of the Protestant movement followed suit. Some Protestants today believe heaven may have an outer perimeter for those unprepared to go into the direct presence of God.

Let's separate the question, 'Is there a Purgatory,' from the idea of indulgences, praying for the dead or even salvation by works. Our goal here isn't to be as "Protestant" as we possibly can, but to seek the truth.

However, we'll leave it as an open question (meaning, this is as close to an answer as you'll find here), except to say that if we take Yeshua's sayings as forming the core of our understanding, then either they indicate something like purgatory, or else something that falls far short of the doctrine of 'eternal security' that many Evangelicals hold dear.

the Gospels or the Epistles? -- No matter how we look at the sayings of Yeshua regarding judgement, they don't sit well with the 'once saved always saved' doctrine, and the Calvinistic angle on the doctrine of salvation by grace, without works*. It's easy to see why many assign all of Yeshua's sayings to a 'dispensation' other than that of the church age, saying that before making atonement, Yeshua was the last prophet of the Old Covenant. Instead, they prefer to treat Paul's epistles as the foundation of Christian faith. [* footnote: before you start in on me, please note that I expressly mean the *Calvinistic Angle* on salvation by grace. I do believe in Ephesians 2:8,9.]

We must consider, however, that much of Yeshua's teaching was directed to those who were to be the leaders of the church soon to be birthed. When the new church came into being, those very apostles began to 'teach all nations ... beginning in Jerusalem ... commanding them to observe all that Yeshua had told them.' Paul's epistles were written to churches that were already thus established, so his purpose in writing to them wasn't to lay a foundation, but to build on the one they had already received and to take them beyond. Early church documents, such as the *Didache* seem to affirm that it was the sayings of Yeshua that were the milk and bread of new believers. Also, how could anyone claim to have prophesied and done miracles in his name, unless the Pentecostal

outpouring of the Holy Spirit had already happened? It's to this group that Yeshua warns in advance, "So, everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on bedrock..." It almost sounds as though Yeshua foresaw the controversy, and said 'these words of mine are the foundation.'

While it may not suit Dispensational Calvinism to apply Yeshua's sayings to the church age, neither does it assume a doctrine of salvation by works.

basis of judgement under the New Covenant -- Matthew 7:1-6 and James 2:8-13 show us the basis of how we will be judged. Yeshua said in his Sermon on the Mt., *Don't judge, so that you won't be judged, for the way you judge others is how you will be judged.*

James, Yeshua's brother and leader of the Jewish church, echoes this principle, saying, *Keep speaking and acting like people who will be judged by a Torah which gives freedom. For judgement will be without mercy toward one who doesn't show mercy; but mercy wins out over judgement.*

W. Carlson's MNV translation from the Hebrew Peshita translates verse 13: *by mercy, you will be raised above judgement.*

By walking according to the royal commandment, that of loving our neighbour as ourself, we are above the law, but when we judge, we're back under the same law we use to judge others. Paul says as much when he writes, in Romans 8, There is no condemnation to those ... who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit. Walking in love is the same as walking in the spirit.

Paul also says in Galatians 5, 'If you walk on the spirit, you won't fulfil the deeds of the flesh.' Elsewhere, it indicates that loving ones neighbour will pre-empt the sins covered by the commandments. Paul also makes the connection between judging and being under judgement in the first few verses of Romans chapter 2.

This reveals the direct link between the forbidden fruit and the human condition -- to which some attach the doctrine of 'original sin'. We can see a progression:

1. The forbidden fruit enabled humanity to distinguish good and evil. It came with a acute awareness of him/herself, the first sign of which was perceiving one's own body as an oddity, and therefore, evil and something to be ashamed of. Everything became subject to a standard of good and evil.

2. With knowledge of good and evil, of course, came the ability to judge. Judgement, in this case, is passing something off as good or evil.

3. The moment we began judging, according to Yeshua's principal, we came under judgement. By judging others, we, in effect write the rulebook by which we are judged. Those who judge others by how well they keep the Torah, are, of course judged by the Torah themselves.

That, of course, is a bit over-simplified. Judgement by our fellow humans is often necessary to maintain justice and civil order. However, even that is rooted in another aspect of the knowledge of good and evil, that human nature is drawn towards evil through our knowledge of it, as well by coveting "good" things.

But we see how it applies to the normal Christian life. Once we've been forgiven of things that marked us out for judgement, through Yeshua's atonement, we receive access

to His grace that enables us to live according to the Royal Law of Liberty, the life of love.

What James called the Royal Law of Liberty, Paul called grace. They both really say the same thing, but this fact, too, tends to be obscured by some of our systematic theology.

James' teaching comes across from a different angle than Paul's, so much that some, like Martin Luther and others were tempted to drop the book of James from the canon of scripture. However, if we consider that James' teaching reflects the foundations laid down by Yeshua, and defines many of the terms used later by Paul, we'll find that James and Paul fit together very well.

James says, 'Faith without works is dead.' Paul says salvation is not of works, but of faith.

When James and Paul say 'works', they're each talking about different things. They're not contradictory, because they're using alternate meanings:

a. James' use: Works = action that is a natural product of what's in one's heart, indicative of life. One must still make a decision, but even that's a matter of giving in to the right desire. They are, in fact, the results God is looking for. They are the sign of life.

b. Paul's use: Works = an attempt to build on something that isn't there in order to gain merit and earn one's favour with God. Living rigidly by a set of rules, perhaps with some success, even when it's against one's nature to do so. The results, if any, are only outward, whereas God looks on the heart. It's a dead thing.

Salvation is by faith, yes, but what kind of faith? If Paul's epistles are the foundation of the faith, then there could be room to believe, as many do, that simply accepting the gospel message as a fact, without any outward sign that we've truly become His disciples, is enough to get us saved (actually, I believe that a close and careful reading of Paul doesn't lead to that).

But if Paul were writing to churches that had already been taught about faith, and therefore knew what it entails, then why would he have to repeat what had been said previously? He could say exactly what he did without the fear that they would interpret his message as a new religion of 'easy believism'.

By emphasising Pauline theology as foundational material, Dispensational Calvinism has attempted to present the Christian experience as a static state, where the emphasis is on salvation from hell, and once having achieved that, true discipleship is optional. I believe there is a static/passive aspect to our salvation, but I believe that has been over-emphasised to the detriment of our understanding of our active role in the Christian life, and walking in the Spirit.

Note: I use the term 'Dispensational Calvinism' to mean the popular theology that has been around for the last 150 years or so, which emphasises Dispensationalism and the 'once-saved-always-saved' doctrine. John Calvin didn't teach 'once-saved-always-saved'. One of the Five Points of Calvinism is *Perseverance of the Saints*. It's the true saints who actively persevere. One can have true faith, according to John Calvin, but by falling away, one shows that one was not predestined to salvation to begin with. However, I must add to their credit, many Dispensational Calvinists do emphasise discipleship as a highly desirable lifestyle, and quite a few have exemplified it in their own lives.

how did the apostles preach it? -- Next, let's look at how the early apostles and evangelists spoke of judgement in their proclamation of the gospel. What did they actually emphasise? Did they warn the non-believers of Hell if they die without repenting to God? Was the purpose of evangelism to populate heaven? Acts 2:40; Acts 8:18-24; Acts 13:46; Acts 17:24-31; Acts 18:6 and Acts 24:25 are examples of Peter's and Paul's presentation.

There is mention of judgement, but it's not as up front as we tend to make it. In many cases, mention of hell is made after the hearer has heard most of the message, but appears to be resistant. The message is never prefaced by, 'If you were to die tonight...' The gospel was not presented as a remedy to hell, but as an invitation to partake of God's plan on earth (his kingdom), his forgiveness, and his life. The word 'salvation' tends to mean 'salvation from sin,' not 'salvation from hell.'

On the other hand, judgement was a factor, as in the case of Paul's chat with Felix, where Paul *began to discuss righteousness, self-control and the coming Judgement*, which frightened Felix into postponing any more discussion on the issue.

We also note, in some of the moves of the Holy Spirit over the past three or so hundred years, people come under conviction and fear for their souls. This happened with Charles Finney, Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley and a number of others. George Whitfield's famous sermon, A Sinner in the Hands of an Angry God, brought many sinners to their knees.

Another saying of Yeshua we should note is Matthew 10:28, Do not fear those who kill the body but are powerless to kill the soul. Rather, fear him who can destroy both soul and body in Gei-Hinnom.

However, there is a subtle difference between this and the way we generally bring up the subject of Hell. With the Apostles, the focus was on God. It's God who can destroy both soul and body. It was the angry God that featured in Whitfield's sermon, not just a sinner bound for hell. Hell was a part of it, yes, but the fear of God was the result of the Holy Spirit's conviction.

Any articulate human, or cleverly done visuals, or advertising technology, can instil a fear of Hell, just as easily as we instil a fear of the "bogeyman" in small children. Only the Holy Spirit can bring on the fear of God. I've personally had enough of clever gimmickry, and I think, so has the rest of the world.

It's those who oppose God's plan and/or refuse to be a part of it after having heard, that are seen as the prime candidates for hell, as the following passage by Paul suggests in II Thess 1:6-9.

obeying the gospel -- Paul's description of it to the Thessalonians is among the only references that speaks Hell as being for those who don't obey the gospel. Other references, even in Revelation 20:10-15 and 21:8 indicate that it is for those who commit the various sins, which it specifically mentions, as well as those whose names are not in the Book of Life.

The mention of the Book of Life, as well as obedience to the Gospel (II Thess) would indicate that there is responsibility to respond to the message of Messiah with repentance

and faith. Hell appears to be for those who refuse to do so after having heard, as well as those who have failed to resist being drawn into a sinful lifestyle, even if they've never heard the gospel. These two references bring us the closest to our present, New Covenant understanding of the role of eternal punishment.

However, the Calvinistic concept of Total Depravity, or born in Original Sin, doesn't seem to be mentioned as a reason for being assigned to hell, though Calvinists would probably put emphasis on the record in the Book of Life.

Five Point Calvinism teaches that because of Adam's fall, we are all tainted with sin before even committing our first wrong act, and therefore condemned to hell. Even babies, according to strict Calvinistic interpretation are doomed to hell. That's one of the reasons many Reformation Protestants practice infant baptism (Dispensational Calvinists' and others believe in an age of accountability, which allows un-baptised infants to go to Heaven). This concept is called 'Original Sin'. Augustine of Hippo was one of the first to give an in depth explanation on this subject. His teaching is the foundation for both the Roman Catholic and the Reformed doctrine. However, very little reference is found to it in the earlier Church Fathers.

Something did happen to the human race when Adam sinned, but I believe that can be explained by the nature of the forbidden fruit. As we mentioned earlier, it brought a consciousness of good and evil.

As Paul says in Romans 3:23, all have sinned. In the context of all this, it is actual sinning that makes us sinners. He explains in chapter 6 that because of Adam's disobedience, we were affected in such a way that we inevitably begin to commit sin.

So, the warning of eternal judgement is appropriate for those who have heard the gospel in an unmistakable way, but have refused to respond. However, let's let the Holy Spirit be the guide, as only He knows to whom it applies, and how to instil a fear of God in the hearer. But, on the other hand, let's not be squeamish about it. Maybe we should be preaching judgement in other arenas as well -- ie. to those who have the means but refuse to show mercy; those whose politics creates a stumbling block...? I have the feeling that an accurate understanding of this could lead to a true prophetic revival.

those who never heard -- So, what about those who have never heard the gospel, but would have probably responded had it been communicated to them the right way -- or members of the Jewish community during the middle ages and beyond, who kept the Torah out of love and fear of God, but who's only witness to the Messiah was an enraged priest waving a crucifix?

Acts chapter 10 gives an account of Cornelius, in which we see a striking description. The first four verses are probably best quoted in whole:

Acts 10:1-4 -- There was a man in Caesarea named Cornelius, a Roman army officer in what was called the Italian Regiment. He was a devout man, a "God-fearer," as was his whole household; he gave generously to help the Jewish poor and prayed regularly to God.

One afternoon around three o'clock he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!"

Cornelius stared at the angel, terrified. "What is it, sir?" he asked. "Your prayers," replied the angel, "and your acts of charity have gone up into God's presence, so that he has you on his mind..."

Here is an example of one's works qualifying one before God. Cornelius' works revealed what was in his heart.

In looking at the difference between Paul's and James' terminology, we saw that there are two ways of looking at works: 1. works as a point system by which one measures one's perfection; or 2. works as revealing what is in one's heart, as James 2 describes (works revealing one's faith).

When we speak of 'salvation by works', we usually assume number one, above. As Romans demonstrates, no one can be saved by that method. However, as we observed earlier, judging puts us in that category.

Cornelius' case would come in under number two. His acts of charity and his prayer demonstrated his fear and devotion to the Lord, as Peter describes in verses 34 and 35, *I now understand that God does not play favourites, but that whoever fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him, no matter what people he belongs to..."*

In the following passage from Romans 2, can we recognise a description of Cornelius?

Romans 2:5-16 -- ...God's righteous judgement will be revealed; for he will pay back each one according to his deeds. To those who seek glory, honour and immortality by perseverance in doing good, he will pay back eternal life. But to those who are self-seeking, who disobey the truth and obey evil, he will pay back wrath and anger. Yes, he will pay back misery and anguish to every human being who does evil, to the Jew first, then to the Gentile; but glory and honour and shalom to everyone who keeps doing what is good, to the Jew first, then to the Gentile. For God does not show favouritism. All who have sinned outside the framework of Torah will die outside the framework of Torah; and all who have sinned within the framework of Torah will be judged by Torah. For it is not merely the hearers of Torah whom God considers righteous; rather, it is the doers of what Torah says who will be made righteous in God's sight.

For whenever Gentiles, who have no Torah, do naturally what the Torah requires, then these, even though they don't have Torah, for themselves are Torah!

For their lives show that the conduct the Torah dictates is written in their hearts. Their consciences also bear witness to this, for their conflicting thoughts sometimes accuse them and sometimes defend them on a day when God passes judgement on people's inmost secrets.

How many are there in the world, past and present, who like Cornelius, demonstrate their love for Truth by their works, and will be judged accordingly -- even if they're living in a place and time where the likes of Peter isn't available?

We need to keep in mind, we're talking about works as in James' definition, action that indicates what's in the heart. Some theology only defines works according to Paul's definition, as a way to achieve perfection. By means of the "Roman Road", they turn it into a catch 22 situation. Romans 3:22 says, "All have sin...", therefore nobody can

achieve perfection, and of course, anything less than perfection is grounds for eternal damnation. Romans 6:22 says, "The wages of sin is death...", so even if your only sin was crying out of turn as a baby, they see no one saved from eternal hell by Romans 2.

I find this logic a tad bit Draconian. Romans 3:22 and 6:22 don't equal "catch 22".

But, does the alternative approach smack of universalism? On the contrary, what Paul is saying in Romans 2 is that those who haven't heard have no excuse. If some have found reprieve from eternal damnation by being faithful to their conscience, even having never heard the gospel, they are witnesses against those who 'suppress the truth' (Romans 1:18), refusing to listen to the subtle signs divinely placed in their path. I won't venture to say what the ratio is of who ends up where. Only God knows the heart, and judges accordingly. Yeshua did say that it's a broad and easy path that leads to destruction, and relatively few find the one that leads to salvation, even if it's by seeking glory, honour and immortality by perseverance in doing good (verse 7). On the other hand, many who were on the road to Hell have been averted by being confronted by a clear witness to the Gospel.

Now, I've pre-empted the next obvious objection by stating that in every case, to evangelise is better than not to evangelise. We don't take away people's excuses by communicating the pure gospel.

But, what is the pure gospel?

the goal of evangelism -- Getting them to say a quick prayer so as to insure their eternal security was not the goal of the apostles, nor should it be ours. Rather, it was to make disciples who would be committed to the lifestyle of the kingdom, and to gather those disciples into local churches that would grow together, and as a community, be a shining witness that would draw yet more people. This approach to evangelism, I'm convinced, will save more people from hell than our 'instant salvation' packets. The quick salvation method may seem to work at first, but as the church fills up with people who haven't truly embraced the kingdom lifestyle, the gospel message loses its credibility. It becomes no more than words, with no real witness.

It's easy to understand how this happened. If our theology tells us that every single person alive will end up in either heaven or hell, depending on if they 'prayed to ask Jesus into their heart,' of course, that becomes top priority. Don't waste time with kingdom communities, there are people dying out there! Our marketing people have risen to the challenge by producing instant salvation packets.

But look where it's got us. The Western church is so full of people who think they're in because they read a prayer off the back of a Chick-tract, or raised their hand when everybody's heads were bowed and eyes closed, that it's hard to tell the difference between a believer and a non-believer. The evangelistic PR machine has run out of steam.

For one thing, our 'instant salvation' packet lacks the vital ingredients: repent, believe, and be baptised.

what is salvation? -- Going back to Cornelius and his household: Acts 11:18 does indicate that they needed to repent and receive salvation. Does this mean that until that point, Cornelius was doomed to eternal damnation?

It depends on what we mean by 'salvation'. In our 21st century style of evangelism, we tend to define it as salvation from hell. In the first century, they preached salvation from *sin*. It's the crossing over from being a citizen of the present world to that of the Kingdom of God. That citizenship begins on earth.

The name, "Yeshua", is derived from the word "salvation". We see in Matthew 1:21 Joseph was instructed by the angel to call his name "Yeshua", "...for he will save his people from their *sin*." This is the answer to the prayer of Psalm 118:25,26 from which we get the word "Hosanna", which means, "Save us". It's what the people shouted as Yeshua rode into Jerusalem, and it has to do with the Kingdom of God being set up.

They weren't saying, 'Take us to heaven when we die'; rather, 'Establish your kingdom to save us from our intense hardship.'

So, "Salvation" means the Kingdom of God displacing the disfigured, broken environment that came about as the result of Adam's sin. It must be understood both as an individual thing and corporate. Individually, we're saved from sin, and we're added to the community, where we apply salvation to other aspects of life.

The goal of the gospel isn't just to save people from hell, but to establish a divine presence on earth. That presence is the Kingdom of God, and the community of citizens in that kingdom is the Church. Because it's a supernatural kingdom, where God is king, the citizens must be connected spiritually. That happens through the initial salvation experience, but as Phillipians 2:12 says, we continue to work out that salvation by being cleansed of our old habits and learning to live in community.

Acts 20:28 refers to us as the *Church of God which He has purchased with His own blood*. The cross provides entrance into the community, enabling us to be recreated spiritually, and provide access to His grace to complete our transformation.

This Kingdom community is what it's all about. It's the goal of evangelism and discipleship. It's the hope of the world, not only for avoidance of hell, but for the solving of worlds problems, sickness, demonic bondage, despair, etc., which was what Yeshua's earthly ministry was all about.

This doesn't happen by gaining political control nor dominating the national cultural, but by our presence, even as a persecuted people. The passage that we call the Beatitudes sums this up by describing the candidates of the kingdom, who are therefore blessed: the poor, the meek, those who weep, who make peace, the pure in heart. To these, he says, even as they're suffering persecution, even as the supposed underdogs, 'you are the salt of the earth ... the light of the world. For you, the world exists. You will inherit it all.'

So, where does judgement come in? It looks to me like it's those who resist or persecute this company, or reject the message when it has been proclaimed and demonstrated, that are judged to hell. But those who even so much as give a glass of cold water to a citizen of the Kingdom of God, gain a share in the world to come.

how does it work? -- So, first I say that the kingdom is the establishing a divine presence on the earth, yet I said that it isn't about political or cultural control, but probably as a persecuted people. Does that make sense?

It does if you consider that political control is probably one of the least effective methods of influencing society. A member of parliament, a cabinet minister, or even a

head of state has absolutely no control over whether a policeman on the corner is accepting bribes or is doing his work honestly. The policeman's believing neighbour has far more influence!

We've thought that applying kingdom dynamics involved control from the top, down. Dictating morals from such a distance has only made us odious. Some define it as letting our light shine, but we've been doing it from too far away for them to see the light in a meaningful way. Yeshua demonstrated kingdom dynamics while in the pub, dining with the wrong crowd -- those over whom the leaders then and now were trying to control with their laws. The persecution we are receiving now, all too often, comes from those we tried to control in the past with our politics.

In the time of Yeshua, persecution for righteousness sake came from the religious establishment. The sinners, on the other hand, crowded to him. Today, it's the sinners who are our persecutors, because we, as the religious establishment, have been holding them down for so long. Now that the tables are turned, now that they've "come out of the closets" in this "post-Christian" age, what we're experiencing is the slingshot effect.

However, when a truly transformed community begins to live out the dynamics of the kingdom from up close, right next door, on the street, wherever friends meet friends, then we'll start seeing what effect salt can have on the earth. When the witness they receive is from what they observe of our lives, and by the power of God flowing from up close where they can see what's up our sleeve; not so much by our expert talking or what they hear on TV occasionally, then the other things will begin to happen as well. People will have heard the message clearly and unmistakably, and therefore left without an excuse. Persecution will be from those who thus heard but still hardened their hearts. That's the group that will, for sure, be judged in eternal fire.

Ephesians 4:17-20 -- ...do not live any longer as pagans live, with their sterile ways of thinking. Their intelligence has been shrouded in darkness, and they are estranged from the life of God, because of the ignorance in them, which in turn comes from resisting God's will. They have lost all feeling, so they have abandoned themselves to sensuality, practising any kind of impurity and always greedy for more.

As much as we like to personalise passages from the Bible, we should understand that people described in this passage are relatively few and far between in our culture. In Paul's time, it is said, all who lived in the district of Asia heard the gospel, and saw a clear demonstration of it. It wasn't just a nice message from a TV preacher, whom you can't be sure if it's really working for or not. It wasn't a bunch of pat one-liners parroted by someone in a suit who knew how to make a sales pitch. It was the lives of people who had put their lives on the line, who had obviously been transformed for the better, and signs and wonders were happening. Many of them saw and heard the real thing, and *still* refused to believe. Continually resisting the obvious dulled their minds so that it didn't matter any more what was right or wrong. They had lost all feeling. That's also the context of II Thessalonians 1:6-9.

Judgement, as in eternal fire, is for the likes of them, yes, but in our time many of the judgements Yeshua spoke of are for those in the church. We've been so lukewarm that the

real witness just isn't getting out.

Brothers and sisters, we've got our work cut out for us.

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For a simpler explanation of what the Kingdom of God is all about,
check out my illustrated e-book:

[The Happy Kingdom](#)