

Jesus' Travels and Teachings

First Edition

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PREFACE

“Static concepts can hinder progress in science, politics, society, and religion. While static concepts may reflect the specific knowledge of their time, they can also lack wisdom and may ultimately be inaccurate.”

- Jesus, on the Isle of Crete, May, 22 CE

“It is essential to remember that God does not restrict the revelation of truth to any particular generation or group of people.”

- Jesus, at Edrei, August, 29 CE

“These teachings should show increasing vitality and exhibit a deeper spiritual power over time. Our teachings must not be allowed to become mere memories or traditions; they must remain living lessons.”

- Jesus, at Mount Olivet Camp, April 6, 30 CE

STORIES OF JESUS' TRAVELS

FIRST YEARS

1.0 BIRTH

Jesus, officially known as Joshua ben Joseph, was born around noon on August 21, 7 BCE, in the town of Bethlehem, located in the district of Judah. His mother, Mary, and her husband, Joseph, had arrived in town the previous day, as they were required to travel to Bethlehem to be counted in the Roman census. Joseph sought accommodations with distant relatives, but every room was fully occupied. Upon returning to Bethlehem, he approached an inn and was informed that the caravan stables, carved into the rock and situated just below the inn, had been cleared of animals and prepared for lodgers.

The donkey they had used for travel was left in the inn's courtyard, and Joseph shouldered their bags of clothing and provisions as he descended the stone steps to their lodgings below with Mary. They found themselves in a grain storage room at the front of the stalls and mangers. Tent curtains had been hung, and they felt fortunate to have accommodations in the crowded city.

Mary was about to give birth, and throughout the night, she was restless, so neither slept much. By dawn, the pangs of childbirth were

unmistakable, and around noon, with the assistance and kind ministrations of her fellow female travelers, Mary delivered a baby boy. After his birth, he was wrapped in the clothes Mary had brought, and she laid him in a nearby manger.

The following day, Joseph went into town to register for the census. While there, he encountered a man with whom they had conversed two nights earlier on their way to Bethlehem. The man introduced Joseph to a wealthy friend who had a room at an inn. The friend kindly offered to exchange accommodations with the couple from Nazareth. That afternoon, they moved to the inn, where they stayed for nearly three weeks until they secured lodgings in the home of a distant relative of Joseph.

On the second day after the birth of Jesus, Mary sent word to her relative Elizabeth, who had recently given birth to a baby boy, to inform her that Mary's child had arrived. Using the same messenger, Joseph was invited to Jerusalem to discuss their affairs with Mary's relative, Zacharias, who was a member of the Jewish priesthood and was Elizabeth's father.

On the eighth day, according to Jewish tradition, Jesus was circumcised and formally given the name Joshua. Moses had instructed the Jews that every firstborn son belonged to the Lord; however, instead of being sacrificed, he could be redeemed by his parents paying five shekels to an authorized priest.

Another Mosaic ordinance stipulated that after a designated period, a mother was required to present herself (or have someone make the appropriate sacrifice on her behalf) at the temple for purification. It was customary to perform both ceremonies simultaneously. Consequently, Joseph and Mary traveled to the temple in Jerusalem to present Jesus to the priests for his redemption and to make the necessary sacrifice to ensure Mary's ceremonial purification from the supposed uncleanness of childbirth. At this time, Joseph considered himself sufficiently poor to justify his offering of two young pigeons, as prescribed by Moses for the purification of mothers from low-income backgrounds.

Two remarkable figures lingered about the courts of the temple: Simeon, a singer, and Anna, a poetess. Simeon was a Judean, while Anna hailed from Galilee. Both longed for the coming of a Jewish Messiah from the House of David and came to believe that Jesus was this anticipated deliverer. For this occasion, Anna had composed a poem that Simeon sang, much to the astonishment of Joseph, Mary, and all those gathered in the temple courts. Upon returning to Bethlehem, Mary was deeply troubled by Anna's poem, and Joseph disapproved of this premature attempt to present Jesus as the expected Messiah of the Jewish people.

The following week, Joseph traveled to Jerusalem to confer with Zacharias. Both Zacharias and Elizabeth had become convinced that Jesus was indeed destined to be the Jewish Messiah and that Elizabeth's son, John, would serve as his chief aide. Since Mary shared these beliefs, it was easy to persuade Joseph to stay in Bethlehem, the City of David, so that Jesus could grow up to become the successor of David on the throne of Israel. Consequently, they remained in Bethlehem for over a year, with Joseph working at his carpentry trade.

1.1 WISE MEN

Earlier, certain teachers from Mesopotamia spoke with a religious leader from their country who had a dream revealing that a source of spiritual light was about to appear on earth as a child and would live among the Jews. These three teachers set out in search of this light. After many weeks of fruitless searching in Jerusalem, they were preparing to return to Ur when they encountered Zacharias, who expressed his belief that Jesus was the object of their quest. He directed them to Bethlehem, where they found the child and presented gifts to Mary, his mother. At the time of their visit, Jesus was nearly three weeks old.

[These teachers saw no star to guide them to Bethlehem. However, on May 29, 7 BCE, an extraordinary conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn occurred in the constellation of Pisces, with similar alignments occurring on September 29 and December 5 of the same year. Based on

this remarkable yet natural event, well-meaning individuals in subsequent generations developed an appealing legend of the Star of Bethlehem, which led the adoring Magi to the manger. During a time when most human knowledge was transmitted orally from one generation to the next, it was easy for myths to evolve into traditions, and for those traditions to eventually be accepted as facts.]

Herod, the ruler of the Roman province of Judah, had been informed that a child was to be born in his jurisdiction who would become the King of the Jews. Determined to find and eliminate this child before the would-be king came of age, he established a network of spies throughout his realm. When one of his informants reported the arrival of the teachers of Ur to Bethlehem, Herod summoned these Chaldeans to appear before him. He inquired about the new King of the Jews, but they explained that a child had been born to a woman who had traveled to Bethlehem with her husband for the purpose of the census enrollment.

Not satisfied with their answer, Herod sent them away with funds and instructed them to find the child so that he might come and honor him, as they had claimed that this kingdom was spiritual rather than temporal. However, when the teachers did not return, Herod grew suspicious. As he contemplated these matters, his spies returned with a report about Anna's poem at the temple. Unfortunately, the watchers had failed to follow Joseph and Mary, and Herod was evidently angry with them for not being able to inform him of the couple's whereabouts with the newborn boy. He then dispatched searchers to locate the couple with a newborn boy.

1.2 THE FLIGHT TO EGYPT

When, after more than a year of searching, Herod's watchers had failed to locate the supposed King of the Jews, he grew suspicious that the child was still hidden in Bethlehem. Consequently, he issued an order for a systematic search of every house in Bethlehem, commanding that all male infants under the age of two be killed. In this way, Herod hoped to eliminate the threat posed by this child.

But there were believers in the coming Messiah even among Herod's court attachés. One of these individuals, upon learning of the impending order to slaughter the baby boys of Bethlehem, communicated with Zacharias, who then dispatched a messenger to Joseph. Joseph and Mary left Bethlehem with Jesus for Alexandria, Egypt, the night before the planned massacre. To avoid drawing attention, they traveled alone to Egypt with Jesus. On that day, sixteen baby boys in Bethlehem perished in mid-October, 6 BCE.

1.3 PARENTS

Joseph was a Hebrew, although he carried several non-Jewish strains that had been introduced into his ancestral lineage over time through the female lines of his forebears. His ancestry traced back to the days of Abraham, but neither David nor Solomon was in the direct line of Joseph's lineage. Joseph's immediate ancestors were skilled tradespeople - builders, carpenters, masons, and smiths. Joseph himself was a carpenter and later became a contractor. His family belonged to a long and distinguished line of ordinary individuals. Joseph was a brunette with striking black eyes.

Mary was an average woman of her time and generation, possessing a relatively normal temperament. However, her ancestry, like Joseph's, was characterized by a predominance of strong yet ordinary individuals, interspersed occasionally with outstanding personalities. Among her forebears were many remarkable women in the region's history. She counted among her ancestors such well-known women as Annon, Tamar, Ruth, Bathsheba, Ansie, Cloa, Eve, Enta, and Ratta. No Jewish women of that era had a more illustrious lineage or one extending back to more auspicious beginnings. While Mary was a true Jewess in culture and belief, her hereditary background was more complex; she was a composite of Syrian, Hittite, Phoenician, Greek, and Egyptian ancestry, making her inheritance more diverse than Joseph's. Mary had brown eyes and nearly blond hair.

1.4 ELIZABETH'S VISION

The story of Jesus' life begins with the figure who would later be known as John the Baptist. Zacharias, John's father, was a member of the Jewish priesthood, while his mother, Elizabeth, came from a more affluent branch of the same extensive family group to which Mary, the mother of Jesus, also belonged. Despite being married for many years, Zacharias and Elizabeth remained childless.

It was late in June, 8 BCE, approximately three months after the marriage of Joseph and Mary, when Elizabeth experienced a vision of a heavenly spirit. She heard the spirit say that she would soon bear a son who would be the forerunner of a divine teacher, and she was to name her son John. She heard that her son would announce the arrival of the "soul healer" for her people and the "spirit liberator" for all humanity, and that Mary would be the mother of this child.

This vision clearly frightened Elizabeth. Afterwards, she likely reflected on this experience, but she only discussed it with her husband and Mary during her subsequent visit in early February of the following year.

Elizabeth withheld her secret from her husband for five months until she could no longer doubt that she was expecting a child. Upon revealing her news, Zacharias was skeptical, only halfheartedly consenting to believe her vision. Given their advanced ages, Zacharias was likely perplexed about Elizabeth's impending motherhood, but he did not question his wife's integrity. It was not until approximately six weeks before John's birth that Zacharias, inspired by a dream, became thoroughly convinced that Elizabeth would be the mother of a son, one who would prepare the way for the coming of the Jewish Messiah.

John was born in Judah on March 25, 7 BCE. Zacharias and Elizabeth rejoiced at the realization that a son had come to them. On the eighth day, when they presented the child for circumcision, they formally named him John, as they had been instructed. A nephew of Zacharias traveled to Nazareth, delivering the message to Mary and Joseph that a son had been born to her and that his name was to be John.

From his earliest infancy, John was instilled with the belief by his parents that he would become a spiritual leader and religious teacher. John's heart was always receptive to such suggestions. Even as a child, he was often found at the temple during his father's service, and he was deeply moved by all that he observed.

1.5 MARY'S VISION

Mary also experienced a vision of a heavenly spirit. This event took place around the middle of November, 8 BCE, while she was working in her home in Nazareth. As the sun was setting, before Joseph had returned, Mary had a vision of a heavenly spirit beside a low stone table. Once she regained her composure, she heard that a child had ordained a child within her and that in due time, she would become the mother of a son. It was the only unusual event in her experience of carrying and giving birth to the child. Mary was to name him Joshua, and he would introduce a new spiritual kingdom to all people on Earth and be destined for greatness.

Mary likely contemplated this vision secretly in her heart for many weeks. When she was sure that she was with child, she finally decided to share her vision with her husband. Although Joseph had confidence in Mary, he struggled to accept the idea of a heavenly vision. Naturally, he was distraught and found it difficult to sleep for many nights. He was undoubtedly conflicted as he considered how such things could arise. How could a human child be destined for divine purpose? The Jewish belief held that the anticipated Deliverer would be divine, not human. Joseph could not reconcile these opposing ideas until, after several weeks of reflection, he and Mary concluded that they had been chosen to be the parents of the Messiah.

Upon reaching this significant conclusion, Mary persuaded Joseph to allow her to travel to the city of Judah, located four miles west of Jerusalem in the hills, to visit Elizabeth. They shared their similar visions with one another. Naturally, they were eager to meet, compare

their experiences, and discuss the potential futures of their sons. Mary stayed with her distant cousin for three weeks. Elizabeth played a crucial role in strengthening Mary's faith in her vision, enabling her to return home more fully committed to her calling as the mother of a child of destiny. Upon her return, Mary visited her parents, Joachim and Hannah. Her two brothers, two sisters, and her parents were unaware of her vision of the heavenly spirit. However, Mary confided in her sister Salome, expressing her belief that her son would become a great teacher.

1.6 JOSEPH'S DREAM

Joseph only came to accept the idea that Mary would become the mother of an extraordinary child after experiencing an inspiring dream. In this dream, a spirit appeared to him and, among other things, said that Mary's son would become a great teacher in the world - an inspiration for all. He would first come to his own people, but not all of them would believe him. Many others would embrace his teachings, and he would help reveal God to all people.

After this experience, Joseph never again doubted Mary's account of her vision.

For centuries, the Hebrew prophets proclaimed the coming of a Deliverer, and successive generations interpreted these promises as referring to a new Jewish ruler who would sit upon the throne of David. By employing the reputed miraculous methods of Moses, this ruler was expected to establish the Jews in Palestine as a powerful nation, free from all foreign domination. However, in the visions of Elizabeth and Mary, there was no mention of a Messiah or the House of David; nothing suggested that Jesus would become a Deliverer of the Jews.

[Some Old Testament verses were reinterpreted to align with certain aspects of Jesus' life; for example, "A maiden shall bear a son" was later understood as "a virgin shall bear a son." The genealogies of both Joseph and Mary were reconstructed following Jesus' ministry. Joseph was not a descendant of King David; Mary had a stronger Davidic lineage than Joseph.]

Joseph traveled to the City of David, also known as Bethlehem, to register for the Roman census. This was due to the fact that six generations earlier, Joseph's paternal ancestor, who was an orphan, had been adopted by Zadok, a direct descendant of David. As a result, Joseph was also considered a member of the House of David. *[Later Jesus himself publicly denied any connection to the House of David.]*

1.7 MARY AND JOSEPH

The families of both Joseph and Mary were well-educated for their time, surpassing the average educational level for their social status. Joseph was a thinker, while Mary was a planner, skilled in adaptation and practical execution. Mary was an expert weaver and possessed above-average proficiency in various household arts of her era; she excelled as a housekeeper and homemaker. Both Joseph and Mary were effective teachers, ensuring that their children were well-versed in the lessons of their time.

Joseph appeared to be mild-mannered, extremely conscientious, and devoted to his people's religious conventions and practices. He seemed to speak little but think deeply. The unfortunate plight of the Jewish people naturally brought Joseph much sadness. As a youth, among his eight siblings, he had been more cheerful; however, during the early years of his marriage (during Jesus' childhood), he likely experienced periods of mild spiritual discouragement. These temperamental challenges significantly improved after his family's economic situation was enhanced, but this change occurred only shortly before his untimely death.

Mary's temperament was seemingly quite the opposite of her husband's. She was typically cheerful, rarely downcast, and possessed an ever-sunny disposition. Mary often indulged in the free and frequent expression of her emotions and was never observed to be sorrowful until after Joseph's sudden death. Throughout her life, Mary appeared composed, courageous, and quite wise in her relationships with her firstborn son and his surviving brothers and sisters.

Jesus may have blended the traits of his parents, exhibiting qualities that contrasted with one another. He inherited much of his remarkable gentleness and profound understanding of human nature from his father, while his gift for teaching and immense capacity for righteous indignation came from his mother. In terms of emotional reactions, Jesus likely mirrored his father at times, being meditative and worshipful, occasionally displaying apparent sadness. However, more often, he embodied his mother's optimistic and determined disposition. Overall, Mary's temperament had the most significant influence on the career of her firstborn son.

From Joseph, Jesus acquired rigorous training in Jewish rituals and a deep familiarity with the Hebrew Scriptures. From Mary, he gained a broader perspective on religious life and a more liberal understanding of personal spiritual freedom. Joseph adhered firmly to the Eastern, or Babylonian, interpretations of the Jewish faith, while Mary favored the more liberal and expansive Western, or Hellenistic, interpretations of the law and the prophets. Joseph was more inclined toward the spiritual concept of the anticipated Messiah, whereas Mary and her family, particularly her father, maintained the belief in the Messiah as a temporal deliverer and political ruler.

Had Joseph lived, he undoubtedly would have become a steadfast supporter of his eldest son's mission, while Mary oscillated between belief and doubt, heavily influenced by the perspectives of her other children, friends, and relatives. Nevertheless, she remained steadfast in her final stance, anchored by the memory of the vision of a heavenly spirit that had appeared to her. Ultimately, a significant portion of Joseph's family embraced the teachings of Jesus, but only a few of Mary's relatives came to accept his teachings after he departed from this world.

1.8 HOME IN NAZARETH

When Joseph was a young man, he was employed by Mary's father to help build an addition to his house. It was during a noontime meal, when Mary brought Joseph a cup of water, that their courtship truly began. Following Jewish customs, Joseph and Mary were married at

Mary's home in the vicinity of Nazareth when Joseph was twenty-one years old. They wed in March, 8 BCE.

This marriage followed a typical courtship lasting nearly two years. Shortly thereafter, they moved into their new home in Nazareth, which Joseph had constructed with the help of two of his brothers. The house was situated at the base of a nearby elevated area, offering a charming view of the surrounding countryside. In this thoughtfully prepared home, they became expectant parents.

The childhood home of Jesus was situated near a prominent hill in the northern part of Nazareth, some distance from the village spring located in the eastern section of the town. Jesus' family resided on the outskirts of the city, which allowed him to enjoy frequent walks in the countryside and make trips to the summit of this nearby highland - the highest of all the hills in southern Galilee, except for the Mount Tabor range to the east and the hill of Nain, which was approximately the same height. Their home was positioned slightly to the south and east of the southern promontory of this hill, about midway between the base of the elevation and the road leading out of Nazareth toward Cana. In addition to climbing the hill, Jesus' likely favorite walk was along a narrow trail that wound around the base of the hill in a northeasterly direction, eventually joining the road to Sepphoris.

The home of Joseph and Mary was a one-room stone structure with a flat roof, accompanied by an adjoining building for housing animals. The furnishings included a low stone table, earthenware and stone dishes and pots, a loom, a lamp stand, several small stools, and mats for sleeping on the stone floor. In the backyard, near the animal annex, there was a shelter that housed the oven and the mill for grinding grain. This type of mill required two people to operate: one to grind the grain and another to feed it. As a small boy, Jesus often fed grain into the mill while his mother turned the grinder.

In later years, as the family expanded, they would gather around the enlarged stone table to enjoy their meals, serving themselves from a communal pot of food, which was customary for families of their

means at the time. During the winter evenings, the table would be illuminated by a small, flat clay lamp filled with olive oil. After the birth of Martha, Jesus' sister, Joseph constructed an addition to their home - a spacious room that served as a carpenter's workshop during the day and a sleeping area at night.

1.9 TRIP TO BETHLEHEM

In March, 8 BCE, Caesar Augustus decreed that all inhabitants of the Roman Empire should be counted; such a census could be utilized to implement more effective taxation. The Jews had always opposed any attempts to "number the people," and this, combined with the serious domestic difficulties faced by Herod, the ruler of Judea, led to the postponement of the census in this Jewish region for one year. Throughout the Roman Empire, this census was recorded in 8 BCE, except in the Palestinian kingdom of Herod, where it was conducted in 7 BCE, one year later.

Mary did not need to travel to Bethlehem for enrollment, as Joseph was authorized to register on behalf of his family. However, being an adventurous person, she insisted on accompanying him. Additionally, she feared being left alone in case the child was born while Joseph was away. With Bethlehem located near the city of Judah, Mary anticipated a potentially enjoyable visit with her kinswoman, Elizabeth.

Joseph initially prohibited Mary from accompanying him, but his efforts were in vain. When the food was packed for three or four days, she prepared double rations and made ready for the journey. However, before they set forth, Joseph likely reconciled himself to Mary's desire to join him, and they cheerfully departed from Nazareth at dawn.

Joseph and Mary were relatively poor; the construction and furnishing of their home had placed a significant financial burden on Joseph, who also had to support his recently disabled father. Consequently, they owned only one beast of burden. Heavily pregnant, Mary rode the donkey, carrying their provisions, while Joseph walked alongside, leading the animal. Thus, this Jewish couple set out from

their modest home early on the morning of August 18, 7 BCE, on their journey to Bethlehem.

Their first day of travel took them around the foothills of Mount Gilboa, where they camped for the night by the Jordan River. They engaged in various speculations about the kind of son that would be born to them - Joseph likely envisioning a spiritual teacher, while Mary held on to the idea of a Jewish Messiah, a Deliverer of the Hebrew nation. Bright and early on the morning of August 19, Joseph and Mary set out once again. They enjoyed their midday meal at the foot of Mount Sartaba, which overlooks the Jordan Valley, and continued their journey, reaching Jericho by nightfall. There, they stayed at an inn located on the outskirts of the city. After their evening meal, they engaged in extensive discussions about the oppressive nature of Roman rule, Herod, the census enrollment, and the relative influence of Jerusalem and Alexandria as centers of Jewish learning and culture. The travelers from Nazareth then retired for a restful night. Early on the morning of August 20, they resumed their journey, arriving in Jerusalem before noon. After visiting the temple, they continued on to their destination, reaching Bethlehem by mid-afternoon.

Joseph had considered going out immediately to enroll, but Mary was weary and considerably distressed. She asked him to stay by her side, and he complied. Around noon, Mary gave birth to a baby boy.

At the birth of Jesus, heavenly spirits undoubtedly celebrated, yet human ears could not hear their utterances. No shepherds or other beings came to pay homage until the arrival of three teachers from Ur.

2

Childhood

2.0 EARLY CHILDHOOD

Before Herod's massacre of the baby boys in Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary had departed for Alexandria, Egypt, with funds provided by Zacharias. Due to the uncertainties and anxieties they experienced during their time in Bethlehem, Mary did not wean Jesus until they had safely arrived in Alexandria, where the family could settle into a routine. There, recognizing that they lived with the affluent relatives of Joseph. Shortly after their arrival, Joseph found work as a carpenter, which he held for several months before being promoted to foreman of a large group of laborers engaged in constructing a public building. This new experience likely inspired him to pursue a career as a contractor and builder upon their return to Nazareth.

They lived in Alexandria for two years, returning to Bethlehem only after the death of Herod. In the home where they resided, there were two other children around Jesus' age, and among the nearby neighbors were six additional children whose ages were close enough to make them suitable playmates.

Throughout the early years of Jesus' childhood, Mary maintained a vigilant watch over her son, determined to protect him from any harm that could jeopardize his well-being or interfere with his future mission on earth. She was utterly devoted to him. Initially, Mary preferred to

keep Jesus close by her side, fearing that he might be at risk if allowed to play in the garden with other children.

Still, Joseph, with the assistance of his relatives, apparently convinced Mary that a highly supervised environment would deprive Jesus of the valuable experience of interacting with children his own age. Mary, ultimately recognizing that excessive sheltering and extraordinary protection could lead to self-consciousness and a degree of self-contentedness, agreed to the plan of allowing him to grow up like any other child. However, she made it her priority to remain vigilant while the young ones played around the house or in the garden.

Throughout his two years in Alexandria, Jesus enjoyed good health and continued to develop normally. Aside from a few close friends and relatives, no one was told about Jesus' being a child of promise. One of Joseph's relatives disclosed this information to a few friends in Memphis, who were descendants of the distant Ikhnaton. They, along with a small group of Alexandrian followers, gathered at the palatial home of Joseph's relative benefactor shortly before their return to Palestine to wish the Nazareth family well and pay their respects to the child.

On this occasion, the assembled friends presented Jesus with a complete copy of the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures. This copy of the Jewish writings was placed in Joseph's hands after both he and Mary had ultimately declined the invitation from their friends in Memphis and Alexandria to remain in Egypt. These followers insisted that Jesus would be able to exert a far more significant influence on the world as a resident of Alexandria than in any designated location in Palestine. The family postponed their departure for Palestine until they received news of Herod's death.

Joseph and Mary finally departed from Alexandria on a boat owned by their friend Ezraeon, bound for Joppa, and arrived at that port in late August, 4 BCE. They went directly to Bethlehem, where they spent the entire month consulting with their friends and relatives about whether they should remain there or return to Nazareth.

Mary had never completely abandoned the idea that Jesus should

grow up in Bethlehem, the City of David. Joseph, however, did not honestly believe that their son was destined to become the kingly Deliverer of Israel. Furthermore, he was aware that he was not a genuine descendant of David. Mary, of course, considered the City of David to be the most suitable place for raising the new candidate for David's throne, but Joseph preferred to take his chances with Herod Antipas rather than with his brother Archelaus. He likely harbored concerns for the child's safety in Bethlehem or any other city in Judea. He suspected that Archelaus would be more inclined to adopt the menacing policies of their father, Herod, than Antipas in Galilee. In addition to these concerns, Joseph was vocal in his preference for Galilee as a more favorable environment for raising and educating the child, but it took three weeks to persuade Mary to overcome her objections.

By the first of October, Joseph had apparently convinced Mary and her friends that it would be best for them to return to Nazareth. Consequently, in early October, 4 BCE, they departed from Bethlehem, traveling through Lydda and Scythopolis. They set out one Sunday morning, with Mary and the child riding on their newly acquired donkey. Meanwhile, Joseph and five accompanying relatives proceeded on foot, as Joseph's relatives insisted that they not undertake the journey to Nazareth alone. They were apprehensive about traveling to Galilee via Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley, and the western routes were deemed unsafe for two solitary travelers with a young child.

2.1 BACK IN NAZARETH

On the fourth day of their journey, the group safely arrived in Nazareth. They came unannounced to their home, which had been occupied for over three years by one of Joseph's married brothers, who was taken aback by their unexpected visit. The family had departed from Alexandria so quietly that neither Joseph's family nor Mary's family was aware of their arrival. The following day, Joseph's brother relocated his family, allowing Mary, for the first time since Jesus' birth, to settle down with her little family and enjoy life in their own home. Within a week, Joseph secured employment as a carpenter.

CHILDHOOD

Jesus was approximately three years and two months old at the time of their return to Nazareth. He had endured all these journeys remarkably well and was in excellent health, filled with childish joy and excitement at having his own space to explore and enjoy. However, he missed the companionship of his playmates from Alexandria.

On their journey to Nazareth, Joseph convinced Mary that it would be unwise to share with their Galilean friends and relatives that Jesus was a child of promise. They both agreed to refrain from discussing these matters with anyone and remained steadfast in keeping this promise.

Jesus' entire fourth year was characterized by normal physical development and typical mental activity. He formed a close bond with a neighbor boy his age named Jacob. Jesus and Jacob were consistently joyful during their playtime and grew up to be great friends and loyal companions.

The next significant event in the life of this family from Nazareth was the birth of their second child, James, in the early morning hours of April 2, 3 BCE. Jesus was overjoyed at the prospect of having a baby brother and would spend hours observing the infant's early activities.

It was midsummer of the same year when Joseph constructed a small workshop near the village spring, a popular refreshment spot for caravans. Following this, he engaged in minimal carpentry work at home during the day. He employed two of his brothers and several other craftsmen, whom he dispatched to various jobs. At the same time, he stayed at the workshop, focusing on making yokes, plows, and other wooden items. Additionally, he worked with leather, rope, and canvas. Jesus, during his upbringing, when not at school, divided his time between assisting his mother with household chores and observing his father at work in the shop. Meanwhile, he listened to the conversations and gossip of caravan conductors and passengers from around the world.

In July, one month before Jesus turned four years old, an outbreak of severe intestinal illness spread through Nazareth due to contact with caravan travelers. Mary became increasingly alarmed by the risk of

Jesus being exposed to this epidemic, prompting her to gather both her children and flee to her brother's country home, located several miles south of Nazareth along the Megiddo Road near Sarid. They did not return to Nazareth for more than two months, during which Jesus greatly enjoyed his first experience on a farm.

2.2 FIFTH YEAR

More than a year after returning to Nazareth, the boy Jesus reached the age at which he made his first personal and wholehearted moral decision. Consequently, a soul came to dwell within him, as it does for all children upon making their first spiritual choice. This event took place in February, 2 BCE. Jesus was no more aware of the arrival of his soul than any other child who, both before and after that day, has similarly received their soul.

Jesus was five years old in August, 2 BCE, marking this as his fifth (calendar) year of life. During this year, just over a month before his fifth birthday, Jesus was filled with joy at the arrival of his sister Miriam, who was born on the night of July 11.

During the evening of the following day, Jesus conversed with his father about how various groups of living beings are born into the world as distinct individuals. The most valuable aspect of Jesus' early education was derived from his parents, who responded to his thoughtful and probing inquiries. Joseph consistently fulfilled his duty by taking the time and effort to answer the boy's numerous questions. From the age of five until he turned ten, Jesus was a constant source of curiosity. Although Joseph and Mary could not always provide answers to his questions, they never failed to engage in discussions about his inquiries and, in every possible way, assisted him in reaching satisfactory solutions to the problems posed by his inquisitive mind.

Since returning to Nazareth, their household had been quite busy, and Joseph had been particularly preoccupied with building his new shop and restarting his business. He was so engrossed in his work that he had not found the time to make a cradle for James. However, this

oversight was rectified long before Miriam's arrival, ensuring that she had a comfortable crib in which to nestle while the family admired her.

Jesus wholeheartedly embraced all of these natural and typical home experiences. He greatly enjoyed spending time with his little brother and baby sister and was a tremendous help to Mary in caring for them. Jesus seemed to be an almost average child in terms of physical development and continued to progress mentally and emotionally. He experienced a mild digestive upset, his first minor illness, during the latter part of his fifth calendar year.

It was customary among the Galilean Jews for mothers to bear the responsibility for a child's upbringing until the child's fifth birthday. After this milestone, if the child were a boy, the father would assume responsibility for the boy's education. In August, 2 BCE, Mary formally entrusted Jesus to Joseph for further instruction. Although Joseph now took on the primary responsibility for Jesus' intellectual and religious education, Mary remained actively involved in his home training. She taught him to tend to the vines and flowers growing around the garden walls of their home. Additionally, she provided shallow boxes of sand on the roof of the house, which served as a summer bedroom, where Jesus practiced drawing maps and engaged in early writing exercises in Aramaic, Greek, and later, Hebrew. Over time, he became fluent in reading, writing, and speaking all three languages.

2.3 SIXTH YEAR

With his mother's assistance, Jesus had already mastered the Galilean dialect of Aramaic; now, his father began teaching him Greek. While Mary spoke little Greek, Joseph was fluent in both Aramaic and the Greek language. The Greek language textbook they used was a copy of the Hebrew Scriptures - a complete version of the law and the prophets which had been presented to them upon leaving Egypt. There were only two complete copies of the scriptures in Greek in all of Nazareth, and possessing one in the carpenter's household made Joseph's home a highly sought-after place.

This unique resource allowed Jesus, as he grew, to encounter an almost endless stream of earnest students. Before the year concluded, Jesus had taken custody of this priceless manuscript, having been informed on his sixth birthday that the sacred book had been presented to him by friends and relatives from Alexandria. In a relatively short time, he was able to read it with ease.

The first shock of Jesus' young life occurred when he was nearly six years old. He believed that his father and mother possessed all knowledge. Therefore, he was surprised when, after asking Joseph about the cause of a mild earthquake that had just occurred, he heard his father admit that he did not know. This moment marked the beginning of a disconcerting disillusionment for Jesus, as he realized that his parents were not all-wise and all-knowing. Joseph's initial instinct had been to tell Jesus that God had caused the earthquake. However, after a moment's reflection, he recognized that such an answer would likely provoke further, more challenging questions. Even at a young age, addressing Jesus' inquiries about physical or social phenomena proved difficult. Carelessly attributing such events to either God or a supposed devil was not a responsible response.

In alignment with the prevailing beliefs of the Jewish people, Jesus was initially open to the doctrine of good and bad spirits as a potential explanation for mental and spiritual phenomena. However, he soon began to question whether such unseen influences were truly responsible for the physical occurrences in the natural world.

Before Jesus turned six years old, in the early summer of 1 BCE, Zacharias, Elizabeth, and their son John visited the family in Nazareth. Jesus and John created joyful memories during this first visit. Although the guests could only stay for a few days, the parents engaged in extensive discussions, including plans for their sons' futures. Meanwhile, the boys played with blocks in the sand on the rooftop and enjoyed themselves in various other boyish activities.

Having met John, who came from near Jerusalem, Jesus began to show a keen interest in Israel's history. He inquired in detail about the significance of the Sabbath rites, the lessons taught in the synagogue,

and the recurring commemorative feasts. His father explained to him the importance of all these observances.

The first festival was the Midwinter Illumination, which lasted eight days. It began with one candle on the first night, adding one additional candle each successive night. This festival commemorated the dedication of the temple following the restoration of the Mosaic services by Judas Maccabee. Next came the early springtime celebration of Purim, which honored the feast of Esther and Israel's deliverance through her. This was followed by the solemn observance of Passover, which the adults celebrated in Jerusalem whenever possible. At home, the children were reminded that they were not to eat any leavened bread for the entire week. Later, the Feast of the First Fruits, a harvest gathering, took place. The most solemn of all was the feast of the new year, known as the Day of Atonement. They then fully embraced the joy of the Feast of Tabernacles, the annual vacation season for the Jewish people, during which they camped in leafy booths and indulged in mirth and pleasure. While some of these celebrations and observances were challenging for Jesus' young mind to comprehend, he reflected on them thoughtfully.

This year, Joseph and Mary were troubled by Jesus' prayers. He insisted on talking to his Heavenly Father in a manner similar to how he spoke with Joseph, his earthly father. This departure from the more solemn and reverent modes of communication with God was somewhat disconcerting to his parents, particularly to his mother. However, there was no persuading him to change; he would say his prayers just as he had been taught, after which he insisted on having "just a little talk with my Heavenly Father."

In June of this year, Joseph transferred ownership of the shop in Nazareth to his brothers and formally began his work as a builder. By the end of the year, the family income had more than tripled. Never again, until after Joseph's death, did the Nazareth family experience the hardships of poverty. The family expanded significantly, investing considerable funds in additional education and travel; however, Joseph's rising income kept pace with their increasing expenses.

During the following years, Joseph undertook significant work in Cana, Bethlehem, Magdala, Nain, Sepphoris, Capernaum, and Endor, as well as in various buildings in and around Nazareth. As James matured and became old enough to assist his mother with household chores and the care of the younger children, Jesus often traveled with his father to these nearby towns and villages. Jesus was an astute observer and acquired a wealth of practical knowledge from these trips away from home.

Jesus made significant strides in managing his strong feelings and vigorous impulses to meet the demands of family cooperation and home discipline. Mary was a loving mother, but she was also a fairly strict disciplinarian. In many respects, however, Joseph exerted greater influence over Jesus, as he would take the time to sit down with the boy and thoroughly explain the fundamental and underlying reasons for curtailing personal desires in favor of the welfare and tranquility of the entire family. Once the situation was clarified to Jesus, he was always willing to cooperate with parental wishes and family regulations.

Much of Jesus' spare time - when his mother did not require his assistance with the house - was spent studying the flowers and plants during the day and observing the stars at night. He developed a fondness for lying on his back and gazing in wonder at the starry heavens long after his usual bedtime.

2.4 SEVENTH YEAR

This year was eventful in Jesus' life. In early January, a significant snowstorm struck Galilee, resulting in two feet of snowfall - the heaviest Jesus experienced during his lifetime and one of the deepest recorded in Nazareth in a century.

The childhood experiences of Jewish children during Jesus' time were limited; often, they imitated the serious activities they observed in their elders. They frequently participated in weddings and funerals - ceremonies they usually witnessed and found spectacular. While they danced and sang, they had few organized games compared to the children of later generations.

Jesus, accompanied by a neighbor boy and later his brother James, enjoyed playing in the far corner of the family carpenter shop, where they had fun with wood shavings and blocks. It was often challenging for Jesus to understand the harm associated with certain types of play that were forbidden on the Sabbath; however, he always complied with his parents' wishes. He appeared to possess a natural sense of humor and a playful spirit, yet he had limited opportunities for self-expression in the environment of his time and upbringing. Nevertheless, until the age of fourteen, he seemed primarily cheerful and lighthearted.

Mary maintained a dovecote on top of the animal house adjacent to their home. The profits from the sale of doves were designated for a special charity fund, which Jesus managed after deducting the tithe that he contributed to the synagogue officer.

The only significant accident Jesus experienced up to that point was a fall down the stone stairs in the backyard that led to the canvas-roofed bedroom. This incident occurred during an unexpected sandstorm in July, which originated from the east. Typically, the hot winds that carry fine sand blow during the rainy season, particularly in March and April. It was unusual to encounter such a storm in July. When this storm arose, Jesus was on the rooftop playing, as was his custom, since this area served as his playroom for much of the dry season. He was blinded by the sand while descending the stairs and fell. Following this accident, Joseph constructed a balustrade on both sides of the stairway.

This minor incident, which occurred while Joseph was away in Endor, caused Mary significant anxiety, prompting her to keep Jesus close to her side for several months. This was just one of several minor mishaps that later befell this curious and adventurous young boy. He seemed to have a typical childhood for an energetic boy, which understandably caused concern for his parents, especially his mother.

The fourth member of the Nazareth family, Joseph, was born on Wednesday morning, March 16, 1 CE.

2.5 SCHOOL DAYS IN NAZARETH

At the age of seven, Jesus was expected to commence his formal education in the synagogue schools, which was the typical age for all Jewish children to begin their studies. Consequently, in August, 1 CE, he entered his educational journey in Nazareth. By this time, he was already a fluent reader, writer, and speaker of two languages: Aramaic and Greek. Now, he was set to familiarize himself with the task of learning to read, write, and speak Hebrew. He seemed genuinely eager for the new school life that lay ahead.

For three years, until he turned ten, he attended the elementary school of the Nazareth synagogue. During this time, he studied the fundamentals of the Book of the Law as recorded in Hebrew. In the subsequent three years, he advanced to a higher level of study, where he memorized and recited the more profound teachings of the law. He graduated from this synagogue school at the age of thirteen and became a Son of the Commandment.

At the synagogue in Nazareth, the pupils sat on the floor in a semicircle while their teacher, the chazzan, an officer of the synagogue, faced them. They began their studies with the Book of Leviticus, progressing to the other law books, followed by the prophets and the Psalms. Before their twelfth year, the students focused exclusively on the scriptures. The typical synagogue school did not utilize textbooks; instead, the chazzan would recite a passage, and the pupils would repeat it in unison. When engaging with the written books of the law, the students learned their lessons by reading aloud and through constant repetition. This particular synagogue in Nazareth possessed a complete Hebrew copy of the scriptures. During the summer months, the school hours were significantly shortened.

Throughout his studies, Jesus gained significant knowledge and inspiration from the regular Sabbath lessons at the synagogue. It was customary to invite distinguished visitors who were spending the Sabbath in Nazareth to address the congregation. As Jesus grew up, he listened to many prominent thinkers of the Jewish world share their

perspectives, many of whom were not strictly orthodox Jews, as the synagogue in Nazareth was a liberal center of Hebrew thought and culture. Jesus became proficient in Hebrew at a young age, and as a young man, when no notable visitor was present in Nazareth, he was often invited to read from the Hebrew scriptures to the faithful gathered in the synagogue.

In addition to his formal education, Jesus began to observe human nature from all corners of the earth as people from various lands passed in and out of his father's repair shop. As he grew older, he mingled freely with the caravans as they paused near the spring for rest and nourishment. Being a fluent speaker of Greek - the dominant language of the travelers - he needed little assistance in conversing with most of the caravan travelers and conductors.

Nazareth served as a caravan way station and a crossroads for travelers, predominantly inhabited by Gentiles, or non-Jews. It was one of the twenty-four priestly centers of the Hebrew nation. In Galilee, Jews interacted more freely with Gentiles than they did in Judea. Among all the cities in Galilee, the Jews of Nazareth were the most liberal in their interpretation of social restrictions and did not fear contamination from contact with Gentiles. These circumstances led to the common saying in traditional Jerusalem: "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

Jesus received his moral training and spiritual development primarily in his own home. He acquired much of his intellectual and theological education from the chazzan. However, he gained his true education - the ability of the mind and heart to confront life's complex challenges - through interaction with his fellow human beings. It was this close association with people of all ages, both Jew and Gentile, that enabled him to understand human nature.

Throughout his years at the synagogue, he was an exceptional student, benefiting from his ability to converse in three languages. When Jesus completed his studies at the school, the chazzan of Nazareth expressed to Joseph his concern that he had learned more from Jesus' probing questions than he had been able to teach the lad.

When entering the school at the age of seven, a time when the Jews had just enacted a compulsory education law, it was customary for students to select a Birthday Text, a sort of golden principle to accompany them throughout their studies. This text was often elaborated upon during their graduation at the age of thirteen. The text that Jesus chose was from the prophet Isaiah:

“The spirit of God is upon me, for God has asked me to bring good news to the meek, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and to set the spiritual prisoners free.”

It was customary for Joseph to take Jesus for walks on Sabbath afternoons, and one of their favorite excursions was climbing the high hill near their home, from which they could enjoy a panoramic view of all Galilee. On clear days, they could see the long ridge of Mount Carmel extending northwest toward the sea. Many times, Jesus listened as his father recounted the story of Elijah, one of the earliest Hebrew prophets, who reproved Ahab and exposed the priests of Baal. To the north, Mount Hermon rose majestically, its snowy peak dominating the skyline, with nearly 3,000 feet of upper slopes glistening white with perpetual snow. Far to the east, they could discern the Jordan Valley, and beyond that lay the rocky hills of Moab. To the south and east, when the sun illuminated their marble walls, they could see the Greco-Roman cities of the Decapolis, complete with their amphitheaters and grand temples. As they lingered toward sunset, they could make out sailing vessels on the distant Mediterranean to the west. From all directions, Jesus could observe the caravan trains winding their way in and out of Nazareth. To the south, he had a view of the broad and fertile plain of Esdraelon, stretching toward Mount Gilboa and Samaria.

When they did not climb the heights to admire the distant landscape, they wandered through the countryside, observing nature's diverse moods throughout the seasons. Jesus' earliest lessons, apart from those learned at home, centered on fostering a reverent and empathetic connection with nature. Jesus learned to milk the family cow and care for the other animals.

During that year and the following one, he also acquired skills in cheese-making and weaving. By the age of ten, he had become an expert loom operator.

It was around this time that Jesus and a neighbor boy named Jacob became great friends with the potter who worked near the flowing spring. As they watched his deft fingers mold the clay on the potter's wheel, both of them often resolved to become potters when they grew up. The potter, Nathan, was very fond of the boys and frequently gave them clay to play with, encouraging their creative imaginations by suggesting friendly competitions in modeling various objects and animals.

Before he turned eight years old, Jesus was well-known among the mothers and young women of Nazareth. They had met him and talked with him at the spring, located not far from his home, which served as one of the town's social centers for interaction and gossip.

2.6 EIGHTH YEAR

This was an exciting year at school. Although Jesus was not an exceptional student, he was a diligent learner and ranked in the top third of his class. He performed his work so well that he was excused from attending school for one week each month. During this time, he typically spent either with his fisherman uncle on the shores of the Sea of Galilee near Magdala or at the farm of another uncle (his mother's brother) located five miles south of Nazareth.

Although his mother initially seemed excessively anxious about her son's health and safety, she gradually came to accept his trips away from home. Jesus' uncles and aunts were all very fond of him, leading to a lively competition among them to secure his company for these monthly visits. His first week's stay on his uncle's farm took place in January of this year, while his first fishing experience on the Sea of Galilee occurred in May.

About this time, Jesus encountered a mathematics teacher from Damascus. After learning new numerical techniques, he dedicated several years to studying mathematics. During this period, he developed a keen understanding of numbers, distances, and proportions.

Jesus greatly enjoyed spending time with his brother James, and by the end of this year, he had begun teaching him the alphabet.

This year, Jesus arranged to exchange dairy products for harp lessons. He had an unusual liking for all things musical. Later, he made significant efforts to foster an interest in vocal music among his young associates. By the time he turned eleven, he had become a skilled harpist and took pleasure in entertaining family and friends with his remarkable interpretations and improvisations.

While Jesus continued to make enviable progress at school, everything could have run smoothly for his parents and teachers. However, he persisted in asking many embarrassing questions about both science and religion, particularly concerning geography and astronomy. He was especially insistent on understanding why there was a dry season and a rainy season in Palestine; repeatedly, he sought an explanation for the temperature differences between Nazareth and the Jordan Valley.

His third brother, Simon, was born on the evening of Friday, April 14, 2 CE.

In February, Nahor, a scholar from the Jerusalem Academy of the Rabbis, traveled to Nazareth to observe Jesus, having previously undertaken a similar mission to Zacharias's home near Jerusalem. He visited Jesus at the request of Zacharias. Initially, Nahor was somewhat taken aback by Jesus' candidness and unconventional approach to religious matters; however, he attributed this to the geographical remoteness of Galilee from the more cultured centers of Hebrew learning and culture.

He advised Joseph and Mary to permit him to take Jesus back to Jerusalem, where the boy could benefit from education and training at the heart of Jewish culture. Mary was half persuaded to agree; she believed that her eldest son was destined to become the Messiah. Joseph hesitated; he was equally convinced that Jesus was meant to grow into a man of destiny, yet he was deeply uncertain about what that destiny would entail. The more he contemplated Nahor's advice, the more he questioned the wisdom of relocating to Jerusalem.

Because of the differing opinions between Joseph and Mary, Nahor requested permission to present the entire matter to Jesus. Jesus listened attentively and engaged in conversation with Joseph, Mary, and their neighbor, Jacob the stone mason, whose son was Jesus' favorite playmate. Two days later, he reported that, due to the significant differences of opinion among his parents and advisors, and because he did not feel competent to assume responsibility for such a decision - not feeling strongly one way or the other - he had ultimately decided to "talk with our Heavenly Father."

While Jesus was not entirely sure about the answer, he eventually felt he should remain at home with his father and mother, adding: "Those who love me so much should be able to do more for me and guide me more safely than strangers who can only observe my body and mind but can hardly truly know me." Everyone marveled at his response, and Nahor returned to Jerusalem. It would be many years before the topic of Jesus leaving home again was raised for consideration.

2.7 LATER CHILDHOOD

Although Jesus may have had better educational opportunities in Alexandria than in Galilee, he could not have experienced such a rich environment for grappling with life's challenges while simultaneously benefiting from constant interaction with a diverse array of individuals from all walks of life and various parts of the civilized world. Had he remained in Alexandria, his education would have been shaped by Jews along strictly Jewish lines. In Nazareth, he received an education and training that more effectively prepared him to understand non-Jews, providing him with a more balanced perspective on the relative merits of Eastern (Babylonian) and Western (Hellenic) theological views.

2.8 NINTH YEAR

Jesus was never seriously ill, yet he did experience some minor childhood ailments this year, along with his brothers and baby sister.

School continued, and he remained a favored pupil, enjoying one week of freedom each month. He divided his time approximately equally between trips to neighboring cities with his father and visits to his uncles. The most significant trouble to arise at school occurred in late winter when Jesus dared to challenge the chazzan regarding the teaching that all images, pictures, and drawings were inherently idolatrous. Jesus took great pleasure in drawing landscapes and modeling various objects from potter's clay. Although such activities were strictly forbidden by Jewish law, he had, until that point, successfully disarmed his parents' objections to the extent that they allowed him to continue these pursuits. However, trouble resurfaced at school when one of the students discovered Jesus drawing a charcoal portrait of the teacher on the classroom floor. It was clearly visible, and many of the elders had seen it before the committee went to confront Joseph, demanding that action be taken to address the perceived lawlessness of his eldest son.

Although this was not the first time Joseph and Mary had received complaints about the behavior of their versatile and assertive child, this was the most serious accusation lodged against him to date. Jesus listened to the indictment of his artistic endeavors for some time, seated on a large stone just outside the back door. He resented their attempts to blame his father for his alleged misdeeds, so he marched in, fearlessly confronting his accusers and throwing them into confusion. Some observers found the episode humorous, while two others considered the boy to be sacrilegious, if not blasphemous. Joseph was nonplussed, Mary was indignant, but Jesus insisted on being heard. He expressed his perspective, courageously defended his viewpoint, and, with remarkable self-control, announced that he would abide by his father's decision in this matter, as in all other controversial issues. The committee of elders departed in silence.

Mary endeavored to persuade Joseph to allow Jesus to model in clay at home, provided he promised not to engage in any questionable activities at school. However, Joseph felt compelled to uphold the rabbinical interpretation of the second commandment. Consequently, Jesus refrained from drawing or modeling the likeness of anything

for the remainder of his time in his father's house. Nevertheless, he remained unconvinced of the wrongdoing in his previous actions, and relinquishing such a cherished pastime became one of the challenges of his young life.

In late June, Jesus first ascended the summit of Mount Tabor accompanied by his father. The day was clear, and the view was magnificent. To this nine-year-old boy, it appeared as though he had gazed upon the entire world, except for India, Africa, and Rome.

Jesus' second sister, Martha, was born on the night of Thursday, September 13. Three weeks after Martha's arrival, Joseph, who was home for a while, began constructing an addition to their house that would serve as both a workshop and a bedroom. A small workbench was built for Jesus, and for the first time, he had his own set of tools. Over the years, he worked at this bench during his free time and became highly skilled in making yokes.

The climate of Nazareth is generally mild. January is the coldest month, with average temperatures around 50 degrees Fahrenheit. In contrast, July and August, the hottest months, see temperatures ranging from 75 to 90 degrees Fahrenheit. From the mountains to the Jordan River and the Dead Sea Valley, the climate varies significantly, ranging from frigid to torrid.

However, the winters of 3 and 4 CE were the coldest in Nazareth for many decades. Jesus had seen snow on the mountains, and on several occasions, it had fallen in Nazareth, remaining on the ground for only a short time. However, it was not until this winter that he had seen ice. The realization that water could exist in three states - solid, liquid, and vapor - had long intrigued him, especially as he pondered the escaping steam from the boiling pots. This contemplation led the young boy to reflect on the physical world and its fundamental nature.

Even during the warmest summer months, a cool sea breeze typically blew from the west from late morning until mid-evening. However, occasionally, scorching hot winds from the eastern desert would occur in February and March, near the end of the rainy season. During that time, rain fell in refreshing showers from November to April, but it did

not rain continuously. The area experienced only two seasons: summer and winter, corresponding to the dry and rainy periods. The flowers began to bloom in January, and by the end of April, the entire landscape transformed into a vast flower garden.

In May of this year, Jesus assisted with the grain harvest on his uncle's farm for the first time. Before turning thirteen, he had gained knowledge about nearly every trade practiced by men and women in Nazareth, except for metalworking. After his father's death, he spent several months in a smith's shop as he grew older.

When work and caravan travel were slow, Jesus often accompanied his father on trips for leisure or business to nearby locations such as Cana, Endor, and Nain. Even as a young boy, he frequently visited Sepphoris, which is located just over three miles northwest of Nazareth. From 4 BCE to approximately 25 CE, Sepphoris served as the capital of Galilee and was one of the residences of Herod Antipas.

Jesus continued to grow in physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual aspects. His journeys away from home significantly enhanced his understanding of his own family, fostering a more generous perspective. By this time, it appeared that even his parents were beginning to learn from him as well as to teach him. Even in his youth, Jesus was an original thinker and a skilled teacher. He frequently found himself in conflict with the so-called Oral Law, yet he consistently sought to adapt to the practices of his family.

He interacted reasonably well with children his age, but he often grew discouraged by their slower cognitive abilities. By the time he turned ten, he had become the leader of a group of seven boys who had formed an informal organization promoting manhood: physical, intellectual, and spiritual. Among these boys, Jesus successfully introduced many new games and various enhanced methods of physical recreation.

2.9 TENTH YEAR

On the fifth of July, the first Sabbath of the month, Jesus, while walking through the countryside with his father, first expressed

feelings that indicated he was becoming self-aware of the spiritual nature of his life mission. Joseph listened attentively to his son's words but offered few comments and volunteered no additional information. The following day, Jesus had a similar but more extensive conversation with his mother. Mary, too, listened to her son's pronouncements, but she also refrained from offering any information. It would be nearly two years before Jesus spoke again to his parents about the growing revelation within his consciousness regarding the spiritual nature of his personality and the future of his life.

He entered the advanced school of the synagogue in August. At school, he frequently caused a stir with the questions he persistently asked. His inquiries increasingly kept Nazareth in a state of excitement. His parents were reluctant to discourage his probing questions, and his chief teacher was fascinated by the youth's curiosity, insight, and thirst for knowledge. Jesus' playmates saw nothing unusual in his behavior; in most respects, he was just like them, except for his somewhat more intense interest in study, which was not entirely uncommon.

One of Jesus' more unusual traits was his reluctance to fight for his rights physically. Despite being a well-developed boy for his age, it seemed strange to his peers that he was disinclined to defend himself against injustice or personal abuse. Fortunately, he did not suffer much due to this trait, thanks to his friendship with Jacob, the neighbor boy who was one year older. Jacob, the son of a stone mason, admired Jesus and took it upon himself to ensure that no one was allowed to take advantage of Jesus because of his aversion to physical confrontation. On several occasions, older and stronger youths attacked Jesus, relying on his reputed docility, but they always faced swift and sure retribution at the hands of his self-appointed defender.

Jesus was widely regarded as the leader of the young men of Nazareth; he embodied the higher ideals of his time and generation. He was genuinely loved by his peers, not only for his fairness but also for his exceptional understanding and compassion.

This year, he began to exhibit a pronounced preference for the company of older people. He took great pleasure in discussing cultural, educational, social, economic, political, and religious topics with these more experienced minds. His depth of reasoning and keen observational skills so captivated his adult companions that they were always eager to engage with him. However, his parents consistently attempted to encourage him to socialize with peers closer to his own age, rather than with the older and more knowledgeable individuals he preferred.

Jesus' physical development progressed, and he was considered an advanced and privileged student at school. He was well-regarded in Nazareth, except by the parents of some children who developed more slowly, who often described Jesus as overly confident and lacking in proper humility. He exhibited a growing inclination to guide his peers' play activities toward more serious and thoughtful pursuits. At home, he maintained a reasonably good relationship with his younger brothers and sisters, benefiting from being three and a half years older than the oldest of his siblings.

Joseph began instructing Jesus at an early age on various means of earning a livelihood, highlighting the benefits of agriculture as well as those of industry and trade. Galilee was a more beautiful and prosperous region than Judea, with a cost of living approximately one-fourth that of Jerusalem and Judea. It was a province characterized by agricultural villages and thriving industrial cities, containing over two hundred towns with populations exceeding five thousand and thirty towns with populations surpassing fifteen thousand.

Later this year, he had a two-month fishing experience with his uncle on the Sea of Galilee, during which he was very successful. Before reaching adulthood, he had become an expert fisherman. Jesus had nearly decided to pursue a career as a fisherman; however, a close association with his father's trade later influenced him to become a carpenter. Ultimately, a combination of influences led him to become a religious teacher.

2.10 ELEVENTH YEAR

Throughout this year, Jesus continued to travel away from home with his father. However, he frequently visited his uncle's farm and occasionally went to Magdala to fish with his uncle, who established his headquarters near that city.

Joseph and Mary were frequently tempted to display favoritism towards Jesus or to reveal their knowledge that he was a child of promise. However, both parents were wise and discerning in these matters. On the rare occasions when they did show any preference for him, even in the slightest degree, the young boy was quick to decline any special treatment.

Jesus spent a significant amount of time at the caravan supply shop, where he engaged in conversations with travelers from various parts of the world. Through these interactions, he amassed an impressive wealth of knowledge about international affairs, a feat all the more remarkable given his age. This year marked the last period in which he experienced much freedom and youthful joy. From this point onward, challenges and responsibilities began to multiply rapidly in his life.

On Wednesday evening, June 24, 5 CE, Jude was born. Complications arose during the birth of this seventh child. Mary was gravely ill for several weeks, prompting Joseph to remain at home. Jesus was preoccupied with errands for his father and numerous responsibilities resulting from his mother's serious condition. Due to his mother's illness, just before he turned eleven, he was compelled to assume the responsibilities of the firstborn son, bearing these burdens for two whole years before they would typically have fallen upon him. He never again found it possible to return to the childlike innocence of his earlier years.

The chazzan spent one evening each week with Jesus, helping him master the Hebrew scriptures. He was deeply invested in the progress of his promising pupil and was therefore willing to assist him in various ways. This Jewish educator exerted a significant influence on Jesus' developing mind. However, he could never understand why Jesus seemed indifferent to all his suggestions about going to Jerusalem to further his education under the esteemed Rabbis.

About the middle of May, Jesus accompanied his father on a business trip to Scythopolis, the principal Greek city of the Decapolis, which was formerly the ancient Hebrew city of Bethshean. During the journey, Joseph recounted much of the ancient history of King Saul, the Philistines, and the subsequent events of Israel's tumultuous past.

Jesus was profoundly impressed by the city's clean appearance and well-ordered layout. He marveled at the open-air theater and admired the stunning marble temple dedicated to the pagan gods. Joseph, however, was greatly disturbed by the boy's enthusiasm and attempted to counteract these favorable impressions by extolling the beauty and grandeur of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. Jesus had often gazed curiously at this magnificent Greek city from the hills of Nazareth, inquiring about its extensive public works and ornate buildings. Yet, his father had consistently avoided answering these questions. Now, confronted with the splendor of this Gentile city, Joseph could no longer gracefully ignore Jesus' inquiries.

It so happened that, at this time, the annual competitive games and public demonstrations of physical prowess among the Greek cities of the Decapolis were taking place at the Scythopolis amphitheater. Jesus was adamant that his father take him to see the games, and his insistence made Joseph reluctant to deny him. The boy was exhilarated by the events and wholeheartedly embraced the spirit of the demonstrations, showcasing physical development and athletic skills. Joseph was profoundly shocked to witness his son's enthusiasm as he observed these exhibitions of vainglorious.

After the games concluded, Joseph was taken aback when he heard Jesus approve of them and propose that wholesome outdoor physical activities would be beneficial for the young men of Nazareth. Joseph engaged in a lengthy and earnest discussion with Jesus about the inappropriate nature of such practices, but he was well aware that the young man remained unconvinced.

The only time Jesus ever witnessed his father angry with him was that night in their room at the inn. During their discussions, the boy momentarily forgot Jewish customs and suggested they return home to work on building an amphitheater in Nazareth. When Joseph heard his firstborn son express such un-Jewish sentiments, he lost his usual calm demeanor. Seizing Jesus by the shoulder, he angrily exclaimed that he never wanted to hear such utterances again for as long as he lived. Jesus was taken aback by his father's emotion; he had never before felt the personal sting of his father's indignation and was astonished and shocked beyond words. He replied: "Very well, my father, it shall be so." Never again did he elude, even in the slightest manner, to the games and other athletic activities of the Greeks as long as his father lived.

[Later, Jesus observed the Greek amphitheater in Jerusalem and recognized how distasteful such structures were from the Jewish perspective. Nevertheless, throughout his life, he endeavored to introduce the concept of wholesome recreation into his plans, as far as Jewish practices allowed. Eventually, he sought to establish regular activity programs for his twelve followers.]

Jesus was a vigorous, well-developed, moderately humorous, and somewhat lighthearted youth at the end of his eleventh year. However, from this point onward, he began to experience peculiar periods of profound meditation and serious contemplation. He often reflected on how to fulfill his obligations to his family while also responding to an internal calling to help the world. By this time, he had likely already conceived that his teachings were not meant to be confined to the betterment of the Jewish people alone.

2.11 TWELFTH YEAR

This year was eventful in Jesus' life. He made significant progress in school and was tireless in his study of nature. Additionally, he increasingly focused on understanding the various methods by which people earn a living. He began working regularly in the family carpenter shop and was allowed to manage his own earnings, which was uncommon in a Jewish household.

This year, he also learned the importance of keeping certain matters within the family. He became aware of the trouble he had caused in the village, and from that point on, he grew increasingly discreet in concealing anything that might lead others to view him as different from his peers.

From that point forward, he became increasingly successful in getting along with his siblings. He demonstrated greater tact, compassion, and consideration for their well-being and happiness, enjoying positive interactions with them until the beginning of his public teaching. He maintained an excellent rapport with James, Miriam, and the two younger siblings, Amos and Ruth, who had not yet been born. His relationship with Martha was generally amicable. However, his primary challenges at home stemmed from conflicts with Joseph and Jude, particularly with the latter. This year, Jesus devoted more attention than ever to music and continued to home school his brothers and sisters.

Throughout this year, he likely experienced numerous periods of uncertainty, if not outright doubt, regarding the nature of his career. It was a challenging experience for Joseph and Mary to raise him, yet they faithfully and successfully fulfilled their parental responsibilities. Jesus became increasingly aware of the differing perspectives of Joseph and Mary concerning his career choices. He often reflected on his parents' contrasting opinions, frequently overhearing their discussions when they believed he was sound asleep. Gradually, he leaned more toward his father's viewpoint, which seemed to cause his mother distress as she realized that her son was slowly rejecting her guidance in matters related to his life and career. As the years went by, this rift in understanding continued to widen. Joseph developed a growing belief in the spiritual nature of Jesus' mission, although he did not live to witness the fulfillment of his vision for Jesus' life.

During his last year at school, when he was twelve years old, Jesus protested against the Jewish custom of touching the piece of parchment affixed to the doorpost each time he entered or exited the house, followed by kissing the finger that had touched the parchment. As part of this ritual, it was customary to say: "God shall preserve our going out and our coming in, from this time forth and even forever." Joseph

and Mary had repeatedly instructed Jesus on the reasons for refraining from making images or drawing pictures, explaining that such creations could lead to idolatry. Although Jesus struggled to understand their prohibitions against images and pictures fully, he had a strong sense of consistency. Consequently, he pointed out to his father the inherently idolatrous nature of this habitual reverence for the doorpost parchment. After Jesus highlighted this inconsistency, Joseph removed the parchment.

As time passed, Jesus made significant modifications to their religious practices, including family prayers and various customs. This was feasible in Nazareth, as its synagogue was influenced by a liberal school of Rabbis, exemplified by the esteemed teacher from Nazareth, Jose.

Throughout this and the subsequent years, Jesus may have experienced mental distress due to his ongoing struggle to reconcile his views on religious practices with the established beliefs of his parents. He was likely troubled by the conflict between his desire to remain faithful to his own convictions and the moral imperative of dutifully submitting to his parents. This internal struggle revolved around two great commands: the first being: “Be loyal to the dictates of your highest convictions of truth and righteousness,” the second: “Honor your father and mother, for they have given you life and nurtured you.” Nevertheless, he never shied away from the responsibility of making the necessary daily adjustments between these realms of loyalty to personal convictions and duty toward family. Ultimately, he appeared to have achieved a harmonious integration of personal beliefs and family obligations, fostering a concept of group solidarity grounded in loyalty, fairness, tolerance, and love.

2.12 THIRTEENTH YEAR

Jesus’ baby brother, Amos, was born on the night of Sunday, January 9, 7 CE.

This year, Jesus transitioned from boyhood to the onset of young manhood; his voice began to change, and other aspects of his mind and body exhibited signs of the approaching status of manhood.

It was around the middle of February when Jesus became convinced that he was destined to undertake a mission on earth to reveal God and enlighten humanity. Momentous decisions, along with extensive plans, were likely taking shape in the mind of this young man, who, to all outward appearances, was an ordinary Jewish boy from Nazareth.

On the first day of the week, March 20, 7 CE, Jesus graduated from the training course at the local school connected with the Nazareth synagogue. This was a great day in the life of any Jewish family, marking the occasion when the firstborn son was recognized as a Son of the Commandment, the Ransomed Firstborn of the God of Israel, a Child of the Most High, and a Servant of the God of All on Earth.

Friday of the week prior, Joseph traveled from Sepphoris, where he oversaw the construction of a new public building, to attend this joyous occasion. Jesus' teacher firmly believed that his attentive and hardworking pupil was destined for a remarkable career and a significant mission. Despite their concerns regarding Jesus' nonconformist tendencies, the elders took great pride in the young man. They had already begun formulating plans to facilitate his journey to Jerusalem to further his education at the renowned Hebrew academies. As Jesus overheard these discussions, he grew increasingly convinced that he would never go to Jerusalem to study with the Rabbis.



2.13 JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

Jesus, having reached the threshold of young manhood and formally graduated from the synagogue schools, was qualified to journey to Jerusalem with his parents to celebrate his first Passover. The Passover feast that year occurred on Saturday, April 9, 7 CE.

Women seldom attended the Passover feast in Jerusalem, as their presence was not required. However, Jesus was virtually unwilling to go unless his mother accompanied him. When she decided to attend, many other women from Nazareth were inspired to make the journey, resulting in the largest proportion of women to men ever to travel to the Passover from their locality.

A large company of 103 residents from Nazareth prepared to depart for Jerusalem early on Monday morning, April 4. They traveled south toward Samaria, but upon reaching Jezreel, they turned east, circumventing Mount Gilboa into the Jordan Valley to avoid passing through Samaria. Joseph and his family would have enjoyed traveling through Samaria, visiting Jacob's Well and Bethel. However, because the Jews generally preferred to avoid interactions with the Samaritans, they chose to journey with their neighbors through the Jordan Valley.

The much-dreaded Archelaus, the would-be ruler of Judea, had been deposed, and they had little to fear in bringing Jesus to Jerusalem. Twelve years had passed since the first Herod had attempted to eliminate the newborn boys of Bethlehem, and no one would now think to associate that incident with this obscure young man from Nazareth.

Before reaching the Jezreel junction, as they continued their journey, they soon passed the ancient village of Shunem on their left. Jesus heard once more about the most beautiful maiden in all of Israel who had lived there, as well as the remarkable miracles performed by Elisha. As they passed by Jezreel, Jesus' parents recounted the doings of Ahab and Jezebel, along with the exploits of Jehu. While navigating around Mount Gilboa, they discussed Saul, who took his life on the mountain's slopes, King David, and the significance of this historic location.

As the pilgrims rounded the base of Gilboa, they could see the Greek city of Scythopolis to their right. They gazed at the marble structures from a distance, careful not to approach the Gentile city for fear of defilement, which would prevent them from participating in the upcoming solemn Passover ceremonies in Jerusalem. Mary could not understand why neither Joseph nor Jesus would mention Scythopolis. She was unaware of the controversy from the previous year, as they had never disclosed that episode to her.

The road now descended directly into the tropical Jordan Valley, where Jesus soon beheld the meandering Jordan River, its waters glistening and rippling as they flowed toward the Dead Sea.

As they journeyed south into this lush valley, they set aside their outer garments, reveling in the fertile fields of grain and the stunning oleanders adorned with pink blossoms. Meanwhile, the imposing, snow-capped Mount Hermon loomed far to the north. After a little over three hours of travel from the vicinity of Scythopolis, they encountered a bubbling spring, where they camped for the night beneath the starlit sky.

On the second day of their journey, they passed the point where the Jabbok River flows into the Jordan River from the east. Gazing eastward up the river valley, they reminisced about the days of Gideon, when the Midianites invaded this region to seize the land. As the second day drew to a close, they set up camp near the base of Mount Sartaba, the highest mountain overlooking the Jordan Valley. The summit of this mountain was home to the Alexandrian fortress, where Herod had imprisoned one of his wives and buried his two strangled sons.

On the third day, they passed two villages that Herod had recently constructed, noting their impressive architecture and beautiful palm gardens. By nightfall, they arrived in Jericho, where they stayed until morning. That evening, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus walked a mile and a half to the site of ancient Jericho, where Joshua, after whom Jesus was named, had performed his renowned exploits, according to Jewish tradition.

By the fourth and final day of their journey, the road was a continuous procession of pilgrims. They began to ascend the hills leading to Jerusalem. As they approached the summit, they could gaze across the Jordan River toward the distant mountains and southward over the sluggish waters of the Dead Sea. Approximately halfway to Jerusalem, Jesus caught his first glimpse of the Mount of Olives, a region that would play a significant role in his subsequent life. Joseph pointed out to him that the Holy City lay just beyond this ridge, and the young boy's heart likely raced with joyful anticipation at the prospect of soon beholding the city and the House of God.

On the eastern slopes of Olivet, they paused to rest on the outskirts of a small village called Bethany. The welcoming villagers came

forward to assist the pilgrims. Joseph and his family had stopped near the home of a man named Simon, who had three children approximately the same age as Jesus: Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. They invited the family from Nazareth in for refreshments, and a lasting friendship developed between them. Throughout his life, Jesus frequently visited this home. They pressed on, soon standing on the brink of Olivet. For the first time, Jesus beheld the Holy City, with its grand palaces and magnificent temple. Never before had Jesus experienced such a profound human thrill as the one that completely captivated him on that April afternoon while standing on the Mount of Olives.

But they hurried on to Jerusalem. It was now Thursday afternoon. Upon reaching the city, they passed by the temple, and Jesus had never seen such throngs of people. He reflected deeply on how these Jews had gathered from all corners of the known world.

Soon, they arrived at the location arranged for their accommodation during Passover week: the spacious home of a prosperous relative of Mary's, who was familiar with the early histories of both John and Jesus through Zacharias. The next day, known as the Day of Preparation, they made the necessary arrangements for the proper observance of the Passover Sabbath.

While all of Jerusalem was bustling with preparations for Passover, Joseph took the opportunity to show his son the academy where he was scheduled to resume his education two years later, upon reaching the required age of fifteen. Joseph was genuinely perplexed when he noticed Jesus' lack of interest in these meticulously arranged plans.

Jesus was deeply impressed by the temple and all the associated services and activities. For the first time, he was so absorbed in his own meditation that he asked few questions. However, he did pose several difficult questions to his father regarding why God required the slaughter of so many innocent animals. His father could see from the expression on the boy's face that his answers and attempts at explanation would likely be unsatisfactory.

The day before the Passover Sabbath was one of the most memorable days that Jesus experienced. His human mind appeared to be

increasingly aware that, while living in the flesh, he bore higher spiritual responsibilities. He had become a more self-aware spiritual being, one who began to reflect on his mission and obligations to the society of his time. During the night, for the first time, he had a vision of a heavenly spirit and heard the words: “The time has come to be about the Heavenly Father’s business.”

2.14 IN JERUSALEM

No incident in Jesus’ eventful career was likely more engaging and profoundly thrilling than his first memorable visit to Jerusalem. He was particularly invigorated by the experience of attending the temple discussions independently. This marked his first opportunity to enjoy a few days of independent living, relishing the exhilaration of coming and going without constraints or restrictions, his first true taste of freedom from responsibility.

From the moment they departed Nazareth until they arrived at the summit of the Mount of Olives, Jesus seemed to endure a continuous state of eager anticipation. Throughout his joyful childhood, he had listened with reverence to stories of Jerusalem and its temple; now, he was about to witness them in person. From the vantage point of the Mount of Olives, the temple appeared to be everything Jesus had hoped for and more. However, upon entering its gates, his disillusionment began to set in.

Accompanied by his parents, Jesus passed through the temple precincts on his way to join the group of new Sons of the Covenant who were about to be consecrated as Citizens of Israel. He felt a twinge of disappointment at the general demeanor of the temple throngs, but the first great shock of the day came when his mother took her leave to head to the women’s gallery. It had never occurred to Jesus that his mother would not accompany him to the consecration ceremonies, and he felt thoroughly indignant that she had to endure such discrimination. While he strongly resented this situation, he only expressed a few protest remarks to his father and ultimately said nothing more.

He underwent the consecration rituals but was undoubtedly disappointed by their perfunctory and routine nature. He longed for the personal engagement that characterized the synagogue ceremonies in Nazareth. Subsequently, he prepared to accompany his father on his inaugural visit to the temple and its various courts, galleries, and corridors. The temple precincts could accommodate over 200,000 worshipers simultaneously. While the vastness of these structures, unlike any he had ever seen, greatly impressed him, he was even more captivated by the spiritual significance of the temple ceremonies.

Though many of the temple rituals deeply impressed his sense of beauty and symbolism, he was perhaps disappointed by the explanations of their true meanings that his parents provided in response to his numerous inquiries. Jesus rejected interpretations of religious devotion that involved belief in God's wrath or the Almighty's anger. During further discussions after they visited the temple, when his father gently insisted that he accept orthodox Jewish beliefs, Jesus suddenly turned to his parents and, looking earnestly into Joseph's eyes, said:

“My father, it cannot be true; God cannot regard erring children on earth in such a manner. Our Heavenly Father cannot love earthly children less than you love me. I know that no matter what foolish thing I might do, you would never pour out wrath upon me or vent anger against me. If you, my earthly father, possess such human reflections of the Divine, how much more must our Heavenly Father be filled with goodness and overflowing with mercy? I refuse to believe that our Heavenly Father loves me less than my earthly father.”

When Joseph and Mary heard the words of their firstborn son, they remained silent. From that moment on, they never sought to change his mind about God's love.

2.15 VISIT TO THE TEMPLE

Everywhere Jesus went through the temple courts, he was likely appalled and disheartened by the feeling of irreverence he observed. He considered the behavior of the temple crowds to be inconsistent with their presence in “our Heavenly Father’s house.” He may have experienced the greatest shock of his young life when his father brought him into the Court of the Gentiles, where loud conversations and curses mingled indiscriminately with the bleating of sheep, the clamor of money changers, and the vendors selling sacrificial animals and various other commercial goods.

However, above all, his sense of propriety was presumably outraged by the sight of the frivolous courtesans parading within the temple precincts: painted women reminiscent of those he had recently encountered during his visit to Sepphoris. This desecration of the temple ignited his youthful indignation, prompting him to express his feelings candidly to Joseph. While Jesus admired the sentiment and service associated with the temple, he was dismayed by the absence of spiritual intent reflected on the faces of so many unthinking worshippers.

They descended to the priests’ court beneath the rock ledge in front of the temple, where the altar was located, to witness the sacrifice of numerous animals and the ritual washing of blood from the hands of the officiating slaughter priests at the bronze fountain. The bloodstained pavement, the priests’ gory hands, and the sounds of the dying animals were likely more than this nature-loving boy could endure. He clutched his father’s arm and pleaded to be taken away. They retraced their steps through the Court of the Gentiles, where even the coarse laughter and profane jesting provided a welcome relief from the disturbing sights he had just witnessed.

Joseph noticed that his son was feeling unwell at the sight of the temple rites, so he wisely guided him to view the Beautiful Gate, an artistic entrance made of Corinthian bronze. However, Jesus had reached his limit for his first visit to the temple. They returned to the upper court to meet Mary and spent about an hour walking in the open

air, away from the crowds, while admiring the Asmonean palace, Herod's grand residence, and the Roman guards' tower. During their stroll, Joseph explained to Jesus that only the residents of Jerusalem were allowed to witness the daily sacrifices in the temple, while the inhabitants of Galilee came only three times a year to participate in temple worship: at Passover, at the Feast of Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles, the old feasts established by Moses. They also discussed the two later-established feasts of Dedication and Purim. Afterward, they returned to their lodgings to prepare for the Passover celebration.

2.16 PASSOVER IN JERUSALEM

Five families from Nazareth were either guests or associates of Simon of Bethany during the Passover celebration, with Simon having purchased the Passover lamb for the gathering. The slaughter of these lambs in such vast numbers had seemingly impacted Jesus during his visit to the temple. Although the initial plan was to celebrate Passover with Mary's relatives, Jesus persuaded his parents to accept the invitation to Bethany.

They gathered for the Passover rites that evening, partaking of roasted lamb accompanied by unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Jesus, as a new Son of the Covenant, was invited to recount the origins of Passover, which he did eloquently. However, he somewhat unsettled his parents by incorporating several comments that subtly reflected the impressions he had recently experienced. This marked the commencement of the seven-day celebrations of the Passover feast.

Jesus slept very little that night. His rest was disturbed by disturbing dreams of slaughter and suffering. His mind may have been troubled by the inconsistencies in the Jewish ceremonial system's theology. His parents also slept little, greatly unsettled by the events of the day. They were disturbed by their son's strange and resolute demeanor. Mary became increasingly anxious during the early part of the night, while Joseph remained calm, though he was equally perplexed. Perhaps both of them feared discussing these issues openly with him.

The following day's services at the temple were more agreeable to Jesus and helped alleviate the unpleasant memories of the previous day. Young Lazarus took Jesus under his wing the next morning and began systematically exploring Jerusalem and its surroundings. By the end of the day, Jesus discovered various locations around the temple where teaching sessions and question-and-answer conferences were taking place. Aside from a visit to the Holy of Holies, where he gazed in wonder at what lay beyond the Veil of Separation, he spent most of his time attending these teaching conferences at the temple.

Throughout the Passover week, Jesus maintained his place among the new Sons of the Commandment, which required him to sit outside the rail that separated those who were not full citizens of Israel. Aware of his youth, he refrained from asking the numerous questions that surged in his mind; at least, he held back until the Passover celebration concluded and the restrictions on the newly consecrated youths were lifted.

On Wednesday of Passover week, Jesus was allowed to return to Bethany with Lazarus to spend the night. During this evening with Lazarus, Martha, and Mary, they listened as Jesus discussed matters both temporal and eternal, human and divine. From that night onward, they loved Jesus as if he were their own son.

By the end of the week, Jesus saw less of Lazarus, as he was not eligible for admission to even the outer circle of the temple discussions. However, he did attend some public talks held in the outer courts. Although Lazarus was the same age as Jesus, youths in Jerusalem were rarely admitted to the Sons of the Commandment until they reached the age of thirteen.

Before Joseph and Mary left Jerusalem, accompanied by Jesus' teacher from Nazareth, they made specific arrangements for Jesus to return at the age of fifteen to begin his extensive studies at one of the most renowned rabbinical academies. Jesus accompanied his parents and teacher on their visits to the school, but they all appeared distressed to observe his indifference to everything they said and did.

Passover week was a significant event in Jesus' life. He had the opportunity to meet numerous boys his age, fellow candidates for consecration, and he used these interactions as a means to learn about the lifestyles of people in Mesopotamia, Turkestan, and Parthia, as well as in the far western provinces of the Roman Empire. By this time, he was already fairly knowledgeable about how youth in Egypt and other regions grew up. Thousands of young people were in Jerusalem during this time, and the lad from Nazareth personally met and interviewed over 150 individuals. He was particularly interested in those from the far eastern and remote western countries. As a result of these encounters, Jesus began to develop a desire to travel the world to understand how various groups of his people earned their livelihoods.

2.17 DEPARTURE OF JOSEPH AND MARY

It had been arranged for the Nazareth party to gather in the vicinity of the temple late in the morning on the first day of the week following the conclusion of the Passover festival. They complied with this arrangement and began their return journey to Nazareth. Meanwhile, Jesus had entered the temple to listen to the discussions while his parents awaited the assembly of their fellow travelers. As the group prepared to depart, the men formed one group and the women another, adhering to their customary practice during their journeys to and from the Jerusalem festivals. Jesus had traveled to Jerusalem in the company of his mother and the women. As a young man of consecration, he was expected to return to Nazareth with his father and the men. However, as the Nazareth party proceeded toward Bethany, Jesus became completely engrossed in the discussions at the temple, entirely unaware of the time passing and the impending departure of his parents. He did not realize he had been left behind until the noontime adjournment of the temple conferences.

The travelers from Nazareth did not realize that Jesus was missing because Mary assumed he was journeying with the men. Meanwhile, Joseph believed he was traveling with the women, as he had accompanied them to Jerusalem while leading Mary's donkey. Both parents discovered his absence upon reaching Jericho and preparing to stay for the night.

After inquiring about the last members of their party to arrive in Jericho and learning that none had seen their son, they undoubtedly spent a sleepless night, anxiously contemplating what might have happened to him. They recalled many of his unusual reactions during Passover week and gently chided each other for not ensuring that he was included in the group before they left Jerusalem.

2.18 FIRST AND SECOND DAYS IN THE TEMPLE

In the meantime, Jesus had remained in the temple throughout the afternoon, absorbed in the discussions and appreciating the quieter, more decorous atmosphere, as the large crowds of Passover week had largely dissipated. After the afternoon discussions, in which Jesus did not participate, he traveled to Bethany, arriving just as Simon's family was preparing their evening meal. The three children were overjoyed to greet Jesus, and he stayed in Simon's house for the night. He engaged in very little conversation during the evening, spending much of his time alone in the garden, meditating.

Jesus rose early the next day and made his way to the temple. Upon reaching the Mount of Olivet, he paused and wept at the sight before him: tradition-bound people living under the watchful eye of the Roman legions. By early morning, he was in the temple, determined to engage in the discussions.

Meanwhile, Joseph and Mary had also risen early at dawn to retrace their steps to Jerusalem. First, they hurried to the home of their relatives, where they had stayed as a family during the Passover week, but no one had seen Jesus. After searching all day and finding no trace of him, they returned to their relatives for the night.

On the second day, Jesus boldly asked questions and participated in the discussions at the temple, always in a manner befitting his youth. At times, his pointed inquiries embarrassed the learned teachers of Jewish law. Nevertheless, he exhibited a spirit of candid fairness and a genuine hunger for knowledge, which led most of the temple teachers to treat him with great consideration. However, when he dared to question the justice of executing a drunken Gentile who had wandered

outside the Court of the Gentiles and inadvertently entered the forbidden sacred precincts of the temple, one of the more intolerant teachers grew impatient with the boy's implied criticisms. Glowering down at him, the teacher asked how old he was. Jesus replied: "Thirteen years, lacking just over four months." The irate teacher then asked why he was there, since he was not of age as a Son of the Commandment.

When Jesus explained that he had received consecration during Passover and was a graduate of the Nazareth schools, the teachers responded derisively in unison: We might have known; he is from Nazareth. The leader insisted that Jesus should not be held accountable if the leaders of the synagogue in Nazareth had technically graduated him at the age of twelve, rather than thirteen. Despite several of his detractors rising to leave, it was decided that the young man could continue participating undisturbed in the temple discussions.

When this, his second day in the temple, was complete, Jesus returned to Bethany for the night. Once more, he went out into the garden to meditate. It was evident to this family that he was preoccupied with contemplating significant issues.

2.19 THIRD DAY IN THE TEMPLE

Jesus' third day with the Scribes and teachers in the temple attracted a large audience. Many spectators, having heard of this youth from Nazareth, came to witness the spectacle of a young boy confounding the learned men of the law. Simon also traveled down from Bethany to observe what the boy was doing.

Throughout the day, Joseph and Mary continued their anxious search for Jesus, visiting the temple several times but failing to consider the various discussion groups. However, they did come close enough to almost hear his voice.

Before the day ended, the entire attention of the chief discussion group at the temple became focused on the questions posed by Jesus. Among his many inquiries were:

* What truly exists in the Holy of Holies, behind the veil?

* Why should mothers in Israel be separated from their fathers?

* If God is a father who always loves his children, why is there so much slaughter of animals to gain divine favor?

* Since the temple is dedicated to the worship of God, is it appropriate to allow the presence of individuals who engage in secular barter and trade?

* Is the expected Messiah meant to be a temporal prince who sits on the throne of David, or is he intended to serve as a source of enlightenment in the establishment of a new spiritual kingdom?

Throughout the day, those who listened marveled at the questions posed, and none was more astonished than Simon. This young man from Nazareth engaged these Jewish teachers with thought-provoking and introspective inquiries for over four hours. He made a few comments on the remarks of his elders, conveying his thoughts through the questions he asked. With deft and subtle phrasing, he challenged their teachings while suggesting his own. His manner of questioning combined sagacity and humor, endearing him even to those who somewhat resented his youthfulness. He consistently demonstrated fairness and consideration in posing these penetrating questions. As a youth and later as a man, he appeared entirely free from any egoistic desire to win arguments merely for the sake of experiencing logical triumph over his followers.

When the day came to a close, Simon and Jesus returned to Bethany. The man and the boy remained silent for most of the journey. Once more, Jesus paused at the summit of Olivet. As he gazed upon the city and its temple, he did not weep; instead, he bowed his head in silent devotion.

After the evening meal at Bethany, he once again declined to join the cheerful gathering. Instead, he retreated to the garden, where he lingered long into the night, likely striving to formulate a definitive plan of action regarding his life's work. How could he effectively communicate his spirituality to deprived fellow citizens? How could he present a more profound understanding of God? How could he liberate

them from their oppressive adherence to law, ritual, ceremony, and outdated traditions? Yet, clarity eluded him.

2.20 FOURTH DAY IN THE TEMPLE

Jesus appeared oddly indifferent to the absence of his parents; even during breakfast, when Lazarus's mother noted that his parents must be home by that time, Jesus did not seem to grasp that they might be somewhat concerned about his delay.

Again, he journeyed to the temple, but he did not pause to meditate at the summit of Olivet. During the morning discussions, considerable time was devoted to the law and the prophets, and the teachers were astonished by Jesus' familiarity with the scriptures in both Hebrew and Greek. However, they were more amazed not by his knowledge but by his youth.

At the afternoon conference, they had barely begun to address his question about the purpose of prayer when the leader invited the young man to come forward. Sitting beside him, the leader encouraged him to share his thoughts on prayer and the act of listening to God.

The evening prior, Jesus' parents had heard about a remarkable young man who skillfully debated the interpreters of the law, but it had not occurred to them that this youth was their son. They had nearly resolved to travel to the home of Zacharias, believing that Jesus might have gone to visit Elizabeth and John. Assuming Zacharias might be at the temple, they decided to stop there on their way. As they walked through the temple courts, they were astonished to recognize the voice of their missing son and to see him seated among the teachers of the temple.

Joseph was speechless, but Mary expressed her long-held fears and anxieties when she rushed up to the boy, who was now standing to greet his astonished parents. She asked him why he had treated them this way. They had searched for him sorrowfully for more than three days. What had possessed him to abandon them?

It was a tense moment. All eyes were fixed on Jesus, eager to hear what he would say. His father cast a reproachful glance at him but

remained silent. Jesus was expected to be a young man, having completed the regular education of a child, been recognized as a Son of the Commandment, and received consecration as a citizen of Israel. Yet, his mother admonished him more than mildly before the gathered crowd, right during the most significant and profound moment of his young life. Nevertheless, the young man rose to the occasion. Jesus responded: “Why have you sought me for so long? Would you not expect to find me in our Heavenly Father’s house, since the time has come for me to be about our Heavenly Father’s business?”

Everyone was astonished by the young man’s manner of speaking. He soon alleviated the embarrassment of all three when he quietly said: “Come, my parents, no one has acted other than what he believed to be best. Our Heavenly Father has ordained these events; let us return home.”

On the three-day journey to Nazareth, Jesus spoke very little, and his parents were similarly quiet in his presence. They were genuinely perplexed by their firstborn son’s behavior, yet they cherished his words.

Upon returning home, Jesus made a brief statement to his parents, assuring them of his love and implying that they need not fear he would ever again cause them anxiety due to his behavior. He concluded by saying: “While I must do the will of our Heavenly Father, I will also be obedient to my earthly father. I will await my hour.” Jesus gracefully conformed to his earthly father’s wishes and his family’s customs. Even when he could not fully agree, he did everything possible to accommodate their expectations. He appeared to be adept at balancing his obligations to his family with his spiritual duties.

3

Adolescence

3.0 TWO CRUCIAL YEARS

Of all of Jesus' experiences, the fourteenth and fifteenth years were the most crucial. These two years were the most challenging of his life, occurring after he became self-aware of his spiritual responsibilities and before he attained a significant level of subconscious communication with his soul. These two years should be referred to as the great test: the true temptation.

This critical period in Jesus' early development began with the conclusion of his visit to Jerusalem and his return to Nazareth. Initially, Mary was delighted to have her son back home, believing that Jesus would resume his role as a dutiful son, not that he had ever been anything less, and that he would be more amenable to her plans for his future. However, she would not remain in this state of maternal bliss and unrecognized family pride for long. Soon, she appeared to become disillusioned; her boy spent more time in his father's company and sought her counsel less frequently regarding his problems.

Jesus' compassion and love for his Jewish people deepened as he matured over the years. He respected the sincere Pharisees and honest Scribes, but he held the hypocritical Pharisees and dishonest theologians in great contempt. When he examined the leadership of Israel, he occasionally contemplated the possibility of becoming the Messiah anticipated by the Jews, but he ultimately rejected such a idea.

The accounts of his experiences with the wise men of the temple in Jerusalem were gratifying to all of Nazareth, particularly to his former teachers at the synagogue school. For a time, his praise was on everyone's lips. The entire village recounted his childhood wisdom and commendable conduct, predicting that he would become a great leader in Israel. At last, they believed that a truly great teacher was to come out of Nazareth. They eagerly anticipated the day when he would turn fifteen, which would allow him to read the scriptures regularly in the synagogue on the Sabbath.

3.1 FOURTEENTH YEAR

During the calendar year of his fourteenth birthday, he became a skilled yoke maker, adept at working with canvas and leather. He was also quickly evolving into an expert carpenter and cabinetmaker. That summer, he often traveled to the top of the hill northwest of Nazareth to meditate and to listen to God. He was gradually becoming more aware of his mission on earth.

This hill, a little more than one hundred years earlier, had been the "high place of Baal." Now, it was the site of the tomb of Simeon, a revered holy man of Israel. From the summit of this Hill of Simeon, Jesus gazed out over Nazareth and the surrounding countryside. He looked upon Megiddo and recalled the story of the Egyptian army achieving its first great victory in Asia, as well as how, later, another such army defeated the Judean king Josiah. Not far away, he could see Taanach, where Deborah and Barak defeated Sisera. In the distance, he could view the hills of Dothan, where Joseph's brothers sold him into Egyptian slavery. He then shifted his gaze to Ebal and Gerizim, reflecting on the traditions of Abraham, Jacob, and Abimelech. Thus, he contemplated the historical and traditional events of his people in his mind.

He continued to pursue advanced reading courses under the guidance of the synagogue teachers, while also providing home education for his brothers and sisters as they reached appropriate ages.

The improved economic condition of the Nazareth family was evident in various aspects of their home, particularly in the increased number of smooth white boards used as writing slates, which were written on with charcoal. Jesus was also able to resume his music lessons, as he enjoyed playing the harp. The family's prospects appeared promising; the future looked bright. Earlier this year, Joseph arranged to allocate the income from his properties in Nazareth and Capernaum to fund Jesus' extensive course of study in Jerusalem. It was planned for Jesus to travel to Jerusalem in August of the following year, when he would turn fifteen years old.

By the beginning of this year, Joseph and Mary frequently grappled with doubts regarding the destiny of their firstborn son. He was indeed a brilliant and lovable child, yet he was difficult to comprehend, and, once again, nothing extraordinary or miraculous ever occurred. Countless times, his proud mother stood in breathless anticipation, hoping to witness her son engage in some miraculous feat, but her hopes were consistently met with disappointment. The devout people of that era genuinely believed that prophets of God consistently demonstrated their divine calling and established their teachings through miracles and wondrous acts. However, Jesus did none of these things.

3.2 DEATH OF JOSEPH

All went well until that fateful Tuesday, September 25, when a runner from Sepphoris delivered the tragic news to this Nazareth home: Joseph had been severely injured by a derrick that fell while he was working on the governor's residence. The messenger from Sepphoris had stopped at the shop on his way to Joseph's home, informing Jesus of his father's accident. Together, they went to the house to break the sad news to Mary.

Jesus wished to go immediately to his father, but Mary would hear nothing of it; she felt compelled to hasten to her husband's side. She instructed that James, who was then ten years old, should accompany

her to Sepphoris while Jesus stayed home with the younger children until her return, as she was uncertain about the severity of Joseph's injuries. However, Joseph succumbed to his injuries before Mary arrived. He was brought to Nazareth, and the following day, he was laid to rest with his ancestors.

Just when prospects appeared promising and the future seemed bright, the head of this household in Nazareth passed away. The affairs of the home were disrupted, and every plan for Jesus and his future education was shattered. Now just past the age of fourteen, Jesus realized that he must not only fulfill his spiritual duties but also take on the responsibility of caring for his widowed mother and his seven siblings, one of whom was yet to be born. This young man from Nazareth now became the sole support and comfort for his suddenly bereaved family.

Jesus appeared to cheerfully accept these responsibilities that had been suddenly thrust upon him, carrying them faithfully. At least one anticipated difficulty in his life had been tragically resolved: he would no longer be expected to go to Jerusalem to study under the Rabbis.

While Jesus did not entirely neglect the recreational and social aspects of life, he increasingly devoted his time and energy to two primary purposes: caring for his family and preparing to do God's will. However, he was unaware of his mother's vision of the heavenly spirits before his birth; he learned of this only from John on the day of his baptism, which marked the beginning of his public teaching.

This year, it became customary for the neighbors to visit during winter evenings to hear Jesus play the harp, listen to him read from the Greek scriptures, and hear his captivating stories, for he was a master storyteller. However, despite all that Jesus and the neighbors from Nazareth did to bring cheer into the home, Mary and the children were clearly overshadowed by sadness; Joseph was gone. Joseph had been an extraordinary husband and father, and they all missed him deeply. It felt even more tragic to think that he had passed away before they could speak to him or receive his farewell blessing.

3.3 FIFTEENTH YEAR

On Wednesday evening, April 17, 9 CE, Ruth, the youngest member of the family, was born. To the best of his ability, Jesus endeavored to take his father's place in comforting and ministering to his mother during these challenging times. For almost a score of years - until he began his public teaching - Jesus loved, nurtured, and cared for little Ruth. He was equally devoted to all the other members of his new family. Jesus believed that caring for his father's family must take precedence over all other responsibilities, and supporting his family became his foremost obligation.

The family's economic affairs initially ran relatively smoothly, as they had a substantial sum of money available at the time of Joseph's death. Jesus demonstrated keen business acumen and financial judgment from an early age. However, by the end of Jesus' fifteenth year, the family's savings had nearly depleted, and they faced the necessity of selling one of the houses in Nazareth, which Joseph and his neighbor Jacob owned in partnership. By the end of that year, they felt the decline in family funds. Mary entrusted the sale of doves to James. They purchased a second cow, and with Miriam's assistance, they began selling milk to their neighbors in Nazareth.

This year saw a notable evolution in family prayers, which took on various forms of praise and included several informal prayers. After his father's death, Jesus attempted to teach his siblings to express themselves individually in prayer, as he greatly enjoyed doing. However, they struggled to grasp this concept and would invariably revert to their memorized prayers. In his efforts to encourage his older brothers and sisters to offer individual prayers, Jesus would lead them with suggestive phrases. Eventually, without any intention on his part, they began to adopt a form of prayer primarily constructed from these suggestive lines that Jesus had introduced.

One evening in October, he sat down by the small, squat lamp on the low stone table. Using a piece of smooth cedar board, approximately eighteen inches square, and a bit of charcoal, he wrote out the prayer that would become the standard family petition from that time onward.

“Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our bread for tomorrow. Refresh our souls. And overlook our mistakes, as we have also overlooked the mistakes of others. Save us from temptation, deliver us from evil. And increasingly make us perfect, like yourself.”

[After Jesus’ death, a clause was added to this prayer: “Yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever.”]

A great confusion in Jesus’ mind now emerged. Having clarified his mission on Earth - to reveal God’s loving character to all - he began to reconsider the numerous scriptural references to the coming of a national deliverer, the Messiah. To what events did these prophecies pertain? Was he, or was he not, of the House of David? His mother believed he was; his father had determined that he was not. Ultimately, he concluded that he was not. Had the prophets misinterpreted the nature and mission of the Messiah? During this year, Jesus became firmly convinced that he was not meant to be the traditional version of the Messiah. He longed to help his people, but he never anticipated leading Jewish armies to overthrow the foreign domination of the region. He understood that he would never sit on the Throne of David in Jerusalem, nor did he believe that his mission was exclusively for the Jewish people.

A second great confusion also arose regarding his relationship with his family and community after embarking on his life mission. What should his connection be to the Jewish world and their religion? To the Roman Empire? To the Gentiles and their beliefs? Jesus contemplated each of these important issues deeply. Consequently, Jesus made frequent journeys to the hilltop for meditation and communion with his soul and listening to God.

Jesus learned not to share all his thoughts or present every idea to the world, not even to his mother. From that year onward, Jesus’ disclosures about his inner thoughts steadily diminished; he spoke less about concepts that an average person might struggle to comprehend, which led to his being perceived as different from ordinary individuals.

To all appearances, he became commonplace and conventional, despite yearning for someone who could understand his struggles. The uniqueness of his situation compelled him to bear this burden alone.

The occasional unconventional ideas he expressed from time to time surely alarmed his mother. At times, she worried that her son was losing his sanity, but then she would calm her fears, remembering that he was, after all, a child of promise and somehow different from other youths.

Meanwhile, he continued to work at the carpenter's bench, diligently earning a living for himself, his mother, and eight other hungry mouths.

3.4 FIRST TEACHING IN THE SYNAGOGUE

With the approach of his fifteenth birthday, Jesus became officially eligible to occupy the synagogue pulpit on the Sabbath. Previously, in the absence of speakers, he had often been invited to read the scriptures. However, the day had finally arrived when, in accordance with the law, he could lead the service. Consequently, on the first Sabbath following his fifteenth birthday, the chazzan arranged for Jesus to conduct the morning service at the synagogue. When all the faithful in Nazareth had gathered, the young man, having chosen his selection of scriptures, stood up and began to read:

“‘The spirit of the God is upon me, for God has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the meek, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and to set the spiritual prisoners free; to proclaim the year of God’s favor and the day of our God’s reckoning; to comfort all mourners, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy in the place of mourning, a song of praise instead of the spirit of sorrow, that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of God, wherewith he may be glorified...’

“‘And what does God require of you but to deal justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God?’ He gives power to the weak, and he increases strength to those who are weary.

“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen, help, and uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness, for I am your God.”

And when he had finished reading, he sat down. The people returned to their homes, reflecting on the words he had shared with them. Never had his townspeople seen him so magnificently solemn; never had they heard his voice sound so earnest and sincere; never had they observed him to be so manly, decisive, and authoritative.

3.5 FINANCIAL STRUGGLE

Gradually, Jesus and his family returned to the simple life they had in their earlier years. Their clothing and even their food became more modest. They had an abundance of milk, butter, and cheese. In season, they enjoyed the produce from their garden, but as each month passed, they had to practice greater frugality. Their breakfasts were simple, as they reserved their best food for the evening meal. However, among these Jews, a lack of wealth did not imply social inferiority.

The wages of a typical day-laboring carpenter were gradually declining. By the following year, they found it increasingly difficult to pay civil taxes, synagogue assessments, and the half-shekel temple tax. During this year, the tax collector attempted to extract additional revenue from Jesus, even threatening to seize his harp. Concerned that the tax collectors might confiscate his copy of the Greek scriptures, Jesus presented it to the Nazareth synagogue library as a maturity offering on his fifteenth birthday.

The closure of operations at the carpenter’s bench during this and subsequent years prevented Jesus from interacting with the caravan passengers. Around this time, he began sending James to the camel lot to gather information about world events, thereby attempting to stay informed about current affairs. His uncle had already assumed control of the family supply shop, while Jesus worked in the home workshop, where he was available to assist Mary with family responsibilities.

This year, Jesus rented a large parcel of land just north of their home, which was divided into individual garden plots for each family member. The older children engaged in spirited competition regarding their agricultural efforts. Their eldest brother spent time with them in the garden each day during the vegetable cultivation season. Jesus worked alongside his younger brothers and sisters, doing everything within his power to help his family adjust to their circumstances and to improve their situation, thereby fulfilling their individual and collective aspirations as fully as possible.

3.6 ADOLESCENT YEARS

As Jesus entered his adolescent years, he became the head and sole support of a large family. The profound shock of his fifteenth year occurred when Jesus traveled to Sepphoris to receive Herod Antipas's decision regarding the appeal concerning the amount of money owed to Joseph at the time of his accidental death. Jesus and Mary had hoped to receive a substantial sum, but the treasurer at Sepphoris offered them a meager amount. Joseph's brothers had appealed directly to Herod, and now Jesus stood in the palace, hearing Herod decree that his father was owed nothing at the time of his death. This unjust decision led Jesus to lose all trust in Herod Antipas.

At one time, Jesus harbored a faint hope of gathering sufficient resources to justify the purchase of a small farm. He had seriously considered relocating his family to the countryside. However, when Herod Antipas refused to disburse the small amount of funds owed to Joseph, they abandoned their ambition of owning a rural home. Nevertheless, they managed to enjoy much of the experience of farm life, having acquired three cows, four sheep, a flock of chickens, a donkey, and a dog, in addition to the doves. Even the little children had their regular responsibilities within the well-organized management system that characterized the family's home life in Nazareth.

3.7 SIXTEENTH YEAR

This year, Jesus reached full physical maturity. People described him as a virile and handsome young man. He also developed a significant degree of human intellect. His voice was both melodious and authoritative, and his greetings were warm yet genuine. He exhibited a kind and empathetic nature, coupled with a somewhat variable but assertive temperament, all of which contributed to a strong and appealing personality. While he became increasingly serious and contemplative, he remained kind and compassionate. His eyes were gentle yet probing, and his smile was consistently engaging and reassuring. He embodied a unique blend of a compassionate friend and an authoritative teacher.

This year, Simon started school, and the family was compelled to sell another house. James now taught his three sisters, two of whom were old enough to begin serious studies. As soon as Ruth grew older, her education was overseen by Miriam and Martha. Typically, girls from Jewish families received limited education. However, Jesus maintained, much to his mother's agreement, that girls should attend school just like boys. Since the synagogue school would not accept them, the family established a home school specifically for the girls.

Throughout this year, Jesus was primarily focused on his workbench. Fortunately, he had an abundance of tasks. The quality of his work was so exceptional that he was never idle. At times, he had so much to accomplish that James would lend a hand.

By the end of this year, he had nearly decided that after raising his father's family and witnessing their marriages, he would publicly assume the role of a teacher. He understood that he was not destined to become the expected Jewish Messiah, and he concluded that discussing these matters with his mother was largely futile. He resolved to let her entertain whatever beliefs she chose, as his previous attempts to communicate had made little to no impact on her. He recalled that his father had also been unable to change her mind. From this point forward, he spoke less and less with his mother or anyone else about these issues. He was a genuinely youthful father to the family, dedicating every possible hour to spending time with the children, who truly loved him.

His mother mourned seeing him work so hard; she lamented that he was toiling daily at the carpenter's bench to provide for the family, instead of being, as they had so fondly envisioned, in Jerusalem studying with the Rabbis. Mary clearly loved him and deeply appreciated the supportive way in which he embraced the responsibilities of the household.

3.8 SEVENTEENTH YEAR

At this time, there was significant agitation, particularly in Jerusalem and Judea, advocating for rebellion against the payment of taxes to Rome. A strong nationalist movement was emerging, which would later be known as the Zealots. Unlike the Pharisees, the Zealots were unwilling to wait for the arrival of the Messiah; instead, they sought to precipitate change through political revolt.

A group of Zealot organizers from Jerusalem arrived in Galilee and made significant progress until they reached Nazareth. When they met with Jesus, he listened attentively and asked numerous questions, but ultimately refused to join their cause. He did not disclose his reasons for declining, which led to his rejection by many of his young peers in Nazareth. Mary made every effort to persuade him to enlist with the Zealots, but she was unable to change his mind. One of Jesus' uncles, Mary's brother Simon, had already joined this group and subsequently became an officer in the Galilean division. For several years, this led to a degree of estrangement between Jesus and his uncle.

Trouble began to brew in Nazareth as Jesus' stance on these issues created a division among the city's Jewish youth. Approximately half aligned themselves with a nationalist organization, while the other half began to form a more moderate group of patriots, anticipating that Jesus would take on a leadership role. The moderates were astonished when he declined the honor, citing his significant family responsibilities, which they all recognized. The situation became even more complicated when a wealthy Jew, named Isaac, a moneylender to the Gentiles, offered to support Jesus' family if he would abandon his trade and assume leadership of the Nazareth patriots. At that time,

Jesus was barely seventeen years old and faced one of the most delicate and demanding situations of his early life.

Jesus faced a more challenging situation because his mother, uncle, and even his younger brother, James, all encouraged him to join the nationalist cause. All the conservative Jews of Nazareth had enlisted, and those young men who had not yet joined the movement would all enlist if Jesus changed his mind. He had only one wise counselor in all of Nazareth, his former teacher, the chazzan, who advised him on how to respond to the citizens' committee of Nazareth when they came to seek his answer to the public appeal that had been made.

Throughout Jesus' early life, this was the first time he had consciously resorted to a public strategy. He had always relied on a straightforward statement of truth to clarify situations, but now he could not reveal the entire truth. His family was in turmoil, his youthful friends were divided, and the whole Jewish community in the town was in an uproar. Some believed he was to blame for the chaos, although he certainly had no intention of causing any trouble, let alone a disturbance.

Jesus had to assert his position, and he did so with both courage and diplomacy, satisfying many, though not all. He remained committed to the terms of his initial plea, emphasizing that his primary responsibility was to his family. A widowed mother and eight siblings required more than what mere money could provide, the essential physical necessities of life. They were entitled to a father's care and guidance, and he could not, in good conscience, absolve himself of the obligation that a tragic accident had imposed upon him.

He expressed gratitude to his mother and eldest brother for their willingness to let him go. However, he emphasized that loyalty to his deceased father prevented him from abandoning the family, regardless of the financial support that might be offered, stating: "money cannot love." During this address, Jesus spoke of his "life mission." The people of Nazareth were well aware of his dedication as a father, and this issue resonated deeply with them, leading to a heartfelt response to Jesus' plea from many in the community.

Many were moved by a speech delivered by James, which, although not scheduled, took place at that time. On that very day, the chazzan had secretly rehearsed James for his address. James expressed his belief that Jesus would assist in liberating his people if he (James) were old enough to take on the responsibilities of the family. He argued that if they allowed Jesus to remain with them, they would not only have one leader from Joseph's lineage but also five dedicated nationalists, as there are five boys who will grow up to serve the nation.

Thus, the young man managed to transform a tense and threatening situation into a relatively happy resolution. For the time being, the crisis had passed, but the incident was never forgotten in Nazareth; the agitation lingered. Jesus was no longer universally favored; the division of sentiment was never completely reconciled. This, compounded by later events, was one of the primary reasons Jesus relocated to Capernaum in subsequent years. From that point on, Nazareth continued to harbor a divided opinion regarding Jesus.

James graduated from school this year and began working full-time at home in the carpentry shop. He had become skilled with tools and took on the responsibility of making yokes and plows, while Jesus focused on finishing houses and performing expert cabinet work.

3.9 EIGHTEENTH YEAR

This year, all the family property, except for the home and garden, was sold. The last piece of property in Capernaum was sold, except for an equity in one already mortgaged parcel. The proceeds were used to pay taxes, purchase new tools for James, and make a payment on the old family supply and repair shop near the caravan lot, which Jesus now intended to buy back since James was old enough to work at the house shop and assist Mary at home.

With the financial pressure somewhat alleviated, Jesus decided to take James to the Passover. They traveled to Jerusalem a day early to spend some time alone in Samaria. As they walked, Jesus shared stories about the historic sites along the way, just as his father had taught him during a similar journey five years earlier.

While passing through Samaria, they discussed many of their problems, personal, familial, and national. Jesus and his brother reflected on the traditions of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. James was very grateful that Jesus had taken him to the Passover, and they explored the future more thoroughly than ever before. James was a deeply religious young man, and he eagerly anticipated the time when he could assume responsibility for the family, allowing Jesus to begin his teaching.

Jesus took significant steps to prepare James for the experiences he was about to encounter in Jerusalem, aiming to mitigate the shock he had felt during his initial visit to the temple. However, James was less affected by some of the sights. He remarked on the mechanical and indifferent way in which certain priests carried out their responsibilities, yet overall, he appreciated his time in Jerusalem.

They traveled to Bethany for the Passover meal. Simon had been laid to rest with his ancestors, and Jesus presided over the household as the head of the Passover family. After the meal, Martha, Lazarus, and Jesus engaged in conversation late into the night.

The following day, they attended the temple services, and James was welcomed into the Commonwealth of Israel. That morning, as they paused on the summit of Olivet to admire the temple, James exclaimed in wonder, while Jesus gazed at Jerusalem in silence. James could not understand his brother's demeanor. That night, they returned to Bethany once more and planned to depart for home the next day. However, James insisted on revisiting the temple, explaining that he wanted to hear the teachers. While this was true, deep down, he secretly longed to hear Jesus participate in the discussions, as he had heard his mother describe. Consequently, they went to the temple and listened to the discussions, but Jesus asked no questions. Apparently everything seemed trivial and insignificant to his awakening mind. James felt disappointed that Jesus remained silent.

The following day, they traveled home through Jericho and the Jordan Valley, during which Jesus recounted various experiences, including his previous journey along this route when he was thirteen years old.

Upon returning to Nazareth, Jesus resumed work in the family repair shop, where he found great joy in meeting people from various regions of the country and surrounding areas daily. Jesus genuinely enjoyed conversing with others. Each month, he made his payments on the shop and, with James's assistance, continued to support the family.

Several times a year, even when visitors were not invited, Jesus continued to read the Sabbath scriptures at the synagogue and often provided commentary on the lessons. He typically chose passages that required revision and organized the readings in a way that allowed one passage to illuminate another. Weather permitting, he would consistently take his brothers and sisters out for nature walks on Sabbath afternoons.

Jesus' social life, although limited, included many close friends and staunch admirers among the young men and women of Nazareth. Around this time, the chazzan established a young men's club for philosophical discussions, which convened at various members' homes, often at his own. Jesus became a prominent member of this group, allowing him to regain some of the local prestige he had lost during the recent nationalistic controversies.

In September, Elizabeth and John visited the Nazareth family. After losing his father, John planned to return to the Judean hills to pursue agriculture and sheep raising, unless Jesus advised him to stay in Nazareth to take up carpentry or another line of work. Unbeknownst to them, the Nazareth family was nearly destitute. As Mary and Elizabeth discussed their sons, they became increasingly convinced that it would be beneficial for the two young men to work together and spend more time in each other's company.

Jesus and John engaged in many conversations, discussing deeply personal and intimate matters. After concluding this visit, they agreed not to see each other again until their paths crossed in public service. John was profoundly impressed by what he witnessed in Nazareth, and upon returning home, he worked diligently with the support of his

mother. He became convinced that he was meant to be a part of Jesus' life mission. However, he recognized that Jesus would be occupied for many years with raising his family, so he felt more at peace returning home to tend to their small farm and care for his mother's needs. Consequently, John and Jesus did not see each other again until the day by the Jordan River when Jesus came to be baptized.

On Saturday afternoon, December 3, of this year, tragedy struck Jesus' family for the second time. Little Amos, their baby brother, passed away after a week-long battle with a high fever. After enduring this period of sorrow with her firstborn son as her only source of support, Mary ultimately acknowledged Jesus as the true head of the family, believing him to be a worthy head.

For four years, their standard of living had steadily declined; year by year, they felt the increasing burden of poverty. By the end of this year, they confronted one of the most challenging experiences amid all their struggles.

James had not yet begun to earn a substantial income, and the expenses of Amos's funeral, in addition to everything else, overwhelmed them. Yet, Jesus would only say to his anxious and grieving mother: "Mother, sorrow will not help us; we are all doing our best, and your smile might even inspire us to strive for more. Each day, we draw strength for these tasks from our hope for better days."

His resilient and pragmatic optimism was genuinely contagious; all the children thrived in an environment filled with anticipation for better times and improved circumstances. This hopeful courage significantly contributed to the development of their strong characters, despite the challenges posed by their poverty.

3.10 NINETEENTH YEAR

By this time, Jesus and Mary had developed a much better relationship. She viewed him less as a son and more as a father figure to her children. Each day was filled with practical and immediate challenges. They spoke less frequently about his life's work; as time

went on, their thoughts became increasingly focused on the support and upbringing of their family, which included four boys and three girls.

Prayer time in this household served as an opportunity to discuss various topics related to the family's well-being. By the beginning of this year, Jesus had successfully persuaded his mother to adopt his approach to child-rearing, which emphasized positive encouragement to do good, in place of the older Jewish practice of forbidding evil or punishing rule-breaking.

Jesus began to instill wise discipline in his brothers and sisters at such an early age that little to no punishment was ever necessary to ensure their prompt and wholehearted obedience. The only exception was Jude, on whom Jesus found it necessary to impose penalties on several occasions for his infractions of the household rules. On three occasions, when it was deemed appropriate to punish Jude for his self-confessed and deliberate violations of family conduct rules, the punishment was determined by the unanimous agreement of the older children. Jude himself consented to the punishment before it was carried out.

In all of Jesus' family interactions, there was a refreshing flexibility in interpretation and a unique adaptability that deeply impressed all the children with the spirit of justice embodied by their so-called father-brother. He never imposed arbitrary discipline on his siblings, and this consistent fairness and personal consideration endeared Jesus to his entire family.

James and Simon grew up striving to follow Jesus' teachings on pacifying their aggressive and sometimes irate playmates through persuasion and nonresistance, and they were reasonably successful in doing so. However, while they accepted these teachings at home, Joseph and Jude were quick to defend themselves when confronted by their peers; in particular, Jude often violated the spirit of these teachings. Nonetheless, nonresistance was not a strict rule within the family. Generally, all the children, especially the girls, would seek Jesus' guidance regarding their childhood troubles and confide in him as they would with a loving father.

James was growing up to be a well-balanced and even-tempered young man, although he was not particularly spiritually inclined. He was a much better student than Joseph, who, while a diligent worker, was even less focused on spiritual matters. Joseph was a steady plodder, striving to reach the intellectual level of his peers.

Simon, a well-meaning boy, was a dreamer. He was slow to settle down in life, which later caused considerable anxiety for Jesus and Mary; however, he was always a goodhearted and well-intentioned lad. Jude was a firebrand: he possessed the highest ideals but was unstable in temperament. He inherited all of his mother's determination and assertiveness but lacked much of her sense of proportion and discretion. Miriam was a well-balanced and level-headed daughter with a keen appreciation for spiritual matters. Martha, though slow in thought and action, was a dependable and efficient child. Baby Ruth was the sunshine of the household; although her speech was often thoughtless, her heart was sincere. She adored Jesus, yet this devotion did not lead to her being spoiled. While she was a beautiful child, she was not quite as attractive as Miriam, who was the belle of the family, if not the city.

As time passed, Jesus made significant efforts to liberalize and modify family practices related to Sabbath observance and various other aspects of religion. Mary approved of all these changes. By this time, Jesus had become the undisputed head of the household.

This year, Jude started school, and Jesus had to sell his harp to cover these expenses. Thus, the last of his recreational pleasures vanished. He loved playing the harp when his mind was tired and his body weary, but he found solace in the thought that at least the harp was safe from seizure by the tax collector.

3.11 REBECCA

Although Jesus was poor, his social standing in Nazareth remained intact. He was one of the most prominent young men in the city and was highly regarded by many of the young women. Given Jesus' impressive combination of physical vitality and intellectual prowess,

along with his reputation as a spiritual leader, it is not surprising that Rebecca, the eldest daughter of Ezra, a wealthy merchant and trader from Nazareth, gradually fell in love with this son of Joseph.

She first confided her feelings to Miriam, the sister of Jesus, who subsequently discussed the matter with their mother. Mary appeared to be distressed. Was she on the verge of losing her son, who had become the indispensable head of the family? Would her troubles never end? She then paused to consider the potential impact of marriage on Jesus' future as a "child of promise." After their conversation, she and Miriam resolved to intervene before Jesus learned of the situation. They decided to approach Rebecca directly, presenting the entire story and candidly expressing their belief that Jesus was destined for greatness; that he was to become a significant religious leader, perhaps even the Messiah.

Rebecca listened intently, thrilled by the recital and more determined than ever to align her future with the man of her choice and support his career in teaching. She reasoned with herself that such a man would require a devoted and capable wife. She interpreted Mary's attempts to dissuade her as a natural response to the fear of losing the head and sole provider of her family. However, knowing that her father approved of her feelings for the carpenter's son, she correctly concluded that he would be more than willing to provide the family with enough income to offset the loss of Jesus' earnings.

When her father agreed to the plan, Rebecca held further discussions with Mary and Miriam. However, when she was unable to gain their support, she boldly approached Jesus directly. This was done with her father's cooperation, as he invited Jesus to their home to celebrate Rebecca's seventeenth birthday. Jesus listened attentively and sympathetically to the accounts presented, first by her father and then by Rebecca herself. He kindly responded that no amount of money could replace his personal obligation to care for his father's family and fulfill the trust of loyalty to one's own flesh and blood. Rebecca's father was deeply moved by Jesus' words of familial devotion and eventually withdrew from the discussion. His only comment was that they could not have him as a son because he was too noble for them.

Then began an eventful conversation with Rebecca. Until this point, Jesus had made little distinction in his interactions with boys and girls, and later with young men and women. His mind had been too preoccupied with the pressing issues of practical earthly matters and the intriguing contemplation of his eventual career to consider marriage seriously. However, he was now confronted with yet another challenge that the average human being must face and resolve.

After listening attentively, he sincerely thanked Rebecca for her expressed admiration, adding: "It shall cheer and comfort me all the days of my life." He explained that he was not free to enter into relationships with any woman beyond those of simple brotherly regard and pure friendship. He clarified that his first and foremost duty was to rear his father's family, and he could only consider marriage once that responsibility was fulfilled. He then added: "I Must not assume obligations of lifelong duration until such a time as my destiny is made clear."

Rebecca was heartbroken. She refused to be comforted and urged her father to leave Nazareth until he finally agreed to move to Sepphoris. In the years that followed, to the many men who sought her hand in marriage, Rebecca had but one response: she lived for a singular purpose: to await the moment when this extraordinary man, whom she believed to be the most remarkable person ever to live, would begin his career as a teacher. She followed him devotedly throughout his years of public teaching, being present on the day he rode triumphantly into Jerusalem. She also stood among the other women by the side of Mary on that fateful and tragic afternoon when Jesus was executed.

3.12 TWENTIETH YEAR

The story of Rebecca's love for Jesus was whispered about in Nazareth and later in Capernaum. As the years passed, many women loved Jesus just as men did; however, he no longer had to reject the personal devotion of another woman. From that point on, human affection for Jesus took on a more adoring quality. Both men and women loved him devotedly for who he was, without any hint of self-satisfaction or desire for possessive affection. For many years,

whenever the narrative of Jesus' human personality was shared, Rebecca's devotion was recounted.

This year, although they could hardly afford it, Jesus felt a strong desire to go to Jerusalem for Passover. Given his recent experience with Rebecca, his mother wisely encouraged him to make the journey. Although he was not fully aware of it, he yearned for the opportunity to speak with Lazarus and visit Martha and Mary. Next to his own family, he cherished these three more than anyone else.

In making his journey to Jerusalem, he traveled through Megiddo, Antipatris, and Lydda, partially retracing the route he had taken when he returned to Nazareth from Egypt. He spent four days en route to the Passover, reflecting on the significant events that had occurred in and around Megiddo, the renowned international battlefield.

Jesus passed through Jerusalem, pausing only to gaze upon the temple and the throngs of visitors gathered there. He felt a growing aversion to this Herod-built temple. Above all, he longed to see Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. Lazarus, who was the same age as Jesus, had now become the head of the household. By the time of this visit, Lazarus's mother had also been laid to rest. Martha was slightly more than a year older than Jesus, while Mary was two years his junior.

On this visit, one of those periodic outbreaks of rebellion against tradition occurred. Unaware that Jesus was coming, Lazarus had arranged to celebrate Passover with friends in a nearby village along the Jericho Road. However, Jesus proposed that they celebrate the feast at Lazarus's house. Lazarus pleaded that they had no paschal lamb. In response, Jesus delivered a lengthy and persuasive discourse, arguing that God was not genuinely concerned with such meaningless rituals.

That evening, around twilight, the four individuals sat down to partake in the first Passover feast ever celebrated by these devout Jews without a paschal lamb. The unleavened bread and wine had been prepared for this Passover, so Jesus served his companions, and they ate in solemn adherence to their teachings. It was his custom to engage in this sacramental ritual during his subsequent visits to Bethany.

When he returned home, he shared everything with his mother. Initially, she was shocked, but she gradually began to understand his perspective. Nevertheless, she felt greatly relieved when Jesus assured her that he did not intend to introduce this new idea of the Passover within their family. At home with the children, he continued to observe the Passover “according to the law of Moses.”

Although all of their property in Nazareth (except for their home) had been lost, this year they received some financial assistance from the sale of equity in a piece of property in Capernaum. This transaction represented the last of Joseph’s estate. The real estate deal in Capernaum was conducted with a boat builder named Zebedee.

Joseph graduated from the synagogue school this year and prepared to begin working at the small bench in the family carpenter shop. Although their father’s estate had been depleted, there were prospects that they would successfully fend off poverty, as three of them were now regularly at work.

4

Adulthood

4.0 EARLY MANHOOD

Jesus was swiftly transitioning from youth to adulthood. He was learning to embrace responsibility and gradually discovering how to lead a life aligned with divine principles as he navigated his earthly existence. Increasingly, he relied on the ultimate guidance of God as he assumed the paternal role of guiding and directing the children in his earthly family.

4.1 TWENTY-FIRST YEAR

Jesus' human role was evident and consistently present in his consciousness. As he entered early adulthood, he lived a typical human life. He came into this world like other children. He worked, grew weary, rested, and slept. He experienced hunger and satisfied his food cravings; he thirsted and quenched his thirst with water. He felt the full spectrum of human emotions and experiences.

Jesus' divine role permitted doubt. The self-realization of his teaching mission was a gradual process and, from a human perspective, a natural evolutionary revelation. This revelation began in Jerusalem when he was thirteen years old, marked by a vision of a heavenly spirit, and culminated at his baptism by John in the Jordan River. Between these two spiritual experiences, nothing extraordinary transpired in his life.

This year, Jesus traveled to Jerusalem with Joseph to celebrate Passover. After taking James to the temple for consecration, he felt it was his duty to accompany Joseph. He journeyed to Jerusalem via the customary route through the Jordan Valley but returned to Nazareth by the East Jordan Way, which passed through Amathus. While descending the Jordan, Jesus recounted Jewish history to Joseph, and during the return trip, he shared stories about the experiences of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Gilead, which traditionally inhabited the regions east of the river.

Joseph posed numerous leading questions to Jesus about his life mission, but to most of these inquiries, Jesus simply responded: “My hour has not yet come.” Nevertheless, during these intimate discussions, many hints were provided, which Joseph recalled during the significant events of the years that followed. Jesus, along with Joseph, spent this Passover with his three friends in Bethany, as was his custom when attending these festival commemorations in Jerusalem.

4.2 TWENTY-SECOND YEAR

This period marked one of several years during which Jesus’ brothers and sisters encountered the trials and tribulations typical of adolescence. At this time, Jesus had siblings ranging in age from seven to eighteen, and he was dedicated to helping them navigate the new awakenings of their intellectual and emotional lives. Consequently, he had to address the challenges of adolescence as they emerged in the lives of his younger siblings.

This year, Simon graduated from school and began working with Jacob, Jesus’ childhood friend and steadfast defender, who is a stone mason. After several family discussions, it was decided that it would be unwise for all the boys to pursue a career in carpentry. Diversifying their trades was believed to better prepare them for taking on contracts to construct entire buildings. However, not all of them had remained busy, as three of the boys were employed as full-time carpenters.

Jesus continued his work in house finishing and cabinetry this year, but he spent the majority of his time at the caravan repair shop. James

began to alternate with him in attending the shop. In the latter part of the year, when carpentry work slowed in Nazareth, Jesus left James in charge of the repair shop and Joseph at the home bench while he traveled to Sepphoris to work with a blacksmith. He worked for six months with metals and acquired considerable skill at the anvil.

Before commencing his new employment at Sepphoris, Jesus convened one of his periodic family conferences and formally appointed James, who had just turned eighteen, as the acting head of the family. He assured his brother of his unwavering support and full cooperation while requiring each family member to pledge their obedience to James. From that day forward, James assumed full financial responsibility for the family, with Jesus making weekly payments to him. Jesus never relinquished control to anyone except James.

Jesus spent six months in Sepphoris, which allowed him to gain a deeper understanding of the non-Jewish perspective on life. He worked alongside Gentiles, lived among them, and studied their habits and way of life in various ways.

The moral standards of Herod Antipas's home city were vastly different from those of the caravan city of Nazareth. After a six-month stay in Sepphoris, Jesus was eager to find a reason to return to Nazareth. The group with which he worked was scheduled to engage in public projects in both Sepphoris and the newly established city of Tiberias. However, Jesus was unwilling to accept any employment under the supervision of Herod Antipas.

When Jesus returned to the repair shop, he did not personally oversee family matters. Instead, he collaborated with James at the shop and, whenever possible, allowed him to maintain control over household affairs. James's management of family expenses and his administration of the home budget continued without interruption.

When James had two years of experience as the acting head of the family, Joseph was appointed to manage the household finances and entrusted with the overall administration of the home.

4.3 TWENTY-THIRD YEAR

This year, the financial pressure was somewhat alleviated as four family members secured employment. Miriam made a significant contribution by selling milk and butter, while Martha became an expert weaver. The purchase price of the repair shop was more than one-third paid off.

The situation was such that Jesus paused his work for three weeks to accompany Simon to Jerusalem for the Passover. This marked the longest period he had spent away from daily labor since his father's death. They traveled to Jerusalem through the Decapolis, passing through Pella, Gerasa, Philadelphia, Heshbon, and Jericho. On their return to Nazareth, they took the coastal route, stopping at Lydda, Joppa, and Caesarea before continuing around Mount Carmel to Ptolemais and finally back to Nazareth. This journey familiarized Jesus with the regions north of the Jerusalem district.

In Philadelphia, Jesus and Simon became acquainted with a merchant from Damascus who developed a strong fondness for the couple from Nazareth. He insisted that they stay with him at his headquarters in Jerusalem. While Simon attended the temple, Jesus spent much of his time conversing with this well-educated and well-traveled man, who was knowledgeable about world affairs. The merchant owned over four thousand caravan camels and had business interests throughout the Roman world; he was currently en route to Rome. He proposed that Jesus come to Damascus to join his Oriental import business. However, Jesus explained that he did not feel justified in leaving his family at that time. On the journey home, he reflected deeply on these distant cities and the even more remote countries of the Far West and the Far East, regions he had often heard discussed by caravan passengers and conductors.

Simon thoroughly enjoyed his visit to Jerusalem. He received a warm welcome in the Commonwealth of Israel during the Passover consecration of the new Sons of the Commandment. While Simon participated in the Passover ceremonies, Jesus engaged with the crowds of visitors and held numerous personal discussions with various Gentiles.

Perhaps the most notable of all these encounters was with a young Hellenist named Stephen. This young Greek was visiting Jerusalem for the first time and happened to meet Jesus on Thursday afternoon during Passover week. As they strolled around the Asmonean palace, Jesus initiated a casual conversation that sparked their mutual interest, leading to a four-hour discussion about the way of life and the true nature of God. This Greek was profoundly impressed by Jesus' words, which he would always remember.

[This was the same Stephen who later became a follower of Jesus' teachings, and whose courage in preaching ultimately led to his being stoned to death. Some of Stephen's remarkable boldness in proclaiming his understanding of the new teachings was a direct result of his earlier encounter with Jesus. However, Stephen never even remotely suspected that the Galilean he had conversed with approximately fifteen years earlier was the very same individual for whom he was so soon to die, thus becoming the first martyr of the emerging teachings.]

[When Stephen sacrificed his life in protest against the Jewish temple and its traditional practices, a man named Saul, a citizen of Tarsus, stood by. Witnessing how this Greek martyr died for his faith stirred emotions within Saul that ultimately compelled him to champion the cause for which Stephen had given his life. Later, he became the fervent and unyielding Paul, the founder of several churches.]

On the Sunday following Passover week, Simon and Jesus began their journey back to Nazareth. Simon always remembered the lessons Jesus imparted during this trip. He had always loved Jesus, but now he felt he was beginning to truly understand his father-brother. They shared many heartfelt conversations as they traveled through the countryside and prepared their meals by the roadside. They arrived home on Thursday afternoon, and that night, Simon kept the family awake late, recounting his experiences.

Mary was deeply troubled by Simon's report that Jesus spent much of his time in Jerusalem socializing with strangers, particularly those from distant lands. Jesus' family could never understand his profound interest in "other people," his desire to engage with them, learn about their ways of life, and discover their thoughts.

The Nazareth family became increasingly engrossed in their immediate human concerns; only occasionally was there any mention of Jesus' future career. His mother was gradually relinquishing the notion that Jesus was destined to fulfill a divine mission. Yet, at times her faith was rekindled when she paused to remember the vision of the heavenly spirit she had seen before his birth.

4.4 DAMASCUS MERCHANT

In the last four months of this year, Jesus stayed in Damascus as the guest of a merchant he had first encountered in Philadelphia on his journey to Jerusalem. A representative of this merchant had sought out Jesus while passing through Nazareth and escorted him to Damascus. This part-Jewish merchant proposed to allocate an extraordinary sum of money to establish a school of religious philosophy in Damascus. He envisioned creating a center of learning that would rival Alexandria. The merchant suggested that Jesus immediately embark on an extensive tour of the world's educational centers in preparation for leading this new initiative. This was one of the greatest temptations Jesus ever faced during his career.

This merchant presented to Jesus a group of twelve merchants and bankers who agreed to support the newly proposed school. Jesus demonstrated a profound interest in the project and assisted them in planning its organization. However, he consistently expressed concern that his other, unspoken obligations would prevent him from accepting the leadership of such an ambitious endeavor. His would-be benefactor was persistent and profitably employed Jesus to translate at home. Simultaneously, he, along with his wife and their sons and daughters, sought to persuade Jesus to accept the honor. Nevertheless, Jesus declined their offer. He understood that his mission on earth was not to be supported by educational institutions; he must not bind himself to the guidance of human councils, regardless of their good intentions.

Jesus never mentioned this offer to his family, and by the end of the year, he found himself back in Nazareth, attending to his daily duties. The people of Damascus did not associate the latter citizen of Capernaum with the former carpenter of Nazareth, who had audaciously declined the honor that their combined wealth could have provided. In the years that followed, he often listened to the retelling of the story about the enigmatic Galilean who turned down the chance to establish a school in Damascus to rival that of Alexandria.

Jesus apparently sought to separate the various phases of his life so that they would not be perceived as the actions of a single individual by the world. He aimed to prevent the development of a remarkable career that might lead future generations to idolize him rather than focus on his teachings. Jesus wished to avoid creating a human record of accomplishments that could distract from his teaching. He did not want to exert any undue influence on others, compelling them to believe him contrary to their genuine convictions. Instead, he desired that people follow him only if their hearts were open to the spiritual truths revealed in his teachings.

By the end of this year, the Nazareth home was operating quite smoothly. The children were maturing, and Mary was becoming accustomed to Jesus being away from home. He continued to entrust his earnings to James for the family's support, retaining only a small portion for his immediate personal expenses.

4.5 TWENTY-FOURTH YEAR

This marked Jesus' first full year of relative freedom from family responsibilities. James effectively managed the household with Jesus' assistance in providing counsel and financial support.

The week following this year's Passover, a young man from Alexandria traveled to Nazareth to arrange a meeting between Jesus and a group of Alexandrian Jews along the Palestinian coast. This conference was scheduled for mid-June, and Jesus went to Caesarea to meet with five prominent Jews from Alexandria. They sought to establish him as a religious teacher in their city, initially offering him

the position of assistant to the chazzan in their main synagogue as an inducement.

The spokespersons for this committee explained to Jesus that Alexandria was destined to become the headquarters of Jewish culture for the entire world and that the Hellenistic trend in Jewish affairs had virtually outpaced the Babylonian school of thought. They reminded Jesus of the ominous rumblings of rebellion in Jerusalem and the surrounding region. They assured him that any uprising by the Palestinian Jews would be tantamount to national suicide, as the iron hand of Rome would swiftly suppress the rebellion, leading to the destruction of Jerusalem and the demolition of the temple.

Jesus listened attentively to all they had to say, expressed his gratitude for their confidence, and, in declining the invitation to go to Alexandria, essentially stated that his hour had not yet come. They were understandably taken aback by his apparent indifference to the honor they sought to bestow upon him. Before parting ways, they presented him with funds as a token of esteem from his Alexandrian friends and as compensation for the time and expense incurred in traveling to Caesarea to meet with them. However, he also declined the money, saying: "The house of Joseph has never accepted alms, and we cannot eat another's bread as long as I have strong arms and my brothers can work."

[His friends from Egypt set sail for home, and in the following years, when they heard rumors of the Capernaum boat builder who was causing such a commotion, few of them suspected that he was the child from Bethlehem, now grown, and the same peculiar Galilean who had so unceremoniously declined the invitation to become a teacher in Alexandria.]

Jesus returned to Nazareth, where the remainder of the year marked the most uneventful six months of his entire career. He appreciated this temporary respite from the usual array of problems to solve and challenges to overcome. At home, Jesus taught evening school three times a week, frequently read the scriptures in the synagogue on the Sabbath, spent time with his mother, instructed the children, and generally conducted himself as a worthy and respected citizen of Nazareth in Israel.

However, human affairs in the world tend to run smoothly only for a brief period. In December, James had a private conversation with Jesus, expressing his deep affection for Esta, a young woman from Nazareth, and their desire to marry if circumstances permitted. He pointed out that Joseph would soon turn eighteen, and it would be beneficial for him to gain experience as the acting head of the family. Jesus agreed to James's marriage two years later, on the condition that he had adequately prepared Joseph to take on the responsibilities of managing the household during that time.

Now that marriage was in the air. James's success in obtaining Jesus' approval for his marriage emboldened Miriam to present her plans to Jesus. Jacob, the younger stonemason and once the self-appointed champion of Jesus, was now a business associate of James and Joseph. He had long sought to win Miriam's hand in marriage. After Miriam laid her plans before Jesus, he instructed that Jacob should come to him to make a formal request for her and promised his blessing for the marriage as soon as she felt that Martha was capable of assuming her duties as the eldest daughter.

4.6 TWENTY-FIFTH YEAR

This year began with the Nazareth family in good health and marked the completion of regular schooling for all the children, except for specific work that Martha needed to do for Ruth. The family finances were in the best condition they had been since the disappearance of Joseph's estate. The final payments on the caravan repair shop had been made; they owed no debts and, for the first time in years, had some funds saved. Given this situation, and since he had taken his other brothers to Jerusalem for their first Passover ceremonies, Jesus decided to accompany Jude, who had just graduated from the synagogue school, on his inaugural visit to the temple.

They traveled to Jerusalem and returned by the same route, the Jordan Valley, as Jesus feared encountering trouble if he took his younger brother through Samaria. Jude had encountered minor issues several times in Nazareth due to his impulsive nature and strong patriotic sentiments.

They arrived in Jerusalem in time for the Passover celebration and were on their way to the temple, the sight of which had stirred and thrilled Jude to the depths of his soul. As they walked, they chanced upon Lazarus of Bethany. While Jesus conversed with Lazarus and sought to arrange their joint celebration of the Passover, Jude inadvertently stirred up real trouble for them all.

Close at hand stood a Roman guard who made inappropriate remarks about a Jewish girl passing by. Jude flushed with fiery indignation and was quick to express his resentment regarding such impropriety directly to the soldier, ensuring he was within earshot.

This Roman legionnaire was highly sensitive to any perceived disrespect towards the Jewish people, prompting the guard to place Jude under arrest promptly. This situation proved overwhelming for the young patriot. Before Jesus could offer a cautionary glance, Jude unleashed a fervent denunciation of his pent-up anti-Roman sentiments, which only exacerbated the situation. Jude, accompanied by Jesus, was immediately taken to the military prison.

Jesus sought to secure an immediate hearing for Jude or to facilitate his release in time for the Passover celebration that evening, but he was unsuccessful in these efforts. Since the following day was a holy convocation in Jerusalem, even the Romans would not dare to hear charges against a Jew. Consequently, Jude remained in confinement until the morning of the second day after his arrest, and Jesus stayed at the prison with him. They were absent from the temple during the ceremony of receiving the Sons of the Commandment into full citizenship in Israel. Jude did not participate in this formal ceremony for several years until he returned to Jerusalem for Passover, coinciding with his advocacy work on behalf of the Zealots, the patriotic organization in which he was actively involved.

The morning after their second day in prison, Jesus appeared before the military magistrate on behalf of Jude. By offering apologies for his brother's youth and providing a further explanatory yet judicious statement regarding the provocative nature of the events that led to his

brother's arrest, Jesus effectively presented the case. As a result, the magistrate expressed the opinion that the young Jew might have had a valid excuse for his violent outburst.

After warning Jude not to be guilty of such rashness again, he dismissed them by saying that Jesus should keep a close eye on the lad, who was likely to cause significant trouble for everyone. The Roman judge spoke the truth: Jude indeed created considerable difficulties for Jesus, and these troubles consistently stemmed from clashes with civil authorities due to his thoughtless patriotic outbursts.

Jesus and Jude walked to Bethany for the night, explaining why they had failed to keep their appointment for the Passover meal, and set out for Nazareth the following day. Jesus did not inform the family about his younger brother's arrest in Jerusalem, but he had an extensive conversation with Jude about this incident three weeks after their return. Following this discussion with Jesus, Jude decided to inform the family. He always remembered the patience and forbearance that his brother-father exhibited throughout this challenging experience.

This was the last Passover that Jesus attended with any of his family members. Gradually, Jesus became increasingly separated from close associations with his own flesh and blood.

This year, his periods of deep meditation were frequently interrupted by Ruth and her playmates. Jesus was always willing to postpone his contemplation of future work to share in the childish joy and youthful exuberance of these youngsters, who never grew tired of listening to him recount his various trips to Jerusalem. They also greatly enjoyed his stories about animals and the natural world.

The children were always welcome at the repair shop. Jesus provided sand, blocks, and stones beside the shop, attracting groups of youngsters who flocked there to entertain themselves. When they grew tired of their play, the more adventurous ones would peek into the shop, and if its keeper was not busy, they would boldly ask Uncle Joshua to come out and tell them a story. They would then lead him

outside by tugging at his hands until he was seated on the favorite rock in the corner of the shop, with the children gathered in a semicircle before him. The little ones truly enjoyed their time with Uncle Joshua; they were learning to laugh and to laugh heartily. It was customary for one or two of the younger children to climb onto his knees and sit there, gazing up in wonder at his expressive features as he narrated his stories. The children loved Jesus, and Jesus loved the children.

It was challenging for his friends to grasp the breadth of his intellectual pursuits, as he could abruptly and entirely shift from profound discussions on politics, philosophy, or religion to the lighthearted and joyful playfulness of young children. As his siblings matured, he found himself with more leisure time, and before the arrival of his grandchildren, he devoted significant attention to these little ones. However, he did not live long enough to fully enjoy his grandchildren.

4.7 TWENTY-SIXTH YEAR

As this year began, Jesus became acutely aware of his potential spiritual strength. However, he was equally convinced that these powers would only be utilized when his hour should come. At this period, he contemplated deeply but spoke little about his relationship with God. The culmination of his reflections was articulated once on the hilltop when he said: “Regardless of who I am and what spiritual strength I may or may not possess, I have always been, and will always be, subject to the will of our Heavenly Father.”

Throughout the year, family affairs ran smoothly, except for Jude. For years, James had struggled with his youngest brother, who was neither inclined to settle down and work nor dependable when it came to contributing to household expenses. While living at home, James felt a strong obligation to be more conscientious about earning his share of the family’s upkeep. Jesus, a man of peace, was often embarrassed by Jude’s belligerent behavior and numerous patriotic outbursts. James and Joseph considered expelling him from the household, but Jesus

would not agree to this course of action. When their patience was severely tested, Jesus would advise: "Be patient. Be wise in your counsel and eloquent in your lives, so that your younger brother may learn from you and be encouraged to follow your example." The wise and loving counsel of Jesus prevented a rift in the family, allowing them to remain united. However, Jude did not come to his senses until after his marriage.

Now, Mary seldom spoke of Jesus' future mission. Whenever this subject was mentioned, Jesus would only respond, "My hour has not yet come." However, Mary sensed that he was preparing to leave them. Leave them to go where? To do what? She had nearly given up on the idea that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah.

This year, Jesus enjoyed more leisure time than usual, devoting significant effort to training James in managing the repair shop and Joseph in overseeing household affairs. He had nearly completed the challenging task of fostering his family's independence from his immediate presence. Throughout the year, Jesus spent considerable time with each member of his family, often taking them on long and frequent walks up the hill and through the countryside.

Before the harvest, Jesus took Jude to his uncle, a farmer located south of Nazareth. However, Jude only stayed for a brief period after the harvest. He eventually ran away, and Simon later discovered him among the fishermen at the lake. When Simon brought the boy back home, Jesus had a conversation with him. Since Jude aspired to be a fisherman, Jesus accompanied him to Magdala and entrusted him to the care of a relative who was also a fisherman. From that time until his marriage, Jude worked diligently and consistently, and he continued his work as a fisherman even after getting married.

In November, a double wedding took place, uniting James and Esta, as well as Miriam and Jacob. It was truly a joyous occasion. Mary was once happier. James and his bride, Esta, moved into a cozy little home on the west side of town, a gift from her father. While James continued to support his mother's household, his financial contribution was

reduced by half due to his marriage, and Jesus formally appointed Joseph as the head of the family. Jude was now diligently sending his share of funds home each month. The weddings of James and Miriam had a profoundly positive impact on Jude. When he departed for the fishing grounds the day after the double wedding, he assured Joseph that he could rely on him to fulfill his responsibilities, and even more if necessary. He kept his promise. Miriam lived next door to Mary in Jacob's home, as Jacob the elder had recently passed away. Martha took Miriam's place in the household, and the new arrangement functioned smoothly before the year concluded.

Jesus held an important conference with James the day after the double wedding. He confided in James that he was preparing to leave home. He formally presented the full title to the repair shop to James, solemnly abdicating his role as head of Joseph's household, and most poignantly established his brother James as the "head and protector of my father's house." They drew up and signed a secret compact stipulating that, in exchange for the gift of the repair shop, James would assume full financial responsibility for the family, thereby releasing Jesus from all further obligations in these matters.

After the contract was signed and the budget was arranged to cover the family's actual expenses without any contribution from Jesus, he said to James: "But, my son, I will continue to send you something each month until my hour shall have come, and what I send as the occasion demands. Allocate my funds for family necessities or pleasures as you see fit. Utilize them in case of illness or apply them to address any unexpected emergencies that may arise for any individual family member."

At last, the day had arrived when all of Jesus' brothers had chosen their paths and were established in their respective vocations. The stage was set for Jesus' departure from home, marking the transition to the second phase of his adult life, before the public commencement of his teaching mission.

4.8 EARLY ADULT LIFE

Jesus had completely and definitively distanced himself from the management of the domestic affairs of the Nazareth family. Until the time of his baptism, he continued to contribute to the family finances and maintained a strong personal interest in the spiritual well-being of his siblings. He was always prepared to do everything possible to ensure the comfort and happiness of his widowed mother.

All the family had gradually come to the realization that Jesus was prepared to leave them. For more than four years, they had sensed that he was planning for this eventual separation. The sadness surrounding the anticipated departure was somewhat alleviated by the gradual way he prepared them for the announcement of his intentions. Jesus naturally loved his family, and his extraordinary devotion to them greatly enhanced this innate affection.

4.9 TWENTY-SEVENTH YEAR

In January of 21 CE, Jesus took an unceremonious leave of his family, merely explaining that he was going to Tiberias and then visiting other cities around the Sea of Galilee. Thus, he left them, never to return as a regular member of that household.

He spent one week in Tiberias, the new city that was soon to replace Sepphoris as the capital of Galilee. Finding little to interest him, he successively passed through Magdala and Bethsaida to Capernaum, where he stopped to visit his father's friend, Zebedee.

Zebedee's sons were fishermen, while he was a boat builder. Jesus of Nazareth possessed expertise in both designing and constructing; he was a master craftsman skilled in working with wood. Zebedee had long recognized the talents of the craftsman from Nazareth. For an extended period, Zebedee had contemplated the creation of improved boats. He eventually presented his plans to Jesus and invited the visiting carpenter to collaborate on the project, to which Jesus agreed. Jesus worked alongside Zebedee for just over a year, during which he developed a new style of boat and established entirely new methods of boat construction. Utilizing innovative techniques and enhanced

methods for steaming the boards, Jesus and Zebedee began to build a specific type of craft—boats that were significantly safer for navigating the lake compared to older designs. For several years, Zebedee’s small workshop was overwhelmed with demand. Within less than five years, nearly all the boats on the lake had been constructed in Zebedee’s shop in Capernaum. As a result, Jesus became well-known among the Galilean fisher-folk as the designer of these new boats.

Zebedee was a moderately affluent man; his boat building shops were located on the lake south of Capernaum, and his home was situated along the lake shore near the fishing headquarters of Bethsaida. Jesus lived in Zebedee’s home throughout the year while he remained in Capernaum. Zebedee’s wife, Salome, was a relative of Annas, a former high priest in Jerusalem and still the most influential member of the Sadducean group, having been deposed only eight years earlier. Salome became a devoted admirer of Jesus, loving him as she loved her own sons, James, John, and David. Her four daughters regarded Jesus as their elder brother. Jesus frequently went fishing with James, John, and David, and they discovered that he was an experienced fisherman and a skilled boat builder.

Throughout the year, Jesus sent money to James each month. He returned to Nazareth in October to attend Martha’s wedding and did not return to Nazareth for over two years, until shortly before the double wedding of Simon and Jude.

Throughout this year, Jesus constructed boats, but he frequently visited the caravan station, as Capernaum was situated on the direct travel route from Damascus to the south. Capernaum served as a significant Roman military outpost, and the commanding officer of the garrison was a Gentile who followed Yahweh; he was “a devout man,” as the Jews often referred to such proselytes. This officer hailed from a wealthy Roman family and took it upon himself to build a beautiful synagogue in Capernaum, which had been dedicated to the Jews shortly before Jesus came to live with Zebedee. Jesus led services in this new synagogue more than half the time this year, and some of the caravan travelers who happened to attend remembered him as the Carpenter from Nazareth.

When paying taxes, Jesus registered himself as a “skilled craftsman of Capernaum.” From that day forward, he was recognized as a resident of Capernaum. He never claimed any other legal residence; however, for various reasons, he allowed others to designate his residence as Damascus, Bethany, Nazareth, and even Alexandria.

Jude’s fishing headquarters were located just a few miles south of Capernaum. He often visited the synagogue on the Sabbath to listen to Jesus speak and would attempt to engage with him. The more Jude observed his eldest brother, the more he became convinced that Jesus was a truly great man.

At the Capernaum synagogue, Jesus discovered numerous new books in the library chests and dedicated at least five evenings a week to intense study. One evening, he engaged in social activities with the older members of the community, while on another evening, he spent time with the youth. There was something gracious and inspiring about Jesus’ personality that invariably attracted young people. He always made them feel comfortable in his presence. His remarkable ability to connect with them stemmed from two key factors: he was genuinely interested in their activities, and he rarely offered advice unless they specifically requested it.

The Zebedee family held a deep admiration for Jesus and consistently attended the question-and-answer sessions he conducted each evening after the meal, before he departed for the synagogue to study. The young neighbors also frequently joined these after-dinner gatherings. Jesus provided diverse and advanced instruction tailored to the understanding of his audience. He engaged in open discussions, sharing his thoughts on politics, sociology, science, and philosophy, but refrained from speaking with authority except when addressing spiritual beliefs, specifically, humanity’s relationship with God.

Once a week, Jesus met with the entire household, as well as the shop and shore helpers, for Zebedee had many employees. Among these workers, Jesus was first referred to as “the Master.” They all held deep affection for him. He appreciated his work with Zebedee in

Capernaum, but he missed the sound of children playing near the carpenter shop in Nazareth.

Of the sons of Zebedee, James was the most interested in Jesus as a teacher and philosopher. John was primarily concerned with his religious teachings and opinions. David respected him as a craftsman but placed little value on his religious beliefs and philosophical teachings. This marked the final year of Jesus' settled life. He would never again spend an entire year in one location. His preparation as a man on earth needed to be completed before he could embark on his teaching career.

4.10 TWENTY-EIGHTH YEAR

In March, 22 CE, Jesus took leave of Zebedee and Capernaum. He requested a small sum of money to cover his expenses for the trip to Jerusalem. While working with Zebedee, he had withdrawn only modest amounts of money, which he would send monthly to his family in Nazareth. One month, Joseph would travel to Capernaum to collect the money; the following month, Jude would come to Capernaum, receive the funds from Jesus, and return to Nazareth with them.

When Jesus took leave of Zebedee's family, he agreed to stay in Jerusalem until the time of Passover, and they all promised to be present for the event. They even made arrangements to celebrate the Passover meal together. Everyone felt sorrowful when Jesus departed from them. Before leaving Capernaum, Jesus spoke with his newfound friend and close companion, John Zebedee. He informed John of his plans to travel extensively and requested that John send money to Jesus' family in Nazareth each month until the funds owed to him were exhausted. John agreed, promising to look after Jesus' family as he would his own brothers and sisters.

Therefore, after Jesus had departed for Jerusalem, John consulted with his father, Zebedee, about the funds owed to Jesus and was surprised by the substantial amount. Since Jesus had entrusted the matter entirely to them, they agreed that it would be prudent to invest the money in real estate and use the income to support Jesus' family in

Nazareth. Zebedee, knowing of a small house in Capernaum that was for sale and had an existing mortgage, instructed John to purchase the property with Jesus' funds, hold the title in trust, and rent it out. John followed his father's advice.

For two years, the rent from this house was applied to the mortgage. This, combined with a substantial fund that Jesus recently sent to John for the family's needs, nearly covered the total obligation. Zebedee provided the remaining amount, allowing John to pay off the mortgage when it came due, thereby securing a clear title to the two-room house. In this manner, Jesus became the owner of a house in Capernaum, although he had not been informed of this development.

When the family in Nazareth learned that Jesus had left Capernaum, they, unaware of his financial arrangement with John, believed it was time to manage without any further assistance from Jesus. James recalled his agreement with Jesus and, with the support of his brothers, took on full responsibility for the family's care.

Jesus brought with him to Jerusalem a letter from Salome, the wife of Zebedee, introducing him to the former high priest, Annas, as "the same as my own son." Annas spent considerable time with him, personally escorting him to visit the various academies of the Jerusalem religious teachers. While Jesus meticulously examined these schools and attentively observed their teaching methods, he refrained from asking a single question in public.

Although Annas regarded Jesus as a remarkable individual, he was uncertain about how to counsel him. He recognized the error in suggesting that Jesus enroll in any of the schools of Jerusalem as a student. However, he understood that Jesus would never be granted the status of a regular teacher, as he had not received formal training in these institutions.

Presently, the time of Passover drew near, and along with the throngs from every quarter, Zebedee and his entire family arrived in Jerusalem from Capernaum. They all stopped at the spacious home of Annas, where they celebrated Passover as one happy family.

Before the end of Passover week, Jesus encountered a wealthy traveler and his son, a young man approximately seventeen years old. These travelers hailed from India, and on their journey to visit Rome and various other destinations around the Mediterranean, they had planned to arrive in Jerusalem during Passover, hoping to find someone who could engage as an interpreter for both of them and as a tutor for the son. The father was insistent that Jesus accompany them. Jesus explained his family situation, noting that being away for nearly two years would be unfair, especially if they found themselves in need. At this point, the traveler from the East proposed to advance Jesus a year's wages, allowing him to entrust those funds to his friends to safeguard his family against hardship. Jesus ultimately agreed to make the trip.

Jesus entrusted a substantial sum of money to John Zebedee, who used it to pay off the mortgage on the property in Capernaum. Jesus confided in Zebedee about his Mediterranean journey but requested that he keep this information secret, even from his own family. Zebedee maintained this confidentiality regarding Jesus' whereabouts for nearly two years. By the time Jesus returned from his trip, the family in Nazareth had nearly given up hope, believing him to be dead. Only Zebedee's reassurances, as he visited Nazareth with his son John on several occasions, kept hope alive in Mary's heart.

During this period, the Nazareth family maintained a harmonious relationship; Jude significantly increased his contributions and continued to do so until his marriage. Although they needed little assistance, John Zebedee made it a practice to bring gifts to Mary and Ruth each month, as Jesus had instructed him.

4.11 TWENTY-NINTH YEAR

Throughout his twenty-ninth year, Jesus traveled extensively across the Mediterranean world. The purpose of this journey was to connect with individuals from diverse backgrounds. During this time, he encountered and embraced hundreds of people. He met and loved individuals from all walks of life: rich and poor, high and low, black

and white, slave and enslaver, educated and uneducated, cultured and uncultured, animalistic and spiritual, religious and irreligious, moral and immoral. Throughout his travels in the Roman world, Jesus became known as the Damascus Scribe.

This was an eventful period in Jesus' life, yet he never disclosed it to any family members or followers. Aside from Zebedee of Bethsaida, no one was aware of his extensive journey. Some of his friends speculated that he had returned to Damascus, while others believed he had traveled to India. His family was inclined to think that he was in Alexandria, as they were aware that he had previously received an invitation to become an assistant chazzan.

This was a period of his personal ministry, in contrast to the subsequent era of public teaching.

Mediterranean Trip



5.0 MEDITERRANEAN TRIP

Jesus' tour of the Roman world occupied most of the twenty-eighth year and the entirety of the twenty-ninth year of his life. Jesus, along with two natives from India, Gonod and his son Ganid, departed from Jerusalem on a Sunday morning, April 26, 22 CE. They followed a prearranged schedule for their journey, and Jesus bid farewell to the father and son in the city of Charax, located on the Persian Gulf, on December 10, 23 CE.

Starting from Jerusalem, they traveled to Caesarea via Joppa. In Caesarea, they boarded a boat bound for Alexandria. From Alexandria, they set sail for Lasea in Crete. After departing from Crete, they continued to Carthage, making a stop at Cyrene. At Carthage, they took a boat to Naples, with stops at Malta, Syracuse, and Messina along the way. From Naples, they proceeded to Capua and then journeyed along the Appian Way to Rome.

After their stay in Rome, they traveled overland to Tarentum, where they set sail for Athens, Greece, making stops at Nicopolis and Corinth. From Athens, they proceeded to Ephesus via Troas. From Ephesus, they sailed to Cyprus, stopping at Rhodes along the way. They spent a considerable amount of time visiting and resting in Cyprus before sailing to Antioch in Syria. From Antioch, they journeyed south to Sidon and then to Damascus. From there, they traveled by caravan to Mesopotamia, passing through Thapsacus and Larissa. They spent some time in Babylon before visiting Ur and Susa. From Susa, they continued their journey to Charax, from where Gonod and Ganid embarked for India.

While working for four months in Damascus, Jesus learned the basics of the language spoken by the people of Gonod and Ganid. During this time, he spent much of his effort translating texts from Greek into one of the languages of India, with the assistance of a native from Gonod's home district.

On this Mediterranean tour, Jesus spent approximately half of each day teaching Ganid and serving as an interpreter during Gonod's

business meetings and social engagements. He dedicated the remaining portion of each day, which was at his disposal, to establishing personal connections with individuals.

Through firsthand observation and direct contact, Jesus became familiar with the material and intellectual civilizations of the west and the Levant. Through Gonod and his brilliant son, he gained significant insights into the society and culture of India and China, as Gonod, a citizen of India, had undertaken three extensive trips to China.

Ganid, the young man, learned a great deal from Jesus during their long and intimate association. They developed a deep affection for one another, and the lad's father often tried to persuade Jesus to return with them to India. However, Jesus consistently declined, citing the need to return to his family.

5.1 AT JOPPA

During their stay in Joppa, Jesus met a Philistine interpreter named Gadiah, who was employed by Simon, a tanner. Gonod's agents in Mesopotamia had conducted significant business with Simon, prompting Gonod and his son to visit him on their way to Caesarea. While they lingered in Joppa, Jesus and Gadiah likely developed a close friendship. This young Philistine was quite inquisitive.

One evening, after the meal, Jesus and the young Philistine took a stroll by the sea. Gadiah, unaware that this Scribe from Damascus was well-versed in Hebrew traditions, pointed out to Jesus the ship landing from which it was said that Jonah had embarked on his ill-fated voyage to Tarshish. After concluding his remarks, he asked Jesus if he believed that a large fish could truly swallow Jonah.

Jesus recognized that this tradition had profoundly influenced the young man's life and that reflecting on it had impressed upon him the futility of attempting to evade his responsibilities. Consequently, Jesus refrained from making any statements that might abruptly undermine the foundations of Gadiah's current motivation. In response to this question, Jesus said:

“My friend, we are all like Jonah, navigating our lives in accordance with the will of God. Whenever we attempt to evade our present responsibilities by pursuing distant temptations, we place ourselves under the influence of forces that are not guided by truth and righteousness.

“The flight from duty represents a sacrifice of truth. Escaping from service inevitably leads to distressing conflicts with the formidable whales of selfishness, which ultimately result in darkness unless such God-forsaking Jonahs turn their hearts, even in the depths of despair, to seek God and his goodness. However, no matter how deep they may have fallen, when they seek God with a whole heart, the spirit of God will deliver them from their captivity. The adverse circumstances of life will cast them upon the dry land of fresh opportunities for renewed service and wiser living.”

Jesus' final visit with Gadiab included a discussion about good and evil. This young Philistine was deeply troubled by a sense of injustice stemming from the pervasive sorrow in the world, which coexists with goodness. He inquired how, if God is infinitely good and powerful, people endure the suffering that seems to be caused by evil.

It was widely believed during that time that God created both good and evil; however, Jesus never taught this. In response to this question, Jesus stated:

“My brother, God is love; he is good. However, the Heavenly Father generally chooses not to interfere with natural processes. Consequently, some negative outcomes are a result of the earth's natural laws.

“Some suffering arises solely from anticipated human immaturity or ignorance.

“Some suffering arises from the poor choices and thoughtless missteps of those who resist goodness, reject beauty, and disavow truth. While you are endowed with the

power to make these choices, this also carries the potential for adverse consequences. Such mistakes are not inevitable; they only manifest when an intelligent being consciously wills their existence through misguided decisions. Consequently, they become errors that stem from knowing and deliberate choices.

“God permits both good and evil to coexist until the end of life, just as nature permits wheat and tares to grow side by side until the harvest.”

[This was the same Gadiah who later listened to Peter’s teachings, became a devoted follower, and engaged in a memorable debate with Peter one evening at Dorcas’s home. Jesus’ teachings profoundly impacted Gadiah, and they conversed late into the night by the seaside. Before returning to their lodgings, they prayed together and for each other. Gadiah played a significant role in influencing Simon, the wealthy leather merchant, to embrace the teachings of Jesus.]

5.2 AT CAESAREA

Jesus and his friends lingered in Caesarea longer than anticipated because one of the large steering paddles of the vessel they intended to board was found to be at risk of breaking. The captain chose to stay in port while a replacement was crafted. Due to a shortage of skilled woodworkers, Jesus volunteered to help.

During the evenings, Jesus and his friends leisurely walked along the picturesque promenade that encircled the port. Ganid took great pleasure in exploring the city’s water system and the method by which the tides were harnessed to cleanse the streets and sewers. This young man from India was particularly impressed by the Temple of Augustus, which was situated on an elevated site and crowned with a colossal statue of the Roman emperor.

On the second afternoon of their stay, the three of them attended a performance in the enormous amphitheater, which could seat twenty

thousand people. That night, they attended a Greek play at the theater. These were the first exhibitions of this kind that Ganid had ever witnessed. On the morning of the third day, they made a formal visit to the governor's palace, as Caesarea was the capital and the residence of the Roman Procurator.

At the inn, a merchant from Mongolia was also staying there. Since this Far-Easterner spoke Greek quite well, Jesus had several extended conversations with him. The merchant was greatly impressed by Jesus' philosophy of life and never forgot his words of wisdom about heavenly life on earth, striving daily to fulfill the will of their Heavenly Father. This merchant was a Taoist who had embraced the doctrine of a universal deity. *[When he returned to Mongolia, he began sharing the teachings of Jesus with his neighbors and business associates. As a direct result of these activities, his eldest son became a Taoist priest. This young man exerted significant influence throughout his lifetime. He was succeeded by a son and a grandson, both of whom were likewise devoted to the doctrine of the one God.]*

One of the young men who worked with Jesus one day at the steering paddle became intrigued by the words he shared as they labored in the shipyard. When Jesus suggested that God cared about the welfare of all his children, this young Greek, Anaxand, asked: Interested in me? Why doesn't he remove this workshop's cruel and unjust foreman? He was taken aback when Jesus replied:

"You understand the principles of kindness and hold justice in high regard, but perhaps fate has brought this wayward man to you so that you may guide him toward a better path. If you have not lost your essence, you could be the salt that makes this brother more agreeable to others. Why not assert your mastery over wrongdoing through the power of goodness and thereby become the master of all your relationships?

"The goodness within you has the potential to triumph over the evil within him, provided you offer it a genuine and

nurturing opportunity. It is a remarkable and transformative experience to serve as a beacon of spiritual light for someone lost in spiritual darkness. If you hold more truth than this man, his plight should inspire you to act. Surely, you are not the coward who would stand idly by on the shore, watching a fellow human being who cannot swim perish! How much more valuable is this man's soul, struggling in darkness, compared to his body drowning in water!"

Jesus' words profoundly moved Anaxand. He promptly informed his superior of what Jesus had said, and that night, both men sought Jesus' guidance regarding the welfare of their souls. *[Later on, both of these individuals, one a Greek and the other a Roman, heard the teachings of Philip of Bethsaida and became prominent members of the church he established. Subsequently, this young Greek was appointed as the steward of a Roman centurion named Cornelius, who became a follower through Peter's teachings. Anaxand continued to teach until he perished in the tragic massacre of twenty thousand Jews while ministering to the suffering and dying.]*

Ganid was, by this time, beginning to understand how his tutor spent his leisure time in this unique form of personal teaching. The young Indian set out to discover the motive behind these ongoing activities. He asked why Jesus devoted himself so consistently to visiting strangers. Jesus answered: "Ganid, no person is a stranger to one who knows God. In the journey of discovering our Heavenly Father, you realize that all people are your siblings. It is not unusual to feel the exhilaration of meeting a newly discovered sibling. To become acquainted with one's brothers and sisters, to understand their struggles, and to learn to love them is the ultimate experience of living."

This conference extended well into the night, during which the young man asked Jesus to explain the difference between the will of God and the act of choosing, often referred to as human will. In essence, Jesus stated that human will is the deliberate choice made by a self-aware mind, leading to decisions and actions based on thoughtful reflection.

A person's will represents their path in life, encompassing what the individual chooses to be and do. To fulfill the will of God is to engage in a progressive experience of becoming increasingly like God. God is the source and ultimate destination of all that is good, beautiful, and true.

Jesus also said: "Human will is the manifestation of the mind that enables subjective consciousness to express itself objectively and to experience the phenomenon of aspiring to be Godlike." He further explained that, in this same sense, every reflective and spiritually minded individual has the potential to be creative.

That afternoon, Jesus and Ganid both enjoyed playing with a very intelligent shepherd dog. Ganid wanted to know whether the dog had a soul and whether it possessed a will. In response to his questions, Jesus said:

"The dog possesses a mind capable of understanding material things, but it cannot comprehend God, who is spirit. Consequently, the dog lacks a spiritual nature and is unable to experience spirituality. While the dog may exhibit a will that is inherent by nature and enhanced through training, this mental capacity is not a spiritual force and cannot be compared to the human soul. It does not arise from the ability to discern higher moral meanings or to choose spiritual and eternal values. The capacity for spiritual discernment and the ability to choose truth are what render a human soul a spiritual being, endowed with responsibility and the potential for eternal survival."

Only to a certain extent do humans possess an intellect that surpasses that of animals, apart from the higher and spiritual functions of the mind. The animal mind is solely aware of the objective universe; thus, animals cannot attain superconsciousness, an awareness of consciousness itself. As a result of this instruction, Ganid no longer entertained the belief in the transmigration of human souls into the bodies of animals.

The following day, Ganid discussed all of this with his father, and in response to Gonod's question, Jesus explained:

“Humans who are solely preoccupied with making temporal decisions related to material problems are souls destined to perish over time. In contrast, those who make wholehearted moral decisions and unqualified spiritual choices increasingly align themselves with their souls. Their souls undergo a transformation that fosters eternal survival and the continuous progression of divine service.”

5.3 AT ALEXANDRIA

When the boat was ready, Jesus and his two companions departed for Alexandria, Egypt, at noon. The three enjoyed a pleasant journey to Alexandria. Ganid was likely delighted with the voyage and kept Jesus engaged by asking numerous questions. As they approached the city's harbor, the young man must have been thrilled by the magnificent lighthouse of Pharos, situated on the island that Alexander had connected to the mainland by a mole, thereby creating two impressive harbors and establishing Alexandria as the maritime commercial crossroads of Africa, Asia, and Europe.

They arose early in the morning to behold this magnificent lifesaving device created by man. Amidst Ganid's exclamations, Jesus said: “And you, my son, will be like this lighthouse when you return to India, even after your father is laid to rest. You will become a source of truth for those around you who are unaware, guiding all who seek it to reach the harbor of truth safely.”

As Ganid squeezed Jesus' hand, he promised he would.

By the fourth hour after landing, they had settled near the eastern end of a long, broad avenue that was one hundred feet wide and five miles long, stretching to the western limits of this city of one million residents. After surveying the city's main attractions, such as the university (which includes a museum), the library, the Royal

Mausoleum of Alexander, the palace, the Temple of Neptune, the theater, and the gymnasium, Gonod turned his attention to business.

At the same time, Jesus and Ganid visited the world's greatest library, which housed nearly a million manuscripts from across the globe, including Greece, Rome, Parthia, India, China, and even Japan. In this library, Ganid encountered the most extensive collection of Indian literature in existence, and they dedicated time to exploring it each day during their stay in Alexandria. Jesus also shared insights with Ganid about the translation of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek that took place in this remarkable setting.

They once again discussed all the world's religions, with Jesus striving to illuminate the truth found within each belief system for this young mind. He added:

“Yahweh is the God derived from the revelations of Melchizedek and the covenant established with Abraham. The Jews are the descendants of Abraham and subsequently inhabited the very land where Melchizedek lived and taught, from which he dispatched teachers to all corners of the world. Their religion ultimately presented a more distinct acknowledgment of the God of Israel as the Universal God than any other world religion.”

Alexandria was a city that exemplified the fusion of Occidental cultures and was, next to Rome, one of the largest and most magnificent cities of its time. It housed the most significant Jewish synagogue in the world, serving as the seat of the Alexandria Sanhedrin, which comprised seventy ruling Jewish elders.

Among the many men with whom Gonod conducted business was a particular Jewish banker named Alexander, whose brother, Philo, was a renowned religious philosopher of that era. Philo was engaged in the commendable yet exceedingly challenging endeavor of reconciling Greek philosophy with Hebrew theology. Ganid and Jesus frequently discussed Philo's teachings and anticipated attending some of his

lectures; however, throughout their stay in Alexandria, this famous Hellenistic Jew remained confined to his bed due to illness. Jesus praised Ganid for his understanding of Greek philosophy and Stoic doctrines. Still, he emphasized that these belief systems were only truly religious if they guided individuals to discover God and experience a genuine relationship with him.

Under Jesus' direction, Ganid compiled a collection of teachings from all the world's religions that acknowledged a universal deity, even if they also recognized subordinate deities to varying degrees. After extensive discussion, Jesus and Ganid concluded that the Romans had no genuine god in their religion, which they deemed little more than emperor worship. They determined that the Greeks possessed a philosophy but lacked a religion centered on a personal god. The mystery cults were disregarded due to the confusion stemming from their multiplicity and the belief that their diverse concepts of deities were derived from older religions.

Ganid ultimately organized these selections and included his conclusions toward the end of their stay in Rome. He was surprised to find that the foremost authors of much of the world's religious literature generally acknowledged the existence of an eternal God and largely concurred regarding God's character and relationship with humanity.

Jesus and Ganid spent a considerable amount of time in the museum during their stay in Alexandria. This museum was not merely a collection of rare artifacts; instead, it functioned as a university dedicated to fine arts, sciences, and literature. Esteemed professors delivered daily lectures, making it the intellectual hub of the Western world during that era. Each day, Jesus interpreted the lectures for Ganid.

One day during the second week, the young man exclaimed that Jesus possessed greater knowledge than the professors and that he should stand up and share the profound insights conveyed to him by Ganid. He sensed that the professors were clouded by excessive contemplation. Jesus smiled and replied:

“You are an eager student, but these teachers are not inclined to accept instruction from you or me. The pride associated with non-spiritual learning poses a significant risk in the human experience. A true teacher preserves their intellectual integrity by continually embracing the role of a learner.”

The night before their departure from Alexandria, Ganid and Jesus had an extended visit with one of the professors at the museum, who lectured on the teachings of Plato. Jesus interpreted the learned Greek teacher for Ganid but refrained from injecting any of his own teachings into the discussion of Greek philosophy. Gonod was away on business that evening; after the professor departed, Jesus and his pupil engaged in a long and heartfelt conversation about Plato's doctrines.

While Jesus expressed qualified approval of certain Greek teachings - specifically, the theory that the material aspects of the world are mere shadowy reflections of more substantial, invisible spiritual realities - he aimed to establish a more reliable foundation for the young man's understanding. He delivered an extensive discourse on the Nature of Reality. In essence, Jesus conveyed to Ganid:

- After death, human souls retain an awareness of their identity as they continue to ascend in the spiritual universe, deepening their consciousness and appreciation of, as well as their response to, God's will. The ultimate level to which a human soul can progress is the recognition of the Heavenly Father's will, which is the knowledge of God.
- In the harmony and unity of their will with that of God, a human soul can become one with the God. The desire to fulfill God's will must be paramount for the soul's survival.
- All true values are revealed through one's depth of understanding. A person with one eye can never hope to perceive the full depth of perspective. Neither a materialist with a narrow viewpoint nor a spiritual mystic with a limited perspective can accurately visualize or fully comprehend the true depths of universal reality.

- Eternal survival does not arise from the material minds of mortals, but from the soul within them. This creative essence of personality represents a progressive spiritual experience.
- Personality is a cosmic gift that can coexist with limitless change while simultaneously retaining its identity amidst all transformations.
- Life is an adaptation of personality to the demands and possibilities of various situations. The spiritual life emerges from the spirit spark of God within, the soul. The meaning of life lies in its adaptability, while the value of life is found in its evolution.
- Spiritual life, in and of itself, serves as evidence for the existence of a spiritual universe, which in turn demonstrates the presence of a divine God.
- Knowledge pertains to the realm of the material or fact-discerning mind, while truth belongs to the domain of the spiritually enlightened consciousness of God. Knowledge is demonstrable; truth is experiential. The material mind perceives a world of factual knowledge, whereas the spiritual intellect discerns a realm of genuine values. When these two perspectives are synchronized and harmonized, they unveil the world of reality.
- Wisdom interprets this reality through the lens of progressive personal experience.

Although Jesus conveyed all this to the boy in language best suited to his understanding, by the end of the discussion, Ganid was heavy-eyed and soon fell into a slumber.

5.4 GOING TO CRETE

They rose early the next morning to board the boat bound for Lasea on the island of Crete.

After they embarked, the boy had additional questions about evil. In summary, Jesus replied:

- Spiritual mistakes (or evils) are a relative concept. Some spiritual errors arise from the inherent incompleteness of God's revelation, expressed through a time-space limited perspective by humanity. Temporal and finite minds of created beings possess an incomplete understanding of the Infinite.
- Some spiritual mistakes are the consequences of imperfection. Making spiritual errors is an inherent part of gaining wisdom, as one progresses from the partial and temporal to the complete and eternal, and from the relative and imperfect to the ultimate and perfected.
- Some spiritual errors do not reflect an inherent quality of the universe; instead, they represent the observation of the distinctions between natural imperfection and the level of God's perfection.
- All static or dead concepts are potentially spiritual errors; the finite shadow and living truth are in a constant state of flux. Static concepts can hinder progress in science, politics, society, and religion. While static concepts may reflect the specific knowledge of their time, they can also lack wisdom and may ultimately be inaccurate.

5.5 ON THE ISLAND OF CRETE

The travelers had a singular purpose for their journey to Crete: to engage in recreation, explore the island, and ascend its mountains. Jesus held a deep affection for the Cretans. During that era, the Cretans did not possess a favorable reputation among neighboring communities. Nevertheless, Jesus and Ganid inspired many individuals to elevate their thoughts and way of life. *[They thus established a foundation for the swift acceptance of the teachings when the first followers of Jesus arrived.]*

On the mountainside in Crete, Jesus conversed with Gonod about religion. The father was greatly impressed, stating that he had never realized they possessed such a religion, even in Jerusalem, let alone in Damascus.

It was during their sojourn on the island that Gonod first proposed to Jesus that he return to India with them. Ganid was presumably delighted at the prospect of Jesus consenting to such an arrangement.

One day, when Ganid asked Jesus why he had not devoted himself to the work of a public teacher, he replied:

“My son, everything must await its appointed time. You are born into this world, but no amount of self-imposed anxiety or impatience will aid your growth. In all such matters, you must be patient and allow time to unfold. Time alone will ripen the green fruit on the tree. Seasons follow one another, and sunset follows sunrise, all in due time. I am currently on my way to Rome with you and your father, which is sufficient for today. My tomorrow rests entirely in the hands of time.”

And then he recounted to Ganid the story of Moses, detailing the forty years of vigilant waiting and ongoing preparation.

One significant event during a visit to Fair Havens left a lasting impression on Ganid; this episode continually inspired him to wish for a change in the caste system of his native India. A drunken degenerate was assaulting an enslaved girl on the public highway. When Jesus witnessed the girl's distress, he rushed forward and pulled her away from the drunker's attack. As the terrified child clung to him, he restrained the enraged man with his powerful, extended right arm until the unfortunate individual had exhausted himself, flailing at the air with his furious blows.

Naturally, Ganid felt a strong impulse to assist Jesus in addressing the situation, but his father prohibited him from doing so. Although they could not communicate in the girl's language, she understood their actions and expressed her heartfelt appreciation as the three of them escorted her home. This was likely the closest Jesus ever came to a personal confrontation with his peers throughout his entire life. However, that evening, he struggled to explain to Ganid why he did not strike the drunken man. Ganid believed that this man should have been hit at least as often as he had struck the girl.

While in the mountains, Jesus conversed with a young man named Fortune, who appeared fearful and despondent. Unable to find comfort and courage in the company of his peers, this youth sought solace in the solitude of the hills. He had grown up feeling helpless and inferior, and these natural tendencies were exacerbated by the numerous challenges he faced during his upbringing, particularly the loss of his father at the age of twelve.

As they met, Jesus said: "Greetings, my friend! Why so downcast on such a beautiful day? If something has happened to distress you, I can assist you in some manner. At any rate, it affords me real pleasure to offer my services."

The young man was reluctant to engage in conversation, so Jesus made a second attempt to speak with him, saying: "I understand that you come to these hills to escape from people. Of course, you may not want to talk with me, but I would like to know if you are familiar with these hills. Do you know the directions of the trails? And, perhaps, could you inform me of the best route to Phoenix?"

Now, this young man was very familiar with these mountains, and he became quite interested in showing Jesus the way to Phoenix. He marked out all the trails on the ground and thoroughly explained every detail. However, the young man was startled and intrigued when Jesus, after saying goodbye and appearing to take his leave, suddenly turned to him and said:

"I know well you wish to be left alone with your sorrow, but it would be neither kind nor fair for me to accept your generous offer of assistance in finding my way to Phoenix and then to leave without making any effort to respond to your heartfelt request for guidance regarding the best route to the destination you seek while you wait here on the mountainside. Just as you are familiar with the trails to Phoenix, having traversed them many times, I, too, know the way to the city of your disappointed hopes and thwarted ambitions. Since you have asked for my help, I will not let you down."

The young man was nearly overwhelmed, but he managed to stammer that he had not asked for anything. Jesus, placing a gentle hand on his shoulder, said:

“No, son, you did not appeal to my heart with words, but rather with longing looks. My boy, to one who loves his fellow beings, your countenance of discouragement and despair conveys an eloquent plea for help. Sit down with me while I share the service trails and happiness highways that lead from the sorrows of self to the joys of loving activities in the fellowship of others and in the service of God.”

By this time, the young man was deeply eager to speak with Jesus. He knelt at His feet, imploring Jesus for assistance and guidance on how to escape his world of personal sorrow and defeat. Jesus said:

“My friend, arise! Stand up like a man! You may be surrounded by minor opponents and hindered by numerous obstacles, but the significant and genuine aspects of this world and the universe are on your side. The sun rises every morning to greet you, just as it does the most powerful and prosperous individuals on earth. Look, you possess a strong body and powerful muscles.

“However, these attributes are rendered nearly useless while you remain here on the mountainside, lamenting your misfortunes, both real and imagined. You can achieve great things with your body if you venture forth to where significant accomplishments await. You may be attempting to escape your unhappy self, but that is impossible. You and your challenges in life are real; you cannot evade them as long as you live. But look again: your mind is clear and capable, and your strong body is guided by an intelligent mind.

“Set your mind to tackle its challenges; train your intellect to serve you; refuse to be governed by fear like an unthinking animal. Your mind should be your courageous ally in addressing life’s problems, rather than allowing yourself to remain, as you have been, a bond servant to depression and defeat.

“But most valuable of all, your potential for genuine achievement lies in the spirit that resides within you. This spirit has the power to stimulate and inspire your mind to gain self-control and activate your body, provided you release it from the shackles of fear. By doing so, you will enable your spiritual nature to guide you toward liberation from the spiritual errors of inaction. Consequently, this will conquer your fear of others through the compelling presence of a new and all-encompassing love for your fellow beings, which will soon fill your soul to overflowing. This transformation arises from the awareness that has been ignited in your heart: you are a child of God.

Jesus continued:

“This day, my son, you are to begin your spiritual journey anew, reestablished as a man of courage and devoted service to humanity, for the sake of God. As you readjust to life within yourself, you will also find harmony with the universe, and from this point forward, your life will be filled with victorious accomplishments. Challenges will invigorate you; disappointments will motivate you; difficulties will test you; and obstacles will inspire you.

“Arise, young man! Bid farewell to a life of cringing fear and fleeing cowardice. Return swiftly to your duty and embrace your existence as a child of God, a mortal committed to the noble service of humanity on earth and destined for God’s magnificent and eternal service in eternity.”

[This youth subsequently became the leader of the followers in Crete and a close associate of Titus in his efforts to teach the Cretan followers.]

The travelers felt truly rested and refreshed as they prepared to set sail for Carthage in northern Africa around noon the following day, after stopping for two days in Cyrene. During their stay, Jesus and Ganid provided first aid to a young boy named Rufus, who had been injured by the collapse of a heavily loaded oxcart. They carried him home to his parents, Simon and his mother. *[Little did Simon know that the man whose cross he would later carry at the command of a Roman soldier was the same stranger who had once befriended his son.]*

5.6 AT CARTHAGE

Most of the time, while en route to Carthage, Jesus engaged in conversations with his fellow travelers about social, political, and commercial issues; hardly a word was spoken about religion. For the first time, Gonod and Ganid discovered that Jesus was an excellent storyteller, and they kept him occupied sharing tales about his early life. They also learned that he was raised in Galilee, not in Jerusalem or Damascus.

When Ganid inquired about how one could make friends, having observed that most people they encountered were drawn to Jesus, his teacher responded:

“Become interested in your fellows; learn how to love them, and look for opportunities to do something for them that you know they would appreciate. As the old Jewish proverb states, ‘A person who would have friends must show himself friendly.’”

At Carthage, Jesus engaged in a lengthy and memorable conversation with a Mithraic priest regarding the concepts of time and eternity. This Persian priest had received his education in Alexandria and sought to learn from Jesus. In essence, Jesus responded to his numerous inquiries as follows:

- Time, as perceived by human consciousness, is a continuous stream of flowing temporal events. It is a term used to describe the sequential arrangement through which events are recognized and categorized. The universe of space is a time-related phenomenon as it is experienced from any given position within it. In the spiritual realm, spirits transcend both time and space. In the physical world, the human soul is the only entity capable of transcending the material sequence of temporal events.
- For humanity, due to a limited and narrow perspective, time often seems to be merely a series of events. However, as individuals undergo spiritual growth and their souls evolve, their understanding of this sequence of events expands, allowing them to perceive it in its entirety. What once appeared as a linear progression of events is then recognized as an interconnected cycle; thus, the spiritual perspective increasingly replaces the linear interpretation of time.
- There are various conceptions of space as it is influenced by time; however, space is not merely an intellectual construct reflecting the relationships among objects. Space is measured by time, rather than time being measured by space. The human soul is the only entity capable of partially transcending space. The soul can operate independently of material objects. As a soul draws closer to spiritual dimensions, the concept of timeless space becomes increasingly apparent.
- The concept of time and space will undergo successive expansions as one's soul ascends through spiritual levels. As souls approach the continuum between the material and spiritual planes of existence, individuals' perceptions of time and space will be significantly enhanced in both quality and quantity of experience. The expanding cosmic understanding of an evolving soul results from increases in both the depth of insight and the breadth of consciousness. As the soul progresses toward the spiritual realm, the concept of time and space will increasingly resemble timelessness and spacelessness, with gravity serving as the only common denominator.

5.7 ON THE WAY TO ROME

The first stop on the way to Italy was the island of Malta. Here, Jesus spoke with a downhearted and discouraged young man named Claudus. This young man had contemplated taking his own life, but after his conversation with the Scribe of Damascus, he resolved to face life like an adult and to stop acting cowardly. He decided to return to his people and start anew. *[Later, he became an enthusiastic teacher of the Cynics, and eventually, he collaborated with Peter in spreading Jesus' teachings in Rome and Naples. After Peter's death, he continued to share these teachings in Spain. However, he was unaware that the man who inspired him in Malta was the very Jesus he would later proclaim as the world's teacher.]*

* * *

At Syracuse, they spent an entire week. The most significant event during their stay was the rehabilitation of Ezra, the wayward Jew who owned the inn where Jesus and his companions rested. Ezra was captivated by Jesus' demeanor and requested His assistance in returning to the faith of Israel. He conveyed his despair by expressing a desire to be a true son of Abraham, yet he felt unable to find God. Jesus responded:

“If you truly want to find God, that desire is evidence that you have already found him. Your challenge is not that you cannot find God, for our Heavenly Father has already found you; your challenge is simply that you do not know God. It is written in the Prophet Jeremiah: ‘You shall seek me and find me when you shall search for me with all your heart’ This same prophet said: ‘And I will give you the heart to know me, that I am God, and you shall belong to my people, and I will be your God.’ It is written in the scriptures: ‘He looks upon men, and if any will say: ‘I have sinned and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not, then will God deliver that man’s soul from darkness, and he shall see the light’”

And Ezra found God to his satisfaction. *[Later, this Jewish man, in collaboration with a wealthy Greek proselyte, established the first church in Syracuse.]*

* * *

At Messina, they stopped for only one day, but that was long enough to change the life of a small boy, a fruit vendor, from whom Jesus purchased fruit. In turn, Jesus offered him the spiritual bread of the soul. The boy never forgot the words of Jesus and the kind expression that accompanied them. As Jesus placed his hand on the boy's shoulder, he said: "Farewell, my lad. Be of good courage as you grow into manhood. After you have fed the body, learn how to feed the soul. God will be with you and go before you." *[The lad later became a devotee of the Mithraic religion before ultimately embracing the teachings of Jesus.]*

* * *

At last, they arrived in Naples and felt they were nearing their destination, Rome. Gonod had numerous business matters to attend to in Naples, and aside from the time Jesus was needed as an interpreter, he and Ganid spent their leisure exploring the city. Ganid was becoming skilled at identifying those who seemed to be in need. They encountered significant poverty in this city and made many donations. Jesus and the young man thoroughly canvassed the area, spreading goodwill and joy with their smiles to hundreds of men, women, and children.

* * *

From there, they traveled to Rome, pausing for three days in Capua. Along the Appian Way, they journeyed alongside their pack animals toward Rome, all three eager to see the capital of the empire and one of the greatest cities in the Western world.

5.8 IN ROME

Since Gonod delivered greetings from the Princes of India to Tiberius, the Roman ruler, on the third day after their arrival in Rome, the two Indians and Jesus appeared before him. The usually morose emperor was unusually cheerful that day and engaged in lengthy conversation with the trio. After they departed from his presence, the emperor remarked to the aide standing on his right that if he possessed Jesus' regal bearing and gracious demeanor, he would truly be a real emperor.

While in Rome, Ganid maintained a regular schedule for studying and exploring the city's points of interest. His father, who had numerous business dealings to attend to, wished for his son to grow into a capable successor in managing his extensive commercial interests. He believed it was time to introduce the boy to the world of business. There were many Indian citizens in Rome, and often one of Gonod's employees would accompany Ganid as an interpreter, allowing Jesus to have entire days to himself. This arrangement provided him with the opportunity to become thoroughly acquainted with the city.

Jesus was often seen in the forum, the hub of political, legal, and business activities. Frequently, he ascended to the Capitolium, reflecting on the spiritual teachings of the Romans as he explored the magnificent temples dedicated to Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva. Additionally, he devoted considerable time at Palatine Hill, where the emperor's residence, the Temple of Apollo, and the Greek and Latin libraries were situated.

At this time, the Roman Empire encompassed southern Europe, Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt, and northwest Africa. Its inhabitants represented citizens from various nations. Jesus' desire to engage with this diverse assembly of people was the primary reason for his decision to undertake this journey.

The most valuable experience during his six-month stay in the city was his engagement with and influence on its religious leaders. By the end of his first week in Rome, Jesus had actively sought out and made

the acquaintance of leaders, from the Cynics, the Stoics, and various mystery cults, particularly the Mithraic group. He selected five prominent Stoics, eleven Cynics, and sixteen leaders from the mystery cults. For nearly six months, he dedicated much of his spare time to a close association with these religious teachers.

Jesus employed his customary method of instruction by refraining from directly confronting their errors or even acknowledging the flaws in their beliefs. Instead, he would identify the truth within their teachings and then elaborate on and illuminate that truth in their minds. This enhancement of their perspectives effectively overshadowed their associated errors in a remarkably short time. Jesus' work with these initially chosen individuals was entirely personal. He typically met with no more than three of them at a time, and often only two, while he frequently engaged with them individually. He was able to undertake this religious teaching because these men and women were still in the process of developing their spiritual understanding.

[Thus, these individuals taught by Jesus were prepared for the subsequent recognition of similar truths found in the teachings of his early followers. This early acceptance of his teachings provided a powerful impetus for the rapid spread of Jesus' teachings in Rome and throughout the empire. Among this group of thirty-two Jesus-taught religious leaders in Rome, only two were unproductive; the remaining thirty became pivotal figures in disseminating Jesus' teachings in the city and played a crucial role in transforming the chief Mithraic temple into the first church in Rome. Throughout their life experiences, the thirty-two never realized that they had once conversed with the man who became the source of their new religious teaching.

[Though Simon Peter never fully discerned the identity of the "Scribe of Damascus," he did, shortly before his death, conclude that the "Tent maker of Antioch" was also the "Scribe of Damascus."

On one occasion, while teaching in Rome, Peter listened to a description of the "Damascus Scribe" and speculated that this individual might have been Jesus. However, he quickly dismissed the idea, believing firmly (or so he thought) that Jesus had never been in Rome.]

5.9 TEACHING ANGAMON

It was with Angamon, a leader of the Stoics, that Jesus engaged in an all-night discussion about science and morality early in his sojourn in Rome. Jesus said to Angamon:

- The standard of true values can be found in the divine realms of eternal reality. For mortals, all lower and material standards must be acknowledged as transient and incomplete. In this context, the scientist is limited to discovering the interconnections of material facts. He has no scientific basis to claim that he is either a materialist or an idealist; by doing so, he abandons the perspective of a true scientist.
- Unless individuals' moral insight and spiritual development are proportionately enhanced, the progress of a purely materialistic culture may ultimately pose a threat.
- The materialistic scientist and the extreme idealist will find themselves in conflict unless they share a common standard of high moral values and spiritual principles.
- In every era, scientists and religious leaders must recognize that they are being evaluated in light of human needs. They should avoid all forms of conflict with each other while striving earnestly to validate their commitment to the advancement of human progress.

[Angamon subsequently became a close friend of Paul and emerged as one of the staunch supporters of the church in Rome.]

5.10 TEACHING MARDUS

Mardus was the recognized leader of the Cynics in Rome and developed a close friendship with Jesus. Day after day, he engaged in conversations with Jesus, and night after night, he listened to his teachings. One of the most significant discussions with Mardus addressed his earnest inquiry regarding the nature of good and bad. In essence, Jesus responded:

- Good and bad are merely terms that symbolize relative levels of human comprehension of the observable universe. If one is ethically complacent and socially indifferent, they may adopt the prevailing social norms as their standard of goodness. If one is spiritually neglectful and morally stagnant, they might derive their standards of goodness from the religious practices and traditions of their contemporaries. However, the soul that endures must make choices between good and bad as determined by the true values of spiritual standards, which can be discerned through listening to God.
- For humans, goodness is relative; it is constantly evolving, inherently a personal experience, and closely linked to the discernment of truth, love, and beauty. An experience is deemed good when it enhances the appreciation of beauty, strengthens moral resolve, deepens the understanding of truth, expands the capacity to love, serves others, elevates spiritual ideals, and aligns human motives with the eternal plans of the soul.
- The spiritually blind individual who rigidly adheres to scientific dictates, social conventions, or religious dogma is at significant risk. Such a person is likely to become an intellectual parrot, a social automaton, or a slave to religious authority.
- The ability to accurately evaluate good and bad will be fully realized once the ascending soul reaches the final level of spiritual development. This perfected personality becomes spiritually unified with goodness, beauty, and truth.

5.11 TEACHING NABON

Nabon was a Greek Jew and one of the foremost leaders of the chief mystery cult in Rome, Mithraism. While this high priest of Mithraism held numerous conferences with the Damascus Scribe, he was most profoundly influenced by their discussions one evening. Nabon had contemplated converting Jesus and had even suggested that Jesus return as a Mithraic teacher. He did not realize that Jesus was preparing him to become one of the early converts to the new teachings of a new spiritual kingdom.

Jesus' teachings were:

- Truth encompasses more than mere knowledge. It cannot be fully articulated through words; it can only be understood through lived experience. Knowledge relates to observable phenomena, while truth transcends these material aspects by engaging with wisdom and embracing the complexities of human experience and spiritual realities. Knowledge is rooted in science, while wisdom is grounded in true philosophy; truth emerges from the experience of spiritual living. Knowledge addresses facts, wisdom focuses on relationships, and truth pertains to values.
- There is never a conflict between true knowledge and truth. However, there may be a conflict between knowledge and human beliefs: beliefs that are influenced by prejudice, distorted by fear, and dominated by the apprehension of confronting new facts arising from material discoveries or spiritual advancements.
- People are often hesitant to change their thinking habits and lifestyle practices. They tend to solidify scientific concepts, formulate philosophical beliefs, and dogmatic truths due to mental inertia and a profound fear of the unknown.

Jesus continued:

- Personally revealed truth is the ultimate delight for humanity; it represents the harmonious creation of the material mind and the spiritual soul.
- Plants and animals endure through time by transmitting their genetic material to subsequent generations. Similarly, the human soul, one's personality, persists beyond mortal death by merging with an immortal spark of divinity.
- The human soul persists and survives because it becomes eternal, akin to God. Spiritual evolution represents a conscious and voluntary choice to align with the will of God.
- The sensation of expanding personal freedom characterizes heavenly progress, as it is linked to the gradual attainment of higher levels of self-understanding and the resulting voluntary self-restraint.

Nabon was profoundly impressed by these words, just as he was by each of his conversations with Jesus. These truths continued to resonate within his heart, and he provided significant support to the teachers who arrived later to spread the new teachings.

5.12 OTHER TEACHINGS IN ROME

Jesus could not function in the world's metropolis for six months without being approached by numerous individuals seeking his assistance for various endeavors. These requests often pertained to teaching, social reform, or religious movements. More than a dozen such offers were made, and he seized each opportunity to impart thoughts of spiritual enrichment through carefully chosen words or acts of kindness. Jesus frequently performed even small acts of kindness for a diverse array of people.

* * *

Jesus engaged in a conversation with a Roman senator regarding politics and statesmanship. This singular encounter with Jesus left a profound impression on the legislator, prompting him to dedicate the remainder of his life to unsuccessfully persuading his colleagues to shift the prevailing governmental policy from one in which the government supported and provided for the people to a model in which the people supported the government.

* * *

Jesus spent one evening with a wealthy slave owner, discussing the idea that all people are children of God. The following day, this man, Claudius, granted freedom to one hundred seventeen enslaved individuals.

* * *

Jesus dined with a Greek physician, explaining that his patients possessed minds and souls in addition to their bodies. This insight inspired the physician to pursue a more comprehensive approach to serving his fellow human beings.

* * *

To a Roman soldier walking along the Tiber, he said: “Be brave of heart as well as of hand. Dare to pursue justice and be magnanimous enough to show mercy. Compel your lower nature to obey your higher nature, just as you obey your superiors. Revere goodness and exalt truth. Choose beauty over ugliness. Love your fellow beings and reach out to God wholeheartedly, for God is your Heavenly Father.”

* * *

To the speaker at the forum in Rome, he said: “Your eloquence is pleasing, your logic is admirable, and your voice is pleasant; however, your teachings are hardly true. Suppose you could experience the profound satisfaction of knowing God as your Heavenly Father. In that case, you might use your oratory skills to liberate your fellow beings from the bondage of darkness and the slavery of ignorance.” *[This was the Marcus who later heard Peter teach in Rome and became his successor. When Simon Peter was executed, this man defied the Roman persecutors and boldly continued to disseminate the new teachings.]*

* * *

Upon encountering a poor man who had been falsely accused, Jesus accompanied him before the magistrate. Having received special permission to represent him, Jesus delivered a powerful address on the importance of justice. He stated:

“Justice makes a nation great, and the greater a nation, the more it must ensure that injustice does not befall even its most humble citizens. Woe to any nation where only those with wealth and influence can secure prompt justice in its courts! Magistrates should not only punish the guilty but also acquit the innocent. The endurance of a nation often hinges on the impartiality, fairness, and integrity of its judicial system. Civil government is built on justice, just as true religion is founded on understanding.”

The judge reopened the case and discharged the prisoner after thoroughly examining the evidence. Among all of Jesus' activities during these days of personal ministry, his conversation with the magistrate was the closest to a public appearance.

Jesus engaged with individuals from various walks of life. The only location in Rome he did not visit was the public baths, as he declined to accompany his friends there due to the sexual promiscuity that was prevalent.

5.13 TEACHING THE RICH MAN

A wealthy Roman citizen and Stoic became deeply interested in the teachings of Jesus after being introduced to him by Angamon. Following numerous private discussions, this affluent individual inquired of Jesus what he would do with wealth if he were to possess it. Jesus responded:

“I would exchange material wealth for the improvement of physical life, just as I would share the wealth of knowledge and wisdom to enrich spiritual life. I would manage material wealth as a prudent and effective steward of the resources of one generation, ensuring their benefit and elevation for future generations.”

But the wealthy man sought further clarification from Jesus. He boldly inquired about what someone in his position should do with his wealth: Should he retain it, or should he distribute it? When Jesus recognized that the man genuinely wished to understand more about his responsibilities to others and his loyalty to God, he provided a more detailed response.

“My good friend, you are a sincere seeker of wisdom and an honest lover of truth; therefore, I will present to you my perspective on the solution to your concerns regarding the responsibilities that accompany wealth.

“I offer this counsel because you have requested it, and in doing so, I am not preoccupied with the wealth of others; my focus is solely on you and your personal needs.

“Civilized individuals should not view everything they possess as their personal property. If you genuinely wish to consider your wealth as a trust, strive to discover the honest answer to the question: Where did this wealth originate? You can categorize your wealth into ten major divisions and then manage each portion according to a wise and honest interpretation of the principles of justice, equity, fairness, and true efficiency. When faced with genuine uncertainty regarding the equity and justice of material circumstances, let your decisions favor those in need and those who endure the misfortune of undeserved hardships.

Jesus continued:

“As a steward of inherited wealth, it is essential to consider its sources. You bear a moral obligation to represent the previous generation by honestly transmitting legitimate wealth to succeeding generations, after deducting a fair toll for the benefit of the present generation. However, you are not required to perpetuate any dishonesty or injustice associated with the unfair accumulation of wealth by your ancestors.

“Any portion of your inherited wealth that is found to have been acquired through fraud or inequitable means may be distributed according to your convictions of justice, generosity, and restitution. You may utilize the remainder of your legitimate inherited wealth equitably and serve as a trustee, passing it on from one generation to the next.

“Any portion of your fortune that reflects the earnings from your own mental and physical efforts is rightfully yours. No one can criticize your right to possess and utilize this wealth as you deem appropriate, as long as your exercise of this right does not harm others.

“Everyone who enjoys wealth resulting from discovery should remember that an individual can only live on earth for a short time. Therefore, they should make adequate provisions for sharing these discoveries in beneficial ways with the largest possible number of their fellow human beings. While the discoverer should not be denied appropriate rewards for their efforts, they should not selfishly presume to claim all the advantages and blessings derived from uncovering nature’s treasures and resources.

“As long as individuals opt to conduct the world’s business through trade and barter, they are entitled to a fair and legitimate profit. Every trades-person deserves compensation for their services; the merchant is entitled to their earnings. An honest trader should not hesitate to seek the same profit that they would willingly extend to a fellow trader in a similar transaction. However, this type of wealth differs from individually earned income when business dealings are conducted on a large scale. In large-scale trade, honest treatment must adhere to the principles of justice, honesty, and fairness.

“No mortal should stoop to engage in the oppression of another’s wealth. No noble person will strive to accumulate riches through the enslavement or unfair exploitation of their fellow human beings. Wealth becomes a moral curse and a spiritual burden when it is derived from the sweat of oppressed individuals. All such wealth should be restored to those who have been robbed or to their descendants. An enduring civilization cannot be built upon the practice of defrauding laborers of their rightful earnings.

“Honest wealth is entitled to interest. As long as individuals engage in borrowing and lending, equitable interest may be collected, provided that the capital lent is derived from legitimate wealth. First, ensure that your capital is purified before you claim any interest. Do not become so petty and avaricious that you resort to the practice of usury. Never allow yourself to be so selfish as to use financial power to gain an unfair advantage over your struggling peers.

“If you happen to acquire wealth through extraordinary talent, and if your riches stem from the rewards of innovative contributions, do not claim an unfair share of such rewards. The genius owes a debt to both their ancestors and their descendants. Similarly, they are obligated to the nation and economy that facilitated and nurtured their inventive discoveries. It would be equally unjust to deprive the genius of their rightful share of wealth.

“Except for the just and legitimate fees earned through administration, no individual should lay personal claim to the wealth that time and chance may cause to fall into their hands. Accidental riches should be viewed as a trust to be expended for the benefit of society. The holders of such wealth should be granted the primary voice in determining the wise and practical distribution of these unearned resources.

“If any portion of your fortune has been knowingly derived from fraud; if dishonest practices or unfair methods have contributed to your wealth; if your riches are the result of unjust dealings with others, make haste to restore all these ill-gotten gains to their rightful owners. Make full amends and thus cleanse your fortune of all dishonest wealth.

“The trusteeship of an individual’s wealth for the benefit of others is a solemn responsibility. Do not risk or jeopardize such a trust. Take only that which all honest individuals would permit from any trust.

“It will ever be unlikely for people to establish fair rules and regulations that apply equally to all issues related to equitable wealth distribution. Therefore, you must recognize others as your siblings. Suppose you genuinely wish to treat others as you would like to be treated. In that case, the fundamental principles of justice, honesty, and fairness will guide you in achieving a just and impartial resolution to every recurring issue of economic rewards and social justice.”

When Jesus had finished counseling him, the wealthy Roman rose from his couch. In bidding farewell for the night, he declared that Jesus was a man of great wisdom and goodness, and that the following day he would begin to manage all his wealth in accordance with such counsel.

5.14 THE LOST BOY

Here in Rome, a poignant incident occurred in which Jesus spent several hours reuniting a lost child with its anxious mother. The little boy had wandered away from home, and Jesus discovered him crying in distress. Although he and Ganid were en route to the libraries, they dedicated themselves to returning the child safely to his home. Ganid likely never forgot Jesus' remark:

“You know, Ganid, most humans resemble the lost child. They spend much of their time crying in fear and suffering in sorrow when, in truth, they are only a short distance from safety and security, just as this child was merely a little way from home. Those who understand the way of truth and enjoy the assurance of knowing God should regard it as a privilege, rather than a duty, to offer guidance to their fellow beings in their quest for the satisfactions of life. Did we not derive immense joy from ministering to the child by reuniting him with his mother? Similarly, those who lead others to God experience the profound satisfaction of human service.”

From that day forward, for the rest of his natural life, Ganid continually sought lost children whom he could return to their homes.

5.15 THE WIDOW

There was a widow with five children whose husband had been accidentally killed. Jesus shared with Ganid the story of his own father's accidental death, and together they went to comfort the grieving mother and her children. Ganid sought financial assistance from his father to provide food and clothing for the family. Their efforts continued until they secured a position for her eldest son, enabling him to contribute to the family's care.

That night, as Gonod listened to the recital of these experiences, he good-naturedly told Jesus that he had intended to raise his son to be a scholar or a businessman. However, now it seemed that Jesus was shaping him into a philosopher or philanthropist. Jesus smiled and replied: "Perhaps we will endow him with all four abilities; then he can experience a fourfold satisfaction in life, as his ear for recognizing human melody will be able to discern four tones instead of just one."

Then Gonod suggested that Jesus should write a book for future generations. Jesus replied: "Not a book - my mission is to live a life in this generation for all generations. I..." but he paused, turning to Ganid and saying, "My son, it is time to retire."

5.16 THE MAN NOT TAUGHT

Jesus, Gonod, and Ganid made five trips from Rome to various points of interest in the surrounding area.

During their visit to the northern Italian Lakes, Jesus engaged in a conversation with Ganid about the challenges of teaching someone about God if that individual does not have a genuine desire to know God. They had encountered a thoughtless pagan. Ganid appeared surprised that Jesus did not adhere to his usual practice of initiating a conversation that would naturally progress to spiritual topics. When Ganid inquired why his teacher showed so little interest in the pagan, Jesus responded:

“Ganid, the man was not hungry for truth; he was not prepared to ask for help; the eyes of his mind were not open to receive the fellowship of souls; he was not ready for the harvest of truth. You cannot reveal God to those who do not seek him; you cannot guide unwilling souls into the joys of everlasting life.

“People must develop a hunger for truth through their life experiences, or they must desire to know God as a result of their interactions with those who are familiar with the divine Father. Only then can another person serve as a conduit to lead them to our Heavenly Father. If we truly know God, our primary purpose on earth is to live in a manner that allows our Heavenly Father to reveal himself through our lives. If we could have God to dwell among us, our lives might demonstrate the path to our Heavenly Father, compelling others to inquire about Him due to the attraction of our example.”

5.17 TEACHING ON BUDDHISM

During his visit to what is now Switzerland, high in the mountains, Jesus engaged in an all-day discussion with both father and son about Buddhism. Ganid had often posed direct questions to Jesus regarding Buddha, but he had consistently received vague or evasive answers. In the presence of his son, the father asked Jesus a straightforward question about Buddha, and this time, he received a clear response. Jesus replied:

“Your Buddha was much more admirable than your Buddhism. Buddha was a remarkable man, even a prophet to his people, but he was an orphaned prophet; by that, I mean that he lost sight of his spiritual Father, our Heavenly Father, at an early age. His experience was tragic.

“He endeavored to live and teach as a messenger of God, but without God. Buddha guided his ship of salvation right up to the safe harbor, right to the entrance of the haven of mortal salvation, and there, due to faulty navigation charts, the good ship ran aground. It has remained there for many generations, motionless. Many of your people have lingered there all these years. They live within hailing distance of the safe waters of rest, yet they refuse to enter because the noble vessel of the good Buddha encountered the misfortune of grounding just outside the harbor. The Buddhist people will only enter this harbor if they abandon the philosophical vessel of their prophet and embrace his noble spirit.

“You see, Gonod, Buddha understood God in spirit but struggled to comprehend him intellectually; the Jews grasped God intellectually but largely failed to connect with him spiritually. Today, Buddhists wander through a philosophy devoid of God, while my people are tragically enslaved by the fear of a God who lacks a redemptive philosophy of life. You possess a philosophy without a God; the Jews have a God but are largely without a guiding philosophy. Buddha, by failing to perceive God as both spirit and father, did not provide in his teachings the moral energy and spiritual impetus that religion must possess to transform a people.”

Then Ganid exclaimed that they should create a new religion, one that would be suitable for India and expansive enough for Rome; perhaps it could even be exchanged with the Jews for Yahweh. Jesus replied: “Ganid, religions are not made - the religions of people grow up over long periods, while the revelations of God flash in the lives of those who reveal God to their fellow beings.”

That night, after they had retired, Ganid found it difficult to sleep. He engaged in a lengthy conversation with his father and

eventually expressed his belief that Joshua might be a prophet. His father, responding sleepily, remarked that there are others. *[From this day, for the remainder of his natural life, Ganid continued to develop his own religion.]*

5.18 ON THE APPIAN WAY

When preparing to leave Rome, Jesus bid farewell to none of his friends. The Scribe of Damascus arrived in Rome without prior announcement and departed in a similar fashion. It took a full year before those who knew and loved him relinquished hope of seeing him again. By the end of the second year, small groups of individuals who had known him found themselves drawn together by their shared interest in his teachings and their fond memories of the time spent with him. These small groups of Stoics, Cynics, and mystery cultists continued to hold irregular and informal meetings until the arrival of the first teachers of Jesus' teachings in Rome.

Gonod and Ganid had acquired numerous items in Alexandria and Rome, prompting them to send all their belongings ahead by pack train to Tarentum. Meanwhile, the three travelers walked leisurely across Italy along the great Appian Way. During their journey, they encountered a diverse array of individuals. Many noble Roman citizens and Greek colonists resided along this route, and the descendants of formerly enslaved people were beginning to emerge.

One day, while resting during lunch and approximately halfway to Tarentum, Ganid asked Jesus a direct question regarding his thoughts on India's caste system. Jesus said:

"People, unfortunately, tend to categorize themselves into various classes based on differing qualifications, which may be assessed physically, mentally, socially, vocationally, or morally. However, all these divisions of people all stand on equal footing before God. God does not show favoritism based on titles or labels; people should strive to follow his

example. While it is impossible to ignore the differences in human abilities and endowments, such distinctions should not be made in the spiritual fellowship among individuals.”

5.19 AT TARENTUM

One afternoon, as they approached Tarentum, they witnessed a rough and bullying youth brutally attacking a more petite boy by the roadside. Jesus rushed to assist the assaulted child, and after rescuing him, he firmly held onto the aggressor until the smaller boy had managed to escape. The moment Jesus released the bully, Ganid lunged at the larger boy and began to thrash him soundly. To Ganid’s apparent astonishment, Jesus quickly intervened. After restraining Ganid and allowing the frightened boy to flee, the young Indian man, once he caught his breath, excitedly expressed his confusion: if fairness requires rescuing the smaller boy, does it not also demand the punishment of the larger, offending youth? In answering, Jesus said:

“Ganid, it is true that you do not understand. Fairness is always the responsibility of the individual, while justice and punishment are the functions of social and governmental institutions. As an individual, I am obligated to act fairly; I must come to the aid of the assaulted boy, and in doing so, I may use sufficient force to restrain the aggressor. That is precisely what I did. I successfully rescued the assaulted boy; that marked the conclusion of my involvement. I then detained the aggressor for a sufficient period to allow the weaker party to escape, after which I withdrew from the situation.

“I did not proceed to sit in judgment on the aggressor; thus, I refrained from passing judgment on his motives or adjudicating the factors that contributed to his attack on another. I also did not undertake to execute the punishment that my mind might dictate as a just recompense for his wrongdoing.

“While fairness may be generous, justice is exacting. It is unlikely that two individuals will agree on a punishment that adequately satisfies the demands of justice. One might impose forty lashes, another twenty, while yet another might advocate for solitary confinement as a fitting penalty. Such responsibilities are better entrusted to a collective or administered by chosen representatives of the group. Judgment should be vested in those who fully understand the antecedents of all wrongdoing and its motivations. The administration of justice should presuppose the issuance of fair sentences based on equitable judgment, and such prerogatives should be entrusted to the judicial bodies of the world.”

For several days, they discussed the issue of administering justice. On another occasion, he referenced Jesus' view that organized society has every right to use force in enforcing its just mandates.

Ganid, to some extent, understood why Jesus would refrain from engaging in personal combat. However, he inquired about what Jesus would do if a stronger and ill-tempered creature were to attack him and threaten his life. Would he make no effort to defend himself? Although Jesus did not fully and satisfactorily answer the young man's question, he said:

“Ganid, I understand how some of these problems perplex you, and I will endeavor to answer your question. First, in any attack that might be directed against me, I would assess whether the aggressor possesses moral judgment and spiritual reasoning. If not, I would unhesitatingly defend myself to the fullest extent of my abilities, regardless of the consequences for the attacker. However, I would not assault a knowledgeable individual, even in self-defense. I would not preemptively punish him without due judgment for his aggression against me. By every possible means, I would seek to prevent and dissuade him from initiating such an attack and would aim to mitigate the situation if I failed to avert it.

“Ganid, I have complete confidence in God’s care for me. I am committed to fulfilling the will of our Heavenly Father, and I do not believe that my life’s work can truly be jeopardized by anything my opponents may wish to impose upon me.”

But Ganid desired more. They frequently discussed these topics, and Jesus shared some of his childhood experiences, including those involving Jacob, the stone mason’s son. Upon learning how Jacob took it upon himself to defend Jesus, Ganid remarked that he could understand why a normal person would rarely want to attack someone as kind as Jesus, and he agreed with this notion intellectually. However, Ganid expressed that if he were in Jacob’s position, he would have relished the opportunity to punish those rude individuals who presumed to attack him, believing he would not defend himself.

And Jesus replied: “That test has not yet come, Ganid, and when it does, we must abide by our Heavenly Father’s will.” That was all the young man could elicit from his teacher on the complex subject of self-defense and non-resistance.

5.20 GOING TO NICOPOLIS

While stopped at the ship landing, waiting for the boat to unload its cargo, the travelers observed a man mistreating his wife. As was his custom, Jesus intervened on behalf of the person being attacked. He stepped up behind the irate husband and, tapping him gently on the shoulder, said: “My friend, may I speak with you in private for a moment?” This approach left the angry man momentarily taken aback, and after a brief moment of awkward hesitation, he inquired what Jesus wanted. Once Jesus had led the aggressor to one side, he said:

“My friend, I sense that something terrible must have occurred in your life. I earnestly wish for you to share what could have led such a strong man to assault his wife, the mother of his children. I am certain you believe you have a

valid reason for this act of violence. What did the woman do to warrant such treatment from her husband?

“As I gaze upon you, I believe I can discern the love of justice in your expression, if not a desire to demonstrate understanding. I would venture to say that if you were to find me by the roadside, attacked by robbers, you would unhesitatingly rush to my rescue. I daresay you have performed many such courageous acts in your life. Now, my friend, please tell me, what is the matter? Did the woman do something wrong, or did you lose your composure and thoughtlessly assault her?”

It was not merely the words of Jesus that touched this man's heart, but rather the kind gaze and sympathetic smile he offered after his remarks. The man expressed that he viewed Jesus as a brother among the Cynics and was grateful for the restraint he had shown. His wife had committed no significant wrongdoing; she was a good woman, yet she often irritated him by criticizing him in public. In moments of frustration, he would lose his temper and regret his lack of self-control. He vowed to strive to uphold the promise he had made to one of the brothers who had taught him a better way many years ago.

And then, as he bid him farewell, Jesus said:

“Always remember that a man has no rightful rights over a woman unless she has willingly and voluntarily granted him such. Your wife has committed to journeying through life with you, to help you face its challenges, and to share in the responsibilities of bearing and raising your children. In return for this significant partnership, it is only fair that she receives the special protection that you can offer to this woman and partner. The loving care and consideration that a man is willing to provide to his wife and their children is the measure of his attainment of higher levels of spiritual self-awareness.

“Did you know that men and women are partners with God in their cooperation to create beings who grow up to possess a soul?

“It is divine to share your life and everything related to it on equal terms with your partner.”

As they boarded the boat, they glanced back at the sight of the tearful couple standing in a silent embrace.

The journey to Nicopolis was enjoyable yet slow, as the wind was not in their favor. The three travelers spent many hours sharing their experiences in Rome and reminiscing about all that had transpired since their first meeting in Jerusalem. Ganid was increasingly inspired by the spirit of personal ministry.

They spent several days in Nicopolis, a city founded by Augustus approximately fifty years earlier as the City of Victory, in commemoration of the Battle of Actium - this site being the location where he camped with his army prior to the battle. They stayed in the home of a man named Jeramy, a Greek proselyte of the Jewish faith, whom they had met on board the ship. *[Later, Paul would spend the entire winter with Jeramy's son in the same house during his third journey there.]*

From Nicopolis, they sailed on the same boat to Corinth, the capital of the Roman province of Achaia.

5.21 AT CORINTH

By the time they arrived in Corinth, Ganid was likely becoming increasingly interested in the Jewish religion. Therefore, it was not surprising that one day, as they passed the synagogue and observed people entering, he asked Jesus to take him to the service. That day, they listened to a learned rabbi discuss the Destiny of Israel. After the service, they met a man named Crispus, the chief leader of the synagogue.

They returned to the synagogue services primarily to meet Crispus. Ganid likely grew very fond of Crispus, his wife, and their five children. He greatly enjoyed observing how a Jewish family conducted their daily life. While Ganid studied family dynamics, Jesus taught Crispus more effective ways of practicing his faith. Jesus held numerous sessions with this progressive Jew.

[Years afterward, when Paul was teaching in this very synagogue, the Jewish leaders voted to prohibit him from continuing his teachings there. Consequently, he turned to the Gentiles, and Crispus, along with his entire family, embraced the new teachings. Crispus became one of the primary supporters of the church that Paul later established in Corinth. During the eighteen months that Paul taught in Corinth, he was eventually joined by Silas and Timothy. Throughout this time, he encountered many others who claimed to have been instructed by the "Jewish tutor of the son of an Indian merchant."]

At Corinth, they encountered individuals from diverse cultures spanning three continents. Alongside Alexandria and Rome, it was one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the Mediterranean empire. The city offered numerous attractions for visitors. Ganid explored the citadel, which stood nearly two thousand feet above sea level, and spent much of his leisure time in the synagogue and the home of Crispus. Initially, he was both shocked and captivated by the status of women in the Jewish household; it was a profound revelation for this young Indian.

Jesus and Ganid were frequent guests in the home of Justus, a devout merchant who lived adjacent to the synagogue. *[During Paul's stay in this home, he listened to the accounts of these visits with the Indian boy and his Jewish tutor, while both Paul and Justus pondered the fate of such a wise and brilliant Hebrew teacher. On several occasions, in the home of Crispus, Jesus and Ganid met a man named Gaius, who later became a loyal supporter of Paul.]*

During their two months in Corinth, they engaged in intimate conversations with numerous individuals. As a result of these casual interactions, more than half of those attracted became members of the community that later followed Jesus' teachings.

[When Paul first arrived in Corinth, he had not intended to make an extended visit. However, he was unaware of how effectively the Jewish tutor had prepared the groundwork for his ministry. Additionally, he

discovered that significant interest had already been generated by Aquila and Priscilla, with Aquila being one of the Cynics who had encountered Jesus during His time in Rome. This couple were Jewish refugees from Rome, and they quickly embraced Paul's teachings. He lived and worked alongside them, as they were also tent makers. Due to these circumstances, Paul extended his stay in Corinth.]

Jesus and Ganid had numerous fascinating experiences in Corinth. They engaged in conversations with many individuals who greatly benefited from Jesus' teachings.

* * *

To the miller he taught about grinding up the grains of truth in the mill of lived experience, making the profound aspects of divine life accessible even to the weakest among one's fellow mortals. Jesus said: "Give the milk of truth to those who are babes in spiritual perception. In your living and loving ministry, serve spiritual food in an appealing form that is suited to the receptivity of each of your inquirers."

* * *

To the Roman centurion, he said: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's. The sincere service of God and the loyal service of Caesar do not conflict, unless Caesar presumes to make himself an idol. Neither physical possessions nor individuals should be made into objects of worship. However, knowing the loving God will render you all the more loyal and faithful in your devotion to a worthy emperor."

* * *

To the earnest leader of the Mithraic cult, he said: "You do well to seek a religion of eternal life, but you err in your quest for such truth

among man-made mysteries and human philosophies. The mystery of eternal life resides within your soul. God has sent his spirit to dwell within you, and this spirit will guide all truth-loving and God-serving mortals through the portals of death to the eternal heights where God awaits to receive his children. Never forget that all who know the Heavenly Father are God's children if they truly yearn to be like him."

* * *

To the Epicurean teacher, he said: "You do well to choose the best and to esteem the good, but you are not wise when you fail to discern the greater aspects of mortal life embodied in the spiritual realms of humanity. The most significant aspect of all human experience is recognizing that a divine spirit resides within you and seeks to guide you on that long, nearly endless journey to God."

* * *

To the Greek contractor and builder, he said: "My friend, as you construct the material structures of humanity, cultivate a spiritual character that reflects the divine spirit within your soul. Do not allow your accomplishments as a temporal builder to surpass your development as a spiritual builder. While you create the mansions of time for others, do not forget to secure your claim to the mansions of eternity for yourself. Always remember, there exists a city whose foundations are righteousness and truth, and whose builder and maker is God."

* * *

To the Roman judge, he said: "As you judge others, remember to do so justly and mercifully, for you may one day seek mercy yourself. Judge as you would wish to be judged under similar circumstances, guided by both the spirit and the letter of the law."

“As you dispense justice with fairness, so shall you expect your own right to justice to be tempered by understanding.”

* * *

To the mistress of the Greek inn, he said: “Minister your hospitality as one who welcomes God’s children. Elevate the drudgery of your daily toil to the lofty realm of fine art - realize that you serve God through his children, striving to transform their minds and guide their souls toward the knowledge of our Heavenly Father.”

* * *

Jesus had numerous encounters with a Chinese merchant named Chang. As they parted ways, he advised him: “Honor only God, your true spiritual ancestor. Remember that this ancestral spirit resides quietly within you and continually guides your soul toward the heavens. If you heed the subtle promptings of this immortal spirit, you will undoubtedly continue on the elevated path to discovering God. When you do find God, it will be because you have increasingly embodied his essence through your pursuit of the Heavenly Father. So, farewell, Chang, but only for a while, for we shall reunite where our Heavenly Father has prepared many spiritual way-stations for those destined for heaven.”

* * *

To a traveler from Britain, he said: “My brother, I perceive that you are seeking the truth, and I suggest that the spirit of our Heavenly Father, the source of all truth, dwells within you. Have you ever sincerely endeavored to communicate with this spirit of your own soul? Such an endeavor is indeed challenging and seldom yields consciousness of success. Nevertheless, every honest attempt by the

material mind to connect with its soul achieves some degree of success, even though the majority of these magnificent human experiences often remain as subconscious registrations within the souls of mortals.”

* * *

To a runaway lad, Jesus said: “Remember, there are two things you cannot run away from - God and yourself. Wherever you go, you take yourself and the spirit of our Heavenly Father, which resides within you. My son, stop trying to deceive yourself; commit to the courageous practice of confronting the realities of life. Hold firmly to the assurances of fellowship with God and the certainty of your soul’s eternal life. From this day forward, resolve to be a real man, a man determined to face life bravely and intelligently.”

* * *

To a condemned criminal, he said in the final hour:

“My brother, you have fallen on hard times. You lost your way and have become entangled in the web of crime. From our conversation, I understand that you did not intend to commit the act that will cost you your life. However, you have committed this wrongdoing, and your peers have deemed you guilty - they have decided that you must die. Neither you nor I can deny the state its right to self-defense in the manner it chooses.

“Your peers may judge you based on your actions, but our Heavenly Father perceives your true motives and noble intentions. You need not fear God if your purpose is sincere. The reality that your mistake carries the death penalty imposed by society does not diminish your soul’s opportunity to attain the spiritual kingdom.”

5.22 THE UNCLEAN WOMEN

When in Rome, Ganid naturally observed that Jesus declined to accompany them to the public baths. Several times afterward, the young man attempted to encourage Jesus to elaborate on the relationships between the men and women attending the baths. Although Jesus answered the lad's questions, he never appeared inclined to discuss these topics in depth.

One evening, as they strolled through Corinth, near the point where the citadel's wall met the sea, they were approached by two women of ill repute. Ganid had come to believe that Jesus was a man of high ideals who abhorred anything associated with impurity or vice. Consequently, he spoke harshly to the women and rudely gestured for them to leave. When Jesus observed this, he said to Ganid:

“You mean well, but you should not presume to speak to people in this manner, even if they happen to be in error. Who are we to sit in judgment of these women? Do you know all the circumstances that led them to resort to such methods of earning a livelihood? Stay here with me while we discuss these matters.”

The courtesans were astonished by his words, even more so than Ganid. As they stood in the moonlight, Jesus continued:

“There lives within every human a divine spirit, a gift from our Heavenly Father. This spirit continually strives to guide us toward God and assist us in our search. However, alongside this divine influence, there are also numerous natural physical tendencies that the Heavenly Father has instilled in us to promote our well-being.

“Men and women often find themselves confused in their efforts to understand their identities and navigate the myriad challenges of making a living in a world sometimes dominated by selfishness. I perceive, Ganid, that neither of these women is willfully wicked.

“I can discern from their faces that they have endured significant sorrow and suffering. They have not intentionally chosen this way of life; rather, in a state of discouragement bordering on despair, they have succumbed to the pressures of their circumstances and accepted this distasteful means of earning a livelihood as the best option available in a hopeless situation that was thrust upon them. Ganid, while some individuals become wicked and deliberately choose to engage in malevolent actions, I ask you, as you look into these tear-stained faces, do you see anything bad or wicked?”

As Jesus paused to respond, Ganid's voice trembled as he stammered an apology for his rudeness. Jesus said: “I assure you that God understands them, and I speak on their behalf when I say that they have forgiven you. Now, all of you, come with me to a friend's house, where we will seek refreshment and plan for the new and better life that lies ahead.”

Up to that moment, the astonished women had not spoken a word; they exchanged glances and silently followed the men as they led the way. Imagine the surprise of Justus's wife when, at this late hour, Jesus appeared with Ganid and these two unfamiliar women, saying:

“We hope you will forgive us for arriving at this hour, but Ganid and I require a bite to eat, and we would like to share it with our newfound friends, who also require nourishment. We believe you will be interested in counseling these women on how to embark on a new chapter in their lives. They can share their stories with you, but I suspect they have faced significant challenges. Their very presence in your home attests to their earnest desire to connect with good people and their willingness to seize the opportunity to demonstrate to the world the brave and noble women they can become.”

When Martha, Justus' wife, had set the food on the table, Jesus unexpectedly took his leave of them and said: “As it is getting late, and since the young man's father will be awaiting us, we kindly request to be excused while we leave you here together - three women, thee loved

children of our Heavenly Father. I will pray for your spiritual guidance as you plan for a new and better life on earth and for your soul's eternal life in the great beyond."

Thus, Jesus and Ganid took their leave of the women. Until that moment, the two courtesans had remained silent; similarly, Ganid appeared to be at a loss for words. For a brief period, Martha was also speechless, but she soon rose to the occasion and provided everything for these strangers that Jesus had hoped for. *[The elder of the two women passed away shortly thereafter, with bright hopes for the eternal survival of her soul, while the younger woman worked at a business and later became a lifelong member of the first church in Corinth.]*

Gonod had numerous interests in Corinth; however, once his business was concluded, he prepared to sail to Athens. They traveled on a small boat that could be transported overland along a track from one harbor of Corinth to another, covering a distance of ten miles.

Except for Athens, which was more renowned as an educational center, Corinth was the most important city in Greece during Roman times. Their two-month stay in this thriving commercial hub provided valuable experience for all three of them.

5.23 AT ATHENS

They soon arrived at the ancient center of Greek science and learning. Ganid was thrilled to be in the cultural hub of the once-mighty Alexandrian Empire, which had extended its influence even to his homeland of India. With little business to conduct, Gonod spent most of his time with Jesus and Ganid, exploring various points of interest and engaging in stimulating discussions.

A magnificent university continued to flourish in Athens, and the trio often visited its academic halls. Jesus and Ganid had extensively discussed the teachings of Plato during their attendance at the lectures in the museum at Alexandria. They all appreciated the art of Greece, remnants of which could still be found throughout the city.

Both the father and the son greatly enjoyed the discussion on science that Jesus had with a Greek philosopher one evening at their inn. After this scholar had spoken for nearly three hours, and upon concluding his discourse, Jesus essentially remarked:

- Scientists may one day measure the energy, force, gravitation, light, and electricity; however, they will never be able to scientifically define what these universal phenomena are. Science focuses on physical-energy activities, while religion addresses eternal values. True philosophy emerges from the wisdom that strives to correlate these quantitative and qualitative observations.
- Logic is valid in the material world, and mathematics is reliable when its application is confined to physical entities. However, neither should be considered entirely dependable or infallible when applied to life, which encompasses phenomena that are not solely material. For instance, arithmetic suggests that if one person can shear a sheep in ten minutes, then ten men could shear it in one minute. While this is mathematically sound, it is not practically true: the ten men would hinder each other to such an extent that the work would be significantly delayed.
- Mathematics suggests that if one individual represents a specific unit of intellectual value, then ten individuals would collectively represent ten times that value. However, when considering human personality, it is more accurate to assert that the combined effect of multiple personalities is proportional to the square of the number of individuals involved, rather than merely the sum of the individuals. A social group of individuals working in coordinated harmony embodies a force that far exceeds the simple sum of its individual contributions.
- Quantity can be identified as a fact, thus establishing a scientific uniformity. In contrast, quality, which is subject to individual interpretation, represents an assessment of values and must, therefore, remain a personal experience. When both science and

religion become less dogmatic and more open to criticism, philosophy will begin to achieve unity in its understanding of the universe.

- There exists unity within the spiritual universe, even if we cannot discern its workings. The fundamental question is: how can the finite mind attain a corresponding unity of thought? This state of mind, which comprehends the universe, can only be achieved by recognizing that both quantitative facts and qualitative values share a common causation in God. Such a conception of reality offers a deeper understanding of the purposeful unity of universal phenomena.

They were all astounded by Jesus' words. When the Greek took his leave, he remarked that at last, he had encountered a Jew who thinks beyond notions of superiority and speaks of more than just religion. They then retired for the night.

The sojourn in Athens was both enjoyable and beneficial; however, the human interactions could have been more fruitful. Some Athenians of that era were either intellectually arrogant, clinging to the glories of the past, or morally uninformed. Nevertheless, many sharp minds remained among the citizens of Athens.

5.24 AT EPHEBUS

Upon leaving Athens, the travelers journeyed through Troas to Ephesus, the capital of the Roman province of Asia. They made several visits to the renowned Temple of Artemis, located approximately two miles from the city. Artemis was the most celebrated goddess of all Asia Minor, representing a continuation of the ancient mother goddess worshiped in Anatolian times. The crude idol displayed in the vast temple dedicated to her worship was said to have fallen from the heavens. Despite Ganid's early training to regard images as symbols of divinity, he still believed it prudent to purchase a small silver shrine in honor of this fertility goddess of Asia Minor. That evening, they engaged in an extensive discussion about the problems of worshipping objects and individuals.

On the third day of their stay, they walked along the river to observe the dredging of the harbor's mouth. At noon, they spoke with a young Phoenician who was feeling homesick and quite discouraged. Most notably, he was envious of a certain young man who had received a promotion over him. Jesus offered comforting words and quoted the ancient Hebrew proverb: "A man's gift makes room for him and brings him before great men."

There was also a progressive thinker associated with the local school of philosophy, and Jesus engaged in several enlightening discussions with him. During these conversations, Jesus frequently used the term "soul." This knowledgeable Greek eventually inquired about the meaning of "soul." Jesus replied:

"The evolving nature of the human soul is challenging to articulate and even more difficult to demonstrate, as it eludes both material investigation and spiritual validation. Material science cannot verify the existence of a soul, nor can pure spiritual testing. Despite the inability of both material science and spiritual frameworks to uncover the presence of the human soul, every morally conscious individual subconsciously senses the reality of their soul as a genuine and personal experience.

"The soul serves as the truth-discerning and spirit-perceiving aspect of a person, elevating humanity above the animal world.

"Self-consciousness is not the soul; rather, it is a manifestation of human self-realization and serves as the foundation of the soul. The soul represents the divine aspect within a person that embodies the potential for the survival of human experience. Moral choice, spiritual attainment, the capacity to know God, and the desire to emulate the Heavenly Father constitute the purpose of the soul. A person's soul cannot exist independently of moral reasoning and spiritual engagement."

He went on to note that this divine spirit arrives simultaneously with the first moral activity of the human mind. When fully developed and spiritualized, the human soul becomes an entity that intervenes between the material and the spiritual realms, bridging the physical self and the divine spirit. This divine gift elevates the mind by enticing it to find the will of God.

He noted that this so-called spark of God within works in the subconscious, serving as a cosmic compass and a source of sublime peace of mind. This little bit of God in each person serves as the wellspring of spiritual attainment. While one's conscience may urge a person to do the right thing, it is their soul that reveals what is truly right.

In response to a question from the Greeks, Jesus observed that many individuals struggle to differentiate between mere intellectual understanding and the inclinations of the soul. However, it is the soul that compels the pursuit of truth, fosters an appreciation for beauty, honors goodness, and encourages acts of service. The soul enhances one's personality but does not dictate or alter one's mind; it remains subordinate to human will. Individuals are free to either cooperate with or disregard this divine essence within themselves.

[Of all the major cities visited during this trip around the Mediterranean, Jesus achieved the least in terms of value for the subsequent work of his early followers. His teachings later gained traction in Ephesus primarily through the efforts of Paul, who lived there for over two years, earning a living by making tents and conducting lectures on religion and philosophy each evening in the main auditorium of the School of Tyrannus.]

5.25 AT CYPRUS

Shortly, the travelers set sail for Cyprus, making a stop at Rhodes. They enjoyed a long and pleasant voyage, arriving at their island destination feeling physically rested and spiritually refreshed. They planned to indulge in a period of genuine rest and relaxation during this visit to Cyprus, as their Mediterranean tour was nearing its conclusion. Upon landing at Paphos, they immediately began the

assembly of supplies for a several-week stay in the nearby mountains. On the third day after their arrival, they set off for the hills with their well-loaded pack animals.

For two weeks, the trio thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Then, without warning, young Ganid fell gravely ill. He suffered from a high fever for two weeks, often becoming delirious, which kept both Jesus and Gonod busy attending to the sick boy. Jesus chose not to use his spiritual powers and tenderly cared for Ganid, and Gonod was amazed by the gentleness and proficiency displayed in all of Jesus' ministrations to the afflicted youth. They were far from human habitations, and the boy was too ill to be moved, so they prepared to nurse him back to health in the mountains as best as they could. During Ganid's three-week convalescence, Jesus shared many fascinating insights about nature and its various moods.

During the last week of their sojourn in the mountains, Jesus and Ganid engaged in an extensive discussion about the functions of the human mind. After several hours of conversation, the young man asked what Jesus meant when he said that humans experience is a higher form of self-consciousness than that of higher animals.

Jesus responded using different words:

- Ideas are not merely a record of sensations; they encompass sensations along with the reflective interpretations of the personal self. The self transcends the mere sum of one's sensations.
- Animals possess physiological coordination for recognizing associated sensations and memories. However, they do not experience a meaningful recognition of these sensations nor exhibit a purposeful association of such recognitions, as is evident in reflective humans.
- The human personality is not simply the aggregate of successive states of consciousness; rather, sufficient mental unity exists to justify the designation of selfhood. An ununified mind could not achieve the conscious levels characteristic of human status. A mind resembling that of a human, constructed solely from the

consciousness of physical sensations, could never reach any spiritual dimensions. This type of material mind would lack the guiding sense of spiritual significance essential for attaining a harmonious personality. Individuals differ in their life experiences not only due to varying hereditary endowments and diverse environmental influences but also in the degree to which their minds are unified with their souls.

They departed for Salamis the following day and set sail for Antioch on the Syrian coast.

5.26 AT ANTIOCH

Antioch served as the capital of the Roman province of Syria, where the imperial governor resided. With a population of half a million, Antioch was the third-largest city in the empire, notorious for its wickedness and flagrant immorality.

Gonod had considerable business to attend to, leaving Jesus and Ganid largely to their own devices. They explored every aspect of this diverse city except for the Grove of Daphne. While Gonod and Ganid visited this notorious shrine of shame, Jesus declined to accompany them. Such scenes were not particularly shocking to Indians, but they were repugnant to an idealistic Hebrew.

Jesus became sober and reflective as he approached the end of their journey. He interacted with few people in Antioch and rarely ventured into the city. After much questioning about why his teacher showed so little interest in Antioch, Ganid finally persuaded Jesus to say: "This city is close; I may return here sometime."

Ganid had an exhilarating experience in Antioch. This young man had proven himself to be an eager learner and had already begun to apply some of Jesus' teachings. There was a particular Indian associated with his father's business in Antioch who had become increasingly unpleasant and disgruntled, leading to discussions about his potential dismissal. Upon hearing this, Ganid visited his father's

place of business and engaged in a lengthy conversation with his fellow countryman. This man felt he had been assigned to the wrong role. Ganid shared insights about God and broadened his understanding of religion in various ways. However, of all that Ganid conveyed, the quotation of a Hebrew proverb resonated the most: “Whatever your hand finds to do, do that with all your might.”

After preparing their luggage for the camel caravan, they traveled to Sidon and then on to Damascus. After three days, they made preparations for the long trek across the desert sands.

5.27 AT UR

The caravan trip across the desert was a familiar experience for the two well-traveled men. After Ganid watched his teacher help load their twenty camels and observed him volunteer to drive his own animal, he wondered if there was anything that Jesus could not do. Jesus simply smiled and replied, “A teacher is surely not without honor in the eyes of a diligent pupil.” And so, they set forth for the ancient city of Ur.

Jesus had a keen interest in the early history of Ur, the birthplace of Abraham. He was equally fascinated by the ruins and traditions of Susa, to the extent that Gonod and Ganid extended their stay in the region by three weeks to allow Jesus more time to conduct his investigations and to provide a better opportunity to persuade him to return to India with them.

At Ur, Ganid engaged in a conversation with Jesus regarding the distinctions between knowledge, wisdom, and truth. He was profoundly captivated by Jesus’ saying: “In all your pursuit of knowledge, seek understanding. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore, acquire wisdom; elevate wisdom, and she will elevate you. She will bring you honor if you choose to embrace her.”

At last, the day of separation arrived. They all displayed remarkable bravery, especially the young boy, but it was a challenging ordeal. Their eyes were filled with tears, yet their hearts remained courageous. In bidding farewell to his teacher, Ganid expressed that this parting

was not permanent. He promised that when he returned to Damascus, he would seek out his beloved teacher. He likely believed that God must resemble someone like Jesus.

The father bid farewell to a remarkable teacher who enriched their lives and guided them in their understanding of God. Jesus replied: "Peace be with you."

And Jesus stood on the shore, watching as the small boat carried his friends to their anchored ship. Thus, Jesus bid farewell to his companions from India at Charax, never to see them again. They would never know that the man who would later be known as Jesus of Nazareth was the same friend they had just parted from, Joshua, their teacher.

[In India, Ganid grew up to become an influential man and a worthy successor to his eminent father. He disseminated many of the truths he had learned from Jesus. Later in life, when Ganid heard of a strange teacher who ended his career on a cross, he recognized the similarities between the teachings of this prophet and those of his Jewish tutor. However, it never occurred to him that these two figures were, in fact, the same person.]

Baptism

6.0 TRANSITION YEARS

During his journey through the Mediterranean, Jesus attentively observed the people he encountered and the regions he traversed. Around this time, he made a definitive decision regarding the course of the remainder of his life. Through personal experience, Jesus had determined that this was the most suitable location in the entire Roman world to embark on the concluding chapters of his life. Consequently, he intentionally returned to Galilee to prepare for the commencement of his public ministry and began to formulate plans for his career as a public teacher.

6.1 THIRTIETH YEAR

After bidding farewell to Gonod and Ganid at Charax on December 10, 23 CE, Jesus traveled via Ur to Babylon, where he joined a desert caravan heading to Damascus. From Damascus, he proceeded to Nazareth, making a brief stop in Capernaum to visit Zebedee's family. During this visit, he encountered his brother James, who had come to work in Zebedee's boat shop. After conversing with James and Jude, who were also in Capernaum at the time, Jesus entrusted his brother James with the small house that John Zebedee had managed to purchase, and then continued to Nazareth.

At the conclusion of his Mediterranean journey, Jesus had acquired enough funds to cover his living expenses until the start of his public teaching.

During his few weeks in Nazareth, Jesus spent time with his family and friends, including his brother Joseph at the repair shop. However, he devoted most of his attention to Mary and Ruth. At nearly fifteen years old, this was Jesus' first opportunity to engage in lengthy conversations with Ruth since she had transitioned into young womanhood.

Both Simon and Jude had long desired to get married, but they were reluctant to do so without Jesus' consent. Consequently, they postponed their plans, hoping for the return of their eldest brother. Although they all considered James the head of the family in most matters, they naturally sought Jesus' blessing when it came to marriage. Thus, Simon and Jude were married in a double wedding in March, 24 CE. All the older children were now married; only Ruth, the youngest, remained at home with Mary.

Jesus interacted with each member of his family in a normal and natural manner. However, when they were all gathered together, he spoke so little that they commented on it among themselves. Mary, in particular, was troubled by the unusually quiet demeanor of her firstborn son.

When Jesus was preparing to leave Nazareth, the leader of a large caravan passing through the city fell violently ill. As a skilled linguist, Jesus volunteered to take his place. This journey would require his absence for a year, and since all his brothers were married and his mother was living at home with Ruth, Jesus convened a family conference. During this meeting, he proposed that his mother and Ruth relocate to Capernaum to live in the home he had recently given to James. Consequently, a few days after Jesus departed with the caravan, Mary and Ruth moved to Capernaum, where they resided for the remainder of Mary's life in the home Jesus had provided. Joseph and his family moved into the old home in Nazareth.

6.2 CASPIAN TRIP

It was the first of April in 24 CE when Jesus departed from Nazareth for a caravan trip to the Caspian Sea region. The caravan, of which Jesus was the conductor, traveled from Jerusalem through Damascus and Lake Urmia, passing through Assyria, Media, and Parthia to reach the southeastern Caspian Sea region. He returned from this journey a full year later.

For Jesus, this caravan trip represented yet another adventure of exploration and personal ministry. He had an exhilarating experience with his caravan family, which included passengers, guards, and camel drivers. Numerous men, women, and children residing along the route followed by the caravan seemed to live more enriched lives due to their interactions with Jesus. While not everyone who participated in these moments of personal ministry benefited, the majority of those who met and conversed with him emerged from the experience improved.

Of all his world travels, this trip to the Caspian Sea brought Jesus closest to the Orient, allowing him to gain a deeper understanding of the Far Eastern peoples. He established intimate and personal connections with many of the world's cultures. He also took great pleasure in teaching each of these diverse groups, all of whom were receptive to the spiritual truths he shared. Both Europeans from the Far West and Asians from the Far East were captivated by his messages of hope and eternal life. Most were profoundly influenced by the life of loving service and spiritual teaching he graciously exemplified among them.

Jesus served in an executive capacity this year, overseeing the materials entrusted to him and ensuring the safe passage of the travelers in the caravan party. He efficiently and wisely fulfilled his numerous responsibilities.

On his return from the Caspian region, Jesus altered the caravan's course at Lake Urmia, where he stayed for just over two weeks. He later traveled as a passenger in another caravan to Damascus, where the camel owners invited him to remain in their service. However, he declined this offer and continued his journey with the caravan to Capernaum, arriving on April 1, 25 CE.

He no longer considered Nazareth his home; Capernaum had become the residence of Jesus, James, Mary, and Ruth. However, Jesus never lived with his family again; when in Capernaum, he resided with the Zebedees.

6.3 URMIA TRIP

On the way to the Caspian Sea, the caravan stopped for several days to rest and recuperate in the ancient Persian city of Urmia, located on the western shores of Lake Urmia, near the largest group of islands situated a short distance offshore. Close to Urmia stood a large amphitheater dedicated to the “spirit of religion.” This structure served as a temple of religious philosophy. It was established by a wealthy merchant from Urmia, Cymboyton, along with his three sons.

The lectures and discussions at this school of religion commenced late each morning throughout the week. Afternoon sessions began mid-afternoon, while evening debates started at mid-evening. Cymboyton, or one of his three sons, always presided over these teaching, discussion, and debate sessions. The founder of this distinctive school of religion lived and died without ever disclosing his personal religious beliefs.

On several occasions, Jesus participated in these discussions. Before leaving Urmia, Cymboyton arranged for Jesus to stay with them for two weeks during his return trip. During this time, he was to deliver twenty-four lectures on The Brotherhood Of Men and conduct twelve evening sessions for questions, discussions, and debates focused on his teachings.

Following this arrangement, Jesus paused during his return trip to deliver these lectures. This was the most systematic and formal teaching of all of Jesus’ discourses. Never before or after did he address a single subject with such depth as he did in these lectures and discussions. The focus of these lectures was on the Kingdom of God and the Kingdoms of Men.

More than thirty religions and religious sects were represented on the faculty of this temple of religious philosophy. Each respective religious group selected, supported, and fully accredited its teachers. At that time, there were approximately seventy-five teachers on the faculty, who resided in cottages that each accommodated about a dozen individuals. Every new moon, these groups were reshuffled by casting lots. Intolerance, a contentious spirit, or any other behavior that interfered with the smooth operation of the community would result in the prompt and summary dismissal of the offending teacher. He would be unceremoniously removed, and his designated alternate would be immediately appointed in his place.

These educators from diverse religious backgrounds made a significant effort to highlight the similarities among their faiths in terms of fundamental aspects of this life and the next. There was only one doctrine that needed to be accepted to gain a position on this faculty - every teacher must represent a religion that acknowledges one God or some supreme deity. Five independent educators on the faculty did not adhere to any organized religion, and it was in this capacity as an independent teacher that Jesus presented himself before them.

The Urmia religious community coexisted in relative peace and tranquility because they had relinquished their notions of religious sovereignty. Spiritually, they all undoubtedly believed in a sovereign God; however, social authority was vested in their leader, Cymboyton. They were acutely aware of the consequences that would befall any teacher who attempted to dominate his fellow educators.

[After the death of Cymboyton, his sons faced significant challenges in maintaining a harmonious faculty. Cymboyton's eldest son had appealed to Abner in Philadelphia for assistance; however, Abner's selection of teachers was inflexible and uncompromising.]

[Other educators aimed to establish their religion as dominant over other belief systems. As confusion within the faculty escalated, the three brothers withdrew their financial support, leading to the school's closure after five years.]

[The buildings were later repurposed as a Mithraic temple and ultimately burned down during one of their orgiastic celebrations. They never suspected that the frequently mentioned lectures by the caravan conductor had been delivered by Jesus himself.]

6.4 URMIA LECTURES

In essence, Jesus' teachings were:

- The fellowship of the children of God is rooted in the fatherhood of God, who loves all children.
- God is spirit, and because God is spirit, the “kingdom” is spiritual; it is neither material nor solely intellectual.
- God is spirit, and imparts a fragment of this spirit to dwell within all people - the soul. Spiritually, all people are equal; the spiritual kingdom transcends castes, classes, social strata, and economic groups. All are siblings.
- Many free-willed beings who may initially view themselves as equals are, sooner or later, tempted to exercise their ability to gain power and authority over others and groups. Achieving true equality is indeed challenging. Religious equity alone will never foster peace, except through the mutual recognition of a higher spiritual sovereignty.
- If different religions acknowledge the spiritual sovereignty of a Heavenly Father, then these religions can coexist peacefully. However, if one religion assumes superiority over others or seeks to exert authority over them, it may become intolerant of other faiths or attempt to persecute their followers.
- True peace among religions (religious liberty) cannot exist unless all beliefs agree to transfer their religious sovereignty to God.

When Jesus returned from his journey to the Caspian Sea, he realized that his travels were nearing their conclusion. He made only one more trip outside the region, which was to Syria. After a brief visit to Capernaum, he went to Nazareth, where he stayed for a few days to

visit. In mid-April, he departed from Nazareth for Tyre. From there, he traveled north, pausing for a few days in Sidon, but his ultimate destination was Antioch.

6.5 THIRTY-FIRST YEAR

This is the year of Jesus' solitary travels. Throughout this year, he was known by various names in different parts of the country: the Carpenter of Nazareth, the Boat Builder of Capernaum, the Scribe of Damascus, the Teacher of Alexandria, or simply the Teacher.

At Antioch, Jesus lived for over two months, engaging in work, observation, study, visitation, ministry, and learning about how people live, think, feel, and react to their environment. During three weeks of this period, he worked as a tent maker. He spent more time in Antioch than in any other location he visited on this trip. *[Ten years later, when the follower Paul was teaching in Antioch and heard his friends discuss the doctrines of the Damascus Scribe, he was unaware that his pupils had heard the voice and listened to the teachings of Jesus himself.]*

From Antioch, Jesus journeyed south along the coast to Caesarea, where he stayed for a few weeks before continuing down the coast to Joppa. From Joppa, he traveled inland to Jamnia, Ashdod, and Gaza. From Gaza, he took the inland route to Beersheba, where he remained for a week.

Jesus then began his final individual tour, traveling from Beersheba in the south to Dan in the north. During this journey northward, he made stops at Hebron, Bethlehem (where he visited his birthplace), and Jerusalem (though he did not visit Bethany). He also passed through Beeroth, Lebonah, Sychar, Shechem, Samaria, Geba, En-Gannim, Endor, and Madon, while traversing Magdala and Capernaum. Continuing his journey northward, he passed east of the Waters of Merom and proceeded by Karahta to Dan, also known as Caesarea Philippi.

6.6 ON MOUNT HERMON

Jesus ascended Mount Hermon to finalize the planning of the remainder of his life's work. He spent six weeks in solitude on the slopes of the mountain. This period marked one of the extraordinary epochs in Jesus' life, akin to the experience he underwent while alone in the hills near Pella shortly after his baptism.

After spending some time in the vicinity of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus prepared his supplies and secured a donkey and hired a young boy named Tiglath. He then proceeded along the Damascus Road to a village formerly known as Beit Jenn, located in the foothills of Mount Hermon. Around mid-August, 25 CE, he established his headquarters and entrusted his supplies to Tiglath before ascending the solitary slopes of the mountain. Tiglath accompanied Jesus on this first day up the mountain to a designated point approximately 6,000 feet above sea level, where they constructed a stone container for storing food, which Tiglath replenished twice a week. While on the mountain, Jesus ate sparingly, abstaining from all food for only a day or two at a time. He spent the last three weeks of August and the first three weeks of September on Mount Hermon.

After more than five weeks of uninterrupted meditation, communion with his soul, and listening to God, Jesus became completely assured of his mission. He firmly believed in and confidently asserted his spiritual nature over his human nature.

At the end of this sojourn on the mountain, as Jesus descended, he encountered Tiglath, who was approaching the rendezvous with food. Turning him away, Jesus simply stated: "The rest period is over; I must return to our Heavenly Father's business." He was a quiet and significantly changed man as they journeyed back to Dan, where he bade farewell to the young man, giving him the donkey. He then proceeded south, retracing his path to Capernaum.

A transformation had been occurring within Jesus throughout the year.

Few of those who had appreciated his visits and ministrations as he traveled throughout the land later recognized in the public teacher the same person they had known and loved as a private individual in earlier years. This profound change in mind and spirit had been developing for years and reached its culmination during the significant sojourn on Mount Hermon.

6.7 TIME OF WAITING

As summer drew to a close, approaching the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus convened a family meeting in Capernaum over the Sabbath. The following day, he set out for Jerusalem, accompanied by John, the son of Zebedee. They traveled east of the lake, passing through Gerasa and descending into the Jordan Valley. During their journey, John observed the notable change in Jesus. The two stopped overnight at Bethany, where they stayed with Lazarus and his sisters, before heading to Jerusalem early the next morning. They spent nearly three weeks in and around the city, with John often venturing into Jerusalem alone while Jesus roamed the nearby hills, engaging in periods of meditation and listening to God.

Both were present at the solemn services of the Day of Atonement. John appeared deeply moved by the ceremonies of this Day of All Days in the Jewish religious calendar, while Jesus remained a contemplative and silent observer. He regarded the events of the day as failing to embody the Jewish ideals of divine justice and infinite mercy.

Jesus intended to stay with John during the week of the Feast of Tabernacles. This feast, an annual holiday, served as a time of celebration for the Jewish people. Although Jesus did not engage in the festivities, it was clear that he found joy and fulfillment in observing the carefree and exuberant spirit of both the young and the old.

During the week of celebration, the festivities concluded, and Jesus took his leave of John, expressing his desire to retreat to the hills for a more profound communion with God. Although John wished to accompany him, Jesus insisted that he remain for the festivities, saying:

“It is not required of you to bear my burden; only the watchman must keep vigil while the city sleeps in peace.”

Jesus did not return to Jerusalem. After spending nearly a week alone in the hills near Bethany, he departed for Capernaum. On his journey home, he spent a day and a night alone on the slopes of Gilboa, near the site where King Saul had taken his life. When he arrived in Capernaum, he appeared more cheerful than when he had left John in Jerusalem.

The following morning, Jesus approached the chest containing his personal belongings that had remained in Zebedee’s workshop. He donned his apron and prepared himself for work, saying: “It is essential for me to stay busy while I await my hour to come.”

He worked alongside his brother James in the boat shop until January of the following year. After this period of working with Jesus, despite any doubts that may have clouded James’ understanding of Jesus’ life work, it is likely that he never again wavered in his belief in Jesus’ mission. During this final phase of work at the boat shop, Jesus dedicated most of his time to the interior finishing of some of the larger craft. He took great care with all his craftsmanship and experienced a sense of fulfillment upon completing commendable projects. Although he did not squander time on trivial matters, he was meticulous in his work concerning the essential aspects of any given task.

As time passed, rumors reached Capernaum that John [*later called John the Baptist*] was teaching and baptizing penitents in the Jordan River. John proclaimed that the new kingdom was at hand, urging people to repent and be baptized. Jesus listened to these reports as John gradually traveled up the Jordan Valley from the ford of the river nearest to Jerusalem. Meanwhile, Jesus continued to work on making boats until John had journeyed to a point near Pella in January, 26 CE. At that moment, he laid down his tools and declared, “My hour has come,” and presented himself to John for baptism.

6.8 JOHN THE BAPTIST

Jesus was baptized on the evening of Saturday, January 12, 26 CE, by the individual later known as John the Baptist.

John was born on March 25, 7 BCE. For five months, his mother, Elizabeth, kept her vision of a heavenly spirit a secret. When she finally shared it with her husband, Zacharias, he was distraught and only came to believe her account after experiencing an inspired dream about six weeks before John's birth. Aside from Elizabeth's vision and Zacharias's dream, there was nothing unusual associated with John's birth.

He grew up as an ordinary child, day by day and year by year, in a small village known at that time as the City of Judah, located about four miles west of Jerusalem. Zacharias and Elizabeth owned a modest farm where they raised sheep. Although they struggled to make a living from the land, Zacharias received a regular stipend from the temple funds allocated to the priesthood.

The only significant event in John's early childhood was his visit to Jesus and the family of Nazareth, accompanied by his parents. This visit took place in June of 1 BCE when he was just over six years old.

After their return from Nazareth, John's parents initiated a systematic education for their son. Although there was no synagogue school in their small village, Zacharias, being a priest, was relatively well-educated, and Elizabeth was significantly more educated than the average Judean woman; she was also connected to the priesthood as a descendant of the Daughters of Aaron. As John was their only child, they devoted considerable time to his mental and spiritual development.

6.9 JOHN BECOMES A NAZARITE

John did not have a school from which to graduate at the age of fourteen, but his parents had chosen this year as the appropriate time for him to take the formal Nazarite vow. Consequently, Zacharias and Elizabeth took their son to Engedi, near the Dead Sea, where he was duly and solemnly inducted into this order.

Following the ceremonies and the making of vows to abstain from all intoxicating beverages, to allow his hair to grow, and to refrain from touching the dead, the family proceeded to Jerusalem. There, before the temple, John completed the required offerings for those who had taken Nazarite vows.

The Jews of that time held Nazarites in nearly the same respect and veneration as they did high priests. This reverence was not surprising, as lifelong Nazarites were the only individuals, aside from high priests, permitted to enter the Holy of Holies in the temple.

John returned home from Jerusalem to tend to his father's sheep and grew up to be a strong, noble man. At the age of sixteen, John became greatly impressed by the prophet Elijah, after reading about him, and decided to adopt his style of dress. From that day forward, John always wore a hairy garment and a leather girdle.

He stood over six feet tall and was nearly fully grown at the age of sixteen. With his flowing hair and distinctive attire, he was a striking young man. His parents had high expectations for their only son.

6.10 DEATH OF ZACHARIAS

After an illness lasting several months, Zacharias died in July, 12 CE, when John was just past eighteen years of age. This situation greatly troubled John, as the Nazarite vow prohibited contact with the dead, even within one's own family. Although John had made every effort to adhere to the restrictions of his vow concerning contamination from the dead, he questioned whether he had been entirely obedient to the requirements of the Nazarite order. Consequently, following his father's burial, he traveled to Jerusalem, where, in the Nazarite corner of the court, he offered the sacrifices necessary for his purification.

Elizabeth and John traveled to Nazareth in September of this year to visit Mary and Jesus. John had nearly resolved to embark on his life's work; however, he was advised, not only by Jesus' words but also by his example, to return home, care for his mother, and await the "coming of his Heavenly Father's hour." After bidding farewell to Jesus and Mary after this pleasant visit, John did not see Jesus again until the occasion of his baptism in the Jordan.

Since John refused to accept the priest's allowance from the temple funds, by the end of two years, they had lost everything except their home. Consequently, they decided to move south with their sheep herd. Thus, the summer when John turned twenty marked their relocation to Hebron. In the so-called "wilderness of Judea," This Engedi colony composed Nazarites of both lifelong and temporary consecration, as well as numerous other ascetic herders who gathered in this region with their herds and interacted with the Nazarite brotherhood. John was so different from most Nazarites that he found it challenging to fully integrate with the brotherhood. However, he held a deep fondness for Abner, the acknowledged leader and head of the Engedi colony.

They supported themselves by raising sheep and receiving donations to the order from wealthy Jews.

6.11 JOHN THE SHEPHERD

Along the valley of this small brook, John constructed a dozen stone shelters and night corrals made of piled stones, where he could watch over and protect his sheep and goats. John's life as a shepherd provided him with ample time for reflection. He often conversed with Ezda, an orphan boy from Beth-zur, whom he had effectively adopted. Ezda took care of the herds during John's trips to Hebron to visit his mother and sell sheep, as well as during his visits to Engedi for Sabbath services. John and the boy lived very simply, subsisting on mutton, goat's milk, wild honey, and the edible locusts native to the region. Their regular diet was supplemented by provisions brought from Hebron and Engedi on occasion.

His mother assured him that his distant cousin, Jesus of Nazareth, was the true Messiah who had come to sit on the throne of David, and that John was to become his foremost herald and chief supporter.

6.12 DEATH OF ELIZABETH

On August 17, 22 CE, John's mother, Elizabeth, suddenly passed away when he was twenty-eight years old. Knowing the Nazarite restrictions regarding contact with the dead, Elizabeth's friends made all the necessary arrangements for her burial before notifying John.

Upon receiving the news of his mother's death, he instructed Ezda to drive his herds to Engedi and set out for Hebron.

On his return to Engedi following his mother's funeral, he presented his flocks to the brotherhood and withdrew from the outside world to engage in fasting and prayer. His ideal prophet was Elijah, the first of Israel's teachers to be recognized as a prophet, and John firmly believed that he was destined to be the last in this long and illustrious lineage of spiritual messengers. Although John was well-versed in Jewish writings, he lacked formal education. He was a clear thinker, a powerful speaker, and a passionate critic.

All of his early teachings were grounded in the prevailing Jewish understanding of the Messiah as the promised deliverer of the Jewish nation from the oppression of Gentile rulers. Many Jews of that era believed that God might soon establish a new kingdom on earth through direct divine intervention. However, most held the belief that God would employ a representative intermediary, the Messiah. To other spiritually inclined individuals, the Jews conferred the title of prophet; however, the Messiah was to be more than just a prophet. It was the promise from Malachi that Elijah would return that deterred John from proclaiming the impending new kingdom and urging his fellow Jews to escape the impending wrath.

John was prepared to proclaim the message of the coming new kingdom; however, his expectation of Elijah's return held him back for more than two years. He eventually began to consider that since the first of the prophets was called Elijah, the last should also bear the same name. Nevertheless, doubts lingered that prevented him from ever identifying himself as Elijah. He sought to dress like Elijah and endeavored to speak like him; in every outward aspect, he resembled the ancient prophet.

At last, he devised a way to announce the new age, the new kingdom; he resolved to become the herald of the Messiah. He cast aside all doubts and departed from Engedi in March of 25 CE to embark on his brief yet remarkable career as a public teacher. John went forth proclaiming: Repent!

6.13 JOHN THE TEACHER

It was evident to all who listened to John that he was more than just a teacher. The vast majority of those who heard this enigmatic man, who had emerged from the Judean wilderness, left believing they had encountered the voice of a prophet. Never in the annals of Jewish history had John's message resonated with such profound and universal appeal as it did during his appearance.

John baptized each of his followers in the Jordan River for the remission of sins. Although baptism was not a new ritual among the Jews, they had never witnessed it being performed in the manner that John employed. It had long been customary to baptize Gentile proselytes into the fellowship of the temple's outer court; however, the Jews themselves had never been asked to submit to baptism.

John taught for four months at Bethany Ford before heading north along the Jordan River. Tens of thousands of listeners—some curious, but many earnest - came to hear him from all parts of Judea, Perea, and Samaria. Even a few came from Galilee. He baptized well over one hundred thousand people.

In May of this year, while he lingered in the Bethany Ford, the priests and Levites sent a delegation to ask John whether he claimed to be the Messiah and by whose authority he taught. John responded: You have heard the voice of one crying in the wilderness. As the prophets said: "Make ready the way of God, make straight a highway for our God; that every valley would be filled, every mountain and hill would be brought low; the uneven ground would become a plain, while the rough places would become a smooth valley; and all flesh would see the truth of God."

John conducted classes for his followers, instructing them on the intricacies of their new life and addressing their numerous questions. He advised his followers to adhere to both the spirit and the letter of the law; he urged the wealthy to provide for the poor; advised the tax collectors not to extort more than what is assigned to them; cautioned the soldiers against committing acts of violence and demanding anything unjustly; encouraged everyone to prepare for the end of the age, for the new kingdom is at hand.

6.14 JOHN JOURNEYS NORTH

John did not doubt the coming new kingdom, but he was uncertain whether Jesus would be its leader. As long as John adhered to the belief in the restoration of the throne of David, the teachings of his parents that Jesus, born in the City of David, was to be the long-expected deliverer seemed consistent. However, as he began to lean more toward the doctrine of a physical kingdom and the conclusion of the temporal age on earth, he likely questioned the role Jesus would play in these events.

He paused at more than a dozen locations as he traveled up the Jordan River. It was at Adam that he first referred to “another one who is to come after me” in response to the direct question posed by his followers: Are you the Messiah? He continued by stating that there will be one who comes after me - one who is greater - one whose sandal straps I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. John baptized with water, but the latter would baptize with the heavenly spirit.

In response to his followers’ questions, John continued to expand his teachings daily, offering more helpful and comforting messages compared to his earlier, cryptic message: Repent and be baptized. By this time, throngs were arriving from Galilee and the Decapolis. Scores of devoted followers lingered with their beloved teacher day after day.

6.15 BAPTISM

By December, 25 CE, when John arrived in the vicinity of Pella during his journey along the Jordan River, his reputation had spread throughout the region, and his activities had become the primary topic of discussion in the towns surrounding the Lake of Galilee.

On Saturday night, January 12, 26 CE, Jesus’ brothers, James and Jude, discussed the possibility of going to John for baptism. Since Jude had come to Capernaum for the Sabbath services, both he and James decided to consult Jesus about their plans. Jesus requested that they postpone the discussion until the following day, when he would provide them with his answer.

Jesus slept very little that night, remaining in close spiritual communication with God. He had arranged to have lunch with his brothers at noon and to advise them about John's baptism. That Sunday morning, January 13, Jesus was working as usual in the boat shop. Just before the noon break, he laid down his tools, removed his work apron, and announced to his brothers James and Jude: "My hour has come - let us go to John." They immediately set off for Pella, eating their lunch as they traveled. They spent the night in the Jordan Valley and arrived at the site of John's baptism around noon the following day.

John had just begun baptizing the candidates for the day. Scores of repentant individuals stood in line, awaiting their turn, when Jesus and his two brothers joined the ranks of earnest men and women who had become followers of John's teachings. Engrossed in the details of rapidly baptizing many converts, John did not look up to see Jesus until he stood directly in front of him. Upon recognizing Jesus, John paused the ceremonies momentarily to greet his cousin and inquire why Jesus had come into the water. Jesus answered: "To be subject to your baptism." John responded that he needed to be baptized by Jesus, asking: Why do you come to me?

And Jesus whispered to John, "Bear with me now, for we have to set this example for my brothers standing here with me, so that the people may know that my hour has come." There was a tone of finality and authority in Jesus' voice. John trembled with emotion as he prepared to baptize Jesus in the Jordan at noon on Monday, January 14, 26 CE.

Thus, John baptized Jesus and his two brothers, James and Jude. As the people were departing, the four men still standing in the water heard a strange sound and had a vision of a heavenly spirit hovering above Jesus' head. They then heard a voice saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Standing at the water's edge, John's followers did not hear these words. While the four of them lingered in the water, Jesus said: "Father, holly is your name. Your kingdom come! Your will be done!"

Coming out of the water in silence, a significant change came over the countenance of Jesus. He bid farewell to them and made his way toward the hills to the east. No one saw Jesus again for forty days.

[Jesus was almost thirty-one and a half years old when he was baptized. While the Gospel of Luke states that Jesus was baptized in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, which corresponds to 29 CE (since Augustus died in 14 CE), it is important to note that Tiberius served as co-emperor with Augustus for two and a half years prior to Augustus's death, having had coins minted in his honor in October, 11 CE. Consequently, the fifteenth year of Tiberius's actual rule was 26 CE, which also marked the beginning of Pontius Pilate's tenure as governor of Judea.]

6.16 FORTY DAYS

After John had baptized the three, he dismissed the others for the day, announcing that he would resume baptisms at noon the following day. He followed Jesus at a sufficient distance, attempting to share the story of his mother's vision of a heavenly spirit that had appeared before he was born, as he had heard it so many times from her. Jesus continued on his way as he heard John say that he was certain Jesus was the Deliverer. Jesus made no reply.

When John returned to his followers, who now numbered around twenty-five or thirty and stayed with him constantly, he found them engaged in earnest discussion about the recent events surrounding Jesus' baptism. They were even more astonished when John recounted the story of Mary's vision of the heavenly spirits that occurred before Jesus was born.

After this day's experience, John's teaching adopted new and specific elements of proclamation regarding the coming kingdom and the anticipated Messiah.

It was a tense period, these forty days of waiting for the return of Jesus. Nevertheless, John continued to teach with great authority, and during this time, his followers began to instruct the overflowing crowds that gathered around him at the Jordan River.

During the forty days of waiting, numerous rumors circulated throughout the countryside, including Tiberias and Jerusalem. Thousands flocked to John's camp to witness the new attraction, the reputed Messiah, but Jesus was nowhere to be found. When John's followers claimed that this man of God had gone to the hills, many began to doubt the entire narrative.

About three weeks after Jesus had left them, a new delegation from the priests and Pharisees in Jerusalem arrived in Pella. They directly asked John if he was Elijah or the prophet that Moses had promised. When John replied that he was not, they boldly inquired whether he was the Messiah. John answered that he was not. The men from Jerusalem then questioned him, stating that if he was neither Elijah, the prophet, nor the Messiah, then why did he baptize the people and create such a stir? John responded that it was for those who had heard him and received his baptism to declare who he was. He then added that while he baptized with water, there was one among them who would come to baptize with the heavenly spirit.

It was early on the morning of Sabbath, February 23, when John's company, engaged in their morning meal, looked up toward the north and beheld Jesus approaching them. Jesus instructed them to continue eating while he sat down to share a meal with John.

His brothers, James and Jude, had returned to Capernaum.

Early the next morning, he bid farewell to John and his followers as he returned to Galilee. He offered no indication of when they might see him again. In response to John's questions about his own teachings and mission, Jesus stated, the Heavenly Father will guide you now and in the future, just as he has in the past. That morning on the banks of the Jordan, the two men parted ways, never to meet again.

6.17 JOHN JOURNEYS SOUTH

Since Jesus had traveled north to Galilee, John felt compelled to retrace his steps southward. Consequently, on Sunday morning, March 3, John and the rest of his followers commenced their journey south. Approximately one-quarter of John's immediate followers set out for Galilee in search of Jesus.

By June, 26 CE, John had returned to the Bethany Ford of the Jordan, where he had begun teaching over a year earlier. He never taught in the same manner after baptizing Jesus. In the weeks following Jesus' baptism, the nature of John's teachings gradually transformed into a proclamation of mercy for ordinary people. Simultaneously, he denounced the corrupt political and religious leaders with renewed fervor.

Near the village of Adam, John stayed for several weeks, during which he launched a special attack against Herod Antipas for unlawfully taking another man's wife. Herod Antipas, in whose territory John had been teaching, was concerned that John and his followers might incite a rebellion. Additionally, Herod naturally resented John's public criticisms of his personal affairs. In light of these factors, Herod decided to imprison John. Consequently, very early on the morning of June 12, before the crowd arrived to hear the teachings and witness the baptisms, Herod's agents arrested John.

As weeks went by without his release, his followers dispersed throughout the region, with many traveling to Galilee to join those seeking Jesus.

6.18 JOHN IN PRISON

John undoubtedly endured a lonely and somewhat bitter experience in prison, as few of his friends were allowed to visit him. This resilient man languished in the deplorable prison for over a year and a half. This ordeal served as a significant test of his faith in Jesus and God.

After spending several months in prison, a group of his followers was finally allowed to see him. They reported on the public activities of Jesus, stating that he welcomes everyone who approaches him, even dining with tax collectors and sinners. They further noted that Jesus does nothing to facilitate John's release. However, John responded that Jesus can do nothing unless our Heavenly Father has approved it.

These followers were astonished by John's pronouncement to the extent that they left in silence. From that moment on, he never doubted the mission and divinity of Jesus; however, the prolonged suspense of being in prison was almost humanly unbearable. It must have been a profound disappointment for John that Jesus did not come to visit him.

Jesus was fully aware of John's condition. He held deep affection for John; however, recognizing his divine mission and understanding that John's work had come to an end, he refrained from intervening in the natural course of the prophet's life.

6.19 DEATH OF JOHN

As John was working in southern Perea at the time of his arrest, he was immediately taken to the prison within the fortress of Machaerus, where he remained incarcerated until his execution.

Herod ruled over Perea and Galilee, maintaining residences at both Julias and Machaerus in Perea during this period. In Galilee, the official residence was relocated from Sepphoris to the new capital at Tiberias. As significant construction was still underway in Tiberias, Herod spent considerable time at his Perean residences, showing a particular preference for the fortress of Machaerus. It took several years for all the public buildings and the official residence in Tiberias to be fully completed.

Herod likely feared releasing John, as it might incite a rebellion. If he executed him, the populace could riot in the capital, for thousands of Pereans regarded John as a prophet. Consequently, Herod kept the Nazarite teacher imprisoned, uncertain about how to proceed. John had appeared before Herod several times, but he would never agree to leave Herod's territory or cease all public activities if released. Furthermore, the growing agitation surrounding Jesus of Nazareth served as a warning to Herod that it was not the right time to release John.

John was also a victim of the intense and bitter hatred of Herodias, Herod's unlawful wife. To celebrate his birthday, Herod hosted a grand feast at the Machaerian palace for his chief officers and other high-

ranking officials in the councils of Galilee and Perea. Since Herodias had been unsuccessful in her direct appeals to Herod for John's execution, she now resorted to cunning schemes to orchestrate his death.

During the evening's festivities and entertainment, Herodias presented her daughter to dance before the banquet guests. Herod was greatly impressed by her performance and, calling her to him, remarked on her charm. He expressed his delight and offered her the opportunity to request anything she desired for his birthday, promising that he would grant her wish, even if it meant giving her half of his kingdom.

Herod carried out all of this while heavily under the influence of his numerous wines. The young lady stepped aside and inquired of her mother what she should request from Herod. Herodias instructed her to ask for John's head. Upon returning to the banquet table, the young woman told Herod that she desired the head of John on a platter.

Herod was filled with fear and sorrow; however, due to his promise and the presence of those who sat with him, he could not deny the request. Consequently, Herod Antipas sent a soldier with the command to bring John's head. That night, John was beheaded in prison, and the soldier brought the prophet's head on a platter, presenting it to the young woman at the rear of the banquet hall. The young woman then gave the platter to her mother. When John's followers heard of this, they came to the prison to retrieve John's body. After laying it in a tomb, they went to inform Jesus.

The followers likely observed a significant contrast between John and Jesus. John was an eager and earnest worker, while Jesus was a calm and joyful laborer. They recognized that Jesus served as a comforting presence to the world and exemplified how life should be lived; in contrast, John was hardly a source of comfort or a model to emulate. John preached about the new kingdom, but scarcely mentioned its associated happiness. When Jesus began to teach, his message was consistently accompanied by good tidings of joy and freedom.

The Twelve

7.0 IN THE WILDERNESS

Many Jews of that time believed that, just as Moses had delivered their ancestors from Egyptian bondage through miraculous wonders and a coming Messiah would liberate the Jewish people from Roman domination with even greater miracles of power and triumph. These Jews sought a restoration of national glory rather than the salvation of the world. Consequently, Jesus of Nazareth could never fulfill this Messianic expectation in the mindset of these Jews.

Many Jews thought that they continued to suffer under Roman rule due to their own mistakes; the Jewish nation had not fully repented; therefore, the Messiah's arrival was delayed.

Many believed that the sins of a father could afflict his children, and some thought that an individual's mistakes might curse an entire nation. Consequently, not everyone who submitted to John's baptism considered themselves guilty of the sins he denounced. John baptized many devout individuals for the benefit of Israel. There was considerable discussion about repentance, which underscored the intense and immediate appeal of John's message: "Repent and be baptized, for a new kingdom is at hand." To these, a new kingdom could signify only one thing: the coming of the Messiah.

Jesus did not perceive his baptism by John as a rite of repentance or a means for the remission of sins. By accepting baptism from John, Jesus was merely following the example set by many devout Israelites.

7.1 FORTY DAYS IN THE PEREAN HILLS

It had always been Jesus' practice, when confronted with new or significant decisions, to withdraw for meditation and introspection, seeking to communicate with his own soul in order to discern God's will. Following his baptism, he embarked on a forty-day period of contemplation, considering the policies to adopt and the methods to employ in this new phase of his life. Jesus did not engage in fasting or self-affliction; he was not an ascetic. Rather, he sought solitude for quiet meditation to thoughtfully devise his plans for public teaching.

Throughout the forty days of isolation, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, diligently searched for Jesus. Although they were frequently near his dwelling, they were unable to find him.

7.2 TEACHING PLAN

Jesus did not fast during these forty days of isolation. Throughout this significant period, Jesus resided in an ancient rock cavern, a shelter located on the hillside near a village known as Beit Adis. He drank from a small spring at the base of the hill adjacent to this rock shelter. The longest duration he went without food was during the first two days in the hills, when he was so absorbed in his thoughts that he completely forgot to eat.

By the third day of his solitary meditation, he began to feel hungry. Should he embark on a quest for food like any ordinary man, or should he seek spiritual powers to manifest suitable nourishment at his disposal? Should he request that these stones transform into loaves of bread? This was not a temptation; instead, it was a moment for reflecting on his life.

In summary, his life planning decisions were:

- He would complete his career in accordance with God's will.
- Jesus chose not to teach concurrently with John the Baptist. He intended to remain in relative obscurity until John's mission was fulfilled or until John's death.

- He resolved not to cater to the physical desires of the people. He would not seek to gain acceptance through displays of political authority or temporal power.
- Jesus opted to follow the path of ordinary earthly existence, following natural law and maintaining harmony with the existing social structures. Consequently, Jesus refrained from performing miracles and wonders, except when directed by his Heavenly Father's will; even then, such acts were intended solely to reinforce his teachings about God.
- He determined that his spiritual powers should be utilized for the benefit of others rather than for his own gain. He adhered to this principle consistently until the very end, when it was mockingly remarked about him: He saved others; but he cannot save himself. He had already resolved that he would not.
- Jesus chose to leave nothing that could be idolized. During his next visit to Nazareth, much to the sorrow of his brother Joseph, Jesus destroyed all of his writings that had been preserved on the boards in the carpenter's shop and those that hung on the walls of their old home. From that point on, Jesus wrote only in the sand.
- He resolved not to become an idol himself, but to focus on a singular task: proclaiming God's Fatherhood and fostering man's fellowship.
- Jesus chose to teach through natural, ordinary, challenging, and sometimes difficult methods, just as his followers would later do. He understood that it would be through much tribulation that many individuals of all ages would enter the spiritual kingdom.
- He decided to exercise normal vigilance over his human safety and take reasonable precautions to prevent the premature end of his mission.

If Jesus had doubts about his mission and spiritual power when he ascended the hills after his baptism, he had none upon his return. He had firmly decided on his course of action. As he contemplated his

decisions, Jesus sat beneath the shade of a tree on an overhanging ledge of rock, with a precipice before him. He fully realized that he could cast himself off the ledge and into the void, and that nothing could harm him unless it was the will of the Heavenly Father. He would place his trust in God to work out the details of the process day by day.

First, he would return to Galilee and quietly initiate the new proclamation of God's fatherhood and the fellowship of God's children.

7.3 WAITING TIME IN GALILEE

Early Saturday morning, February 23, 26 CE, Jesus descended from the Perean Hills to rejoin John's company, which was encamped at Pella. Throughout the day, Jesus interacted with the multitude. He ministered to a young boy who had injured himself in a fall and traveled to the nearby village of Pella to safely return the boy to his parents.

7.4 CHOOSING THE FIRST FOUR

During this Sabbath, two of John's leading followers spent considerable time with Jesus. Among all of John's followers, one named Andrew was particularly impressed by Jesus; he accompanied him on the trip to Pella with the injured boy. On the return journey to John's rendezvous, Andrew asked Jesus many questions. Just before reaching their destination, the two paused for a brief conversation, during which Andrew expressed that he had been observing Jesus ever since Capernaum. He believed that Jesus was a new prophet. Although he did not fully understand all of the teachings, he had decided to follow Jesus, sit at his feet. Jesus, with heartfelt assurance, welcomed Andrew as the first of his followers, joining the group of twelve who would labor alongside him to instill the desire to fulfill God's will in the hearts of humanity.

Andrew was a silent observer and sincere follower of John's work, and he had a capable and enthusiastic brother named Simon, who was one of John's most devoted followers. Soon after Jesus and Andrew

returned to the camp, Andrew sought out his brother Simon and, taking him aside, informed him that he had come to the conclusion that Jesus was a great teacher and that he had pledged himself as an associate. He mentioned that Jesus had accepted his offer of service and suggested that Simon also approach Jesus to offer himself for service. Simon replied that ever since Jesus began working in Zebedee's shop, he believed God had sent him. But what about John? Would Andrew forsake John? Is this the right decision to make?

At that point, they agreed to consult John immediately. John was saddened by the prospect of losing two of his capable advisors and most promising followers, but he bravely responded to their inquiries, saying that this is only the beginning; soon, John's work would come to an end, and all would become followers of Jesus.

Then Andrew beckoned to Jesus to step aside while he announced that his brother wished to join the service. In welcoming Simon as his second follower, Jesus said: "Simon, your enthusiasm is commendable, but poses a risk to my work. I urge you to be more thoughtful in your speech. To reflect your transformation, change your name to Peter."

After Jesus had returned to Pella for the night, Andrew and Simon Peter were discussing the nature of their service in establishing the new spiritual kingdom in the minds of everyone. At that moment, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, arrived, having just returned from their long and fruitless search in the hills for Jesus. Upon hearing Simon Peter explain that he and his brother, Andrew, would follow Jesus and leave with their new teacher for Galilee the next day, both James and John appeared saddened. They had known Jesus for some time and loved him deeply. After searching for many days in the hills, they returned only to learn that others had been accepted before them.

They inquired about Jesus' whereabouts and hurried to find him. When they arrived at his dwelling, Jesus was asleep, but they awakened him, saying: How is it that you prefer others before us? They recounted the details of their long search in the hills. Jesus answered them: "Be calm in your hearts and ask yourselves: Who directed you to search for

me when I was about our Heavenly Father's business? You should learn to search within your hearts and not in the hills; what you sought was already present in your souls. You are indeed my brethren; you do not need my acceptance, for you are already with me. Therefore, be of good cheer and prepare to join us tomorrow in Galilee."

John then boldly asked if James and he would be associates with Jesus in the new kingdom, just as Andrew and Simon are. Jesus, placing a hand on each of their shoulders, replied:

"My brethren, you were already with me, even before these others made their requests. You, my brethren, do not need to request entrance into heaven; it has always been available to you. In the eyes of others, some may take precedence over you, but in my heart, I have always counted on you among my own, even before you thought to make this request of me. And yet, you might have been first had you not been absent, engaged in a well-intentioned but self-appointed task of seeking one who was not lost. Do not dwell on those things that foster your anxiety; instead, at all times, concern yourselves solely with doing the will of our Father."

James and John accepted the rebuke graciously; they were likely never envious of Andrew and Peter again. The following morning, they prepared to depart for Galilee with their two companions.

That evening, James, John, Andrew, and Simon Peter engaged in conversation with John the Baptist. With a tearful eye yet a steady voice, the stalwart Judean prophet entrusted his devoted followers to become companions of Jesus.

7.5 CHOOSING PHILIP AND NATHANIEL

Sunday morning, February 24, 26 CE, Jesus bid farewell to John the Baptist by the river near Pella, never to see him in the flesh again.

On that day, as Jesus departed for Galilee with his four associates and friends, a great tumult erupted among the followers of John.

The first significant division was about to occur. The day before, John had confidently declared to Andrew and Ezra that Jesus was the Deliverer. Andrew chose to follow Jesus, while Ezra rejected the mild-mannered carpenter from Nazareth. He proclaimed to his associates that the Prophet Daniel had foretold that the Deliverer would come with the clouds of heaven, in power and great glory. This Galilean carpenter, this boat builder from Capernaum, cannot possibly be the Deliverer. Can such a gift from God emerge from Nazareth? This Jesus is a relative of John, and our teacher has been misled by his kindness of heart. Let us remain distant from this false Messiah.

When John rebuked Ezra for his statements, he withdrew with many followers and hastened south. *[This group continued to baptize in John's name and eventually established a sect of individuals who believed in John but refused to accept Jesus. A remnant of this group persisted in Mesopotamia for generations.]*

While this turmoil was brewing among John's followers, Jesus and his four associates were making their way toward Galilee. Before they crossed the Jordan River to travel from Nain to Nazareth, Jesus, looking ahead along the road, spotted Philip of Bethsaida approaching with a friend. Jesus had known Philip previously and was also well-acquainted with all four of the new followers. Philip was en route with his friend Nathaniel to visit John at Pella to learn more about the anticipated arrival of a new kingdom, and he was delighted to greet Jesus.

Philip had admired Jesus since his arrival in Capernaum. However, Nathaniel, who lived in Cana of Galilee, was not familiar with Jesus. While Philip greeted his friends, Nathaniel rested in the shade of a mulberry tree by the roadside. Peter pulled Philip aside and explained that he, along with Andrew, James, and John, had all become followers of Jesus, strongly encouraging Philip to volunteer for service. Philip found himself in a quandary. What should he do? Suddenly, without any warning, he faced the most momentous question of his life, requiring an immediate decision. At that moment, he was engaged in an

earnest conversation with Peter, Andrew, and John, while Jesus outlined the trip through Galilee to James, leading to Capernaum.

Finally, Andrew suggested to Philip, why not ask him? It suddenly dawned on Philip that Jesus was a truly great man, possibly the Messiah, and he decided to abide by Jesus' decision in this matter. He went straight to Jesus and asked: Should I go down to John or join my friends who follow you?

And Jesus answered: "Follow me." Philip was thrilled with the assurance that he had found the Deliverer. He motioned to the group to remain where they were while he hurried back to share the news of his decision with his friend Nathaniel, who was still lingering under the tree, contemplating the many things he had heard about John the Baptist, the coming new kingdom, and the expected Messiah. Philip interrupted Nathaniel's thoughts, exclaiming that he had found the Deliverer: the one of whom Moses and the prophets wrote and whom John had promised. Nathaniel looked up and inquired, Who is this teacher?

Philip replied that he is Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph the carpenter, who has more recently resided in Capernaum. Nathaniel, somewhat shocked, then asked if anything good could come out of Nazareth. However, Philip, taking him by the arm, urged him to come and see.

Philip led Nathaniel to Jesus, who, looking kindly into the face of the sincere doubter, said: "Behold a genuine Israelite in whom there is no deceit. Follow me." Nathaniel turned to Philip and replied, You are right. He is indeed a master and I will also follow if I am worthy. And Jesus nodded at Nathaniel, reiterating: "Follow me."

Jesus had now gathered half of his future core group of close associates: five individuals who had known him for some time and one newcomer, Nathaniel.

Without further delay, they crossed the Jordan River and, passing through the village of Nain, arrived in Nazareth late that evening.

They all stayed overnight with Joseph in Jesus' childhood home. The followers of Jesus had little understanding of why their newly found

teacher was so intent on eliminating every trace of his writings about the home, including the Ten Commandments, family prayers, and other sayings. They failed to realize that Jesus feared that future generations might idolize him or his possessions.

7.6 VISIT TO CAPERNAUM

The following day, Jesus sent his followers to Cana, as they were all invited to the wedding of Naomi, a prominent young woman from that town. Meanwhile, he prepared to make a brief visit to his mother in Capernaum, stopping in Magdala to see his brother Jude.

Before leaving Nazareth, the new associates of Jesus informed Joseph and other members of Jesus' family about the extraordinary events of recent times. They openly expressed their belief that Jesus was the long-awaited Deliverer. The family members discussed these matters, and Joseph suggested that perhaps his mother was right, maybe our strange brother is indeed the coming king.

Jude was present at Jesus' baptism and, along with his brother James, became a steadfast believer in Jesus' mission. Although both James and Jude were initially perplexed about the nature of their brother's mission, their mother had revived all her early hopes for Jesus as the Messiah. She encouraged her sons to have faith in him as the Deliverer of Israel.

Jesus arrived in Capernaum on Monday night, but he did not go to his own home, where James and his mother lived; instead, he went directly to the home of Zebedee. All of his friends in Capernaum noticed a significant and pleasant change in Jesus. Once again, he appeared comparatively cheerful and more like his former self than he had during his earlier years in Nazareth. In the years leading up to his baptism, Jesus had become increasingly serious and self-contained; however, he now seemed to embody his old spirit to all of them. There was an air of majestic importance and exalted presence about him, yet he was once more lighthearted and joyful.

Mary was naturally thrilled with anticipation. She undoubtedly believed that the promise of heavenly spirits was on the verge of fulfillment.

She expected the entire region to be soon astonished and amazed by the miraculous revelation of her son as the King of the Jews. However, in response to the numerous questions posed by his mother, James, Jude, and Zebedee, Jesus simply smiled and replied, “I must wait here for a while; I must fulfill the will of our Heavenly Father.”

On Tuesday, the following day, they all journeyed to Cana for Naomi’s wedding, which was scheduled to take place the next day. Despite Jesus’ repeated warnings to keep his mission confidential until the appointed time set by our Heavenly Father, they insisted on quietly spreading the news that they had found the Deliverer. Each of them confidently anticipated that Jesus would publicly assume his Messianic authority at the upcoming wedding in Cana, and they expected him to do so with great power and sublime grandeur. They recalled what had been shared with them about the phenomena surrounding his baptism, and they seemed to believe that increasingly remarkable supernatural wonders would characterize his future actions on earth. Consequently, the entire countryside was preparing to gather in Cana for the wedding feast of Naomi and Johab, the son of Nathan.

Mary had not experienced such evident joy in years. She traveled to Cana with the regal spirit of a queen mother on her way to witness her son’s coronation. As she made her way, whispers circulated among the gathered crowd in small groups, speculating about what this enigmatic figure would do next. How would he usher in the glory of the impending new kingdom? They were undoubtedly excited at the prospect of witnessing the revelation of the might and power of Israel’s God.

7.7 NAOMI’S WEDDING

By noon on Wednesday, nearly a thousand guests had arrived in Cana, more than four times the number originally invited to the wedding feast. It was customary in Jewish tradition to celebrate weddings on Wednesday, and the invitations had been sent out a month prior to the event. Throughout the morning and early afternoon, the gathering resembled more of a public reception for Jesus than a

traditional wedding. Everyone was eager to greet this nearly famous Galilean, and he was gracious to all, regardless of age or ethnicity, whether Jew or Gentile. The crowd rejoiced when Jesus agreed to lead the preliminary wedding procession.

As the day progressed, Jesus became increasingly aware that the people were anticipating a miraculous event from him. More importantly, he recognized that his family and followers were expecting him to announce the coming kingdom through a remarkable and supernatural display.

Early in the afternoon, Mary summoned James, and together they boldly approached Jesus to inquire whether he would confide in them regarding the hour and location of his planned manifestation during the wedding ceremonies. As soon as they broached this subject with Jesus, they realized they had provoked his characteristic indignation. He said only: "If you love me, then be willing to wait with me while I await the will of our Heavenly Father."

But the eloquence of his rebuke was evident in the expression on his face. His mother's actions were a great disappointment to the human side of Jesus, and her suggestion deeply sobered him. This was one of the very things he had resolved not to do during his recent isolation in the hills. For several hours, Mary felt profoundly depressed. She confided in James, expressing her inability to understand him. What can it all mean? Is there no end to his strange behavior?

James and Jude attempted to comfort their mother while Jesus withdrew for an hour of solitude and meditation. However, he returned to the gathering feeling lighthearted and joyous once more. The wedding continued with a hush of expectancy, yet the entire ceremony concluded without a movement or a word from the honored guest.

It was then rumored that he would reveal his intentions during the evening festivities, possibly at the wedding meal. However, all anticipation of such a demonstration was effectively dispelled from the minds of his followers when he gathered them just before the wedding meal and, with great earnestness, said: "Do not think that I have come to this place to perform some wonder for the amusement of the curious

or to convince those who doubt. Instead, we shall await the will of our Heavenly Father.”

But when Mary and the others observed him in discussion with his associates, they became fully convinced that something extraordinary was about to occur. They all sat down to enjoy the wedding meal and an evening of joyful camaraderie.

The bridegroom’s father had provided an ample supply of wine for all the guests invited to the wedding feast, but how could he have known that his son’s marriage would become an event so closely associated with the anticipated manifestation of the Messianic deliverer? He was delighted to have the honor of hosting the renowned Galilean among his guests. However, before the wedding meal concluded, the attendants brought him the troubling news that the wine was running low. By the time the formal meal had ended and the guests were leisurely strolling in the garden, the bridegroom’s mother confided to Mary that the supply of wine had been exhausted. Mary confidently reassured her that there was no need for concern; she would speak to her son, and he would help.

And thus, she presumed to speak, despite the rebuke she had received a few hours earlier. For many years, Mary had consistently turned to Jesus for assistance during every crisis in their home life in Nazareth, so it was only natural for her to think of him at this moment. However, this ambitious mother had additional motives for appealing to her eldest son on this occasion.

As Jesus stood alone in the corner of the garden, his mother approached him and said, They have no wine. Jesus replied: “Good woman, what does that have to do with me?” Mary expressed her belief that his hour had come and asked: Can you not help? Jesus replied: “Again, I have not come to address matters of this nature. Why do you trouble me with these concerns?”

And then, breaking down in tears, Mary entreated him, saying that she had promised them help. Wouldn’t he please do something for her? Then Jesus said: “Mother, why have you made such a promise? Please do not do it again. We must, in all things, wait upon the will of God.”

Mary was devastated; she was clearly in shock. As she stood before him, motionless, with tears streaming down her face, the human heart of Jesus was overcome with compassion for the woman who had borne him. Bending forward, he gently placed his hand on her head and said: "Now, now, Mother, do not grieve over my seemingly harsh words, for I have come only to do the will of our Heavenly Father. I would gladly do what you ask of me if it were part of God's will..."

Jesus stopped abruptly, hesitating in his thoughts. Mary appeared to sense that something significant was happening. Leaping up, she threw her arms around Jesus' neck, kissed him, and hurried off to the helpers' quarters, instructing them to do whatever my son says. Jesus remained silent; he now realized that he had already said, or instead, thought too much.

Mary danced with joy. Although she was unaware of how the wine would be produced, she confidently believed that she had finally persuaded her firstborn son to demonstrate his Messianic power. Furthermore, due to the presence of heavenly spirits (of which all those present were wholly ignorant), she was not to be disappointed. The wine that Mary desired, and which Jesus humanly and sympathetically wished for, was on its way.

Nearby stood six stone water pots, each filled with approximately twenty gallons of water. This water was intended for use in the final purification ceremonies of the wedding celebration. The commotion of the helpers around these massive stone vessels, under the busy direction of his mother, caught Jesus' attention. As he approached, he observed that they were drawing wine from them by the pitcherful.

It was dawning on Jesus what had happened. Of all the attendees at the wedding feast, Jesus was the most astonished. While others anticipated that he would perform a miracle, that was precisely what he had intended not to do. There was no escaping the appearance of wine was inevitable, as Jesus' spirit had signified the fulfillment of his desire, and there was no contradiction from God. Apparently, heavenly spirits assembled the necessary ingredients in the stone vessels and then expedited the chemical reactions.

When the helpers drew the new wine and presented it to the master of ceremonies, he tasted it and called to the bridegroom, saying: It is customary to serve the good wine first, and when the guests have drunk freely, to bring out the inferior wine. But you have saved the best wine until now.

Mary and the followers of Jesus rejoiced greatly at the miracle they believed he had intentionally performed. However, Jesus withdrew to a secluded corner of the garden and engaged in deep contemplation for a few moments. He ultimately concluded that the event was beyond his personal control and was not averse to God's will. When he returned to the crowd, they regarded him with awe; many undoubtedly believed him to be the Messiah.

Jesus once again withdrew to the rooftop to reflect on everything that had transpired. He now fully understood that he must remain vigilant to ensure that his sympathy and compassion do not lead to repeated incidents of this nature.

7.8 BACK IN CAPERNAUM

Although many of the guests stayed for the entire week of wedding festivities, Jesus, accompanied by his new associates - James, John, Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathaniel - departed very early the next morning for Capernaum, leaving without bidding farewell to anyone. Jesus' family and friends in Cana were deeply distressed by his sudden departure, prompting Jude, Jesus' youngest brother, to set out in search of him. Jesus and his companions went directly to the home of Zebedee in Bethsaida. During this journey, Jesus discussed many important matters with his new associates and specifically cautioned them not to mention the of turning water into wine. He also advised them to avoid the cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias in their future endeavors.

After the meal that evening, in the home of Zebedee and Salome, one of the most significant conferences of Jesus' earthly ministry took place. Six of his followers were present at this meeting, and Jude arrived just as they were about to disperse. They were filled with

anticipation and exhilarated by the thought of being chosen as close associates of Jesus. However, they were taken aback when Jesus began to clarify his mission and the potential outcome. They struggled to comprehend his message. They were likely left speechless; even Peter was rendered utterly speechless, while only the contemplative Andrew had the courage to respond to Jesus' words of guidance.

When Jesus realized that they did not understand his message and recognized that their perceptions of the Jewish Messiah were firmly entrenched, he sent them to rest while he walked and conversed with his brother Jude. Before Jude took his leave, he expressed with deep emotion that he never fully understood Jesus. He did not know whether their mother's teachings were correct and did not completely grasp the concept of the coming heaven, but he acknowledged that his brother was a mighty man of God; he had heard the voice at the Jordan River.

That night, Jesus did not sleep. Donning his evening garments, he sat by the lake shore, reflecting until dawn. During the long hours of meditation, as he engaged with his soul and listened to God, Jesus came to understand that it would be very difficult to make his friends perceive him in any light other than that of the long-awaited Messiah. He decided not to completely deny that he was the Messiah and to leave the final resolution of this complex situation to the unfolding of God's will.

Jesus joined his friends for breakfast the following morning, but they seemed a somber group. He conversed with them, and at the end of the meal, he gathered them around him, saying:

“It is our Heavenly Father's will that we wait here for a while. You have heard John say that he came to prepare the way for the new kingdom; therefore, it is our duty to await the completion of John's teachings. We will begin our proclamations when the forerunner has finished his work.”

He instructed his friends to return to their nets while he prepared to accompany Zebedee to the boat shop. He promised to meet them the following day at the synagogue, where he was scheduled to speak, and arranged a conference with them for that Sabbath afternoon.

7.9 THE SABBATH DAY

Jesus' first public appearance following his baptism occurred in the Capernaum synagogue on the Sabbath, March 2, 26 CE. The synagogue was filled to capacity. The account of his baptism in the Jordan was now augmented by the recent news from Cana regarding the transformation of water into wine.

Jesus assigned seats of honor to his six followers, and among them were his brothers, James and Jude. His mother, who had returned to Capernaum with James the previous evening, was also present, seated in the women's section of the synagogue. The entire audience was on edge, anticipating an extraordinary display of supernatural power that would serve as a fitting testament to the nature and authority of the person who was to address them that day. However, they were destined for disappointment.

When Jesus stood up, the leader of the synagogue handed him the scroll of scripture, and he read from the Prophet Isaiah: "Be patient, and you shall see the glory of God; even so shall it be with all those who wait with me and thus learn to do the will of our Heavenly Father."

The audience returned to their homes, undoubtedly pondering the meaning of it all.

That afternoon, Jesus and his friends, including James and Jude, entered a boat and rowed a short distance along the shore, where they anchored while he talked to them about the new spiritual kingdom. They understood more than they had on Thursday night.

Jesus instructed them to resume their regular duties until "the hour comes." To encourage them, he set an example by consistently returning to the boat shop. In explaining that they should dedicate three hours each evening to study and prepare for their future work, Jesus further said:

"We will all remain here until our Heavenly Father calls us. Each of you must now return to your usual work as if nothing has happened.

“Do not speak of me, and remember that my new teachings should not be accompanied by noise and glamour; rather, they must emerge from the profound change that God will bring about in your hearts and in the hearts of those who are called to join you.

“You are now my friends; I trust and love you. Be patient, be gentle, and be ever obedient to our Heavenly Father’s will. Prepare yourselves for the call. While you will experience great joy in the service of God, you should also be ready for challenges, for I warn you that it will be only through much tribulation that many will join. However, for those who have embraced the new teachings their joy will be complete. Do not entertain false hope; the world will stumble at my words. Even you, my friends, do not fully comprehend what I am revealing to you. Please make no mistake: we labor with a generation of sign seekers. They will demand miraculous proof and will be slow to recognize my mission.”

That evening, after they had returned to shore, Jesus stood by the water’s edge, said: “Our Heavenly Father, I thank you for those who, despite their doubts, still believe. For their sake, I will fulfill your will. May they learn to be one, just as we are one.”

7.10 FOUR MONTHS OF TEACHING

For four long months - March, April, May, and June - Jesus conducted over one hundred earnest, yet cheerful and joyous, sessions with his six associates and his brother James. Due to illness in his family, Jude was seldom able to attend these classes. Although James did not lose faith in him, Mary nearly despaired of her son during these months of delay and inaction. Her dedication, which had reached such heights at Cana, now sank to new lows. She could only revert to her oft-repeated exclamation that she could not understand him. However, James’s wife did much to bolster Mary’s courage.

Throughout these four months, these seven friends became acquainted with Jesus and adjusted to living with him. Although they referred to him as Rabbi, they were learning not to fear him. Day by day, they engaged in their daily work, while night after night, they sat at Jesus' feet. They were united by his extraordinary personality and the gracious words he shared with them each evening.

This period of waiting and teaching was particularly challenging for Simon Peter. He consistently attempted to persuade Jesus to begin teaching in Galilee while John continued his ministry in Judea. However, Jesus always responded to Peter with: "Be patient, Simon. Make progress. We must be fully prepared when our Heavenly Father calls." Occasionally, Andrew would soothe Peter with his more experienced and philosophical advice.

Throughout this entire period, Jesus spoke in the synagogue only twice. By the end of these many weeks of waiting, the reports about the visions at his baptism in the Jordan River and the wine of Cana had begun to fade. Jesus insured that no further miracles occurred during this time.

Even though they lived quietly in Bethsaida, reports of Jesus' unusual activities reached Herod Antipas, who subsequently sent spies to investigate his actions. However, Herod was more preoccupied with the teachings of John the Baptist. He chose not to interfere with Jesus, whose work continued to progress quietly in Capernaum.

During this period of waiting, Jesus instructed his followers on how they should regard the various religious groups and political parties in the region. His message was consistently: "We aim to win all of them, but we do not belong to any of them." Jesus also reinforced the followers' understanding of the different religious groups:

- The Scribes and Rabbis collectively referred to themselves as Pharisees. In many respects, they represented the progressive faction among Jewish leaders, having adopted numerous teachings that are not explicitly found in the Hebrew scriptures, such as the belief in the resurrection of the dead, a doctrine mentioned only by the later prophet Daniel.

- The Sadducees comprised the priesthood and certain affluent Jews. They were not as stringent regarding the minutiae of legal enforcement. The Pharisees and Sadducees were more accurately described as religious factions rather than sects.
- The Essenes were a genuine religious sect whose requirements were, in some respects, more stringent than those of the Pharisees. They adopted numerous Persian beliefs and practices, lived as a brotherhood in monasteries, refrained from marriage, and shared all possessions. They specialized in the teaching of spiritual matters.
- The Zealots were a group of fervent Jewish patriots who believed that any means were justified in the struggle to liberate themselves from Roman rule.
- The Herodians, on the other hand, were a purely political party that sought to achieve emancipation from direct Roman control by reinstating the Herodian dynasty.
- The Samaritans resided in the heart of the region however “the Jews had no dealings” with them - notwithstanding that they shared many beliefs similar to Jewish teachings.

All of these parties and sects, including the smaller Nazarite brotherhood, believed in the coming of the Messiah, a national deliverer. However, Jesus was unequivocal in clarifying that he and his followers would not align themselves with any of these schools of thought.

While Jesus later instructed his followers to go forth, as John had done, and teach, he consistently emphasized that they must “show forth love, compassion, and sympathy.” He taught them from the beginning that this invisible kingdom was not a physical place, but rather a spiritual experience that brought God into the souls of humanity.

As they prepared to embark on their public teaching, Jesus and the seven spent two evenings each week at the synagogue studying the Hebrew scriptures. Jesus taught these men all they could absorb, avoiding the mistake of overwhelming them with information.

He refrained from causing confusion by presenting truths that were too advanced for their understanding. *[In later years, the followers considered these four months to be the most valuable and beneficial of all their time with Jesus.]*

7.11 FIRST PUBLIC LESSON

On Sabbath, June 22, shortly before embarking on their first teaching tour, Jesus occupied the synagogue pulpit for the second time since bringing his friends to Capernaum.

Jesus was working in the boat shop when Peter brought him the news of John's arrest. Jesus set down his tools, removed his apron, and said to Peter: "Our Heavenly Father's hour has come. Let us prepare to proclaim the new teachings."

Peter hurried out of the shop and, by mid-afternoon, had gathered all of the associates. After leaving them in a grove by the shore, he set out in search of Jesus. However, he could not locate him, as Jesus had gone to a different grove to meditate. They saw him later that evening when he returned to Zebedee's house for a meal.

Jesus completed his final task at the carpenter's bench on Tuesday, June 18, 26 CE. The following day, he sent his brother James to request the opportunity to speak in the synagogue on the upcoming Sabbath. The leader of the synagogue was very pleased that Jesus was once again willing to lead the service.

Before Jesus taught this memorable lesson, known as The Kingdom: the first significant effort in his public career, he read from the scriptures. When he had finished reading, Jesus said:

"I have come to proclaim the establishment of a new spiritual kingdom. This new kingdom will encompass the souls of Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, men and women, free and bonded, for God does not show favoritism; his love is universal. Our Heavenly Father sends his spirit to dwell within the souls of all people.

“This spiritual kingdom is not of this world. We will not lead armies into battle to establish a throne of power or a kingdom of worldly glory. The children of this world fight for the establishment and expansion of earthly kingdoms, but you will enter heaven through your moral choices and spiritual victories. Once your soul enters, you shall find joy, righteousness, and eternal life.

“Those who first seek to enter this spiritual kingdom, striving to cultivate a nobility of character akin to that of our Heavenly Father, shall possess all that they need. However, I say to you with utmost sincerity: you must approach the entrance to heaven with the belief and trusting dependence of a little child. Do not be deceived by those who say, ‘Here is the kingdom’ or ‘There is the kingdom,’ for God’s kingdom does not pertain to visible and material things. This spiritual kingdom is already among you. Where the spirit of God leads the souls of humanity, there, in truth, is heaven. The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy.

“In this spiritual kingdom, those who seek perfection through service shall be welcomed. He who aspires to greatness in this kingdom must first become a servant to all. If you believe in and are willing to serve your fellow beings, you shall enter heaven.

“This spiritual kingdom is akin to a seed growing in fertile soil. It gradually matures, producing its full fruit over time. There exists a period between the establishment of the kingdom within the soul and the moment when the kingdom fully ripens into the complete fruit of everlasting righteousness and eternal life.

“Heaven is not a realm of power and abundance. The spiritual kingdom is not a matter of meat and drink but is

rather by a life of progressive righteousness and increasing joy in the perfecting service of God. The scriptures state regarding the children of this world: ‘It is my will that they should ultimately attain perfection, even as I am perfect.’

“I have come to teach the lessons of the spiritual kingdom. I do not intend to add to the heavy burdens of those who seek to enter this kingdom. Regardless of the sacrifices you may make in the material world, and no matter the price you pay to enter heaven, your soul will receive manifold joy and spiritual advancement in the eternal age to come.

“This spiritual kingdom is an invisible yet everlasting dominion. Those who enter heaven shall ultimately ascend to our Heavenly Father. I have come to call not only the would-be righteous but also sinners and all who hunger and thirst for divine perfection.

“John came teaching repentance to prepare you for a new kingdom; now I have come proclaiming that true belief is the price of entrance into heaven. If you would only believe that our Heavenly Father loves you and your worldly siblings with infinite love, then you will enter the spiritual kingdom.”

When he had finished speaking, he sat down. All who heard him were astonished by his words. However, most people were not ready to accept such news from the lips of this Galilean. Approximately one-third of those who heard him believed the message, even though they could not fully comprehend it; another one-third prepared in their hearts to reject such a purely spiritual concept of the anticipated kingdom, while the remaining one-third struggled to understand his teachings, with many believing that he was out of his mind.

7.12 TRAINING THE FOLLOWERS

After teaching the lesson on The Kingdom, Jesus gathered his six followers that afternoon and began to share his plans for visiting the cities around the Sea of Galilee.

His brothers, James and Jude, were deeply hurt because they were not invited to this conference. Until that point, they had considered themselves part of Jesus' inner circle of associates; however, Jesus intended to exclude close relatives from this group. This omission of James and Jude, along with his apparent distance from his mother since the incident at Cana, marked the beginning of an ever-widening rift between Jesus and his family. This estrangement persisted throughout his public ministry, leading them to nearly reject him. These differences were not fully resolved until after his death and subsequent appearances. Only Ruth, the youngest sibling, remained steadfastly loyal to her father-brother. Until after his reappearance, Jesus' entire family had minimal involvement with his teachings. "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, and he is not without appreciation except in his own family."

7.13 FINAL INSTRUCTIONS

The following day, Sunday, June 23, 26 CE, Jesus imparted his final instructions to the six. He directed them to go forth in pairs to privately disseminate the new teachings. He prohibited them from baptizing and advised against public teaching. He explained that, at a later time, he would permit them to teach publicly; however, for the time being, he wanted them to gain practical experience in engaging with individuals. Although this announcement may have disappointed the followers, they understood, at least in part, Jesus' rationale for initiating the teachings in this manner. They embarked on their mission with good hearts and confident enthusiasm. He sent them out in pairs: James and John went to Kheresa, Andrew and Peter traveled to Capernaum, while Philip and Nathaniel headed to Tarichea.

Before the commencement of the first two weeks of service, Jesus expressed his desire for his followers to continue the work after his departure. He instructed them to select one man from among the early followers to join the anticipated group of teachers. John spoke up and inquired whether these six would share all things equally with those

who had been with him since the time of the Jordan River and had heard all his teachings. Jesus replied: “Yes, John, the men you choose shall become one with us, and you will teach them all, just as I have taught you.”

After this speech, Jesus departed from them. The six separated to attend to their respective tasks after engaging in extensive discussion regarding Jesus’ instructions. Ultimately, Andrew’s counsel prevailed, and they proceeded with their labors. In essence, Andrew said that the Master was right; they were too few to accomplish this work. There would be a need for additional teachers, and he had demonstrated great confidence in them by entrusting them with the responsibility of selecting six new associates.

It had been arranged for the six to work for two weeks, after which they would return to Zebedee’s home for a conference. As they parted ways to go to work this morning, there was likely a hint of concealed sadness in each of their hearts. They knew they would miss Jesus, and in addition to their fear and timidity, this was not how they had envisioned the kingdom that was now being taught.

Meanwhile, Jesus traveled to Nazareth to visit Joseph, Simon, and other family members residing in the area. Jesus tried to maintain the confidence and affection of his family.

While the followers were on this mission, Jesus reflected deeply on John the Baptist, who was still imprisoned. It was a great temptation to use his spiritual powers to free him; however, once again, he chose to “wait upon our Heavenly Father’s will.”

7.14 CHOOSING THE SECOND SIX

This initial tour of the six was exceptionally successful. They all recognized the immense value of direct and personal contact with individuals. Upon returning to Jesus, they gained a deeper understanding that belief is fundamentally a matter of personal experience. They began to perceive the profound hunger among the people for words of religious comfort and spiritual encouragement.

When they gathered around Jesus, everyone wanted to speak at the same time. However, Andrew took the lead and called upon each person individually. They made their formal reports to Jesus and presented their nominations for the six new followers.

Jesus, after each man had presented his selection for the new followers, asked the others to vote on the nominations. Consequently, the six older members formally accepted all six new followers. Jesus then announced that they would visit these candidates to extend the call to service.

The newly selected followers were:

- Matthew Levi, the customs collector of Capernaum, had his office located just east of the city, near the borders of Batanea. Andrew chose him.
- Thomas Didymus, a fisherman from Tarichea and a former carpenter and stonemason from Gadara, was chosen by Philip.
- James Zebedee selected James Alpheus, a fisherman and farmer from Kheresa.
- Judas Alpheus, the twin brother of James Alpheus and also a fisherman, was chosen by John Zebedee.
- Simon Zelotes held a prominent position in the patriotic organization known as the Zealots, which he relinquished to become one of Jesus' followers. Before his involvement with the Zealots, Simon had worked as a merchant. He was selected by Peter.
- Judas Iscariot was the only son of affluent Jewish parents in Jericho. He had developed a close association with John the Baptist, which led to his disownment by his parents, who were Sadducees. While seeking employment in the area, he was discovered by Jesus' followers. Notably, due to his financial expertise, Nathaniel extended an invitation for him to join their group. Judas Iscariot was the sole Judean among the twelve followers.

Jesus spent an entire day with the six, addressing their questions and attentively listening to the details of their reports, as they had numerous exciting and valuable experiences to share. They likely now recognized the wisdom of Jesus' strategy to send them out to work quietly and personally before embarking on their ambitious public efforts.

7.15 CALL OF MATTHEW AND SIMON

The following day, Jesus and the six went to visit Matthew Levi, the customs collector. Matthew was prepared for their arrival, having balanced his books and arranged to hand over the responsibilities of his office to his brother. As they approached the house, Andrew stepped forward alongside Jesus, who, gazing into Matthew's face, said: "Follow me."

And he went to his house with Jesus and the followers. Matthew informed Jesus about the banquet he had planned for that evening, expressing his desire to host a dinner for his family and friends, provided that Jesus would approve and agree to be the guest of honor. Jesus nodded in agreement.

After a midday luncheon at Matthew's house, they all accompanied Peter to visit Simon the Zealot, whom they found at his former place of business, now managed by his nephew. When Peter introduced Jesus to Simon, Jesus greeted the passionate patriot and said: "Follow me."

They all returned to Matthew's home, where they engaged in extensive discussions about politics and religion until the evening meal. The Levi family had long been involved in business and tax collection; therefore, many of the guests invited to this banquet by Matthew would have been labeled as "publicans and sinners" by the Pharisees.

In those days, when a reception banquet of this nature was held in honor of a prominent individual, it was customary for all interested parties to linger in the banquet room to observe the guests dining and to listen to the conversations and speeches of the honored guests. Consequently, most of the Pharisees from Capernaum were present on this occasion to observe Jesus' behavior at this unusual social gathering.

As the dinner progressed, the joy of the diners reached new heights, and everyone enjoyed such a splendid time that the observing Pharisees began to harbor criticisms in their hearts regarding Jesus' participation in such a lighthearted and carefree gathering. Later in the evening, during the speeches, one of the more malevolent Pharisees went so far as to condemn Jesus' conduct towards Peter, exclaiming: How dare you teach that this man is righteous when he dines with tax collectors and sinners, thereby endorsing such scenes of frivolous enjoyment? Peter discreetly relayed this criticism to Jesus before offering the parting blessing to those assembled. Jesus said:

“As I come here tonight to welcome Matthew and Simon to our fellowship, I am delighted to witness your lightheartedness and cheerful camaraderie. However, you should rejoice even more, for many of you will find entry into the spirit, where you will abundantly enjoy the blessings of the spiritual kingdom.

“To you who stand by, criticizing in your hearts, let me say that I have come to proclaim joy to the socially downtrodden and spiritual liberty to the morally captive. Those who are whole do not need a physician, but those who are sick do. I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Simon Zelotes wished to speak at the gathering in Matthew's house; however, Andrew, aware that Jesus wanted to prevent any confusion between the new teachings and the Zealots' movement, urged him to refrain from making any public remarks.

Jesus and the followers stayed that night at Matthew's house. As the other guests returned to their homes, the followers discussed only one topic: the kindness and compassion of Jesus.

7.16 CALL OF THE TWINS

The following day, all nine of them traveled by boat to Kheresa to formally invite the next two followers, James and Judas, the twin

sons of Alpheus, who were nominated by James and John Zebedee. The fisherman twins were anticipating the arrival of Jesus and his companions and were waiting for them on the shore. James Zebedee introduced Jesus to these fishermen of Kheresa, and as he gazed at them, he nodded and said: "Follow me."

That afternoon, they spent together, Jesus fully instructed them on attending festive gatherings, concluding his remarks by saying:

"All people are our siblings. Our Heavenly Father does not despise any of these children. The spiritual kingdom is open to all. We will sit and eat with everyone who wishes to hear the new teachings.

"As God looks upon us, we are all equal. Therefore, do not hesitate to break bread with the Pharisee or the sinner, the Sadducee or the publican, the Roman or the Jew, the rich or the poor, the free or the enslaved. The door of heaven is wide open for all who seek the truth and wish to find God."

The twin brothers were welcomed into the fellowship that evening during a modest meal at Alpheus' home. After a restful night, the entire party, now consisting of eleven members, traveled by boat to Tarichea.

7.17 CALL OF THOMAS AND JUDAS

Thomas Didymus, the fisherman, and Judas Iscariot, the wanderer, met Jesus and the followers at the boat landing in Tarichea. Thomas then led the group to his nearby home. Philip presented Thomas as his nominee for a follower, while Nathaniel nominated Judas Iscariot, a Judean, for similar recognition. Jesus looked at Thomas and said: "Thomas, you lack faith; nevertheless, I welcome you. Follow me." To Judas Iscariot, Jesus said: "Judas, we are all of one flesh, and as I welcome you into our midst, I pray that you will always remain loyal to your Galilean brethren. Follow me."

When they had refreshed themselves, Jesus took the twelve aside to instruct them about the nature and work of heavenly spirits. However, they largely failed to comprehend the significance of the truths he endeavored to teach them. One would grasp one point, while another understood a different aspect, but none could fully encompass the entirety of his teachings. Initially, they struggled to understand that Jesus had come to proclaim a new lesson and establish a new path to finding God.

The following day, Jesus left his twelve followers quite alone; he wanted them to become acquainted and to discuss what he had taught them. He returned for the evening meal, and during the hours that followed, he provided further instruction about the spiritual kingdom, allowing some of the followers to gain a deeper understanding of his teachings.

Zebedee and Salome moved in with their son David so that their spacious home could be dedicated to Jesus and his twelve followers. They rested for the night and departed by boat for Capernaum the next day. Jesus observed a peaceful Sabbath with his chosen messengers, meticulously outlining the plans for the new teachings. He emphasized the importance of avoiding any conflict with civil authorities, saying: "If the civil rulers are to be rebuked, leave that task to me. Ensure that you make no denunciations of Caesar or his servants."

This evening, Judas Iscariot took Jesus aside to ask why nothing had been done to free John from prison. Judas was not entirely satisfied with Jesus' response.

7.18 WEEK OF INTENSIVE TRAINING

The following week was dedicated to an intensive training program. Each day, the six new followers were placed in the care of their respective nominators for a comprehensive review of everything they had learned and experienced in preparation for their new roles. To benefit the younger six, the older followers meticulously revisited Jesus' teachings up to that point. Each evening, they gathered in Zebedee's garden to receive instruction from Jesus.

At this time, Jesus instituted Wednesday as a day of rest and recreation. Throughout his life, his followers generally adhered to this relaxation plan, taking one day each week for leisure. On this weekly holiday, Jesus would often withdraw from them, saying: “My children, take a day for play. Rest from your arduous labors and enjoy the rejuvenation that comes from returning to your former vocations or exploring new recreational activities.” While Jesus did not actually require this day of rest during this period of his life, he embraced this practice because he understood it was beneficial for his associates.

In these early lessons, Jesus aimed to minimize controversies with his followers, except when addressing misconceptions about God; in such cases, he did not hesitate to correct erroneous beliefs. His constant exhortation to the followers was: “Go seek the sinners; find the downtrodden and comfort the anxious.” Jesus emphasized conducting his teaching mission in the most unobtrusive and unassuming manner, deliberately avoiding any displays of spiritual power. He planned to work quietly for several months with his twelve followers around the Sea of Galilee.

7.19 ANOTHER DISAPPOINTMENT

Jesus had planned for a quiet campaign of five months focused on personal work. He did not inform his followers how long this would last; instead, they worked on a week-by-week basis. Early on this first day of the week, just as he announced his plans to his twelve followers, Simon Peter, James Zebedee, and Judas Iscariot approached him for a private conversation. Taking Jesus aside, Peter boldly stated that they had come at the request of the other associates to inquire whether the time was now ripe to begin the mission. He asked if Jesus would proclaim the new teachings in Capernaum or if he would move on to Jerusalem. Additionally, they wanted to know when each of them would learn the positions they would occupy in establishing the new kingdom.

Peter would have asked further questions, but Jesus raised an admonitory hand to stop him. Beckoning the other followers standing nearby to join them, Jesus said:

“The kingdom is not of this world. I have not come to sit on David’s throne; yet, you inquire about the places each of you will occupy in heaven. I have called you ambassadors of a spiritual, not a physical, kingdom. Soon, very soon, you will represent me in the world and proclaim a spiritual kingdom, just as I now represent our spiritual God.

“My friends, cast aside the notion that the kingdom is merely a manifestation of power, a reign of glory, or a tangible location. It is not our Heavenly Father’s desire that we glorify ourselves during this age. In a future age, you shall sit with me, but it is our duty now to submit to God’s will and proceed in humble obedience to fulfill God’s purpose on earth.”

Once again, his associates were shocked. Jesus sent them away in pairs to pray, instructing them to return to him at noon. On this crucial morning, they each sought to listen to God, endeavored to encourage and strengthen one another, and returned to Jesus as he had instructed them.

Jesus recounted the arrival of John, the baptism in the Jordan, the marriage feast at Cana, the recent selection of the six, and the withdrawal of his own brothers. Following this brief yet earnest discussion, the followers, led by Peter, stood to express their unwavering devotion to their teacher and to pledge their steadfast loyalty to the new teachings regarding the forthcoming kingdom, regardless of its nature, even if they did not fully comprehend them. They all genuinely believed Jesus.

Jesus then asked them how much money they had among them and what provisions had been made for their families. When it was discovered that they had barely enough funds to support themselves for two weeks, Jesus said: “It is not right that we commence our work in this manner. We will remain here by the sea for two weeks, engaging in fishing or any other tasks that come to hand. In the meantime, under Andrew’s guidance, you should organize yourselves to ensure that all necessary provisions are made for your future work, both for the present personal ministry and for the time when I will later ask you to teach and instruct followers.”

They were naturally greatly encouraged by these words; this was their first clear and positive indication that Jesus intended to embark on more assertive and ambitious public endeavors in the future.

The followers spent the remainder of the day refining their organization and finalizing arrangements for boats and nets in preparation for tomorrow's fishing expedition, as they had all committed to this endeavor, most of them were experienced fishermen. Many of the boats they would use over the next few years had been built by Jesus' own hands and were reliable and sturdy. Jesus instructed them to dedicate themselves to fishing for two weeks, adding: "And then you will go forth to become fishers of men."

They fished in three groups, with Jesus joining a different group each night. Everyone enjoyed Jesus; he was an excellent fisherman, a cheerful companion, and an inspiring friend. The more they worked with him, the more they grew to love him. As Matthew remarked one day: The more you understand some people, the less you admire them; but of this man, even the less I comprehend him, the more I love him.

This plan of fishing for two weeks followed by two weeks of personal ministry was maintained for over five months, extending into the latter part of 26 CE.

7.20 FIRST WORK OF THE TWELVE

After disposing of the fish caught over the course of two weeks, Judas Iscariot, who was selected to serve as the treasurer for the twelve, divided the remaining funds into six equal portions, as provisions for the care of dependent families had already been allocated.

In mid-August of 26 CE, they began providing personal instruction as assigned by Andrew. During the first two weeks, Jesus accompanied Andrew and Peter; in the following two weeks, he was with James and John, and so forth with the other pairs in the order of their preference. This approach allowed him to spend time with each pair at least once before he gathered them together to commence their public teaching.

Jesus instructed them to teach belief in God without the need for penance or sacrifice, emphasizing that God loves all his earthly children with the same eternal love. He asked his friends to refrain from discussing:

- The work and imprisonment of John the Baptist,
- The voice at the baptism (“Only those who heard the voice may refer to it. Speak only that which you have heard; do not speak hearsay”), and
- The transformation of water into wine at Cana.

Jesus explained to his followers the difference in the price of admission to the kingdom between repentance through good works, as taught by the Jews, and his teaching of a change of mind through true belief and service. John had taught: “repentance - to flee from the wrath to come.” In contrast, Jesus taught: “The open door to entering into God’s perfect and eternal love.”

The followers perceived that Jesus did not speak like a threatening prophet, one who comes to declare the wrathful words of God; instead, Jesus seemed to speak with authority. The followers early learned various teaching techniques by observing Jesus:

- Jesus exhibited a profound respect and sympathetic regard for every human being he encountered, leaving a lasting impression on them with his consistent and unwavering consideration for all people: men, women, and children alike. He would pause during deep discussions to offer words of encouragement to a passing woman burdened by her struggles, both physical and emotional. He would interrupt serious conversations with his friends to engage with an inquisitive child. Nothing appeared to matter more to Jesus than the individual human being who happened to be in his immediate presence.

- Though Jesus' public teachings primarily consisted of stories and brief discourses, he consistently engaged his audience through questions and answers. He would always take a moment to respond to sincere inquiries during his public lessons.
- The followers were initially shocked by Jesus' treatment of women, but they soon became accustomed to it. He made it very clear to them that women should be accorded equal respect and rights as men in their pursuit of the spiritual kingdom.

7.21 FIVE MONTHS OF TESTING

This somewhat monotonous period of alternating fishing and personal work proved to be a grueling experience for the twelve followers, yet they endured the challenge. Despite their grumblings, doubts, and fleeting dissatisfactions, they remained steadfast in their devotion and loyalty. Their personal association with Jesus during these months of testing endeared him to them, ensuring their faithfulness even during the dark hours of his trial and execution. These five months of work alongside Jesus led each of these followers to regard him as "the best friend he had in all the world." It was this deep devotion and human sentiment, rather than his remarkable teachings or extraordinary deeds, that united them until after his death.

Not only were these months of quiet work a significant test for the followers, a test that they successfully endured, but this period of public inactivity also posed a considerable challenge for Jesus' family. They attempted to reach out to him on only a few occasions, primarily to persuade him to return home, as they were close to believing that he had lost his sanity. This period proved overwhelming for those who were his own flesh and blood.

By the end of this period, the twelve had developed fairly satisfactory plans for caring for their respective families. Most of the followers were married, and some had several children. Nevertheless, they had made arrangements for the support of their families so that,

with a bit of assistance from the group funds, they could devote their entire energies to Jesus' work without worrying about their families' financial well-being.

The followers continued their personal work in Capernaum, Bethsaida-Julias, Chorazin, Gerasa, Hippos, Magdala, Cana, Bethlehem of Galilee, Jotapata, Ramah, Safed, Gischala, Gadara, and Abila. In addition to these towns, they also worked in numerous villages and rural areas.

7.22 ORGANIZATION OF THE TWELVE

The followers initially organized themselves in the following manner:

- Andrew was appointed as the chairman and director of the twelve.
- Peter, James, and John were appointed as personal companions of Jesus. Their responsibilities included attending to him, ministering to his physical and various needs, and accompanying him during his vigils of meditation and communion with God.
- Philip of Bethsaida was appointed as the steward of the group. His responsibility was to ensure that visitors, as well as the numerous listeners at times, were provided with food.
- Matthew Levi served as the fiscal agent for the corps. His responsibility was to ensure that the budget remained balanced and that the treasury was adequately replenished. If the funds for mutual support were not forthcoming or if donations sufficient to sustain the party were not received, Matthew had the authority to send the twelve back to their nets temporarily. However, this was never necessary once they commenced their public work; he consistently had enough funds in the treasurer's hands to support their activities.
- Judas Iscariot was appointed as the treasurer. He was responsible for carrying the money bag, managing all expenses, and maintaining the financial records. He prepared budget estimates for Matthew weekly and also submitted weekly reports to Andrew. Judas disbursed funds only with Andrew's authorization.

- Nathaniel oversaw the needs of the families of the twelve. He received regular updates on the requirements of each follower's family and, by making requisitions to Judas, would send funds each week to those in need.
- Thomas Didymus served as the itinerary manager, responsible for arranging accommodations and selecting teaching locations to ensure a smooth and efficient travel schedule.
- James and Judas, the twin sons of Alpheus, were tasked with managing the crowds. Their responsibility was to appoint a sufficient number of ushers to maintain order among the crowds during the teachings.
- Simon Zelotes was responsible for overseeing recreation and play. He managed the Wednesday programs and also aimed to provide a few hours of relaxation and entertainment each day.

On Sunday, January 12, 27 CE, Jesus convened the twelve and formally appointed them as ambassadors and teachers. Shortly thereafter, they prepared to embark on their first public teaching tour in Jerusalem and Judea.

7.23 THE DISCIPLES

The followers learned from Jesus about the spiritual kingdom, while Jesus gained valuable insights from them regarding human nature. These twelve represented a diverse array of temperaments; they had not been molded into uniformity through education. The followers were neither ignorant nor uneducated. All of them, with the exception of the Alpheus twins, were graduates of synagogue schools, having received comprehensive training in the Hebrew scriptures as well as much of the contemporary knowledge of their time. Seven of them graduated from the Capernaum synagogue schools, which were regarded as the finest Jewish educational institutions in all of Galilee. From adolescence onward, they each experienced various opportunities to learn how to navigate life.

7.24 ANDREW

Andrew, the chairman of the corps, was born in Capernaum. He was the eldest child in a family of five, which included himself, his brother Simon, and three sisters. His father, who had passed away, had been a partner of Zebedee in the fish-drying business located in Bethsaida, the fishing harbor of Capernaum. At the time he became a follower, Andrew was unmarried and lived with his married brother, Simon Peter. Both brothers were fishermen and partners with James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

In 26 CE, the year he was chosen as a follower, Andrew was 33 years old, making him a full year older than Jesus and the eldest among the followers. He was the most capable of the twelve. With the exception of his oratory, he was on par with his peers in every conceivable skill. Andrew exemplified the qualities of a well-rounded, even-tempered, self-made, and successful individual engaged in modest pursuits. Although Jesus never assigned Andrew a nickname or a fraternal title, the other followers soon began to refer to him by a term equivalent to Chief.

Andrew was an effective organizer and an even better administrator. He was one of the four core followers in Jesus' inner circle. However, his appointment by Jesus as the leader of the group required him to remain engaged with his brethren, while the other three maintained a more intimate relationship with Jesus. Throughout his time, Andrew consistently served as the dean of the corps.

Although Andrew was never a particularly influential lecturer, he was an effective personal worker. He served as the chief supporter of Jesus' initiative to implement the personal work program for training the twelve as messengers of the new teachings.

Whether Jesus taught privately to his followers or addressed the multitude, Andrew was typically well-informed about the events taking place. He was an insightful leader and an effective administrator. He made prompt decisions on every issue presented to him, unless he deemed the matter to be beyond his authority; in such cases, he would take it directly to Jesus.

As the first chosen follower, Andrew brought his brother, Simon, to Jesus, who would become one of the most influential teachers. Andrew never felt irritated by spending the rest of his life being introduced as “Simon’s brother.” Among all the ambassadors, Andrew was the most astute judge of character. He possessed a remarkable ability to uncover the hidden potential and latent talents of young people. Andrew and Peter were markedly different in character and temperament, yet they worked exceptionally well together. Andrew never felt envious of Peter’s oratorical skills. It is uncommon to witness an older man of Andrew’s disposition exerting such a profound influence over a younger and talented sibling. Both Andrew and Peter seemed entirely free of jealousy concerning each other’s abilities and accomplishments. Andrew was a man of clear insight, logical reasoning, and decisive action, whose remarkable strength of character resided in his exceptional stability. However, his temperamental drawback was a lack of enthusiasm; he often struggled to inspire his associates with genuine praise. This reluctance to acknowledge the commendable achievements of his friends stemmed from his aversion to flattery and insincerity.

7.25 SIMON PETER

When Simon joined the followers, he was thirty years old. He was married, had three children, and lived in Bethsaida, near Capernaum. His brother, Andrew, and his mother-in-law resided with him. Both Peter and Andrew were fishing partners with the sons of Zebedee. Simon’s wife was an exceptionally capable woman. For years, she served diligently as a member of the women’s corps. *[When Simon was driven out of Jerusalem, she accompanied him on all his journeys and teaching excursions. On the day her illustrious husband was executed, she was thrown to the wild beasts in the arena at Rome.]*

Jesus had known him for some time before Andrew introduced him as the second of the followers. When Jesus gave Simon the name Peter, he did so with a smile; it was a nickname. Peter was well known among his friends for being erratic and impulsive. Later, Jesus ascribed a new and profound significance to this casually given nickname.

Peter was a man of impulse and an optimist. He had grown up indulging in strong emotions, which often led him into difficulties due to his tendency to speak without thinking. This thoughtlessness not only caused him problems but also created ongoing challenges for his friends and associates, resulting in numerous mild rebukes from his teacher. Peter encountered fewer issues stemming from his impulsive speech because he learned to discuss many of his plans and ideas with his brother, Andrew, before making public proposals.

Peter was a fluent and eloquent speaker, renowned for his dramatic flair. He was also a natural and inspirational leader, quick to think but not necessarily a profound reasoner. He posed numerous questions, more than all of his followers combined. While the majority of these inquiries were insightful and relevant, many were thoughtless. Although Peter did not possess a profound intellect, he had a solid understanding of his own thoughts. Consequently, he was a man of swift decisions and prompt actions. While others stood in astonishment at the sight of Jesus on the beach, Peter leaped into the water and swam ashore to meet him. Peter exhibited a troubling tendency to vacillate, abruptly swinging from one extreme to another. Initially, he refused to allow Jesus to wash his feet, only to later plead to be washed all over upon hearing Jesus' response. However, Jesus understood that Peter's shortcomings stemmed from his intellect rather than his heart. He embodied one of the most perplexing combinations of courage and cowardice. His greatest strengths were his loyalty and friendship; Peter genuinely loved Jesus. He could endure persecution and any direct assault, yet he faltered and shrank in the face of ridicule. Despite this remarkable strength of devotion, he was so unstable and inconstant that he allowed a girl to provoke him into denying his teacher.

He was the first among the followers to make a wholehearted confession of Jesus' dual nature, encompassing both humanity and divinity, and the first, excluding Judas, to deny him. Peter was not much of a dreamer; he preferred to remain in the ecstasy of spiritual highs rather than descend into the mundane and matter-of-fact world of reality.

In following Jesus, both literally and figuratively, he either led the procession or trailed behind - “following afar off.” Nevertheless, he was the foremost teacher among the twelve; he contributed as much as any other individual to publicize the new teachings and disseminate their message to the farthest corners of the earth within a single generation.

7.26 JAMES ZEBEDEE

James, the elder of the two brothers, the sons of Zebedee, whom Jesus nicknamed “sons of thunder,” was thirty years old when he became a follower. He was married, had four children, and lived with his parents on the outskirts of Capernaum, near Bethsaida. As a fisherman, he worked alongside his younger brother, John, and was associated with Andrew and Simon Peter. James and John took pride in having known Jesus longer than any of the other followers.

This capable follower was a temperamental contradiction; he possessed two natures, both driven by intense emotions. He was particularly fervent when his indignation was fully aroused, exhibiting a fiery temper when provoked. Once the storm had passed, he often justified and excused his anger, claiming it was merely a manifestation of righteous indignation. James’s personality resembled Andrew’s, with the exception of these periodic outbursts of wrath. While he required Andrew’s discretion and insight into human nature, he was a far superior public speaker. Next to Peter, and possibly Matthew, James was the best public orator among the twelve.

James possessed a profound understanding of human nature and maintained harmonious relationships with the adaptable Andrew, the impulsive Peter, and his introspective brother, John. Although he was often quiet and reserved, he displayed bravery and determination when his convictions were provoked and challenged. While James was not inherently moody, he could be reticent one day and an engaging conversationalist and storyteller the next. He typically communicated openly with Jesus; however, among the twelve, he could remain silent

for days at a time. His primary weakness lay in these episodes of inexplicable silence.

Though James and John encountered challenges in their collaboration, their ability to coexist was genuinely inspiring. Although they did not attain the same level of success as Andrew and Peter, they performed significantly better than one might typically expect from two brothers, especially considering their strong-willed and determined personalities. Remarkably, these two exhibited much greater tolerance for each other than they did for strangers.

James Zebedee was a thoughtful and strategic planner. Along with Andrew, he was one of the more level-headed members of the group. He was a vigorous individual but never rushed. He served as an excellent stabilizing force for Simon Peter. Modest and unassuming, he was a dedicated servant and an unpretentious worker, seeking no special recognition once he understood the true significance of his contributions.

7.27 JOHN ZEBEDEE

When he became a follower, John was twenty-four years old and the youngest of the twelve. He was unmarried and lived with his parents in Bethsaida, where he worked as a fisherman alongside his brother James, in partnership with Andrew and Peter. Both before and after becoming a follower, John served as the personal representative of Jesus in matters concerning his family, and he continued to uphold this responsibility for as long as Mary, the mother of Jesus, was alive.

He was the youngest member of his father's family, perhaps a bit spoiled and perhaps indulged a little too much. However, the John of later years was a very different person from the self-admiring and capricious young man who initially joined Jesus' followers.

John possessed many admirable character traits; however, one less commendable trait was his excessive, yet often well-concealed, conceit. His long association with Jesus brought about significant changes in his character. Because John was closer to Jesus than any other mortal and served as his chosen personal representative in numerous matters, it is

not surprising that he came to see himself as whom Jesus loved. Jesus never exhibited favoritism or loved any of his friends more than the others. The fact that John was one of Jesus' three personal aides further contributed to this misconception.

John was a man of few words, except when his temper was provoked. He was contemplative but spoke infrequently. As he aged, his temper became more subdued and better controlled; however, he never completely overcame his reluctance to engage in conversation. Despite this reticence, he possessed a remarkable and creative imagination.

There was another side to John that one might not expect to find in this quiet and introspective individual: he was exceedingly intolerant. In this regard, he and James were quite similar; both desired to call down fire from above upon the heads of the disrespectful Samaritans. When John encountered some strangers teaching in Jesus' name, he promptly forbade them. However, he was not the only one among the twelve who exhibited this kind of inflated self-esteem and sense of superiority.

John exhibited remarkable and audacious courage, a quality that few of his fellows possessed. He was the only follower who accompanied Jesus on the night of his arrest, bravely entering the very jaws of death alongside him. John remained close by until the final earthly moments. He was found faithfully fulfilling his responsibility regarding Jesus' mother and was prepared to receive any additional instructions that might be given during the last moments of Jesus' mortal life. John was thoroughly dependable; he typically sat at Jesus' right hand during meals with the twelve. Furthermore, he was the first of the twelve to genuinely and fully believe that Jesus reappeared, and he was the first to recognize Jesus when he saw his spirit on the seashore.

John's life was profoundly influenced by witnessing Jesus live without a home, notably as he recognized how faithfully Jesus provided for the care of his mother and family. Jesus' consistent willingness to defer even his slightest wishes to the will of God left a deep impression on John, resulting in significant and lasting changes in his character that were evident for the remainder of his life.

7.28 PHILIP OF BETHSAIDA

Philip of Bethsaida had been aware of Jesus for some time, but it had not dawned on him that Jesus was truly an extraordinary man until that day in the Jordan Valley when Jesus said, "Follow me." Philip was also somewhat influenced by the fact that Andrew, Peter, James, and John had joined Jesus.

Philip was twenty-seven years old when he joined the followers. He had recently married but had no children at that time. Philip came from a family of seven, which included three boys and four girls. He was the second oldest and baptized his entire family. Philip's family were fishermen. His father was a capable and thoughtful man, while his mother came from a modest background.

When the followers were organized for service, Philip was appointed as a steward, and he excelled in this role. His most notable characteristic was his methodical thoroughness; he approached tasks with both mathematical precision and systematic rigor. Although Philip was not inclined to undertake grand endeavors, he possessed a remarkable ability to manage small tasks with great care and effectiveness. During his four years of service, he only failed to provide food to meet everyone's needs on a few occasions. Even the numerous emergency demands that arose in their daily lives rarely caught him unprepared; he handled these situations with intelligence and efficiency.

The weak point in his character was his complete lack of imagination. He was mathematically inclined in the abstract but lacked the ability for constructive, imaginative thinking. He possessed little discernment and struggled to grasp the dramatic possibilities of any given situation. He was not pessimistic; instead, he was simply prosaic. He would not hesitate to interrupt Jesus during one of the teacher's most profound discourses to ask what seemed like a foolish question. However, Jesus never reprimanded him for such thoughtlessness; instead, he was patient and considerate of Philip's inability to

comprehend the deeper meanings of his teachings. Jesus understood that if he were to rebuke Philip for asking these seemingly annoying questions, he would not only wound this honest soul but also discourage him from ever feeling free to ask questions again. Jesus aimed to encourage all people to approach him and feel comfortable bringing their questions and problems. After all, Jesus was genuinely more interested in Philip's inquiries than in the lesson he might be teaching. He was supremely interested in all kinds of people.

There were numerous ordinary men and women among the crowds who came to hear Jesus teach. They found great comfort in seeing someone like themselves elevated to a respected position within Jesus' circle; they drew courage from the knowledge that someone akin to them had already attained a prominent place. As Jesus patiently listened to Philip's questions, he gained valuable insights into the workings of the human mind.

This steward could have been a more effective public speaker, but he was a highly persuasive and successful personal worker. He was not easily discouraged; instead, he was diligent and tenacious in all his endeavors. He possessed the rare and valuable gift of invitation, often saying, his first convert, Nathaniel, sought to debate the merits and shortcomings of Jesus of Nazareth. He was not a dogmatic teacher who urged his listeners to do this or that. Instead, he approached every situation in his work with an invitation: "I will show you the way." This was his effective technique in all forms and phases of teaching.

The inability of Philip to adapt to a new situation was clearly demonstrated when the Greeks approached him in Jerusalem, saying, "Sir, we desire to see Jesus." While Philip would have readily responded to any Jew asking such a question, these men were foreigners. Consequently, Philip needed assistance in recalling his superiors' instructions regarding such matters. Therefore, he decided to consult the chief, Andrew, who then escorted the inquiring Greeks to Jesus.

7.29 NATHANIEL

Nathaniel, the sixth and final follower chosen by Jesus himself, was brought to Him by his friend Philip. He had been involved in several business ventures alongside Philip, and together they were on their way to see John the Baptist when they encountered Jesus.

When Nathaniel joined the followers, he was twenty-five years old and the second youngest in the group. As the youngest child in a family of seven, he was unmarried and the sole support of his elderly and infirm parents, with whom he lived in Cana. His siblings were either married or deceased, and none lived nearby. Nathaniel and Judas Iscariot were the two most educated men among the twelve. Nathaniel had contemplated pursuing a career as a merchant.

Jesus did not personally assign Nathaniel a nickname, but the twelve soon began to refer to him in ways that signified honesty and sincerity. He was described as “without guile,” which became his defining virtue, embodying both honesty and sincerity.

The weakness of his character was his pride; he took great pride in his family, city, reputation, and nation, all of which were commendable qualities if not taken to excess. Nathaniel often went to extremes with his personal biases and was prone to prejudging individuals based on preconceived notions. He did not hesitate to ask the question, even before he had met Jesus: “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” Nathaniel was not obstinate; despite his pride, he was quick to change his mind once he looked into Jesus’ face.

In many respects, Nathaniel was the unconventional genius among the twelve. He was both a philosopher and a dreamer, yet remarkably practical. He oscillated between periods of profound philosophical contemplation and moments of rare, droll humor. When in the right mood, he was arguably the best storyteller among the twelve; Jesus greatly enjoyed listening to Nathaniel’s discourse on both serious and lighthearted topics. Nathaniel gradually began to take Jesus and the new teachings more seriously, although he could have benefited from taking himself more seriously as well. Often, when Jesus was away on the mountain and tensions were rising among the followers, Nathaniel

would ease the atmosphere with a touch of philosophy or a burst of good humor.

Nathaniel's responsibility was to care for the families of the twelve. He often missed group meetings because, upon hearing of any illness or unusual occurrence affecting one of his charges, he wasted no time rushing to their home. The twelve felt confident that their families' well-being was secure in Nathaniel's capable hands.

7.30 MATTHEW LEVI

Matthew Levi, the seventh follower, was chosen by Andrew. He hailed from a family of tax collectors, also known as publicans, and worked as a customs officer in Capernaum, where he lived. At the age of thirty-one, he was married and had four children. Matthew was a man of moderate wealth, the only one among the group with substantial means. He was a skilled businessperson and an adept socializer, possessing a remarkable ability to forge friendships and maintain harmonious relationships with a diverse array of individuals.

Andrew appointed Matthew as the financial representative for the followers. He served as the fiscal agent and public spokesperson for the organization. Matthew was an astute judge of human nature and an exceptionally effective propagandist. He was a devoted follower, becoming increasingly committed to Jesus' mission and the principles of the new teachings. Although Jesus never assigned Matthew a nickname, his fellow followers commonly referred to him as the "money-getter."

His greatest strength was his unwavering devotion to the cause. The fact that he, a former tax collector, had been embraced by Jesus and his companions filled him with immense gratitude. However, it took some time for the other followers, particularly Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, to come to terms with the publican's presence.

Matthew's weakness was his shortsighted and materialistic perspective on life. However, as the months passed, he made significant progress in these areas. He had to forgo many of the most valuable lessons because it was his responsibility to replenish the treasury.

Though Matthew had a complicated past, he presented himself exceptionally well, and over time, his associates grew proud of the publican's performances. He was among those who meticulously documented the sayings of Jesus. These notes served as the foundation for Isador's subsequent narrative of the sayings and actions of Jesus, which later became known as the Gospel of Matthew.

Matthew, the remarkable and benevolent businessman and customs collector of Capernaum, served as a conduit, leading thousands of other businessmen, public officials, and politicians through the ages to hear the compelling voice of Jesus saying, "Follow me." His presence among the twelve played a crucial role in keeping the doors of new teachings wide open for countless downhearted and marginalized souls who had long considered themselves beyond the reach of religious consolation. Matthew was undoubtedly a shrewd politician; however, he demonstrated profound loyalty to Jesus and an unwavering commitment to ensuring that the messengers were adequately funded. He accepted voluntary contributions from devoted followers and those who directly listened to Jesus' teachings, but he never publicly solicited donations from the general public. Instead, he conducted all his financial activities discreetly and personally, primarily raising funds from a more affluent group of interested supporters.

He devoted nearly his entire modest fortune to the work of Jesus and his followers; however, they remained unaware of this generosity, with the exception of Jesus, who was fully aware of it. Matthew openly hesitated to contribute to the funds, fearing that Jesus and his associates might perceive his money as tainted. Consequently, he often donated in the names of others. At times, when he became deeply engaged in Jesus' teachings, he chose to stay and listen to the instruction, fully aware that he would have to personally compensate for his failure to solicit the necessary funds. All the followers passed away without ever realizing that Matthew was such a benefactor. Later, when he proclaimed the new teachings, he was virtually penniless.

7.31 THOMAS DIDYMUS

Thomas, the eighth follower, was chosen by Philip of Bethsaida. He later became known as “Doubting Thomas,” but his fellow followers did not regard him as a chronic doubter. Although he possessed a logical and skeptical personality, his courageous loyalty prevented those who knew him well from viewing him as a skeptic. In some respects, Thomas was similar to Philip; he also sought evidence, but his outward expressions of doubt arose from entirely different intellectual processes. Thomas was analytical, not merely skeptical.

When Thomas joined the followers, he was twenty-nine years old, married, and the father of four children. Previously, he had worked as a carpenter and stonemason; however, he had more recently taken up fishing and resided in Tarichea, a village located on the west bank of the Jordan River, where it flows out of the Sea of Galilee. He was regarded as the leading citizen of this small village. Although he had limited formal education, he possessed a sharp analytical mind and was the son of exceptional parents who lived in Tiberias.

Thomas’s early home life was troubled; his parents were not entirely happy in their marriage, and this discontent would influence his adult experiences. He grew up with a disagreeable and quarrelsome disposition. Even his wife felt a sense of relief when he joined the followers, as she found comfort in the thought that her pessimistic husband would be away from home most of the time.

The loss of his twin sister at the age of nine inflicted profound sorrow during his youth and contributed to his temperamental challenges in later life. During episodes of deep depression, he often sought to avoid direct contact with Jesus. However, Jesus was fully aware of his struggles and offered understanding and sympathy to his followers during these times of affliction and doubt. Occasionally, Thomas would request permission from Andrew to spend a day or two alone. Yet, he soon realized that this approach was unwise; he discovered early on that it was best to stay engaged with his work and remain close to his associates when he felt downhearted. Despite the turmoil in his emotional life, he remained a devoted follower.

His greatest weakness was his tendency to doubt, a struggle he never fully overcame throughout his life. Thomas also exhibited a suspicious nature, which made it challenging for others to interact with him harmoniously. Initially, Peter was quite upset with Thomas, expressing to his brother, Andrew, that Thomas was “mean and always suspicious.” However, as his associates became better acquainted with Thomas, they grew to appreciate him more. They discovered that he was exceptionally honest and unwavering loyal. He served as a litmus test for Jesus and his fellow followers; if Jesus and his mission had not been genuine, they would not have been able to retain a man like Thomas from beginning to end. Thomas possessed a keen and reliable sense of truth. He would have abandoned them all at the first sign of fraud or deception.

He was rapidly losing faith in his peers when he became associated with the twelve and, consequently, came into contact with the noble character of Jesus. This association with Jesus began to transform Thomas's entire disposition and to bring about significant changes in his mental responses to others.

In the organization of the twelve, Thomas was responsible for arranging and managing the itinerary, showcasing his skills as a director of the corps' activities and movements. He was an effective executive and a shrewd businessman; however, his fluctuating moods often impeded his performance. One day, he would display one persona, and the next day, another. Initially, he leaned toward melancholic brooding, but his interactions with Jesus and the other followers significantly alleviated this morbid introspection.

Jesus greatly valued Thomas and engaged in numerous lengthy, personal conversations with him. His presence among the followers provided significant comfort to all sincere doubters. It encouraged many troubled minds to embrace the new teachings, even if they could not fully comprehend all aspects of Jesus' message. Thomas's inclusion among the twelve signified that Jesus loved even those who doubted sincerely. He likely possessed the most profound intellectual understanding of Jesus among the twelve.

In the councils of the twelve, Thomas consistently advocated for a safety-first policy. However, if his conservative stance was voted down or overruled, he was always the first to implement the agreed-upon program fearlessly. Time and again, he stood against certain projects, deeming them foolhardy and presumptuous. He would debate passionately until the bitter end, but when Andrew put the proposition to a vote, or when the twelve chose to proceed with a course of action he had vehemently opposed, Thomas was the first to say, "Let's go!" He was a gracious loser, holding no grudges and nursing no wounded feelings. Although he frequently opposed allowing Jesus to expose himself to danger, when Jesus chose to take such risks, Thomas always rallied the followers with his courageous words: "Come on, let's go and die with him." His personal physical courage was such that he was among the bravest of the twelve.

7.32 SIMON THE ZELOT

Simon the Zealot, the eleventh, was selected by Simon Peter. He was a capable individual who lived with his family in Capernaum. At the age of twenty-eight, he joined the group of followers. Known for his passionate disposition, he often spoke impulsively. Before fully committing himself to the patriotic cause of the Zealots, he had worked as a merchant in Capernaum.

Simon was responsible for organizing the group's diversions and leisure activities, and he demonstrated exceptional efficiency as a coordinator of play and recreational pursuits for the twelve members. Simon's greatest strength was his inspirational loyalty. When followers encountered someone who struggled with indecision about embracing the new teachings, they would call upon Simon. Typically, he could dispel any doubts and resolve all uncertainty in a few minutes.

Simon's significant weakness was his material-mindedness. He struggled to transition quickly from a Jewish nationalist to a spiritually oriented internationalist. Four years proved insufficient for such an

intellectual and emotional transformation; nevertheless, Jesus remained patient with him. Although Simon was a fervent revolutionary and a fearless advocate for change, he gradually tempered his fiery disposition, ultimately becoming a powerful and effective teacher of goodwill on earth. Simon was an exceptional debater who enjoyed engaging in arguments. When addressing the legalistic perspectives of educated Jews or the intellectual disputes of the Greeks, Simon was consistently entrusted with the task.

He was a rebel by nature and an iconoclast by training; yet, Jesus won him over to the higher ideals of the spiritual kingdom and human fellowship. He had always aligned himself with the party of protest, but he now embraced the party of progress - an unlimited and eternal progression of spirit and truth. Simon was a man of deep loyalties, warm personal devotion, and profound love for Jesus.

Jesus engaged in numerous discussions with Simon, yet he never fully succeeded in transforming this fervent nationalist into an internationalist. Jesus often conveyed to Simon that it was commendable to seek improvements in social, economic, and political systems; however, he would always add, "That is not the concern of the spiritual kingdom. We must be devoted to fulfilling our Heavenly Father's will. Our mission is to serve as ambassadors of God's fatherhood and humanity's fellowship." Although it was challenging for Simon to comprehend, he gradually began to grasp the essence of Jesus' teachings.

7.33 AND 7.34 JAMES AND JUDAS APPHEUS

James and Judas, the sons of Alpheus and twin fishermen residing near Kheresa, were the ninth and tenth followers chosen by James and John Zebedee. At the time of their selection, both were twenty-six years old and married, with James having three children and Judas having two. These two men were nearly identical in personal appearance, mental characteristics, and levels of spiritual perception; what can be said of one equally applies to the other.

James and Judas, also known as Thaddeus and Lebbeus, were affectionately nicknamed by their fellow followers as lighthearted designations of mediocrity. They were regarded as “the least among all the followers,” a status they acknowledged and embraced with cheerfulness.

They were two ordinary fishermen who cherished their teacher, and in return, Jesus loved them. However, they never interrupted his discourses with questions. Although they understood little about the philosophical discussions or theological debates among the ambassadors, they took great joy in being counted among such a remarkable group of individuals. Andrew assigned them the responsibility of managing the crowds. They served as the chief ushers during the teaching sessions and acted as general helpers and errand runners for the twelve. They assisted Philip with supplies, delivered money to families on Nathaniel’s behalf, and were always prepared to lend a helping hand to any of the followers.

The multitude of ordinary people was greatly encouraged to see two individuals like themselves honored with positions among the followers. By their very acceptance as followers, these twins inspired many timid individuals to embrace the new teachings. The twins were good-natured helpers, and everyone adored them. Jesus welcomed these young men of modest talent into esteemed positions on his personal staff because he wished to extend the same invitation to countless other common and fearful souls in the world, encouraging them to join in active and faithful fellowship. Jesus did not look down upon ordinary individuals; instead, he recognized their generosity and kindness.

James Alpheus especially loved Jesus for his simplicity. Although these twins could not fully grasp the complexities of Jesus’ mind, they did understand the empathetic connection between themselves and the heart of their teacher. They had faith in Jesus.

7.35 JUDAS ISCARIOT

Judas Iscariot, the twelfth, was chosen by Nathaniel. He was born in Kerioth, a small town in southern Judea. As a child, his parents

relocated to Jericho, where he spent his formative years. His father was involved in various business enterprises, but Judas eventually became captivated by the teachings and work of John the Baptist.

When Nathaniel met Judas at Tarichea, he sought employment with a fish-drying enterprise located at the southern end of the Sea of Galilee. At the age of thirty and unmarried, he joined the group of followers. He was the most educated member among the twelve and the only Judean in the group. Judas displayed many outward traits of culture and possessed well-developed habits of discipline. He was a good thinker; however, he was not always genuinely honest.

Andrew appointed Judas as the treasurer of the twelve, a position for which he was exceptionally qualified. Until the time of the betrayal, Judas fulfilled the responsibilities of his office with integrity and remarkable efficiency. He was a skilled businessman, requiring tact, ability, patience, and meticulous dedication to manage the financial affairs of an idealist like Jesus, while also navigating the chaotic business methods of some of the other followers. Judas was indeed an exceptional executive, foresighted and capable as a financier. He was also a strong advocate for organization.

Judas consistently demonstrated financial loyalty to Jesus and his followers; money could never have been a motive for his betrayal. None of the twelve criticized Judas. To them, Judas Iscariot was an unparalleled treasurer, a knowledgeable individual, a loyal (albeit sometimes critical) follower, and, in every sense, a remarkable success. The followers admired Judas; he was truly one of them. He was regarded by eleven of the followers as the perfect man, the “one altogether lovely and the chiefest among ten thousand.”

Judas was an only child who, from a very young age, was pampered and spoiled. As he matured, he developed an inflated sense of self-importance and struggled with being a poor loser. His perceptions of fairness were distorted, and he often indulged in feelings of hatred and suspicion. Judas was adept at misinterpreting the words and actions of his friends. Throughout his life, he cultivated a habit of seeking revenge against those he believed had wronged him. He lacked a true

understanding of himself and was insincere in his self-reflection. Although Judas grew intellectually in his knowledge of Jesus' teachings, he made slow progress in developing his spiritual character, much like the other followers.

Judas believed in Jesus, but he did not truly love Him with his whole heart. To Jesus, Judas represented a test of faith. From the beginning, Jesus fully understood the weaknesses of this follower and was acutely aware of the risks associated with admitting him to fellowship. However, it is in Jesus' nature to offer every soul a full and equal opportunity for eternal life. Jesus wanted the mortals of this world to understand that when doubts arise regarding the sincerity and wholeheartedness of a creature's devotion to God, heaven's consistent practice is to fully welcome the uncertain candidate. The door to eternal life is wide open to all; "for whosoever will come there are no restrictions or qualifications" except for the belief of the one who approaches.

There was no specific trait of Jesus that Judas admired more than his generally appealing and exceptionally charismatic personality. However, Judas could never overcome his Judean prejudices against his Galilean associates. This self-satisfied Judean often criticized Jesus internally, harboring the belief that Jesus was timid and somewhat hesitant to assert his power and authority.

Judas increasingly became a brooder, consumed by personal disappointment and ultimately succumbing to resentment. His feelings had been hurt numerous times, leading him to develop an abnormal suspicion of his closest friends, including Jesus. He became fixated on the idea of revenge, willing to betray his associates and his teacher to achieve it. However, these wicked and dangerous thoughts did not crystallize until the day a grateful woman anointed Jesus' feet with an expensive box of perfume. Judas perceived this act as wasteful, and it became unbearable when Jesus publicly dismissed his protest in front of everyone. This event catalyzed a lifetime's worth of accumulated hate, hurt, malice, prejudice, jealousy, and a desire for revenge, prompting him to seek retribution.

Jesus repeatedly warned Judas, both privately and publicly, that he was straying from the right path. However, these warnings often proved ineffective against the bitterness inherent in human nature. Jesus did everything within his power, while respecting humanity's moral freedom, to dissuade Judas from making the wrong choice. Nevertheless, Judas engaged in a base and shameful conspiracy to betray Jesus, swiftly putting his nefarious plan into action. Throughout the unfolding of his anger-driven schemes, he experienced fleeting moments of regret and shame. During these moments of clarity, he weakly entertained the notion that Jesus might, at the last moment, use his power to become The Deliverer.

7.36 INSTRUCTION OF THE TWELVE

On Sunday, January 12, 27 CE, Jesus gathered his followers for instruction as public teachers. The twelve followers anticipated being called at any moment, so they remained close to the shore that morning to fish. Several of them lingered near the water, repairing their nets and tending to their fishing equipment. Jesus brought together the other followers in pairs. Once he had assembled all twelve, he journeyed with them to the highlands north of Capernaum, where he prepared and motivated them for their formal instruction.

All twelve followers were silent for once; even Peter was in a contemplative mood. They distanced themselves from the crowd with Jesus to participate in a solemn ceremony of personal consecration and collective dedication.

7.37 MORNING INSTRUCTIONS

Before the formal service, Jesus spoke to the twelve as they were seated around him, discussing their new responsibilities.

“My brethren, the hour for the new teachings has arrived. As God’s ambassador, I have gathered you here today. Some of you may remember hearing me speak in the synagogue when you were first asked to join us. Each of you has deepened your understanding of these new teachings through our work together in the cities surrounding the Sea of Galilee.

“However, I have something more to share with you at this moment. The spirit resides in the hearts of all people and is destined to be an everlasting dominion. There shall be no end for those souls who desire to fulfill his divine will. Many will come from the East and the West to sit down with us, while many of the children of Abraham will refuse to join the spirit within the hearts of the children of God.

“The divine spirit comes to enlighten minds and govern the hearts of people through the fellowship of love, where righteousness prevails. Its battle cry shall be: ‘Peace on earth and goodwill to all.’ This new teaching, which you are soon to proclaim, embodies the desires of people across all ages, represents the hope of the entire world, and fulfills the wise promises of all the prophets.

“However, a significant challenge awaits you and all others who wish to embrace this new teaching. Faith will guide you through its gates, but everyone must persist in the ongoing journey of divine fellowship. Those who choose to follow God’s will shall enter the spiritual kingdom.

“Your message to the world should be: Seek first God and his righteousness, and in finding him, all other things essential to your soul’s eternal survival will be secured. Then, seek to serve God’s other children.

Jesus continued:

“It is clear that God will not be manifest through outward displays of power or inappropriate demonstrations. You are not to depart with the announcement of an earthly kingdom, for the kingdom you teach is the presence of God within you.

“Whoever desires to be great in the will of our God must become a servant to all; and whoever wishes to be first among you must become the servant of all. However, once you enter the spiritual kingdom, you are no longer servants but children of the living God.

“Thus, this progress in our world will continue until it eventually breaks down every barrier and leads all people to know God. What your eyes now behold - a small beginning with twelve ordinary men - shall multiply and grow until the earth is eventually filled with the spirit of God.

“It will not be solely through the words you speak, but by the lives you lead, that people will recognize you have been with me and have grasped the essence of the new teachings. While I do not intend to impose heavy burdens upon your minds, I am about to place upon your souls the serious responsibility of representing these new teachings in the world as I am about to depart from you.”

And when he had finished speaking, he stood up.

7.38 THE BLESSING

Jesus instructed the ambassadors to kneel in a circle around him. He then placed his hands on the head of each follower, beginning with Judas Iscariot and concluding with Andrew. Afterward, he extended his hands and said: “Our Heavenly Father, I now present to you these men, my messengers. From among your children on earth, these twelve have been chosen to go forth and represent you and me. Love them and be with them as you have loved and been with me. Now, Heavenly Father, grant them wisdom as I entrust the affairs of the new teachings into their hands. Once again, Heavenly Father, I thank you for these men, and I ask you to protect them as we continue to fulfill your work.”

When Jesus had finished speaking, the followers remained, each man bowing in his place. Several minutes passed before even Peter dared to lift his eyes to look upon Jesus. One by one, they embraced Jesus, but not a single word was spoken. A profound silence enveloped them.

7.39 AFTERNOON INSTRUCTIONS

Later that afternoon, Jesus addressed the twelve:

“Now you are ambassadors of the new teachings. You are men among men, but also enlightened citizens among the people of this world. It is no longer sufficient for you to live as you did before this moment; henceforth, you must live as those who have experienced the glories of a better life and are now representatives of the spiritual realm.

“It is expected that more is required of the teacher than of the pupil. Similarly, greater expectations are placed on the citizens of heaven than on those on earth. Some of the concepts I am about to share with you may seem challenging, but you have chosen to be God’s representatives. As such agents, you will be obligated to adhere to the teachings and practices that embody these ideals of mortal living in the world, which I will exemplify through my earthly life.”

Jesus inspired his followers by highlighting the possible outcomes of their future endeavors:

“Go forth to proclaim liberty to the spiritual captives, joy to those in bondage to fear, and to heal the sick in accordance with the will of our Heavenly Father. When you encounter my children in distress, offer them words of encouragement.

“Happy are the poor in spirit and the humble, for theirs is heaven. Happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Happy are the meek, for they shall inherit a spiritual world. Happy are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Happy are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Happy are those who weep, for they shall receive the spirit of joy. Happy are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Happy are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God. Happy are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is heaven.

“Happy are you when people revile you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you—rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven.

“My brethren, as I send you out, you are the salt of the earth, salt with a saving flavor. However, if this salt has lost its flavor, how can it be used? It is good for nothing but to be cast out and trampled underfoot by men.

“You are the spiritual light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a candle and place it under a bushel; instead, they put it on a candlestick, which gives light to all in the entire house. Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and be guided by our Heavenly Father. I am sending you out into the world to represent me and serve as ambassadors of our Heavenly Father. As you go forth, place your trust in God, whose messengers you are.

“Do not forcibly resist injustice; do not place your trust in mere human strength. If your neighbor strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. In kindness and mercy, minister to all who are in distress and in need. Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you and pray for those who mistreat you. And what I would do to your fellows, you also do to them.

“The sun shines on both the righteous and the unrighteous; similarly, it rains on the just and the unjust. You are now the ambassadors of these new teachings.”

Jesus then provided guidance on how to serve as a representative of the Heavenly Father:

“You are expected to teach others, not to judge them. If you seek understanding from your peers, extend understanding to all. Do not make the mistake of trying to remove a speck from your brother’s eye while there is a log in your own; once you have removed the log from your own eye, you will be better able to help remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

“Discern the truth clearly; live the righteous life fearlessly; and you shall be ambassadors of our Heavenly Father. You have heard it said, ‘If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the pit.’ If you wish to guide others in the new teachings, you must walk in the clear light of living truth yourselves. In all matters concerning the new teachings, I urge you to exercise sound judgment and keen wisdom. Do not present these teachings to dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample your gems underfoot and turn to attack you.

“I warn you against false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Do people gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles? When entering the spiritual kingdom, it is the motive that matters.

“God examines the hearts of individuals, perceiving them through their innermost desires and genuine intentions. Those of you who receive this calling and faithfully fulfill their duty before others will discover a rich opportunity to serve and enter the spiritual kingdom.”

Never before had the followers heard Jesus speak in such a manner; he addressed them with unparalleled authority. As they descended the mountain at sundown, no one dared to ask Jesus a question.

7.40 SERMON ON THE MOUNT

These instructions given to his associates, which later followers referred to as the “Sermon on the Mount,” constituted Jesus’ commission to those tasked with disseminating his teachings and embodying new principles in the world. This uplifting guidance offered numerous valuable insights for all, but it was specifically intended as Jesus’ charge to these twelve followers. The teachings, later known as the “Beatitudes,” were founded on belief and love rather than on law, ethics, or obligation.

7.41 EVENING INSTRUCTIONS

Sunday evening, upon arriving at Zebedee's home from the highlands north of Capernaum, Jesus and the twelve disciples shared a simple meal. Afterward, while Jesus walked along the beach, the disciples engaged in conversation. Following a brief discussion, the twins built a small fire to provide warmth and additional light. Andrew then went to find Jesus, and upon catching up with him, he expressed that they could not fully comprehend the new teachings. They could only begin this work once they received further instructions. He invited Jesus to join them in the garden to help them understand his words.

And Jesus went with Andrew to meet the disciples. Upon entering the garden, he gathered the followers around him and continued to teach them, saying:

“You find it challenging to receive my message because you tend to build the new teachings directly upon the old. However, you must start anew, like little children, and be willing to trust the teachings and believe in God. The new teachings cannot be made to conform to what has come before.

“Please do not make the mistake of thinking that I have set aside the law and the prophets; I have not come to destroy but to fulfill, expand, and illuminate. I do not come to transgress the law but rather to inscribe these new ‘rules’ on the tablets of your hearts. I ask of you a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of those who seek to obtain God's favor through alms giving, prayer, and fasting. If you wish to enter the spiritual kingdom, you must possess a righteousness rooted in love, fairness, and truth - the sincere desire to do the will of our Heavenly Father.”

Then Simon Peter said that if there was a new rule, they wanted to hear it. Jesus answered Peter:

“You have heard it said by those who teach the law: ‘You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be subject to judgment.’ However, look beyond the act to uncover the motive. In the eyes of God, anyone who is angry with their sibling is at risk. Those who harbor hatred in their hearts and plan vengeance in their minds should take heed. While it may be best for society to judge individuals by their actions, our Heavenly Father perceives you by your intentions.

“You have heard the law teachers say: ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that in the eyes of God, every man who gazes upon a woman with the intent to lust after her has already committed adultery in his heart. People can only judge others by their actions, but God examines the hearts of children and considers their intentions and true desires.”

Jesus intended to continue discussing the other old rules when James Zebedee interrupted him, asking what they should teach the people regarding divorce. Should they say that a man can divorce his wife as Moses had instructed? When Jesus heard this question, he responded:

“I do not intend to legislate but to enlighten. I do not intend to reform the kingdoms of this world but rather to reveal a spiritual kingdom. It is not the will of God that I should yield to the temptation to teach you rules of government, trade, or social behavior that, while they may be beneficial today, would be unsuitable for another society or era. I am here solely to comfort the minds, liberate the spirits, and preserve the souls of humanity.

“If I must address the question of divorce, while Moses permitted such practices, it was not so in the days of Adam and the Garden. You must always recognize the two perspectives on all human conduct: the human and the

divine; the ways of the flesh and the way of the spirit; the viewpoint of earthly time and the viewpoint of eternity.

“However, you may struggle with the teachings because you need to interpret the message with caution; you are slow to grasp the essence of the instruction. Again, remember that you are my messengers; you are obligated to live your lives as I have lived mine. You are God's representatives, but do not make the mistake of expecting everyone to live as you do in every aspect.”

Although the twelve could not fully comprehend all that he taught them, his instruction was genuinely beneficial to them. Nathaniel then asked about the place of justice. The law of Moses states, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ What should we say? Jesus answered:

“You shall return good for bad. My followers must not contend with others but should be gentle toward all. An eye for an eye shall not be your rule. The rulers of the earth may have such laws, but it shall not be so in the spiritual kingdom; understanding shall always guide evaluations, and love shall dictate conduct. If these teachings are difficult to accept, if you find the demands of following too challenging, you may choose to return to a less rigorous path.”

Upon hearing these startling words, the followers momentarily separated, but they soon returned. Peter stated that they would continue with him; not one of them would turn back. They were fully prepared to pay the additional price. They would be apostles, not merely followers. When Jesus heard this, he said:

“Be willing to accept your responsibilities and follow my teachings. Perform your good deeds in secret. When you give alms, let not your left hand know what your right hand is doing.

“And when you pray, withdraw to a quiet place and avoid vain repetitions and meaningless phrases. Remember that our Heavenly Father knows your heart even before you do.

“And do not fast with a sad countenance to be seen by others. As my chosen followers, set apart for your service, do not store up treasures on earth. Instead, through your selfless service, accumulate treasures in the spiritual kingdom, for where your treasures are, there your hearts will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body; if your eye is generous, your whole body will be full of spiritual light. But if your eye is selfish, your whole body will be filled with darkness. If the very light within you is turned to darkness, how great is that darkness!”

And then Thomas asked Jesus whether the twelve should continue to have everything in common. Jesus replied:

“Yes, my brethren, I would like us to live together as one united family. You are entrusted with significant responsibilities, and I seek your unwavering commitment. It has been wisely stated, ‘No person can serve two masters.’ You cannot sincerely serve God while only pursuing material wealth. Having now fully committed to this work, do not be anxious about your lives; much less should you worry about what you will eat or drink, or what clothing you will wear.

“You have already learned that your willing hands and earnest hearts shall not go hungry. Now, as you prepare to devote all your energies to the work, be assured that our Heavenly Father will not overlook your earthly needs. Seek God first; when you have found him, all necessary things shall be provided to you. Therefore, do not be unduly anxious about tomorrow; focus on what is sufficient for today.”

When Jesus saw that they were inclined to stay up all night asking questions, he said to them: "My brethren, you are earthen vessels; you should go to your rest so that you are prepared for tomorrow's work."

But sleep had departed from their eyes. Peter ventured to request a private conversation due to his "troubled spirit." Jesus said: "Come with me, Peter." He led the way into the house. Peter returned from his teacher feeling much uplifted and greatly encouraged.

Then James decided to go in to speak with Jesus. Throughout the early morning hours, the other followers entered individually to converse with Jesus.

When everyone had held personal conferences with him, except for the twins who had fallen asleep, Andrew approached Jesus and informed him that the twins were resting in the garden by the fire. He asked if he should wake them to see if they would also like to speak with him. Jesus smiled and replied to Andrew, "They do well - trouble them not." As the night continued to pass, the light of a new day began to dawn.

7.42 THE WEEK FOLLOWING

After a few hours of sleep, when the twelve were gathered for a late breakfast with Jesus, he said: "Now you must begin teaching the good news and instructing others. Prepare to go to Jerusalem."

After Jesus had spoken, Thomas gathered the courage to suggest that they should be prepared to begin their work, but he feared they might not yet be able to undertake such a significant task. He asked Jesus if they could stay in the area for just a few more days before starting the work. When Jesus noticed that this same fear affected all of his companions, he replied: "It shall be as you have requested; we will remain here over the Sabbath day."

For weeks, small groups of earnest truth-seekers and curious spectators had been arriving in Bethsaida to see Jesus. Word about him had already spread throughout the countryside; inquisitive groups had traveled from cities as distant as Tyre, Sidon, Damascus, Caesarea, and Jerusalem.

Heretofore, Jesus had greeted these individuals and taught them the new lessons; however, he now entrusted this responsibility to the twelve. Andrew would select one of the followers and assign him to a group of visitors, and at times, all twelve were engaged in this work.

For two days, they worked diligently, teaching during the day and holding private conferences late into the night. On their holiday Wednesday, Jesus visited with Zebedee and Salome while sending his followers off to fishing, seek carefree change, or visit their families. On Thursday, they returned for three additional days of teaching.

One week of this diverse experience had a profound impact on the twelve; some even seemed overly self-assured. At the final conference, the night after the Sabbath, Peter and James approached Jesus, saying: “We are ready, let us now go forth.” To this, Jesus replied: “May your wisdom match your zeal, and may your courage compensate for your ignorance.”

7.43 TEACHINGS ON THE LAKE

Jesus recognized that the twelve were beginning to understand certain aspects of the concept of a spiritual kingdom. However, his friends needed to assimilate his teachings fully. To facilitate this, he provided special instructions to Peter, James, and John, hoping they could help clarify their companions’ understanding. Consequently, on Thursday afternoon, Jesus took a boat with Peter, James, and John and ventured out from the shore to further discuss the new teachings.

This four-hour conference encompassed numerous questions and answers and was summarized by Simon Peter for his brother, Andrew, the following morning:

- In response to numerous inquiries about frugality and thriftiness, he highlighted his experiences as a carpenter, boat maker, and fisherman, and meticulously organized the twelve.
- Jesus sought to clarify that the world should not be regarded as an enemy.
- He taught the importance of actively and attentively seeking God’s will. Jesus did not suggest that religion is humanity’s sole earthly pursuit; instead, he encouraged his followers to engage in the pursuit of genuine culture.

- He advocated for thoughtful consideration rather than unnecessary self-imposed anxiety and worry.
- Jesus refused to physically defend himself, and it seemed to his followers that he would be pleased if they adopted a similar approach.
- He instructed them not to resist wrongful actions forcefully and not to initiate conflict, but he did not teach passive tolerance of wrongdoing.
- He warned against the unethical practice of retaliation and made no allowance for revenge or the notion of getting even. He condemned the holding of grudges and rejected the principle of “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” as well as the concept of personal revenge, assigning such matters to the civil authorities.
- He endorsed the social punishment of wrongdoers and criminals, hinting that civil government could legally and ethically employ force to maintain social order and execute justice.
- He made it clear that his teachings were intended for individuals, not for the state.

Peter asked numerous questions and Jesus said: “I want to set people free so they can begin anew as little children, embarking on a new and better life.”

James discovered the exhilarating truth that Jesus desired God’s children to live as if they were already citizens of the spiritual kingdom.

Peter understood that the teachings they were about to proclaim represented a new beginning for human culture.

They all understood that Jesus recognized the uniqueness of each individual, which is why he consistently encouraged his followers to avoid conforming to a rigid set of standards. He aimed to allow each soul to evolve in its own manner, becoming a distinct and perfected individual in the sight of God. *[These lessons never solidified into creeds or theological doctrines during Jesus’ time.]*

7.44 THE DEDICATION

On the next Sabbath, Jesus dedicated his time to all of his followers, journeying back to the highland where he had previously instructed them. There, after delivering a long and profoundly touching personal message of encouragement, he officially welcomed the twelve. This Sabbath afternoon, Jesus gathered his followers around him on the hillside and prepared them for the day when he would leave them to navigate the world on their own. He reviewed many aspects of his previous teachings delivered at the exact location and, calling them forward one by one, urged them to go forth into the world as his representatives. Jesus' advice was: "Go into all the world and spread the new teachings. Liberate spiritual captives, comfort the oppressed, and minister to the afflicted. Freely you have received; freely give."

Jesus then advised them to take neither money nor extra clothing, saying:

"The laborer is worthy of his hire. Behold, I send you forth as sheep among wolves; therefore, be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves. But take heed, for your enemies will bring you before their councils. You will be presented before governors and leaders because you believe these teachings, and your testimony shall serve as a witness for the lessons.

"And when they judge you, do not be anxious about what you shall say, for the spirit of God that dwells within you will speak through you at that time. Some of you will face death, and many will hate you because of these new teachings, but do not fear; I will be with you, and my spirit shall go before you into all the world. Our Heavenly Father's presence will abide with you as you first go to the Jews, then to the Gentiles, then to the world."

When they descended from the mountain, they returned to Zebedee's house.

7.45 EVENING AFTER

That evening, while teaching in the house as the rain began to fall, Jesus spoke at great length, attempting to convey to the twelve what they must become, rather than what they must do. He repeatedly emphasized, "In the new teachings, you must be righteous in your work." Many times he reiterated: "Strive, therefore, to be perfect, even as your Heavenly Father is perfect. John taught a baptism of repentance and sorrow for the old way of living, but you are to proclaim a spiritual baptism of fellowship with God. Teach repentance to those who require such guidance, but to those already seeking the truth, open the doors wide and invite them to enter the joyous fellowship of all people."

However, it was a challenging task to persuade these Galilean fishermen that, in the new teachings, belief must precede the practice of righteousness in daily life.

A significant obstacle in his efforts to teach the twelve was their tendency to transform highly idealistic and spiritual principles of religious truth into concrete rules of personal conduct. Jesus would present to them the beautiful spirit of the soul's attitude, but unfortunately, they insisted on interpreting such teachings as rules for individual behavior. Many times, even when they made an effort to remember what Jesus said, they were almost certain to forget what he did not say. Nevertheless, they gradually assimilated his teachings because Jesus embodied all that he taught; they slowly acquired what they could not learn from his verbal instruction by living alongside him.

This evening, Thomas asked Jesus why he said that one must become like little children in order to gain entrance to the kingdom. At the same time, Jesus warned them not to be deceived by false prophets or to cast their pearls before swine. Thomas struggled to understand this teaching.

Jesus then replied to Thomas:

“You insist on interpreting everything I teach literally. When I asked you to become like little children as a prerequisite for entering the spiritual kingdom, I was not referring to a susceptibility to deception, a mere willingness to believe, or a quickness to trust those who may seem pleasing.

“What I wanted you to understand from the illustration was the child-father relationship. You are the child, and it is your Father’s kingdom that you seek to enter. A natural affection between every child and their father fosters an understanding and loving relationship, which eliminates any inclination to negotiate for our Heavenly Father’s love. The lessons you impart stem from this eternal child-father relationship.”

While eating a meal, Jesus spoke with Matthew, explaining that an individual’s motives determine the morality of any action. He emphasized personal morality rather than that of a culture or nation. In response to a question posed by Andrew, Jesus clarified that the morality of his teachings was inseparable from his way of life. He taught morality not based on human nature, but on humanity’s relationship with God.

Jesus’ character was consistently positive. His newly articulated golden rule emphasized the importance of active social engagement, whereas the older negative rule could be obeyed in isolation. However, Jesus’ teachings transcended mere rules by stripping morality from them and elevating the lessons to profound levels of spiritual insight and genuinely righteous living.

After Jesus and Matthew finished their conversation, Simon Zelotes asked whether all people are children of God. Jesus answered: “Yes, Simon, all are the sons and daughters of God, and that is the good news you are going to proclaim.” Jesus taught the importance of treating all people as brothers and sisters. However, the followers struggled to comprehend this doctrine; it was a new, unfamiliar, and startling revelation.

Then John asked Jesus about the new kingdom. Jesus answered: "The spiritual kingdom is founded on three essential beliefs: first, the universality of God; second, that all are children of God; and third, the desire to do God's will and to be like God. This is the good news of the teachings: that through belief, every soul can attain these essential elements of eternal life."

The week of waiting had finally come to an end, and they were preparing to depart for Jerusalem the following day.

Beginning Public Teaching

8.0 FIRST TRIP

On the first day of the week, January 19, 27 CE, Jesus and the twelve followers prepared to depart from their headquarters in Bethsaida. The ambassadors knew nothing of their teacher's plans except that they were going to Jerusalem to attend the Passover feast in April and that they intended to journey by way of the Jordan Valley. They left Zebedee's house near noon because the followers' families had come to bid them farewell and wish them well in the new mission they were about to undertake.

The followers missed Jesus just before departing, prompting Andrew to go out in search of him. After a brief search, he discovered Jesus sitting in a boat by the beach, weeping. The twelve had often witnessed their teacher in moments of grief and had observed his occasional periods of deep contemplation, but none had ever seen him cry.

Andrew was somewhat startled to see Jesus so affected on the eve of their departure for Jerusalem. He ventured to approach Jesus and ask why he weeped? Who has offended you? And Jesus, walking back with Andrew to join the twelve, replied, "None of you has grieved me. I am saddened because none of my father Joseph's family has come to bid us a safe journey."

At that time, Ruth was visiting her brother Joseph in Nazareth. Other family members were kept away by pride, disappointment, misunderstanding, and petty resentment stemming from hurt feelings.

8.1 LEAVING GALILEE

Capernaum was located not far from Tiberias, and news of Jesus had begun to spread throughout all of Galilee and even to regions beyond. Aware that Herod would soon take notice of his activities, Jesus decided it was prudent to journey south into Judea with his friends. A group of over one hundred followers expressed a desire to accompany them; however, Jesus addressed them and requested that they not join the twelve as they traveled down the Jordan. Though they agreed to stay behind, many chose to follow Jesus within a few days.

On the first day, Jesus and the ambassadors only traveled as far as Tarichea, where they rested for the night. The following day, they traveled to a location on the Jordan River near Pella, where John had taught approximately one year earlier and where Jesus had been baptized. They remained there for more than two weeks, teaching the gathered crowds. By the end of the first week, several hundred people had assembled in a camp near where Jesus and the twelve dwelt. They had come from Galilee, Phoenicia, Syria, the Decapolis, Perea, and Judea.

Jesus did not engage in public teaching. Andrew organized the crowd and assigned teachers for the morning and afternoon assemblies. After the evening meal, Jesus conversed with the twelve. He did not impart any new teachings but instead reviewed his previous lessons and answered their numerous questions. On one of these evenings, he recounted the forty days he spent in the hills near this location.

Many individuals from Perea and Judea had been baptized by John the Baptist and were eager to learn more about Jesus' teachings. The followers of Jesus made significant progress in teaching the followers of John since they did not undermine John's teachings and refrained from baptizing new followers. But it remained a source of frustration for John's followers that Jesus did not intervene to free John from prison, despite being the Messiah that John had proclaimed.

From night to night, Andrew meticulously guided the twelve in the delicate and challenging task of fostering harmonious relationships with the followers of John the Baptist. During this initial year of Jesus' public teaching, approximately three-fourths of his audience were followers of John and had received his baptism. This entire year was devoted to gradually assuming John's responsibilities in Perea and Judea.

8.2 AT PELLA

The night before they departed from Pella, Jesus provided his followers with additional instructions. He said:

“You have been taught to anticipate the arrival of the spiritual kingdom, and now I come to announce that this long-awaited kingdom is already present and among us. This kingdom represents the realization and acknowledgment of God dwelling within our souls. In this kingdom, our Heavenly Father sits upon a throne that is not constructed by human hands; rather, the throne of God is a spiritual realm within each individual. God resides in the hearts of children on earth through the spirit that is the soul of each.

“As subjects of this kingdom, you can truly feel the will of the Heavenly Father. However, you should not view yourselves merely as law-bound subjects of a powerful king, but rather as privileged children of a loving and divine Father. When the will of our Heavenly Father aligns with your own, you are truly in the kingdom, for the kingdom has become an integral part of your experience.”

Some followers seemingly understood aspects of this teaching; however, if anyone fully comprehended the significance of this announcement, it was James Zebedee. These words resonated deeply within their hearts and later emerged to uplift their ministry during subsequent years of service.

8.3 AT AMATHUS

Jesus and his friends stayed near Amathus for nearly three weeks. These followers continued to teach the multitude twice daily, while Jesus delivered lessons each Sabbath afternoon. The large crowds made it impractical to maintain the Wednesday playtime, so Andrew organized a schedule in which two followers would rest each day of the week, while all remained on duty during the Sabbath services.

Peter, James, and John were primarily responsible for public teaching. Philip, Nathaniel, Thomas, and Simon focused on personal outreach and conducted classes for specific groups of inquirers. Meanwhile, the twins maintained general crowd supervision, while Andrew, Matthew, and Judas evolved into a managerial committee, each contributing significantly to teaching efforts.

Andrew was heavily engaged in resolving the frequent misunderstandings and disagreements between the followers of John the Baptist and the newer followers of Jesus. Serious conflicts would arise every few days; however, with the help of his associates, Andrew successfully encouraged the opposing parties to reach a temporary agreement.

Jesus refused to participate in any of these conferences, nor would he offer any advice on how to navigate these difficulties properly. When Andrew approached Jesus with these questions, he would always say: "It is unwise for the host to involve himself in the family troubles of his guests; a wise parent never takes sides in the petty quarrels of his own children."

The rugged Galilean fishermen referred to him as Master. They observed that when Jesus spoke, he exhibited a strong and forceful personality, embodying both intellectual authority and spiritual strength. He did not present himself as a mild, sweet, gentle, or kindly mystic. His character resonated not only with spiritually minded women but also with the educated Nicodemus and the resilient Roman soldier, the captain stationed at the cross.

8.4 AMATHUS TEACHINGS

While sojourning in Amathus, Thomas Didymus inquired about the “God of heaven.” Jesus replied: “God is your Heavenly Father, and the teachings are nothing more and nothing less than the recognition of the truth that you are his child. I am here to clarify both of these concepts through my life and teachings.”

Here, Jesus spent considerable time with the followers, instructing them in the new concept of God. He emphasized that God is not a distant and supreme bookkeeper, documenting the faults of his wayward children or recording their spiritual mistakes to be used against them. Jesus taught that God is not a king over all or a father of a nation, but rather a loving father to each individual.

Jesus also aimed to liberate the minds of his followers from the notion of offering animal sacrifices as a religious obligation. However, these individuals, steeped in the tradition of daily sacrifice, were slow to grasp his meaning. Nevertheless, Jesus did not tire of teaching this concept. When he was unable to convey his message to all of the followers through one illustration, he would rephrase his message and use a different type of story for clarification.

At this time, Jesus began to instruct the twelve more comprehensively about their mission to comfort the afflicted and minister to the sick. He taught them extensively about the holistic nature of the individual, emphasizing the union of body, mind, and spirit. As the weeks and months progressed throughout the year, the followers increasingly focused on the healing ministry for the sick.

8.5 LESSONS AT AMATHUS

One of the most eventful evening conferences at Amathus was the session dedicated to discussing Spiritual Unity. James Zebedee asked how they could learn to see alike and foster greater harmony among themselves. When Jesus heard this question, he replied:

“James, you should not all see alike. I have come into the world to proclaim spiritual liberty so that individuals may be

empowered to live individual lives of originality and freedom before God. I do not wish for the sacrifice of personal freedom and spiritual creativity to be exchanged for social harmony and fraternal peace. What I ask of you is spiritual unity, and that you may experience the joy of your collective dedication to wholeheartedly fulfilling the will of God.

“Your spirit unity implies two things, which always will be found to harmonize in the lives of individual followers: First, you all share a common goal of spiritual existence: the pursuit of God’s will, which demonstrates to the world that you are becoming more like him. Second, you possess a shared motivation for service; you all aspire to serve your fellow beings.”

Jesus instructed the twelve that he did not wish for his followers to become dogmatized or standardized by the interpretations of men. His new teachings cautioned against forming creeds, idolizing words or people, and establishing traditions that would control followers.

8.6 TEACHING TEHERMA

Near the end of last week at Amathus, Simon Zelotes introduced Jesus to Teherma, a Persian merchant from Damascus. Teherma had heard of Jesus and traveled to Capernaum to meet him. Upon learning that Jesus had journeyed with his friends down the Jordan River on the way to Jerusalem, Teherma sought to find him. Andrew had recommended Teherma to Simon for instruction. Simon regarded the Persian as a fire worshiper, despite Teherma’s efforts to clarify that fire was merely a visible symbol of the Pure and Holy One. After conversing with Jesus, the Persian expressed his desire to stay for several days to listen to and learn from the teachings.

When Simon Zelotes and Jesus were alone, Simon asked why he could not persuade Teherma - why he resisted Peter yet readily listened to Jesus. Jesus answered:

“Simon, please refrain from attempting to extract anything from the hearts of those who seek the truth. Instead, focus on enriching these eager souls. When I first came to you, did I denounce Moses and the prophets? No, I did not come to take away what you inherited from your ancestors, but to present you with an enhanced vision of what they perceived only in part.

“Go then, Simon, and teach. When you have someone who believes safely and securely, that will be the time when they come to you with inquiries to receive instruction on the progressive advancement of the soul in the spiritual kingdom.”

Simon was undoubtedly astonished by these words, yet he followed Jesus’ instructions. Teherma, the Persian, was among those who later embraced the teachings.

That night, Jesus spoke to his followers about the teachings of the new life in the spiritual kingdom. He said, in part:

“You cannot teach the profound truths of the soul to those who are solely of the flesh. First, ensure that individuals acknowledge their souls before you attempt to instruct them in the ways of the spirit.

“Only reveal the temple’s beauty after you have first guided individuals into the temple. Introduce them to God and their identity as children of God before discussing the teachings of God’s love and the fellowship among humanity. Avoid engaging in conflict with others; instead, always practice patience.”

8.7 AT BETHANY BEYOND JORDAN

On February 26, Jesus, along with his friends and numerous followers, traveled down the Jordan River to the ford near Bethany in Perea, where John the Baptist first announced the coming new kingdom. Jesus and his followers stayed there for four weeks, teaching before they proceeded to Jerusalem.

During the second week of their sojourn at Bethany Beyond Jordan, Jesus took Peter, James, and John into the hills across the river and south of Jericho for a three-day retreat. During this time, Jesus imparted many new and profound truths about the spiritual kingdom to these three. He emphasized two fundamental truths: the attainment of eternal life through belief in one's soul and the concept of human liberty achieved through the recognition of eternal truth. "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free."

Jesus promised to send his spirit into the hearts of all of God's children after he went to God. To broaden the understanding of God, Jesus explained that he had intentionally overlooked the prominent figures of the world. He began his work with the poor, the very individuals whom most preceding religions had largely neglected. He held no disdain for anyone; his mission was worldwide, even universal. He was so bold and emphatic in these announcements that even Peter, James, and John were tempted to believe he might be out of his mind.

He announced that he had come to serve as a teacher, presenting spiritual truths to both the material mind and the spiritual soul. Jesus' teachings were particularly effective due to his unique personality, rather than through compelling oratory or emotional appeal. These three followers noted that Jesus consistently spoke directly to people's souls. He was a teacher of the spirit, yet he engaged the mind. From a human perspective, Peter was a significantly more effective teacher of the mind than of the soul.

On this occasion, Jesus conveyed to Peter, James, and John that his mission was, in certain respects, to be focused on a singular purpose. He informed them that he had come to fulfill God's will and only God's will. Therefore, driven by a sincere commitment to this singular purpose, he was not preoccupied with rectifying the injustices in the world. As a result, the three came away with varying perspectives on Jesus as an individual.

Peter was beginning to recognize the genuine friendliness of Jesus. Although Jesus was approachable, he always lived independently of

others. Peter observed that Jesus never asked anyone for advice, never requested prayers, and seldom paused to correct misunderstandings or resent misrepresentations. He paid no attention to public opinion and was uninfluenced by praise.

James was astonished by how Jesus seemed to perceive the end from the beginning. He rarely appeared surprised; he was never excited, vexed, or disconcerted, and he never apologized to anyone. At times, he expressed sadness, but he was never discouraged.

John recognized that, despite all of his spiritual endowments, Jesus was fundamentally human. He lived as a man among men, understanding, loving, and effectively managing those around him. In his personal life, Jesus exemplified humanity while remaining faultless; he consistently demonstrated selflessness.

Although Peter, James, and John may not have fully comprehended the significance of Jesus' words on this occasion, his gracious messages resonated deeply within their hearts. *[After the appearance of Jesus' spirit, these teachings endured and profoundly enriched their work.]*

8.8 AT JERICHO

Throughout the four-week sojourn at Bethany Beyond Jordan, Andrew assigned couples to visit Jericho for a day or two several times each week. John the Baptist had many followers in Jericho, and most welcomed the more advanced teachings of Jesus and his companions. During these visits to Jericho, the followers began to carry out Jesus' instructions more specifically by ministering to the sick; they visited numerous homes in the city and sought to comfort every afflicted individual.

The followers engaged in public discussions in Jericho; however, their efforts were primarily quieter and more personal in nature. They soon realized that the new teachings provided comfort to the sick and that their message offered healing to the afflicted. It was in Jericho that Jesus' request for the twelve to disseminate the teachings and minister to those in need was first fully realized.

On the journey to Jerusalem, the group paused in Jericho, where they

were joined by a delegation from Mesopotamia that had come to consult with Jesus. Although the visitors had intended to stay for only one day, Jesus spent three days with these seekers of truth from the East. They returned to their respective homes along the Euphrates, enriched by the knowledge of the new teachings.

8.9 DEPARTING FOR JERUSALEM

On Monday, the last day of March, Jesus and the followers began their journey up the hills toward Jerusalem.

Lazarus of Bethany had traveled to the Jordan twice to see Jesus, and all arrangements had been made for Jesus and his friends to establish their headquarters with Lazarus and his sisters in Bethany for as long as they wished to stay in Jerusalem.

The followers of John the Baptist remained in Bethany Beyond Jordan, teaching and baptizing the multitudes. As a result, Jesus was accompanied only by the twelve when he arrived at Lazarus's home. Here, Jesus and his followers stayed for five days, resting and rejuvenating themselves before traveling to Jerusalem for the Passover. This was a significant memory for Martha and Mary, as they had the opportunity to host Jesus and his friends in their brother's home.

On Sunday morning, April 6, Jesus and the followers went to Jerusalem. This was the first time that Jesus and all twelve had been there together.

8.10 AT JERUSALEM

In April, Jesus and the followers worked in Jerusalem, leaving the city each evening to spend the night in Bethany. Jesus himself spent one or two nights each week in Jerusalem at the home of Flavius, a Greek Jew, where many prominent Jews secretly gathered to meet with him.

On the first day in Jerusalem, Jesus visited his old friend Annas, the former high priest and relative of Salome, Zebedee's wife. Annas had been hearing about Jesus and his teachings, but when Jesus arrived at the high priest's home, he was met with considerable reserve. Sensing Annas's coldness, Jesus took his leave, stating as he departed: "Fear is

man's chief enslaver, and pride is his greatest weakness; will you allow yourself to be bound by both of these destroyers of joy and liberty?" However, Annas did not respond.

8.11 TEACHING IN THE TEMPLE

Throughout this month, Jesus or one of the followers taught daily in the temple. When the crowds celebrating Passover became too large to access the temple, the followers organized numerous teaching groups outside the temple grounds. The multitudes who came to celebrate Passover listened to them, and hundreds rejoiced in the new teachings. The chief priests and leaders of the Jews grew increasingly concerned about Jesus and his friends and debated what actions should be taken against them.

Besides teaching in and about the temple, the twelve and other followers engaged in significant personal outreach among the throngs attending Passover. These dedicated men and women disseminated Jesus' message from this Passover celebration to various regions of the Roman Empire and the East. This marked the beginning of the teachings' spread beyond the local area. The work of Jesus was no longer to be confined to one place.

8.12 TEACHING JACOB

In Jerusalem, during the Passover festivities, a wealthy Jewish trader from Crete named Jacob approached Andrew with a request to meet Jesus privately. Andrew arranged this confidential meeting with Jesus at Flavius's home the following evening. Jacob did not fully understand Jesus' teachings and sought to learn more about the new revelations of God. He expressed that Moses and the ancient prophets describe Yahweh as a jealous God, filled with great wrath and fierce anger. The prophets asserted that God despises evildoers and exacts vengeance on those who disobey his laws. In contrast, Jesus taught that God is a kind and compassionate father who loves all people and welcomes everyone into heaven. Jesus said that God is ever-present and accessible. When Jacob finished speaking, Jesus replied:

“Jacob, you have eloquently articulated the teachings of the ancient prophets who taught the children of their time by following the light available to them. Our Heavenly Father is unchanging; however, the understanding of his nature has expanded and evolved from the days of Moses, through the era of Amos, and into the generation of the prophet Isaiah. Now, we can reveal God in a new light and demonstrate his love to all people across the world.

“As the new teachings spread across the world, conveying messages of joy and goodwill to all, improved relations among the families of all nations will emerge. Over time, the children of our Heavenly Father will come to love one another more deeply, fostering a greater understanding of love for children on earth.

Jesus continued:

“Remember, Jacob, that a good and devoted father loves his family as a whole and genuinely cares for each member with affection. When your children are very young and immature, and when you must discipline them, they may perceive their father as angry and filled with resentful wrath. Their immaturity prevents them from understanding that the punishment is rooted in a far-sighted and corrective love. However, as these same children grow into adults, it would be unwise for them to cling to these earlier misconceptions about their father. As adults, they will come to recognize their father’s love in the context of those early disciplinary actions. Over time, the children of God will gain a deeper understanding of the Father’s true nature and loving character.

“What benefit do you derive from successive generations of spiritual illumination if you continue to perceive God as Moses and the prophets did? You should see our Heavenly Father in a way that none of those who came before you ever

did. By seeing him in this manner, you should rejoice in entering the spiritual kingdom and strive to allow God's will to guide your life from this point forward."

Jacob responded that he believed this and expressed his desire to be led into heaven.

8.13 CONCEPTS OF GOD

The twelve followers, most of whom had listened to the discussion about the character of God, asked Jesus many questions that night regarding the Heavenly Father. Jesus gently reproached the twelve, essentially saying, you do not understand the traditions of Israel concerning the evolution of the concept of Yahweh and the progressive understanding of God.

Then Jesus proceeded to instruct the ambassadors on the evolution of concepts throughout the development of the Jewish people:

- **Yahweh.** This name was attributed to God by the Sinai clans. It represents the early concept of Deity that Moses elevated to the higher status of the God of Israel. The Heavenly Father consistently acknowledges the sincere efforts of all children to communicate, regardless of how rudimentary their concepts may be or the names they use to symbolize his divine nature.
- **Most High.** This concept of God was proclaimed by Melchizedek to Abraham and was widely embraced by those who subsequently adopted this expanded understanding of the Deity.
- **El Elyon.** Abraham and his brother left Ur due to the rise of sun worship and became followers of Melchizedek's teachings regarding El Elyon - the Most High God. Their understanding of God was a composite, blending their earlier Mesopotamian beliefs with the doctrine of the Most High.
- **El Shaddai.** During these early days, many Hebrews worshiped El Shaddai, the Egyptian concept of the God of Heaven, which

they encountered during their captivity in Egypt. Long after Melchizedek, these three concepts of God coalesced to form the doctrine of the Creator Deity, the God of Israel.

- Supreme Yahweh. By the time of Isaiah, beliefs about God had evolved into the concept of a Universal Creator who was both omnipotent and benevolent. This expanding understanding of God effectively replaced all previous notions of divinity in the religion of our ancestors.
- Heavenly Father. We now recognize God as our Heavenly Father. Our current teaching emphasizes the role of a listener - one who is a child of God. At all times and throughout all ages, humanity's soul is attuned to our Heavenly Father.

Never before had the followers been so shocked as they were upon hearing this account of the evolution of the concept of God in the minds of previous generations of Jews. They were too bewildered to ask questions. As they sat in silence before Jesus, he continued:

“It is written in Samuel: ‘And the anger of God was kindled against Israel, so much so that he moved David against them, saying, ‘Go number Israel and Judah.’ This was not unusual because, in the days of Samuel, the descendants of Abraham genuinely believed that Yahweh created both good and evil. However, when a later writer recounted these events, following the expansion of the Jewish understanding of the nature of God, he attributed evil to Satan. He stated: ‘And Satan stood up against Israel and provoked David to number Israel.’ The records in the scriptures demonstrate how the concept of the nature of God continued to evolve from one generation to another.”

8.14 TEN COMMANDMENTS

Jesus continued:

“When the children of Israel emerged from Egypt, prior to the expanded revelation of Yahweh, they adhered to ten commandments that served as their law until they were encamped before Sinai. These initial ten commandments were: You shall worship no other god, for God is a jealous God. You shall not make molten gods. You shall not neglect to keep the feast of unleavened bread. You shall bring the first of the fruits of the ground to the house of God your God. Of all the males of men or cattle, the firstborn are mine, says God. Six days you may work, but on the seventh day, you shall rest. You shall not fail to observe the feast of the first fruits and the feast of the harvest at the end of the year. You shall not offer the blood of any sacrifice with leavened bread. The sacrifice of the feast of Passover shall not be left until morning.

“A midst the thunder and lightning of Sinai, Moses presented the new Ten Commandments, which you will all agree are more worthy expressions to accompany the expanding concepts of Yahweh as Deity.”

He then noted the newer version of the commandments:

- I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.
- You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone blameless who misuses God’s name.
- Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

- Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work - you, nor your son or daughter, your male or female servant, your livestock, or the foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days, the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but God rested on the seventh day; therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it.
 - You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything in heaven above, on the earth below, or in the waters beneath the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the iniquity of their parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.
- You shall not murder.
- You shall not commit adultery.
- You shall not steal.
- You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
- You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or enslaved male or female, or ox, or donkey, nor anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Jesus continued:

“These commandments were recorded twice in the scriptures. In the first instance, deliverance from Egypt is cited as the reason for Sabbath observance. At the same time, in a later account, the evolving religious beliefs of our ancestors necessitated a shift to recognizing the act of creation as the reason for Sabbath observance.

“Once again, during the greater spiritual enlightenment of Isaiah's day, these ten negative commandments were changed into the great and positive value of love, the injunction ‘to love God supremely and your neighbor as yourself.’ The goal to love God and all people constitutes the entirety of human duty.”

And when he had finished speaking, no one asked him a question. They each went to sleep.

8.15 TEACHING FLAVIUS

Flavius, a Greek Jew, was a recent convert, having neither been circumcised nor baptized. A great lover of beauty in art and sculpture, the house he occupied while sojourning in Jerusalem was a stunning edifice. This home was exquisitely adorned with priceless treasures that he had collected during his travels around the world. When he first considered inviting Jesus to his home, he feared that Jesus might take offense at the sight of these so-called idols. However, Flavius was pleasantly surprised when Jesus entered the house. Instead of rebuking him for the supposedly idolatrous objects scattered throughout, Jesus expressed great interest in the entire collection and asked many thoughtful questions about each piece as Flavius guided him from room to room, showcasing all of his favorite statues. Noticing Flavius's bewilderment at his friendly attitude toward art, Jesus remarked after they had completed their tour of the collection:

“Because you appreciate the beauty of things fashioned by the artistic hands of man, why should you expect to be rebuked? Because Moses once sought to combat idolatry and the worship of false gods, it does not mean that people should frown upon the reproduction of grace and beauty. Moses’ later followers have misunderstood his teachings about creating false idols from earthly things. However, even if Moses taught such restrictions to the minds of his contemporaries, what does that have to do with this day, when God is revealed as the universal spiritual Father of all?”

“In an era when the nature of God was not well understood, Moses was justified in his efforts to combat idolatry. However, in the coming age, this new revelation of God will render it unnecessary to confuse the Heavenly Father with idols, whether they be objects or individuals. From this point forward, people can appreciate treasures without confusing this material appreciation of beauty with the worship and service of our Heavenly Father.”

Flavius wholeheartedly embraced all that Jesus taught him. The following day, he traveled to Bethany Beyond the Jordan, where he was baptized by the followers of John the Baptist. Upon returning to Jerusalem, Flavius hosted a grand feast in honor of Jesus, inviting sixty of his friends. Many of these guests subsequently became followers of the new teachings.

8.16 MAN FROM DAMASCUS

One of the lessons Jesus taught in the temple during this Passover week involved responding to a question posed by a man from Damascus, a listener. This man inquired how they could be certain that Jesus spoke for God and how they could genuinely enter the spiritual kingdom that Jesus and his followers proclaimed. Jesus answered:

“As to the message and teachings, you should judge them by their outcomes. If we proclaim the truths of the spirit, your spirit will tell your heart that our message is genuine.

“The spiritual kingdom and your assurance of acceptance by your Heavenly Father, let me ask: what father among you, who is both worthy and kindhearted, would keep his child in a state of anxiety or suspense about their status within the family or their place of security in his father’s heart? Fathers do not take pleasure in tormenting their children with uncertainty about their position in their hearts. Neither does your Heavenly Father leave earthly children in doubt about their position in the spiritual kingdom.”

The throng of listeners remained with Jesus for many hours, asking him questions and listening attentively to his comforting answers. Even the twelve were likely emboldened by Jesus’ teachings, gaining greater power and assurance. This experience in Jerusalem served as a significant inspiration for the twelve. It was their first encounter with such large crowds, and they learned many valuable lessons that greatly aided their future work.

8.17 TEACHING TO NICODEMUS

One evening at the home of Flavius, Nicodemus, a wealthy and elderly member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, came to see Jesus. He had heard much about the teachings of this Galilean, so he decided to visit one afternoon to listen to him as he taught in the temple courts. Although he would have liked to attend regularly, he feared being seen by the people present, as the Jewish leaders were already in conflict with Jesus, and no member of the Sanhedrin wanted to be publicly associated with him. Therefore, Nicodemus arranged to meet Jesus privately with Andrew that evening after nightfall. Peter, James, and John were in Flavius's garden when the conversation began, but they later moved into the house, where the discussion continued.

Nicodemus was not an official delegate of the Sanhedrin; he approached Jesus solely out of his personal and genuine interest in Jesus' teachings. In receiving Nicodemus, Jesus displayed no particular deference; during their conversation, he remained calm and dignified. When introduced by Flavius, Nicodemus expressed his desire to learn more about the coming kingdom. Jesus responded to Nicodemus:

“When the wind blows, you hear the rustle of the leaves, but you do not see the wind - whence it comes or whither it goes. So it is with the spirit. With the eyes of the flesh, you can perceive the manifestations of the spirit, but you cannot discern the spirit itself.

“It is the duty of those who understand the realities of the spirit to reveal these truths to those who perceive only the manifestations of the material world. There is but one manifestation that is observed in both the spiritual and physical worlds, and that is gravity. But will you believe us if we share with you the heavenly truths? Do you have the courage, Nicodemus, to accept our words?

“The spirit of God already resides within you. If you allow this spirit to guide you, you will soon begin to perceive the world through spiritual eyes. By wholeheartedly choosing to follow this spiritual guidance, you will make it your only purpose in life to fulfill God’s will. In discovering this spirit, you will start to manifest the abundant results of the spirit in your daily life.”

Nicodemus was genuinely sincere. He was profoundly impressed yet left feeling bewildered. Accomplished in self-development, self-restraint, and possessing high moral qualities, Nicodemus was both refined and complex, embodying both egoism and altruism. However, he struggled to submit his will to that of the divine Father. Despite this, Nicodemus found the strength to follow the new teachings.

[Nicodemus later faintly protested when his colleagues in the Sanhedrin sought to condemn Jesus without a hearing. Along with Joseph of Arimathea, he boldly acknowledged his beliefs and claimed the body of Jesus, even as most of the followers had fled in fear from the scene of their teacher’s execution.]

8.18 THOMAS’ QUESTION

After the busy period of teaching and personal work during Passover week in Jerusalem, Jesus rested the following Wednesday at Bethany with his friends. That afternoon, Thomas asked a question that prompted a lengthy and instructive response. He remarked that on the day they were designated as ambassadors, they received numerous teachings and guidance regarding their way of life. However, he inquired, what should they teach the multitude? How should others live once the new teachings are more fully understood? Should all followers embrace poverty and renounce material possessions? Will mercy ultimately prevail to the extent that law and justice become obsolete?

After the meal, Jesus and the twelve spent the entire afternoon and evening discussing Thomas’s questions, during which Jesus delivered

a lesson on the Concept Of Family. He first sought to clarify to his friends that he was living a life in the flesh and that they, the twelve, had been called to participate in this life experience. As coworkers, they too must share in many of the unique restrictions associated with his unique life experiences. These special obligations do not necessarily apply to others. He then explained that the spiritual kingdom was not the most effective way to illustrate humanity's relationship with God. He used such figures of speech because the people were anticipating a kingdom, and John had taught in terms of the forthcoming new kingdom. Jesus stated: "People will have a deeper understanding of the teachings when they are presented in terms that express familial relationships. They are more likely to comprehend these teachings through the concepts of God's fatherhood and the fellowship among children."

He reiterated the two fundamental laws of life: the first rule is to love the Heavenly Father, and the second rule is to foster mutual love among God's children, specifically, to love God's siblings as you love yourself. Then Jesus spoke at length about the earthly family as an illustration of the heavenly family. This included a discussion of the fundamental characteristics of family life on earth and their application to the relationship between God and humanity. Jesus stated that a true family is founded on the following principles:

- The fact of existence - The essence of the family is the intertwined relationships found in nature and the phenomena of human likeness, all of which are encapsulated within the family unit. Children inherit specific traits from their parents, and their personalities develop as a result of their parents' actions. The bond between a parent and child is a fundamental aspect of nature and permeates all forms of life.
- Security and joy - Devoted parents derive immense satisfaction from meeting their children's needs. Most fathers are not merely satisfied with providing the basic necessities; they also take pleasure in ensuring their children experience joy and fulfillment.

- Education and Training - Thoughtful parents meticulously plan for their sons' and daughters' education and provide adequate training, equipping them for the greater responsibilities of adulthood.
- Discipline and Restraint - Visionary parents offer guidance, correction, discipline, and, at times, restraint for their young and developing children, immature offspring.
- Companionship and loyalty - The affectionate parents maintains a close and loving spiritual connection with his children. He is always attentive to their needs, ready to listen to their struggles, and willing to assist them with their challenges when appropriate. The parent is deeply invested in the ongoing well-being of his offspring.
- Love - A compassionate parent does not harbor vengeful memories against his children. Parents are not like judges or creditors; genuine families are built on tolerance, patience, and understanding.
- Provisions for the Future - Temporal parents often seek to leave an inheritance for their sons, ensuring the continuity of the family across generations. While death marks the end of an individual's life, it also signifies the beginning of a new generation; thus, death does not necessarily terminate the family lineage.

For several hours, Jesus discussed the application of these aspects of family life to the relationship between the material child and the Heavenly Father. Despite the lengthy discourse, Thomas remained unsatisfied; he inquired why the Heavenly Father did not consistently treat people with kindness and mercy. He sought to understand why individuals often endure significant suffering and why their prayers are not always answered. Jesus responded:

“Thomas, this Kingdom is spiritual, and our Heavenly Father is a spiritual being. I am teaching you as spiritual children within the spirit family, of which the Father is an eternal spirit. Allow me to use the earthly family as an illustration of divine relationships without directly applying

these teachings to material affairs. Strive to distinguish the realities of heaven from the material, social, economic, and political issues of our time. When I speak the language of the spirit, do not insist on translating the meaning into the language of the flesh simply because I choose to use commonplace and literal relationships for illustration.

“Temporal matters concern the people of this world, but you are spiritual ambassadors of a spiritual kingdom. I urge you to strive for growth in spiritual perception. Nevertheless, I love you and will support you, even to the very end of our association.”

Then, very clearly, Jesus explained that the spiritual kingdom is an evolutionary experience, beginning here on the physical earth and progressing through successive nonphysical layers.

8.19 IN SOUTHERN JUDEA

By the end of April, opposition to Jesus from the Pharisees and Sadducees had intensified to such an extent that Jesus and his followers decided to leave Jerusalem temporarily. They traveled south to work in Bethlehem and Hebron. The entire month of May was dedicated to personal outreach in these cities and the surrounding villages. During this trip, no public teaching occurred; instead, they focused solely on house-to-house visitation.

During this period, while the followers disseminated the teachings and ministered to the sick, Jesus and Abner spent their time in Engedi, visiting the Nazarite colony. John the Baptist had originated from this location, and many of the Nazarite brothers became followers of Jesus. However, most of these ascetic men refused to accept him as a teacher because he did not advocate for fasting and other forms of self-denial. The people in this region were unaware that Jesus had been born in Bethlehem; they assumed that he had been born in Nazareth, as did most of his other followers.

This sojourn in the southern region of Judea was a restful and productive period of labor. By early June, the agitation against Jesus had significantly diminished in Jerusalem, allowing Jesus and his ambassadors to return and provide instruction and comfort to other followers.

Although Jesus and the twelve spent the entire month of June in or near Jerusalem, they did not engage in public teaching during this time. For the most part, they lived in tents that they pitched in a shaded area known as Gethsemane. This garden was situated on the western slope of Mount Olivet, not far from the Kidron Brook. On the Sabbath weekends, they usually spent with Lazarus and his sisters in Bethany. Jesus entered the walls of Jerusalem only a few times, but many curious inquirers came to Gethsemane to visit him. One Friday evening, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea ventured out to see Jesus but turned back in fear, even after standing at the entrance to his tent. They were unaware that Jesus was fully aware of their intentions.

When the Jewish leaders learned that Jesus had returned to Jerusalem, they prepared to arrest him. However, upon observing that he was not engaging in public teaching, they may have concluded that he was intimidated by their previous hostility and decided to allow him to continue teaching privately without further interference.

Consequently, events progressed quietly until the last days of June, when a man named Simon, a member of the Sanhedrin, publicly endorsed the teachings of Jesus after declaring his position before the Jewish authorities. Immediately, it became apparent that a renewed agitation for Jesus' apprehension had emerged, prompting him to retreat to the cities of Samaria and the Decapolis.

8.20 IN SAMARIA

At the end of June 27, CE, due to increasing opposition from the Jewish religious authorities, Jesus and the twelve departed from Jerusalem, sending their tents and meager personal belongings to be stored at Lazarus's home in Bethany.

They traveled north into Samaria, where they stayed over the Sabbath in Bethel. During their time there, they taught for several days to the people who came from Gophna and Ephraim. A group of citizens from Arimathea and Thamna approached Jesus to invite him to visit their villages. Jesus and his followers spent more than two weeks teaching the Jews and Samaritans in this region, many of whom traveled from as far as Antipatris to hear the good news.

The people of southern Samaria received Jesus with joy, and many followers overcame their prejudices against the Samaritans. In the last week of July, Jesus and his associates prepared to depart for the new Greek cities of Phasaelis and Archelais, located near the Jordan River.

8.21 AT ARCHELAIS

The first half of August saw the followers establish their headquarters in the cities of Archelais and Phasaelis, where they had their initial experience teaching to nearly exclusive gatherings of Gentiles - Greeks, Romans, and Syrians - for few Jews resided in these two Greek towns. In their interactions with these Roman citizens, the followers faced new challenges in proclaiming the message of a new spiritual kingdom and encountered additional objections to Jesus' teachings.

During one of the many evening conferences with his friends, Jesus listened attentively to their objections regarding the new teachings as the twelve recounted their experiences with the subjects of their personal labors. A question posed by Philip of Bethsaida exemplified the challenges they faced.

Philip remarked that the Greeks and Romans dismissed their message, claiming that such teachings were suitable only for the weak. They argued that the religion of the heathens was superior to the new teachings because it fosters the development of a strong, robust, and assertive character. They suggested that these new teachings would transform all individuals into weakened specimens of passive non-resisters who would soon vanish from the earth. He said that they appreciate you, Master, and openly acknowledge that your teachings

are heavenly and ideal, but they refuse to take us seriously. They contend that Jesus' beliefs are not applicable to this world and that people cannot live according to his teachings.

Philip asked: What should they say to these Gentiles? After hearing similar objections from Thomas, Nathaniel, Simon, and Matthew, Jesus addressed the twelve:

“The teachings are not intended solely for the weak. You, my followers, do not resemble the weak. John did not appear to be weak. Do you see that I am enslaved by fear?

“True, the poor and oppressed of this generation deserve to be taught the truth. The religions of this world have often neglected the needs of the impoverished, but God does not show favoritism. The new lessons should be imparted to all people - Jew and Gentile, Greek and Roman, rich and poor, free and bond - and equally to the young and old, male and female.

“No armies in the world have ever demonstrated greater courage and bravery than what will be exhibited by you and your loyal successors, who will go forth to proclaim to the world the message of the fatherhood of God and the fellowship of children.

“The courage of the flesh represents the lowest form of bravery. Mental bravery is a higher type of human courage, but the highest and most profound courage is the unwavering loyalty to the enlightened convictions of your inner spirit. This form of courage embodies the heroism of those who are God-knowing, and you are all God-knowing. Your service will demand all the courage and fortitude you and your colleagues can muster.

“Many of you may face death for your loyalty to the new teachings. It is relatively easy to die in the heat of physical

battle when the presence of your fellow fighters bolsters your bravery. However, it requires a higher and more profound form of human courage and devotion to calmly and all alone to lay down your life for the love of a truth that resides in your mortal heart. Because our Heavenly Father is a God of love and understanding, do not embrace the notion that service is meant to be one of ease. The journey to the spiritual kingdom is the ultimate adventure of all time, the rugged achievement of eternity.”

Jesus elaborated extensively on this lesson, providing both amplification and illustration. Rarely did he express strong emotions when speaking to his friends, but this was one of those exceptional occasions marked by evident earnestness and deep feeling.

The immediate impact on the followers’ public teaching and personal ministry was immediate; their message adopted a new tone of courageous assertiveness. The twelve continued to develop the skill of proactive engagement in their new teachings. From that day forward, they focused less on teaching negative virtues or passive injunctions.

8.22 EVENING CONFERENCE

At one of the evening conferences, Andrew inquired of Jesus regarding the teachings of John the Baptist. He asked whether they should practice self-denial as John advocated or strive for the self-control that Jesus taught. Andrew sought to understand how Jesus’ teachings differed from those of John. Jesus responded:

“John indeed taught you the way of righteousness, following the light and laws of his fathers; that was the religion of self-examination and self-denial. However, I come with a new message of self-forgetfulness and self-control. He who masters his own self is greater than he who captures a city. Self-mastery is the measure of a man’s moral character and the indicator of his spiritual development.

“In the old order, you fasted and prayed; now you are taught to believe and rejoice. In the spiritual kingdom, you become new; old things will pass away; indeed, all things will become new. By your love for one another, you will demonstrate to the world that you have transitioned from bondage to liberty, from death to everlasting life.

“By the old way, you seek to suppress, obey, and conform to the rules of living. In contrast, the new way transforms you from within, thereby strengthening your inner-self through the continual spiritual renewal of your mind. By embracing your beliefs and undergoing a transformation of your spirit, you become a temple of God within you. When God resides in you, you are no longer enslaved by the flesh but are free and liberated children of the spirit. The spirit grants you the freedom of self-mastery, replacing the old law rooted in the fear of self-bondage and the slavery of self-denial.

“When you recognize that you embrace these new teachings, you experience genuine peace with God. For those who follow these teachings, this heavenly peace is not merely a duty; rather, it is an exalted privilege that allows you to purify yourselves from all errors of mind and body as you strive for perfection in God’s love.”

8.23 AT MOUNT SARTABA

The interactions with the Gentiles and Samaritans posed a significant challenge for the followers, and the recent teachings of Jesus had intensified their occasional states of disturbance. They had not yet adapted to living and working in close proximity to one another. Additionally, they were facing growing difficulties in maintaining harmonious relationships with the followers of John the Baptist.

Andrew’s mind seemed overwhelmed with problems. John often felt deeply perplexed. James was likely suffering from profound turmoil in his soul. Matthew appeared to be struggling financially, as they had

been residing among the Gentiles. Peter seemed increasingly overwrought and had recently become more temperamental than usual. Perhaps Judas was experiencing intermittent bouts of sensitivity and selfishness. Simon was understandably distressed as he tried to reconcile his patriotism with his love for humanity. Philip was becoming increasingly baffled by the unfolding events. Nathaniel had seemingly lost his sense of humor since their interactions with the Gentile populations. Thomas might be enduring a significant period of depression. Only the twins seemed unaffected.

When Jesus listened to their troubles, he said:

“You cannot persuade individuals to abandon their confusions when they have become so deeply involved, especially when many people with strong feelings are at stake. I will refrain from engaging in these personal social challenges, but I will gladly join all of you in enjoying three days of relaxation. We would like to announce that we will all travel to Mount Sartaba, where we will spend a day or two resting.

“We should take some time apart to rest and relax. Given that we have all recently endured considerable vexation and mental stress, I propose that we refrain from discussing our trials and tribulations during this holiday.”

This vacation was a marvelous experience for each of the twelve; they never forgot the day they ascended the mountain. Throughout the entire trip, hardly a word was spoken about their troubles. Upon reaching the summit, Jesus seated them around him as he spoke:

“My brethren, you must all learn the value of rest and the effectiveness of relaxation. It is essential to understand that sometimes the best approach to resolving complex problems is to set them aside temporarily. When you return, rejuvenated from your rest, you can confront your challenges with a clearer mind, steadier hand, and a more determined

heart. Often, you will find that your problem has diminished in size and complexity while you have been allowing your mind and body to rest.”

The following day, Jesus assigned each of the twelve a lighthearted topic for discussion. The entire day was dedicated to reminiscing and engaging in conversations unrelated to their teaching duties. They were momentarily taken aback when Jesus even neglected to give thanks, verbally, at least, when he broke bread for their midday meal. This was the first time they had witnessed him overlook such formalities.

On the third day, they began their descent from the mountain and returned to their camp, and a significant transformation had naturally occurred within them. They made the critical discovery that many human perplexities are illusory and that numerous pressing troubles are the products of exaggerated fear and heightened anxiety. They learned that some of these perplexities are best addressed by being abandoned; by distancing themselves, they allowed such problems to resolve on their own.

On their return from this holiday, many of the twelve were filled with joy as they noticed the transformed state of everyone's mindset and observed the apparent relief from nervous irritability that had resulted from their three-day vacation from the routine duties of life. This time also signified the beginning of significantly improved relations with the followers of John the Baptist.

Only a handful of Gentiles in the two Greek cities of Archelais and Phasaelis appeared to embrace the new teachings. Nevertheless, the twelve followers acquired valuable experience during their initial extensive engagement with exclusively Gentile populations.

On a Monday morning in the middle of the month, Jesus said to Andrew: “We are going into Samaria.” They set out immediately for the city of Sychar, near Jacob's well.

8.24 SAMARITANS

For more than six hundred years, the Jews of Judea, and later those of Galilee, harbored animosity toward the Samaritans. This hostility began around 700 BCE, when Sargon, the king of Assyria, quelled a revolt in central Palestine. He deported over twenty-five thousand Jews from the northern kingdom of Israel and replaced them with an almost equal number of descendants from the Cuthites, Sepharvites, and Hamathites. Subsequently, Ashurbanipal sent additional colonies to inhabit Samaria. The religious enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans originated from the Jews' return from the Babylonian captivity, during which the Samaritans attempted to obstruct the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Later, they further alienated the Jews by providing friendly assistance to the armies of Alexander the Great. In gratitude for their support, Alexander allowed the Samaritans to construct a temple on Mount Gerizim, where they worshiped their tribal gods and offered sacrifices similar to those conducted at the Jerusalem temple. This practice continued until the Maccabean period, when John Hyrcanus destroyed the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim. *[Philip of Bethsaida, a follower of Jesus, later conducted numerous meetings at the site of this ancient Samaritan temple while working with the Samaritans after Jesus' death.]*

The antagonism between the Jews and the Samaritans was longstanding and historic; increasingly, since the days of Alexander, they had ceased to have any dealings with one another. The twelve followers were not opposed to teaching in the Greek and other Gentile cities of the Decapolis and Syria. However, it was a significant test of their loyalty to Jesus when he instructed them to go into Samaria. Yet, during the year or more they had spent with Jesus, they cultivated a personal loyalty that transcended their prejudices against the Samaritans.

8.25 TALK WITH NALDA

When Jesus and the twelve arrived at Jacob's well, Jesus, weary from the journey, lingered by the well while Philip took the others with him to gather food and tents from Sychar, as they intended to stay in the

area for a while. Peter and the sons of Zebedee would have preferred to remain with Jesus, but he encouraged them to join their companions, saying, "Do not be afraid; these Samaritans will be friendly; only our fellow Jews seek to harm us." It was early evening when Jesus sat by the well, waiting for the return of the followers.

The water from Jacob's well contained fewer minerals than that from the wells of Sychar, making it highly valued for drinking purposes. Jesus was thirsty, but there was no way to obtain water from the deep well. When a woman from Sychar approached with her water pitcher to draw from the well, Jesus said to her, "Please give me a drink."

This woman of Samaria recognized Jesus as a Jew by his appearance and attire, and she inferred that he was a Galilean Jew based on his accent. Her name was Nalda, and she was a strikingly beautiful woman. She was quite surprised that a Jewish man would speak to her in such a manner, as it was considered inappropriate in those times for a self-respecting man to engage a woman in public, let alone for a Jew to converse with a Samaritan. Consequently, Nalda asked Jesus how he, being a Jew, could ask her, a Samaritan woman, for a drink. Jesus answered: "I have indeed asked you for a drink, but if you could only understand, you would ask me for a drink of the spiritual water."

Jesus was referring to the refreshing gifts of the soul to both the physical and mental person. Nalda did not understand and remarked that Jesus had nothing to draw water with and that the well was deep; so where is this water? Jesus replied: "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the spiritual water shall never thirst."

Nalda then requested that she be given this spiritual water so that she would not have to thirst or come all the way here to draw it. Furthermore, receiving anything from such a commendable Jew would be a pleasure for a Samaritan woman. Nalda was uncertain about how to interpret Jesus' willingness to engage in conversation with her. She observed the countenance of an upright and spiritual man in his face. However, she mistakenly equated his friendliness with ordinary familiarity and misinterpreted his figurative language as a form of romantic interest.

As a woman of loose morals, she felt inclined to respond flirtatiously when Jesus, looking directly into her eyes with a commanding voice, said: “Woman, go get your husband and bring him here.”

This command brought Nalda to her senses. She recognized that she had misjudged Jesus’ kindness and had misconstrued his manner of speech. Naturally frightened, she began to realize that she stood in the presence of an extraordinary individual. Groping for a suitable reply amidst her confusion, she stated that she could not call her husband because she had no husband. Jesus then said: “You have spoken the truth; for while you may have once had a husband, he with whom you are now living is not your husband. Please cease to trifle with my words and seek the spiritual water, which I have offered you today.”

By this time, Nalda appeared to be sober, and her better self had been awakened. She was not an immoral woman by choice; instead, she had been ruthlessly and unjustly abandoned by her husband. In her desperate circumstances, she had consented to live with a certain Greek man as his wife, albeit without the formalities of marriage. Nalda now felt a profound sense of shame for having spoken to Jesus so thoughtlessly. With deep penitence, she addressed him, expressing her regret for her manner of speaking, as she recognized that he was a holy man, perhaps even a prophet.

She was on the verge of seeking direct and personal help from Jesus when she, like many before and after her, evaded the issue of her private life by shifting the conversation to theology and philosophy. She swiftly redirected the discussion from her own needs to a theological controversy. Pointing to Mount Gerizim, she remarked that her ancestors worshiped on that mountain, while others claimed that Jerusalem is the rightful place for worship. So, which is the correct location to honor God?

Jesus recognized the woman’s attempt to evade direct and probing contact with him, yet he also discerned a sincere desire within her soul to discover a better way of life. After all, Nalda harbored a genuine thirst for the spiritual water; thus, he addressed her with patience,

saying: "Woman, let me say the day is approaching when you will no longer worship God either on this mountain or in Jerusalem. Currently, you worship what you do not understand, a blend of various pagan deities and Gentile philosophies. Your understanding of truth does not stem from knowing how or where others should worship, but from receiving this spiritual water."

But Nalda would make one final effort to avoid discussing the uncomfortable topic of her personal life and the state of her soul. Once again, she turned to broader questions of religion, stating that she was aware John taught about the arrival of the Converter, who would be known as the Deliverer, and that when he came, he would reveal all things to them.

Jesus, interrupting Nalda, said with startling assurance, "I am he." This was the first direct, positive, and unequivocal declaration of his spiritual purpose that Jesus had made, and it was directed toward a woman - a Samaritan woman and a woman of questionable character in the eyes of society at that moment. However, she was a woman whom Jesus recognized as having been wronged more than as one who sinned out of her own desire. She was a human soul who sincerely and wholeheartedly desired eternal life, and that was sufficient. Jesus spoke openly to the Samaritans about himself because he could do so safely, knowing that he would not return to the heart of Samaria to teach again.

As Nalda was about to express her genuine and personal longing for a better life and a more noble way of living, just as she was ready to articulate the genuine desire of her heart, the twelve followers returned from Sychar. Upon witnessing this intimate conversation between Jesus and the woman, they were taken aback. They quickly set down their supplies and stepped aside, with no one daring to reprove him, while Jesus addressed Nalda: "Woman, go your way; God understands. From now on, you will live a new life. You have received the spiritual water, and a new joy will spring up within your soul, and you shall become a daughter of God."

The woman, sensing the disapproval of the followers, left her water pot and hurried into the city. As she entered, she proclaimed to everyone she encountered to go quickly to Jacob's Well, for there was a man who told her everything she had ever done. Could this be the Converter?

As the sun began to set, a large crowd gathered at Jacob's Well to listen to Jesus. He spoke to them about the spiritual water of the soul.

The followers were continually astonished by Jesus' willingness to engage in conversation with women, including those deemed immoral. It was challenging for Jesus to teach his friends that women, regardless of their past, possess souls capable of choosing the Heavenly Father as their God. They are daughters of God and candidates for life everlasting. *[Even generations later, some followers struggled to comprehend this lesson.]*

Nalda recounted her entire story to the follower John the following day; however, he only disclosed part of it to the other followers, and Jesus did not discuss it in detail with the twelve. Nalda informed John that Jesus had told her, "All I ever did." Although John often felt compelled to inquire about Nalda's encounter with Jesus, he never found the courage to do so. Jesus revealed only one thing about her, but the depth of his gaze and the way he interacted with her brought her tumultuous life into sharp focus, allowing her to reflect on it in a moment of clarity. She associated this profound self-revelation with the look and words of a teacher. *[Jesus never explicitly told her that she had had five husbands; instead, she had lived with four different men since her husband abandoned her. This realization, along with her entire past, surged vividly in her mind at the moment she recognized Jesus as a man of God, prompting her to later tell John that Jesus had truly revealed everything about herself.]*

8.26 AT SAMARIA

On the evening when Nalda gathered the crowd from Sychar to see Jesus, the twelve had just returned with food and sought to share a

meal with him instead of engaging with the people, as they had been hungry all day. However, Jesus understood that darkness would soon fall, so he remained resolute in his determination to address the crowd before dismissing them. Later, these ambassadors expected Jesus to rebuke them for their attitude toward the woman at Jacob's well, but he did not address the issue. Instead, he delivered a memorable discourse on The Realities In The Kingdom Of God. He suggested that in any religion, it is easy for values to become devalued and for facts to take precedence over truth in one's theology.

Two days before establishing their camp on Mount Gerizim, Jesus and his followers entered Sychar to teach. Many of the residents of Sychar embraced the new teachings and requested baptism; however, Jesus' followers did not perform baptisms.

8.27 MOUNT GERIZIM

Jesus and the twelve camped on Mount Gerizim until the end of August. During the day, they shared the new teachings with the Samaritans in the surrounding cities and spent their nights at the camp. The efforts of Jesus and the twelve in these Samaritan cities resulted in many conversions. *[This work significantly paved the way for the remarkable ministry of Philip in these regions following Jesus' death.]*

During the evening conferences on Mount Gerizim, Jesus taught many lessons, with particular emphasis on the following points:

- True religion is the unconscious communication of an individual soul with the God. Organized religion, on the other hand, represents humanity's attempt to socialize the religion of individuals.
- Worship is the act of the soul's personal communication with the Heavenly Father, encompassing refreshing, creative, fraternal, and even romantic feelings.
- Religion is designed to foster a deeper spiritual life in the future and to apply these new insights to our present lives. Worship is the contemplation of the spiritual and must alternate with service, which involves a religious engagement with material reality.

- The tranquility of worship should alleviate the stresses of daily life. Work should be balanced with play; religion should be complemented by humor; and profound philosophy should be relieved by rhythmic poetry. The feelings of insecurity stemming from the fear of personal isolation should be countered by spiritual communication with God.
- Prayer serves as a means of self-reflection, while worship embodies self-forgetfulness. Worship involves effortless attention and provides a sense of spiritual rest, a form of restorative spiritual engagement.
- The purpose of prayer is to encourage individuals to think less and realize more; it is not aimed at increasing knowledge but rather at fostering a receptive mindset for insight.
- Meditation serves as a benchmark for assessing the degree of the soul's detachment from the material universe and its firm connection to spiritual realities.
- Meditation is a practice that involves seeking inspiration from God.
- Meditation is the process of identifying the self with the whole, the finite with the infinite, and the child with the father.

[Although the followers understood some of these teachings at the camp, few in the subsequent generation fully adopted them.]

8.28 MOUNT GILBOA

September and October were spent in seclusion at a camp on the slopes of Mount Gilboa. During September, Jesus remained there with his friends, further instructing them in the new teachings. Several factors contributed to Jesus and his followers' retreat at this time, near the borders of Samaria and the Decapolis. The religious authorities in Jerusalem were still highly antagonistic; Herod Antipas continued to hold John the Baptist in prison, fearing either to release or execute him, while harboring suspicions that John and Jesus were somehow associated.

These circumstances made it unwise to plan for any aggressive work in either Judea or Galilee. Additionally, a growing tension developed between the leaders of John the Baptist's followers and those of Jesus, which intensified as the number of adherents increased.

Jesus understood that the period of preliminary public teaching was nearing its conclusion. The next phase would involve the initiation of a comprehensive and final effort, and he did not want the commencement of this undertaking to be in any way embarrassing for John the Baptist. Therefore, Jesus decided to spend some time in seclusion, preparing his friends, and then to engage in quiet work in the cities of the Decapolis until John was either executed or released to join them in a unified effort.

8.29 GILBOA ENCAMPMENT

As time passed, the twelve became more devoted to Jesus and increasingly committed to the work. Their devotion was primarily rooted in personal loyalty. While they were dedicated, they did not fully grasp the complexity of his teachings or comprehend the full significance of his mission on earth.

While waiting on Mount Gilboa, Jesus shared with the twelve much about his early life and his experiences on Mount Hermon. He also disclosed details about what transpired in the hills during the forty days immediately following his baptism. Furthermore, he explicitly instructed them not to share these experiences with anyone until after he departed from the earth.

During the weeks of September, they rested, visited, recounted their experiences since Jesus first called them to service, and made a sincere effort to coordinate what Jesus had taught them thus far. To some extent, they all sensed that this would be their final opportunity for extended rest.

The twelve seemingly understood that their next public endeavor in either Judea or Galilee would mark the beginning of the final proclamation. However, they had not yet formed a clear conception of the spiritual kingdom.

John and Andrew believed that the spiritual kingdom had already arrived, while Peter and James maintained that it was still forthcoming. Nathaniel and Thomas openly admitted their confusion, and Matthew, Philip, and Simon Zelotes expressed uncertainty. The twins remained blissfully unaware of the ongoing debate, and Judas Iscariot remained silent and noncommittal.

Jesus spent much of his time alone on the mountain near the camp. Occasionally, he took Peter, James, or John with him, but more often, he went off to meditate alone. These periods of meditation were not strictly prayer; rather, they were personal moments of meditation and listening to God. When Jesus spent entire nights on the mountain, he prayed very little for himself; his focus was primarily on his followers, especially the twelve.

8.30 TEACHINGS FOR THOMAS

The central theme of the discussions throughout September was meditation on one's soul and listening to God. After several days of discussion, Jesus ultimately delivered his memorable Discourse On Prayer in response to Thomas' request to teach them how to pray.

The followers requested Jesus to teach them a model prayer suitable for new followers. The Jewish religious leaders had approximately twenty-five set prayers that they recited in synagogues and even on street corners. However, Jesus was notably averse to public prayer. Up to this point, the twelve had witnessed him meditating frequently, but they had only heard him pray aloud a few times. They observed him spending entire nights in meditation, and they were very curious to understand the manner and form of his spiritual communications with God.

John the Baptist taught his followers a prayer for life. Although Jesus never prohibited his friends from using John's form of prayer, they quickly sensed that their teacher did not fully endorse the recitation of fixed and formal prayers. Nevertheless, the followers consistently requested instruction on how to pray.

The twelve longed to understand what form of petition Jesus would endorse. It was primarily due to the need for a straightforward prayer for the common people that Jesus, in response to Thomas' request, agreed to teach them a model of prayer. He delivered this lesson one afternoon during the third week of their stay on Mount Gilboa:

“John indeed taught you a simple form of prayer: ‘O Heavenly Father, cleanse us from sin, show us your glory, reveal your love, and let your spirit sanctify our hearts forever. Amen!’ He taught this prayer so that his followers might have something to share with the multitude. John did not intend for it to be used as a rigid and formal petition.

“Prayer is a deeply personal and spontaneous communication with one's soul. It should serve as a spiritual endeavor to seek God's will and express fellowship with God's children. When inspired by the spirit, prayer fosters cooperative spiritual growth. True prayer involves listening attentively to the divine in order to achieve your spiritual ideals. Ultimately, prayer should guide you in your persistent efforts to discern God's will.

“I encourage you to continue praying, but do not imply that your petitions will alter the attitude of our Heavenly Father. Your persistence is not meant to earn favor with God; rather, it is intended to transform your attitude and expand your soul's capacity for spiritual receptivity. Authentic belief will help you overcome the obstacles that may hinder your soul's expansion and spiritual progress.”

However, the followers remained unsatisfied; they wished for Jesus to provide them with a model prayer to teach the new believers. After hearing this discussion on prayer, James Zebedee expressed that they did not seek a fixed form of prayer for themselves, but rather for the newer followers who often asked them how to pray acceptably to our Heavenly Father.

When James had finished speaking, Jesus said: “If you still desire such a prayer, I will present the one that I taught my brothers and sisters in Nazareth.” Jesus taught the family prayer, later known as the Lord’s Prayer. He never instructed a formal personal prayer. Instead, He taught the twelve to always pray in secret, to withdraw into nature’s tranquil surroundings, or to go into their rooms and shut the doors when they engaged in prayer.

For several days following the discussion on prayer, the followers continued to ask Jesus questions about this practice. His teachings during this time can be summarized as follows:

- Prayer fosters improved spiritual communication between one’s soul and God.
- The earnestness and longing inherent in any petition, when expressed sincerely, invariably enhance the soul’s capacity for unconscious communication with God.
- God knows a person’s soul better than the individual does, so prayer serves as an attempt for one to understand their own soul.
- In all prayer, remember that spiritual fellowship is a gift. The earthly child comes into being by the will of its parents, but the children of God come into spiritual life by the will of God.
- Prayer serves as a means of detachment from the daily routine of life; it is the breath of spiritual existence amid material civilizations. Just as prayer can be likened to recharging the spiritual batteries of the soul, divine communication can be compared to tuning the soul to receive the broadcasts of God.
- Jesus consistently utilized the positive impact of praying for others.
- Prayer is a process through which one’s soul exchanges human will for divine will.

One of the reasons Peter, James, and John, who frequently accompanied Jesus during his long night vigils, never heard him pray is that Jesus rarely expressed his prayers in spoken words. Most of his praying was conducted silently. Among all his followers, Peter and James came closest to understanding Jesus’ teachings on prayer.

8.31 CONFERENCE WITH JOHN'S FOLLOWERS

Around the beginning of October, Philip of Bethsaida and some of his friends were in a nearby village purchasing food when they encountered several followers of John the Baptist. This chance meeting in the marketplace led to a three-week conference at the Gilboa camp, attended by the followers of Jesus and those of John.

John had recently appointed twelve of his leaders as apostles, a decision made in response to the urging of Abner, the chief of his loyal supporters. Jesus was present at the Gilboa camp during the first week of this joint conference but withdrew for the last two weeks.

By the beginning of the second week of this month, Abner had gathered all of his associates at the Gilboa camp and was prepared to convene a council with the followers of Jesus. For three weeks, these twenty-four men met three times a day, six days a week. During the first week, Jesus mingled with them between their morning, afternoon, and evening sessions. Although they wanted Jesus to preside over their joint deliberations, he steadfastly refused to participate in their discussions. However, he did agree to speak to them on three occasions, addressing topics such as sympathy, cooperation, and tolerance.

Andrew and Abner took turns presiding over the joint meetings of the two groups of followers. They faced numerous challenges and had many issues to address. Once again, they brought their troubles to Jesus, only to hear him respond: "I am solely focused on the personal and purely religious issues of the individual, rather than those of the group. When you reach your conclusions regarding group matters of non-spiritual significance, and provided that you are all in agreement, I pledge my full approval and wholehearted cooperation in advance."

After this discourse, Jesus descended the mountainside, and they saw him again for two weeks. They were unaware of his whereabouts or activities during this time. It took a while for the twenty-four to focus on their pressing issues, as Jesus' absence greatly unsettled them. However, within a week, they returned to the core of their discussions, unable to seek Jesus' assistance.

The first item the group agreed upon was the adoption of the family prayer that Jesus had recently taught them. It was unanimously decided to accept this prayer as the one to be taught to followers by both groups. They then determined that, as long as John lived, whether in prison or out, both groups would continue their work, and that joint meetings would be held every three months for one week at locations to be agreed upon periodically.

However, the most pressing issue they faced was the question of baptism. Their difficulties were further compounded by Jesus' refusal to engage in discussions on the topic. They ultimately reached a consensus that, as long as John was alive, John's followers would perform baptisms, while only Jesus' followers would provide instruction to new followers. Accordingly, from that point until after John's death, two of John's followers accompanied Jesus' friends to administer baptisms, as the joint council had unanimously decided that baptism would serve as the initial step in the outward expression of belief in the new kingdom.

It was subsequently agreed that, in the event of John's death, his disciples would present themselves to Jesus, become his followers, and baptize only after receiving approval from Jesus or his followers. They voted that, upon John's passing, the followers of Jesus would commence baptizing with water as a sign of their commitment to the new kingdom.

Whether remorse should be associated with the teaching of baptism was left as an option; the group made no binding decision. John's followers taught: "Repent and be baptized." Jesus' followers proclaimed, "Believe and be baptized."

Many other minor matters were considered, and their solutions were unanimously agreed upon. These twenty-four men had a truly remarkable experience over the past two weeks as they were compelled to confront challenges and navigate difficulties without the guidance of Jesus.

They learned to disagree, debate, contend, pray, and compromise, all while remaining empathetic toward others' viewpoints and maintaining a degree of tolerance for differing honest opinions.

On the afternoon of their final discussion regarding financial matters, Jesus returned, learned of their deliberations, listened to their decisions, and said: "These, then, are your conclusions, and I shall assist each of you in embodying the spirit of your consensus decisions."

Two and a half months later, John was executed. During this time, John's followers remained with Jesus and the twelve. They all worked diligently, baptizing new followers throughout the cities of the Decapolis.

The Gilboa camp was disbanded November 2, 27 CE.

8.32 IN DECAPOLIS

Throughout November and December, Jesus and the twenty-four worked quietly in the Greek cities of the Decapolis, primarily in Scythopolis, Gerasa, Abila, and Gadara. This marked the conclusion of the initial phase of assuming John's work and organization.

Jesus engaged in minimal public teaching during his mission to the cities of the Decapolis. He devoted significant time to instructing the twenty-four and held numerous special sessions with John's twelve followers. Over time, they gained a deeper understanding of why Jesus did not visit John in prison and why he made no effort to secure his release. However, they struggled to comprehend why Jesus performed no miraculous works or refrained from demonstrating outward signs of power. Before arriving at the Gilboa camp, their belief in Jesus was primarily based on John's testimony; however, they were beginning to develop their own faith through their direct interactions with Jesus and his teachings.

For the past two months, the groups primarily collaborated in pairs, with one of Jesus' followers accompanying one of John's. The followers of John performed baptisms, while the followers of Jesus provided instruction, both groups disseminating the new teachings as

they understood them. As a result, they converted many individuals among the Gentiles and apostate Jews.

Abner, the leader of John's followers, became a devout follower of Jesus and was subsequently appointed as the head of a group of seventy teachers whom Jesus commissioned to disseminate the new teachings.

8.33 NEAR PELLA

In late December, they traveled to the area near the Jordan River, close to Pella, where they resumed their teaching. Both Jews and Gentiles gathered at this camp to hear the teachings. John had been in prison for a year and a half, and during most of this time, Jesus had taught quietly.

One afternoon, while Jesus was addressing the multitude, some of John's close friends delivered the final message received from John. One day, John's friends interrupted Jesus' teaching to convey John's message: he wanted to know if Jesus was truly the Deliverer, or if he should look for another. It was not surprising that John began to question his beliefs.

Jesus paused and responded to John's friends, assuring them that he had not forgotten John. After the messengers spoke with Abner, they departed for Machaerus to relay this message to John, who found great comfort in it. His faith was strengthened by the words of Jesus and the message from Abner. After addressing John's messengers, Jesus turned back to the multitude and said:

"Do not think that John doubts these new teachings. He inquires only to reassure his followers, who are also my followers. John is no weakling. Let me ask you: who heard John teach before Herod imprisoned him? What did you perceive in John? A reed shaken by the wind? A man of changeable moods and clothed in soft clothing? What did you see when you beheld John? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and much more than a prophet."

“It is written in the scriptures: ‘Behold, I send my messenger before your face; he shall prepare the way before you.’ Among those born of women, there has not arisen one greater than John.”

Many who heard Jesus that day chose to be baptized, thereby publicly professing their belief in the new kingdom. From that day forward, the followers of John were closely united with Jesus. This event marked the true union of the followers of John and Jesus.

On this afternoon, Jesus continued to teach, stating: “But to what shall I compare this generation? Many of you will neither accept John’s message nor my own. God reveals himself to each individual through methods suited to their needs. Come, all you who are burdened and weary, and you shall find rest for your souls. Take upon yourselves the spiritual light and divine yoke, and you will experience the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding.”

8.34 BURIAL OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

John the Baptist was executed by order of Herod Antipas on the evening of January 10, 28 CE. The following day, a few of John’s followers, who had traveled to Machaerus, learned of his execution. They approached Herod to request his body, which they placed in a tomb, later giving him a burial near Sebaste, the home of Abner.

The following day, they traveled north to the camp of John’s and Jesus’ followers near Pella, where they informed Jesus about John’s death. Upon hearing their report, Jesus dismissed the crowd and, gathering the twenty-four together, said: “John is dead. Herod has beheaded him. Tonight, convene the joint council and arrange your affairs accordingly. We shall delay no longer. The hour has come to proclaim the spiritual kingdom openly and with power. Tomorrow, we will go into Galilee.”

Accordingly, early in the morning of January 13, 28 CE, Jesus, accompanied by some twenty-five followers, made their way to Capernaum and spent the night at Zebedee’s house.

First Teaching Tour

9.0 AT CAPERNAUM

Jesus and the followers arrived in Capernaum on the evening of Tuesday, January 13. As was customary, they established their headquarters at Zebedee's home in Bethsaida. With the execution of John the Baptist, Jesus prepared to embark on Galilee's first open and public teaching tour. News of Jesus' return quickly spread throughout the city, and early the following day, Mary, the mother of Jesus, hurried to Nazareth to visit her son Joseph.

Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, Jesus spent time at the house of Zebedee, instructing his friends in preparation for their first extensive public teaching tour. He also received and taught many earnest inquirers, both individually and in groups. Through Andrew, he arranged to speak in the synagogue on the upcoming Sabbath day.

Late on Friday evening, Jesus' baby sister, Ruth, secretly visited him. They spent nearly an hour together in a boat anchored a short distance from the shore. No one, except for John Zebedee, ever knew of this visit, and he was instructed to tell no one. Ruth was apparently the only member of Jesus' family who consistently and unwaveringly believed in his mission from the earliest moments of her spiritual awareness until his death and subsequent spirit appearances. Baby Ruth was the primary source of comfort for Jesus within his family.

9.1 DRAUGHT OF FISHES

On Friday morning of that same week, while Jesus was teaching by the seaside, the crowd pressed so closely to the water's edge that he signaled to some fishermen in a nearby boat for assistance. After entering the boat, he continued teaching the assembled multitude for over two hours. This boat belonged to Simon; it was the former fishing vessel of Simon Peter and had been constructed by Jesus himself. On that particular morning, the boat was being used by Zebedee's son, James, and two associates, who had just returned to shore after a fruitless night of fishing on the lake. They were cleaning and mending their nets when Jesus requested their help.

After Jesus had finished teaching the people, he said to David: "Since you were delayed in coming to my aid, let me work with you now. Let us go fishing; put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." However, Simon, one of David's assistants, replied that it was futile, as they had toiled all night without catching anything. Nevertheless, Simon agreed to follow Jesus' instructions due to a gesture made by David.

When they arrived at the location designated by Jesus, they lowered their nets and caught such a large number of fish that they feared the nets would break. They signaled to their partners on the shore to come and assist them. After filling three boats with fish, nearly to the point of sinking, Simon fell at Jesus' knees, and he, along with all the others, was astonished by the catch of fish. From that day forward, James Zebedee, Simon, and their companions abandoned their nets to follow Jesus. However, this was not a supernatural event. Jesus was a keen observer of nature; he was an experienced fisherman who understood the habits of the fish in the Sea of Galilee. On this occasion, he simply directed them to where the fish were typically found at that time of day. Nevertheless, many of Jesus' followers perceived this as a miracle.

9.2 AFTERNOON AT THE SYNAGOGUE

At the afternoon service in the synagogue the following Sabbath, Jesus delivered a lesson on The Will of Our Heavenly Father,

following Simon Peter, who had taught a lesson in the morning. Andrew had presented at the synagogue's Thursday evening meeting, focusing on New Way. At that time, Capernaum had more people believing in the new teachings than any other city.

As Jesus taught in the synagogue on this Sabbath afternoon, he followed the custom of selecting the first text from the law, reading from the Book of Exodus. He then chose a second text from the Prophets, reading from Isaiah. Jesus said:

“You know well that while a kindhearted father loves his family as a whole, he does so because of his deep affection for each individual member. You no longer need to approach our Heavenly Father merely as a child of Israel, but rather as a child of God. As a group, you are indeed the children of Israel; however, as individuals, each of you is a son or daughter of God.

“God is the father to the children of Israel, but he is also the father to all individuals. The prophets have consistently taught that Yahweh cares for his people and that God loves Israel. However, the greater truth, one that many of the later prophets also grasped, is that God loves each of you as individuals. For all these generations, you have adhered to a national or racial religion; now you are called to embrace personal beliefs.

“But even this is not a new idea. Many of the spiritually minded among you have recognized this truth, just as some of the prophets have instructed you. The Prophet Jeremiah states: ‘Behold, the days are coming when I will establish a new covenant with my people, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, but according to a new way. I will be their God, and they shall be my people. On that day, they shall not ask one another: ‘Do you know God?’ No! They shall all know me personally, from the least to the greatest.’

“The prophet’s words are fulfilled today! Jeremiah urged you to make religion a matter of the heart, to connect with God as individuals. The prophet told you that God searches your individual hearts.

“Ezekiel taught even your fathers that religion must become a reality in your personal experiences. ‘As I live,’ says God, ‘behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son.’ Furthermore, Ezekiel foresaw this very day when he spoke on behalf of God, declaring: ‘A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.’

“You should no longer fear that God will punish a nation for the spiritual mistakes of an individual; nor will our Heavenly Father punish one person for the errors of a nation. The hope for a better nation - or a better world - is bound up in the progress and enlightenment of the individual.”

Then Jesus taught his followers that it is God’s will for earthly children to embark on an eternal ascent in their spiritual journey. This journey involves a conscious response to the subconscious divine urge within the soul to seek and know God, and to strive to become like God.

Even though the people of Capernaum were familiar with Jesus’ teachings, they were astonished by his lesson on that Sabbath day. He taught with authority, unlike the Scribes.

Just as Jesus finished speaking, a young man in the congregation, who had been greatly agitated by his words, was suddenly seized by a violent epileptic attack and cried out loudly. At the end of the seizure, as he regained consciousness, he spoke in a dazed state, saying: What do we have to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth? Are you the Holy One of God? Have you come to destroy us?

Jesus instructed the crowd to be quiet and, taking the young man by the hand, said: “Come out of it.” The young man was immediately awakened. Although he suffered from ordinary epilepsy, he had been led to believe that his affliction was the result of possession by an alleged devil. People of that era believed that unclean spirits were

directly responsible for such phenomena. Consequently, they thought that Jesus had expelled the supposed devil from this man. However, Jesus did not cure his epilepsy at that time. *[Long after those days, John, the last to document Jesus' teachings, refrained from mentioning these so-called acts of "casting out the devil."]*

As a result of this ordinary incident, the news quickly spread that Jesus had cast a demon out of a man and miraculously healed him in the synagogue following his afternoon lesson. The Sabbath was the perfect time for such a startling rumor to circulate rapidly and effectively. This report also reached the smaller settlements surrounding Capernaum, and many people came to believe it.

The cooking and household chores at the large Zebedee home, where Jesus and the twelve made their headquarters, were primarily managed by Simon Peter's wife and her mother. Peter's home was located near that of Zebedee, and Jesus and his companions stopped there on their way from the synagogue because Peter's mother-in-law had been suffering from chills and fever for several days. It so happened that the fever left her just as Jesus stood over the ailing woman, holding her hand, smoothing her brow, and speaking words of comfort and encouragement. Jesus had not yet had the opportunity to explain to his friends that no miracle had occurred at the synagogue. With this incident still fresh in their minds, and recalling the miracle of the wine at the wedding in Cana, they interpreted this event as yet another miracle.

Some of them rushed out to disseminate the news throughout the city. This behavior exemplified how a wonder-seeking generation seized upon such coincidences as justification for proclaiming that Jesus had performed miracles. Amatha, Peter's mother-in-law, was afflicted with malaria fever. Jesus did not heal her immediately. It was not until several hours later, after sundown, that her healing occurred naturally in the front yard of the Zebedee home.

9.3 AT SUNDOWN

By the time Jesus and his friends had prepared to partake in their evening meal at the conclusion of this eventful Sabbath day, all of

Capernaum and its surrounding areas were abuzz with excitement over the reported healing miracles. Those who were ill or suffering began making arrangements to visit Jesus or to be carried there by their friends as soon as the sun set. According to Jewish teaching, it was not permissible to seek healing during the sacred hours of the Sabbath.

Therefore, as soon as the sun dipped below the horizon, numerous afflicted men, women, and children began to make their way toward the Zebedee home in Bethsaida. The events of the entire day had prepared the stage for this extraordinary sunset scene. Even the scripture Jesus had referenced during his afternoon lesson suggested that illness should be eradicated.

Soon after sunset, while Jesus and the followers lingered at the dinner table, Peter's wife heard voices in the front yard. Upon going to the door, she saw a large group of sick individuals gathering, and the road from Capernaum was crowded with those seeking healing at Jesus' hands. Upon witnessing this, she promptly informed her husband, who then relayed the message to Jesus.

When Jesus stepped out of the front entrance of Zebedee's house, his eyes fell upon a multitude of suffering individuals. He beheld nearly one thousand ailing human beings; although not everyone present was afflicted, some had come to support their loved ones in the pursuit of healing.

The sight of these afflicted mortals, men, women, and children, suffering, peculiarly touched the human heart of Jesus. He understood that he could not establish a lasting spiritual movement based solely on material wonders; therefore, he adopted a policy of refraining from invoking heavenly spirits to perform supernatural acts.

Then a voice from the front yard called out to Jesus, asking Jesus to speak the word to restore their health and heal their souls. No sooner had these words been spoken than numerous heavenly spirits prepared to act with their creative power, should Jesus give the signal. This was one of those pivotal moments in Jesus' ministry when divine wisdom and human compassion were so intertwined in Jesus' judgment that he

sought refuge in an appeal to his Heavenly Father's will. Looking down upon the afflicted throng, Jesus responded: "I come to reveal our Heavenly Father and a spiritual kingdom. For this purpose, I have lived my life up to this moment. Therefore, if it is the will of God I desire to see the children made whole and..."

The tumult drowned out the other words of Jesus.

Jesus had seemingly entrusted the responsibility for this healing decision to God. Evidently, God's will raised no objections, for scarcely had Jesus spoken when the heavenly spirits began their work. These unseen spirits seemed to descend into the midst of the throng of afflicted individuals, and in an instant, 683 men, women, and children were made whole. They were perfectly healed of all their physical and mental ailments, as well as other material disorders. Jesus never disclosed to his followers how these heavenly spirits executed their cures for such a diverse array of afflictions.

Such a scene had never been witnessed before that day, nor has it been since. For those who were present to behold this extraordinary wave of healing, it was indeed a thrilling spectacle. This physical ministry truly transformed some individuals; however, the spiritual kingdom was not advanced in the hearts of many by this remarkable display of creative healing. Such miracles caused Jesus considerable trouble, as they generated unwanted publicity and brought him much unrequested notoriety.

Chiefly due to his demonstration of physical healing, Jesus became recognized not only for his role as a teacher but also for his role as a physician throughout his career. While Jesus continued his teachings, a significant portion of his personal efforts also involved ministering to the sick and the distressed.

As might have been expected, the fame of the sundown healing at Bethsaida in Capernaum spread throughout Galilee, Judea, and the surrounding regions. Once again, Herod's fears were aroused, prompting him to send watchers to report on the work and teachings of

Jesus and to determine whether he was the former carpenter of Nazareth or John the Baptist risen from the dead.

9.4 LATER THAT EVENING

Throughout the evening following this extraordinary display of healing, a jubilant crowd overflowed Zebedee's home, and the followers of Jesus were clearly filled with heightened emotional enthusiasm. From a human perspective, this was the most remarkable day in all their time with Jesus. They were undoubtedly exhilarated by the possibilities that lay ahead if this astonishing demonstration of healing power was merely the beginning. Their lingering doubts regarding Jesus' mission were dispelled.

But when they sought Jesus, they could not find him. Jesus was deeply troubled by what had transpired. The men, women, and children who had been healed of various ailments lingered late into the evening, hoping for Jesus' return so that they might express their gratitude. His followers could not understand his behavior as the hours passed and he remained in seclusion; their joy would have been complete and perfect had it not been for his continued absence.

When Jesus returned to their midst, the hour was late, and nearly all the beneficiaries of the healing episode had gone home. Jesus declined the congratulations and adoration of his followers and those who had lingered to greet him, saying only, "Rejoice not that God is powerful to heal the body, but rather that God is mighty to restore the soul. Let us go to our rest, for tomorrow we must be about our Heavenly Father's business."

And once again, the disappointed, perplexed, and sorrowful men went to their rest; few found much sleep that night. No sooner would Jesus do something to uplift his friends' spirits than he seemed to dash their hopes and undermine their courage and enthusiasm immediately. As these bewildered followers gazed into each other's eyes, there was likely but one prevailing thought: We cannot understand him.

9.5 EARLY SUNDAY MORNING

Neither did Jesus sleep much that Saturday night. He recognized that the world was rife with physical suffering and material hardships. He pondered the significant risk of dedicating so much of his time to caring for the sick and afflicted that his mission of establishing a spiritual kingdom in the hearts of people would be overshadowed by the ministry of physical needs. Although he did not wish to completely neglect ministering to the sick, he understood that he must also prioritize the more crucial work of spiritual teaching and training.

Because of these and similar thoughts that occupied the mortal mind of Jesus during the night, he arose that Sunday morning long before daybreak and went alone to one of his favorite hills for meditation and communion with his soul, as well as to listen to God. Jesus frequently retreated to the hills for meditation, as there were no private rooms suitable for his personal devotions.

Peter could not sleep that night. Very early, shortly after Jesus had gone out to meditate, he roused James and John, and the three set out to find him. After more than an hour of searching, they located Jesus and asked him to explain the reason for his unusual behavior. They wanted to understand why he seemed troubled by the overwhelming outpouring of healing, even though all the people were filled with joy and his friends were celebrating.

Jesus endeavored to explain to these three followers what had transpired over the course of more than four hours, detailing the dangers associated with such manifestations. He confided in them the purpose of his retreat to pray. Jesus aimed to clarify the fundamental reasons why the teachings could not be based solely on miraculous acts and physical healing. However, they did not fully grasp this lesson.

Meanwhile, early Sunday morning, additional crowds of afflicted individuals and numerous curiosity seekers began to gather around the house of Zebedee. They clamored to see Jesus.

Andrew and the followers were so perplexed that, while Simon Zelotes addressed the assembly, Andrew and several associates went to

search for Jesus. Upon locating Jesus in the company of the three, Andrew inquired why Jesus had left them alone with the multitude. He observed that people were seeking him as never before; never had so many sought after his teachings. He remarked that the house was surrounded by those who had come from near and far because of his mighty works. He urged Jesus to return and minister to them. When Jesus heard this, he responded:

“Andrew, my mission is to reveal our Heavenly Father, and my message is the proclamation of heaven. Please do not ask me to divert my attention from my work for the sake of the curious or to satisfy those seeking signs and wonders. Have we not spent these months among these people, and have they not flocked in multitudes to hear the good news? Why have they now come to besiege us? Is it not because they seek healing for their physical bodies rather than the spiritual truth for their souls? I have asked you to teach and minister to the sick, but I must refrain from becoming so engrossed in healing that I neglect the teachings.

“No, Andrew, I will not accompany you. Go and tell the people to believe what we have taught them and to rejoice in the kindness of God. Prepare for our immediate departure to the other cities of Galilee, where the way has already been prepared for the teaching of good news.”

When Jesus had finished speaking, Andrew and his fellow followers sorrowfully returned to Zebedee's house, dismissed the gathered crowd, and swiftly prepared for their journey.

On the afternoon of Sunday, January 18, 28 CE, Jesus and the followers embarked on their first public teaching tour of the cities of Galilee. During this initial tour, they shared their new teachings in various towns, but they did not visit Nazareth.

Shortly after Jesus and his friends left for Rimmon that Sunday afternoon, his brothers James and Jude came to visit him at Zebedee's house. At noon that day, Jude sought out his brother James and insisted that they go to see Jesus. By the time James agreed to accompany Jude, Jesus had already departed.

The followers were reluctant to leave the great interest that had been generated at Capernaum. Peter estimated that at least one thousand followers could have been baptized. Jesus listened to them patiently, but he would not agree to return. Silence prevailed for a moment, and then Thomas addressed his fellow followers, saying: Let's go! The Master has spoken. No matter if we cannot fully comprehend the mysteries of the new kingdom, one thing is sure: We follow a teacher who seeks no glory for himself.

Reluctantly, they ventured forth to teach the new lessons in the cities of Galilee.

9.6 FIRST TOUR OF GALILEE

The first public teaching tour of Galilee began on Sunday, January 18, 28 CE, and lasted for approximately two months, concluding with the return to Capernaum on March 17. During this tour, Jesus, along with the twelve followers and former followers of John the Baptist, taught and baptized in Rimmon, Jotapata, Ramah, Zebulun, Iron, Gischala, Chorazin, Madon, Cana, Nain, and Endor. They lingered and taught in these cities, while also proclaiming the new teachings in many smaller towns as they passed through.

On this tour, he cautioned them on three occasions, advising them to stay away from Nazareth and to exercise discretion when passing through Capernaum and Tiberias. Ultimately, it brought great satisfaction to the followers to feel they were free to teach - to teach without restriction - and they naturally threw themselves into teaching, ministering to the sick, and baptizing new followers with earnestness and joy.

9.7 AT RIMMON

The small city of Rimmon was once dedicated to the worship of Ramman, the Babylonian god of the air. Many earlier Babylonian and later Zoroastrian teachings continued to influence the beliefs of the Rimmonites. Consequently, Jesus and the twenty-four devoted much of their time to distinguishing between these older beliefs and the new teachings. Peter imparted one of the great lessons of his early career regarding Aaron and the Golden Calf.

It was at Rimmon that Todan first encountered the teachings. *[He later disseminated this message throughout Mesopotamia and beyond. He was among the first to instruct those who resided beyond the Euphrates.]*

Although many citizens of Rimmon embraced the teachings of Jesus, some later caused significant strife for their fellow believers. Converting nature worshipers to fully embrace the adoration of a spiritual ideal within the limited span of a single lifetime is no easy task.

[Many of the Babylonian and Persian concepts of light and darkness, good and bad, time and eternity were later added to the teachings of Jesus' followers. This addition made these teachings more readily acceptable to the people of the region. Similarly, many of Plato's theories regarding the ideal spirit or the invisible patterns underlying all visible things were added by Philo, which facilitated the acceptance of Paul's teachings among the Western Greeks.]

9.8 AT JOTAPATA

While the people of Jotapata welcomed Jesus and his followers with enthusiasm, and many embraced the new teachings, the discourse Jesus delivered to the twenty-four on the second evening of their stay in this small town sets the Jotapata mission apart.

Nathaniel was perplexed by Jesus' teachings on prayer and thanksgiving. In response to his inquiry, Jesus elaborated extensively to clarify his message, Nathaniel summarized the key points as follows:

- Prayer is the conscious communication of one's mind with one's soul, enhancing the soul's unconscious communication with God.

- By opening the human end of the subconscious communication channel, individuals make the continuous stream of divine ministry more accessible. When one feels God speaking to their soul, it is inherent in such an experience that God simultaneously hears one's prayers.
- Pray for improved communication between your soul and God. While prayer for divine guidance along life's journey is valuable, it is less important than the genuine desire to understand God's will.
- While God hears all souls, the sincerity of a prayer significantly influences how it is received. The proper intention behind one's prayer grants it "right-of-way" to the divine ear.
- God communicates most effectively with individual's soul when the human mind is in a state of genuine receptivity. Prayer represents one's endeavor to discern God's will.
- Prayers will not be made more effective by elaborate repetitions, eloquent language, fasting, penance, or sacrifices.
- "When to pray, I will not say. Only the spirit within you may inspire the utterance of those petitions that express your inner communication with God."
- "Always keep your personal communications private; do not allow others to overhear your private prayers. Prayers of thanksgiving are suitable for groups, but the prayer of the soul is a personal matter. There is only one form of prayer that is appropriate for all of God's children, and that is: 'Nevertheless, your will be done.'"

The followers did not grasp these concepts, so Jesus continued:

- Of all the prayers in the Hebrew scriptures, listen to the petitions of the Psalmist: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Purge me from secret sins and keep this servant from presumptuous transgression." "Set a watch, O God, before my mouth; keep tight the door of my lips." "The human tongue is a member that few people can tame, but the spirit within can transform this unruly member into a voice of kindness and an inspiring minister of mercy."

- Prayer does not alter God's attitude toward humanity; rather, it transforms humanity's attitude toward the unchanging God.
- Prayer cannot overcome the limitations imposed by natural laws; therefore, it is advisable to avoid materialistic prayers.
- Human knowledge and unique skills cannot be enhanced through prayer; however, prayer can enhance one's ability to receive the subconscious divine spirit.

Jesus provided additional personal advice:

- Cultivate a more relaxed attitude toward your daily needs; focus less on praying about the challenges of earthly life and more on seeking to find God's will.
- Guard against the significant risk of becoming self-centered in your prayers; refrain from praying excessively for yourself and instead focus on praying for the spiritual progress of your brethren.
- When praying for the sick and afflicted, do not expect that such petitions can substitute for compassionate and thoughtful ministry to those in need.
- Pray for the well-being of your families and friends, and also pray for those who curse you; offer loving petitions for those who persecute you.
- Do not turn to prayer only in times of trouble. Pray when you are facing challenges, but also remember to express gratitude in your prayers when everything is going well.
- Even God's infinite love cannot compel eternal survival upon the soul of anyone who does not choose to endure. Prayer solely for immortality does not ensure success.
- After praying, remain in silent receptivity to provide your soul with a greater opportunity to listen. Prayer is a transformative experience in which the finite gradually approaches and ultimately attains the presence of the infinite.

Jesus shared many other truths about man's spiritual communication with God with his friends; however, not many of the twelve could fully grasp his teachings.

9.9 AT RAMAH AND ZEBULUN

At Ramah, Jesus engaged in a profound discussion with an elderly Greek philosopher who believed that science and philosophy were adequate to meet the needs of human experience. Jesus listened patiently and empathetically to this Greek teacher, acknowledging the validity of many of his points. However, he noted that, in his exploration of human existence, the philosopher had neglected to address the fundamental questions of why and whither. Jesus then added: “Where you leave off, we begin. Belief is a revelation to the human soul, engaging with spiritual realities that the mind alone can never fully comprehend. Intellectual pursuits may uncover the facts of life, but spiritual practice reveals the true essence of existence. You have explored the material shadows of truth, but you should seek the spiritual realities that cast these transient shadows of material facts.”

Jesus taught this Greek new lessons for over an hour. The old philosopher was receptive to Jesus’ methods, and, being genuinely honest, he came to accept many of them. The followers were somewhat disconcerted by Jesus’ open agreement with many of the Greek’s propositions, but afterward, Jesus privately said to them:

“My children, do not be astonished by my tolerance of Greek philosophy. Genuine inner certainty does not fear external analysis or truth, nor does it resent honest criticism. Intolerance serves as a mask that conceals the secret doubts regarding the validity of one’s beliefs. A person who possesses unwavering confidence in the truth of their convictions is not disturbed by their neighbor’s attitudes. Courage stems from a deep-seated honesty about the principles one professes to believe. Sincere individuals are unafraid to critically examine their true convictions and noble ideals.”

On the second evening at Ramah, Thomas asked Jesus how a new follower could truly know and be certain about the validity of these new teachings. Jesus responded to Thomas:

“Your assurance that you have entered into the family of our Heavenly Father and that your soul will eternally survive in heaven is entirely a matter of personal experience - belief in the truth. Spiritual assurance equates to your individual religious experience and your intelligent understanding, combined with your spiritual belief, while subtracting your sincere doubts.

“The earthly father materially endows the earthly child. Having received spiritual life from the Heavenly Father, you are, therefore, a child of God. You survive in the material world of the flesh due to your earthly father; you survive in the spiritual world because you are infused with the living spirit of your Heavenly Father.

“While you cannot directly observe the divine spirit at work within you, there is a practical method for assessing the extent to which you have surrendered to the teachings and guidance of this spirit of our Heavenly Father. This method is reflected in the depth of your love for your fellow human beings. The subconscious spirit of God can exert a powerful influence, guiding you toward divine communication and fostering a loving regard for others.

Jesus continued:

“At first, you may believe that you are the sons and daughters of God because the teachings have heightened your awareness of the inner guidance provided by the Father’s indwelling presence. This spirit is bestowed upon all humanity, dwells among everyone, and instructs all people. It will unfailingly bear witness to your Heavenly Father’s presence within you, affirming that you are, in truth, the children of God.

“The path from earthly existence to eternal life has not been clearly revealed to you, but there is indeed a way; there always has been. The soul that experiences the spiritual kingdom attains eternal life and shall never perish as it seeks God. However, you will better comprehend much of this when I ascend to God, allowing you to reflect on your current experiences with greater clarity.”

And all who heard these words were greatly encouraged. The old teachings had been ambiguous and unclear regarding the survival of the righteous, so it was refreshing and inspiring for Jesus’ followers to hear these definitive words of assurance about the eternal survival of all seeking souls.

In Zebulun, the inhabitants were neither strictly Jewish nor Gentile, and few genuinely embraced the new teachings, despite having heard of the healings that took place in Capernaum. The specific lesson Jesus imparted during his time in Zebulun primarily focused on the mutual obligations within the spiritual kingdom. It included teachings aimed at clarifying the distinctions between personal religious experiences and the collective experiences associated with social and religious events.

This was one of the rare occasions when Jesus addressed the social dimensions of religion. Throughout his life, Jesus provided minimal guidance to his followers regarding the socialization of religious beliefs.

The followers continued to teach and baptize new adherents as they visited from house to house, comforting the downtrodden and ministering to the sick and afflicted. The organization expanded as each of Jesus’ followers was paired with one of John’s as an associate, and this arrangement persisted until they traveled to Jerusalem for the upcoming Passover.

9.10 AT IRON

In Iron, as in many of the smaller cities in Galilee and Judea, there was a synagogue. During the early period of Jesus’ ministry, it was his custom to speak in these synagogues on the Sabbath. Sometimes he

would deliver a message during the morning service, while Peter or one of the other followers would teach in the afternoon. Jesus and his followers also frequently taught at the weekday evening assemblies held at the synagogue. Although the religious leaders in Jerusalem grew increasingly antagonistic toward Jesus, they exerted no direct control over the synagogues outside the city. It was not until later in Jesus' public ministry that they fostered widespread sentiment against him, leading to the near-universal closure of synagogues to his teachings. At this time, all the synagogues in Galilee and Judea remained open to him.

Iron was the site of extensive mineral mines during that era, and since Jesus had never experienced the life of a miner, he spent most of his time, while sojourning in Iron, working in the mines. While his followers visited homes and taught in public places, Jesus labored alongside the underground workers. The reputation of Jesus as a healer had spread even to this remote village, attracting many sick and afflicted individuals seeking his assistance. His healing ministry greatly benefited numerous people; however, in none of these instances did Jesus perform a miracle of healing except in the case of the leper.

Late in the afternoon of the third day at Iron, as Jesus returned from the mines, he happened to pass through a narrow side street on his way to his lodging. As he approached the squalid hovel of a certain leprous man, who had heard of Jesus' fame as a healer, the man boldly accosted him at his door. Kneeling before Jesus, he expressed his desire to enter the kingdom if Jesus would make him clean.

The leper spoke here because, among the Jews, lepers were prohibited from attending the synagogue or participating in public worship. This man genuinely believed that he could not be accepted into heaven unless he found a cure for his leprosy. When Jesus saw him in his suffering and heard his words of unwavering faith, his human heart was touched, and he was filled with compassion. Jesus reached out his hand and, touching him, said: "You will be clean."

Immediately, he was healed; leprosy no longer afflicted him. This cleansing of the leper was the first miracle that Jesus had intentionally and deliberately performed up to that point. It appears that Jesus had called upon heavenly spirits, and they responded; this was a genuine case of leprosy.

Jesus then lifted the man to his feet and said: "See that you tell no one about your healing. Instead, go quietly about your business, present yourself to the priest, and offer the sacrifices commanded by Moses as a testimony of your cleansing."

But this man did not follow Jesus' instructions; he did not go to the priests. Instead, he began to proclaim throughout the town that Jesus had healed him of his leprosy. Since he was well-known in the village, the people could see that he had been cleansed of his affliction.

As a result of his spreading the news that Jesus had healed him, Jesus was so overwhelmed by the sick that he was compelled to rise early the next day and leave the village. Although Jesus did not re-enter the town, he remained on the outskirts near the mines for two days, continuing to instruct the miners about the new teachings.

From Iron, the group traveled to Gischala, where they spent two days imparting new lessons before departing for Chorazin. In Chorazin, they dedicated nearly a week to teaching; however, they were only able to attract a few followers. In no location where Jesus had taught had he encountered such widespread rejection of his message. The stay in Chorazin was particularly disheartening for most of the followers, and Andrew and Abner struggled significantly to maintain the morale of their companions.

Most of the followers believed that their inability to achieve success in these towns was due to Jesus' insistence that they refrain from referring to him as a healer. They longed for him to cleanse another leper or, in some other way, demonstrate his spiritual powers to capture the people's attention. However, Jesus remained unmoved by their earnest pleas.

Passing quietly through Capernaum, they continued on to the village of Madon, where they fared somewhat better.

9.11 AT CANA

The twelve were likely filled with excitement when Jesus announced: “Tomorrow, we go to Cana.” They anticipated a warm reception there, as Jesus was well-known in the region. Their efforts to spread the new teachings were progressing well when, on the third day, a prominent citizen of Capernaum named Titus arrived in Cana. Titus, a partial follower of Jesus’ teachings, was desperate to seek help for his critically ill son. He had heard that Jesus was in Cana and hurried to find him, as many in Capernaum believed that Jesus could heal any illness.

When this nobleman found Jesus in Cana, he urged him to hurry to Capernaum to heal his ailing son. As the followers stood by in breathless anticipation, Jesus looked at the father of the sick boy and said: “The power of God is in your midst; you see signs and behold wonders, but do you believe the new teachings?”

But the nobleman pleaded with Jesus, reinforcing his belief, and when he left, the child was at the point of death. After a moment of silent meditation, Jesus raised his head and said, “Return to your home; your son will live.”

Titus truly believed the teachings of Jesus and hurried back to Capernaum. As he was returning, his servants came out to meet him, reporting that his son had improved - he lives. Then Titus inquired about the time when the boy began to recover, and when the helpers answered that it was around the seventh hour when the fever left him, the father remembered that it was at that very hour when Jesus had said: “Your son will live.”

Though the entire household of Titus, along with their friends and followers, regarded this episode as a miracle, however it was merely a demonstration of understanding natural law, knowledge that Jesus frequently employed. *[This son later became a minister of the new teachings and ultimately sacrificed his life for those who taught in Rome.]*

Again, Jesus felt compelled to leave Cana quickly due to the excessive attention drawn by this second episode. The townspeople recalled the transformation of water into wine, and now that he was

believed to have healed the nobleman's son from such a great distance, they approached him, not only bringing the sick and afflicted but also sending messengers to request healing for those suffering far away. When Jesus observed that the entire region was stirred, he said: "Let us go to Nain."

9.12 AT NAIN

When Jesus sought to leave Cana and travel to Nain, a large multitude of followers accompanied him, along with many curious onlookers. These individuals were inclined to believe in signs and wonders. By this time, the people of central and southern Galilee had developed a strong belief in the miracles associated with Jesus and his ministry. Hundreds of sincere individuals suffering from nervous disorders and emotional disturbances came into Jesus' presence. They then returned home to their friends, proclaiming that Jesus had healed them. In these instances of mental healing, people perceived it as physical healing, a supernatural cure.

The crowd was eager to witness extraordinary events, and they were not disappointed. As Jesus and his companions approached the city gate, they encountered a funeral procession heading to the nearby cemetery, carrying the only son of a widowed mother from Nain. This woman was highly respected, and half of the village followed the bearers of the bier for this supposedly deceased boy. When the procession reached Jesus and his companions, the widow and her friends recognized Jesus and implored him to restore her son to life. Their expectation of a miracle was so profound that they believed Jesus could heal any ailment; surely, such a healer could also raise the dead.

Jesus, while being thus implored, stepped forward and, lifting the covering of the bier, examined the boy. Discovering that the young man was not truly dead, he recognized the tragedy that his presence could avert. Turning to the mother, he said: "Weep not. Your son is not dead; he sleeps. He will awaken." Then, taking the young man by the hand, he said: "Awake and arise." The youth immediately sat up and began to speak, and Jesus instructed them to return home and remain silent about the event.

Jesus endeavored to calm the crowd and attempted to explain that the boy was not truly dead and that he had not brought him back from the grave; however, his efforts were in vain. The crowd that followed him, along with the entire village of Nain, was stirred to a fever pitch of emotional frenzy. It was not until long after nightfall that the clamoring crowd could finally be dispersed.

So, the news spread throughout Galilee and into Judea that Jesus had raised the widow's son from the dead, and many who heard this report believed it. Jesus was never able to make even his friends fully understand that the widow's son was not truly dead when he bade him to awake and arise. *[But Jesus did impress upon his followers sufficiently to ensure that this account was excluded from all subsequent records, except for that of Luke, who reported it as the episode had been conveyed to him.]*

Jesus was so overwhelmed as a healer that he departed early the next day for Endor.

9.13 AT ENDOR

At Endor, Jesus took a brief respite from the clamoring multitudes seeking physical healing. During their stay at this location, Jesus recounted the story of King Saul and the witch of Endor to instruct his followers. He explained to his friends that the imagined "rebellious spirits" were believed to impersonate genuine heavenly spirits at that time. Furthermore, Jesus clarified that the souls of departed human beings do not return to their original world nor communicate with the living.

After resting for two days, Jesus said to his friends: "On the morrow, let us return to Capernaum to wait and teach while the countryside quiets down. By now, they will have partly recovered from this sort of excitement at home."

9.14 AT TIBERIAS

Jesus and the followers arrived in Capernaum on Wednesday, March 17, and spent two weeks at the Bethsaida headquarters before departing

for Jerusalem. During this time, the followers taught by the seaside while Jesus spent much of his time alone in the hills, contemplating his teaching mission. During this period, Jesus, accompanied by James and John Zebedee, made two trips to Tiberias, where they met with the people and instructed them in the new teachings.

Many members of Herod's household believed in Jesus' teachings and attended the meetings in Tiberias. The influence of these followers within Herod's official family likely helped to diminish the ruler's animosity toward Jesus. The followers in Tiberias had thoroughly explained to Herod that the kingdom Jesus proclaimed was spiritual in nature, rather than a political endeavor. Herod trusted these members of his household and did not allow himself to become unduly alarmed by the reports circulating about Jesus' teachings and healings. He had no objections to Jesus' healings or his religious work.

Notwithstanding the favorable attitude of many of Herod's advisers, there was a faction among his subordinates who were so influenced by the religious leaders in Jerusalem that they remained bitter and hostile opponents of Jesus. Later, they significantly hindered Jesus' activities. For this reason, Jesus and his followers devoted much of their time to conducting most of their public teaching in Galilee, rather than in Jerusalem and Judea.

9.15 MANGUS'S HELPER

On the day before they prepared to travel to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover, Mangus, a centurion, or captain of the Roman guard stationed in Capernaum, approached the leaders of the synagogue. He reported that his orderly was gravely ill and near death, and he inquired whether Jesus would be willing to heal him.

The Roman captain believed that the Jewish leaders would have greater influence over Jesus. Consequently, the elders approached Jesus and requested that he travel to Capernaum to heal the beloved servant of the Roman centurion, who had constructed the synagogue where Jesus had preached on numerous occasions.

When Jesus heard their request, he replied: "I will go with you." As he accompanied them toward the centurion's house, and just before they entered the courtyard, the Roman soldier sent his friends to greet Jesus. He instructed them to convey that the teacher should not trouble himself to enter his home, for he was not worthy. He did not consider himself worthy to approach Jesus directly; therefore, he sent the elders of his community. However, he was confident that Jesus could speak the word from where he was, and the servant would be healed.

When Jesus heard these words, he turned to his friends and those who were with him and said: "I marvel at the faith of this Gentile. I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel." After turning away from the house, Jesus added: "Let us go from here."

The centurion's friends entered the house and informed Mangus of what Jesus had said. From that moment on, the helper began to recover and was eventually restored to his usual health; the recovery was ultimately complete.

Jesus' followers believed that this was yet another of his miracles; however, it was not.

9.16 PASSOVER AT BETHANY

Early on Tuesday, March 30, Jesus and his companions began their journey to Jerusalem for Passover, traveling along the route through the Jordan Valley. They arrived on the afternoon of Friday, April 2, and, as was customary, established their headquarters in Bethany. While passing through Jericho, they took a moment to rest as Judas Iscariot deposited a portion of their communal funds with a family friend. This marked the first occasion on which Judas had carried a surplus of money, and this deposit remained undisturbed until they passed through Jericho again on their final journey to Jerusalem.

The group had an uneventful journey to Jerusalem, but they had scarcely settled in Bethany when people from near and far began to gather, seeking healing for their bodies and comfort for their troubled

minds and souls. The influx was so great that Jesus had little time to rest. Consequently, they set up tents at Gethsemane, and Jesus would travel back and forth between Bethany and Gethsemane to evade the ever-present crowds. The group spent nearly three weeks in Jerusalem, during which Jesus instructed them to refrain from public teaching, focusing instead on private instruction and personal outreach.

At Bethany, they quietly celebrated Passover. This was the second Passover that Jesus had observed with his friends in Jerusalem, and it was the first time that Jesus and all twelve partook in a bloodless Passover feast. The followers of John the Baptist did not share this Passover with Jesus and his followers - they celebrated the feast with Abner and many of the early adherents of John's teachings.

When Jesus and the twelve departed for Capernaum, the followers of John did not accompany them. Under the leadership of Abner, they remained in Jerusalem and the surrounding region, diligently working to promote the new teachings, while Jesus and the twelve returned to their ministry in Galilee. The twenty-four were together only briefly again, shortly before the commissioning of the seventy evangelists. Despite their differing opinions, the two groups collaborated effectively, and a spirit of goodwill undoubtedly prevailed.

9.17 AT THE POOL OF BETHESDA

On the afternoon of the second Sabbath in Jerusalem, as Jesus and the followers were preparing to participate in the temple services, John said to Jesus: Let me show you something.

John led Jesus through one of the gates of Jerusalem to a pool of water known as Bethesda. Surrounding this pool was a structure consisting of five porches, under which a large group of individuals gathered in search of healing. This was a hot spring, and its reddish-tinged water bubbled irregularly due to gas accumulations in the rock caverns beneath the pool. Many believed that supernatural influences caused this periodic disturbance of the warm waters, and it was a common belief that the first person to enter the water after such a disturbance would be healed of any ailment they had.

Jesus' followers were somewhat restless under the restrictions imposed upon them, and John, the youngest of the twelve, was particularly agitated by this constraint. He had brought Jesus to the pool, believing that the sight of the gathered sufferers would evoke Jesus' compassion, prompting him to perform a miracle of healing. John inquired if there was anything Jesus could do for them. Jesus replied:

“John, why would you tempt me to stray from the path I have chosen? Please do not replace the performance of miracles and the healing of the sick with the proclamation of the teachings of eternal truths. My son, I may not fulfill your desires, but gather together these sick and afflicted so that I may offer them words of encouragement and eternal comfort.”

In addressing those gathered, Jesus said:

“Many of you are here, suffering from illness and affliction, as a result of years of poor choices; some endure the consequences of time's accidents; others grapple with spiritual missteps; while some of you contend with the limitations imposed by the imperfect conditions of your earthly existence. God does not work to enhance your material circumstances, but rather to secure your spiritual well-being. None of us can significantly alter life's challenges unless we discern God's will - and we are all called to fulfill that will.

“If you could all be healed of your physical afflictions, you would indeed marvel. However, it is even more remarkable that you should be cleansed of all spiritual ailments and find yourselves healed of all moral infirmities. You are all children of God; you are the sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father.

“The constraints of time may seem burdensome, but God loves you. Fear not; you will all discover an abundance of love. Truly, I say to you: The soul that embraces the new teachings and believes in this lesson of fellowship with God's children shall attain eternal life.”

Many of those who heard the teachings believed them. Some of the afflicted were so inspired and spiritually revitalized that they proclaimed they had also been cured of their physical ailments.

One man, who had been downcast for many years and grievously afflicted by the infirmities of his troubled mind, rejoiced at Jesus' words. Picking up his bed, he went forth to his home, even though it was the Sabbath day. This afflicted man had waited all those years for someone to help him; he was so consumed by his feelings of helplessness that he had never considered helping himself. This realization proved to be the crucial step he needed to take for his recovery, getting out of his bed and walking home.

Then Jesus said to John: "Let us depart before the chief priests and the Scribes come upon us and take offense at our words of life spoken to these afflicted ones." They returned to the temple to join their companions, and soon they all departed to spend the night in Bethany. *[John never told the other followers about this visit of himself and Jesus to the pool of Bethesda on that Sabbath afternoon.]*

9.18 VISITING SIMON THE PHARISEE

Although Simon was not a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, he was an influential Pharisee in Jerusalem. He was a somewhat reluctant follower, and despite the potential for severe criticism, he boldly invited Jesus and his associates, Peter, James, and John, to his home for a social meal. This Simon had long observed Jesus and was greatly impressed by his teachings and even more so by his character.

The affluent Pharisees were committed to alms giving and did not shy away from publicizing their philanthropic efforts. At times, they would even sound a trumpet just before donating to a beggar. It was customary for these Pharisees, when hosting a banquet for distinguished guests, to leave the doors of their homes open, allowing anyone, including street beggars, to enter. Often, these unfortunate individuals would stand along the walls of the room, positioned behind the diners' couches, ready to receive portions of food that might be tossed to them by the guests.

On this particular occasion at Simon's house, a woman of unsavory reputation entered from the street. She had recently become a follower of the new teachings and was well-known throughout Jerusalem as the former proprietor of one of the so-called high-class brothels located near the Temple Court of the Gentiles. Upon embracing the lessons of Jesus, she closed her disreputable establishment and encouraged most of the women associated with her to accept the teachings and change their way of life. Despite her efforts, she continued to be held in great disdain by the Pharisees and was compelled to wear her hair down - the badge of her former life as a harlot.

This woman brought with her a large flask of perfumed anointing lotion. Standing behind Jesus as he reclined, she began to anoint his feet, wetting them with her tears of gratitude and wiping them with the hair of her head. After completing the anointing, she continued to weep and kiss his feet.

When Simon saw all this, he said to himself, if Jesus were a true prophet, he would have perceived who this woman is and what kind of person she is; she is a notorious sinner. Knowing what was going on in Simon's mind, Jesus spoke up and said: "Simon, I have something I would like to share with you. A certain wealthy moneylender had two debtors. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other owed fifty. When neither of them had the means to repay their debts, he forgave them both. Which of them do you think, Simon, would love him the most?"

Simon stated that he believed he had forgiven the one the most. Jesus said:

"You have judged correctly." Then, pointing to the woman, he continued: "Simon, take a good look at this woman. I entered your house as a guest, yet you provided me with no water for my feet. This grateful woman has washed my feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You did not greet me with a kiss, but this woman has not stopped kissing my feet. You neglected to anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my head with precious ointment.

“What is the meaning of all this? Simply put, her numerous spiritual mistakes can be understood, and this has led her to love deeply. However, others who have been given much sometimes love only a little.”

And turning toward the woman, he took her by the hand and, lifting her, said: “You have truly regretted your mistakes. Do not be discouraged by the thoughtless and unkind attitudes of others; continue in the joy and freedom of pursuing the spiritual kingdom.”

When Simon and his guests, who were seated with him, heard these words, they were even more astonished and began to whisper among themselves ; Who is this man that he even dares to pardon people. And when Jesus heard them murmuring, he turned to the woman and said: “Go in peace; your belief has healed you.”

After the meal, as Jesus stood up with his friends to depart, he turned to Simon and said:

“I understand your heart, Simon; I see how you are torn between faith and doubt, how fear distresses you and pride troubles you. I hope that you may experience, in your current station in life, transformations of mind and spirit that are comparable to the profound changes that the new teachings have already brought about in the heart of your uninvited and unwelcome guest.

“Our Heavenly Father has opened the doors of the spiritual kingdom to all who possess the faith to enter. No individual or group of individuals can close those doors, even to the most humble soul or the most notorious sinner on earth, if they sincerely seek entry.”

Jesus, accompanied by Peter, James, and John, took leave of their host and went to join the other followers at the camp in the garden at Gethsemane. That same evening, Jesus spoke to his followers about the condition of people’s souls and their progress in the eternal ascent in the spiritual kingdom. Jesus said:

“If a genuine and vibrant connection exists between a child of God and the Heavenly Father, that son or daughter will continuously progress toward the Father’s ideals. While it is true that the child may initially make slow progress, this is the type of progress that is ultimately desired. The crucial aspect is not the speed of one’s advancement but rather its certainty. One’s actual achievements are less significant than the direction of one’s progress toward God. What one becomes each day is infinitely more important than what one is today.

“The transformed woman whom some of you saw at Simon’s house today is currently living at a material level that is lower than that of Simon and his well-meaning associates. While these Pharisees are preoccupied with the false progress of traversing deceptive circles of meaningless ceremonial services, this woman has earnestly embarked on a long and eventful search for God. Her path toward the spiritual kingdom is unobstructed by spiritual pride and moral self-satisfaction; her soul is in progressive motion and is moving toward an eternal goal.”

But Jesus cautioned his listeners not to mistakenly interpret his illustrations of father and child in a way that suggests God resembles overindulgent parents who unwittingly undermine the moral standards of their thoughtless children, thereby contributing to the early demoralization of their offspring. “Our Heavenly Father does not indulgently condone the self-destructive actions and practices of children that are harmful to their moral growth and spiritual progress.”

Many other semiprivate meetings and banquets were attended by Jesus, alongside both the rich and the poor of Jerusalem, before he and his friends finally departed for Capernaum. Many individuals became followers of the new teachings and were subsequently baptized by Abner and his associates, who remained in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas to promote the teachings.

9.19 RETURNING TO CAPERNAUM

In the last week of April, Jesus and the twelve departed from their headquarters in Bethany, near Jerusalem. They began their journey back to Capernaum, traveling through Jericho and along the Jordan River.

The chief priests and religious leaders of the Jews held numerous secret meetings to determine how to deal with Jesus. They all concurred that action needed to be taken to halt his teachings, but they could not agree on the method. They had hoped that the civil authorities would dispose of him as Herod had done with John, but they soon realized that Jesus conducted his work in such a way that the Roman officials were not significantly alarmed by his teachings. Consequently, at a meeting held the day before Jesus departed for Capernaum, it was decided that he would need to be apprehended on a religious charge and tried by the Sanhedrin.

A commission of six spies was appointed to follow Jesus, observe his words and actions, and return to Jerusalem with their report once they had gathered sufficient evidence of lawbreaking and blasphemy. These six spies caught up with Jesus' party, which numbered about thirty, in Jericho. Under the pretense of wanting to become followers, they attached themselves to Jesus' group and remained with them until the beginning of the second teaching tour in Galilee. At that point, three of the spies returned to Jerusalem to submit their report to the chief priests and the Sanhedrin.

The following morning, Peter spoke to the assembled multitude at the crossing of the Jordan River. Afterward, they moved up the river toward Amathus. Although they intended to proceed directly to Capernaum, a large crowd gathered, prompting them to stay for three days, during which they taught and baptized. They did not depart until early on Sabbath morning, the first day of May.

The spies from Jerusalem were confident that they would finally secure their first charge against Jesus - that of Sabbath breaking - since he had chosen to begin his journey on the Sabbath day. However, they were destined for disappointment because, just before their departure, Jesus summoned Andrew into his presence and instructed him, in front of them all, to proceed for the distance permitted by Jewish law for a Sabbath day's journey.

But the spies did not have to wait long for their opportunity to accuse Jesus and his associates of breaking the Sabbath. As the group walked along the narrow road, the waving wheat, which was just beginning to ripen, was close at hand on either side. Some of the followers, feeling hungry, plucked the ripe grain and ate it. It was customary for travelers to help themselves to grain as they passed along a road; therefore, no thought of wrongdoing was associated with such behavior. However, the spies seized upon this as a pretext to confront Jesus. When they saw Andrew rubbing the grain in his hand, they approached him and asked if he was not aware that it is unlawful to pluck and rub grain on the Sabbath day.

And Andrew responded that they were hungry and had only gathered enough grain to meet their needs. Since when did it become sinful to eat grain on the Sabbath? The Pharisees argued that while eating was permissible, plucking and rubbing the grain between one's hands constituted a violation of the law. Surely, your master would disapprove of such actions. Andrew countered that rubbing the grain between their hands was hardly more laborious than chewing it, which is allowed. Why quibble over such trivial matters?

They believed that Andrew implied they were quibblers, which made them indignant. They rushed back to where Jesus was speaking with Matthew and protested, insisting that he should command his followers to cease their actions. However, Jesus responded:

“You are indeed zealous for the law, and it is commendable that you remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

“However, the scripture states that on one occasion, when David was hungry, he and those who were with him entered the house of God and ate the show bread, which was not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests. Furthermore, David also gave this bread to his companions. Therefore, our law permits performing many necessary tasks on the Sabbath day.

“And shall I not, before the day is finished, see you eat what you have brought for this day? My good men, you do well to be zealous for the Sabbath, but you would do better to safeguard the health and well-being of your fellow beings. The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath.”

The Pharisees were astonished and confounded by his words of discernment and wisdom. For the rest of the day, they kept to themselves and refrained from asking any further questions.

9.20 BACK IN CAPERNAUM

It was around noon on Monday, May 3, when Jesus and the twelve arrived in Bethsaida by boat from Tarichea. They traveled by boat to evade those who were accompanying them. However, by the following day, others, including the official spies from Jerusalem, had once again located Jesus.

On Tuesday evening, Jesus was conducting one of his regular question-and-answer sessions when the leader of the six spies asked why he never instructed his followers to fast and pray as the Pharisees did and as John instructed his disciples. In response to this question, Jesus referred to a statement made by John:

“To pray is a natural act for people, but fasting is not included in the new teachings. A wise tailor does not sew a piece of unshrunk cloth onto an old garment; otherwise, when it becomes wet, the cloth will shrink and create a larger tear. Similarly, people do not put new wine into old wine skins, for

the new wine may cause the skins to burst, resulting in the loss of both the wine and the skins. A wise person places new wine into fresh wine skins.

“Therefore, my followers demonstrate wisdom by integrating the valuable aspects of the old order into the new teachings. While fasting may have been an appropriate practice under the law of Moses, in the spiritual kingdom, individuals will experience freedom from fear and joy in the divine spirit.”

And when they heard these words, the followers of John may have felt comforted, while the Pharisees became even more perplexed. Jesus then cautioned his listeners against the idea that new teachings should entirely replace old ones. He stated:

“That which is old and true must endure. Similarly, that which is new but false must be dismissed. However, have the faith and courage to embrace that which is new and true. It is written: ‘Forsake not an old friend, for the new cannot compare to him. As with new wine, so is a new friend; if it matures, you shall enjoy it with gladness.’”

And then, late into the night, Jesus expressed the hope that they would advance far beyond even the ideals of Isaiah and the earlier prophets. His final words that night were: “Grow in grace by embracing that living faith which acknowledges that you are the children of God, while simultaneously recognizing every person as a sibling.”

It was after midnight when Jesus finished speaking, and each man returned to his place to sleep.

9.21 AT BETHSAIDA

From May 3 to October 3, 28 CE, Jesus and his followers resided at the Zebedee home in Bethsaida. During these five months of the dry season, they established a large teaching school and camp near the Zebedee residence, which had been significantly expanded to

accommodate Jesus' growing family of friends. This seaside camp, populated by a fluctuating number of truth seekers, candidates for healing, and curious onlookers, ranged from five hundred to fifteen hundred individuals. The tented city was overseen by David Zebedee, with assistance from the Alpheus twins. It functioned as a self-sustaining enterprise where no one was ever turned away. The encampment exemplified order, sanitation, and effective administration. Individuals with various ailments were segregated and placed under the care of a physician follower, a Syrian named Elman.

Throughout this period, the followers would go fishing at least once a week, selling their catch to David for consumption at the seaside school. The funds received were deposited into the group treasury. Each month, the twelve spent one week with their families or friends.

While Andrew maintained overall responsibility for activities, Peter was fully in charge of the school's teachers. Each morning, the followers contributed by teaching groups, while teachers and students engaged with the community in the afternoons. After the evening meal, five nights a week, the followers led question-and-answer sessions to benefit the students. Once a week, Jesus presided over this question hour, addressing lingering inquiries from previous sessions.

In a span of five months, several thousand individuals came and went from this school. Interested individuals from all corners of the Roman Empire and the regions east of the Euphrates regularly attended. This marked the most extended and most organized period of Jesus' teachings. Jesus' immediate family spent the majority of this time in either Nazareth or Cana.

9.22 A NEW SCHOOL

Peter, James, and Andrew were members of the committee appointed by Jesus to evaluate applicants for teaching positions at the school. Students from various cultures and nationalities across the Roman world and the East, as far as India, were represented in this new

institution. The school operated on a model of learning through practice. In the afternoons, students taught what they had learned earlier in the day to the assembly by the seaside. After a meal, they engaged in informal discussions about both the morning's lessons and the afternoon's teaching experiences.

Each of the teachers presented their own perspective on the lessons of about heaven. They made no effort to teach in a uniform manner; there was no standardized or dogmatic formulation of theological doctrines. Although they all conveyed the same truth, each follower offered their personal interpretation of Jesus' teachings. Jesus supported this expression of diverse personal experiences consistently harmonizing and coordinating these varied and divergent views during his weekly question-and-answer sessions.

Even with this considerable degree of personal liberty in teaching, Simon Peter tended to dominate the school's theological framework. Next to Peter, James Zebedee exerted the most significant personal influence. The more than one hundred pupils trained during these five months by the seaside represented the pool from which the later seventy teachers were selected, excluding Abner and John's followers.

9.23 BETHSAIDA HOSPITAL

In connection with the seaside encampment, Elman, a Syrian physician, organized and operated what can be considered the first hospital for four months, with the assistance of a team comprising twenty-five young women and twelve men. This infirmary, situated a short distance south of the central tented city, provided care for the sick using all known medical methods as well as spiritual practices, including prayer. Jesus visited the sick at this encampment at least three times a week, making personal contact with each individual in need.

No so-called miracles of supernatural healing occurred among the one thousand afflicted individuals who left this infirmary feeling improved or cured. However, many of these individuals claimed that

Jesus had healed them. While some of the cures experienced by Elman's patients resembled miraculous transformations, they were, in fact, changes of mind and spirit that can occur in the presence of expectant individuals under the immediate and inspirational influence of a strong and benevolent personality, whose ministry alleviates fear and dispels anxiety. Those who cared for the sick learned valuable lessons by observing how Jesus inspired faith and confidence in the suffering.

Elman and his associates endeavored to educate these individuals about the truth regarding the possession of a supposed devil; however, they encountered limited success. The belief that physical illness and mental disturbances could be attributed to an imaginary unclean spirit residing in the mind or body of the afflicted person proved challenging to alter.

The camp disbanded just before the onset of winter.

9.24 THE TEACHING MISSION

Throughout this period, Jesus conducted public teaching sessions at the encampment fewer than a dozen times and spoke only once in the Capernaum synagogue, on the second Sabbath, before departing with the newly trained teachers.

Not since his baptism had Jesus felt so alone as during this period at the training school in Bethsaida. Whenever any of the followers ventured to ask why he was so frequently absent from their midst, he would invariably respond that he was "about our Heavenly Father's business." During these times of absence, Jesus was accompanied by only two followers. He had temporarily released Peter, James, and John from their roles as his personal companions so that they could also participate in training the new teachers, who numbered more than one hundred.

When Jesus wished to go to the hills to meditate, he would summon any two of the followers who were available to accompany him. In this manner, each of the twelve had the opportunity for close association and intimate contact with Jesus.

On numerous occasions, when Jesus was alone for hours, two of his friends nearby observed his features undergo rapid and numerous changes, even though they heard no words spoken. They also did not witness any visible manifestations of heavenly spirits.

9.25 DISCOURSE ON AFFLICTION

During one of these private interviews in the hills, Nathaniel asked Jesus why he refrained from healing indiscriminately. He struggled to comprehend why a loving Heavenly Father would allow so many earthly children to endure so many afflictions. Jesus responded to Nathaniel in his Discourse On Affliction:

“Nathaniel, it is not unusual for thoughtful individuals to feel bewildered by the suffering and affliction they observe. However, you can be certain of one thing: God does not send affliction as a punishment for wrongdoing; our Heavenly Father does not intentionally cause suffering. It is written: ‘God does not afflict willingly.’

“Man should not blame God for the afflictions that are some-times the natural consequences of life; nor should individuals complain about experiences that are inherent to living in this world. This world is imperfect, and God has chosen not to rectify its imperfections. Do not question the love of God simply because you encounter misfortunes; our Heavenly Father rarely intervenes with natural laws.

“It is our Heavenly Father’s desire that mortals work persistently and consistently toward the betterment of their condition on earth. An intelligent application would enable individuals to overcome many of their earthly afflictions.

“Nathaniel, our mission is to assist individuals in resolving their spiritual challenges, thereby enhancing their mental clarity and preparing them to tackle their various material issues with greater inspiration. I understand your confusion, as you have read the scriptures. Unfortunately, there has been a prevailing tendency to attribute to God the responsibility

for everything that people struggle to understand. However, God is not accountable for all that you may find difficult to comprehend.

“Sometimes people bring unnecessary suffering upon themselves due to their deliberate and persistent refusal to follow the more virtuous paths aligned with divine will. Many hardships arise from these spiritual errors. The flaws and limitations associated with spiritual mistakes are inherent to human nature; some consequences of immorality are unavoidable.

“It was in ancient times that it was written: ‘God will not forget the sick.’ ‘When you pass through the waters of affliction, I will be with you, and when the rivers of adversity overflow you, I will not forsake you.’ ‘Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I do keep the law. Affliction was good for me that I might thereby learn the divine statutes.’ ‘There is a correction in suffering.’ ‘God will strengthen him upon the bed of affliction.’”

9.26 TEACHINGS ON JOB

This same evening in Bethsaida, John Zebedee asked Jesus why so many innocent people suffered from various diseases and endured numerous afflictions. In response to John’s questions, Jesus said, among other things:

“My son, you should understand the significance of adversity, the purpose of suffering, and the unpredictability of life. The masterpiece of Semitic literature is the scripture story of Job’s afflictions. This remarkable narrative begins with a description of the material prosperity enjoyed by God’s servant. Job provided his children with wealth, dignity, status, health, and all the things that people cherish in this temporal existence. According to the time-honored teachings of Abraham’s descendants, such material prosperity was

considered unequivocal evidence of divine favor. However, material possessions and temporal success do not signify God's blessing. God loves the poor just as much as the rich; God does not show favoritism. While individuals may often reap the consequences of their actions, human suffering should not be viewed as a punishment for spiritual failings.

"Job and his friends struggled to uncover the true answers to their perplexities. With the understanding you now possess, it would be difficult to attribute the roles played in this unique narrative to God. Although Job did not resolve his intellectual dilemmas or find solutions to his philosophical challenges through his suffering, he did attain significant victories, even during the collapse of his theological defenses.

Jesus continued:

"The first of Job's friends, Eliphaz, urged the sufferer to demonstrate the same fortitude in his afflictions that he had recommended to others during his days of prosperity. This false comforter said: 'Trust in your God, Job; remember that it is the wicked, not the righteous, who suffer. You must deserve this punishment; otherwise, you would not be afflicted. You know well that no one can be entirely righteous in God's sight. You understand that the wicked never truly prosper. Ultimately, people seem destined for trouble, and perhaps God is merely chastising you for your own good.' It is no wonder that poor Job found little comfort in such an interpretation of the problem of human suffering.

"But the advice of his second friend, Bildad, was even more disheartening, despite its validity from the perspective of the prevailing theology of the time. Bildad stated: 'God cannot be unjust. Your children must have sinned since they perished; you must be mistaken, or you would not be suffering so greatly. If you are truly righteous, God will undoubtedly rescue you from your afflictions. You should

take note of the history of God's interactions with humanity, as the Almighty only destroys the wicked.'

"Job's third friend, Zophar, then spoke even less comforting words when he said: 'You are foolish to claim righteousness, given your afflictions. However, I acknowledge that it is impossible to understand God's ways fully. Perhaps there is a hidden purpose behind all your suffering.'

"When Job listened to all three of his friends, he appealed directly to God for help, pleading: 'Man, born of woman, is few of days and full of trouble.'

"And then Job replied to his friends, saying: 'I know well that God does not hear my cries for help. How can God be just and at the same time so utterly disregard my innocence so completely? I am coming to understand that I can find no satisfaction in appealing to the Almighty. God tolerates the persecution of both the good and the wicked. Given the frailty of humanity, what chance do we have for consideration at the hands of an omnipotent God? God has made me as I am, and when he thus turns against me, I am defenseless. Why did God ever create me to suffer in such a miserable fashion?'

"And who can challenge Job's attitude, given the counsel of his friends and the erroneous ideas about God that occupied his own mind? Job longed for a human-like God, yearning to communicate with a divine being who knows man's mortal condition and recognizes that the just must often suffer innocently. Our Heavenly Father will ultimately be able to comfort all who are called upon to endure the afflictions faced by Job.

"Then the second session with his friends began. Eliphaz grew increasingly stern, accusatory, and sarcastic. Bildad became indignant at Job's perceived contempt for his friends. Zophar reiterated his dismal advice. By this time, Job had become disillusioned with his friends and once again

appealed to God. He now called upon a just God in contrast to the God of injustice represented by the philosophy of his friends and even reflected in his own religious beliefs.

“Next, Job sought solace in the hope of a future life where the injustices of mortal existence might be rectified more justly. The absence of support from humanity compels Job to turn to God. This leads to a profound internal struggle between faith and doubt.

In conclusion Jesus said:

“Finally, Job begins to perceive the divine truth; his tormented soul ascends to new heights of hope and courage. He may continue to suffer and even face death, but his enlightened soul now proclaims that cry of triumph, ‘My Vindicator lives!’ Although he initially misunderstood suffering, Job rises to a superhuman level of moral understanding and spiritual insight. When the suffering servant obtains a vision of God, a ‘peace which passes all understanding’ is gained.

“Job was correct in challenging the doctrine that God afflicts children to punish their parents. He consistently acknowledged that God is always righteous, yet he yearned for a profound revelation of God’s personal character. This quest for understanding is our mission on earth. Individuals who suffer will ultimately be granted the comfort of knowing God’s love and understanding.

“Study the Book of Job to uncover how many misconceptions about God even well-meaning individuals may sincerely hold, believing that God is responsible for numerous unexplained events. Observe how even the deeply afflicted Job was able to find the God of comfort despite these erroneous beliefs. Ultimately, his faith transcended the clouds of suffering, allowing him to perceive the truth emanating from God.

“While the speech of God, delivered from the whirlwind, was a majestic concept at the time it was uttered, you have

already learned that our Heavenly Father is not revealed in that manner. Instead, He speaks within the human soul as a still, small voice, saying, ‘This is the way; walk therein.’ God lives within you!”

John contemplated these sayings in his heart for many days. His entire later life was profoundly transformed as a result of this conversation with Jesus in the hills. *[In later years, John played a significant role in encouraging other followers to reconsider their perspectives on the source, nature, and purpose of ordinary human afflictions. John refrained from discussing this meeting until after Jesus had departed.]*

9.27 MAN WITH THE WITHERED HAND

On the second Sabbath, before the followers and the new corps of teachers embarked on their second teaching tour of Galilee, Jesus delivered a sermon in the Capernaum synagogue titled The Joys Of Righteous Living. When Jesus concluded his address, a large crowd of individuals who were maimed, lame, sick, and afflicted gathered around him, seeking healing. Among this group were the followers, many new teachers, and the Pharisaic spies sent from Jerusalem. Wherever Jesus went (except when he retreated to the hills alone), the six spies from Jerusalem were sure to follow.

As Jesus spoke to the crowd, a leader among the observing Pharisees prompted a man with a withered hand to approach him and inquire whether it was lawful to be healed on the Sabbath or if he should seek assistance on another day. When Jesus saw the man, listened to his words, and recognized that the Pharisees had sent him, he said: “Come forward while I ask you a question. If you had a sheep that fell into a pit on the Sabbath, would you not reach down, take hold of it, and lift it out? Is it lawful to perform such acts on the Sabbath?”

The man replied that it would be lawful to do good on the Sabbath day. Jesus then addressed all of them, saying: “I understand the reason you have brought this man before me. You would seek to find fault with me if you could entice me to show mercy on the Sabbath.

In silence, you all acknowledged that it is permissible to lift a distressed sheep out of a pit, even on the Sabbath. I call upon you to witness that it is lawful to demonstrate loving-kindness on the Sabbath, not only to animals but also to human beings. I assert that doing good for others on the Sabbath is indeed lawful.”

As they all stood before him in silence, Jesus addressed the man with the withered hand, saying: “Stand here by my side so that all may see you. Now, so that you may understand it is our Heavenly Father’s will for you to do good on the Sabbath day, if you have the faith to be healed, I invite you to stretch out your hand.”

As the man stretched forth his withered hand, it was restored to wholeness. The crowd was inclined to turn against the Pharisees, but Jesus urged them to remain calm, saying: “I have just told you that it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath, to save a life; however, I did not instruct you to do harm or to give in to the desire to do harm.” *[This man later returned to his work as a stonemason, demonstrating a life characterized by gratitude and righteousness following his healing.]*

The angered Pharisees departed, and despite it being the Sabbath, they hurried to Tiberias to confer with Herod. They did everything in their power to incite his animosity and secure the Herodians as allies against Jesus. However, Herod declined to take action against Jesus, suggesting that they present their grievances in Jerusalem.

This is the first instance of a miracle performed by Jesus in response to the challenge posed by his opponents. Jesus called upon heavenly spirits to effect this healing, not as a demonstration of his power, but as a meaningful protest against the transformation of the Sabbath rest into a burdensome set of meaningless restrictions for all people. Jesus’ request must have also aligned with the will of God.

9.28 LAST WEEK AT BETHSAIDA

During the final week of their stay in Bethsaida, the Jerusalem spies became increasingly divided in their attitudes toward Jesus and his teachings. Three of these Pharisees were profoundly impressed by

what they had seen and heard. Meanwhile, in Jerusalem, Abraham, a young and influential member of the Sanhedrin, publicly embraced the teachings of Jesus and was baptized in the Pool of Siloam by Abner. This new convert from Jerusalem, Abraham the Pharisee, donated all of his worldly possessions to Jesus' treasury, significantly contributing to the immediate dispatch of one hundred newly trained teachers. All of Jerusalem was abuzz with excitement over Jesus, and messengers were sent to Bethsaida to recall the six spying Pharisees.

At approximately this time, a trance prophet from Baghdad, named Kirmeth, arrived at the Bethsaida encampment. This so-called prophet experienced peculiar visions while in a trance and had fantastical dreams when his sleep was interrupted. His presence caused considerable disruption at the camp, and Simon Zelotes advocated for a rather harsh approach to dealing with the self-deceived pretender.

Still, Jesus intervened and granted him complete freedom of action for a few days. Most who heard his teachings soon recognized that his lessons were not sound when evaluated against the new teachings. He soon returned to Baghdad, taking only half a dozen erratic individuals with him.

On the same day, Beth-Marion, a Phoenician woman, became so fanatical that she lost her sanity. After nearly drowning while attempting to walk on water, she was taken away by her friends.

The Greek philosopher, who had previously been won over during the tour of Galilee, returned with several wealthy Jews from Alexandria. Once again, they invited Jesus to their city to establish a joint school of philosophy and religion, as well as an infirmary for the sick. However, Jesus graciously declined the invitation.

9.29 AT ZEBEDEE'S HOME

On Friday afternoon, October 1, as Jesus held his final meeting with the followers, teachers, and other leaders of the encampment, six Pharisees from Jerusalem were seated in the front row of this assembly in the spacious and expanded front room of the Zebedee home. During

this gathering, one of the most remarkable episodes of Jesus' life took place. Jesus was speaking at that moment while standing in a large room designed to accommodate gatherings during the rainy season. The house was surrounded by a vast crowd of people straining to hear some part of Jesus' discourse. As the house was filled with people and encircled by eager listeners, a man with paralysis was carried down from Capernaum on a small stretcher by his friends.

This paralytic had heard that Jesus was about to leave Bethsaida. After speaking with Aaron, the stone mason who had recently been healed, he resolved to be carried into Jesus' presence to seek healing. His friends attempted to gain entrance to Zebedee's house through both the front and back doors, but the crowd was too large. However, the paralytic refused to accept defeat; he instructed his friends to procure ladders, which they used to ascend to the roof of the room where Jesus was speaking. After loosening the tiles, they boldly lowered the sick man on his couch by ropes until he rested on the floor directly in front of Jesus.

When Jesus observed their actions, he paused his speech, while those present in the room marveled at the determination of the paralyzed man and his friends. The man with paralysis expressed that he did not wish to interrupt the teachings, yet he was resolute in his desire to be made whole. Unlike those who received healing and quickly forgot the lessons imparted, he was committed to serving in heaven.

Now, despite the fact that this man's affliction was a consequence of his own misspent life, Jesus, recognizing his faith, said to the paralytic: "Son, fear not; your past mistakes will be overlooked. Your faith will heal you."

When the Pharisees from Jerusalem, along with other Scribes and lawyers who were seated with them, heard this pronouncement by Jesus, they began to say to themselves: How dare this Jesus speak like this? Who can forgive sins but God? Does he not understand that such words are blasphemous?

Jesus perceived that they were questioning among themselves, and he spoke to them, saying: "Why do you reason in your hearts? What is

the difference between saying to this paralyzed person, ‘Your sins are overlooked,’ or ‘Arise, take up your bed, and walk’?”

And when Jesus had spoken these words, the paralytic arose, and as the crowd made way for him, he walked out before them all. Those who witnessed these events were filled with amazement. Once again, Jesus must have recognized that it was God’s will for heavenly spirits to heal the man.

Peter dismissed the assembly while many prayed and praised God, confessing that they had never witnessed such strange occurrences before.

And it was around this time that the messengers from the Sanhedrin arrived to summon the six spies to return to Jerusalem. Upon receiving this message, the spies engaged in a serious debate among themselves. Once they concluded their discussions, the leader and two of his associates accompanied the messengers back to Jerusalem. Meanwhile, three of the spying Pharisees confessed their belief in Jesus’ teachings and, without delay, went to the lake to be baptized by Peter.

Andrew announced the closing of the encampment, and everyone prepared to return home or follow Jesus into Galilee.

Second And Third Teaching Tours

10.0 SECOND TEACHING TOUR

The second public teaching tour of Galilee commenced on Sunday, October 3, 28 CE, and lasted for nearly three months, concluding on December 30. Jesus and the twelve followers participated in this endeavor, supported by a newly recruited corps of 117 evangelists and numerous other interested individuals. During this tour, they visited Gadara, Ptolemais, Japhia, Dabaritta, Megiddo, Jezreel, Scythopolis, Tarichea, Hippos, Gamala, Bethsaida-Julias, and many other cities and villages.

Before departing on Sunday morning, Andrew and Peter requested that Jesus provide final instructions to the new teachers. However, Jesus declined, stating that it was not his role to perform tasks that others could adequately handle. After some deliberation, it was decided that James Zebedee would speak with them.

After James' remarks, Jesus addressed the new teachers: "Go forth to perform the tasks assigned to you, and later, once you have demonstrated your competence and faithfulness, you will be asked to share the new teachings. In both body and mind, individuals respond uniquely; the only consistent aspect of humanity is their souls. Only through and by appealing to their souls can people ever achieve true fellowship."

On this tour, only James and John accompanied Jesus. Peter and the other followers engaged approximately a dozen new teachers, maintaining close contact with them as they continued their teaching work. As soon as new followers were prepared to accept the spiritual kingdom, the John's teachers would administer baptism. During these three months, Jesus and his two companions traveled extensively, often visiting two cities in a single day to observe the teachers' work and encourage them in their efforts. This entire second teaching tour was primarily aimed at providing practical experience for the 117 newly trained teachers in this corps.

Throughout this period, David Zebedee maintained a permanent headquarters for the work at his father's house in Bethsaida. This location became the clearinghouse for Jesus' ministry and served as a relay station for the messenger service that David operated between workers in neighboring regions. He undertook these initiatives independently, yet with Andrew's approval. David employed forty to fifty messengers in this intelligence division, which was rapidly expanding and extending the work. While engaged in this endeavor, he partially supported himself by dedicating some of his time to his previous fishing activities.

10.1 HEALINGS AFTER BETHSAIDA

By the time the camp at Bethsaida had disbanded, the reputation of Jesus, particularly as a healer, had spread throughout the region, encompassing all of Syria and neighboring countries. For weeks after leaving Bethsaida, the sick continued to arrive. When they could not find Jesus, they would inquire with David about his whereabouts and then set out to search for him. Numerous afflicted individuals experienced restoration of health and happiness, thanks to the reconstructive power of the deep belief that motivated them to seek healing. During this three-month tour, more than one hundred men, women, and children from Judea, Idumea, Galilee, Syria, Tyre, Sidon, and areas beyond the Jordan benefited from such self-healing. Upon returning home, they contributed to the growing fame of Jesus.

Jesus did not intentionally perform any of these so-called miracles of healing. He never explained to his friends how these healings occurred, except on several occasions when he would merely say, "I perceive that power has gone forth from me." On one occasion, when touched by an ailing child, he remarked, "I perceive that life has gone forth from me." It seems that when human need and divine power converge, and provided that God does not object, heavenly spirits carry out the healing, even if unconsciously to Jesus.

While physical cures had the most direct and immediate appeal to ordinary people, Jesus was increasingly sought after by those suffering from moral enslavement and mental distress. He consistently taught them the new path to deliverance. Fathers sought his counsel on how to manage their sons, while mothers came to him for guidance regarding their daughters. His ear was always open to the sorrows of humanity, and he readily assisted those who sought his teachings.

On the other hand, many individuals sought healing for entirely selfish reasons. Accompanied by her entourage, a wealthy widow from Tyre came in search of relief from her numerous infirmities. As she followed Jesus through Galilee, her disappointment grew, prompting her to offer increasing sums of money, as if the power of God could be bought by the highest bidder. However, she remained uninterested in the new teachings; her sole focus was on obtaining a cure for her physical ailments.

10.2 JERUSALEM RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Notwithstanding the favorable reception of Jesus and his teachings by the ordinary people, the religious leaders in Jerusalem grew increasingly alarmed and antagonistic. They perceived Jesus as a leader who taught opportunistically rather than as a systematic instructor. Jesus drew upon life experiences rather than strictly adhering to their laws, often conveying his messages through parables. When he employed a story to illustrate a point, he intended to highlight a single aspect of that narrative for clarity. *[Many misconceptions regarding the teachings of Jesus emerged later as a result of attempts to create elaborate allegories from his stories.]*

The followers learned that while Jesus adhered to the fundamental principles of the religion of his ancestors, he did not hesitate to reject man-made traditions rooted in superstition and oppression. They taught that natural disasters, temporal accidents, and other calamitous events are not manifestations of divine judgment. They condemned blind devotion to meaningless rituals and exposed the fallacy of materialistic worship. They observed that Jesus emphasized pure hearts over clean hands as the true hallmark of religion. He refrained from engaging in destructive criticism and did not show disregard for the religious, social, economic, and political norms of his time. To his followers, he boldly proclaimed the message of spiritual freedom for all people.

His followers recognized that his attitude toward women was the most astonishing and revolutionary aspect of his mission. In an era when men were often discouraged from greeting even their own wives in public, Jesus boldly included women as teachers during his third tour of Galilee. He demonstrated remarkable courage by doing so, despite the prevailing rabbinic teaching that stated: “It was better that the words of the law should be burned than delivered to women.” *[In one generation, Jesus elevated women from a state of disrespectful oblivion and oppressive drudgery that had persisted for ages. However, many in subsequent generations noted that some of his followers failed to emulate his example.]*

The religious leaders in Jerusalem were becoming increasingly frantic due to the recent conversion of young Abraham the Pharisee and the defection of the three spies whom Peter had baptized. These spies were now accompanying the teachers on this second teaching tour of Galilee. The leaders were persuaded that Jesus needed to be apprehended, convicted, and executed as a religious offender, a violator of the fundamental teachings of Jewish law.

10.3 LESSON FOR A YOUNGER TEACHER

Jesus did very little public work during this teaching tour; however, he held numerous evening classes with teachers in most cities and villages where he stayed with James and John. During one of these

evening sessions, a younger teacher posed a question to Jesus regarding anger. In his response, Jesus addressed several points, stating:

“Anger is a tangible manifestation that generally reflects the extent to which the spiritual nature has failed to gain control over the intellectual and emotional aspects of the self. It signifies a deficiency in tolerant, brotherly love, as well as a lack of self-respect and self-control. Anger undermines health, diminishes mental clarity, and impairs the soul.

“The scriptures state that ‘wrath kills the foolish man,’ and that ‘a man tears himself in his anger.’ ‘He who is slow to anger is of great understanding,’ while ‘he who is hasty in temper exalts folly.’ ‘A soft answer turns away wrath,’ and ‘discretion defers anger.’ Furthermore, ‘he who has no control over himself is like a defenseless city without walls.’ ‘Angry people stir up strife, while the furious multiply their transgressions.’ Lastly, ‘be not hasty in spirit, for anger rests in the bosom of fools.’

“Let your hearts be so filled with love that your spirit will find it easy to refrain from expressing those outbursts of primal anger that are inconsistent with the status of a child of God.”

On this occasion, Jesus spoke to the group about the importance of cultivating a well-balanced character. He emphasized that any virtue, when taken to extremes, can become a vice. Jesus taught that while many individuals must diligently focus on a specific pursuit for their livelihood, it is equally important for people to develop a broad cultural awareness of life. He lamented the tendency toward overspecialization, which can lead to narrow-mindedness and a limited engagement with life's activities. He said that truly educated individuals are not content to remain ignorant of the lives and actions of others.

Here, Jesus taught the principles of temperance and consistency, emphasizing the importance of proportionate adjustments to life's

challenges. He cautioned that excessive enthusiasm could lead to fanaticism and discussed a former associate whose imagination had driven him into visionary yet impractical endeavors. Simultaneously, Jesus warned against the perils of the dullness associated with overly conservative mediocrity. What truly impressed his associates was not merely his teachings on balanced character, but rather how his own life exemplified those teachings.

And then Jesus spoke about the dangers of excessive courage and faith, explaining how they can sometimes lead unthinking individuals to recklessness and presumption. He also illustrated how prudence and discretion, when taken to extremes, can result in cowardice and failure. He urged his listeners to pursue originality while cautioning against a tendency toward eccentricity. He advocated for sympathy devoid of sentimentality and piety, free from sanctimoniousness. He taught reverence free from fear and superstition.

10.4 LESSON FOR SIMON

When Jesus visited the group of teachers under the supervision of Simon Zelotes during their evening conference, Simon asked Jesus why some people are significantly happier and more content than others. He wondered if contentment was a matter of religious experience. Among other things, Jesus replied:

“Simon, some individuals are naturally happier than others. Much depends on one’s willingness to be guided and directed by God’s spirit, which lives within. The scriptures offer wise counsel: ‘A little that a righteous person possesses is better than the riches of many wicked; for ‘a good person shall find satisfaction within himself;’ and ‘the wicked are like the troubled sea, which cannot rest, for its waters cast up mire and dirt; there is no peace for the wicked.’

“Much of people’s sorrow arises from the disappointment of their ambitions and the wounding of their pride.

“Individuals have a duty to themselves and to others to make the most of their lives on earth. However, after sincerely exerting themselves, they should accept their circumstances and exercise ingenuity in maximizing what has come their way.

“All too many people’s troubles stem from the fear of their own hearts. Seek not false peace and fleeting joy, but rather the assurance of faith and the certainties of divine fellowship, which yield composure, contentment, and supreme joy in the spirit: ‘A merry heart does good like medicine,’ and ‘A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance and is a continual feast.’ Better is a little with the reverence of God than great treasure accompanied by trouble. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is present than a fatted ox with hatred there.”

His followers learned that Jesus did not regard this world as a “vale of tears;” he perceived it as an eternal spiritual ascension, the “vale of soul-making.”

10.5 TEACHINGS FOR PHILIP

It was during the evening conference at Gamala that Philip of Bethsaida asked why the scriptures instruct people to fear God, while Jesus encourages individuals to approach God without fear. In response, Jesus replied to Philip, saying:

“My child, I am not surprised that you ask such questions. When small, reverence was often instilled through fear. However, I have come to reveal our Heavenly Father’s love, so that you may be drawn to God’s profound and perfect love. I seek to free you from the bondage of serving a jealous or wrathful God out of slavish fear.

“The ‘fear of God’ has held various meanings throughout the ages, evolving from fear, through anguish and dread, to awe and reverence. Now, from reverence, I aim to guide you through recognition, realization, and understanding,

ultimately leading to love. When individuals recognize only the works of the heavenly Father, they may be led to fear God. However, as people begin to understand and experience the personality and character of the living God, they are led increasingly drawn to love such a good, perfect, and eternal Father. This transformation in the relationship between people and God is what constitutes our mission.

“Your forebears feared God due to the aura of might and mystery surrounding God. Now, you are called to adore God because you perceive the magnificence of love, abundant understanding, and the glory of truth. The power of God instills fear in the hearts of ancient people, but the nobility and righteousness of God’s character inspire reverence, love, and open communication today. A dutiful and loving child does not fear or dread even a mighty and noble father. We should come to replace fear with love, sorrow with joy, revenge with understanding, dread with confidence, and meaningless ceremonies with loving service.

Jesus continued:

“When children are young and naive, they must be admonished to honor their parents. However, as they grow older and begin to appreciate the benefits of parental guidance and protection, they develop a deeper understanding of respect and affection. This maturation leads them to a level of experience where they love their parents more for who they are than for what they have done.

“You have been taught to fear God and keep God’s rules, for that was the entirety of man’s duty. However, I have come to give you a new and elevated principle. We should teach ‘love God and strive to fulfill the heavenly Father’s will.’ Your ancestors were instructed to fear God, the Almighty King. We teach to love God, the all-loving Father.

“Humility, indeed, befits mortals who receive all these gifts from our Heavenly Father. Humility before God is fitting in the depths of our hearts; meekness before others is commendable, but the hypocrisy of self-conscious and attention-seeking humility is immature and unworthy of enlightened individuals. You do well to be meek before God and self-controlled before others, but let your meekness stem from a spiritual foundation rather than from a self-deceptive display of self-righteous superiority.

“The prophet wisely stated, ‘Walk humbly with God,’ for while our Heavenly Father is infinite and eternal, God also cherishes ‘those who are of a contrite mind and a humble spirit.’ God disdains pride, loathes hypocrisy, and abhors iniquity. We should emphasize the importance of sincerity in our relationship with our Heavenly Father by frequently referring to the little child as a representation of the mindset essential for people to enter heaven.

“The prophet Jeremiah described many mortals when he said: ‘You are near God with your words, but far from God in your heart.’ It is also written as a dire warning from the prophet: ‘The priests teach for hire, and the prophets divine for money. At the same time, they claim piety and proclaim that God is with them.’ You have been cautioned against those who ‘flatter with their lips while their hearts are given to double-dealing.’ Of all the sorrows that befall a trusting man, none is as terrible as being ‘wounded in the house of a trusted friend.’”

Philip was satisfied with this response.

10.6 RETURNING TO BETHSAIDA

Andrew, in consultation with Simon Peter and with the approval of Jesus, instructed David at Bethsaida to send messengers to the various teaching groups with instructions to conclude the tour and return to Bethsaida on Thursday, December 30. By dinner time on that rainy day,

Jesus' followers and the new teachers had arrived at the Zebedee home. The group remained together throughout the Sabbath, being hosted in the homes of Bethsaida and nearby Capernaum. The two or three days spent in Bethsaida were truly exhilarating and inspiring; even the older teachers felt uplifted by the young teachers as they shared their experiences.

Afterward, the entire party was granted a two-week recess to return home to their families, visit friends, or go fishing. Jesus, along with Andrew, Peter, James, and John, remained at the Zebedee home, where they spent considerable time discussing the welfare and extension of the tour.

Of the 117 evangelists who participated in this second teaching tour of Galilee, only 75 passed the test of experience. They were present to be assigned to service at the conclusion of the two-week recess.

10.7 THIRD TEACHING TOUR

On Sunday evening, January 16, 29 CE, Abner, accompanied by the followers of John, arrived in Bethsaida and participated in a joint conference with Andrew and the followers of Jesus the following day. Abner and his associates established their headquarters in Hebron and regularly traveled to Bethsaida for these conferences.

Among the various topics discussed at this joint conference was the practice of anointing the sick with specific types of oil in conjunction with prayers for healing. Once again, Jesus chose not to engage in their discussions or to express his views on their conclusions. The followers of John had consistently utilized anointing oil in their ministry to the sick and afflicted, and they aimed to establish this as a standard practice for both groups. Nevertheless, the followers of Jesus declined to commit to such a regulation.

On Tuesday, January 18, the twenty-four were joined by seventy-five tested teachers at the Zebedee house in Bethsaida, in preparation for their third teaching tour of Galilee. This mission lasted for seven weeks. The new teachers were dispatched in groups of five, while Jesus and the twelve traveled together most of the time.

The former followers of John went out in pairs to baptize. Abner and his associates collaborated with the new teaching groups for nearly three weeks, providing guidance and baptizing. They visited Magdala, Tiberias, Nazareth, and the principal cities and villages of central and southern Galilee, including many places previously seen and several others. This marked their final message to Galilee, except for the northern regions.

10.8 WOMEN'S TEACHER CORPS

Of all the audacious actions that Jesus undertook during his ministry, the most remarkable was his unexpected announcement on the evening of January 16: "Tomorrow, we will designate ten women for ministerial work."

At the beginning of the two-week period during which the followers and the new teachers would be absent from Bethsaida on their furlough, Jesus requested that David summon his parents back to their home and send messengers to call ten devout women to Bethsaida. These women had previously served in the administration of the former encampment and the tented infirmary. Although they had all listened to the instruction given to the young teachers, it had never occurred to either the women or their teachers that Jesus would dare to ask women to spread the new teachings and minister to the sick.

These ten women selected by Jesus were: Susanna (the daughter of the former chazzan of the Nazareth synagogue), Joanna (the wife of Chuza, the steward of Herod Antipas), Elizabeth (the daughter of a wealthy Jew from Tiberias and Sepphoris), Martha (the elder sister of Andrew and Peter), Rachel (the sister-in-law of Jude, Jesus' brother by birth), Nasanta (the daughter of Elman, the Syrian physician), Milcha (a cousin of the follower Thomas), Ruth (the eldest daughter of Matthew Levi), Celta (the daughter of a Roman centurion), and Agaman (a widow from Damascus). Subsequently, Jesus added two other women to this group: Mary Magdalene and Rebecca (the daughter of Joseph of Arimathea). Jesus empowered these women to establish their own organization and instructed Judas to provide funding for their supplies and pack animals. The ten elected Susanna as

their leader and Joanna as their treasurer. From that point forward, they managed their own finances; they never again relied on Judas for support.

It was truly astounding during a time when women were not even permitted on the main floor of the synagogue, being confined to the women's gallery, to witness their recognition as teachers of the lessons. The charge that Jesus entrusted to these ten women served as an emancipation proclamation that liberated all women; no longer should men regard women as their spiritual inferiors. This was a significant shock even to the twelve disciples. Although they had often heard Jesus say that: "in the spiritual kingdom there is neither rich nor poor, free nor bond, male nor female; all are equal in God's eyes," they were taken aback when he formally proposed to appoint these ten women as religious teachers and to allow them to travel with him.

This decision stirred the entire country, and Jesus' opponents took advantage of this development. Nevertheless, most women steadfastly supported these chosen sisters and expressed their unequivocal approval of this overdue recognition of women's roles in religious work. *[This liberation of women was actively practiced by the followers immediately after his departure. During the early days of the teachings, women ministers were referred to as deaconesses and received general recognition. However, despite acknowledging this in theory, Paul struggled to incorporate it into his own attitudes and found it difficult to implement in practice. Consequently, in later generations, many reverted to ancient customs.]*

As the party journeyed from Bethsaida, the women traveled at the rear. During the gatherings, they consistently sat in a group to the right of the speaker. Increasingly, women had become followers of the new teachings. Until that point, it had been a source of considerable difficulty and embarrassment when they wished to engage in personal conversation with Jesus or one of the followers. However, this situation had now changed. When any of the women followers wanted to see Jesus or speak with the followers, they would approach Susanna. Accompanied by one of the ten women teachers, they could proudly enter the presence of Jesus or one of his followers.

10.9 AT MAGDALA

At Magdala, the women first demonstrated their value and validated their chosen wisdom. Andrew had imposed strict rules on his associates regarding personal interactions with women of questionable character. When the group arrived in Magdala, these ten women teachers were able to enter the illicit establishments and teach their lessons directly to all the patrons. Additionally, when visiting the sick, these women could engage closely in their ministry with their afflicted sisters.

At this location, Mary Magdalene found the new teachings because of the ministry of these ten women, later known as the twelve women. Due to a series of misfortunes and the prevailing attitudes of respectable society toward women who make such errors in judgment, Mary found herself in one of the disreputable establishments of Magdala. Martha and Rachel made it clear to Mary that the spiritual kingdom was open to individuals like her. Mary embraced the new teachings and was baptized by Peter the following day. Subsequently, Mary Magdalene became the most compelling new teacher among this group of women teachers. She was designated for this service alongside Rebecca in Jotapata approximately four weeks after her baptism.

Mary and Rebecca, along with the others, continued to support Jesus throughout the remainder of his life, working diligently and effectively for the enlightenment and upliftment of other women. When the final events of Jesus' life unfolded, all of the twelve all fled, but one, these women remained present, and none of them denied or betrayed him.

10.10 AT TIBERIAS

The next Sabbath service was entrusted to the women by Andrew, following instructions from Jesus. Consequently, it could not be held in the new synagogue. The women chose Joanna to oversee the occasion, and the meeting took place in the banquet room of Herod's new palace, as Herod was residing in Julias in Perea. Joanna read from the scriptures regarding women's contributions to the religious life of Israel, citing figures such as Miriam, Deborah, and Esther, among others.

Late that evening, Jesus delivered a memorable talk to the assembled group on the topics of Magic And Superstition. During that time, the appearance of a bright and supposedly new star was considered a sign that a great man had been born. With such a star recently observed, Andrew inquired of Jesus whether these beliefs were well-founded.

In his detailed response to Andrew's question, Jesus engaged in a comprehensive discussion of the entire topic of human superstition:

- The movements of the stars in the heavens have no bearing on the events of human life on earth. Astronomy is a legitimate scientific discipline, whereas astrology is a collection of superstitious misconceptions that have no place in scholarly teachings.
- The examination of the internal organs of a recently killed animal cannot provide any insights into the weather, future events, or the outcomes of human affairs.
- The souls of the deceased do not return to communicate with their families, former friends, or enemies among the living.
- Charms and relics are ineffective in healing diseases, warding off disasters, or correcting spiritual errors; the belief in such material means of influencing the spiritual world is merely superstition.
- While casting lots may provide a convenient means of resolving minor difficulties, it is not a method intended to reveal divine will. The outcomes of such practices are purely matters of chance. The only true means of communication with the spiritual realm lies within the soul.
- The belief in magic numbers, omens of good fortune, divination, sorcery, witchcraft, and harbingers of misfortune is purely unfounded superstition.
- The interpretation of dreams is fundamentally a superstitious and unfounded system of ignorant and fantastical speculation. The teachings should have no connection to the practices of soothsayer priests in other religions.

- The heavenly spirits do not reside within material representations made of clay, wood, or metal; idols are merely the physical substances from which they are constructed.
- The practices of enchanters, wizards, magicians, and sorcerers were derived from the unfounded superstitions of the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and ancient Canaanites.
- Amulets and various incantations are ineffective in securing the favor of heavenly spirits.
- He exposed and denounced beliefs in spells, ordeals, bewitchment, curses, omens, mandrakes, knotted cords, and all other enslaving superstitions.

Andrew understood.

10.11 SENDING THE FOLLOWERS OUT TWO BY TWO

The following evening, after gathering the twelve followers, John's followers, and the newly appointed women's group, Jesus said: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, let us ask God of the harvest to send forth even more laborers into the fields. While I remain to comfort and instruct the younger teachers, I will send out the older ones two by two so that they may swiftly traverse all of Galilee, teaching while it is still convenient and peaceful."

Then he designated the pairs of followers as he wished them to go forth: Andrew and Peter, James and John, Philip and Nathaniel, Thomas and Matthew, James and Judas, and Simon and Judas. Jesus scheduled the meeting with the twelve in Nazareth, and as he parted, he said:

"On this mission, do not go to any city of the Gentiles, nor enter Samaria; instead, go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Teach the lessons and proclaim that they are children of God. Remember that the listener is not spiritually inferior to the teacher, and the servant is not inferior to the leader. It is sufficient for the follower to be equal to his teacher, and the servant to become like his leader.

“Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed. What I have taught you in private, teach with wisdom in public. You should proclaim what I have shown you in the inner chamber from the rooftops. Do not be afraid of those who can kill the body but cannot destroy the soul; rather, place your trust in God, who can sustain the body and restore the soul.

“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet, not one of them is forgotten in God’s sight. Therefore, do not fear; you are worth more than many sparrows. Remember that the very hairs on your head are all numbered.

“Do not be ashamed of the teachings; proclaim peace and goodwill, but do not be deceived - peace will not always accompany your message. Strive to bring peace to the earth, but when people reject this gift, division and turmoil may ensue. When an entire family embraces the teachings, true peace resides in that household; however, when some family members accept the teachings while others reject them, such division can only lead to sorrow and sadness. Work diligently to teach the entire family, lest a person’s adversaries become those within their own household.”

When the twelve had heard these words, they were prepared to depart. They did not gather again until they assembled in Nazareth to meet with Jesus and the other followers, as he had arranged.

10.12 LESSON FOR RACHEL

One evening in Shunem, after Jesus’ followers had sent out his followers two by two, he was teaching a group of twelve younger teachers under the direction of Jacob, along with twelve women. At this point, Rachel asked what they should say when women ask: What shall I do to attain eternal life? Jesus responded:

“When men and women inquire in this manner, you should respond: ‘Embrace these new teachings; accept divine understanding.’ Through belief, discover the soul of God within you; this transformation enables you to become a child of God, allowing you to serve God’s children. The scriptures declare: ‘In God, I find righteousness and strength;’ ‘My soul shall rejoice in the love of my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation and has covered me with the robe of his righteousness;’ ‘take away the filthy rags of self-righteousness and clothe my child in the robe of divine righteousness;’ and ‘the just shall live by faith.’

“Entrance into the spiritual kingdom is entirely free; however, progress and growth are essential for continued existence within it. Your acceptance through belief allows you to partake in the divine nature, becoming a son or daughter of God. Through this same belief, you are eternally advanced along the path of progressive and divine perfection. By faith, Abraham became aware of salvation through the teachings of Melchizedek. Throughout the ages, this same faith has guided the children of this world. Now, I aim to demonstrate that eternal life is real and that serving God’s children is essential.

“You cannot purchase eternal life, nor can you earn righteousness. Your soul attains eternal life not because you lead a righteous life; rather, you lead a righteous life because you believe you are a child of God and serve God’s other children on earth. When you embrace this teaching, which reveals God’s goodness, you will experience spiritual relief. True followers yearn for righteousness and thirst for divine perfection.”

When Jesus had finished speaking, there was great rejoicing among those who had heard his gracious words. They all began to proclaim the new teachings with renewed power, energy, and enthusiasm.

10.13 EVENING TEACHINGS

In the evening discussions, Jesus addressed a variety of subjects. During the remainder of this tour - before they all reunited at Nazareth - he discussed The Love Of God, Dreams And Visions, Malice, Humility And Meekness, Courage And Loyalty, Music And Worship, Service And Obedience, Pride And Presumption, Peace And Perfection, Wrong Speaking And Envy, Doubts And Unbelief, and Wisdom And Worship. With the older followers absent, these younger groups of men and women participated more freely in these discussions with Jesus.

After spending two or three days with a group of twelve new teachers, Jesus would move on to join another group, receiving updates about the whereabouts and activities of all these workers from David's messengers. Since this was their first tour, the women often accompanied Jesus. Through the messenger service, each group was kept fully informed about the tour's progress, and receiving news from other groups consistently provided encouragement to these scattered and separated workers.

Before their separation, it had been arranged that the twelve followers, along with the new teachers and the women's corps, would assemble in Nazareth to meet Jesus on Friday, March 4. Consequently, around this time, various groups of followers and teachers began their journey toward Nazareth from all parts of central and southern Galilee. By mid-afternoon, Andrew and Peter, the last to arrive, reached the encampment set up by the early arrivals, located in the highlands north of the city. This marked the first time Jesus had visited Nazareth since the commencement of his public teaching.

10.14 AT NAZARETH

This Friday afternoon, Jesus walked through Nazareth completely unnoticed and unrecognized. He passed by his childhood home and the carpenter shop, spending half an hour on the hill he had cherished as a boy.

Not since the day of his baptism had such a surge of human emotion stirred within his heart. As he descended the mount, he heard the familiar sound of the trumpet blast announcing the setting sun, just as he had so many times during his youth in Nazareth. Before returning to the encampment, he walked by the synagogue where he had attended school, indulging in many memories of his childhood. Earlier that day, Jesus had sent Thomas to arrange with the leader of the synagogue for his teaching at the Sabbath morning service.

The people of Nazareth were not particularly known for their piety or righteous living. Over the years, this village increasingly reflected the low moral standards of the nearby city of Sepphoris. Throughout Jesus' youth and early adulthood, opinions about him in Nazareth were divided, with considerable resentment arising when he relocated to Capernaum. Although the inhabitants of Nazareth had heard much about the activities of their former carpenter, they were offended that he had never included his hometown in any of his previous teaching tours. They were aware of Jesus' growing fame, but many citizens felt angered that he had performed none of his remarkable works in the city of his youth. For months, the people of Nazareth had engaged in discussions about Jesus, but their overall opinions of him remained largely unfavorable.

Most of Jesus' older friends, including the affectionate chazzan who had taught him in his youth, were either deceased or had left Nazareth. Meanwhile, the younger generation harbored intense jealousy towards his growing fame. They seemed to forget his early dedication to his father's family and expressed bitterness over his perceived neglect in visiting his brother and married sisters who resided in Nazareth. Additionally, the attitude of Jesus' family towards him contributed to the unkind sentiments among the townspeople. The more orthodox members of the Jewish community even went so far as to criticize Jesus for walking too quickly on his way to the synagogue that Sabbath morning.

Thus, Jesus encountered not a warm homecoming but a distinctly hostile and critical atmosphere. However, this was not the entirety of his challenges. Aware that he would be spending this Sabbath day in Nazareth and anticipating that he would speak in the synagogue, his adversaries had enlisted numerous rough and uncouth individuals to harass him and create disturbances in every possible way.

10.15 SABBATH SERVICE

This Sabbath was a beautiful day, and all of Nazareth, friends and foes alike, turned out to hear this former citizen of their town speak in the synagogue. Many had to remain outside, as there was not enough room for everyone who had come to listen to him. As a young man, Jesus had often spoken here, and this morning, when the leader of the synagogue handed him the scroll of religious writings from which to read the scripture lesson, none present seemed to remember that this was the very manuscript he had presented to the synagogue.

The services on this day were conducted in the same manner as when Jesus attended them as a boy. He ascended the speaking platform alongside the leader of the synagogue, and the service commenced with the recital of two prayers. The congregation then recited the Shema, the Jewish creed of faith. This ritual involved the repetition of several passages from the Torah, signifying that the worshipers accepted the yoke of the kingdom of heaven, as well as the yoke of the commandments applicable to both day and night.

Then the third prayer commenced. The leader of the synagogue took his position before the ark, or chest, that housed the sacred writings and began reciting the nineteen prayer eulogies, or benedictions. However, on this occasion, it was deemed necessary to shorten the service to allow the distinguished guest more time for his discourse; therefore, only the first and last of the benedictions were recited.

The congregation did not look at the reader as he recited the benedictions. After the benedictions, he offered an informal prayer appropriate for the occasion, and when it concluded, the entire congregation joined in saying: "Amen."

Then the chazzan approached the ark and retrieved a book, which he presented to Jesus so that he might read the scripture lesson. It was customary to call upon seven individuals to read no fewer than three verses of the law; however, this practice was waived on this occasion to allow the visitor to read a lesson of his own choosing. Jesus, taking the book, stood up and read from the book of Deuteronomy. He then turned to Isaiah and read: "The spirit of God is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good tidings to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and recovery of sight for the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the year of God."

Jesus closed the book and, after returning it to the leader of the synagogue, sat down to talk with the people. He began by saying: "Today these scriptures are fulfilled." Jesus then spoke for nearly fifteen minutes about the Children Of God. Many listeners were pleased with his discourse and marveled at his graciousness and wisdom.

It was customary in the synagogue, after the conclusion of the formal service, for the speaker to remain available for questions from those interested. Accordingly, Jesus stepped into the crowd that pressed forward to ask him questions on that Sabbath morning. Among this group were many disruptive individuals intent on causing mischief, while on the periphery circulated men who had been hired to create trouble for Jesus. Many of the followers and teachers who had remained outside now pressed into the synagogue and quickly recognized that trouble was brewing. They attempted to lead Jesus away, but he refused to go with them.

10.16 NAZARETH REJECTION

Jesus was surrounded in the synagogue by a large crowd of his opponents, along with a few of his followers. In response to their rude questions and sinister banter, he remarked with a hint of humor: "Yes, I am Joseph's son; I am the carpenter. I am not surprised that you remind me of the proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself,' and that you challenge

me to perform in Nazareth what you have heard I did at Capernaum; but I call upon you to witness that even the scriptures declare a prophet has honor, except in his own country and among his own people.”

They jostled him, pointing accusing fingers and claiming that he thinks he is better than the people of Nazareth. They noted his brother was an ordinary laborer, and his sisters still live among them. They know his mother, Mary. Where are they today? We hear grand things about you, yet we observe that you perform no wonders when you return.

Jesus responded to them: “I love the people who reside in the city where I grew up, and I would rejoice to see you all enter the spiritual kingdom. However, that is not for me to determine. The transformations of grace are brought about in response to the living faith of the beneficiaries.”

Jesus would have good-naturedly managed the crowd and effectively disarmed even his most violent opponents had it not been for the tactical blunder of one of his own followers, Simon Zelotes. With Nahor’s assistance, Simon had gathered a group of Jesus’ friends from among the crowd. Adopting a confrontational stance, he issued a warning to Jesus’ adversaries to leave the area.

Jesus had long taught his followers that a gentle response could defuse anger, yet his friends were unaccustomed to seeing their beloved teacher, whom they affectionately referred to as “Master,” being treated with such disrespect and contempt. This was overwhelming for them, and they expressed their passionate and vehement outrage, which only served to incite the crowd mentality.

Under the influence of hired thugs, these ruffians seized Jesus and dragged him out of the synagogue to the edge of a nearby steep hill, where they intended to throw him over the precipice. However, just as they were about to push him off the cliff, Jesus suddenly turned to face his captors and calmly folded his arms. He said nothing, but his friends were astonished when, as he began to walk forward, the crowd parted and allowed him to pass unharmed.

Jesus, accompanied by his followers, proceeded to their encampment, where all that had transpired was recounted. That evening, they prepared to return to Capernaum early the following day, as Jesus had instructed. The tumultuous conclusion of the third public teaching tour had a sobering effect on all of Jesus' followers. They were beginning to realize the significance of some of Jesus' teachings; they understood that the new teaching might only be attained through considerable sorrow and profound disappointment.

They left Nazareth on Sunday morning and, traveling by different routes, finally assembled in Bethsaida by noon on Thursday, March 10. They came together as a somber group of disillusioned teachers, rather than as an enthusiastic and triumphant band of crusaders.

10.17 AT BETHSAIDA

By March 10, all of the teaching groups had gathered at Bethsaida. Many of them went out fishing on Thursday night and Friday, while on the Sabbath, they attended the synagogue to hear an elderly Jew from Damascus discourse on The Glory Of Father Abraham. Jesus spent most of that Sabbath alone in the hills. That Saturday night, he spoke for over an hour to the assembled groups on the Mission Of Adversity, and the Spiritual Value Of Disappointment. This was a memorable occasion, and his listeners always remembered the lessons he imparted.

Jesus had not fully recovered from the sorrow of his recent rejection in Nazareth; the followers noticed a peculiar sadness intertwined with his usual cheerful demeanor. James and John accompanied him for much of the time, while Peter was preoccupied with the numerous responsibilities related to the welfare and guidance of the new corps of teachers. During this period of waiting before departing for Passover in Jerusalem, the women spent their time visiting from house to house, spreading the teachings and ministering to the sick in Capernaum and the surrounding cities and villages.

10.18 BY THE SEASIDE

Since Jesus had talked with the followers and others late into the night, very few members of the group were awake for breakfast on that Sunday morning. Therefore, he went out to the seaside and sat alone in the old fishing boat belonging to Andrew and Peter, which was always kept at his disposal. He took this time to meditate on the following steps to be taken in his work.

But Jesus was not to be alone for long. Very soon, people from Capernaum and nearby villages began to arrive. By late morning, nearly one thousand individuals had gathered on the shore near Jesus' boat, clamoring for his attention. Peter, now awake, made his way to the boat and asked Jesus if he should speak to the crowd. However, Jesus answered: "No, Peter, I will tell them a story."

About this time, Jesus began to use the storytelling method to teach the multitudes that frequently gathered around him. He then recounted The Story Of The Sower, one of the first in a long series of stories he shared with the throngs that followed him. He sat on an elevated seat in a boat, as it was customary to sit while teaching, and spoke to the crowd assembled along the shore. After Peter had spoken a few words, Jesus said:

"A sower went out to sow, and as he sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside, where they were trampled underfoot and devoured by birds. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where there was little soil. They sprang up quickly, but because the soil was shallow, they withered as soon as the sun appeared, having no roots to retain moisture. Some seeds fell among thorns, and as they grew, they were choked and yielded no grain. Still, other seeds fell on good soil and, as they grew, produced a harvest - some thirty fold, some sixty fold, and some a hundredfold."

And when he had finished telling this story, he said to the multitude, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." When the followers and those with them heard Jesus teach the people in this manner, they were greatly perplexed.

After much discussion among themselves that evening in the Zebedee garden, Matthew inquired about the meaning of the story. He wanted to understand why Jesus spoke in stories when people were seeking the truth. Jesus responded:

“To the undiscerning multitudes and to those who seek our destruction, we shall henceforth present the teachings in the form of stories. This approach is intended for those souls who genuinely wish to enter the spiritual kingdom, allowing them to discern the meaning of the teachings and thus find eternal life. Conversely, those who listen only to ensnare us will be further confounded, as they will see without truly seeing and hear without truly hearing.

“For some people’s hearts have become calloused, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes are closed, lest they should discern the truth and understand it in their hearts. To him who has faith, more shall be given, so that he will have an abundance; but from him who lacks faith, even what he has shall be taken away.”

The followers did not fully grasp the significance of Jesus’ words. While Andrew and Thomas continued their conversation with Jesus, Peter and the other followers withdrew to a different part of the garden to engage in a serious and extended discussion.

10.19 LESSON OF THE SOWER

Peter and the group surrounding him concluded that The Story Of The Sower was an allegory, with each element possessing a hidden meaning. Therefore, they decided to approach Jesus for clarification. Peter approached Jesus and requested a more detailed explanation. Jesus replied: “My son, I wish to withhold nothing from you. However, first, I would like you to share your thoughts: what is your interpretation of the story?”

After a moment of silence, Peter offered his interpretation. After listening to Peter's perspective on the story, Jesus asked the other followers if they had any suggestions to contribute. In response to this invitation, Nathaniel spoke up. Once Nathaniel finished, the followers and their companions entered into a serious discussion. They engaged in earnest debate, with some advocating for the validity of Peter's interpretation, while nearly an equal number defended Nathaniel's explanation of the story. Meanwhile, Peter and Nathaniel had retreated to the house, where they were engaged in a vigorous and determined effort to persuade each other and change one another's minds.

Jesus allowed the confusion to reach its peak before clapping his hands and calling them to him. Once they had gathered around him again, he said: "Before I share this story, does anyone have anything to say?" After a brief silence, Thomas spoke up, asserting that both Peter and Nathaniel were mistaken in their interpretations of the story. He explained that attempts to derive spiritual analogies from every aspect of a natural story often lead to confusion and a serious misunderstanding of its true purpose. Jesus had previously instructed them that when using illustrations for teaching, they should rely on true stories rather than fables, and that they should choose a narrative that best illustrates the central and vital truth they wished to convey to the people.

The words spoken by Thomas had a profound impact on everyone present. He prompted them to remember the teachings of Jesus from previous occasions. Before Jesus continued speaking, Andrew stood up and expressed his belief that Thomas was correct. He requested that Thomas share his interpretation of the story of the sower.

Jesus beckoned Thomas to speak: This story was shared to convey one profound truth. The truth is that our instruction of the lessons, regardless of how faithfully and effectively we carry out our responsibilities, will yield varying degrees of success. Furthermore, all differences in outcomes are directly attributable to conditions inherent in the circumstances of our teaching, conditions over which we have little or no control.

When Thomas finished speaking, most of his fellow teachers were inclined to agree with him. Even Peter and Nathaniel were on their way over to speak with him when Jesus stood up and said: “Well done, Thomas; you have discerned the true meaning of stories. However, both Peter and Nathaniel have equally demonstrated the danger of attempting to create an allegory from these narratives. While you may often find it beneficial to engage in such flights of speculative imagination within your own heart, you make a mistake when you seek to present these conclusions as part of your public teaching.”

Now that the tension had subsided, Peter and Nathaniel congratulated each other on their interpretations. With the exception of the Alpheus twins, each of the followers took the opportunity to interpret the story of the sower before retiring for the night.

This session proved highly profitable for the followers and their associates, particularly as Jesus began to increasingly incorporate stories into his public teachings from this point forward.

10.20 USE OF STORIES

The followers were deeply engaged in storytelling to the extent that the entire evening was dedicated to further discussions about stories. Jesus initiated the evening's conference by stating:

“My friends, it is essential to adapt your teaching to suit the minds and hearts of your audience. When addressing diverse interests and temperaments, you may not be able to use different words for each group of listeners, but you can share a story that effectively conveys your message. Each group, and indeed each individual, will interpret your story according to their own intellectual and spiritual capacities.

“You are to let your spiritual light shine, but with wisdom and discretion. No one, when lighting a lamp, covers it with a vessel or places it under the bed; instead, they put the lamp on a stand where all can see the light. Let me assure you that nothing is hidden that will not be revealed; no secrets will remain concealed.

“Ultimately, all these matters will come to light. Do not only consider the multitudes and how they receive the truth; pay attention also to how you hear it yourselves.”

The ongoing discussion of stories and additional guidance regarding their interpretation continued:

- Jesus advised against using fables or allegories about people to convey the truths of the teachings. Instead, he advocated for the unrestricted use of stories, particularly those related to nature. He emphasized the importance of employing narratives about the natural and spiritual worlds to impart truth. He often referred to the natural world as “the unreal and fleeting shadow of spiritual realities.”
- Jesus narrated three or four stories from the Hebrew scriptures, highlighting that this teaching method was not entirely new. However, it evolved into a new teaching method, which he employed from that point onward.
- A story simultaneously appeals to vastly different levels of mind and spirit. It stimulates the imagination, challenges discernment, and provokes critical thinking, while fostering empathy without inciting antagonism.
- A story progresses from familiar concepts to the understanding of the unknown. It uses tangible elements to introduce spiritual and the supermaterial.
- Stories promote the development of impartial moral decisions. They circumvent significant prejudice, introduce new truths gracefully into the mind, and achieve this while eliciting minimal self-defense or personal resentment.
- To reject the truth embedded in a story necessitates a deliberate intellectual effort that directly contradicts one’s honest judgment and fair decision-making. The narrative compels the audience to engage in critical thinking through the sense of hearing.

- The use of storytelling as a teaching method allows for the presentation of new and potentially startling truths while simultaneously avoiding controversy and minimizing conflict with tradition and established authority.
- A story also has the advantage of stimulating the memory of the truths learned when the same familiar scenes are subsequently encountered.

Toward the end of the evening's lesson, Jesus made his first comment on the Story Of The Sower. The appeal to nature contradicted the prevailing teachings of the time, which viewed natural phenomena as acts of heavenly spirits and supernatural forces. Jesus stated that the story referred to two key concepts:

- First, it was a reflection on his teaching up to that point and a projection of what lay ahead for the remainder of his life.
- Second, it also served as a guideline for what followers and other teachers could anticipate in their teachings as they were passed down from generation to generation over time.

Before dismissing the group for the night, Jesus said:

“Now I will tell you the conclusion of the story of the sower. I would like to test you to see how you will receive this: it is also like a man who sowed good seed upon the earth; and while he slept at night and went about his business during the day, the seed sprouted and grew. Although he did not know how it happened, the plants bore fruit. First, there was the blade, then the ear, and finally the full grain in the ear. When the grain was ripe, he put forth the sickle, and the harvest was complete. Let him who has ears to hear, hear.”

The followers often turned this saying over in their minds, but Jesus never referenced this addition to The Story Of The Sower.

10.21 MORE STORIES BY THE SEA

The following day, Jesus once more taught the people from the boat, saying:

“Heaven is like one who sowed good seed in his field; but while he slept, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and then went away. When the young blades sprang up and were about to bear fruit, the weeds appeared.

“Then the helpers of the householder came and said to him: Didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where, then, do these weeds come from?’ The householder replied that an enemy had done this. The helpers then asked their master, Should we go out and pull up the weeds? But he said: No, lest in gathering the weeds you uproot the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; then I will say to the reapers, gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, and then gather the wheat to be stored in my barn.”

After the people had asked several questions, Jesus shared another story:

“Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a person sowed in his field. Although a mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds, when it is fully grown, it becomes the greatest of all herbs, resembling a tree that allows birds to come and rest in its branches.

“Heaven is also like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour. In this way, all of the flour was leavened.

“Heaven is also like a treasure hidden in a field, which a person has discovered. In his joy, he sold all he had to obtain the money to buy the field.

“Heaven is also like a merchant in search of fine pearls. Upon seeing one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he owned in order to purchase this extraordinary pearl.”

Jesus told many other stories to the crowds. After addressing a public audience through these stories, he would elaborate more fully and explicitly on his teachings during the evening sessions for both his followers and the teachers.

10.22 ACROSS THE LAKE

The multitude continued to grow throughout the week. On Sabbath, Jesus withdrew to the hills, but when Sunday morning arrived, the crowds returned. Jesus addressed them in the early afternoon after Peter's teaching, and when he had finished, he said to his friends: "I am weary of the throngs; let us cross over to the other side so that we may rest for a day."

On their journey across the lake, they encountered one of the violent and sudden windstorms characteristic of the Sea of Galilee, particularly during this season. This body of water lies nearly seven hundred feet below sea level and is bordered by steep banks, especially to the west. There are deep gorges that ascend from the lake into the hills. As the heated air rises in a pocket over the lake during the day, the cooling air from the gorges tends to rush down upon the lake after sunset. These gales can arise rapidly and sometimes dissipate just as suddenly.

Just such an evening gale caught the boat carrying Jesus to the other side this Sunday evening. Three other boats, containing some of the younger teachers, trailed behind. This tempest was severe; notwithstanding that it was confined to this region of the lake, there was no evidence of a storm on the western shore. The wind was so strong that waves began to wash over the boat. The high winds had torn the sail away before the followers could furl it, leaving them entirely dependent on their oars as they laboriously rowed toward the shore, which was a little more than a mile and a half away.

Meanwhile, Jesus lay asleep in the stern of the boat, sheltered beneath a small overhead covering. He had been weary when they departed from Bethsaida, and it was to secure rest that he had instructed them to sail him across to the other side.

These former fishermen were strong and experienced rowers, but this was one of the worst gales they had ever encountered. Although the wind and waves tossed their boat about like a toy, Jesus slumbered on undisturbed. Simon Peter was at the right-hand oar near the stern. When the boat began to fill with water, he dropped his oar and rushed over to Jesus, shaking him vigorously to awaken him. Once aroused, Peter exclaimed that he did not know they were in a violent storm, and if Jesus did not save them, they would all perish.

As Jesus stepped out into the rain, he first looked at Peter and then peered into the darkness at the struggling rowers. He turned his gaze back to Peter, who, in his agitation, had not yet returned to his oar, and said: "Why are all of you so filled with fear? Where is your faith? Peace, be still."

Jesus had scarcely finished speaking when the turbulent atmosphere, having regained its equilibrium, settled into a great calm. The angry waves quickly subsided, and the dark clouds, having released their rain in a brief shower, dissipated, allowing the stars to shine brightly overhead. While this sequence of events was purely coincidental, the followers, especially Peter, continued to perceive the incident as a genuine miracle. It was natural for the people of that time to believe in the miracles of nature, as they firmly held the view that nature was a phenomenon directly influenced by spiritual forces. Jesus clearly explained to the twelve that he had spoken to the troubled spirits of Peter and had not addressed any heavenly spirits - that he had not commanded the elements to obey his word, but this explanation was of no avail. Jesus' followers often insisted on interpreting all such natural occurrences in their own way. [*Peter never grew weary of recounting how "even the winds and the waves obey him."*]

It was late in the evening when Jesus and his companions reached the shore. Since it was a calm and beautiful night, they all rested in the boats, not going ashore until shortly after sunrise the following day. When they were gathered together, about forty in total, Jesus said: "Let us go up into those hills and wait for a few days while we contemplate our Heavenly Father."

10.23 TALKING WITH AMOS

Although the eastern shore of the lake generally sloped gently toward the highlands beyond, this particular spot featured a steep hillside, with the beach in some areas dropping abruptly into the lake. Pointing to the nearby hill, Jesus said: "Let us go up this hillside for our breakfast and rest under some of the shelters while we talk."

The entire hillside was covered with caverns carved from the rock. Many of these niches served as ancient sepulchers. Approximately halfway up the hillside, on a small, relatively level area, lay the cemetery of the small village of Kheresa. As Jesus and his companions passed near this burial ground, a maniac who resided in the hillside caverns rushed toward them. This deranged individual was well known in the region, having once been bound in chains and confined to one of the grottos. Long ago, he had broken free from his shackles and now roamed freely among the tombs and abandoned sepulchers.

This man, named Amos, suffered from a periodic form of insanity. During certain intervals of lucidity, he would find some clothing and manage to conduct himself relatively well among his peers. During one of these clear moments, he traveled to Bethsaida, where he listened to the teachings of Jesus and the followers, and at that time, he had become a halfhearted follower of the teachings. However, soon after, a tumultuous phase of his affliction emerged, causing him to flee to the tombs, where he moaned, cried out loudly, and behaved in a manner that terrorized anyone who happened to encounter him.

When Amos recognized Jesus, he fell at his feet and exclaimed that he was possessed by the devil, pleading with Jesus not to torment him. This man genuinely believed that his periodic mental afflictions were caused by a supposed devil that had entered him and dominated his mind and body. His troubles were primarily emotional; his brain was not diseased.

Jesus, gazing down at the man crouching at his feet like an animal, reached down, took him by the hand, and lifted him up. He said to him:

“Amos, you are not possessed by any devil; you have already received the good news that you are a child of God. I urge you to break free from this spell.”

When Amos heard Jesus speak these words, a remarkable transformation occurred in his thoughts, restoring him to his right mind and allowing him to regain normal control over his emotions.

By this time, a substantial crowd had gathered from the nearby village, and these individuals, joined by the swine herders from the highlands above, were astonished to see the man previously considered a lunatic sitting with Jesus and his friends, now in his right mind and engaging in conversation with them.

As the swineherds rushed into the village to announce the taming of the lunatic, their dogs charged at a small, unattended herd of approximately thirty swine, driving most of them over a precipice into the sea. *[This incidental event, coupled with the presence of Jesus and the alleged supernatural healing of the lunatic, gave rise to the legend that Jesus had cured Amos by casting the supposed devil out of him and into the herd of swine, causing them to rush headlong to their destruction in the sea below.]*

Before the day was over, the incident had been widely disseminated by the swine tenders, and the entire village came to believe it. Amos certainly accepted this story; he witnessed the swine tumbling over the crest of the hill shortly after his troubled mind had settled, and he always believed that they carried with them the supposed devil that had tormented and afflicted him for so long. All of Jesus’ followers, except for Thomas, believed that the incident involving the swine was directly linked to Amos’s healing.

Jesus did not find the rest he was seeking.

Early Tuesday morning, Jesus and his friends were awakened by a delegation of swine herders who had come to urge him to leave their region. Their spokesman addressed Peter and Andrew, requesting that they depart. Although they recognized Jesus as a spiritual man, they

felt that their local deities did not acknowledge him, and they were concerned about the potential loss of their swine. Upon hearing their plea, Jesus said to Andrew: "Let us return to our place."

Amos sought permission from Jesus to accompany him and his followers as they were about to depart, but Jesus did not consent. He said to Amos: "Do not forget that you are a child of God. Return to your own people and tell them about the great things God has done for you." Amos shared his story, traveling through all the cities of the Decapolis and proclaiming the remarkable deeds Jesus had performed in his life.

10.24 VERONICA OF CAESAREA-PHILIPPI

The story of Amos's cure had already reached Bethsaida and Capernaum, so a large crowd was waiting for Jesus when his boat landed that Tuesday morning. Among this throng were new observers from the Jerusalem Sanhedrin who had come to Capernaum to seek grounds for Jesus' apprehension and conviction.

As Jesus spoke with those who had gathered to greet him, Jairus, one of the leaders of the synagogue, made his way through the crowd. Falling at Jesus' feet, he took his hand and urged him to come quickly, explaining that his only daughter was at the point of death. He asked Jesus to come and heal her. When Jesus heard the father's request, he said: "I will go with you."

As Jesus walked alongside Jairus, a large crowd that had heard the father's request followed to see what would happen. Just before they reached the leader's house, as they hurried through a narrow street and the throng jostled him, Jesus suddenly stopped, exclaiming: "Someone touched me." And when those who were near him denied that they had touched him, Peter noted that the crowd was pressing him, even threatening to crush him, so how could Jesus say, "Someone has touched me."

Then Jesus said: "I asked who touched me, for I perceived that living energy had left me." As Jesus looked around, his gaze fell upon a nearby woman who, coming forward, knelt at his feet. She explained

that for years she had been afflicted with a debilitating hemorrhage, suffering greatly at the hands of many physicians and spending all her resources, yet none could cure her. She believed that if she could just touch the hem of Jesus' garment, she would surely be made whole. Therefore, she pressed through the crowd as it moved along until, standing near Jesus, she touched the edge of his garment and said: Now I know that I have been healed of my affliction.

Jesus called this woman, known as Veronica of Caesarea-Philippi, into his presence to address two misconceptions that may have lingered in her mind or persisted among those who witnessed her healing. He did not want Veronica to leave, believing that her fear in attempting to obtain a cure had been validated, nor that her superstition in associating the touch of his garment with her healing had been effective. He wanted everyone to understand that it was her pure and living faith that had brought about the cure - her touch had not made her whole. Then Jesus took her by the hand and, lifting her, said: "Daughter, it is your faith that has made you whole; go in peace." *[The passing of time demonstrated that this woman was truly healed of her affliction.]*

10.25 AT JAIRUS' HOUSE

Jairus was, understandably, extremely impatient about the delay in reaching his home, so they quickened their pace. Even before they entered the yard, one of his helpers emerged, stating that his daughter had died. However, Jesus appeared to disregard the helper's words. Taking Peter, James, and John with him, he turned to the grief-stricken father and said: "Do not be afraid; only believe."

When he entered the house, he found the flute players already present with the mourners, who were creating an uproar; the relatives were already engaged in weeping and wailing. After he had expelled all the mourners from the room, he entered with the father, mother, and his three followers. Jesus had informed the mourners that the girl was not dead, but they mocked him. Jesus then turned to the mother, saying: "Your daughter is not dead; she is merely asleep."

When the house had quieted down, Jesus approached where the child lay, took her by the hand, and said: "Daughter, I say to you, awake and arise!" Upon hearing these words, the girl immediately rose and walked across the room. After she had recovered from her daze, Jesus instructed them to give her something to eat, for she had been without food for a long time.

Due to the significant unrest in Capernaum regarding Jesus, he gathered the family together. He explained that the young girl had been in a coma following a prolonged fever and that he had merely awakened her; he had not raised her from the dead. He conveyed this explanation to his friends, but it was in vain; they remained convinced that he had resurrected the little girl.

Jesus' attempts to clarify many of these seemingly miraculous events had little impact on his friends. Afterward, Jesus and the followers returned to Bethsaida, having specifically instructed them not to disclose anything to anyone.

When he exited Jairus's house, two blind men, accompanied by a boy, followed him and cried out for healing. At this time, Jesus' reputation as a healer was at its peak. Wherever he went, the sick and afflicted awaited his arrival. Jesus appeared visibly worn, and his friends grew increasingly concerned that he might continue his teaching and healing work to the point of exhaustion.

10.26 FEEDING THE FIVE THOUSAND

Jesus continued to teach people daily, while instructing the followers and teachers at night. On Friday, he requested a one-week furlough so that all his friends could return home or visit their acquaintances for a few days before preparing to go to Jerusalem for the Passover. However, more than half of his followers refused to leave him, and the crowd continued to grow in size daily. As a result, David Zebedee expressed a desire to establish a new encampment, but Jesus denied his request.

Jesus had so little rest over the Sabbath that on Sunday morning, March 27, he sought to escape the crowds. While some teachers

remained to address the multitude, Jesus and the twelve planned to discreetly make their way to the opposite shore of the lake, where they intended to find much-needed rest in a picturesque park south of Bethsaida-Julias. This area was a popular retreat for the people of Capernaum, who were well-acquainted with the parks along the eastern shore.

But the people would not accept this. They observed the direction in which Jesus' boat was heading and, hiring every available craft, began their pursuit. Those who could not secure boats set out on foot to walk around the northern end of the lake. By late afternoon, more than a thousand people had gathered in one of the parks to see Jesus. He spoke to them briefly, followed by Peter. Many of these individuals had brought food with them, and after eating the evening meal, they gathered in small groups while Jesus' followers and teachers instructed them.

By Monday afternoon, the crowd had grown to over 3,000 individuals. Even well into the evening, people continued to arrive, bringing with them a diverse array of sick individuals. Hundreds of eager visitors had intended to stop in Capernaum to see and hear Jesus on their way to Passover, and they were determined not to be disappointed. By Wednesday noon, approximately five thousand men, women, and children had gathered in this location. The weather was pleasant, as it was nearing the end of the rainy season in this region.

Philip had provided a three-day supply of food for Jesus and the twelve, which was in the care of Mark, their all-purpose assistant. By the afternoon of the third day, nearly half of the multitude had nearly exhausted the food they had brought with them. David Zebedee did not have a tented city to feed and accommodate the crowds, nor had Philip made provisions for such a large gathering. However, despite their hunger, the people refused to leave.

It was quietly whispered that Jesus, wishing to avoid conflict with both Herod and the leaders of Jerusalem, had selected this secluded location, beyond the reach of all his adversaries, as the appropriate place to be crowned king. The enthusiasm of the people grew with each passing hour.

Although no one spoke directly to Jesus, he was, of course, aware of everything that was happening. Even the twelve followers, especially the younger teachers, were still influenced by such ideas. The mastermind behind this scheme to elevate him to kingship was Joab, one of the young teachers.

This was the scene during dinner time on Wednesday when Jesus asked James Alpheus to summon Andrew and Philip. Jesus said: "What shall we do with the multitude? They have been with us for three days now, and many are hungry; they have no food."

Philip and Andrew exchanged glances, and then Philip suggested that they send the crowd away so that the people could go to the nearby villages and buy food for themselves. Andrew, fearing the unfolding of the king's plot, quickly agreed with Philip, stating that it would be best to dismiss the multitude so they could procure food while they rested. By this time, other members of the twelve had joined the discussion. Then Jesus said: "But I do not wish to send them away hungry; can you not feed them?"

This was overwhelming for Philip, who immediately asked where they could possibly buy bread for such a large crowd. Two hundred denarii would not be sufficient for lunch. Before the other followers had a chance to voice their thoughts, Jesus turned to Andrew and Philip, saying: "I do not want to send these people away. They are like sheep without a shepherd. I want to feed them. What food do we have with us?"

While Philip conversed with Matthew and Judas, Andrew sought out Mark to determine how much of their supply of provisions remained. He returned to Jesus, reporting that the boy had only five barley loaves and two dried fish left. Peter promptly added that Jesus' followers had not yet eaten.

For a moment, Jesus stood in silence, a distant look in his eyes. His followers remained quiet. Jesus then turned to Andrew and said: "Bring me the loaves and fishes." When Andrew brought the basket to Jesus, he instructed: "Direct the people to sit down on the grass in groups of one hundred and appoint a leader for each group while you gather all the teachers here with us." Jesus took the loaves in his hands, and

after giving thanks, he broke the bread and distributed it to his friends, who passed it on to their companions, who in turn delivered it to the multitude. Similarly, Jesus broke and distributed the fish. The multitude ate and was satisfied.

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to the followers: “Gather up the broken pieces that remain so that nothing will be lost.” After they had gathered the fragments, they filled twelve baskets. Those who ate from this extraordinary feast numbered about five thousand, including men, women, and children.

The feeding of the five thousand is a notable instance where Jesus’ compassion, combined with God’s approval, resulted in a remarkable event. It appears that God had no objection to heavenly spirits reproducing the loaves and fishes. This miracle is unique in that it was the first and only one that Jesus orchestrated through conscious preplanning. While his followers often labeled many occurrences as miracles that were not, this event stands out as a true supernatural act. Jesus, however, never disclosed the specifics of how this miracle took place.

10.27 KING-MAKING EPISODE

Now that the multitude had been fully fed, and with Jesus’ fame significantly increased by this astonishing miracle, the initiative to seize Jesus and proclaim him as king no longer required personal direction. The idea spread through the crowd like a contagion.

For a long time, the Jewish people had been taught that the Messiah, when he arrived, would cause the land to once again flow with milk and honey, and that bread and fishes would be bestowed upon them, just as manna from heaven was believed to have fallen upon their forefathers in the wilderness. Weren’t all of these expectations now being fulfilled right before their eyes? When this hungry, undernourished multitude finished the food, there was an unanimous reaction: Here is our king. In the eyes of these people, the power to provide sustenance was equated with the right to rule. It is no wonder,

then, that the crowd rose as one after their feast and shouted: "Make him king!" This mighty shout enthused Peter and the other followers, who still hoped to see Jesus assert his claim to rule.

But these false hopes were not destined to last long. The mighty shout of the multitude had scarcely ceased to reverberate off the nearby rocks when Jesus stepped onto a large stone. Lifting his right hand to command their attention, said: "My children, you mean well, but you are short-sighted and material-minded." There was a brief pause; he stood there majestically, illuminated by the enchanting glow of the eastern twilight. Every inch of him resembled a king as he continued to address the breathless multitude:

"You would make me king, not because your souls have been illuminated, but because your stomachs have been filled with bread. God's kingdom is not of this world. The kingdom we are teaching is a spiritual fellowship, and no one rules over it seated upon a material throne.

"Our Heavenly Father embodies the spiritual fellowship of the people on earth; God would never appoint a king in the flesh. Now, everyone, please return to your own homes. If you must have a king, let God be enthroned in the hearts of each of you."

These words of Jesus left the multitude stunned and disheartened. Many who had believed him turned back and no longer followed him from that day forward. The followers stood in silence, speechless, around the twelve baskets of food fragments. Only the chore boy, Mark, broke the silence by stating: Jesus refused to be our king.

Jesus, before retreating to the hills for solitude, turned to Andrew and said: "Take your brethren back to Zebedee's house and pray with them, especially for your brother, Simon Peter."

10.18 PETER'S DREAM

The followers, separated from their teacher and sent off on their own, entered the boat and, in silence, began to row toward Bethsaida on the western shore of the lake. None of the twelve felt as crushed and downcast as Peter. Hardly a word was spoken; they were all preoccupied with thoughts of Jesus alone in the hills. Had he forsaken them? He had never before sent them away or refused to accompany them. What could all of this mean?

Darkness descended upon them as a strong and contrary wind arose, making progress nearly impossible. As the hours of darkness and arduous rowing passed, Peter grew weary and succumbed to a deep sleep of exhaustion. Andrew and James laid him to rest on the cushioned seat at the stern of the boat. While the other followers toiled against the wind and waves, Peter dreamed a vivid dream; he saw Jesus approaching them, walking on the sea. In his dream, as Jesus walked by the boat, Peter cried out for him to save them.

Those in the rear of the boat heard him utter some of these words. As this vision lingered in Peter's mind, he dreamed that he heard Jesus say: "Be of good cheer; it is I; do not be afraid." This message was like the Balm of Gilead to Peter's dreamy mind; it soothed his anxieties so that, in his dream, he cried out to Jesus, saying: If it is truly you, let me come and walk with you on the water. When Peter dreamed that he began to walk on the water, the turbulent waves frightened him, and as he was about to sink, he cried out, "God, save me!" Many of the twelve heard him utter this cry. Then Peter dreamed that Jesus came to his rescue, stretching forth his hand to lift him up, saying: O you of little faith, why did you doubt?

In the latter part of his dream, Peter rose from the seat where he had been sleeping and stepped overboard into the water. This awakened him from his dream and Andrew, James, and John reached down and pulled him out of the sea. To Peter, this experience always felt real. He genuinely believed that Jesus had come to them that night.

[In later years, Peter only partially convinced John Mark of this account, leading Mark to omit a portion of the story from his narrative. Luke, the physician, who subsequently conducted a thorough investigation into these matters, concluded that the episode was merely a dream of Peter's and therefore chose not to include this story in the preparation of his own narrative.]

10.29 AT BETHSAIDA

Before dawn, they finally anchored their boat offshore near Zebedee's house on Thursday morning and sought rest until around noon. Andrew was the first to awaken, and while taking a walk by the sea, he discovered Jesus sitting on a stone at the water's edge, accompanied by their helper, Mark. Despite the fact that many in the crowd, along with the young teachers, searched throughout the night and much of the following day in the eastern hills for Jesus, shortly after midnight, he and Mark began walking around the lake and across the river back to Bethsaida.

Of the five thousand who were miraculously fed, only about five hundred continued to follow him after their stomachs were full and their hearts remained empty. Before these individuals received word that he had returned to Bethsaida, Jesus instructed Andrew to gather the twelve followers, their associates, and the women, saying: "I desire to speak with them." Once everyone was assembled, Jesus began to speak:

"Throughout these months, I have imparted to you the truths of the new teachings; however, you appear to be driven more by material motives than by spiritual considerations. The scriptures state that Moses urged the unbelieving children of Israel, saying: 'It is better to trust in God than to place confidence in human princes.'

"The performance of material wonders will not win souls for the spiritual kingdom. We fed the multitude, but this did not lead them to hunger for the bread of eternal life or the waters of spiritual righteousness. When their physical hunger was satisfied, they did not seek entrance into the spiritual

kingdom; rather, they sought to proclaim a king in the manner of the kings of this world, solely so they could continue to eat bread without having to toil for it. All of this, in which many of you participated to varying degrees, does nothing to reveal God or advance the spiritual kingdom.

“We have enough opposition among the religious leaders of the land without taking actions that may also alienate the civil authorities. I hope that God will anoint your eyes so that you may see and open your ears to hear, enabling you to embrace the new teachings fully.”

Jesus then announced his intention to withdraw for a few days of rest with the twelve before they prepared to journey to Jerusalem for the Passover. He instructed that none of the new teachers or the multitude should follow him. Consequently, they traveled by boat to the region of Gennesaret for two or three days of rest and sleep. During this time, Jesus devoted much of his time to meditation and reflection, seeking to connect with his soul and listen to God.

The news of the feeding of the five thousand and the attempt to make Jesus king sparked widespread curiosity and heightened the fears of both religious and civil leaders throughout Galilee and Judea. This episode marked the conclusion of the early period of teaching and healing, paving the way for the commencement of Jesus’ final year of proclaiming the higher and more spiritual dimensions of his new teachings: divine fellowship, universal brotherhood and service, and eternal life with continued growth.

10.30 AT GENNESARET

While resting at the home of a wealthy follower in the Gennesaret region, Jesus held informal conferences with the twelve every afternoon. His followers were a serious, sober, and chastened group of disillusioned men. However, despite all that had transpired, and as subsequent events would reveal, these twelve did not seem to be fully liberated from their long-held beliefs regarding the coming of the Jewish Messiah.

The events of the preceding weeks had unfolded too rapidly for these astonished fishermen to fully comprehend their significance. It apparently would take time for these men and women to undergo radical and extensive changes in their fundamental concepts of social conduct, philosophical attitudes, and religious convictions.

While Jesus and the twelve were resting at Gennesaret, the crowds dispersed, with some returning to their homes and others traveling to Jerusalem for the Passover. In less than a month, the enthusiastic and devoted followers of Jesus, who numbered more than fifty-thousand in Galilee alone, dwindled to fewer than five hundred. Jesus aimed to provide his friends such an experience of the fickleness of popular acclaim, ensuring they would not be tempted to rely on such fleeting manifestations of religious fervor after he left them to continue their work. However, he was only partially successful in this endeavor.

On the second night of their stay at Gennesaret, Jesus once more shared with his followers The Story Of The Sower and added these words: "You see, my children, the appeal to human physical feelings is fleeting and ultimately unsatisfying; the sole appeal to the intellect is similarly devoid of substance and unfulfilling. It is only by appealing to the spirit that resides within you that you can hope to achieve lasting success and bring about the remarkable transformations of human character."

Jesus endeavored to prepare the followers for the impending shock - the crisis in public attitude toward him that was only a few days away. He explained to the twelve that the religious leaders of Jerusalem would conspire with Herod Antipas to orchestrate his death. Gradually, these twelve seemed to comprehend the full extent of their responsibilities as ambassadors, and they started to brace themselves for the challenging and testing trials of the final year of Jesus' ministry.

10.31 AT JERUSALEM

On Sunday, April 3, Jesus, accompanied only by the twelve companions, began his journey from Bethsaida to Jerusalem. To avoid the crowds and attract as little attention as possible, they traveled through Gerasa and Philadelphia. He instructed them not to engage in public teaching during this trip, nor did he allow them to teach in Jerusalem.

They arrived in Bethany, near Jerusalem, late on the evening of Wednesday, April 6. For that one night, they stayed at the home of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. However, the following day, they parted ways. Jesus, accompanied by John, remained at the residence of a follower named Simon, located near Lazarus's house in Bethany. Judas Iscariot and Simon Zelotes chose to stay with friends in Jerusalem, while the other followers traveled in pairs, lodging in various homes.

Many of the followers in Jerusalem were brought out by Abner to meet Jesus in Bethany. Jesus entered Jerusalem only once during this Passover, on the feast's great day. During this visit to Jerusalem, the twelve learned how intense the animosity of the religious leaders toward Jesus was becoming. They left Jerusalem, all convinced that a crisis was imminent.

On Sunday, April 24, Jesus and the twelve departed from Jerusalem, traveling to Bethsaida via the coastal cities of Joppa, Caesarea, and Ptolemais. They then journeyed overland through Ramah and Chorazin, arriving in Bethsaida on Friday, April 29.

Immediately upon arriving in Capernaum, Jesus sent Andrew to request permission from Jairus, the leader of the synagogue, to speak at the afternoon service the following day, which was the Sabbath. Jesus was fully aware that this would be the last time he would have to address the congregation in the Capernaum synagogue.

On Friday evening and again on Sabbath morning, the leaders of Jerusalem worked diligently and earnestly with Jairus to prevent Jesus from speaking in the synagogue, but their efforts were in vain. Jairus' only response to their pleas was that he had granted this request and would not go back on his word.

10.32 AT CAPERNAUM

Upon their arrival at Bethsaida on Sabbath morning, the followers observed that Jesus was deeply engaged in a significant matter. He skipped breakfast and ate very little at noon. Throughout the Sabbath morning and the previous evening, the twelve and their companions gathered in small groups around the house, in the garden, and along the seashore.

A palpable tension of uncertainty and a sense of apprehension hung over them all. Since leaving Jerusalem, Jesus had spoken very little to them. It had been months since the twelve had seen Jesus so absorbed and uncommunicative.

Jesus ventured out on this beautiful Sabbath afternoon to impart his groundbreaking lesson in the synagogue of Capernaum. The only cheerful greeting or well-wishing from any of his immediate followers came from one of the unsuspecting Alpheus twins. As Jesus left the house on his way to the synagogue, the twin greeted him warmly, expressing their prayers for God's assistance and their hope for even larger crowds than before.

10.33 THE CAPERNAUM SYNAGOGUE

A distinguished congregation gathered to greet Jesus on a beautiful Sabbath afternoon in the new Capernaum synagogue. Jairus presided over the assembly and handed Jesus the scriptures to read. The day before, fifty-three Pharisees and Sadducees had arrived from Jerusalem, accompanied by more than thirty leaders from neighboring synagogues. These religious leaders were acting under direct orders from the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, forming the orthodox vanguard that had come to initiate open conflict against Jesus and his followers. Seated alongside these Jewish leaders in the synagogue's seats of honor were the official observers of Herod Antipas, who had been tasked with ascertaining the truth regarding the troubling reports that the populace had attempted to proclaim Jesus as the king of the Jews in the territories governed by his brother Philip.

At the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus challenged the notion of a material Messiah; now, he openly sought to confront the concept of a Jewish deliverer. Through Jesus' lessons, the doubts and disappointments of the discontented evolved from unconscious opposition into outright hatred. This marked a significant shift in the tide of popular fame and acclaim.

Jesus was acutely aware that some individuals were gradually preparing to reject him. He also recognized that many of his followers were undergoing a mental and spiritual training that would empower them to overcome doubt and confidently affirm their unwavering faith in the teachings. Jesus understood that he was confronted with the imminent declaration of open opposition and chose to take the offensive boldly.

10.34 SYNAGOGUE LESSON

Jesus introduced this lesson by reading from the law as found in Deuteronomy. After completing this reading, he turned to the Prophets and read from the book of Jeremiah:

“‘If you do not heed the words of my servants, the prophets whom I have sent to you, then I will make this house like Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth.’ And the priests heard Jeremiah speak these words in the house of God. When Jeremiah had finished speaking all that God had commanded him to speak to the people, the priests and teachers seized him, saying, ‘You shall surely die.’ And all the people gathered around Jeremiah in the house of God. When the princes of Judah heard these things, they convened to judge Jeremiah. The priests and teachers then addressed the princes and all the people, saying: ‘This man is deserving of death, for he has prophesied against our city, and you have heard him with your own ears.’”

“Then Jeremiah spoke to all the princes and the people: ‘God sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the words that you have heard. Therefore, amend your ways, reform your actions, and obey God’s voice so that you may escape the spiritual consequences that have been pronounced against you. As for me, I am in your hands. Do with me what seems good and right in your eyes. But know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves and these people, for truly God has sent me to speak all these words in your ears.’”

After the reading, Jesus stated:

“The priests and teachers of that time sought to kill Jeremiah, but the judges would not consent. Instead, they allowed him to be lowered by cords into a filthy dungeon, where he sank in mire up to his armpits. This is what the people did to the Prophet Jeremiah when he obeyed God’s request to warn his brethren of their impending political downfall.

“Today, I want to ask you: What will your chief priests and religious leaders do with a man who dares to warn them of their spiritual doom? Will you also seek to silence a teacher who boldly proclaims the word of God and is unafraid to point out where you refuse to walk in the path that leads to the entrance of heaven?

“We have allowed you, the Pharisees and Sadducees, to remain undisturbed in your positions of influence and power while we have taught lessons to the poor and the outcast. We have made no hostile attack on that which you hold in reverence, but have proclaimed a new liberty for the fear-ridden soul of humanity. Our only desire is to reveal our Heavenly Father and to establish on earth the spiritual fellowship of the children of God.

“Some of you, when you could not find me after the multitude had feasted on the other side, hired the Tiberias fishing fleet, which had taken shelter nearby during a storm just a week before, to pursue me. And what for? Not for truth and righteousness, nor to better know how to serve and minister to your fellow men! No, it was rather to obtain more bread for which you had not labored. It was not to fill your souls with the word of life, but only that you might fill the belly with the bread of ease.

“You have long been taught that the Messiah, upon his arrival, would perform wonders that would make life pleasant and easy for all the chosen people.

“It is not surprising, then, that you, having received such teachings, should yearn for the loaves and the fishes. However, that is not our mission. We have come to proclaim spiritual liberty, teach eternal truths, foster living beliefs, and seek sincere fellowship.

“My brethren, do not long for the meat which perishes, but instead seek the spiritual food that sustains - spiritual bread that God offers to all who are willing to accept and partake of it.

Jesus was referring to God’s gift of the soul which provides nourishment to everybody’s mind and body.

“When you asked me, ‘What must we do to fulfill the will of God?’ I clearly responded: ‘This is the will of God - that you believe the new teachings and serve the fellowship of God’s children.’

“What is it that you seek as evidence of this mission? What new sign do you desire? I have reminded you that the spiritual kingdom is not of this world. God has granted you numerous manifestations of material wonders, as well as many spiritual transformations and regenerations. You already possess sufficient evidence to make your decision.

“I say to many who sit here today, you are faced with the necessity of choosing which path you will take. As Joshua said to your forefathers, ‘Choose you this day whom you will believe.’ Today, many of you stand at a crossroads.”

And then Jesus said, pointing to the pot of manna that adorned the lintel of the new synagogue, which was embellished with clusters of grapes:

“You have believed that your forefathers in the wilderness ate manna - the bread of heaven - but I tell you that this was the bread of the earth. While Moses did not provide your forefathers with bread from heaven, God is now prepared to offer you spiritual bread.

“This spiritual bread comes down from God and grants eternal life to all souls in the world. When you say: ‘Give us this spiritual bread,’ I will respond: ‘You already possess this spiritual bread.’ Whoever believes this teaching shall not hunger; whoever embraces these teachings shall forever be nourished.

“And now, let me say to you: every soul who believes these teachings and serves shall have eternal life. Only yesterday, you were fed bread for your bodies; today, you are offered spiritual bread for your hungry souls. Now, take this spiritual bread as you so willingly ate the bread of this material world.”

As Jesus paused for a moment to survey the congregation, one of the teachers from Jerusalem, a member of the Sanhedrin, rose and asked: I understand you to say that you give spiritual bread which comes down from heaven, and that the manna Moses gave to our fathers in the wilderness did not? Jesus responded to the Pharisees: “You understood, right?”

Then the Pharisee asked, Jesus of Nazareth, are you not the son of Joseph, the carpenter? Are not your father, mother, brothers, and sisters well known to us? How do you come here to God’s house and claim to know the way to heaven?

By this time, there was much murmuring in the synagogue, and a tumult was imminent, prompting Jesus to stand and speak:

“Let us be patient; the truth never suffers from honest examination. I am all that you say and more. You are offered the bread of spiritual life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness and are dead. But this spiritual bread if one eats it, shall never die in spirit. This spiritual bread will provide all who receive it with a revelation of the spiritual world.”

When Jesus had finished speaking, the leader of the synagogue dismissed the congregation; however, they refused to leave. They gathered around Jesus to ask additional questions, while others murmured and debated among themselves.

10.35 AFTER-MEETING

Many questions were posed to Jesus during this post-meeting discussion. His bewildered followers asked some inquiries, but more were posed by frivolous non-followers who sought only to embarrass and entrap him.

Jesus spoke out with greater candor, knowing that the time had come when nothing could be done to prevent an open rupture in relations with these religious leaders.

One of the visiting Pharisees, standing on a lamp stand, shouted out another question. And Jesus responded to his inquiry, saying: "I did not teach you that my flesh is spiritual bread. However, I did say that you can be nourished by the spirit, a gift of God, which is indeed the spiritual bread; and your spiritual thirst can be quenched by the spiritual water of the soul. Our Heavenly Father desires for you to understand how all people can live, and I have tried to live in such a way as to inspire others to do the same."

Then one of the spies from Jerusalem, who had been observing Jesus and his companions, remarked that they noticed neither he nor the followers washed their hands properly before eating bread. They also failed to adequately wash their drinking cups and eating vessels. Why do you defile the traditions of the elders and the laws of our forefathers? Jesus replied:

"Hearken while I reveal the truth about those things that morally defile and spiritually contaminate individuals. I tell you, it is not what enters the body through the mouth or what gains access to the mind through the eyes and ears that defiles a person.

"A person is only defiled by the wrongs that find expression in their words and deeds, which stem from wrongful thoughts, thoughts of wicked schemes such as murder, theft, and adultery, along with jealousy, pride, anger, revenge, slander, and false witness. It is precisely these things that defile individuals, not the act of eating bread with ceremonially unclean hands."

These Jews regarded eating with unwashed hands as equivalent to engaging in commerce with a harlot, and both offenses were subject to excommunication. *[Even many years later, Peter remained bound by many of these traditions concerning clean and unclean practices, only altering his beliefs after experiencing an extraordinary and vivid dream.]*

10.36 DISTRAUGHT YOUTH

Amid the discussions following the meeting, one of the Pharisees from Jerusalem brought a troubled youth to Jesus, exhibiting an unruly and rebellious attitude. He led the distressed young man to Jesus and asked what could be done to alleviate such affliction. Could Jesus cast out the devil?

And when Jesus looked upon the youth, he was moved with compassion. Beckoning for the lad to come to him, he took him by the hand and said: “You know who I am.” Immediately, the lad was restored to his right mind. When the people marveled, one of the Pharisees stood up and accused Jesus of performing these miracles in league with the supposed devil. The Pharisee warned the audience to have nothing to do with Jesus, claiming that he was in partnership with Satan. Then Jesus said:

“How can Satan cast out Satan? A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand; if a house is divided against itself, it will soon become desolate. Can a city withstand a siege if it is not united? You should know that no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods unless he first overpowers and binds that strong man.

“And so, if I possess the power of the devil, whom can I cast out? But if I, by the spirit of God, cast out the devil, then has the kingdom of God truly come upon you? Let me say this to you who would attribute God’s works to the devil’s doings!

“Many of you have reached a pivotal moment today, standing at the crossroads of decision. You are faced with the unavoidable choice between the will of God and the self-imposed paths of tradition. You must either cultivate a good tree and produce good fruit, or the tree will inevitably become corrupt, yielding corrupt fruit. A tree is recognized by its fruit. Yet, for those of you who have already chosen corrupt trees, can you truly bear good fruit? While your mistakes can be overlooked, even your blasphemies; however, if you never seek the truth, you are rejecting divine blessings.”

Then another Pharisee stood up, seeking a predetermined sign that they could agree upon to establish his right to teach. Will you agree to such an arrangement? Jesus heard this, he responded: “Those who are faithless and seek signs among you look for a token, but no sign shall be given to you other than that which you already possess and that which you will witness when I depart from your midst.”

The Pharisaic commissioners of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin were nearly convinced that Jesus should be apprehended on charges of blasphemy or for violating the sacred laws of the Jews. They endeavored to entangle him in discussions regarding, and potential criticisms of, some of the traditions of the elders, commonly referred to as the Oral Laws of the nation. This state of confrontation persisted for over three hours, and it was well into the evening before the audience finally dispersed.

When Jesus had finished speaking, his friends surrounded him and safely led him away from the synagogue. In silence, they journeyed home with him to Bethsaida. They were all amazed and somewhat terrified by the sudden shift in Jesus’ teaching style. They were entirely unaccustomed to witnessing him act in such a militant manner.

10.37 SATURDAY EVENING

The followers apparently felt that, time and again, Jesus had dashed their hopes and repeatedly crushed their fondest expectations. However, no time of disappointment they had ever experienced equaled the one that now overtook them. Additionally, their depression was compounded by a genuine fear for their safety. They were all taken aback by the suddenness and totality of the populace's desertion. The unexpected boldness and assertive determination of the Pharisees who had come down from Jerusalem left them frightened and disconcerted. But most of all, they were bewildered by Jesus' sudden change in tactics. Under ordinary circumstances, they would have welcomed the emergence of this more aggressive attitude; however, given the unexpected nature of the situation, it seemed to startle them.

In addition to these worries, Jesus refused to eat upon their return home. He isolated himself in one of the upper rooms for hours. It was nearly midnight when Joab, the leader of the teachers, returned to report that approximately one-third of his associates had abandoned the cause. Throughout the evening, loyal followers had come and gone, observing that the sentiment against Jesus was widespread in Capernaum.

The leaders from Jerusalem were quick to exploit this feeling of disaffection and sought to promote a movement away from Jesus and his teachings in every possible way.

The twelve women gathered at Peter's house during these challenging hours. Although they were deeply upset, none of them abandoned their commitment.

A little after midnight, Jesus descended from the upper chamber and stood among the twelve and their associates, who numbered about thirty. He said:

"I recognize that this reinforcement of the lessons causes you distress, but it is unavoidable. Nevertheless, after all your training, is there any valid reason for you to falter in your words? Do not be overwhelmed with fear and dismay when you witness the new teachings being rejected by these

indifferent multitudes and halfhearted followers. A new day is dawning, heralding the emergence of the spiritual lessons of heaven in renewed glory. If you find it challenging to endure this test, what will you do when I must go to God?

“Many will be offended by the candid discourse of these times. You have already heard that many so-called followers have turned away; they no longer walk with us. I anticipated that these halfhearted followers would stray from the path. I have chosen you and set you apart as ambassadors. And now, at this moment, would you also abandon us? Let each of you examine your own faith. Remember that the spirit gives life; the flesh and all that pertains to it is of little profit. Be of good cheer! I have not forsaken you!”

And when Jesus had finished speaking, Simon Peter expressed that they were saddened and perplexed, yet they would never forsake him: you have taught us the words of eternal life; we believe in you and will follow you all the time; we will not turn back. Peter concluded his statement, and they all nodded their approval in unison to his pledge of loyalty.

Then Jesus said: “Go to your rest, for busy times are upon us; active days lie just ahead.”

10.38 LAST DAYS AT CAPERNAUM

On the eventful Saturday night of April 30, while Jesus was offering words of comfort and courage to his disheartened and perplexed followers in Tiberias, a council convened between Herod Antipas and a group of special commissioners representing the Jerusalem Sanhedrin. These Scribes and Pharisees urged Herod to arrest Jesus, attempting to persuade him that Jesus was inciting the populace to dissent and even rebellion. However, Herod declined to take action against him as a political offender. Herod’s advisers had accurately reported the incident across the lake when the people sought to proclaim Jesus as an earthly king and how he had rejected that proposal.

One of Herod's officials, Chuza, whose wife was part of the women's ministering corps, informed him that Jesus did not intend to involve himself in earthly governance. Instead, Jesus was solely focused on establishing a spiritual fellowship among people, which he referred to as a spiritual kingdom. Herod had great confidence in Chuza's reports to the extent that he refrained from interfering with Jesus' activities.

Herod's attitude toward Jesus at this time was also shaped by his superstitious fear of John the Baptist. As an apostate Jew, Herod believed in nothing yet feared everything. He clearly harbored a guilty conscience for having executed John the Baptist and was reluctant to become embroiled in the intrigues surrounding Jesus.

Herod was aware of numerous instances in which Jesus had seemingly healed the sick, and he viewed him as either a prophet or a relatively harmless religious fanatic. When the representatives from Jerusalem threatened to report to Caesar that Herod was protecting a traitorous subject, Herod ordered them to leave his council chamber. Consequently, the situation remained unchanged for one week, during which Jesus prepared his friends for the impending dispersion.

10.39 A WEEK OF COUNSEL

From May 1 to May 7, Jesus engaged in intimate discussions with his friends at the Zebedee house. Only his most trusted and loyal followers were permitted to attend these conferences. During this period, approximately one hundred followers demonstrated moral courage by confronting the opposition of the Pharisees and openly professing their commitment to the new teachings. With this group, he conducted sessions in the morning, afternoon, and evening. Each afternoon, small groups of inquirers gathered by the seaside, where various teachers or followers provided instruction. These groups typically consisted of no more than fifty individuals.

On Friday, the leaders of the Capernaum synagogue officially took action to close their house of God to Jesus and all his followers. This decision was made at the instigation of the Pharisees from Jerusalem. Jairus resigned from his position as chief leader and openly aligned himself with Jesus.

The final seaside meeting took place on Sabbath afternoon, May 7. Jesus addressed fewer than 150 individuals who had gathered at that time. This Saturday night marked the lowest point in the tide of popular support for Jesus and his teachings.

From that point forward, there was a steady, gradual, yet healthier and more reliable growth in favorable sentiment. A new following emerged, one that was more firmly rooted in spiritual faith and genuine religious experience. Consequently, there was a more open proclamation of the teachings, highlighting their vast scope and far-reaching spiritual implications.

10.40 A WEEK OF REST

Sunday, May 8, 29 CE, in Jerusalem, the Sanhedrin enacted a decree prohibiting Jesus and his followers from entering all synagogues. This marked a new and unprecedented usurpation of authority by the Jerusalem Sanhedrin. Each synagogue operated as an independent congregation, governed by its own board of directors. Previously, only the synagogues within Jerusalem had been subject to the Sanhedrin's authority. This abrupt action by the Sanhedrin led to the resignation of five of its members. One hundred messengers were promptly dispatched to communicate and enforce this decree.

Within a brief span of two weeks, every synagogue in the area had complied with the decree issued by the Sanhedrin, except for the synagogue in Hebron. The leaders of the Hebron synagogue rejected the Sanhedrin's authority to impose such jurisdiction over their congregation. Their refusal to adhere to the decree from Jerusalem was rooted in their belief in congregational autonomy rather than any alignment with Jesus' cause. *[Shortly after that, the Hebron synagogue was destroyed by fire.]*

This Sunday morning, Jesus requested a week-long holiday, urging all of his followers to return to their homes or visit friends to rest their troubled souls and uplift their loved ones. He said: "Go to your respective places to play or fish while you pray for the expansion of the spiritual kingdom."

This week of rest allowed Jesus to visit numerous families and groups at the seaside. He also went fishing with David Zebedee on several occasions. Although he spent much of his time alone, two or three of David's most trusted messengers were always nearby, following their chief's clear instructions to safeguard Jesus. There was no public teaching of any kind during this week of rest.

This week, Nathaniel and James Zebedee experienced more than a minor illness. They were severely afflicted for three days and nights with a painful digestive disorder. On the third night, Jesus ministered to his suffering followers. While Jesus had the power to heal these two men instantly, he chose not to employ that method for addressing such ordinary difficulties and afflictions. Throughout his life, Jesus never called upon heavenly spirits for supernatural assistance on behalf of any member of his family or any of his immediate followers.

10.41 SECOND TIBERIAS CONFERENCE

On May 16, the second conference in Tiberias was convened between the authorities in Jerusalem and Herod Antipas. Both religious and political leaders from Jerusalem were in attendance. The Jewish leaders reported to Herod that nearly all the synagogues in Galilee and Judea had closed their doors to Jesus' teachings. A renewed effort was made to persuade Herod to arrest Jesus, but he declined to comply with their request.

On May 18, however, Herod agreed to the plan that allowed the Sanhedrin authorities to apprehend Jesus and transport him to Jerusalem for trial on religious charges, contingent upon the approval of the Roman ruler of Judea. Meanwhile, Jesus' opponents were actively disseminating rumors throughout Galilee that Herod had turned against Jesus and intended to eliminate all who adhered to his teachings.

On Saturday night, May 21, just before midnight, Herod signed the decree that authorized the officers of the Sanhedrin to apprehend Jesus within Herod's territories and forcibly transport him to Jerusalem for trial. Intense pressure from various factions was exerted on Herod before he agreed to grant this permission, and he was acutely aware that Jesus could not anticipate a fair trial in front of his adversaries in Jerusalem.

10.42 SATURDAY NIGHT IN CAPERNAUM

On that same Saturday night, fifty prominent citizens gathered at the synagogue in Capernaum to deliberate the significant question of what actions to take regarding Jesus. They engaged in discussions and debates that extended past midnight, yet they were unable to reach a consensus. Aside from a few individuals who leaned toward the belief that Jesus could be the Messiah, or at the very least a spiritual man or prophet, the assembly was divided into four nearly equal factions, each holding distinct perspectives on Jesus:

- That he was perceived as a deluded and harmless religious fanatic.
- That he was a dangerous and scheming agitator who could incite rebellion.
- That he was in league with the devil and might even be the supposed devil.
- That he was beside himself, mad, or mentally unbalanced.

There was considerable discussion regarding Jesus' teachings, which many found troubling. His opponents argued that his teachings were impractical and that society would collapse if everyone genuinely adhered to his principles.

10.43 EVENTFUL SUNDAY MORNING

May 22 was an eventful day in the life of Jesus. On that Sunday morning, before daybreak, one of David's messengers arrived in great haste from Tiberias, delivering the news that Herod had authorized, or was about to authorize, the arrest of

Jesus by the officers of the Sanhedrin. Upon receiving this alarming news, David Zebedee quickly roused his messengers and dispatched them to all the local groups of followers, summoning them for an emergency council early that morning.

When the wife of Jude, Jesus' brother, heard this alarming report, she quickly sent word to all of Jesus' family who lived nearby, summoning them to gather immediately at Zebedee's house. In response to this urgent call, Mary, James, Joseph, Jude, and Ruth soon assembled there. At this early morning meeting, Jesus said he should flee, then imparted his farewell instructions to the assembled followers, bidding them farewell for the time being, fully aware that they would soon be dispersed from Capernaum. He urged them all to seek God's guidance and to continue their work regardless of the consequences. The original teachers were selected as the twelve to accompany him. He instructed these ambassadors to remain with him no matter what transpired. The twelve women were directed to stay at the Zebedee house and Peter's house until he sent for them.

Jesus consented to David Zebedee's continuation of his countrywide messenger service. In bidding Jesus farewell, David urged him to go forth to his work, advising him not to let them catch him and to never doubt that the messengers would follow after him: My men will always maintain contact with you, and through them, you shall be informed of new developments in other regions. In turn, we will keep you updated about us. Nothing that may happen to me will interfere with this service, for I have appointed first and second leaders, and even a third. I am not a teacher, but it is in my heart to undertake this mission, and no one can stop me.

Early in the morning, Jesus noted the need to leave the region and commenced his farewell address to nearly one hundred followers who had gathered indoors to listen to him. This was a solemn occasion for all, yet Jesus appeared unusually cheerful; he seemed to embody his true self once again. The weight of the past weeks had lifted, and he inspired them with his messages of faith, hope, and courage.

10.44 JESUS' FAMILY ARRIVES

It was early Sunday morning when five members of Jesus' earthly family arrived at the scene in response to the urgent summons from Jude's wife. Of all his family members, only one, Ruth, believed wholeheartedly and consistently in his mission on earth. Jude, James, and even Joseph likely retained much of their belief about Jesus; however, they allowed pride to interfere with their better judgment and genuine spiritual inclinations.

Mary was likely torn between love and fear, mother's love and family pride. Although doubts plagued her, she could never fully forget the vision of the heavenly spirit that appeared before Jesus was born. The Pharisees had earlier been working diligently to convince Mary and her family that Jesus was out of his mind and delusional. They urged her to accompany her sons and attempt to dissuade him from continuing his public teachings. They assured her that Jesus' health would soon deteriorate and that allowing him to persist would bring only dishonor and disgrace upon the entire family.

The five family members gathered at Mary's home, where they met with the Pharisees and engaged in discussions with the leaders of Jerusalem late into the night. All were somewhat convinced that Jesus had been behaving unusually for quite some time. Although Ruth could not account for all of his actions, she maintained that he had always treated his family fairly and refused to support any efforts to dissuade him from continuing his work.

When the news arrived from Jude's sister-in-law, all five of them immediately set out for Zebedee's house. On their way, they discussed their plans and agreed to try to persuade Jesus to return home with them. Mary expressed her belief that she could influence her son if he would only come home and listen to her.

James and Jude had heard rumors about the plans to arrest Jesus and bring him to Jerusalem for trial. They also feared for their own safety. As long as Jesus remained a popular figure in the public eye, his family allowed events to unfold without intervention.

However, now that the people of Capernaum and the leaders of Jerusalem had turned against him, they began to acutely feel the pressure of the perceived disgrace associated with their embarrassing situation.

They had anticipated meeting Jesus, taking him aside, and persuading him to return home with them. They believed they could assure him that they would overlook his neglect of them - they would forgive and forget - if he would only abandon his efforts to teach new beliefs that could bring him only trouble and dishonor to his family.

To all of this, Ruth stated that she would inform my brother that she believed he was a man of God and that she hoped he would be willing to die rather than allow these wicked Pharisees to hinder his teaching. Joseph promised to keep Ruth silent while the others worked alongside Jesus.

When they arrived at the Zebedee house, Jesus was delivering his farewell address to his followers. They attempted to gain entry, but the house was overflowing with people. Eventually, they settled on the back porch. They relayed a message to Jesus through various individuals until it was finally whispered to him by Simon Peter, who interrupted his speech to inform him that his mother and brothers were outside and eager to speak with him.

Now, it did not occur to his mother how vital this parting message was for his friends, nor was she aware that his address could be terminated at any moment by the arrival of his captors. She genuinely believed that, after such a prolonged period of apparent estrangement, her and his brothers' willingness to come to him would prompt Jesus to cease speaking and come to them as soon as he received word that they were waiting.

It was yet another instance in which his family could not understand that Jesus was focused on his teaching mission. Consequently, Mary and his brothers were deeply hurt when, despite his pausing to receive their message, he did not rush out to greet them.

Instead, they heard his melodic voice speaking with increased volume. “Tell my mother and my brothers not to fear for me. Our Heavenly Father will not forsake me, nor will any harm come to my family. Encourage them to be courageous and to place their trust in our Heavenly Father.”

It was in Jesus’ mind to see his family before he departed. He did not wish to interrupt his discourse, as he wanted to avoid making their long-awaited reunion a public affair. His intention was to complete his address and then visit them before leaving.

This plan was thwarted by a series of events that immediately followed. A messenger arrived in haste from Tiberias, bearing news that the officers of the Sanhedrin were en route with the authority to arrest Jesus and transport him to Jerusalem. Andrew received this message and, interrupting Jesus, conveyed it to him. Andrew did not remember that David had stationed approximately twenty-five sentinels around the Zebedee house, ensuring that no one could take them by surprise.

The urgency of Jesus’ departure was heightened by the arrival of a group of messengers from David at the rear entrance of the Zebedee home. The commotion caused by these men alarmed Jesus’ followers, leading them to believe that the newcomers might be there to apprehend them. Fearing imminent arrest, they quickly ushered him through the front entrance to the waiting boat.

So, Jesus did not have the opportunity to visit with his family, who were waiting on the back porch. However, as he entered the boat in a hurried manner, he said to David Zebedee, “Tell my mother and brothers that I appreciate their coming and that I intended to see them. Encourage them to take no offense at me, but rather to seek knowledge of the will of God and to find the grace and courage to fulfill that will.”

10.45 HASTY FLIGHT

On the Sunday morning of May 29 CE, Jesus, accompanied by his twelve followers and twelve teachers, embarked on a hasty flight from the Sanhedrin officers. On this beautiful morning, this group of twenty-five took to the oars and rowed toward the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Following Jesus' boat was a smaller craft carrying six of David's messengers. They were tasked with maintaining contact with Jesus and his associates, ensuring that information regarding their whereabouts and safety was regularly transmitted to the home of Zebedee in Bethsaida, which had served as the headquarters for their work for some time. However, Jesus would never again reside at the house of Zebedee. From this point forward, Jesus indeed "had nowhere to lay his head." No more did he have even the semblance of a settled abode.

They rowed near the village of Kheresa, entrusted their boat to friends, and began the teachings of their final year. For a time, they stayed within the territories of Philip, traveling from Kheresa to Caesarea-Philippi, and then making their way to the coast of Phoenicia.

The crowd lingered around the home of Zebedee, observing as two boats made their way across the lake toward the eastern shore. They had just begun their journey when the officers from Jerusalem hurried in and initiated their search for Jesus. The officers were unwilling to accept that he had eluded them. Meanwhile, as Jesus and his companions traveled northward through Batanea, the Pharisees and their aides spent nearly an entire week futilely searching for him in the vicinity of Capernaum. Jesus' family returned to their home in Capernaum and spent nearly a week engaged in discussions and debates, likely filled with confusion and concern. They found no peace of mind until Thursday afternoon when Ruth returned from a visit to the Zebedee household. There, she learned from David that Jesus was safe, in good health, and making his way toward the Phoenician coast.

Phoenician Trip



11.0 THROUGH NORTHERN GALILEE

Soon after landing near Kheresa on that eventful Sunday, Jesus and the twenty-four traveled a short distance north, where they spent the night in a picturesque park south of Bethsaida-Julias. They were well - acquainted with this camping site, having visited it in the past. Before retiring for the night, Jesus gathered his friends around him to discuss plans for their upcoming tour through Batanea and northern Galilee to the Phoenician coast.

11.1 AT KHERESA

At Kheresa, Jesus continued to teach the twenty-four, delivering his lesson titled Why Heathen Rage:

“Recall how the Psalmist spoke of these times, saying: ‘Why do the heathen rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers of the people take counsel together against God and his anointed, saying, ‘Let us break the bonds of mercy asunder and cast away the cords of love.’

“Today, you witness this fulfilled before your eyes. However, you will not see the remainder of the Psalmist’s prophecy come to fruition, as he held erroneous beliefs. The kingdom is built on love, proclaimed through understanding, and established by selfless service. God is not wrathful; rather, He will welcome these Gentiles with open arms of affection.

“All this loving-kindness shall be extended to those often labeled as heathens. The Psalmist exhorts you to ‘serve God with fear,’ but I encourage you to embrace the joyful privileges of divine fellowship through faith. While the Psalmist commands you to rejoice with trembling, I invite you to rejoice with confidence. Those of you who have journeyed with me understand that anger, revenge, and wrath are not components of establishing the kingdom.

Jesus continued:

“The heathen are not without excuse when they express their anger towards us. Their perspective is limited and narrow, allowing them to focus their energies with enthusiasm. Their goals are immediate and relatively clear; thus, they pursue them with determination and effectiveness. In contrast, you are excessively indecisive and ambiguous in your teaching approach. The heathen aim directly for their objectives, while you display a persistent sense of longing. If you wish to enter heaven seize it through spiritual assault, even as the heathen captures a city under siege? Your service should not primarily consist of lamenting the past, complaining about the present, and futilely hoping for the future.

“Why do the heathens rage? Because they do not know their truth. You know the truth, but do not obey it; therefore, cease your futile yearning and go forth bravely to teach the new lessons.

“In all that you do, strive to avoid being one-sided and overly specialized. The Pharisees who seek our destruction genuinely believe they are serving God. They have become so constrained by tradition that they are blinded by prejudice and hardened by fear. They are misled into accepting a narrow and fragmented understanding of truth.

“Let me emphatically state this eternal truth: If you learn to embody this beautiful wholeness of righteousness in your lives, your fellow human beings will seek you out in hopes of gaining what you have acquired. The degree to which truth seekers are drawn to you reflects your success. Conversely, the extent to which you must go to convey your message to others serves as an indicator of your failure to live a complete and righteous life - a life aligned with truth.”

And many other things Jesus taught his friends and the teachers before they bid him good night and sought rest upon their pillows.

11.2 AT CHORAZIN

On Monday morning, May 23, Jesus instructed Peter to accompany the twelve teachers to Chorazin while he, along with the eleven, departed for Caesarea-Philippi. They traveled along the Jordan River to the Damascus-Capernaum Road, then continued northeast to the junction with the road leading to Caesarea-Philippi, ultimately arriving in that city, where they stayed and taught for two weeks. They reached their destination during the afternoon of Tuesday, May 24.

Peter and the teachers sojourned in Chorazin for two weeks, sharing their teachings with a small but earnest group of residents. However, they were only able to gain a few new adherents.

No city in all of Galilee yielded as few souls as Chorazin. Following Peter's instructions, the twelve focused less on physical healing, things physical, while they taught the spiritual truths of the spiritual kingdom and brotherhood with renewed vigor.

These two weeks at Chorazin represented a true baptism of adversity for the twelve. It was perhaps the most challenging and unproductive period in their careers to date. Deprived of the satisfaction that comes from winning souls, each teacher earnestly and honestly reflected on his own spiritual journey and progress in the new life.

When it seemed that no one else was inclined to seek entry into the spiritual kingdom, Peter gathered his associates on Tuesday, June 7, and set out for Caesarea-Philippi to join Jesus and the followers. They arrived around noon on Wednesday and spent the entire evening recounting their experiences among the non-followers of Chorazin. During the discussions that evening, Jesus further referenced the story of the sower and imparted valuable insights regarding the meaning of what appeared to be a failure.

11.3 AT CAESAREA-PHILIPPI

Although Jesus did not engage in public work during this two-week stay near Caesarea-Philippi, the followers held numerous quiet evening meetings in the city, and many came to the camp to converse with Jesus. Very few individuals were added to the group of followers as a result of this visit. Jesus spoke with the group daily, and they began to discern more clearly that a new phase of the teaching work was commencing.

The sojourn at Caesarea-Philippi was undoubtedly a significant challenge for the eleven followers; it was a difficult two weeks for them to endure. They were nearly overwhelmed with feelings of depression and missed the invigorating presence of Peter's enthusiastic personality.

Although they made few converts during these two weeks, they gained valuable insights from their daily discussions with Jesus. They learned to view human personalities in terms of their potential. They discovered that many individuals could be more effectively led to love the unseen God by first being taught to love their visible brethren. In this context, a new meaning was attached to Jesus' statement regarding selfless service to others: "Since you did it to one of the least of our brethren, you did it to me."

One of the significant lessons from this sojourn in Caesarea was the origin of religious traditions, highlighting the grave danger of allowing a sense of sacredness to become attached to commonplace ideas, everyday events, ordinary objects, or people. Jesus consistently warned the twelve about the peril of accepting religious symbols and ceremonies instead of genuine spiritual experience. Ultimately, the followers came to understand that Jesus' entire life was dedicated to transforming the rigid structures of religion into the fluid freedoms of enlightened fellowship with God.

From one conference, they emerged with the understanding that religion represents humanity's profound loyalty to its highest and truest convictions. Jesus cautioned his friends that if their religious aspirations were solely material, an increasing knowledge of nature could, through the gradual advancement in knowledge of the universe, could undermine their faith in God. However, if their religion were spiritual, advancements in physical science could never shake their belief in eternal truths and divine values.

They discovered that when religion is entirely spiritual in its motives, it enhances the value of life, imbuing it with noble purposes, elevating it with transcendent values, and inspiring it with admirable intentions, while reinforcing the human soul with sublime and sustaining hope. A purely spiritual faith fosters courage and resilience for daily living and selfless service; belief nurtures spiritual vitality and cultivates righteous outcomes.

11.4 AT LUZ

On Thursday morning, June 9, after receiving updates from David's messengers in Bethsaida, a group of twenty-five teachers departed from Caesarea-Philippi to commence their journey to the Phoenician coast. They passed around the marshlands, traveling via Luz to the junction with the Magdala-Mount Lebanon Trail. From there, they proceeded to the crossing that leads to Sidon, arriving on Friday afternoon.

While pausing for lunch beneath the shadow of an overhanging rock ledge near Luz, Jesus delivered one of the most remarkable addresses his friends had ever heard throughout their years together. No sooner had they seated themselves to break bread than Simon Peter asked Jesus why they should flee from the threats posed by their opponents. Why do we refuse to confront the enemies of truth?

But before Jesus could respond to Peter's question, Thomas interjected, inquiring about the shortcomings of the religion practiced by the leaders in Jerusalem. What is the fundamental difference between their faith and ours? Why is there such a diversity of beliefs among them when they all believe and serve the same God?

After Thomas finished speaking, Jesus replied: "While I do not wish to dismiss Peter's question, I am acutely aware of how easily my reasons for avoiding an open confrontation with the Jewish leaders at this moment could be misinterpreted. Therefore, it would be more beneficial for all of you if I address Thomas's question first. I will proceed to do so once you have finished your lunch."

From this Discourse On Religions, the followers learned three distinct forms of religious devotion:

- Primitive Religion: The innate and instinctive tendency to fear mysterious energies and to worship superior forces primarily reflects a religion rooted in the physical realm, essentially, a religion of fear. Jesus did not belittle the religion rooted in physical senses and the superstitious fears of humanity. However, he lamented the persistence of this primitive form of worship directed toward objects and people within the religious practices of people.

- **Authoritative Religion.** The advancing religious concepts and practices of societies - the religion of the mind - are characterized by intellectual theology that derives its authority from established religious traditions. The acceptance of authoritative religions offers an easy solution for humanity's desire to fulfill the longings of its spiritual nature. Established and crystallized religions provide a convenient refuge for the mind, allowing it to escape when confronted by fear and plagued by uncertainty. Such religions demand from their followers, as the cost for the comfort and assurances they provide, only a passive agreement.
- **Spiritual Religion** - The religion of revelation of supernatural values, offers a partial insight into eternal realities and provides a glimpse of the goodness and beauty inherent in the infinite character of God. It embodies the spirit and service, as demonstrated through human experience. Jesus made it clear that the significant difference between the beliefs of the mind and the spirit lies in the fact that while the former is upheld by authority, the latter is rooted in human experience.

The religion of the spirit encompasses effort, struggle, conflict, faith, determination, love, loyalty, and progress. In contrast, the religion of the mind - often referred to as the theology of authority - demands little to no exertion from its formal adherents. Tradition serves as a safe refuge and an easy path for those individuals who instinctively avoid the spiritual struggles and mental uncertainties associated with the adventurous journeys into the uncharted waters of truth, seeking the distant shores of spiritual realities.

Pointing out each of the twenty-four and addressing them by name, Jesus said:

“Which of you would prefer to follow the easy path of conformity to an established and outdated religion rather than

endure the challenges associated with the mission of proclaiming a better way of life? Do you not recognize the satisfaction that comes from discovering the eternal truths through personal experience? Are you fearful, complacent, and seeking comfort? Are you afraid to trust your future to the God of truth, of whom you are all children?"

All twenty-four of his listeners rose to their feet, intending to express their united and loyal response to this, one of the few emotional appeals that Jesus ever made to them. However, he raised his hand and stopped them, saying: "Go now apart by yourselves, each man alone with God, and there discover the unemotional answer to my question. Having found such a true and sincere attitude from your soul, speak that answer freely and boldly to our Heavenly Father."

Jesus and the followers withdrew for a brief period of reflection. Their feelings were elevated, their minds inspired, and their emotions profoundly stirred by Jesus' teachings. When Andrew gathered them, Jesus spoke: "Let us resume our journey. We will travel to Phoenicia to pause for a while, and I encourage all of you to pray to God to transform your emotions of both mind and body into higher loyalties of mind and more fulfilling experiences of the spirit."

As they journeyed down the road, the twenty-four remained silent at first, but soon they began to converse with one another. By mid-afternoon, they could travel no further and came to a halt. Peter approached Jesus and said: You have spoken words of life and truth to us. We would like to hear more; we kindly request that you speak further about these matters.

11.5 LESSON ON THE HILLSIDE

While they paused in the shade of the hillside, Jesus continued to teach them about the religion of the spirit, saying:

“You have emerged from among those of your fellows who choose to remain content with a religion of the mind, who seek security and favor conformity. You have chosen to trade your sense of authoritative certainty for the assurance that comes with a spirit of adventurous and progressive belief.

“Our Heavenly Father indeed spoke through Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Amos, and Hosea; however, he did not cease to convey words of truth to the world when these ancient prophets completed their utterances. Rather than continually quoting the prophets of old and extolling the heroes of Israel, strive to become living prophets of our Heavenly Father and spiritual heroes of the heavenly kingdom. God does not show favoritism among nations or generations; the word of truth is not granted to one age while being withheld from another.

“Your beliefs shall change from a mere intellectual acceptance of authority to a genuine experience of living faith, which can comprehend the reality of God and all that pertains to the divine spirit of our Heavenly Father. The beliefs of the mind anchor you to the past. In contrast, the beliefs of the spirit are rooted in progressive revelation, continually urging you toward higher achievements in spiritual ideals and eternal truths.

Jesus continued:

“The religion of the spirit grants you the freedom to pursue the truth wherever its guidance may lead you. Who can judge? This spirit may have insights to offer this generation that older generations have chosen to ignore.

“Teachers of the religions of the mind often find themselves unsettled by every new discovery; each revelation of truth disturbs them. The prophet who said: ‘He will be kept in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on God,’ was not simply an intellectual authority in theology. This truth-seeking individual had truly encountered God; he was not merely discussing God.”

Jesus taught that religions based on authority tend to divide people and create conflict among them, while a religion rooted in the spirit fosters unity and encourages mutual understanding and sympathy.

He said that the religions of authority demand uniformity in belief among their followers; however, this is unattainable in reality. In contrast, the religion of the spirit seeks only a unity of spiritual experience, allowing for a diversity of beliefs. The religions of authority will never achieve true unification. Human unity and fellowship can only be realized through the religion of the spirit.

Jesus noted that minds may differ, but all people contain the same divine and internal spirit. The hope for human fellowship can only be realized when, and as, divergent beliefs are infused with the unifying and ennobling principles of the spirit - principles rooted in personal spiritual experience. Jesus said:

“Never forget that there is only one adventure more satisfying and thrilling than the pursuit of discovering the will of the living God, and that is the supreme experience of genuinely striving to fulfill that divine will. The will of God can be realized in any earthly vocation. Some callings may be spiritual, while others may be secular. However, for those who are spirit-led, that is, subordinated to truth, ennobled by love, guided by understanding, drawn to service, and governed by fairness and justice, everything becomes spiritual.

“You must stop seeking the word of God solely in the pages of ancient authoritative texts. Those who possess the spirit of God will henceforth be able to discern the word of God, regardless of its source. Divine truth should not be dismissed simply because it is conveyed through human channels. It is less important to know the facts about God than it is to cultivate your ability to sense the presence of God.

“When you begin to find God within your soul, you will start to discover him in the souls of others and, eventually, in

all the creatures and creations of the universe. Although the mind is not the seat of spiritual nature, it is indeed the gateway to it.”

Jesus taught that one should not make the mistake of trying to prove to others that one has found God. It is impossible to produce valid proof consciously; however, two powerful demonstrations indicate a person's knowledge of God. They are:

- The results of the spirit of God manifest in daily life - service to all people.
- The reality that an individual's entire life plan provides compelling evidence of their willingness to unreservedly risk everything in the pursuit of discovering the God of eternity.

He continued:

“Do not be mistaken; God will always respond to the faintest flicker of belief. He acknowledges the physical and superstitious emotions of primitive man. Our Heavenly Father remains ever vigilant to honor and nurture even the most fragile attempts of those honest souls whose faith may be weak as they reach out for him.

“But you, who have been called out of darkness into the light, are expected to believe wholeheartedly. Your faith should dominate the collective attitudes of body, mind, and spirit. Your beliefs will become the reality of genuine experience, testifying that you have enlisted in the eternal adventure of discovering the God who has found you.”

And when Jesus had finished speaking, he beckoned to Andrew and, pointing to the west toward Phoenicia, said: “Let us be on our way.”

11.6 AT SIDON

On Friday afternoon, June 10, Jesus and his associates arrived in the vicinity of Sidon, where they stopped at the home of a wealthy woman who had been a patient at the Bethsaida hospital during the height of Jesus' popularity.

He and the followers were accommodated by her friends in the immediate neighborhood, and they rested over the Sabbath day in these pleasant surroundings. They spent nearly two and a half weeks in Sidon and its environs before preparing to visit the coastal cities to the north.

This June Sabbath day was marked by profound tranquility. Jesus and the followers were completely absorbed in their reflections on the discourses he had delivered on religion during their journey to Sidon. While they could all comprehend some aspects of his teachings, none fully grasped the complete significance of his teachings.

11.7 NORANA'S DAUGHTER

Near the home of Karuska, where Jesus stayed, lived a Syrian woman who had heard much about Jesus as a great healer and teacher. On this Sabbath afternoon, she approached him, bringing her young daughter. The child, twelve years old, suffered from a severe nervous disorder characterized by convulsions and other distressing symptoms.

Jesus had instructed his associates not to disclose his presence at Karuska's home, explaining that he wished to rest. Although they adhered to their teacher's instructions, Karuska's helper went to the house of a Syrian woman named Norana to inform her that Jesus was staying at her mistress's home. This helper urged the anxious mother to bring her afflicted daughter for healing, as she believed that a supposed demon possessed her child.

When Norana arrived with her daughter, the Alpheus twins explained through an interpreter that Jesus was resting and could not be disturbed. In response, Norana stated that she and her child would remain there until Jesus had completed his rest.

Peter also endeavored to reason with her and persuade her to return home. He explained that Jesus was weary from extensive teaching and healing and had come to Phoenicia seeking peace and rest. However, it

was futile; Norana refused to leave. In response to Peter's pleas, she insisted that she would not depart until she had seen Jesus: I know he can cast the demon out of my child, and I will not go until the healer has looked upon my daughter.

Then Thomas attempted to send the woman away, but was met only with failure. She expressed her faith that his master could cast out the demon that tormented her child: I have heard of his mighty works in Galilee and believe him. What has happened to you, his followers, that you would turn away those seeking your master's help?

And when she had spoken, Thomas withdrew. Then Simon Zelotes stepped forward to remonstrate with Norana. Simon stated that the woman was a Greek-speaking Gentile and argued that it was inappropriate for her to expect the Master to take the bread intended for the household's children and cast it to the dogs.

But Norana refused to take offense at Simon's remark. She replied that she understood she was regarded as merely a dog in the eyes of the Jews, but she was a believing dog. She was determined that Jesus would see her daughter, for she was convinced that if he merely looked upon her, he would heal her: And even you, my good man, would not dare to deny the dogs the privilege of receiving the crumbs that happen to fall from the children's table.

At that moment, the little girl was suddenly seized by a violent convulsion in front of everyone, and her mother cried out, claiming that the devil possessed her child: If our plight does not move you, it will surely appeal to your master, who, I have been told, loves all people and dares to heal even the Gentiles when they have faith. I will not leave until my child has been healed.

Jesus, who had overheard this last conversation through an open window, stepped outside, much to their surprise, and said: "O woman, great is your faith, so great that I cannot withhold what you desire. Go your way in peace; your daughter has already been made whole."

God must have sent heavenly spirits at Jesus' request, for the little girl was well from that hour onward. As Norana and the child took

their leave, Jesus urged them to keep this occurrence a secret. While his associates complied with this request, the mother and the child proclaimed the miracle of the little girl's healing throughout the countryside and even in Sidon. So much so that Jesus found it necessary to change his lodgings within a day.

The following day, as Jesus taught his friends, commenting on the healing of the daughter of the Syrian woman, he said: "And so it has been all along; you can see for yourselves how the Gentiles can truly embrace the teachings. Truly, I tell you that the Gentiles shall enter the spiritual kingdom, even if the children of Abraham are unwilling to do so."

The followers understood.

11.8 AT JUSTA'S HOME

In entering Sidon, Jesus and his companions crossed a bridge, the first many of them had ever encountered. As they walked across this bridge, Jesus remarked, "This world is merely a bridge; you may pass over it, but you should not consider building a dwelling upon it."

As the twenty-four began their work in Sidon, Jesus went to stay in a home just north of the city, belonging to Justa and her mother, Bernice. Each morning, Jesus taught the twenty-four at Justa's home, and in the afternoons and evenings, they ventured into Sidon to share their teachings.

The followers and teachers were greatly encouraged by the warm reception of their message by the Gentiles of Sidon; during their brief sojourn, many souls were added to their ranks. This period, approximately six weeks in Phoenicia, proved exceptionally fruitful. Many of these Greek-speaking Syrophoenicians embraced the teachings of Jesus. These so-called heathens understood the principle that God does not show favoritism toward individuals, cultures, or nations, and that the universe is consistently reliable. *[The later Gospels overlooked the account of this enthusiastic acceptance of Jesus' teachings by these Gentiles.]*

Jesus made it clear to the twenty-four that he had not fled from Galilee due to a lack of courage in confronting his opponents. They understood that he was not yet prepared for an open clash with the established leaders and did not wish to become a martyr who would later be idolized. It was during one of these conferences at Justa's home that Jesus first told his followers: "Even though some of the current kingdoms on earth shall pass away, the word shall not. Future followers will continue to make spiritual mistakes, but they will learn and improve; they will learn to refuse to harbor feelings of guilt."

Jesus greatly appreciated the keen sense of humor exhibited by the Gentiles. The humor displayed by Norana, the Syrian woman, along with her profound and unwavering faith, touched Jesus' heart and appealed to his mercy.

Jesus deeply lamented that his people lacked a sense of humor. He once said to Thomas: "My people take themselves too seriously; they are nearly devoid of an appreciation for humor. The burdensome religion of the Pharisees could never have originated among people with a sense of humor. They also lack consistency; they strain at gnats while swallowing camels."

11.9 JOURNEY UP THE COAST

On Tuesday, June 28, Jesus and his associates departed from Sidon, traveling up the coast to Porphyreon and Heldua. The Gentiles welcomed them warmly, and many souls were added during this week of teaching. The followers taught in Porphyreon, while the new teachers conducted lessons in Heldua.

While the twenty-four were engaged in their work, Jesus departed for a period of three or four days to visit the coastal city of Beirut. There, he met with a Syrian named Malach, a follower who had been in Bethsaida the previous year.

On Wednesday, July 6, they all returned to Sidon. They stayed at the home of Justa until Sunday morning, when they departed for Tyre, traveling south along the coast via Sarepta, and arrived in Tyre on

Monday, July 11. By this time, the followers and the new teachers had become accustomed to working among these Gentiles, who were primarily descended from the earlier Canaanite tribes of even earlier Semitic origin. All of these individuals spoke the Greek language. The followers and teachers were greatly surprised to observe the eagerness of these Gentiles to hear the teachings and to note the willingness with which many of them embraced the new ideas.

11.10 AT TYRE

From July 11 to July 24, the teachers conducted their lessons in Tyre. Each follower accompanied one of the teachers, allowing them to teach in pairs throughout Tyre and its surrounding areas. The polyglot population of this bustling seaport welcomed their message, and many individuals were baptized. Jesus established his headquarters at the residence of a Jewish follower named Joseph, who lived three to four miles south of Tyre, near the tomb of Hiram, the king of the city-state of Tyre during the reigns of David and Solomon.

Daily, for two weeks, the followers and teachers entered Tyre via Alexander's mole to conduct small meetings. Each night, most of them would return to the encampment at Joseph's house, located south of the city. Followers came from the city daily to speak with Jesus at his resting place. Jesus addressed the people of Tyre only once, on the afternoon of July 20, when he taught the followers about God's love for all humanity and his mission to reveal God to everyone. The interest in the teachings among these Gentiles was so great that, on this occasion, the doors of the Melkarth temple were opened to him. *[In subsequent years, a church was built on the very site of this ancient temple.]*

Many of these individuals were prominent leaders in the production of Tyrian Purple, the dye that made Tyre and Sidon renowned worldwide. *[This trade significantly contributed to their global commerce and subsequent expansion. However, shortly thereafter, the supply of the sea creatures that served as the source of this dye began to dwindle. Consequently, these dye makers sought new habitats for the*

shellfish. As they migrated to distant lands, they carried with them the message of the fatherhood of God and the fellowship of humanity.]

On this Wednesday afternoon, during his address, Jesus first shared with his friends the story of the white lily, which raises its pure and snowy head high into the sunshine while its roots are grounded in the slime and muck of the darkened soil below. He said: "Likewise, mortal people, while rooted in the animal soil of human nature, can raise their spiritual nature into the sunlight of heavenly truth and bear the noble fruits of the spirit."

During this same lesson, Jesus shared his first and only story about his own trade - carpentry. In the course of his admonition to build a strong foundation for the development of noble character and spiritual endowments, he stated

"To yield the fruits of the spirit, one must possess the spirit. It is essential to be taught by the spirit and guided by the spirit in order to live a spirit-filled life among others. However, do not fall into the error of the foolish carpenter who wastes valuable time squaring, measuring, and smoothing his worm-eaten and internally decaying timber. After investing all his labor into the unsound beam, he ultimately must reject it as unfit for the foundations of the structure he intends to build, one that is meant to withstand the trials of time and storm.

"Let every individual ensure that the intellectual and moral foundations of character adequately support the superstructure of an expanding and ennobling spiritual nature, which is destined to transform the mortal mind and then is to achieve the evolution of the soul toward immortal destiny. The mind and morals of each person serve as the soil from which these higher manifestations of human development and divine purpose must arise. While the soil of the evolving soul is both human and material, the destiny of this integrated mind and spirit is spiritual and divine."

On the evening of the same day, Nathaniel asked why they prayed for God not to lead people into temptation when everyone knew that God does not do this. Jesus responded to Nathaniel:

“You are correct, but it is not surprising that you ask such questions, as you are beginning to understand our Heavenly Father as he truly is, rather than as the early prophets perceived God so dimly. You are well aware of how our forefathers tended to see God in nearly every event that occurred. They sought the hand of God in all natural occurrences and every unusual episode of human experience. They associated God with both good and bad. They believed that he softened Moses’s heart while hardening Pharaoh’s heart.

“When an individual feels a strong urge to act, whether for good or ill, they often attribute these unusual emotions to divine influence, saying, ‘God spoke to me, instructing me to do this or that, or to go here or there.’ Consequently, as people frequently and fervently succumbed to temptation, it became customary for our forefathers to believe that God led them into such situations for the purposes of testing, punishment, or strengthening.

“You, indeed, now possess a deeper understanding. You recognize that people are frequently swayed by their own selfish desires and the instincts of their animal nature. When you find yourself facing such temptations, I urge you to acknowledge them honestly and sincerely for what they are. Redirect the energies of your spirit, mind, and body - energies that seek expression - into higher pursuits and more idealistic goals. By doing so, you can transform your temptations into profound and uplifting lessons for humanity, while also avoiding the futile and debilitating conflicts between your animal instincts and spiritual natures.

“But let me caution you against the folly of attempting to overcome temptation by merely replacing one desire with another, supposedly superior desire, through the sheer force of human will. If you genuinely wish to triumph over the temptations of the lesser nature, you must reach a state of spiritual advantage where you have really and truly developed an interest in and love for the higher, more idealistic forms of conduct.

“Your mind must seek to replace the lower, less idealistic habits of behavior that you recognize as temptations. In this manner, you will experience spiritual transformation rather than becoming increasingly burdened by the deceptive suppression of mortal desires. The old and inferior will be forgotten in love for the new and superior. There is immense power in the expulsive energy of genuine spiritual affection. Once more, I urge you not to be overcome by spiritual errors, but rather to overcome bad with good.”

Long into the night, the followers and teachers continued to ask questions. In summary, Jesus stated:

- Material success depends on forceful ambition, intelligent judgment, and seasoned wisdom. Effective leadership relies on innate ability, discretion, willpower, and determination.
- Spiritual success depends on faith, love, service, and truth, as well as a deep hunger and thirst for righteousness - the wholehearted desire to seek God and be like him.

He added:

“Do not be disheartened by the realization that you are human. While human nature may lead to spiritual missteps, this does not inherently equate to sinfulness. God-knowing individuals are not disheartened by misfortune or dismayed by disappointment. True followers remain resilient in the face of the emotional turmoil that often accompanies material challenges. Those who aspire to eternal life engage in a revitalizing and constructive approach to navigating the trials and tribulations of mortal existence. With each passing day, a

devoted follower discovers that it becomes increasingly effortless to make the right choices.”

He continued, in summary:

- Do not be disheartened by your inability to forget certain regrettable experiences. The spiritual missteps you struggle to forget will ultimately be overlooked in eternity. Lighten the burdens of your soul by adopting a broader perspective on your destiny and expanding your life-career vision.
- The God-conscious soul is assured of eternal life; it remains unafraid of life and embodies honesty and consistency. It possesses the courage to endure unavoidable suffering and remains uncomplaining when confronted with inescapable hardship.
- The devoted follower does not become weary in doing good simply because one faces obstacles. Challenges sharpen the enthusiasm of those who love the truth, while difficulties only serve to test the efforts of those who are undaunted in their pursuit of new teachings.
- Do not estimate the worth of a person's soul based on the imperfections of the mind or the body's desires. Avoid judging an individual's soul or evaluating their destiny by the standard of a single erroneous human experience. Spiritual destiny is determined by one's spiritual aspirations and intentions.
- Religion represents the spiritual journey of the evolving immortal soul of a person. Moreover, moral strength and spiritual energy can serve as powerful tools in addressing challenging social issues and resolving complex problems. These moral and spiritual gifts enrich human existence, making it more profound and meaningful.
- One is destined to lead a narrow life if they only learn to love those who love them in return. True love is never self-serving, nor can it be self-generated. While human love may indeed be reciprocal, divine love is expansive; it cannot be self-contained and must be given selflessly.
- Love is to be freely received from both divine and human sources, regardless of one's merits, and to be freely given in return.

- One must increasingly learn to step aside from the rush of life - escaping the harassment of material existence - while refreshing the soul, inspiring the mind, and renewing the spirit through meditation and spiritual communion with God.
- Living a spiritually guided life significantly enhances genuine self-respect; however, self-respect should not be confused with self-admiration. Self-respect is always aligned with the love and service of one's fellow beings. It is impossible to respect oneself more than one loves one's neighbor; one serves as the measure of the capacity for the other.

Jesus continued to speak on Nathaniel's question:

- As the days pass, you should become more adept at enticing others into the love of eternal truth. Are you a more effective advocate for righteousness this year than you were last year? Are you becoming increasingly artistic in your approach to guiding hungry souls toward heaven?
- As you grow older and gain more experience in spiritual matters, are you becoming more tactful in dealing with difficult individuals and more tolerant in coexisting with stubborn associates? Tact serves as the fulcrum of social leverage, while tolerance is the earmark of a great mind. If you possess these rare and admirable qualities, you will become increasingly alert and skilled in your efforts to avoid unnecessary social misunderstandings as time goes on.
- Are your ideals sufficiently high to ensure your soul's eternal life? Simultaneously, are your ideas practical enough to enable you to be a valuable citizen, functioning on earth alongside your fellow mortals? In the spiritual realm, your citizenship lies in heaven; in the physical realm, you remain citizens of the earthly kingdoms. Render to the Caesars the things that are material, and to God the things that are spiritual.

- The measure of the spiritual capacity of an evolving soul is one's faith in truth and love for others. The measure of your human strength of character lies in your ability to resist holding grudges and seeking revenge, plus your capacity to endure brooding in the face of profound sorrow. Defeat serves as the true mirror in which you can honestly reflect upon your authentic self.
- Avoid dishonesty and unfairness in all your efforts to teach the truth and convey the teachings. Do not seek unearned recognition or crave undeserved sympathy. In all matters concerning honor and admiration, pursue only what rightfully belongs to you.

Before departing from Tyre, Jesus taught his disciples these and many other important lessons.

The day prior to his return to the region of the Sea of Galilee, he gathered the twelve associates. He instructed the teachers to take a different route than the one he and the twelve followers would follow. After the new teachers left Jesus at that point, they were never again as closely associated with him.

11.11 RETURN FROM PHOENICIA

About noon on Sunday, July 24, Jesus and the twelve left the home of Joseph, located south of Tyre, and traveled down the coast to Ptolemais. They stayed there for a day, offering words of comfort to the group of followers residing in the area.

On Tuesday, they departed from Ptolemais, traveling eastward inland toward Jotapata via the Tiberias Road. On Wednesday, they halted at Jotapata and provided further instructions to residents regarding the matters of the spiritual kingdom.

Thursday, they departed from Jotapata, traveling north along the Nazareth-Mount Lebanon Trail to the village of Zebulun, passing through Ramah. They conducted meetings in Ramah on Friday and stayed there over the Sabbath. They arrived in Zebulun on Sunday, the 31st, held a meeting that evening, and departed the following morning.

Leaving Zebulun, they traveled to the junction of the Magdala-Sidon Road near Gischala. From there, they proceeded to Gennesaret, located on the western shores of the Sea of Galilee, south of Capernaum. They had arranged to meet with David Zebedee at this location, where they planned to discuss their next steps in imparting the new lessons.

During a brief conference with David, they learned that many followers had gathered on the opposite side of the lake near Kheresa. Consequently, they took a boat across. They rested quietly in the hills for one day and visited a nearby park the following day, where Jesus had once fed the five thousand. Here, they rested for three days and held daily conferences attended by approximately fifty men and women, the remnants of the once numerous groups of followers residing in Capernaum and its surrounding areas.

While Jesus was absent from Capernaum and Galilee during the period of the Phoenician mission, his opponents believed that the entire movement had been dismantled. They concluded that Jesus' swift withdrawal indicated he was so thoroughly frightened that he would likely never return to trouble them again. As active opposition to his teachings had largely subsided, the followers began to hold public meetings once more. There was a gradual yet effective consolidation of the tried-and-true survivors who had endured the great sifting that the followers had recently passed through.

The mandate to close all synagogues to the teachings of Jesus and his followers had a detrimental effect on the Scribes and Pharisees. As soon as Jesus distanced himself from the controversy, a reaction emerged among many Jewish people, with widespread resentment toward the Pharisees and the leaders of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. Many synagogue leaders began to covertly reopen their synagogues to Abner and his associates, asserting that these teachers were followers of John, not Jesus.

Philip, the brother of Herod, had become a halfhearted follower of Jesus and sent word that he was free to live and work in his territories. Even Herod Antipas experienced a change of heart. Upon learning that

Jesus was staying across the lake in the region of his brother Philip, he sent word that, while he had issued warrants for Jesus' arrest in Galilee, he had not authorized his apprehension in Perea. This indicated that Jesus would not be disturbed as long as he remained outside of Galilee. He communicated this same ruling to the Jews in Jerusalem.

On August 1, 29 CE, Jesus returned from his mission in Phoenicia and began reorganizing his scattered, tested, and depleted followers for the final and eventful year of his earthly ministry.

11.12 AT CAESAREA-PHILIPPI

Before Jesus took the twelve for a brief sojourn in the vicinity of Caesarea-Philippi, he coordinated through the messengers of David to travel to Capernaum on Sunday, August 7, to meet his family. This visit was prearranged to take place at the Zebedee boat shop. David Zebedee had made arrangements with Jude, Jesus' brother, for the presence of the entire Nazareth family - Mary and all of Jesus' brothers and sisters - and Jesus went with Andrew and Peter to keep this appointment.

It was undoubtedly Mary and the children's intention to maintain this engagement. However, a group of Pharisees, aware that Jesus was on the opposite side of the lake in Philip's territory, decided to visit Mary to inquire about his whereabouts. The arrival of these emissaries from Jerusalem greatly unsettled Mary, and observing the tension and anxiety of the entire family, they concluded that Jesus was expected to visit them. Consequently, they positioned themselves outside Mary's home and, after calling for reinforcements, waited patiently for Jesus' arrival.

This, of course, effectively prevented the family from keeping their appointment with Jesus. Throughout the day, both Jude and Ruth attempted to evade the watchful eyes of the Pharisees as they sought to send a message to Jesus, but they were unsuccessful.

Early in the afternoon, David's messengers delivered word to Jesus that the Pharisees were encamped at the doorstep of his mother's house. Consequently, he refrained from visiting his family. Thus, through no fault of either party, Jesus and his family were unable to make contact.

11.13 TEMPLE-TAX COLLECTOR

As Jesus, along with Andrew and Peter, lingered by the lake near the boat shop, a temple tax collector approached them. Recognizing Jesus, he called Peter aside and inquired whether Jesus paid the temple tax. Peter felt a surge of indignation at the implication that Jesus should be expected to contribute to the upkeep of their religious activities. However, noticing a peculiar expression on the tax collector's face, he correctly surmised that the collector intended to entrap them by refusing to pay the customary half shekel for the support of the temple services in Jerusalem. Consequently, Peter responded that, of course, Jesus pays the temple tax: Wait by the gate, and I will return shortly with the tax.

Now, Peter had spoken hastily. Judas carried their funds, and he was across the lake. Neither Peter, his brother, nor Jesus had brought any money with them. Knowing that the Pharisees were searching for them, they could not go to Bethsaida to obtain funds. When Peter informed Jesus about the collector and mentioned that he had promised him the money, Jesus replied: "If you have made a promise, then you should fulfill it. However, how will you redeem your promise? Nevertheless, Peter, we will pay the tax under the circumstances. Let us not give them any reason to take offense at our attitude. We will wait here while you take the boat and fish. Once you have sold the catch at that market, please pay the collector on behalf of all three of us."

All of this was overheard by David's messenger, who stood nearby and signaled to an associate fishing near the shore to come in quickly. When Peter prepared to go out in the boat for a catch, the messenger and his fisherman friend presented him with several large baskets of fish. They assisted him in carrying the fish to a nearby merchant, who purchased the catch and paid enough, along with the contribution from David's messenger, to cover the temple tax for the three of them. The tax collector accepted the payment, waiving the penalty for late payment due to their prolonged absence from Galilee.

As Peter left to go toward the boat, Jesus remarked, half-jokingly: "Strange that we must pay tribute; usually, it is the stranger who is

taxed for the upkeep of the court, but it is our duty to avoid causing any stumbling blocks for the authorities. Go forth! Perhaps you will catch the fish with the shekel in its mouth.” *[In those days, tales of finding treasures in the mouths of fish were quite common; such tales of near miracles were prevalent.]*

After Jesus spoke, Peter soon returned with the temple tax, so it is not surprising that this episode later evolved into a supposed miracle.

Jesus, along with Andrew and Peter, waited by the seashore until nearly sundown. Messengers informed them that Mary’s house was still under surveillance; therefore, as darkness fell, the three men entered their boat and slowly rowed toward the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

11.14 AT BETHSAIDA-JULIAS

On Monday, August 8, while Jesus and the twelve followers were encamped in Magadan Park, near Bethsaida-Julias, more than one hundred followers, including teachers, members of the women’s corps, and others, arrived from Capernaum for a conference. Many of the Pharisees, upon learning that Jesus was present, also came. By this time, some of the Sadducees had allied with the Pharisees in their efforts to entrap Jesus.

Before entering the closed conference with the followers, Jesus held a public meeting attended by the Pharisees, who heckled him and attempted to disrupt the assembly. One of the leaders among the disruptors challenged Jesus to provide a sign of his authority, asserting that if he did so, all the people would recognize that God had sent him. Jesus responded to them:

“When evening arrives, you say it will be fair weather because the sky is red; in the morning, you predict foul weather, as the sky is red and overcast. When you observe a cloud rising in the west, you anticipate that showers will follow; when the wind blows from the south, you expect scorching heat to come.

“How is it that you are so adept at discerning the face of the sky yet utterly incapable of recognizing the signs of the times? For those who seek the truth, signs have already been provided; however, to hypocritical individuals, no further signs shall be given.”

When Jesus had spoken, he withdrew to prepare for the evening conference with his friends. During this conference, it was decided to embark on a united mission across all the cities and villages of the Decapolis as soon as Jesus and the twelve returned from their planned visit to Caesarea-Philippi. Jesus actively participated in the planning for the Decapolis mission and, upon dismissing the group, said:

“I say to you, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Do not be deceived by their display of much learning and their apparent loyalty to the forms of faith. Instead, focus solely on the living truth and the power of true belief. It is not the fear of outdated traditions that will lead you to the spiritual kingdom, but rather your faith in a living experience of spiritual realities. Do not allow yourselves to be blinded by prejudice or paralyzed by fear. Furthermore, do not let reverence for traditions distort your understanding, for your eyes do not see, and your ears do not hear.

“It is not the purpose of true belief merely to bring peace to people, but rather to ensure progress. There can be no peace in the heart or progress in the mind unless you wholeheartedly embrace the truth and the ideals of eternal realities. When feelings of service for the children of God arise within your soul, do not stifle them. When emotions of love for your neighbor well up within your heart, express these urges of affection through intelligent ministry that addresses the genuine needs of your fellow beings.”

11.15 SON OF GOD

Early Tuesday morning, Jesus and the twelve followers left Magadan Park en route to Caesarea-Philippi, the capital of the Tetrarch Philip's territory. Caesarea-Philippi was located in a region of extraordinary beauty, nestled in a picturesque valley between scenic hills where the Jordan River emerged from an underground cave. To the north, the majestic heights of Mount Hermon were clearly visible, while the hills to the south offered a breathtaking view of the upper Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus had previously visited Mount Hermon during the early stages of his ministry, and now, as he entered the final phase of his work, he wished to return to this mountain. He hoped that his followers would gain new insights into their responsibilities and acquire renewed strength for the challenging times that lay ahead. As they journeyed along the path, passing south of the Waters of Merom, the followers discussed their recent experiences in Phoenicia and other regions. They recounted how their message had been received differently and how various groups regarded their teacher.

As they paused for lunch, Jesus suddenly confronted the twelve with the first question he had ever posed to them regarding his identity. He asked this unexpected question: "Who do people say that I am?"

Jesus had spent many months training these followers on the nature and character of the spiritual kingdom, and he knew that the time had come to teach them more about his relationship with God. As they sat beneath the mulberry trees, Jesus prepared to conduct one of the most significant sessions of his long association with the dozen followers. More than half of them participated in answering Jesus' questions.

They informed him that he was regarded as a prophet or an extraordinary individual by all who knew him, and that even his adversaries greatly feared him, some attributing his powers to being in league with the supposed devil.

They mentioned that some individuals in Judea and Samaria, who had not met him personally, believed he was John the Baptist risen from the dead. Peter explained that he had, at various times and by different people, been compared to Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah.

When Jesus heard this report, he stood up and, looking down at those seated around him in a semicircle, pointed to them with a sweeping gesture of his hand and asked, "But who do you say that I am?" There was a moment of tense silence. The twelve never took their eyes off Jesus, and then Simon Peter, springing to his feet, exclaimed, "You are a representative of God, a Son Of God."

The eleven seated followers rose in unison, signifying that Peter had spoken on behalf of all of them. After Jesus beckoned them to sit once more, he remained standing before them and said: "This has been revealed to you by our Heavenly Father. The hour has come for you to know the truth about me. However, for now, I urge you to tell this to no one. Let us depart."

And so, they resumed their journey to Caesarea-Philippi, arriving late that evening and stopping at the home of Celsus, who was expecting them. The followers slept little that night, as they seemed to sense that a significant event in their lives and work had occurred.

11.16 UPON THIS ROCK

Since the occasions of Jesus' baptism by John and the turning of water into wine at Cana, some of the followers had, at various times, come to see him as the Jewish Messiah. However, just as these hopes would arise in their hearts, Jesus would dash them with a harsh word or a disappointing action. They had long been in a state of turmoil, caught between their preconceived notions of the expected Messiah and the profound experience of their extraordinary relationship with this remarkable man.

It was late afternoon on Wednesday when the followers gathered in Celsus' garden for their midday meal. Throughout the night and since their awakening that morning, Simon Peter and Simon Zelotes had

been diligently working with their brethren to encourage them to wholeheartedly accept Jesus, not as the Messiah, but as a Son Of God.

The two Simons were nearly in agreement regarding their perception of Jesus and worked tirelessly to persuade their brethren to fully embrace their views.

They were all seated in the garden just before noon when Jesus appeared. Their expressions reflected dignified solemnity, and they all rose to their feet as he approached. Jesus alleviated the tension with his characteristic friendly and fraternal smile, which he often displayed when his friends took themselves too seriously. With a commanding gesture, he indicated that they should be seated, signaling his disapproval of such an outward display of respect. From that moment on, the twelve never greeted their teacher by standing when he entered their presence. After they had finished their meal and were discussing plans for the upcoming tour of the Decapolis, Jesus suddenly looked up at their faces and said: “Now that a full day has passed since you agreed to Simon Peter’s declaration regarding my identity as a Son Of God, I would like to know if you still stand by your decision.”

Upon hearing this, the twelve stood to their feet, and Peter, stepping a few paces forward toward Jesus, declared that he believed Jesus was truly a representative of God, a Son Of God. Peter then sat down with his brethren. Jesus, still standing, addressed the twelve:

“You are my chosen ambassadors, but I understand that, given the circumstances, you may struggle to embrace this belief based solely on human knowledge. This is a revelation from the spirit of God to your innermost souls. Therefore, you make this confession through the insight of the spirit of God that resides within you. Upon this foundation, I will build the fellowship of souls.

“Upon this rock of spiritual reality, I will build the living temple of spiritual fellowship, one that will endure due to this revelation of the divine spirit.

“And while God’s spirit will always serve as the divine guide and mentor for all who enter the bonds of this spiritual fellowship, I now entrust you and your successors with the keys to the kingdom - the social and spiritual aspects of this association of men and women united in the new teachings.”

And once again, he instructed them, for the time being, not to disclose his relationship with God. After speaking, Jesus directed the twelve to retreat to the hills to seek wisdom, strength, and spiritual guidance until the evening meal. They followed Jesus’ admonition.

11.17 NEW PHASE

Neither Peter nor the other followers fully understood Jesus’ relationship with God. They did not realize that this marked the beginning of a new epoch in Jesus’ ministry, during which the teacher-healer was recognized as an agent of God. From this point onward, a new significance was attached to all of Jesus’ teachings. Before Caesarea-Philippi, he presented the teachings as their master teacher; after Caesarea-Philippi, he appeared as God’s envoy, fulfilling this role as a human being.

11.18 NEXT AFTERNOON

Jesus and the followers stayed another day at the home of Celsus, awaiting the arrival of messengers from David Zebedee with funds. Following the decline in Jesus’ popularity among the masses, there was a significant drop in revenue. By the time they reached Caesarea-Philippi, the treasury was empty. Matthew Levi was reluctant to leave Jesus and his companions during such a difficult time, and he had no available funds of his own to give to Judas, as he had done so many times in the past.

David Zebedee had anticipated this potential decrease in revenue. Consequently, he instructed his messengers that, as they traveled through Judea, Samaria, and Galilee, they should act as collectors of funds to be sent to the exiled followers and their teacher. By the evening of that day, these messengers arrived from Bethsaida, bringing sufficient funds to support the followers until their return to begin the Decapolis tour. Matthew expected to receive money from the sale of his last piece of property in Capernaum by that time, having arranged for these funds to be anonymously transferred to Judas.

Jesus spoke to them in the garden, and some of what he said sounded strange to them. Among other things, they heard:

“Now I have brought you together with me and by yourselves for a little while so that you may comprehend the glory and grasp the grandeur of the life to which you are called. From this time on, if any child of God wishes to have fellowship with us, let them assume the obligations of fellowship and follow us. And when I am no longer with you, do not think that the world will treat you better. I must soon go to our Heavenly Father. If you love me, be prepared to demonstrate this affection by your willingness to make the supreme sacrifice.

“I call both the righteous and the sinners. I do not want to be served, but to serve - to live as an example for all. I seek out and reassure all those who are lost.”

The followers listened in silence to these bold and startling statements, stunned. They then dispersed into small groups to discuss and reflect on Jesus' words, struggling to comprehend the whole meaning of what they had been called to do.

11.19 THAT EVENING

That evening, Andrew took it upon himself to conduct a personal and searching conference with each of his brethren, engaging in excellent and uplifting discussions with all of his associates.

And now, Jesus took his friends with him to Mount Hermon, where he had planned to inaugurate his fourth phase of teaching. Some of them had been present at his baptism in the Jordan River and had witnessed the beginning of his ministry. He wanted them to be present to hear his declaration of a new and public role as a representative of God. Accordingly, on the morning of Friday, August 12, Jesus addressed the twelve: "Lay in provisions and prepare yourselves for a journey to yonder mountain, where the spirit bids me to go to complete my work. I wish to take you along so you may also be strengthened for the challenging times ahead as we embark on this experience together.

Mount Hermon

12.0 ON MOUNT HERMON

It was near sundown on Friday afternoon, August 12, 29 CE, when Jesus and his companions arrived at the foot of Mount Hermon, close to the very place where the young lad Tiglath once waited while Jesus ascended the mountain alone to contemplate his earthly destinies. Here, they remained for two days, engaging in spiritual preparation for the forthcoming events.

In general, Jesus was aware in advance of what would occur on the mountain, and he wished for all his friends to partake in this experience. This was intended to prepare them for a revelation; however, since he could not bring all of his associates, he chose to take only the three who regularly accompanied him on such special vigils. Thus, only Peter, James, and John shared this unique experience with Jesus.

12.1 TRANSFIGURATION

Jesus ascended the mountain to meditate and reflect on his life's journey and future. He climbed Mount Hermon in preparation for his descent to the plains of the Jordan, where he would enact the final chapters of his life on earth.

Early on the morning of Monday, August 15, Jesus and the three of his followers began their ascent of Mount Hermon. They reached their

destination, located approximately halfway up the mountain, shortly before noon. While having lunch, Jesus recounted his experiences in these hills shortly after his baptism, as well as additional insights from his previous visit to this secluded retreat.

It was mid-afternoon on this beautiful afternoon that Jesus took his leave of the three followers, saying: "I will step away by myself for a while to communicate with God. I ask you to wait here and, while you await my return, pray that our Heavenly Father's will may be fulfilled in all your experiences related to your future life mission."

After saying this to them, Jesus withdrew for an extended conversation with God, not returning until about dusk. When Jesus noticed their anxiety over his prolonged absence, he said: "Do not be afraid. I must be about our Heavenly Father's business; do not doubt when I am not with you. I have chosen to live my life among you. Be of good cheer; I will not leave you until my work is finished."

As they partook of their meager evening meal, Peter inquired how long they would remain on the mountain, separated from their brethren. Jesus replied: "Until you know that all I have said to you is true." They discussed various matters while seated around the glowing embers of their fire until darkness descended and the followers' eyes grew heavy, having begun their journey very early that morning.

When the three had been asleep for approximately half an hour, they were suddenly awakened by a crackling sound. To their astonishment and dismay, they beheld a vision of Jesus engaged in intimate conversation with two apparent heavenly spirits. They observed Jesus' face and form shine, and they heard the three voices conversing in an unfamiliar language. Peter mistakenly speculated that the heavenly figures accompanying Jesus were the spirits of Moses and Elijah.

The three followers were so profoundly frightened by this vision that they were slow to collect their wits. However, Peter was the first to regain his composure. As the vision faded and they observed Jesus standing alone, Peter exclaimed: It's good to have been here. He rejoiced in the vision and was reluctant to return to the mundane world.

He asked that they remain there and erect three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. Peter expressed this due to his confusion, as nothing else occurred to him at that moment. While Peter was speaking, they experienced a second vision of a cloud approaching and overshadowing them, which filled them with terror, causing them to fall to the ground. Then, they heard a voice, the same one that had spoken during Jesus' baptism, say: This is my beloved Son; listen to him.

When the cloud dissipated, Jesus was once again alone with the three followers, and he reached down and touched them, saying: "Arise and do not be afraid; in the ages to come, you shall witness greater things than this." However, the followers were filled with terror. They remained a silent and contemplative trio as they prepared to descend the mountain shortly before midnight.

12.2 COMING DOWN THE MOUNTAIN

For approximately half the distance down the mountain, not a word was spoken. Then, Jesus initiated the conversation by saying: "Make certain that you tell no one, not even your brethren, what you have seen and heard on this mountain until I have died and reappeared again."

Jesus requested silence regarding their vision because he did not want to encourage the belief that, by being mistakenly seen as the Messiah, he would somehow fulfill their misguided expectations of a wonder-working deliverer [*Peter, James, and John contemplated these matters in their minds, but they did not speak of them to anyone until after Jesus' appearances in spirit form.*]

The three followers were clearly shocked and bewildered; they had recently reaffirmed their belief in him and had just experienced a vision of him changing his appearance. Now, he began to speak of dying and appearing again. Peter shuddered at the thought of Jesus' dying - it was too distressing an idea to contemplate. Fearing that James or John might ask a question related to this statement, he decided it would be best to initiate a more lighthearted conversation.

Not knowing what else to discuss, he voiced the first thought that came to mind: he asked if it was stated in the Scriptures that Elijah must come before the Messiah appears.

And Jesus, aware that Peter was trying to avoid discussing his death and later appearances, responded: "Elijah indeed comes first to prepare the way for a Deliverer, who must suffer many things and finally be rejected. But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not receive him; instead, they did to him whatever they wished."

The three followers eventually realized that he was referring to John the Baptist as the reincarnation of Elijah. Jesus understood that if they insisted on viewing him as the Messiah, then John must be the Elijah mentioned in the prophecy.

12.3 ATTEMPTED HEALING

It was shortly before breakfast on Tuesday morning when Jesus and his companions arrived at the camp. As they approached, they noticed a considerable crowd gathered around the followers and soon began to hear the loud arguments and disputes among this group of approximately fifty people, which included the nine followers and a gathering that was equally divided between Jesus' followers and the Jerusalem Scribes who had tracked Jesus and his associates on their journey from Magadan.

Although the crowd engaged in numerous arguments, the primary controversy centered around a particular citizen of Tiberias who had arrived the previous day in search of Jesus. This man, James of Safed, had a fourteen-year-old son, his only child, who suffered from severe epilepsy. For nearly two weeks, this anxious father, a minor official under Herod Antipas, had wandered through the western borders of Philip's territories, seeking Jesus in hopes of persuading him to heal his afflicted son. He encountered the group around noon while Jesus was on the mountain with three of his followers. The nine remaining followers were surprised and considerably disturbed when this man, accompanied by nearly forty others searching for Jesus, suddenly approached them.

Andrew approached to greet the father and his son, inquiring who they were seeking. The father said he was searching for Jesus, hoping to obtain healing for his afflicted son by casting out the devil that possessed him. He then described to the followers how his son was so severely afflicted that he had nearly lost his life on multiple occasions due to these malignant seizures.

As the followers listened, Simon Zelotes and Judas Iscariot approached the Father, claiming they could heal the son. He need not wait for Jesus' return. They were his ambassadors; Jesus entrusted them with the keys to heaven.

By this time, Andrew and Thomas were engaged in consultation on one side, while Nathaniel and the others looked on in amazement. They were all astonished by the sudden boldness, if not presumption, displayed by Simon and Judas.

Then the father said that if such power had been given to them, they should speak those words that would deliver his child from this bondage. Simon stepped forward and placed his hand on the child's head. He looked directly into the boy's eyes and commanded the unclean spirit to come out of him: In the name of Jesus, obey me! However the boy only experienced a more violent fit, while the Scribes mocked the followers in derision. The disappointed followers endured the taunts of these unfriendly critics.

Andrew was clearly deeply chagrined by this ill-advised endeavor and its dismal failure. He called the followers aside for a conference, and after a period of reflection, acutely feeling the sting of their defeat and sensing the humiliation that weighed upon them all, Andrew made a second attempt to cast out the demon, but once again, it was a failure.

Andrew candidly admitted defeat and requested that the father stay with them overnight or until Jesus' return, suggesting that perhaps this kind of affliction can only be overcome by Jesus' direct action.

Although they could not provide the father with any indication of when Jesus might return, James of Safed resolved to remain until Jesus returned. And so, while Jesus descended the mountain with the exuberant and ecstatic Peter, James, and John, their nine companions

were left sleepless, engulfed in confusion and downcast humiliation. Clearly, they formed a dejected and chastened group.

12.4 JAMES OF SAFED'S SON

As Jesus approached, the nine followers felt a profound sense of relief at his arrival. They were greatly encouraged by the good cheer and unusual enthusiasm evident on the faces of Peter, James, and John. Eagerly, they rushed forward to greet Jesus and their three companions. As they exchanged pleasantries, a crowd gathered, prompting Jesus to inquire about the nature of their dispute as he drew closer.

But before the disconcerted and humiliated followers could respond, the anxious James of Safed stepped forward and, kneeling at Jesus' feet, said: I have a son, an only child, who is possessed by a devil. Not only does he cry out in terror, foam at the mouth, and fall like a lifeless body during seizures, but often this devil that possesses him throws him into convulsions and sometimes casts him into water or even fire. With much grinding of teeth and as a result of numerous bruises, my child is wasting away. His life is worse than death; his mother and I are filled with sorrow and despair. Yesterday around noon, while searching for you, I encountered your followers. While we were waiting, they attempted to cast out this demon, but they were unable to do so. And now, Master, will you do this for us? Will you heal my son?

Jesus had listened to this account, but of course, he already knew what had transpired. He then touched the kneeling father and instructed him to rise while he surveyed the nearby followers with a discerning gaze. Jesus addressed all those who stood before him, saying: "The works of faith do not emerge at the bidding of doubting belief."

Then, pointing to the bewildered father, Jesus said: "Bring your son." When the father brought the boy before Jesus, he asked: "How long has the boy been afflicted in this way?" The father replied that it had been since he was very young. As they conversed, the youth was suddenly seized by a violent attack, falling in their midst, gnashing his teeth, and foaming at the mouth. After a series of intense convulsions, he lay before them as if he were dead.

MOUNT HERMON

The father once again knelt at Jesus' feet, imploring Him to heal his son: I ask you to have compassion on us and deliver us from this affliction.

And when Jesus heard these words, he looked down into the father's anxious face and said: "Do not question God's power of love; instead, examine the sincerity and extent of your own faith. All things are possible for those who truly believe." Then James of Safed expressed a mixture of faith and doubt, stating that he believed in God and prayed for Jesus to help his unbelief.

When Jesus heard these words, he stepped forward and, taking the boy by the hand, said: "We will do this by our Heavenly Father's will and in honor of living faith. My son, arise!" Then, placing the boy's hand in his father's hand, Jesus added: "Go your way. God has granted the desire of your soul."

All those present, including Jesus' opponents, were astonished by what they witnessed: the boy was cured, seemingly by heavenly spirits with God's approval.

When James of Safed departed with his restored son, Jesus said: "We are now going to Caesarea-Philippi; prepare at once." Then the group traveled quietly southward, with the crowd following behind.

12.5 IN CELSUS' GARDEN

They spent the night with Celsus, and that evening, in the garden, after they had eaten and rested, the twelve gathered around Jesus. Thomas remarked that those who had stayed behind were unaware of what had transpired on the mountain, which had greatly encouraged those who were with him. They longed to discuss their defeat, hoping he could provide guidance on these matters, as the events that occurred on the mountain could not be disclosed at this time. Jesus responded to Thomas, saying:

"Everything your brethren heard on the mountain shall be revealed to you in due time. However, I will now show you the reason for your defeat in that which you so unwisely

attempted. While my companions, your brethren, and I ascended the mountain yesterday, you, who remained on watch here with instructions to strive for spiritual insight and to pray for a fuller revelation of our Heavenly Father's will, failed to exercise the faith at your disposal.

"No sooner do you comprehend my identity than your selfish desire for worldly recognition resurfaces, leading you to debate among yourselves about who should be the greatest in a new physical kingdom that, as you continue to envision it, neither exists nor ever will.

"He who aspires to be the greatest in the new spiritual kingdom must first humble himself and become a servant to the children of God. True spiritual greatness lies in comprehending divine love rather than reveling in the exercise of material power or seeking self-exaltation.

Jesus continued:

"In your attempts, which were ultimately unsuccessful, your purpose was not pure; your motives were not divine; our ideals were not spiritual; our ambitions were not altruistic; our methods were not rooted in love; and your goals were not aligned with the will of our Heavenly Father.

"You cannot alter the course of established natural phenomena except when such things follow God's will. Additionally, you cannot engage in spiritual work without the presence of spiritual power. Furthermore, even when the potential for both is present, you cannot achieve either without the existence of a third essential human factor: the personal experience of possessing living faith.

"Now, go to your rest, for tomorrow we return to Magadan, where we will continue our mission to the cities and villages of the Decapolis.

"I now enter the final phase of my life. We are about to embark on the labors that will soon lead to the ultimate

testing of your faith and devotion, as I will be delivered into the hands of those who seek my destruction. Remember what I am telling you: I will be put to death, but my spirit shall appear again.”

They were undoubtedly bewildered and could not comprehend his words. Although they were afraid to ask for clarification, they recalled everything he had said after his reappearances. They retired for the night, feeling deeply sorrowful.

12.6 PETER’S PROTEST

Early Wednesday morning, Jesus and the twelve departed from Caesarea-Philippi for Magadan Park, located near Bethsaida-Julias. The followers had slept very little that night, so they were up early and prepared for the journey. Even the stoic Alpheus twins were taken aback by the discussions surrounding the death of Jesus.

As they journeyed south, just beyond the Waters of Merom, they arrived at the Damascus Road. Jesus instructed them to travel to Capernaum via the Damascus Road, which traverses Galilee. He made this decision because he anticipated that those who followed him would take the East Jordan Road, believing that Jesus and the followers would be apprehensive about passing through the territory of Herod Antipas. Jesus aimed to avoid his critics and the crowd that surrounded him so that he could spend time alone with his friends that day.

They traveled through Galilee until well past lunchtime, when they stopped in the shade to refresh themselves. After partaking of food, Andrew spoke to Jesus, expressing that they did not comprehend his profound teachings. They had come to believe that Jesus was a representative of God, yet now they were hearing unfamiliar words about leaving them and dying. They needed assistance in understanding: Are you speaking to us in stories? We pray that you speak to us directly and in clear terms.

In response to Andrew, Jesus said:

“My brethren, I feel compelled to share with you the truth about the end of my life. You insist on clinging to the belief that I am the Messiah, and you refuse to abandon the notion that the Messiah must sit upon a throne in Jerusalem. However, I tell you that I must go to Jerusalem, where I will suffer many things, be rejected by the Scribes, the elders, and the chief priests, and after all this, I will be killed and appear again. I do not speak to you in parables; I speak the truth so that you may be prepared for these events when they suddenly come upon us.”

While he was still speaking, Simon Peter, rushing impetuously toward him, laid his hand on Jesus' shoulder and declared that it would be unthinkable for him to contradict Jesus. However, he insisted that such things would never happen. Peter spoke this way out of love for Jesus; however, Jesus recognized in Peter's words, which were meant with affection, a suggestion to alter his course in fulfilling God's will during the final days of his earthly life. It was precisely because Jesus perceived the danger of allowing even the well-meaning suggestions of his affectionate and loyal friends to dissuade him that he turned to Peter and the other followers, saying: “You relish the feeling of the adversary, the tempter. When you speak in this manner, you are not aligned with me but rather with our opponents. In doing so, you make your love for me into an obstacle to fulfilling our Heavenly Father's will. Do not concern yourself with the ways of people, but rather with the will of God.”

After they had recovered from the initial shock of Jesus' stinging rebuke and before they resumed their journey, Jesus spoke further:

“If you would follow me, set aside your own desires and embrace your responsibilities each day. For whoever seeks to save their life selfishly will lose it, but whoever loses their life for the sake of our Heavenly Father will find it. What

does it profit a person to gain the whole world yet lose their own soul? What can a person give in exchange for eternal life? Do not be ashamed of me and my words in these hypocritical times, just as I will not be ashamed to see you in the next.”

In all the interactions between the twelve and their teacher, they had only witnessed such a piercing gaze and heard such swift words of rebuke directed at them on this one occasion. Until now, Jesus had consistently shown patience with their shortcomings. The followers were left utterly stunned; they were amazed and even horrified. They could hardly find the words to express their sorrow.

Slowly, the twelve began to grasp the concept that Jesus was telling them something about the possibility of his dying. They only vaguely understood his remarks about his impending demise, while his assertion about appearing after death seemed to elude their minds. *[In later times, Peter, James, and John, reflecting on their experience on the Mount, attained a deeper understanding of some of these matters.]*

In silence, Jesus and the twelve started for their camp at Magadan Park, traveling through Capernaum. As the afternoon progressed, although they did not speak directly to Jesus, they engaged in lively discussions among themselves while Andrew talked with Jesus.

12.7 AT PETER’S HOUSE

As they entered Capernaum at twilight, they took less-traveled paths directly to Simon Peter’s home for their evening meal. While David Zebedee prepared to take them across the lake, they lingered at Simon’s house. Jesus, looking at Peter and the other followers, asked: “As you walked together this afternoon, what did you discuss so earnestly among yourselves?”

The followers remained silent because many of them had continued the discussion that began at Mount Hermon regarding their positions in the new kingdom, including who would be the greatest among them.

Jesus, aware of the thoughts that occupied their minds that day, beckoned to one of Peter's young children and, placing the child among them, said:

“Verily, I say to you, unless you turn and become like this child, you will make little progress in the search for heaven. Whoever humbles himself and becomes like this little one will be great in the spiritual kingdom. And those who receive such a little one accept the truth and will also receive God. Seek to minister these good truths to your brethren in the flesh.

“If the actions you perform with your hands or the sights you observe with your eyes offend you in the pursuit of new teachings, it is better to relinquish these cherished idols. It is preferable to enter heaven without many of life's fondest treasures than to cling to these idols and not find the spiritual kingdom. Above all, ensure that you do not despise any of these little ones, for their spirits are in communion with the heavenly spirits.”

When Jesus had finished speaking, they boarded the boat and sailed across to Magadan.

12.8 DECAPOLIS TOUR

When Jesus and the twelve arrived at Magadan Park, they were met by a group of nearly one hundred individuals, including teachers and members of the women's corps, who were prepared to commence the teaching tour of the cities in the Decapolis.

On the Thursday morning of August 18, Jesus called his friends and instructed each follower to associate with one of the twelve teachers. Together with other teachers, they were to form twelve groups to labor in the cities and villages of the Decapolis. He directed the women's corps and other followers to remain with him. Jesus allocated four weeks for this tour, instructing his friends to return to Magadan by

Friday, September 16. He promised to visit them frequently during this time. Throughout the month, these twelve groups worked in Gerasa, Gamala, Hippos, Zaphon, Gadara, Abila, Edrei, Philadelphia, Heshbon, Dium, Scythopolis, and many other cities. Notably, no supernatural healings or extraordinary events occurred during this tour.

12.9 AT HIPPOS

One evening at Hippos, in response to a follower's question, Jesus delivered a well-remembered Lesson On Forgiveness. He said:

“If a kindhearted person has a hundred sheep and one goes astray, does he not immediately leave the ninety-nine to search for the one that has wandered off? If he is a good shepherd, will he not continue his quest for the lost sheep until he finds it? When the shepherd finally locates his lost sheep, he joyfully places it on his shoulders and, returning home, calls to his friends and neighbors: ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep.’ There is more joy in heaven over one lost person who is found than over ninety-nine righteous individuals who have not strayed.

“Even so it is not the will of our Heavenly Father that one of these little ones should go astray, let alone that they should perish. In your old religion, God may accept repentant sinners; in the new teachings, our Heavenly Father finds them even before they have seriously thought of regret.

“Our Heavenly Father loves all of God's children, and you should learn to love one another in the same way. Our Heavenly Father overlooks your spiritual mistakes; therefore, you should learn to overlook one mistakes. If your brother harms you, approach him with tact and patience, and kindly point out his mistake. Ensure that this conversation remains private between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother back.

“But if your brother refuses to listen to you and continues in his wrongdoing, go again to him, bringing one or two mutual friends with you. This way, you will have two or even three witnesses to confirm your account and demonstrate that you have approached your wayward brother justly. If he still refuses to heed your friends, you may share the entire situation with others. If he disregards their counsel as well, allow them to take appropriate action as they see fit. Ultimately, let such a disobedient brother be.

“While you cannot claim to evaluate the souls of your fellow beings, and while you may not condone spiritual errors, it is your responsibility to uphold order in the earthly realm. Although you cannot ascertain the eternal fate of an individual, you may legislate concerning the conduct of the group when two or more of you reach a consensus on these matters. This remains eternally true, for where two or more are gathered together, God is in the midst of them.”

Simon Peter was the leader of the workers at Hippos. When he heard Jesus speak, he asked how many times he should excuse the brother who had wronged him, seven times? And Jesus replied to Peter:

“Not only seven times, but even seventy times seven. There-fore, this lesson can be likened to a property owner who ordered a financial reckoning with his stewards. When they began to examine the accounts, one of his chief retainers was brought before him, confessing that he owed the owner ten thousand talents. This officer pleaded that hard times had come upon him and that he did not have the means to pay this obligation. Consequently, the property owner commanded that his assets be confiscated and that his property be sold to settle his debt.

“When the chief steward heard this stern decree, he fell on his face before the property owner, imploring him to have mercy and grant him more time. He pleaded, ‘Lord, have a

little more patience with me, and I will repay you in full.’ When the property owner looked upon this negligent steward and his family, he was moved with compassion. He ordered that the steward be released and that the debt be completely forgiven. Having received mercy and forgiveness from the property owner, the chief steward went about his business. However, upon encountering one of his subordinate stewards, who owed him a mere hundred denarii, he seized him by the throat and demanded, ‘Pay me all you owe.’

“Then this steward fell before the chief steward and, beseeching him, said: ‘Only have patience with me, and I will be able to pay you back soon.’ However, the chief steward refused to show mercy and instead had him thrown into prison until he could repay his debt.

The story continued.

“When his fellow helpers witnessed what had transpired, they were so distressed that they went to inform the property owner. When he heard of the actions of his chief steward, he summoned this ungrateful and unforgiving man before him and said: ‘You are an unworthy steward. When you sought compassion, I freely forgave you your entire debt. Why did you not also show mercy to your fellow stewards, just as I showed mercy to you?’ The property owner was so upset that he handed his ungrateful chief steward over to the jailers, instructing them to hold him until he had paid all that was due.

“And even so, our Heavenly Father will show abundant compassion to those who freely show compassion to their fellow beings. Would it be fair for you to approach God seeking His understanding for your shortcomings while you chastise your brethren for possessing the same human frailties? I say to all of you: freely you have received good things; therefore, freely give to your fellow beings on earth.”

Thus, Jesus taught about the dangers of and illustrated the unfairness of passing personal judgment on others. His followers came to recognize that legislative and judicial authority should be vested in the group rather than in individuals. This collective authority must not be exercised as personal power. Group judgment is more likely to mitigate the risks of injustice; Jesus emphasized the importance of eliminating personal bias and minimizing unfairness, retaliation, and vengeance.

12.10 ADEN'S TEACHING

Jesus traveled to Gamala to visit John and his associates. That evening, after a session of questions and answers, John mentioned that the previous day he had gone to Ashtaroth to meet a man named Aden, who was teaching in Jesus' name and even claiming to have the ability to cast out demons. John noted that Aden had never been among the followers, nor did he adhere to their teachings; therefore, John prohibited him from performing such things." Jesus responded:

"Allow him. These lessons will soon be proclaimed throughout the world. Do not expect that all who believe the teachings will be subject to our direction. Rejoice that our teachings have already begun to manifest beyond our personal influence. John, those who claim to perform great works must ultimately support their assertions. They will certainly not be quick to speak ill of us.

"In matters of this nature, it would be prudent for you to consider that he who is not against us is for us. In the generations to come, many who do not fully understand will engage in various strange actions in God's name; however, allow them. I assure you that even when a cup of cold water is offered to a thirsty soul, God will recognize such an act of love."

This instruction greatly perplexed John. He had previously heard Jesus say: "He who is not with me is against me." He learned that, in

this context, Jesus was referring to an individual's personal relationship with spiritual teachings. In contrast, in the other case, reference was made to the external social relations among followers concerning the jurisdiction of one group over the work of others. *[John often recounted this distinction in connection with his subsequent efforts; nevertheless, the followers were frequently offended by those who boldly taught in Jesus' name.]*

[Aden, whom John forbade to teach and work in Jesus' name, did not heed John's injunction. He continued his efforts and garnered numerous followers in Kanata before entering Mesopotamia. He had been led to believe Jesus' teachings through the testimony of the man possessed by demons, whom Jesus healed near Kheresa. This man confidently believed that the supposed devil had been cast out of him by Jesus.]

12.11 AT EDREI

At Edrei, where the twelve labored, Jesus spent a day and a night. During the evening discussion, he articulated the principles that should guide those who teach the truth and inspire all who hear the teachings. Jesus taught:

“Speak of our joy, the buoyancy of our goodwill, and the inspiration of our good humor. We proclaim a message of infectious good news and its transformative power. Those who embrace these teachings are filled with joy and will carry it in their hearts forever. Increasing happiness is the constant experience of all who are sure about God. You shall not depict us as people of sorrows.

“When God's children become self-aware of the assurance of the divine presence, this belief will expand their minds, ennoble their souls, reinforce their personalities, enhance their happiness, deepen their spiritual perception, increase their willingness to serve, and amplify their capacity to love and be loved.

“Never should a righteous cause be promoted through force; only spiritual power can achieve spiritual victories. This prohibition against the use of material influences encompasses both psychic and physical force. Overbearing arguments and mental superiority should not be used to coerce individuals. A person’s mind should not be subdued by the sheer weight of logic or intimidated by cunning eloquence. While emotion plays a significant role in human decision-making, it should not be directly invoked in the teachings of those who seek to advance the cause. Instead, make your appeals directly to the spirit that lives within each individual.

“Always respect the personality of each person. Avoid appealing to fear, pity, or mere sentimentality. When reaching out to God’s children, be fair, exercise self-control, and demonstrate appropriate restraint. As it was said: ‘Behold, God stands at the door and knocks; if anyone opens, God will enter.’

“In bringing individuals to heaven, do not diminish or destroy their self-respect. While excessive self-respect can undermine genuine humility and lead to pride and arrogance, a loss of self-respect often results in a paralysis of the will. The purpose of our beliefs is to restore self-respect to those who have lost it and to temper it in those who possess it. Please do not make the mistake of condemning the wrongs in your pupils’ lives; also, remember to offer generous recognition for the most commendable aspects of their lives. Similarly, please refrain from using sarcasm at the expense of our fellow beings. Avoid cynicism when interacting with our fear-ridden children.

“Idleness undermines self-respect; therefore, encourage your students to remain engaged in their chosen tasks and make every effort to secure work for those who are currently unemployed.

“Never employ unworthy tactics, such as attempting to frighten men and women. A loving father does not intimidate children into obeying his rightful demands. The Heavenly Father is gentle with God’s children’s feelings, patient with their weaknesses, and compassionate toward those who are disheartened by spiritual missteps.

“In living our teachings on earth, one cannot evade their spiritual and service responsibilities. Remember: ‘The gospel yoke is easy, and the burden of truth is light.’ In imparting these lessons, you are simply teaching friendship with God. This fellowship will resonate with both men and women, as each will discover that which most genuinely fulfills their inherent longings and ideals.

The teaching continued.

“Teach all followers to avoid relying on the insecure props of false sympathy. Strong character cannot be developed through indulgence in self-pity. Strive to resist the misleading influence of mere camaraderie in suffering. Extend sympathy to the brave while withholding excessive pity from those cowardly souls who only halfheartedly stand up before the trials of living. Offer no consolation to those who surrender to their troubles without a fight.

“Teach all your students that those who enter the spiritual kingdom are not rendered immune to the accidents of time or the ordinary catastrophes of nature. Believing in the teachings will not prevent one from encountering difficulties, but it will ensure that they remain unafraid when challenges arise. Do not promise deliverance from the waters of adversity; instead, assure them that God’s spirit will accompany them through it all.

“People should understand that intense emotions are not synonymous with divine guidance. Feeling a strong and unusual urge to take action or to visit a specific religious site does not automatically indicate that these impulses are the leadings of the soul.

“Inform all students about the challenges that must be faced by those transitioning from earthly life to spiritual life as it is experienced in heaven. Everyone will encounter varying degrees of uncertainty during the transition between these two states of living.”

And Jesus taught this group of followers much more before they prepared for the night's rest. *[Those who heard these teachings treasured them in their hearts and often recited them to edify the followers who were not present when they were spoken.]*

12.12 TALK WITH NATHANIEL

Jesus traveled to Abila, where Nathaniel and his associates were working. Nathaniel was troubled by some of Jesus' statements, which appeared to undermine the authority of the recognized Hebrew scriptures. That night, after the usual period of questions and answers, Nathaniel took Jesus aside from the others and requested to learn the truth about the scriptures. He noted that Jesus taught only a portion of the writings - the ones he considered the most significant - and inferred that Jesus rejected the Rabbis' teachings, which asserted that the words of the law are the very words of God, having originated from God even before the times of Abraham and Moses: What is the truth about the scriptures? When Jesus heard these questions from his bewildered follower, he responded:

“Nathaniel, you have made a correct judgment; I do not interpret the scriptures in the same way as the Rabbis. I will discuss this matter with you because you do not share these insights with your brethren: you are prepared to receive this teaching.

“The words of the law of Moses and the teachings of the scriptures did not exist before Abraham. Only recently have the scriptures been compiled into the form we recognize today. While they encompass the best of the higher thoughts

and longings of the Jewish people of that era, they also include many elements that do not accurately represent the truth of God's character and teachings. Therefore, I select from among the better teachings those truths that can be derived from the older teachings.

"Many of these books were not written by the individuals whose names they bear; however, this does not diminish the value of the truths they contain. Even if the story of Jonah is not factual, the profound truth of this narrative - the love of God for Nineveh and the so-called heathens - is nonetheless precious in the eyes of all who love their fellow human beings. The scriptures were essential because they present the thoughts and acts of individuals in search of God, who, through these writings, have left a record of their highest concepts of righteousness, truth, and holiness.

"These writings are the work of various spiritual individuals, some more enlightened than others. The teachings contained within these texts reflect the perspectives and extent of enlightenment prevalent during the periods in which they were produced. As a revelation of truth, the latter are generally more reliable than the former. Even though these spiritual figures of the past may have led inspired and spirit-filled lives, it does not necessarily imply that their words were equally divinely inspired. The scriptures are entirely human in origin; however, it is essential to acknowledge that they comprise the most comprehensive collection of religious wisdom and spiritual truth available in the world today.

"Nathaniel, never believe the scriptural accounts that claim the God of love instructed your ancestors to go forth in battle to slay all their enemies - men, women, and children. Such accounts are the words of men, and not particularly spiritual

men at that; they do not represent the word of God. The scriptures have always reflected, and will continue to reflect, the intellectual, moral, and spiritual status of their authors. The concepts of Yahweh evolve in beauty and glory as the prophets make their records from Samuel to Isaiah. The scriptures are intended for religious instruction and spiritual guidance; they are not the works of historians or philosophers.

“It is a mistake to believe that the scriptures are a doctrine of sealed books filled with mystery and wisdom that only the wise dare to interpret. A misguided reverence for sacredness has hindered common sense from protecting religion. Unfortunately, the so-called wise men of today are aware of the limited truths contained in religious writings but choose to withhold this knowledge from the people.

“Unfortunately, there exists a misguided belief in the perfection of the scriptural record and the infallibility of its teachings, compounded by the confusing misinterpretations of these religious texts by the Scribes and Pharisees in Jerusalem. They often manipulate inspiration and misinterpretations to resist newer insights. It is essential to remember that God does not restrict the revelation of truth to any particular generation or group of people. Many sincere seekers of truth have been, and will continue to be, perplexed and disheartened by these doctrines derived from the scriptures.

“Similarly, we should refrain from documenting our teachings today, lest, after my departure, future followers might quickly fragment into various groups of truth seekers due to differing interpretations of today’s writings. For this generation, it is preferable to live these truths while avoiding the creation of written records.”

Nathaniel was both enlightened and shocked by Jesus’ pronouncement, and he pondered this conversation for a long time.

[He did not share any details about this meeting until after Jesus' death, and even then, he was hesitant to reveal the complete story of the instructions.]

12.13 LESSON FOR JAMES

In Philadelphia, where James was working, Jesus instructed his followers on the uplifting nature of the teachings. During his discourse, he suggested that certain sections of scripture contained more profound truths than others and encouraged his listeners to nourish their souls with the finest spiritual food. James interjected, inquiring how they could discern the more valuable passages from the scriptures.

Jesus responded: “Yes, James, when you read the scriptures, seek out those eternally true and divinely beautiful teachings, such as: ‘Create in me a clean heart, O, God.’ ‘God is my shepherd; I shall not want.’ ‘You should love your neighbor as yourself.’ ‘For I, your God, will hold your right hand, saying, fear not; I will help you.’ ‘Neither shall nations learn war anymore.’”

This lesson included Jesus’ profound exhortation: “Love your neighbor as yourself,” which he derived from the scripture that reads: “You shall not take vengeance against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus embraced the affirmative aspect of this scripture while dismissing the negative portion. He urged his friends to respond positively and proactively to every life situation.

Jesus even opposed negative or purely passive non-resistance. He stated: “When an enemy strikes you on one cheek, do not remain silent and passive; instead, with a positive attitude, turn the other cheek.” In other words, actively do the best to guide a misguided brother away from the wrong paths and toward the better ways of righteous living.

Jesus instructed his followers that when someone unjustly takes away a coat, they should also offer another garment. This instruction is not meant to be taken literally as a call to give a second coat, but rather as a prompt to take positive action to address the wrongdoing.

This teaching contrasts with the old adage of suffering and retaliation. One of the followers once asked what he should do if a stranger forced him to carry his pack for a mile. Jesus answered: "Do not sit idly and sigh in relief while you criticize the stranger under your breath. Righteousness does not stem from such passive attitudes. If you cannot think of anything more positively effective to do, you can at least carry the pack an extra mile. This will undoubtedly challenge the unrighteous stranger."

12.14 RETURN TO MAGADAN

The four-week mission in the Decapolis was moderately successful. Hundreds of individuals were welcomed, and both the followers and new teachers gained valuable experience in continuing their work without the immediate personal presence of Jesus.

On Friday, September 16, the entire corps of workers gathered as previously arranged at Magadan Park. On the Sabbath, a meeting of more than one hundred followers convened to thoroughly discuss plans for expanding the work. The messengers of David were present and provided reports regarding the welfare of the followers throughout Judea, Samaria, Galilee, and neighboring districts.

Few of Jesus' followers at that time fully appreciated the immense value of David's messenger corps. Not only did the messengers keep the followers in the area connected with one another and with Jesus, but during the difficult days, they also served as collectors of funds. Their efforts were crucial not only for the sustenance of the associates but also for supporting the families of the twelve followers and the twelve teachers.

Abner relocated his base of operations from Hebron to Bethlehem around this time, which also served as the headquarters in Judea for David's messengers. David established an overnight relay messenger service between Jerusalem and Bethsaida. These runners departed from Jerusalem each evening, making relay stops at Sychar and Scythopolis, and arrived in Bethsaida by breakfast the following morning.

Jesus and his associates were now prepared to take a week's rest before they began to ready themselves for the final phase of their

labors. This was their last period of rest, as the Perean mission evolved into a teaching campaign that continued until they arrived in Jerusalem to enact the concluding episodes of Jesus' career.

12.15 ON THE WAY TO JERUSALEM

On Sunday morning, September 18, Andrew announced that no work would be scheduled for the upcoming week. All the followers, except for Nathaniel and Thomas, returned home to visit their families or stay with friends. During this week, Jesus experienced a period of nearly complete rest, while Nathaniel and Thomas engaged in extensive discussions with a particular Greek philosopher from Alexandria named Rodan.

On Sunday, September 25, 29 CE, the followers and teachers gathered at Magadan. After a lengthy conference that evening with his associates, Jesus surprised everyone by announcing that he and the twelve followers would depart for Jerusalem the following day to attend the Feast of Tabernacles. He proposed that the teachers visit the followers in Galilee and that the women's corps return to Bethsaida for a time.

When the time came to depart for Jerusalem, Nathaniel and Thomas were still engaged in discussions with Rodan of Alexandria. They obtained Jesus' permission to remain in Magadan for a few additional days. Consequently, while Jesus and the other ten were en route to Jerusalem, Nathaniel and Thomas continued their earnest debates with Rodan. Once Nathaniel and Thomas concluded their discussions with Rodan, they hurried toward Jerusalem to reunite with their fellow associates, arriving on Friday of that week. *[Rodan returned to Alexandria, where he taught philosophy for many years at the school of Meganta. He became a prominent teacher of the new lessons. He remained a devoted follower until the end of his life, ultimately sacrificing his life in Greece alongside others during the height of the persecutions.]*

When Jesus set out for Jerusalem with the ten followers, he intended to take the shorter route through Samaria. Consequently, they traveled along the eastern shore of the lake and, passing through Scythopolis,

entered the region of Samaria. As night approached, Jesus sent Philip and Matthew to a village on the eastern slopes of Mount Gilboa to arrange accommodations for the company.

It so happened that these villagers harbored significant prejudice against the Jews, even more so than the average Samaritans. This animosity was particularly heightened at this time, as many Jews were passing through on their way to the Feast of Tabernacles. The villagers knew very little about Jesus and consequently refused them lodging.

When Matthew and Philip expressed their indignation and informed the Samaritans that they would not entertain the Holy One of Israel, the enraged villagers chased them out of the small town with sticks and stones. After Matthew and Philip returned to their companions and reported how they had been expelled from the village, James and John approached Jesus and asked him to call down fire from above to consume the insolent and impenitent Samaritans. However, when Jesus heard their words of vengeance, he turned to the sons of Zebedee and rebuked them sternly: "You are unaware of the attitude you are displaying. Vengeance has no place in the spiritual kingdom. Rather than dispute, let us travel to the small village near the Jordan Ford."

Jesus and the ten stopped for the night at a village near the Jordan Ford. Early the next day, they crossed the river and continued to Jerusalem via the East Jordan Highway, arriving in Bethany late Wednesday evening. Thomas and Nathaniel arrived on Friday, delayed by their meetings with Rodan.

Jesus and the twelve remained near Jerusalem until the end of October, approximately four and a half weeks. Jesus himself entered the city only a few times, and these brief visits occurred during the Feast of Tabernacles. He spent a significant portion of October with Abner and his associates in Bethlehem.

12.16 THE HOUR HAS COME

Long before they fled from Galilee, the followers of Jesus had implored him to go to Jerusalem to proclaim the teachings so that his message would gain prestige by being delivered at the heart of Jewish

culture and learning. However, now that he had arrived in Jerusalem to teach, they feared for his life. Aware that the Sanhedrin sought to bring Jesus to Jerusalem for trial and recalling his recent declarations that he must face death, the followers were stunned by his sudden decision to attend the Feast of Tabernacles. In response to their previous pleas for him to go to Jerusalem, he had replied: "The hour has not yet come." Now, in response to their protests of fear, he stated: "But the hour has come."

During the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus entered Jerusalem boldly on several occasions and taught publicly in the temple. The followers grew increasingly apprehensive as they listened to his increasingly bold pronouncements regarding the nature of his mission. They were unaccustomed to hearing Jesus make such confident claims and extraordinary assertions, even in the company of his friends. His presence in Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles, despite the counsel of his friends to avoid it, effectively silenced any lingering doubts about Jesus' courage and cowardice.

Jesus publicly taught in the temple courts throughout the days of the feast, primarily due to the fear that had arisen among the Sanhedrin officers as a result of the secret division of sentiment within their own ranks. Many members of the Sanhedrin either secretly believed Jesus' teachings or were strongly opposed to arresting him during the feast, when large crowds were present in Jerusalem, many of whom either supported him or were at least sympathetic to the spiritual movement he represented.

The efforts of Abner and his associates throughout Judea significantly consolidated support for the new teachings to the extent that Jesus' opponents were hesitant to express their opposition openly. He would likely have faced execution one or two months earlier; however, Jesus' audacious boldness in publicly appearing in Jerusalem intimidated his adversaries, who were unprepared for such a daring challenge. Throughout this month, the Sanhedrin made several feeble attempts to arrest Jesus, but these efforts ultimately proved fruitless.

Jesus' opponents were so taken aback by his unexpected public appearance in Jerusalem that they speculated he must have been promised protection by the Roman authorities. Aware that Philip, the brother of Herod Antipas, was nearly a follower of Jesus, the members of the Sanhedrin conjectured that Philip had secured assurances of protection for Jesus against his adversaries. By the time they recognized their error in believing that his sudden and audacious appearance in Jerusalem was the result of a clandestine agreement with the Roman officials, Jesus had already departed from their jurisdiction.

Only the twelve followers had known that Jesus intended to attend the Feast of Tabernacles when they departed from Magadan. Although his followers did not expect him to participate in the feast, many pilgrims from distant lands who had heard of him hoped to see him in Jerusalem. They were not disappointed, as he taught in Solomon's Porch and other areas of the temple courts on several occasions. These teachings seemed to serve as the official announcement of Jesus' mission to the Jewish people and the entire world. During the Feast of Tabernacles, thousands of followers from across the Roman Empire gathered to see Jesus, listen to his teachings, and even travel to Bethany to discuss progress in their home regions.

The crowds who listened to Jesus' teachings held varying opinions about him. Some regarded him as a good man, others as a prophet, and some believed he was indeed the Messiah. Conversely, some considered him a troublesome meddler, leading the people astray with his strange doctrines. His opponents were reluctant to denounce him openly, fearing the backlash from his numerous followers. Meanwhile, his supporters hesitated to acknowledge him publicly due to their apprehension of the Jewish leaders, fully aware that the Sanhedrin was intent on having him killed.

12.17 FIRST TEMPLE TEACHINGS

The first afternoon that Jesus taught in the temple, a large crowd gathered to listen to his words, which depicted the liberty of the new

teachings and the joy experienced by those who embraced the good news. However, a curious listener interrupted him, asking how he could quote the scriptures and teach the people so fluently despite being uneducated in the ways of the Rabbis. Jesus replied:

“No one has taught me the truths that I share with you. This teaching is not my own; it comes from the Heavenly Father. If anyone truly desires to do the will of our Heavenly Father, they will undoubtedly come to understand the teachings, whether they are from God or whether I speak on my own behalf. Those who speak for themselves seek their own glory, but I speak these words for our Heavenly Father.

“But before you attempt to embrace the new light, it is more prudent to follow the light you already possess. Moses provided you with the law; however, how many of you genuinely strive to fulfill its requirements? In this law, Moses commands you, saying, ‘You shall not kill;’ yet, despite this command, some of you seek to kill me.”

When the crowd heard these words, they began to argue among themselves. Some claimed he was mad, while others suggested he was the supposed devil. Still, others believed he was indeed the prophet from Galilee, whom the Scribes and Pharisees had long sought to kill. Some argued that the religious authorities were afraid to confront him, while others thought they refrained from laying hands on him because they had become followers of Jesus.

After considerable debate, a member of the crowd stepped forward and asked why the leaders sought to kill him. Jesus replied:

“Your leaders seek to kill me because they resent the teachings of the good news, a lesson that sets people free from the burdensome traditions of a formal religion steeped in ceremonies that these teachers are determined to uphold. They adhere to the law by performing circumcisions on the Sabbath, yet they would kill me for having set free a person who was afflicted on the Sabbath. They pursue me on the

Sabbath to spy on my actions, but they would condemn me for choosing to heal a grievously afflicted man on another Sabbath.

“They seek to kill me because they know that if you genuinely believe and dare to embrace these new teachings, their traditional religious system could be altered forever. Consequently, they would lose the authority over what they have dedicated their lives to, as they refuse to accept these new and more profound lessons about God.

“And now I appeal to each of you: Do not judge according to outward appearances, but rather judge by the true spirit of these teachings; judge righteously.”

The agents of the Scribes sought to apprehend him, but they feared the crowd, for many believed him. Jesus' ministry since his baptism had become widely recognized, and many of these individuals recounted their experiences. One among the crowd remarked that even though this teacher is from Galilee and does not fulfill all of our expectations of the Messiah, we wonder if the Deliverer, when he arrives, will truly perform any wonders greater than those already accomplished by this Jesus of Nazareth.

When the Pharisees and their associates heard the people speaking in this manner, they conferred with their leaders. They determined that immediate action was necessary to halt Jesus' public appearances in the temple courts.

The Jewish leaders, in general, were inclined to avoid a confrontation with Jesus, believing that the Roman authorities had granted him immunity. They could not otherwise explain his boldness in coming to Jerusalem at this time; however, the Sanhedrin officials did not fully trust this rumor. They reasoned that the Roman rulers would not act secretly without the knowledge of the highest governing body of the Jewish nation. Consequently, Eber, the designated officer of the

Sanhedrin, along with two assistants, was sent to arrest Jesus. As Eber approached Jesus, he said:

“Do not be afraid to approach me. Come closer as you listen to the teachings. I understand that you have been sent to apprehend me, but you must realize that nothing will happen to me until my hour comes. You are not my enemies; you come only to fulfill the orders of your leaders, who, in their ignorance, believe they are serving God while they secretly seek my destruction. I harbor no ill will towards any of you. Our Heavenly Father loves you, and I, too, long for your deliverance from the bondage of prejudice and the shadows of tradition.

“I teach the liberty of life and the joy of truth. I have come to tell you that you may have life and have it eternally. You seek to be rid of me and the disquieting teachings, but you should realize that I will be with you only a little while longer! In just a short time, I will go to the Heavenly Father. Then many of you will diligently seek me, but you shall not find my presence.”

One of the scoffers asked: Where will this man go that we cannot find him? Will he go to live among the Greeks? Will he destroy himself? What can he mean when he declares that soon he will depart from us and that we cannot go where he is going?

Eber and his assistants refused to arrest Jesus and returned to their meeting place without him. When the chief priests and the Pharisees reprimanded Eber and his assistants for not bringing Jesus with them, Eber replied that they feared arresting him in the presence of the crowd, as many believed in his teachings. Furthermore, they had never heard anyone speak like this man. There is something extraordinary about this teacher. You would all benefit from listening to him.

When the chief leaders heard these words, they were astonished and spoke tauntingly to Eber, saying: You also being led astray? Are you about to believe this deceiver? Have you heard of any of our learned scholars or leaders who have believed him? Have his clever teachings deceived any of the Scribes or the Pharisees? How is it that you are influenced by the behavior of this ignorant multitude who do not know the law or the prophets? Do you not know that such untaught people are accursed?

Eber responded: This man speaks to the multitude with words of love and hope. He uplifts the downhearted, and his words bring comfort to their souls. What could be wrong with these teachings, even if he is not the Messiah of the scriptures? Furthermore, does our law not require fairness? Should we condemn a man before we have heard him?

The chief of the Sanhedrin was furious with Eber. Turning to him, he asked if he had gone mad: Are you, by any chance, also from Galilee? Search the scriptures, and you will discover that no prophet arises from Galilee, much less the Messiah.

The Sanhedrin disbanded in confusion, while Jesus withdrew to Bethany for the night.

12.18 LESSON FOR HILDANA

During his visit to Jerusalem, Jesus encountered a woman of ill repute who had been brought before him by his adversaries and accusers. As Jesus approached the temple, he was confronted by a group of hired agents from the Sanhedrin, who were dragging the woman along with them. As they drew near, the spokesperson declared that the woman had been caught in the act of adultery. The law of Moses commands that such a woman should be stoned. What do you say should be done with her?

It was the intention of Jesus' opponents to create a dilemma for him regarding the law of Moses, which mandated that a confessed transgressor be stoned. They aimed to entangle him with the Roman authorities, who had denied the Jews the right to impose the death penalty without the approval of a Roman tribunal. If Jesus permitted

the stoning of the woman, they would accuse him of elevating himself above Moses and the Jewish law in the eyes of the Sanhedrin. Conversely, if he forbade the stoning, they would label him a coward. However, Jesus skillfully navigated the situation, causing the entire plot to unravel under its own weight.

This woman, once beautiful, was the wife of a citizen of Nazareth, a man who had caused trouble for Jesus throughout his youth. After marrying this woman, the man shamefully forced her to earn their living by exploiting her body. He had traveled to the feast in Jerusalem so that his wife could sell her physical charms for financial gain. He entered into a bargain with the agents of the Temple leaders, thus betraying his wife in her vice. Consequently, they brought the woman and her accomplice in transgression to ensnare Jesus into making a statement that could be used against him in the event of his arrest.

Jesus, observing the crowd, noticed her husband standing behind the others. He understood the type of man he was and recognized that he was complicit in the despicable transaction. Jesus first approached the area where this disreputable husband stood and wrote a few words in the sand that prompted him to leave in haste. He then returned to the woman and wrote again on the ground for the benefit of her would-be accusers. As they read his words, they too departed, one by one. After Jesus had written in the sand a third time, the woman's accomplice in her misdeeds also left, so that when Jesus finally rose from his writing, he found the woman standing alone before him.

Jesus asked: "Woman, where are your accusers? Did no one remain to stone you?" The woman, lifting her eyes, answered: No, man. And then Jesus said: "I do not condemn you either. Go your way in peace." This woman, Hildana, forsook her wicked husband and joined the followers of Jesus. The followers were unable to see what Jesus had written in the sand.

12.19 FEAST OF TABERNACLES

The presence of individuals from across the known world, ranging from Spain to India, made the Feast of Tabernacles an ideal occasion

for Jesus to publicly proclaim his complete teachings in Jerusalem for the first time. During this feast, people lived mainly in the open air, residing in leafy booths. It was a celebration of the harvest, occurring in the cool autumn months, and it attracted a larger attendance from Jews worldwide compared to the Passover at the end of winter or Pentecost at the beginning of summer. At last, the followers witnessed their teacher boldly announcing his teachings before the entire world.

This was the feast of feasts, as any sacrifice not offered during the other festivals could be made at this time. This occasion marked the reception of the temple offerings, combining festive pleasures with the solemn rites of religious observance. It was a time of rejoicing, mingled with sacrifices, Levitical chants, and the resonant blasts of the priests' silvery trumpets.

At night, the impressive spectacle of the temple and its throngs of pilgrims was brilliantly illuminated by the grand candelabras that burned brightly in the women's court, as well as by the glare of numerous torches positioned throughout the temple courts. The entire city was festively decorated, except for the Roman castle of Antonia, which loomed in grim contrast over this festive scene, and the Jews hated this ever-present reminder of the Roman presence.

The ceremony of the outpouring of water symbolized the effusion of the divine spirit. This ritual followed the sunrise procession of the priests and Levites, who served as the ritual caretakers of the Temple. The worshipers descended the steps leading from the Court of Israel to the Women's Court, accompanied by successive blasts from the silver trumpets. They then proceeded toward the beautiful gate that opened onto the Court of the Gentiles. Here, they turned to face westward to repeat their chants and continue their march for the symbolic water.

The final day of the feast was officiated by nearly four hundred and fifty priests, accompanied by a corresponding number of Levites, who are believed to be descendants of the tribe of Levi. At daybreak, pilgrims gathered from all corners of the city, each carrying a sheaf of myrtle,

willow, and palm branches in their right hand, while in their left hand, they held a branch of the heavenly apple - the citron, or the “forbidden fruit.”

These pilgrims were divided into three groups for the early morning ceremony. One group remained at the temple to participate in the morning sacrifices; another group descended from Jerusalem to near Maza to gather willow branches for the adornment of the sacrificial altar. Meanwhile, the third group formed a procession, marching from the temple behind the water priest, who, accompanied by the sound of silvery trumpets, carried the golden pitcher intended to hold the symbolic water. They proceeded through Ophel to near Siloam, where the fountain gate was located.

After the golden pitcher had been filled at the Pool of Siloam, the procession marched back to the temple, entering through the Water Gate and proceeding directly to the Court of the Priests. There, the priest carrying the water pitcher was joined by the priest bearing the wine for the drink offering. The two priests then repaired the silver funnels leading to the base of the altar and poured the contents of the pitchers into them.

The execution of the rite involving the pouring of wine and water signaled the assembled pilgrims to begin chanting Psalms 113 to 118, alternating with the Levites. As they recited these verses, they waved their sheaves at the altar. During the feast, seventy bullocks were sacrificed, symbolizing the seventy nations of heathendom. Then the sacrifices for the day were conducted, accompanied by the recitation of the Psalm designated for that day, with the Psalm for the final day of the feast being the eighty-second, commencing with the fifth verse.

12.20 THREE TABERNACLE TEACHINGS

It was during the Feast of Tabernacles that Jesus delivered three of his most impactful sermons: Light Of The World, The Spiritual Water, and The Truth Shall Make You Free. These discourses employed symbols drawn from the ceremonies.

On the evening of the next-to-last day of the feast, when the scene was brilliantly illuminated by the lights of the candelabras and torches, Jesus stood up amid the assembled crowd and began by saying: "I bring spiritual light to the world. Those who believe this light shall not live in darkness but shall live in truth."

On the final day of the feast, known as the great day, the procession from the Pool of Siloam passed through the temple courts. Shortly thereafter, the priests poured water and wine over the altar. Jesus did not interrupt the service; instead, he addressed the worshipers immediately after the chanting of the Hallel, which is the responsive reading of the Psalms accompanied by the waving of branches before the altar. At this moment, there was a pause while the sacrifices were being prepared. Jesus said that he offered spiritual water to every soul that thirsts for spiritual fulfillment. Standing among the pilgrims, Jesus began by saying: "If anyone thirsts, let him come and drink. For our Heavenly Father brings the spiritual water to this world. He who believes this shall be filled with the spirit that this water represents. All who receive this spirit shall never know spiritual thirst."

On the afternoon of the final day of the feast, after the followers had failed to persuade him to flee Jerusalem, Jesus returned to the temple to teach. Upon finding a large gathering of followers assembled in Solomon's Porch, he addressed them: "If the words reside within you and you are inclined to do the will of God, then you are indeed one of the Heavenly Father's children. You will know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. If people keep this word of truth alive in their hearts, they will never taste spiritual death."

When the unbelievers and the agents of the Sanhedrin who had gathered by this time heard these words, they raised a tumult, shouting. Jesus was unable to continue the discourse. Many of the non-followers rushed to fetch stones to cast at him, while the agents of the Sanhedrin sought to arrest him. However, Jesus quickly navigated through the temple corridors and escaped to a secret meeting place near Bethany, where Martha, Mary, and Lazarus awaited him.

12.21 VISIT WITH MARTHA AND MARY

The followers were dispersed in small groups throughout the city, taking precautions because the Jewish authorities were once again becoming bold in their plans to arrest him. It had been arranged for Jesus to stay with Lazarus and his sisters at a friend's house.

For years, it had been customary for the three of them to drop everything and listen to Jesus' teachings whenever he visited. Following the loss of their parents, Martha had taken on the responsibilities of managing the household. On this occasion, while Lazarus and Mary sat at Jesus' feet, absorbing his refreshing teaching, Martha busied herself with preparations for the evening meal. She became unnecessarily distracted by numerous trivial tasks, which burdened her - this was her nature.

As Martha busied herself with these supposed duties, she felt perturbed because Mary did nothing to assist her. Consequently, she approached Jesus and asked if he did not care that her sister had left her alone to handle all the serving. She requested that Jesus tell Mary to come and help her. Jesus responded: "Martha, why are you always anxious about so many things and troubled by so many trifles? Only one thing is truly worthwhile, and since Mary has chosen this good and essential part, I shall not take it away from her. Learn to live as I have taught you: serving in cooperation while refreshing your souls in unison. There is a time for everything; the lesser matters of earthly life should yield to the greater things of heaven."

12.22 AT BETHLEHEM WITH ABNER

The day after the feast concluded, Jesus departed for Bethany and did not teach in the temple again during this visit to Jerusalem. Throughout the week following the Feast of Tabernacles, numerous followers gathered in Bethany to receive teachings from the followers. The Sanhedrin did not attempt to disrupt these gatherings, as Jesus was not present; instead, he worked with Abner and his associates in Bethlehem. At this time, Abner was establishing his headquarters in Bethlehem.

From this center, numerous workers were dispatched to the cities of Judea, southern Samaria, and even Alexandria. Within a few days of his arrival, Jesus and Abner finalized the arrangements to consolidate the work of the two groups of followers. In Bethlehem, Jesus instructed the other former followers of John the Baptist.

It was this intimate contact that ultimately led them to believe Jesus' teachings. These former followers of John the Baptist were inspired by the courage he demonstrated in his public teachings in Jerusalem, as well as by the empathetic understanding they encountered in his private teachings in Bethlehem. These influences ultimately and completely convinced each of Abner's associates to wholeheartedly accept Jesus' teachings and all that such a commitment entailed.

Before leaving Bethlehem for the final time, Jesus arranged for both sets of followers to join him in a united effort at Magadan Park. Abner and his eleven companions aligned themselves with Jesus and his twelve followers, working together as a single organization until Jesus' execution.

In the latter part of October, Jesus and the twelve withdrew from the immediate vicinity of Jerusalem. On Sunday, October 30, Jesus and his associates departed from the city of Ephraim, where he had been resting in seclusion for several days. They traveled along the West Jordan Highway directly to Magadan Park, arriving late on the afternoon of Wednesday, November 2. The followers were greatly relieved to have Jesus back on friendly soil; no longer urged him to go up to Jerusalem to proclaim the teachings.

The Seventy

13.0 AT MAGADAN

A few days after Jesus and the twelve returned to Magadan from Jerusalem, Abner arrived from Bethlehem with a group of approximately fifty followers. At that time, the Magadan Camp also hosted the teaching corps, the women's corps, and about one hundred and fifty other devoted and tested followers from various regions. After spending a few days visiting and reorganizing the camp, Jesus and the twelve commenced intensive training for this specific group of followers.

From this well-trained and experienced group of followers, Jesus subsequently chose seventy individuals and sent them forth to teach the new lessons. Over fifty followers who sought appointment were rejected by the committee appointed by Jesus to select these candidates. This committee consisted of Andrew, Abner, and the acting head of the new teaching corps. In all cases where this committee of three did not reach an unanimous agreement, they presented the candidate to Jesus.

While Jesus never rejected anyone who sought to be accepted as a teaching messenger, there were more than a dozen individuals who, after conversing with Jesus, no longer wished to pursue that role.

One earnest follower approached Jesus, wishing to become one of your new followers, but my father is very old and near death: May I be permitted to return home to bury him? To this man, Jesus replied: "My

son, the foxes have holes, and the birds have nests, but I have nowhere to lay my head. You are a faithful follower, and you may continue to be so while you return home to care for your loved ones. However, this is not the case for the teaching messengers. They have forsaken everything to proclaim the new teachings. If you wish to be such a teacher, you must allow others to bury the dead while you spread the good news.” The man left feeling deeply disappointed.

Regular instruction commenced on Friday, November 4, and continued until Sabbath, November 19. Each morning, Jesus delivered a talk to the group; Peter taught public speaking techniques; Nathaniel instructed them in the art of teaching; Thomas explained how to answer questions effectively; and Matthew oversaw the organization of their group finances. The other followers also engaged in this training, drawing upon their experiences and natural talents.

13.1 BLESSING OF THE SEVENTY

The seventy were initiated by Jesus on Sabbath afternoon, November 19, at the Magadan Camp, with Abner appointed as their leader. This corps of seventy included Abner, ten former followers of John the Baptist, fifty-one earlier teachers, and eight additional followers who had distinguished themselves through their service.

Mid-afternoon on this Sabbath, a midst intermittent showers of rain, a gathering of followers, augmented by the arrival of David and the majority of his messenger corps, totaling over four hundred, assembled on the shores of the Lake of Galilee to witness the formal acceptance of the seventy. Before Jesus laid his hands upon the heads of the seventy to set them apart as messengers, he addressed them, saying:

“The harvest is indeed plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, I urge all of you to pray that God of the harvest will send additional laborers into the harvest. I am about to set you apart as messengers and send you to both Jew and Gentile as lambs among wolves. As you embark on your

journey, two by two, I ask you to carry neither purse nor extra clothing, for you are undertaking this first mission for only a short time. Please refrain from engaging in lengthy greetings along the way; focus solely on your work.

“Whenever you go to stay in a home, say: ‘Peace be upon this household.’ If those who love peace reside there, you should remain; if not, you may choose to leave. Once you have selected a home, stay there for the duration of your visit in that city, eating and drinking whatever is provided for you. This is because the laborer is deserving of his sustenance. Do not move from house to house in search of better accommodations. Remember, as you proclaim peace on earth and goodwill among all people, you must contend with bitter and self-deceived opponents. Therefore, be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves.

“And wherever you go, teach, saying: ‘The spiritual kingdom is already here,’ and minister to all who may be suffering in mind or body. Freely you have received these new lessons; freely give. If the people of any city welcome you, they will find an abundant entrance into heaven. However, if the people of any city refuse to accept these teachings, you should still proclaim your message as you depart from that unbelieving community, saying, even as you leave, to those who reject your teaching: ‘Despite your rejection of the truth, it remains that the spiritual kingdom is within you.’”

When Jesus had spoken to the seventy, he began with Abner, and as they knelt in a circle around him, he laid his hands on the head of each person. Early the next morning, Abner dispatched seventy messengers to all the cities of Galilee, Samaria, and Judea. These thirty-five couples traveled for approximately six weeks, teaching along the way, and all returned to the new camp near Pella in Perea on Friday, December 30.

13.2 TEACHING MATADORMUS

Andrew presented to Jesus a wealthy young man who was a devoted follower and wished to join the ambassadors. This young man, Matadormus, was a member of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin; he had heard Jesus teach and had subsequently received instruction in the teachings from Peter and the other followers. Jesus conversed with Matadormus about the requirements and asked him to postpone his decision until he had given the matter further consideration.

Early the next morning, as Jesus was taking a walk, a young man approached him and stated that he had observed all the commandments since his youth. He wanted to know what more he must do to gain eternal life. In response to this question, Jesus shared a Lessons On Wealth: "If you keep all the commandments - do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, and honor your parents - you do well, but your soul is rewarded by faith, not merely of works. Do you believe these teachings?"

And Matadormus responded that he believed everything he had been taught, to which Jesus replied that he was indeed a child of the Heavenly Father. However, the young man expressed his dissatisfaction with merely being a believer; he aspired to become one of the new messengers. When Jesus heard this, he looked down upon him with great love and said: "I will make you one of my messengers if you are willing to pay the price; if you provide the one thing you lack."

Matadormus replied that he would do anything if granted the opportunity to follow. Jesus, kissing the kneeling young man on the forehead, said: "If you would be one of our messengers, go and sell all that you have. After you have given the proceeds to the poor or to your brethren, come and follow me, and you shall receive the treasure that is heaven."

When Matadormus heard this, his expression changed dramatically. He stood up and walked away in sorrow, for he possessed great wealth. This affluent young Pharisee had been brought up to believe that wealth was a sign of God's favor.

Jesus understood that he was not free from his attachment to wealth. He sought to liberate Matadormus from the love of riches, rather than from wealth itself. Jesus recognized that Matadormus, with his means, could not possibly become an associate of those who had renounced all for the sake of the teachings. Simultaneously, he perceived that without his riches, Matadormus could emerge as the ultimate leader among them. While most of Jesus' friends did not relinquish all their worldly possessions, the followers and the seventy did. Matadormus aspired to be one of the seventy new messengers, which is why Jesus required him to divest himself of all his temporal possessions.

Matadormus deprived himself of the intimate and personal association with Jesus that could have been his experience had he been willing to do what Jesus asked at that time. If Matadormus had relinquished his wealth, he would likely have been reinstated as the treasurer of the seventy. *[Later on, after the establishment of the church in Jerusalem, Matadormus followed Jesus' instruction and became the treasurer of the Jerusalem church, which was led by James, Jesus' brother. However, by then, it was too late for him to enjoy membership in the seventy.]*

13.3 TEACHING PETER

By the time Jesus had finished speaking with Matadormus, Peter and several of the followers had gathered around him. As the rich young man was departing, Jesus turned to face the followers and said: "You see how challenging it is for those with wealth to become full-time teachers. No one can serve two masters. There is a saying that it is 'easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the wealthy to inherit eternal life.' However, it is more accurate to say it is just as easy for this camel to pass through the needle's eye as it is for self-satisfied, wealth-loving individuals to relinquish all their possessions."

When Peter and the followers heard these words, they were exceedingly astonished. Peter then asked whether all those who possess riches would be excluded from heaven. Jesus replied: "No, Peter, for

those who place all their trust in riches, it may be difficult to enter the spiritual life that leads to eternal progress. However, we must acknowledge that all things are possible with God.”

As they departed, Jesus felt sorrowful that Matadormus did not stay with them, for he held a deep affection for him. After walking along the lake shore, they settled beside the water. Peter, speaking on behalf of the twelve (who were all present at that moment), expressed their concern regarding Jesus’ words to the rich young man: Should we require those who follow the teachings to renounce all their worldly possessions?

Jesus replied: “No, Peter, only those who wish to become associates and desire to live with us as you do. However, our Heavenly Father requires that the affections of God’s children be pure. Anything - be it a thing, person, or belief - that comes between you and the love of truth must be surrendered. If one’s love of wealth does not encroach upon the sanctity of the soul, it holds no significance in the spiritual life of those who seek to enter heaven.”

Jesus later taught that wealth does not directly determine one’s entrance into heaven; rather, it is the love of wealth that poses a challenge. It can be difficult for individuals to balance their loyalty to spiritual ideals with a complete devotion to material possessions. Jesus did not condemn the possession of wealth; instead, he asked only the twelve and the seventy to dedicate all their worldly possessions to the common cause. For ordinary followers, Jesus viewed the prudent investment of surplus earnings as a legitimate means of safeguarding against future and inevitable hardships.

Later, he condemned a particular economic injustice: the unfair exploitation of the vulnerable, uneducated, and less fortunate individuals by their stronger, more knowledgeable, and more privileged counterparts. Jesus asserted that such inhumane treatment of men, women, and children was incompatible with the ideals of the spiritual kingdom.

The conversation continued after Peter noted that the twelve had left everything to follow, but he wanted to know what they would receive in return.

Jesus then spoke to all of the twelve:

“I say to you, no one who has left behind wealth, home, spouse, siblings, parents, or children for the sake of the spiritual kingdom will receive manifold blessings in the world to come. Many who are first will be last, while those who are last will often be first. God observes the needs of earthly children and eventually extends merciful and loving consideration for the welfare of those striving for heaven.

“This spiritual kingdom is like a householder who was a large employer and went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing to pay the laborers a denarius for a day’s work, he sent them into the vineyard. Later, he noticed others standing idle in the marketplace and said to them: ‘You also go to work in my vineyard, and whatever is fair, I will pay you.’ They immediately went to work.

He continued the teaching.

“Once again, he went out around noon and mid-afternoon and did the same. When he went to the marketplace in the late afternoon, he found others still standing idle. He inquired of them: ‘Why have you been standing here idle all day?’ They answered, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ The householder then said, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is fair.’

“When evening arrived, the vineyard owner instructed his steward, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, starting with those hired last and concluding with those hired first.’ When those hired in the late afternoon came, they each received a denarius, and the same was true for each of the other laborers.

“When the men hired at the beginning of the day saw how the latecomers were compensated, they anticipated receiving more than the agreed-upon amount. However, like the others, each received only a denarius. After everyone had received

their pay, the early hires complained to the householder, saying: 'These men who were hired last worked only one hour, and yet you have paid them the same as us, who have endured the burden of the day in the scorching sun.'

"Then the householder answered: 'My friends, I do you no wrong. Did each of you not agree to work for a denarius a day? Take what is yours and go your way, for I wish to give to those who came last as much as I have given to you. Is it wrong for me to do what I will with my own? Or do you begrudge my generosity because I wish to be good and show mercy?'"

While some of the twelve may not have fully understood this story, others interpreted it to mean that heaven is accessible to both those who have recently begun to embrace the teachings as well as those who have long believed them and have worked diligently to spread these new teachings.

13.4 FAREWELL TO THE SEVENTY

It was a momentous occasion at the Magadan Camp when the seventy embarked on their first mission. Early that morning, during his final address to the seventy, Jesus emphasized the following:

- The new teachings must be proclaimed to the entire world: to Gentiles and Jews, to men and women, as well as to both the enslaved and enslavers.
- While ministering to the sick, avoid creating the expectation of miracles.
- Avoid spending excessive time on social visits and other trivial matters that may detract from your full commitment to the new lessons.
- If the first house selected for a headquarters proves to be a suitable residence, remain there for the duration of your stay in that city.
- It is essential to communicate to all devoted followers that the moment for a definitive separation from the religious leaders in Jerusalem has now come.

- Teach about the spiritual fellowship among all people, rather than an external kingdom characterized by power and material glory.
- Teach that a person's entire duty is encapsulated in this principle: love God with all your mind and soul, and love your neighbor as yourself. This should be presented as the singular duty, replacing the 613 rules of conduct outlined by the Pharisees.

When Jesus had spoken to the seventy in the presence of all the followers, Simon Peter took them aside and imparted a lesson that elaborated on Jesus' teachings given to the twelve. Peter urged the seventy to embrace the following virtues in their experiences:

- Consecrated Devotion - Always pray for more laborers to be sent into the harvest. It has been explained that when one asks, they are more likely to respond, "Here I am; send me."
- Prayer - He encouraged them to engage in daily spiritual communication with their souls and God through prayer.
- True Courage - He cautioned them that they would encounter hostility and would undoubtedly face persecution. Peter informed them that their mission was not for the faint of heart and advised anyone who felt afraid to step forward before they began; however, none chose to withdraw.
- Faith and Trust - They were encouraged to embark on their brief mission, even if they were entirely unprepared; they were to place their faith in God and rely on the goodwill of the people for sustenance, shelter, and other essential needs.
- Kindness and Courtesy - He instructed them to minimize unnecessary delays caused by social formalities, while emphasizing the importance of showing courtesy to everyone they encountered. During that time, greetings often involved lengthy and elaborate rituals; therefore, he urged them to conduct their affairs efficiently without wasting time. However, this directive did not apply to friendly salutations. They were to extend every kindness to those who welcomed them into their homes.

- Zeal and Initiative - They should demonstrate joy and intelligent enthusiasm in their pursuit.
- Ministry - They should seek out those who are ill, both in mind and body, and do everything possible to alleviate or cure their ailments.

And when they had received instructions in this manner, the seventy set out two by two on their mission in Galilee, Samaria, and Judea. *[Although the Jews held a particular reverence for the number seventy, often considering the total number of nations outside their faith to be seventy, it was merely coincidental that this group consisted of exactly seventy members.]*

The women's corps operated in pairs, with seventy members assigned to labor in the larger cities of Perea. This original group of twelve women had recently trained an expanded corps of fifty women in home visitation and in ministering to the sick and afflicted. The enlarged women's corps included the wives of Philip and Matthew, as well as the mothers of James and John. Perpetua, the wife of Simon Peter, became a member of a new division of the women's corps that was tasked with working under Abner. *[After Jesus' reappearances, she remained with her husband, accompanying him on all of his teaching tours. On the day Peter was crucified in Rome, she was fed to the wild beasts in the arena.]*

13.5 MOVING THE CAMP TO PELLA

Jesus and the twelve were now preparing to establish their final headquarters in Perea, near Pella. They spent the last ten days of November in council at Magadan. On Tuesday, December 6, the entire company of nearly three hundred set out at daybreak with all their belongings, intending to lodge that night near the river by Pella. This was the same site, by the spring, that John the Baptist had occupied with his camp several years earlier.

After the dissolution of the Magadan Camp, David Zebedee returned to Bethsaida and promptly began organizing the messenger service. The new teachings were entering a new phase. Daily, pilgrims arrived

from all parts of the region and even from distant areas of the Roman Empire. New followers occasionally came from Mesopotamia and the lands east of the Tigris River.

On Sunday, December 18, David, assisted by his messenger corps, loaded the camp equipment onto pack animals and subsequently stored it in his father's house, where he had previously established the camp of Bethsaida by the lake. After bidding farewell to Bethsaida for the time being, he proceeded along the lake shore and down the Jordan River to a point approximately half a mile north of the camp.

The camp could accommodate approximately five hundred people at a time; however, he was prepared to extend hospitality to nearly fifteen hundred pilgrim visitors each week. During this rainy season, these accommodations were essential to manage the ever-increasing number of earnest inquirers who traveled to Perea to see Jesus and hear his teachings.

David undertook all of this on his own initiative, although he had consulted with Philip and Matthew in Magadan. He utilized the majority of his former messenger corps as assistants in managing the camp, now employing fewer than twenty for regular messenger duties. By the end of December, and before the return of the seventy, nearly eight hundred visitors had gathered around Jesus, finding accommodations in David's camp.

13.6 RETURN OF THE SEVENTY

On Friday, December 30, while Jesus was in the nearby hills with Peter, James, and John, the seventy messengers arrived in pairs, accompanied by numerous followers, at the headquarters in Pella. All seventy were gathered at the teaching site in the late afternoon when Jesus returned to the camp.

The evening meal was delayed for over an hour as these enthusiasts of the teachings shared their experiences. David's messengers had conveyed much of this news to the followers in the preceding weeks. Nevertheless, they found it genuinely inspiring to hear these new

teachers personally recount how hungry Jews and Gentiles, men and women and enslavers and enslaved had received their message.

At last, Jesus could see people venturing out to share the teachings in his absence. He now realized that he could leave this world without significantly hindering the progress of the new teachings.

And it was at this moment, just before partaking in the evening meal, that Jesus experienced one of those rare instances of emotional ecstasy that his friends had occasionally witnessed. He said: "I thank you, Father, for revealing these spiritual truths to these people. We rejoice in the knowledge that the new teachings will spread throughout the world, even after I return to you."

When Jesus had spoken these words, he turned aside to converse with his friends and teacher: "Precious are the eyes that see and the ears that hear these truths. Let me tell you that many prophets and great figures of past ages have longed to witness what you now see. Many generations will envy you for having heard and seen these remarkable things. You have learned how numerous cities and villages have embraced the new teachings and how all have welcomed the ministers and teachers."

The following day, which was the Sabbath, Jesus withdrew with the seventy and said:

"I did indeed rejoice with you upon your return, bringing the wonderful news of the lessons received by so many individuals across Galilee, Samaria, and Judea. However, why were you so unexpectedly elated? Did you not anticipate that your message would exhibit power in its delivery? Did you set forth with such little faith in this teaching that you returned astonished by its effectiveness? While I do not wish to dampen your joy, I must caution you against the insidious nature of pride—spiritual pride.

"You have embarked on the noble endeavor of teaching humanity that they are the children of God. Now, go forth to fulfill your duty and do not grow weary in doing good.

“Let me say to you, and to all who will follow in your footsteps through the ages: I am always near, and my invitation is, and will always be: ‘Come to God, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and the Father will give you rest. Take the spiritual yoke; learn the lessons; and you shall find spiritual rest for your souls.’”

They found Jesus’ words to be true when they tested his promises.

13.7 PREPARATION FOR THE LAST MISSION

The following days were busy at the Pella camp as preparations for the Perean mission were finalized. Jesus and his associates were about to embark on their final mission, a three-month tour of all of Perea, which would conclude only when Jesus entered Jerusalem later. During this time, the headquarters of Jesus and the twelve followers were established at the Pella camp.

It was no longer necessary for Jesus to travel abroad to teach. Increasingly, people came to him each week from various regions, not only from the local area but also from the broader Roman world and the Near East. Although Jesus participated in the tour of Perea with the seventy, he spent much of his time at the Pella camp, teaching the multitude and instructing his followers. Throughout these three months, at least ten teachers remained with Jesus.

The mission was now ready to enter its final phase under the personal leadership of Jesus. This phase emphasized spiritual depth, contrasting with the miracle-seeking and wonder-driven multitudes that had followed Jesus during his earlier days of popularity in Galilee. Nevertheless, many continued to seek wonders.

13.8 FEAST OF DEDICATION

As the camp at Pella was being established, Jesus, accompanied by Nathaniel and Thomas, secretly traveled to Jerusalem to attend the Feast of Dedication. It was only when they crossed the Jordan River

at the Bethany Ford that the two followers realized their teacher was heading to Jerusalem. Upon understanding that he genuinely intended to participate in the Feast of Dedication, they earnestly protested, employing various arguments in an attempt to dissuade him. However, their efforts proved futile; Jesus was resolute in his decision to visit Jerusalem. In response to their pleas and warnings about the folly and danger of placing himself in the hands of the Sanhedrin, he would only reply, "I would give these leaders in Israel another opportunity to see the light before my hour comes."

They arrived in Jericho in the late afternoon and made arrangements to stay overnight.

13.9 THE GOOD SAMARITAN

That evening, a large crowd gathered around Jesus and the two followers to ask questions. Many of these inquiries were answered by the followers, while others were addressed directly by Jesus himself. In the course of the evening, a lawyer attempted to entrap Jesus in a contentious debate concerning the requirements for inheriting eternal life. Jesus responded: "What is written in the law and the prophets? How do you interpret the scriptures?" The lawyer, well-versed in the teachings of both Jesus and the Pharisees, replied: One must love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love their neighbor as themselves. Jesus then affirmed: "You are correct; if you truly do this, it will lead you to heaven."

However, the lawyer was not entirely sincere in posing the next question. Drawing a little closer to Jesus, he inquired about the identity of his neighbor. The lawyer posed this question intending to trap Jesus into making a statement that would contradict Jewish law, which defined a neighbor as a member of one's own people. Familiar with Jesus' teachings, the lawyer recognized that Jesus held a different perspective; thus, he hoped to provoke him into making a statement that could be interpreted as an attack on religious law.

But Jesus discerned the lawyer's motives, and instead of falling into the trap, he told his listeners a story that any audience in Jericho would fully appreciate. Jesus said:

"A certain man was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho when he fell into the hands of ruthless bandits who robbed, stripped, and beat him, leaving him half dead. Shortly thereafter, a priest happened to be traveling that way, and when he saw the wounded man in his dire condition, he crossed to the other side of the road and continued on his way. Shortly, a Levite came along and, upon seeing the injured man, also passed by on the other side.

"Now, about this time, a certain Samaritan was journeying down to Jericho when he came across this wounded man. Upon seeing that the man had been robbed and beaten, he was filled with compassion. He approached the man, bandaged his wounds, and poured oil and wine on them. Then, he placed the man on his donkey, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The following day, he took out some money and gave it to the innkeeper, instructing him to take good care of the wounded traveler. He also promised that if the expenses exceeded the amount given, he would repay the difference upon his return. Now let me ask: Which of these three was a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"

When the lawyer realized that he had ensnared himself, he responded, of course, with the one who demonstrated love for him. Jesus then said, "Go and do likewise." In this moment, Jesus confounded the dishonest lawyer and shared a story that served as both a poignant admonition to his friends and a rebuke to all who held negative attitudes toward the Samaritans.

13.10 AT THE HOME OF NICODEMUS

Jesus attended the Feast of Tabernacles to proclaim new teachings to the pilgrims from all parts of the Roman Empire. He now went up to

the Feast of Dedication for one purpose: to give the Sanhedrin and the Jewish leaders another opportunity to see the light.

Some twenty-five Jewish leaders who believed Jesus' teaching gathered together on Friday night at the home of Nicodemus. Among this group were fourteen individuals who were either current or recent members of the Sanhedrin. Eber, Matadormus, and Joseph of Arimathea were in attendance at this meeting.

On this occasion, Jesus' audience consisted entirely of learned men, and both they and his two followers were astonished by the breadth and depth of the remarks Jesus made to this distinguished group. Not since he had taught in Alexandria, Rome, and the Mediterranean islands had he demonstrated such profound knowledge and understanding of both secular and religious affairs.

When this brief meeting concluded, everyone left in awe of Jesus' personality, captivated by his gracious demeanor, and enamored with the man himself. They had sought to advise Jesus regarding his desire to win over the remaining members of the Sanhedrin. Jesus listened attentively but remained silent throughout their proposals. He understood that none of their plans would be effective. He suspected that most of Jerusalem's religious leaders would never accept the new teachings; nevertheless, he was willing to give them another opportunity to learn. However, as he departed that night with Nathaniel and Thomas to stay on the Mount of Olives, he had not yet determined the approach he would take to re-engage the Sanhedrin in his teachings.

That night, Nathaniel and Thomas slept little; they were too astonished by what they had heard at Nicodemus's house. They pondered deeply over Jesus' final remark concerning the offer made by both former and current members of the Sanhedrin to accompany him before the seventy. Jesus stated: "No, my brethren, it would serve no purpose. You would only increase the wrath that will be visited upon your own heads, but you would not lessen the hatred they bear for the teachings. Go, each of you, about our Heavenly Father's business as the

spirit guides you, while I present the new lessons to their attention in the manner that God may direct.”

13.11 HEALING JOSIAH

The next morning, the three of them went to Martha’s home in Bethany for breakfast before heading into Jerusalem. On that Sabbath morning, as Jesus and his two followers approached the temple, they encountered a well-known beggar, a man who had been born blind, sitting at his usual spot. Although beggars were not allowed to solicit or receive alms on the Sabbath, they were permitted to sit in their familiar places. Jesus paused and looked at the beggar, and as he gazed upon him, he considered using this man to once again draw the attention of the Sanhedrin and other religious leaders to his teachings.

As Jesus stood before the blind man, lost in deep thought, Nathaniel pondered the possible cause of the man’s blindness and asked: Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? The Rabbis taught that all cases of congenital blindness were a result of sin, even if the father committed the sin. They also taught that such defects could arise from the mother’s mistakes or other indulgences during pregnancy. Throughout these regions, a persistent and erroneous belief in reincarnation existed. The earlier Jewish teachers, along with Plato, Philo, and many of the Essenes, accepted the theory that individuals might reap the consequences of their actions in one incarnation based on what they had sown in a previous existence. Consequently, it was believed that in one life, individuals could rectify the spiritual errors made in their prior lives.

Jesus sought to convince people that their souls did not have previous existences. While this affliction was believed to stem from sin, the Jews maintained that it was commendable to give alms to these blind beggars. It was customary for these blind men to continually chant to passersby, saying: Show tenderheartedness and gain merit by assisting the blind.

Jesus engaged in the discussion of this case with Nathaniel and Thomas because he consistently encouraged his friends to seek the true causes of all phenomena, whether natural or spiritual. He frequently cautioned them to resist the inclination to attribute spiritual causes to ordinary physical events.

Jesus had nearly resolved to heal the blind man to draw the attention of the Jerusalem leaders to his teachings. Although he had initially intended to avoid using miracles and wonders as a means of instruction, he now sought his Heavenly Father's will on how to potentially win over the religious leaders.

However, before taking any action for the beggar, whose name was Josiah, he answered Nathaniel's question. He said: "Neither this man nor his parents have sinned. This blindness has occurred as part of the natural course of events, but we must now carry out the works of our Heavenly Father."

When Jesus had finished speaking, he addressed Nathaniel and Thomas: "Let us restore the sight of this blind man on this Sabbath day, so that the Scribes and Pharisees may have the opportunity to either accuse me or accept the lessons." Then, stooping down, he spat on the ground and mixed the clay with his saliva. Speaking loudly enough for the blind man to hear, he approached Josiah and applied the clay to his sightless eyes, saying: "Go, my son, wash away this clay in the pool of Siloam, and you shall receive your sight."

After Josiah washed in the pool of Siloam, he returned with his sight restored. Jesus never revealed to his followers how the heavenly spirits, with God's blessing, had accomplished this.

When the initial excitement of gaining his sight subsided, he returned to his usual spot for seeking alms. Having always been a beggar, Josiah knew nothing else. His friends, neighbors, and all who had known him before remarked: Isn't this Josiah, the blind beggar? Some affirmed that it was indeed him, while others insisted that he was someone who resembled him, for this man can see. However, when they inquired directly, Josiah replied: I am he.

When they began to inquire how he was able to see, he responded by recounting what Jesus had done: I do not yet fully understand what I see. When the people who had gathered around him asked where they could find the mysterious man who had healed him, Josiah could only reply that he did not know.

Josiah did not seek healing. This man had little faith that he would regain his sight, but the people of that time held great faith in the power of the saliva of a revered or spiritual figure. From Jesus' discussions with Nathaniel and Thomas, Josiah concluded that his potential benefactor was indeed a great man, a learned teacher or a spiritual prophet. Consequently, he followed Jesus' instructions.

Jesus restored this man's sight on a Sabbath morning in Jerusalem, near the temple, to persuade or challenge the Sanhedrin and all the religious leaders of the city.

13.12 JOSIAH BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

By mid-afternoon, the healing of Josiah had sparked such a discussion around the temple that the leaders of the Sanhedrin decided to convene the council in its usual meeting place. They did so in violation of a standing rule that prohibited the Sanhedrin from meeting on the Sabbath.

Jesus understood that violating the Sabbath would be one of the primary accusations leveled against him if he were to face a final trial. He wished to be presented before the Sanhedrin for the validation of his teachings or for a judgment regarding the allegation of having healed a blind man on the Sabbath.

However, they did not summon Jesus; they were afraid to do so. Instead, they called for Josiah. After some preliminary questioning, the spokesman for the Sanhedrin, which had about fifty members present, instructed Josiah to recount what had happened to him. Since his healing that morning, Josiah had learned from Thomas, Nathaniel, and others that the Pharisees were upset about his healing on the Sabbath and that they were likely to cause trouble for everyone involved.

Nevertheless, Josiah did not yet realize that Jesus was sometimes regarded as the Deliverer. Therefore, when the Pharisees questioned him, he explained that a man had approached him, applied clay to his eyes, instructed him to wash in Siloam, and as a result, he could now see.

One of the senior Pharisees, after delivering a lengthy speech, asserted that this man cannot be from God because he does not observe the Sabbath. He first violates the law by making clay and then instructs this beggar to wash in Siloam on the Sabbath. Such a man cannot be a teacher sent from God.

Then one of the younger men, who secretly believed Jesus' teachings, asked: If God did not send this man, how can he perform these miracles? We know that a commoner cannot accomplish such feats. We are all aware of this beggar, who was born blind; now he can see. Will you still claim that this prophet performs these wonders by the power of the devil?

For every Pharisee who dared to accuse and denounce Jesus, there was one who would arise to question the possibility of genuine spiritual healing, leading to a significant division among them. The presiding officer recognized the direction of their discourse and, to quell the discussion, decided to question the man himself. Turning to Josiah, he asked what he had to say about this man, Jesus, whom he claimed had opened his eyes. Josiah responded by stating that he believed Jesus was a prophet.

The leaders were distraught and, uncertain of what else to do, decided to summon Josiah's parents to ascertain whether he had indeed been born blind. They were reluctant to accept the possibility that the beggar had been healed. It was widely known in Jerusalem that not only was Jesus denied entry into all synagogues, but that anyone who believed in his teachings was also cast out, excommunicated from the congregation of Israel. This exclusion meant the denial of all rights and privileges, except for the right to purchase the necessities of life.

When Josiah's parents appeared before the esteemed Sanhedrin, they were hesitant to speak openly. A spokesman for the court inquired

whether Josiah was their son and if he had been born blind. If this was indeed the case, how could he now see? Josiah's father, supported by his mother, confirmed that he was their son and that he had been born blind; however, they did not know how he had come to see or who had opened his eyes. They suggested that the court ask Josiah himself, as he was of age and could speak for himself.

They called Josiah before them a second time. Their scheme of conducting a formal trial was not progressing smoothly, and some began to feel uneasy about doing so on the Sabbath. Consequently, when they summoned Josiah again, they attempted to ensnare him using a different approach.

The court officer addressed the formerly blind man, asking: Why do you not give God the glory for this? Why do you not tell us the whole truth about what happened? We all know that this man is a sinner. Why do you refuse to discern the truth? You are aware that both you and this man stand convicted of breaking the Sabbath. Will you not atone for your sins by acknowledging God as your healer if you still claim that your eyes have been opened today?

But Josiah was neither dumb nor lacking in humor, so he replied to the officer of the court that he did not know if this man was a sinner, but he did know one thing: Whereas I was blind, now I see.

And since they could not entrap Josiah, they sought to question him further, asking: What did Jesus actually do to you? What did he say to you? Did he ask you to believe him?

Josiah replied somewhat impatiently that he had already explained how it all happened. If they did not believe his testimony, why would they want to hear it again? Would you, by any chance, also consider following him?

When Josiah had finished speaking, the Sanhedrin erupted in confusion and near violence, as the leaders rushed toward him, angrily declaring that while he could speak of following this man, they were followers of Moses and the teachers of God's laws. They acknowledged that God spoke through Moses, but as for this man, they did not know who he was.

Then Josiah, standing on a stool, shouted to all who could hear, saying: You who claim to be the teachers of all Israel! I declare that this is a great marvel, for you confess that you do not know from whence this man comes, and yet you know with certainty, from the testimony you have heard, that he opened my eyes. We all know that God does not perform such works on behalf of the ungodly; God would do such a thing only at the request of a true prophet, one who is spiritual and righteous.

He continued, saying: You know that since the beginning of the world, no one has ever heard of the eyes of a person born blind being opened. Look, all of you, upon me and recognize what has been accomplished this day in Jerusalem! I tell you, if this man were not from God, he would not be able to perform such a miracle.

As the members of the Sanhedrin departed in anger and confusion, they shouted at him: You were born in sin, and do you now presume to teach us? Perhaps you were not truly born blind, and even if your eyes were opened on the Sabbath, this was accomplished by the power of the devil.

They immediately went to the synagogue to expel Josiah.

Josiah entered this trial with a limited understanding of Jesus and the nature of his healing. Much of the bold testimony he skillfully and courageously presented before this tribunal of Israel evolved as the trial unfolded along such unfair and unjust lines.

13.13 TEACHING IN SOLOMON'S PORCH

Throughout the duration of the Sanhedrin session, which took place in one of the temple chambers, Jesus was nearby, teaching the people in Solomon's Porch, hoping to be summoned before the Sanhedrin so that he could share the truth. However, they were afraid to send for him. The sudden and public appearances of Jesus in Jerusalem consistently unsettled them. Jesus now presented the very opportunity they had fervently sought. Yet, they were understandably reluctant to bring him before the Sanhedrin, even as a witness, and even more so, they feared arresting him.

This was midwinter in Jerusalem, and the people sought the partial shelter of Solomon's Porch. As Jesus lingered, the crowds asked him many questions, and he taught them for more than two hours. Some of the Jewish teachers attempted to entrap him by publicly asking how long he would keep them in suspense. If you are the Messiah, why did he not plainly tell them now? Jesus responded:

"I have shared my story and that of our Heavenly Father with you numerous times, yet you still refuse to believe me. Can you not recognize that the works performed in God's name testify on my behalf? A teacher of truth draws only those who yearn for truth and thirst for righteousness. My sheep hear my voice, and all who embrace these teachings will have eternal life. I have demonstrated many acts of love from our Heavenly Father; for which of these good works do you intend to stone me?"

And then one of the Pharisees answered, stating that they would not stone him for good works, but for blasphemy, since he, being a man, dared to make himself equal with God. Jesus responded:

"You accuse me of blasphemy because you refuse to believe me. If I do not perform the works of God, then do not believe me; but if I do perform the works of God, you should believe the works themselves. Let me again say that the spirit of our Heavenly Father is with me and dwells within me, and likewise, that spirit dwells within everyone."

When the people heard these words, many rushed to seize stones to throw at him; however, he passed through the temple precincts and encountered Nathaniel and Thomas, who had been present at the Sanhedrin session. He waited with them near the temple until Josiah emerged from the council chamber.

When Josiah learned that he had been expelled from the synagogue, he initially felt deeply disheartened. However, he found great encouragement when Jesus instructed him to prepare immediately to

accompany them to the camp at Pella [*Josiah ultimately became one of the most fruitful recipients of the teachings, as he dedicated his life to sharing these new lessons.*]

And now, Jesus left Jerusalem, not to return again until he was prepared to leave this world. Accompanied by two followers and Josiah, Jesus went back to Pella.

13.14 PEREAN MISSION

On Tuesday, January 3, 30 CE, Abner, the former chief of the twelve followers of John the Baptist, a Nazarite and once the head of the Nazarite school at Engedi, now serving as the chief of the seventy messengers, gathered his associates and provided them with final instructions before sending them on a mission to all the cities and villages of Perea. This journey through Perea lasted nearly three months and marked the last of Jesus' teaching missions. Following this endeavor, Jesus went directly to Jerusalem to undergo his final experiences on earth.

The seventy, along with the periodic efforts of Jesus and the twelve followers, worked in the cities and towns of Zaphon, Gadara, Macad, Arbela, Ramath, Edrei, Bosora, Caspin, Mispheh, Gerasa, Ragaba, Succoth, Amathus, Adam, Penuel, Capitolias, Dion, Hatita, Gadda, Philadelphia, Jogbehah, Gilead, Beth-Nimrah, Tyrus, Elealah, Livias, Heshbon, Callirrhoe, Beth-Peor, Shittim, Sibmah, Medeba, Beth-Meon, Areopolis, and Aroer, in addition to approximately fifty smaller villages. This was the region where the followers and friends of Jesus engaged most diligently, and in no other region did the citizens so widely embrace Jesus' teachings.

Perea at this time was approximately equal parts Gentile and Jewish, as the Jewish population had generally been displaced from these regions during the era of Judas Maccabee. Perea was one of the most beautiful and picturesque provinces; the Jews commonly referred to it as "the land beyond the Jordan."

Throughout this tour of Perea, the women's corps, now numbering sixty-two, assumed the majority of the responsibilities for ministering to the sick. This marked the final phase in the development of the higher spiritual aspects of the teachings, characterized by a notable absence of miraculous works.

Throughout this period, Jesus divided his time between the camp at Pella and trips with the twelve to assist the seventy in the various cities where they both taught and learned. Under Abner's guidance, the seventy baptized all their followers, even though Jesus had not instructed them to do so.

13.15 AT THE PELLA CAMP

By mid-January, more than twelve hundred people had gathered at Pella, where Jesus taught this multitude at least once each day during his stay at the camp, typically speaking in the mid-morning unless interrupted by rain. Peter and the other followers taught each afternoon. Jesus reserved the evenings for question-and-answer sessions with the twelve and other advanced followers, with these evening groups averaging around fifty participants. By mid-March, the audience had grown to over four thousand individuals who attended the teachings of either Jesus or Peter each morning.

Jesus chose to conclude his work when interest in his message was at its peak, reaching its highest point during this second, non-miraculous phase of the teachings. While three-quarters of the crowd consisted of truth seekers, a significant number of Pharisees from Jerusalem and other regions were also present, along with many skeptics and critics.

Jesus and the twelve followers devoted much of their time to the multitude gathered at the Pella camp. The twelve paid little to no attention to the fieldwork, only accompanying Jesus occasionally to visit Abner's associates. Abner was well-acquainted with the Perean district, as this was the area where his former teacher, John the Baptist, had conducted most of his ministry. After initiating the Perean mission, Abner and the seventy never returned to the Pella camp.

13.16 THE GOOD SHEPHERD

A company of over three hundred Jerusalem, including Pharisees and others, followed Jesus north to Pella when he departed from the jurisdiction of the Jewish leaders after the Feast of Dedication. In the presence of these religious leaders and the twelve followers, Jesus delivered the lesson on The Good Shepherd. After half an hour of informal discussion with a group of approximately one hundred individuals, Jesus stated:

“On this night, I have much to share with you. Since many of you are my followers and some of you are my opponents, I will present these teachings in the form of a story, allowing each of you to take away what resonates with your heart.

“The true shepherd, during times of danger, gathers his flock in a sheepfold for the night. When morning arrives, he enters the fold through the door, and when he calls, the sheep recognize his voice. Any shepherd who gains access to the sheepfold by any means other than through the door is a thief and a robber. The true shepherd enters the fold, and his sheep, recognizing his voice, come out at his command; he leads the way, and the sheep follow him. His sheep follow him because they are familiar with his voice; they will not follow a stranger. They will flee from the stranger because they do not recognize his voice.

“This multitude gathered around us is like sheep. When we speak to them, they recognize the shepherd’s voice and follow us; at least, those who hunger for truth and righteousness do. Some of you are not of this fold; you do not know our voice, and you do not believe our teachings. Because some of you are false shepherds, these sheep do not recognize your voice and will not follow you.”

And when Jesus told this story, no one asked him a question. After a while, he began to speak again and continued to discuss the story: “You

who aspire to be the under-shepherds of our Heavenly Father's flocks must not only be worthy leaders but also nourish the flock with good food; you are not true shepherds unless you lead your flocks into green pastures and beside still waters. Every soul who embarks on the eternal path shall be able to progress toward the eternal pastures of heaven."

When they heard these words, his friends were confused, his followers were amazed, and the Pharisees from Jerusalem and the surrounding areas went out into the night, declaring that he was either mad or possessed by the devil. However, even some of the teachers from Jerusalem remarked that he spoke with authority. Furthermore, who has ever seen someone possessed by the devil open the eyes of a man born blind or perform all the remarkable deeds that this man has accomplished?

The following day, approximately half of these Jewish teachers expressed belief in Jesus' teachings, while the other half, in dismay, returned to Jerusalem and their homes.

13.17 SABBATH LESSON AT PELLA

By the end of January, the Sabbath afternoon crowds numbered nearly three thousand. On Saturday, January 28, Jesus delivered a lesson on Trust And Spiritual Preparedness. Following introductory remarks by Simon Peter, Jesus stated:

"I say to you, my friends, when they seek to execute me, be unafraid of them. Fear not those who, although they may be able to kill your body, have no more power over you afterward. I remind you to fear none but to rejoice in the knowledge that you will be part of the spiritual kingdom. And when our opponents bring you before the leaders of the synagogues and other high authorities, do not be concerned about what you should say, nor be anxious about how you should answer their questions, for the spirit that lives within you will undoubtedly teach you in that very hour what you should say.

“Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet, when these birds flit about in search of their sustenance, not one of them exists without the knowledge of God. To the heavenly spirits, even the very hairs of your head are counted. If all of this is true, why should you fear the many trifles that arise in your daily lives? I say to you: fear not; you are of much greater value than five sparrows.

“I have revealed our Heavenly Father to you and will guide you toward God and the spiritual fellowship of all. The latter I cannot achieve without your consent. God never compels anyone to enter heaven. The invitation has always been and will continue to be: whosoever will, let them come and freely begin the journey.”

When Jesus had finished speaking, many went forth to be baptized in the Jordan River, while he listened to the questions of those who remained.

13.18 THE RICH MAN

As Jesus' ambassadors baptized followers, Jesus conversed with those who lingered. A particular young man approached him and said that his father had died, leaving a substantial inheritance to him and his brother. However, his brother refused to grant him his rightful share. My brother refuses to divide this inheritance with me.

Jesus felt a mild indignation that this material-minded youth would raise such a business-related question for discussion. Nevertheless, he seized the opportunity to provide further instruction. Jesus delivered his lesson on Divine Inheritance, turning to all those around him and saying:

“Take heed and keep yourselves free from covetousness; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of the possessions he may acquire. Happiness does not stem from the power of wealth, nor does joy arise from riches. Wealth,

in itself, is not a curse; however, the love of riches often leads to such devotion to worldly things that the soul becomes blinded to the spiritual realities of God and the joys of eternal life in the spiritual kingdom.

“Let me tell you a story about a certain rich man whose land produced an abundant harvest. As he became increasingly prosperous, he began to ponder to himself, saying, ‘What shall I do with all my riches? I have so much that I have no place to store my wealth.’ After contemplating his dilemma, he declared, ‘This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, so that I will have ample space to store my produce and goods. Then I can say to myself, “You have ample wealth laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry, for you are rich and have an abundance of goods.”’

“However, this rich man was also unwise. In addressing the material needs of his mind and body, he neglected to store up treasures in heaven for the satisfaction of his spirit and the eternal life of his soul.

“He was not destined to enjoy the results of his hoarded wealth, for that very night, outlaws broke into his house with the intent to kill him. After plundering his barns, they set fire to what remained. As for the property that escaped the robbers, his heirs began to quarrel among themselves. This man amassed riches for himself on earth, but he was not rich in God.”

Jesus addressed the young man’s concerns about inheritance because he recognized that his issue stemmed from covetousness. Had this not been the case, Jesus would not have intervened, as he typically refrained from meddling in the temporal affairs of even his friends, let alone his followers.

When Jesus had finished his story, another man stood up and asked him if his followers should sell all their earthly possessions to follow and share everything in common, as the Essenes do. Is it a mistake to possess honest wealth? Jesus replied to this question:

“My friend, it is not a mistake to possess honorable wealth; however, it becomes a mistake when you allow material possessions to consume all your interests and divert your affections from spiritual pursuits. There is no error in having honest possessions on earth, as long as your treasure is also in the spiritual kingdom - where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

“There is a great difference between wealth that fosters covetousness and selfishness and wealth that is held and distributed in the spirit of stewardship by those who possess an abundance of this world’s resources. These individuals generously contribute to supporting those in need and to those who dedicate their efforts to new teachings. Many of you present here, who may lack financial means, are being fed and housed in the tented city because benevolent individuals of means have provided funds to your host, David Zebedee, for these purposes.

“However, never forget that wealth is not enduring. The desire for riches often obscures and can even destroy one’s spiritual focus. Be sure to recognize the danger of allowing wealth to become not your servant, but your master.”

Then, as the people gathered by the river to witness the baptism, the young man approached Jesus privately regarding his inheritance, believing that Jesus had treated him unfairly. After listening to him again, Jesus replied:

“Do not miss the opportunity to acquire your spiritual inheritance on a day like this, and do not indulge your covetous tendencies.

“The laws of inheritance will be administered fairly if you present your complaint to the court of the synagogue. My role is to ensure that you are aware of your heavenly inheritance.

“The scriptures state: ‘There is one who grows wealthy through caution and frugality, and this is the measure of his reward.’ However, he claims: ‘I have found peace and can now enjoy my possessions continually,’ yet he is unaware of what the future holds for him, and that he must ultimately leave all these things to others upon his death.

“The commandment says: ‘You shall not covet.’ Furthermore, it is written, ‘They have eaten, filled themselves, and grown fat; then they turned to other gods.’ The Psalms note that: ‘God abhors the covetous,’ and ‘the little a righteous man possesses is better than the riches of many wicked.’ Additionally, it advises, ‘If riches increase, do not set your heart upon them.’

“Jeremiah said: ‘Let not the rich man glory in his riches,’ and Ezekiel spoke the truth when he said: ‘With their mouths they make a show of love, but their hearts are set upon their own selfish gain.’ My son, what will it profit you if you gain the whole world and lose your own soul?”

Then Jesus went into his tent to rest for a while before the evening meal. When the followers finished baptizing, they came to talk with him about earthly wealth and treasures in heaven, but he was asleep.

13.19 LESSON ON WEALTH

That evening, after a meal, when Jesus and the twelve gathered for their daily conference, Andrew, while they were baptizing the followers, asked if Jesus would repeat his words for the benefit of the lingering multitude, which had not heard him. In response to Andrew’s request, Jesus said:

“Yes, Andrew, I will discuss with you the topics of wealth and self-sufficiency, but my words must differ somewhat from those spoken to the followers and the multitude. This is because you have forsaken everything, not only to follow the new teachings but also to serve as ambassadors of God. You already possess several years of experience and understand that the Heavenly Father you proclaim will not forsake you. You have dedicated your lives to teaching; therefore, do not be anxious or worried about the concerns of temporal life, what you shall wear.

“The welfare of the soul transcends mere food and drink; spiritual progress far surpasses the need for clothing. When you are tempted to doubt the reliability of your sustenance, consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have no storehouses or barns, yet our Heavenly Father provides food for each one of them that seeks it. Are you not more valuable than a ravens?

Jesus confirmed the lesson.

“All of your self-imposed anxiety and worrying doubts do little to meet your material needs. Which of you, by being anxious, can add a handbreadth to your stature or a day to your life? Since some matters are beyond your control, why do you devote self-imposed anxious thought to these issues?

“Consider the lilies, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin. Yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is cut down and cast into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, the ambassadors of the heavenly kingdom? O, you of little faith! Devote yourselves to your work, believing that our Heavenly Father knows your needs.

“Once and for all, let me assure you that if you dedicate your lives to the work of the new teachings, your true needs

will be met. Seek the greater good, and the lesser will be found within it. Ask for the heavenly, and the earthly will be included; the shadow will follow the substance.

“You are but a small group, yet if you have faith and do not stumble in fear, you will achieve this spiritual kingdom. You have stored your treasures where the purse does not grow old, where no thief can plunder, and no moth can destroy. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

“But in the work that lies ahead of us, and in what remains for you after I go to God, you will face significant trials. Each of you must remain vigilant against fear and doubt. Gird up the loins of your minds and keep your lamps burning. Be like those who are waiting for their boss to return from the wedding feast, so that when he comes and knocks, you can promptly open the door for him. The boss praises such watchful helpers, who are found faithful at that moment. Then, he will have his servants recline at the table while he serves them. A crisis is approaching in your lives, and you need to stay alert and prepared.

“You fully understand that no one would allow his house to be broken into if he knew the exact hour the thief would arrive. Therefore, remain vigilant for yourselves, for at an hour you least expect and in a manner you do not anticipate, I shall depart.”

For several minutes, the twelve sat in silence. Some of these warnings they had heard before, but not with the intensity presented to them at this moment.

13.20 ANSWER TO PETER’S QUESTION

As they sat in contemplation, Simon Peter inquired whether this story was intended solely for the twelve or for all followers. And Jesus responded:

“In times of testing, one’s soul is revealed; trials disclose what truly resides in the heart. When a servant is tested and proven, the head of the household may appoint that servant to oversee his household, confidently entrusting this faithful steward with the care and nurturing of his children. Similarly, I hope you will be entrusted with the welfare of God’s children when I return to God.

“But if the servant is lazy and begins to say in his heart, ‘My master is taking a long time to return,’ and starts to mistreat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with the drunkards, then the boss of that servant will come at a time when he does not expect him, and, finding him unfaithful, will dismiss him in disgrace.

“Therefore, it is wise to prepare yourselves for the day when you will be visited suddenly and unexpectedly. Remember, much has been given to you; thus, much will be required of you.

“We teach peace on earth, but my mission will not bring peace to the material affairs of people - not in our time, at least. Friends, relatives, and loved ones may find themselves at odds due to the lessons we impart. It is true that each of you, as followers, shall experience great and lasting peace within your own hearts, but peace on earth will not be realized until all are willing to embrace their glorious inheritance of fellowship with the Heavenly Father and God’s children. Nevertheless, go into all the world, proclaiming this teaching to all nations, every man, woman, and child.”

And thus concluded a full and busy Sabbath day. The following day, Jesus and the twelve went into the cities of northern Perea to meet with the seventy, who were working in these regions under Abner’s supervision.

13.21 NORTHERN PEREA

From February 11 to 20, Jesus and the twelve made a tour of the cities and villages in northern Perea where the associates of Abner and the members of the women's corps were actively working. They observed that these messengers were achieving success, and Jesus consistently drew his friends' attention to the fact that the teachings could spread without the need for miraculous signs. This entire three-month mission in Perea was carried out successfully with minimal assistance from the twelve followers.

13.22 AT RAGABA

On Sabbath, February 18, Jesus was in Ragaba, where a wealthy Pharisee named Nathaniel resided. As many of his fellow Pharisees were following Jesus and the twelve disciples throughout the region, Nathaniel prepared breakfast for approximately twenty guests on that Sabbath morning and invited Jesus to be the guest of honor.

By the time Jesus arrived at the breakfast, most of the Pharisees, along with two or three lawyers, were already seated at the table. Jesus immediately took a seat to Nathaniel's left, without first going to the water basins to wash his hands. Many of the Pharisees, particularly those who were sympathetic to Jesus' teachings, understood that he washed his hands only for reasons of cleanliness and disdained these purely ceremonial practices. Therefore, they were not surprised by his decision to come directly to the table without having washed his hands twice.

But Nathaniel was taken aback by Jesus' failure to adhere to the requirements of Pharisaic practice. After a significant amount of whispering between Nathaniel and an unfriendly Pharisee to his right, accompanied by numerous raised eyebrows and disdainful sneers from those seated opposite the Pharisee, Jesus finally said:

"I had thought that you invited me to your home to share a meal and perhaps to discuss the new teachings about God. However, I now realize that you have brought me here to witness a display of ceremonial devotion. You have honored me with this service; what else will you offer me as your guest on this occasion?"

"How carefully you cleanse the outside of the cups and platters while neglecting the pollution of the spiritual vessels. You ensure that you present a pious appearance to others, yet your inner selves are filled with self-righteousness and covetousness.

"God examines the inner motives of the soul as well as your outward pretenses and pious professions. The act of giving alms and paying tithes will not cleanse you of unrighteousness or allow you to stand clean. While it is commendable to attend to minor duties, you must not neglect the more significant requirements. Do not disregard justice, dismiss understanding, or reject truth!"

When Jesus was about to depart, one of the lawyers at the table addressed him, saying: In some of your statements, you reproach us. Is there nothing good in the Scribes, the Pharisees, or the lawyers? And Jesus, standing, replied to the lawyer:

"You, like the Pharisees, delight in the places of honor at feasts and in wearing long robes, while you impose heavy burdens that are difficult for people to bear. And when the souls of people stagger under these burdens, you do not even lift a finger to help them.

"You take great delight in building tombs for the prophets your ancestors killed! Your complicity in your fathers' actions is evident when you plot to kill those who come today, doing what the prophets did in their day - proclaiming God's fatherhood and revealing humanity's fellowship.

"You lawyers have taken away the key to knowledge from the common people! You refuse to walk the path of truth, and

at the same time, you seek to hinder all others who wish to walk it. However, you cannot close the doors of heaven; these doors are open to all who have the faith to enter, and they shall not be shut by those who are like whitewashed tombs, which, while appearing beautiful on the outside, are inwardly filled with the bones of the dead.”

When Jesus finished speaking at Nathaniel’s table, he left the house without partaking in any food. Some Pharisees who heard his words became followers of his teachings. However, a larger number became increasingly determined to lie in wait for him, hoping to catch some of his words that could be used to bring him to trial and judgment before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem.

13.23 AT AMATHUS

The following day, Jesus traveled with the twelve to Amathus, located near the border of Samaria. As they approached the city, they encountered a group of ten lepers who were residing nearby. Among this group, nine were Jews and one was a Samaritan. Typically, these Jews would have avoided any association or contact with the Samaritans; however, their shared affliction was sufficient to transcend their prejudices. They had heard much about Jesus and his earlier so-called miracles of healing. Additionally, since the seventy had a practice of announcing the expected arrival time of Jesus during his outings with the twelve, the ten lepers were aware that he was expected to appear in the area around this time. They were, therefore, stationed on the outskirts of the city, hoping to attract his attention and request healing. When the lepers saw Jesus approaching, they did not dare to come near him; instead, they stood at a distance and cried out: Have mercy on us; cleanse us from our affliction; heal us as you have healed others.

Jesus had just explained to the twelve that the Galileans and the Samaritans had readily accepted their message. However, the twelve followers were still reluctant to harbor any positive feelings toward the

long-despised Samaritans. Consequently, when Simon Zelotes noticed the Samaritan among the lepers, he attempted to persuade Jesus to proceed into the city without pausing to exchange greetings with them. Jesus asked Simon: "But what if the Samaritan loves God as much as the Jews do? Should we sit in judgment over our fellow men? Who can say? If we make these ten whole, perhaps the Samaritan will prove to be even more grateful than the Jews. Are you certain about your opinions, Simon?"

And Simon quickly replied: If you cleanse them, you will soon find out. Jesus responded: "It shall be, Simon, and you will soon know the truth regarding the gratitude of these people."

Jesus approached the lepers and said: "If you wish to be made whole, go immediately and show yourselves to the priests, as mandated by the law of Moses." As they went, they were healed. However, when the Samaritan realized he had been healed, he turned back and sought out Jesus, thanking God with a loud voice. Upon finding Jesus, he fell at his feet and expressed his gratitude for his healing.

The other nine, who were Jews, had also experienced their healing. While they expressed gratitude for their cleansing, they continued to present themselves to the priests. Meanwhile, the Samaritan remained kneeling at Jesus' feet. Jesus, looking around at the twelve, particularly at Simon Zelotes, said: Were not ten cleansed? Where, then, are the other nine? Only this Samaritan has returned to give thanks." Then said to the Samaritan: "Go your way; your faith has made you whole."

Jesus glanced once more at his friends as the stranger departed. All the followers turned their gaze toward Jesus, except for Simon Zelotes, whose eyes were cast downward. The twelve remained silent, and Jesus did not speak; he didn't have to do so. Although all ten believed they had leprosy, only four were actually afflicted. The other six had been cured of a skin disease that had been mistaken for leprosy. However, the Samaritan truly had leprosy; through God's blessing, the heavenly spirits had somehow healed them all.

Jesus instructed the twelve not to speak about the cleansing of the lepers. As they continued their journey into Amathus, he remarked: “You see how the children of the household, even when they are disobedient to their Heavenly Father’s will, take their blessings for granted. They consider it a trivial matter to neglect giving thanks when God heals them. In contrast, strangers, upon receiving gifts, are filled with wonder and express gratitude in recognition of the good things bestowed upon them.”

13.24 AT GERASA

As Jesus and the twelve conversed with the messengers in Gerasa, one of the Pharisees, who believed the teachings, inquired whether there would be few or many who would truly survive death. Jesus responded by saying:

“You have been taught that only the children of Abraham will survive death and that only the Gentiles who are adopted can hope for eternal life. Some of you have reasoned that, since the scriptures record that only Caleb and Joshua from among all the hosts who left Egypt lived to enter the promised land, only a comparatively few of those who seek heaven will find its entrance. However, every soul who sincerely desires to attain eternal life shall indeed find it.

“Someday, the prophets from the seed of Abraham will sit down with the teachers of the Gentiles, and together they will enter this spiritual kingdom. Those who find heaven will come from the north, south, east, and west.”

Jesus then presented a new interpretation of the well-known proverb regarding the straight and narrow path.

“You also have another saying, one that contains much truth: the path that leads to eternal life is straight and narrow, and the door that leads to it is likewise narrow, so that among those who seek eternal life, few can find entrance through this door.

“This proverb holds significant meaning. However, life is first a matter of your personal choice. Even if the door is narrow, it is wide enough to welcome all who sincerely seek to enter. The Heavenly Father will never deny entrance to any child who earnestly seeks to find him.

“Similarly, God stands at the doors of people’s hearts and knocks. If anyone opens, the Heavenly Father will enter. Then, the seekers will forever be brethren in their long and fruitful service and search for God.”

13.25 THOMAS’ QUESTION

While most Palestinians typically consumed only two meals a day, it was customary for Jesus and the followers, when traveling, to pause at midday for rest and refreshment. It was during one such noontime stop on the way to Philadelphia that Thomas inquired whether heavenly spirits are involved in producing strange and extraordinary events in the material world, and whether these spirits can prevent accidents. In response to Thomas’s question, Jesus delivered his Lesson On Accidents:

“All too long, your forefathers have believed that prosperity is a sign of divine approval and that adversity is evidence of God’s displeasure. Such beliefs are wrong. A far greater number of the poor joyfully embrace the teachings and attain heaven. If wealth is a testament to divine favor, why do the affluent often reject this message of heaven? The power of the spiritual world is not typically evident in the material existence of this world, except for the occasional revelations and healing of God’s afflicted children.

“God allows the rain to fall on both the just and the unjust; similarly, the sun shines on both the righteous and the unrighteous. You are aware of the Galileans, but I tell you, they were not greater sinners than the others. You also know about the eighteen men upon whom the tower of Siloam fell,

killing them. Do not think that these men, who were thus destroyed, were more guilty than all their brethren in Jerusalem. These individuals were merely innocent victims of one of life's accidents.

"There was a certain individual who planted a fig tree in his yard. After several seasons of searching for fruit and finding none, he called the vine dressers and said: 'I have come these past three seasons looking for fruit on this fig tree and have found none. Cut down this barren tree. Why should it take up space on the ground?' However, the head gardener replied to his employer, 'Let it remain for one more year, so that I may cultivate the soil around it and apply fertilizer. Then, next year, if it bears no fruit, it shall be cut down.' Because the tree was alive and healthy, they were rewarded with an abundant yield the following year.

"In the context of accidents, illness, and health, these physical conditions arise from material causes. Health is not a blessing from God, nor is suffering a punishment from him.

"When it comes to spiritual gifts, the only limitation is one's willingness to receive divine truths. Although God does not show favoritism, individuals may restrict themselves in spiritual gifts based on their beliefs and their willingness to align with our Heavenly Father's will."

As they journeyed toward Philadelphia, Jesus continued to teach them and address their questions regarding accidents, illness, and healing. *[However, one hour of instruction was insufficient to completely alter the beliefs formed over a lifetime. Therefore, Jesus felt it necessary to reiterate this message, emphasizing repeatedly what he wanted them to understand.]*

13.26 AT PHILADELPHIA

Throughout this period of teaching in the Perean region, only ten of Jesus' followers typically accompanied him, as it was customary to

leave at least two followers at Pella to instruct the assembled multitudes. As Jesus prepared to journey to Philadelphia, Simon Peter and his brother Andrew returned to the Pella encampment to teach the crowds gathered there. When Jesus departed from the camp at Pella to visit Perea, it was common for three to five hundred campers to follow him. Upon his arrival in Philadelphia, he was accompanied by over six hundred followers.

Jesus and the ten followers arrived in Philadelphia on Wednesday, February 22. They spent Thursday and Friday resting from their recent travels and labors. On Friday night, James spoke in the synagogue, and a general council was convened for the following evening.

No miracles occurred during the recent teaching tour through the Decapolis, except for the cleansing of the ten lepers. This was a time when the teachings were proclaimed with great power, often without the personal presence of Jesus or his immediate followers. The progress of the teachings in Philadelphia and the surrounding villages was met with much rejoicing. Additionally, the messengers of David brought news of further teachings throughout the region, as well as positive updates from Alexandria and Damascus.

13.27 PHILADELPHIA CONGREGATION

Of all the cities in Perea, Philadelphia, which had the largest population of Jews and Gentiles - rich and poor, learned and unlearned, enslaved and enslavers - embraced the teachings of the seventy. The synagogue in Philadelphia had never been under the supervision of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem and, therefore, had never been closed to the teachings of Jesus and his associates. At this time, Abner was teaching three times a day in the Philadelphia synagogue.

[Later, Abner found himself at odds with the leaders of the early church in Jerusalem due to disagreements regarding the jurisdiction of the Jerusalem church. He parted ways with Paul over theological differences, as his philosophical outlook was more aligned with Babylonian thought than Hellenic traditions. As the leader of a congregation that lacked recognition in Jerusalem, Abner was compelled to teach the lessons in isolation.]

[Abner stubbornly resisted Paul's attempts to modify the teachings of Jesus to make them more palatable to various groups - first to the Jews and then to the Greco-Roman followers of the mysteries. Although he was entirely sympathetic to Paul's mission to the Gentiles and supported him in his disputes with the Jerusalem congregation, he opposed the emphasis on Jesus' life over Jesus' teachings. In his later years, Abner denounced Paul as a "clever corrupter of the life teachings of Jesus of Nazareth."]

[Abner dared to defy James, the brother of Jesus, who subsequently received support from Peter. This feud between Jerusalem and Philadelphia persisted throughout the lifetimes of both James and Abner and continued for an extended period thereafter. This estrangement accounts for the limited documentation of Abner and his contributions in the New Testament records. Abner's synagogue in Philadelphia later transformed into a church, serving as the headquarters for disseminating teachings throughout the eastern regions. Abner lived to the age of 89, passing away in Philadelphia on November 21, 14 CE.]

13.28 BREAKFAST WITH THE PHARISEES

There lived in Philadelphia a very wealthy and influential Pharisee who had embraced Abner's teachings and invited Jesus to his home for Sabbath morning breakfast. It was widely known that Jesus was expected in Philadelphia at this time, prompting many visitors, including numerous Pharisees, to travel from Jerusalem and other locations. Consequently, approximately forty of these prominent individuals, along with a few lawyers, attended the breakfast, which had been organized in honor of Jesus.

As Jesus lingered by the door, conversing with Abner, and after the host had taken his seat, one of the leading Pharisees of Jerusalem, a member of the Sanhedrin, entered the room. As was his custom, he made a beeline for the seat of honor to the host's left. However, since this place had been reserved for Jesus and the seat on the right for Abner, the host gestured for the Jerusalem Pharisee to sit four seats to the left.

This dignitary was greatly offended by not receiving the seat of honor. Soon, they were all seated and enjoying each other's company, as most of those present were followers of Jesus or were supportive of the teachings. Only his opponents observed that he did not perform the ceremonial washing of his hands before sitting down to eat. Abner washed his hands at the beginning of the meal, but not during the serving of the meal.

Near the end of the meal, a man entered from the street, long afflicted with a chronic illness and now suffering from dropsy. This man was a follower, having recently been baptized by Abner's associates. Although he did not explicitly ask Jesus for healing, Jesus understood that this afflicted man had come to breakfast hoping to avoid the crowds and thereby increase his chances of gaining Jesus' attention.

This man understood that few so-called miracles were being performed; however, he had reasoned in his heart that his unfortunate situation might evoke the compassion of Jesus and God. He was not mistaken, for when he entered the room, both Jesus and the self-righteous Pharisee from Jerusalem took notice of him. The Pharisee was quick to express his resentment that someone like him should be allowed to enter. However, Jesus looked upon the sick man and smiled so kindly that he felt encouraged to draw near and sit on the floor.

As the meal was concluding, Jesus surveyed his fellow guests and, after casting a meaningful glance at the man suffering from dropsy, said: "My friends, esteemed teachers in Israel, and learned lawyers, I would like to pose a question to you: Is it lawful to heal the sick and afflicted on the Sabbath, or not?"

But those present knew Jesus too well; they remained silent and did not answer his question. Jesus then approached the sick man, took him by the hand, and said: "Arise and go your way. You have not asked to be healed, but I know the desire of your heart and the faith of your soul." It appears that God authorized heavenly spirits to heal the man.

Before the man left the room, Jesus returned to his seat and, addressing those at the table, said: "Our Heavenly Father permits such

works, not to tempt you into new teachings, but to reveal himself to those who already know the way to the spiritual kingdom. You can understand that it would be characteristic of God to act in this manner, for which of you, having a beloved animal that fell into a well on the Sabbath, would not go out and rescue it?"

Since no one would respond to Jesus, and his host evidently approved of the situation, Jesus stood up and addressed everyone present:

"My brethren, when you are invited to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, lest a more distinguished guest than you has been invited. The host may come to you and ask you to relinquish your seat for this esteemed guest. In such a case, you will be filled with shame as you are compelled to move to a lower position at the table.

"When you are invited to a feast, it would be wise to seek the lowest place at the table upon your arrival. This way, when the host surveys the guests, he may say to you: 'My friend, why do you sit in the lowest seat? Come up higher.' In doing so, you will receive honor in the presence of your fellow guests. Remember, everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, while he who genuinely humbles himself will be exalted in heaven.

"When hosting a dinner, do not only invite your friends, family, relatives, or wealthy neighbors with the expectation that they will reciprocate by inviting you to their gatherings. Consider inviting some of the poor, the disabled, and the blind. By doing so, you demonstrate humility, as you understand that they cannot repay your generous hospitality."

13.29 THE LAWYER'S QUESTION

As Jesus concluded his discourse at the breakfast table of the Pharisees, one of the lawyers present, eager to break the silence, thoughtlessly remarked: Blessed is he who shall eat the bread of God. This was a common saying of that time.

Then Jesus shared a story that even his gracious host felt compelled to reflect upon. He imparted his lesson on the Marriage Feast:

“A certain leader hosted a grand wedding feast and invited many guests. Nearing mealtime, he sent his helpers to inform those invited: ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ However, they all began to make excuses. The first said: ‘I have just purchased a field, and I must go inspect it; I ask you to excuse me.’ Another said: ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I must go to examine them; I ask you to excuse me.’ A third said: ‘I have just married a wife, and therefore I cannot attend.’

“So, the helpers went back and reported this to the leader. When he heard their message, he was outraged. Turning to his helpers, he said: ‘I have prepared this marriage feast; the fattened calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready for my guests. Yet, they have rejected my invitation; each has gone off to his own land, and they even show disrespect to my helpers who invited them to my feast. Go out quickly, therefore, into the streets and alleys of the city, and into the highways and byways, and invite the poor, the outcasts, the blind, and the lame, so that my marriage feast may be filled with guests.’ The helpers obeyed his command, and there was still room for more guests.

“Then the leader said to his helpers: ‘Go out into the roads and the countryside and invite those who are there to come in, so that my house may be filled.’ The helpers complied with his request, and the house was filled.”

And when they heard these words, they departed; each person returned to his own place. One of the mocking Pharisees present that morning understood the significance of this story, for he was baptized that day and made a public confession of his belief in the new teachings. Abner taught this lesson that night at the general council of followers.

The following day, all of the followers participated in the philosophical exercise of attempting to interpret the meaning of the story of the Marriage Feast. Although Jesus listened with interest to their varying interpretations, he declined to provide any additional assistance in understanding the story. He stated, “Let everyone discover the meaning for themselves and within their own soul.”

13.30 WOMAN WITH THE INFIRMITY

Abner had arranged for Jesus to teach in the synagogue on this Sabbath day, marking the first time Jesus had appeared in a synagogue since the Sanhedrin had ordered all synagogues to close to his teachings.

After the service, Jesus looked down at an older woman who wore a downcast expression and was significantly bent over. This woman had long been plagued by fear, and all joy had vanished from her life. As Jesus stepped down from the pulpit, he approached her and, gently touching her shoulder, said: “Woman, if you would only believe, you could be completely freed from your spirit of infirmity.”

This woman, who had been bent over and burdened by the weight of fear for more than eighteen years, believed the words of Jesus and immediately stood up straight. Upon realizing that she was upright, she lifted her voice and glorified God. Although her affliction was entirely mental, with her hunched posture resulting from her depressed state of mind, the people believed that Jesus had healed a genuine physical ailment.

Although the congregation of the Philadelphia synagogue was receptive to Jesus’ teachings, the chief of the synagogue was a hostile Pharisee. He expressed his disapproval to the congregation, arguing that Jesus had healed a physical ailment and was indignant that Jesus had dared to perform such an act on the Sabbath. He stood before the congregation and asked: If there are not six days in which people should do all their work? Therefore, come and be healed on those days, but not on the Sabbath.

When the unfriendly leader had finished speaking, Jesus returned to the platform and said: "Why act as hypocrites? Does not each of you, on the Sabbath, lose his ox from the stall and lead him out for watering? If such a service is permissible on the Sabbath, should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham who has been bound for eighteen years, be freed from this bondage even on this Sabbath?"

As the woman continued to praise God, her critic felt ashamed, and the congregation rejoiced with her for her healing. Consequently, due to his public criticism of Jesus on that Sabbath, the chief of the synagogue was deposed, and a follower of Jesus was appointed in his stead.

Jesus taught once more in the synagogue on Sunday, and Abner baptized many people at noon that day in the river that flowed south of the city.

The following day, Jesus and the ten ambassadors were preparing to return to the Pella encampment when one of David's messengers arrived with an urgent message for Jesus from his friends in Bethany, near Jerusalem.

Lazarus' Resurrection

14.0 RESURRECTION DECISION

Very late on Sunday night, February 26, a runner from Bethany arrived in Philadelphia, delivering a message from Martha and Mary that said he is very sick. This message reached Jesus after the evening conference, just as he was preparing to bid farewell to his followers for the night. Initially, Jesus did not respond. Then, for a period, Jesus seemed to engage in communication with something beyond himself. Finally, looking up, he addressed the messenger in the presence of the followers, saying: "This sickness will not lead to death; rather, it may serve to further reveal the divine nature of God."

Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and their brother Lazarus; he loved them fervently. His initial, human instinct was to rush to their aid immediately, but another thought soon emerged. He had nearly lost hope that the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem would ever embrace the new teachings. Nevertheless, he still cared deeply for his people, and a plan occurred to him that might provide the Scribes and Pharisees of Jerusalem with another opportunity to accept these new lessons. He resolved, God willing, to make this final appeal to Jerusalem the most profound and remarkable demonstration of his entire ministry.

The Jews of that era held firmly to the belief in a miraculous Deliverer. Although he declined to engage in material wonders or to

demonstrate political power through temporal displays, he did seek God's permission to reveal the previously unseen powers of God over life and death to convince the unbelieving.

Jews traditionally buried their dead on the day of their passing, a practice deemed necessary in a warm climate. It was not uncommon for individuals who were merely comatose to be placed in the tomb, leading to instances where a comatose person would emerge from the tomb on the second or even third day. However, Jewish belief held that while the soul might linger near the body for two or three days, it would not remain after the third day. By the fourth day, decomposition had progressed to such an extent that no one was believed to return from the tomb after such an extended period.

For these reasons, Jesus delayed for two full days in Philadelphia before preparing to depart for Bethany. Consequently, early on Wednesday morning, he said to his friends: "Let us prepare at once to go into Judea again."

When the followers heard their teacher's words, they withdrew for a time to confer with one another. James took the lead in the discussion, and they all agreed that it would be unwise to allow Jesus to return to Judea. They returned as a united group to inform him, with James stating: We were in Jerusalem a few weeks ago, and the leaders sought your death while the people were inclined to stone you. At that time, you allowed them to accept the truth, but they did not. We will not permit you to go back to Judea. Then Jesus replied:

"There are twelve hours in the day during which work can be safely accomplished. If one walks during the day, he does not stumble because he has light. However, if one walks at night, he is likely to stumble due to the absence of light. As long as my day lasts, I do not fear entering Judea.

"I would perform one more mighty work for these sons of Abraham; I would give them another opportunity to learn the new teachings, even on their own terms - conditions of

visible manifestation of the power of our Heavenly Father.

Furthermore, our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, and I would go to awaken him from this slumber!”

Then one of the followers remarked that if Lazarus had merely fallen asleep, he would surely recover on his own. At that time, it was customary for the Jews to refer to death as a form of sleep. However, since the followers did not comprehend that Jesus meant Lazarus had departed from this world, he stated plainly, “Lazarus is dead. And I am glad that all shall now have a new reason to believe in the teachings; by what you will witness, you should all be strengthened.”

When they could not persuade him to refrain from going to Judea, and some of the followers were reluctant even to accompany him, Thomas addressed his companions, stating: We have expressed our fears to the Master, but he was resolute in his decision to go to Bethany. I am convinced that this signifies the end; they will surely kill him. However, if that is the Master’s choice, let us conduct ourselves like men of courage. Let us also go, so that we may die with him.

In situations that demanded deliberate and sustained courage, Thomas consistently served as the cornerstone for the twelve followers.

14.1 ON THE WAY TO BETHANY

On the way to Judea, Jesus was accompanied by a company of nearly fifty friends and opponents. During their lunchtime on Wednesday, he addressed this assembly on the Terms Of Life. After this lesson, he recounted the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector. Jesus said:

“You see, then, that our Heavenly Father offers eternal life to all people, and this life is a free gift to all who have the faith to receive fellowship in the divine family. There is nothing one can do to earn this life. Acts of self-righteousness cannot purchase God’s favor, and extensive public prayer will not compensate for a lack of genuine faith

in the heart. While you may deceive others with your outward service, God looks into your souls.

“What I am conveying is well illustrated by two men who went into the temple to pray: one was a Pharisee, and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed to himself: ‘O, God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity - extortioners, uneducated, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I acquire.’

“But the tax collector, standing at a distance, would not even lift his eyes; instead, he struck his breast, saying to himself: ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner.’ Remember that everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted in heaven.”

Some followers interpreted this story to suggest that the Pharisee judged himself by the lowest standard, while the publican measured himself against the highest ideal. The Pharisee’s devotion led to a form of self-righteous complacency and a false sense of spiritual security, whereas the tax collector’s devotion inspired a deep awareness of his humility and his need for mercy. They recognized that the Pharisees pursued justice, while the publicans sought mercy.

That night in Jericho, hostile Pharisees attempted to entrap Jesus by provoking him to discuss marriage and divorce, similar to what his followers had done once in Galilee.

Though Jesus declined to engage in a controversy with the Pharisees regarding divorce, he did articulate a positive teaching that emphasized the highest ideals of marriage. He elevated marriage as the most ideal and significant of all human relationships. Simultaneously, he expressed strong disapproval of the lax and unjust divorce practices prevalent at that time, which allowed a man to divorce his wife for trivial reasons, such as being a poor cook, an inadequate housekeeper, or simply because he had become infatuated with a more attractive woman.

So, while Jesus refrained from making definitive statements regarding the marriage and divorce laws of his time, he vehemently condemned the egregious violations of the sanctity of marriage and highlighted the injustices faced by women and children. His followers came to understand that Jesus never endorsed any divorce practices that favored men over women; he only supported teachings that promoted equality between women and men.

After Jesus discussed marriage and divorce, his friends privately asked him several additional questions that evening. His responses alleviated many of their misconceptions. Jesus worked diligently to elevate the ideals of social union and to enhance respect for women, children, and the family unit.

Following this discussion, Jesus stated: "Marriage is honorable, and my decision to pursue this mission independently does not reflect on the desirability of marriage. My commitment to this work is in accordance with our Heavenly Father's will. However, men and women can find their greatest fulfillment and joy in establishing homes for the nurturing and upbringing of children, in the creation of whom these parents become partners. For this reason: 'a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and they two shall become one.'"

It required considerable effort for the followers to comprehend Jesus' hesitance to make additional positive statements regarding scientific, social, economic, and political issues. They did not fully understand that his mission was solely focused on revealing spiritual truths.

14.2 BLESSING THE LITTLE CHILDREN

That evening, Jesus' message about marriage and children spread throughout Jericho. The next morning, long before Jesus and the followers prepared to leave - indeed, even before breakfast - scores of mothers and fathers came to the place where Jesus was staying, bringing their children in their arms and leading them by the hand, and they requested that he honor the little ones.

When the followers went out to view this gathering, they attempted to send them away. However, they refused to leave until Jesus laid his hands on their children and prayed for them. When the followers loudly rebuked these mothers, Jesus, hearing the tumult, came out and indignantly reproved them, saying: "Let the little children come to me; do not hinder them, for the spiritual kingdom belongs to such as these. Truly, I tell you, anyone who does not receive God like a little child will hardly enter it and grow to the full stature of spiritual adulthood."

And when Jesus had spoken to his friends, he welcomed all the children, laying his hands on them and speaking words of encouragement and hope to their parents. In connection with the discussion on the early religious training of children, it was also at Jericho that Jesus emphasized to his listeners the immense value of guiding children to communicate with God. This, along with other teachings of Jesus, significantly enhanced the status of children and women in the region.

Later, Jesus taught the value of communicating with the God through both precept and example, particularly in the natural surroundings of creation. Personally, he preferred to converse with God among the trees and the humble creatures of the natural world. He found joy in contemplating God through the inspiring spectacle of the starry realms of the Heavenly Father. He suggested that when it is not possible to engage with God in the "tabernacles of nature," people should strive to create spaces of beauty within their homes, sanctuaries characterized by appealing simplicity and artistic design. He said that such environments can evoke the highest human emotions and facilitate an emotional approach to spiritual communication with God. Jesus understood that truth and beauty serve as powerful and effective aids to authentic communication.

14.3 LAZARUS

Shortly after noon, Martha went to meet Jesus as he approached the crest of the hill near Bethany. Her brother, Lazarus, had been dead for four days and had been laid to rest in their private tomb at the far end of the garden late on Sunday afternoon.

The stone at the entrance of the tomb had been rolled into place on Thursday morning of that week. When Martha and Mary initially informed Jesus about Lazarus's illness, they were confident that he would take action. They understood that their brother was gravely ill. Although they scarcely dared to hope that Jesus would interrupt his teaching to help him, their faith in his healing power was so strong that they believed he would simply speak the words of healing, and Lazarus would be restored to health immediately.

When Lazarus died a few hours after the messenger left Bethany for Philadelphia, they reasoned that Jesus had not learned of their brother's illness until it was too late - after Lazarus had already been dead for several hours. However, they, along with their believing friends, were greatly puzzled by the message that the runner brought back on Tuesday afternoon when he reached Bethany. The messenger insisted that he had heard Jesus say: "This sickness is not unto death." They could not understand why Jesus had sent no word to them or offered assistance.

Many friends from nearby hamlets, as well as others from Jerusalem, came to comfort the grief-stricken sisters. Lazarus and his sisters were the children of a prosperous and respected Jewish family, with their father being a prominent resident of the small village of Bethany. Despite being ardent followers of Jesus, they were highly regarded by everyone who knew them. They had inherited extensive vineyards and olive orchards in the area and could afford a private burial tomb on their property. Both of their parents had already been interred in this tomb.

Mary had relinquished her hope for Jesus' return and was consumed by her grief, while Martha held onto the belief that Jesus would come. This hope persisted even on the morning when the stone was rolled in front of the tomb and the entrance was sealed. At that moment, she instructed a young neighbor boy to keep watch along the Jericho Road from the hilltop to the east of Bethany. This boy later brought news to Martha that Jesus and his companions were approaching.

When Martha met Jesus, she fell at his feet, exclaiming: Had you had been here, my brother would not have died! Many fears were likely racing through Martha's mind; however, she expressed no doubt and did not criticize or question Jesus' actions regarding Lazarus's death. When she had spoken, Jesus reached down, lifted her to her feet, and said: "Only have faith, Martha, and your brother shall rise again." Martha replied: I know that he will rise again in heaven. Jesus then looked directly into Martha's eyes and said: "Yes, he who believes, though he dies, shall live. In truth, whoever lives and believes shall never truly die. Martha, do you believe this?" Martha answered Jesus: Yes, I have long believed that.

Jesus, having inquired about Mary, prompted Martha to go immediately into the house. She whispered to her sister: The Master is here and has asked for you. Mary quickly rose and hurried out to meet Jesus, who was still some distance away from the house where Martha had first encountered him. The friends who were with Mary, seeking to comfort her, followed her when they noticed her swift departure, assuming that she was going to the tomb to mourn.

Many of those present were bitter opponents of Jesus. This is why Martha had come out to meet him alone and discreetly informed Mary that he had asked for her. Although Martha longed to see Jesus, she wished to avoid any potential unpleasantness that might arise from his sudden arrival among a large group of adversaries from Jerusalem. Martha had intended to stay in the house with their friends while Mary went to greet Jesus; however, she was unsuccessful in this plan, as everyone followed Mary and unexpectedly found themselves in Jesus' presence.

Martha led Mary to Jesus, and when she saw him, she fell at his feet, exclaiming: If you had only been here, my brother would not have died! Jesus saw how they all grieved over the death of Lazarus, he was moved with compassion. The mourners, noticing that Mary had gone to greet Jesus, withdrew briefly. Meanwhile, Martha and Mary spoke with Jesus, receiving further comfort and encouragement to maintain a strong belief in God and to seek his will.

The human mind of Jesus was profoundly affected by the conflict between his love for Lazarus and his grieving sisters, and his disdain for the superficial displays of affection exhibited by some of the unbelieving neighbors. While Jesus resented their ostentatious mourning for Lazarus, though some were genuinely sincere in their grief, as they were true family friends.

14.4 AT THE TOMB OF LAZARUS

After Jesus spent a few moments comforting Martha and Mary, away from the mourners, he asked them: "Where have you laid him?" Martha then replied: Come and see. As Jesus silently followed the two grieving sisters, he wept.

When the friendly Jews who followed them saw his tears, one of them remarked that he surely loved him. Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind have prevented this man from dying? Many of Jesus' adversaries were inclined to mock his displays of affection, and they whispered among themselves: If he cared so deeply for this man, why did he wait so long before coming to Bethany? If he is who they claim he is, why did he not heal his dear friend? What is the value of healing strangers in Galilee if he cannot heal those he loves?

By this time, they stood before the family tomb, a small natural cave or declivity on the ledge of rock that rose approximately thirty feet at the far end of the garden plot. Jesus had mixed feelings about bringing Lazarus back to mortal life. Although his sisters desperately needed him, Jesus felt a deep regret about having him endure the bitter persecution he knew Lazarus would face as the subject of the greatest demonstration of divine power.

Jesus spoke the commanding words: "Take away the stone." In response, a multitude of heavenly spirits prepared to enact the drama of Lazarus's resurrection in the likeness of his mortal flesh. This form of resurrection undoubtedly presented challenges of execution that far exceeded the typical supernatural methods of the heavenly spirits.

When Martha and Mary heard Jesus' command to roll away the stone in front of the tomb, they were filled with conflicting emotions. Mary hoped that Lazarus would be raised from the dead, but Martha, while

somewhat sharing her sister's faith, was more preoccupied with the fear that Lazarus would not be presentable in appearance. Martha asked if Jesus must roll away the stone, saying: My brother has been dead for four days, and by this time, his body has begun to decay. Martha expressed this concern because she was unsure why Jesus had requested the stone be removed; she thought perhaps Jesus wanted only to take one last look at Lazarus. Her attitude seemed unsettled and inconsistent. As they hesitated to roll away the stone, Jesus said: "I told you that this sickness would not end in death? Why do you doubt?"

When Jesus had finished speaking, his friends, along with the help of willing neighbors, took hold of the stone and rolled it away from the entrance of the tomb.

It was a common belief among the Jews at the time that the drop of blood on the point of the sword of the "angel of death" began to take effect by the end of the third day, reaching full potency on the fourth day. They believed that the soul of an individual might linger near the tomb until the end of the third day, attempting to reanimate the deceased body; however, they held that by the fourth day, the soul had departed to the realm of the spirits. These beliefs about the dead and the departure of their spirits assured all those present at Lazarus's tomb that this was indeed a genuine case of the raising of the dead by the working of Jesus and the heavenly spirits.

14.5 RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS

As the company of approximately forty-five people stood before the tomb, they could faintly discern the figure of Lazarus, wrapped in linen bandages, resting in the lower right niche of the burial cave. Jesus lifted his eyes and said: "Heavenly Father, I am grateful that you have heard and granted this request. I know that you always hear me, but for the sake of those who stand here with me, I speak to you now, so that they may believe and understand that you are working with me in what is about to be done."

And when he had prayed, he called out with a loud voice: "Lazarus, come forth!"

Although these human observers remained motionless, it is likely that the heavenly spirits were acting in unified harmony, responding to God's will. In just twelve seconds, the previously lifeless form of Lazarus began to move and eventually sat up on the edge of the stone shelf where he had been resting. His body was wrapped in grave clothes, and his face was covered with a napkin. As he stood before them - alive - Jesus said: "Lose him and let him go."

All, except for the followers, along with Martha and Mary, fled to the house. They were pale with fear and overwhelmed with astonishment. While some lingered in the area, many hurried to their homes.

Lazarus greeted Jesus and his followers, inquiring about the meaning of the grave cloths and why he had awakened in the garden. Jesus and the followers drew to one side while Martha explained to Lazarus the details of his death, burial, and resurrection. She clarified that he had died on Sunday and had now been brought back to life on Thursday, as he had been unaware of the passage of time since falling into the sleep of death.

As Lazarus emerged from the tomb, he approached Jesus and, along with his sisters, knelt at Jesus' feet to offer thanks and praise to God. Jesus, taking Lazarus by the hand, lifted him up, saying: "My son, what has happened to you will also be experienced by all who believe the teachings, except that they shall be spiritually resurrected in a more glorious form. You will be a living witness to the truth we have taught. But let us now go into the house and partake of nourishment for our physical bodies."

Lazarus could hardly comprehend what had transpired. He was aware that he had been gravely ill, but he could only remember falling asleep and then awakening. He could never articulate anything about the four days he spent in the tomb, as he had been unconscious during that time.

By noon the following day, this story had spread throughout all of Jerusalem. Numerous men and women traveled to Bethany to see Lazarus and speak with him. The alarmed and unsettled Pharisees quickly convened a meeting of the Sanhedrin to decide how to address these new developments.

14.6 MEETING OF THE SANHEDRIN

Even though the testimony of the man raised from the dead significantly strengthened the faith of the multitude of followers in the teachings, it seemingly had little to no impact on the attitudes of the religious leaders in Jerusalem. Instead, it only expedited their decision to halt his work and execute Jesus. Early in the afternoon, the following day, Friday, the Sanhedrin convened to further deliberate the question: What shall we do with Jesus of Nazareth? After more than two hours of discussion and heated debate, a certain Pharisee proposed a resolution calling for Jesus' immediate execution, asserting that he posed a threat to all of Israel and formally committing the Sanhedrin to the decision of death without trial.

Time and again, this esteemed assembly of Jewish leaders decreed that Jesus be apprehended and brought to trial on charges of blasphemy and various other accusations of violating Jewish law. They had previously gone so far as to declare that he should die, but this was the first time the Sanhedrin had officially expressed a desire to decree his death before a trial.

However, this resolution did not come to a vote, as fourteen members of the Sanhedrin resigned from the council when such an unprecedented action was proposed. Although these resignations were not formally acknowledged for nearly two weeks, this group of fourteen withdrew from the Sanhedrin on that day, never to return. Additionally, five other members were expelled when these resignations were eventually processed, as their colleagues suspected they harbored sympathetic sentiments toward Jesus. With the removal of these nineteen individuals, the Sanhedrin was ultimately able to try and condemn Jesus with a level of solidarity approaching unanimity.

Lazarus and his sisters were summoned to appear before the Sanhedrin the following week. Once their testimony was heard, there could be no doubt that Lazarus had been raised from the dead. Although the proceedings of the Sanhedrin effectively acknowledged

the resurrection of Lazarus, the official record included a resolution attributing this miracle, along with all other wonders performed by Jesus, to the power of an alleged devil, with whom Jesus was claimed to be in collusion.

Regardless of the source of his miraculous power, many Jewish leaders were convinced that if he were not stopped immediately, the common people would soon accept his teachings. Furthermore, they feared that severe complications with the Roman authorities would arise, as many of his friends regarded him as the Messiah, Israel's Deliverer.

It was during this same meeting of the Sanhedrin that Caiaphas, the high priest, first articulated the old Jewish adage that he repeated many times: 'It is better for one person to die than for the community to perish.' The Pharisees and the chief priests began to formulate their charges and clarify their accusations. They objected to Jesus' teachings on the following grounds

- He is a friend of publicans and sinners; he welcomes the ungodly and even dines with them.
- He is a blasphemer; he refers to God as his Father and believes he represents God.
- He is a lawbreaker, healing diseases on the Sabbath and disregarding the sacred laws of Israel in numerous other ways.
- He is in league with the alleged devil, performing wonders and apparent miracles through the power of a supposed Satan.

Although Jesus had received a warning about the actions of the Sanhedrin on that Friday afternoon, he remained completely unperturbed. He continued to rest over the Sabbath with friends in Bethphage, a small village near Bethany. Early Sunday morning, Jesus and the followers gathered, as previously arranged, at the home of Lazarus and quickly bid farewell to the Bethany family. They then set out on their journey back to the Pella encampment.

On the journey from Bethany to Pella, the followers posed numerous questions to Jesus, all of which he answered freely, except for those concerning the specifics of the resurrection of the dead.

He believed that such discussions were beyond the comprehension of his friends. He would only state that it was the will of the Heavenly Father.

Since they had departed from Bethany in secret, they were alone. Therefore, Jesus seized the opportunity to share many insights with the ten, believing it would prepare them for the challenging days ahead.

The followers appeared to be deeply stirred in their minds and spent considerable time discussing their recent experiences related to prayer and its significance. They all recalled Jesus' statement to the messenger from Bethany in Philadelphia when he clearly said, "This sickness is not unto death."

14.7 LAZARUS LEAVES FOR PHILADELPHIA

Lazarus remained at his home in Bethany, becoming the focus of great interest for many devoted followers and numerous curious onlookers until the week of Jesus' execution. He then received a warning that the Sanhedrin had decreed his death. The leaders were determined to halt the further spread of Jesus' teachings, recognizing that it would be futile to execute Jesus while allowing Lazarus, who epitomized the pinnacle of Jesus' miraculous works, to live and testify to the fact that Jesus had raised him from the dead. Lazarus had already endured severe persecution from them.

And so, Lazarus quickly bid farewell to his sisters in Bethany, fleeing through Jericho and crossing the Jordan River, never allowing himself to rest for long until he reached Philadelphia. He was well acquainted with Abner and felt secure from the intrigues of the Sanhedrin in this place. Soon after, Martha and Mary sold their lands in Bethany and joined their brother in Perea.

[Lazarus eventually became the treasurer for the followers in Philadelphia. He was a strong supporter of Abner and ultimately died at the age of 61 from the same illness that had afflicted him in his youth at Bethany.]

14.8 AT PELLA

Late on Monday evening, March 6, Jesus and the ten followers arrived at the Pella camp. This marked the final week of Jesus' life there, during which he was highly engaged in teaching the multitude and instructing the followers. He delivered lessons to the crowds every afternoon and spent each night answering questions from his followers, including some of the more advanced individuals residing at the camp.

The news of Lazarus's resurrection had reached the encampment two days before Jesus' arrival, and the entire assembly was filled with curiosity. Not since the feeding of the five thousand had anything captured the public's imagination to such an extent. Consequently, it was at the peak of the second phase of his public teaching that Jesus intended to spend one brief week in Pella before embarking on a tour of southern Perea, which would lead directly to the final events of the last week in Jerusalem.

14.9 THREE STORIES

On Thursday afternoon, Jesus delivered his Lesson On Grace. During this session, he recounted the story of the lost sheep and the lost coin, and then added his favorite Story Of The Prodigal Son. Jesus stated:

“You have been admonished by the prophets, from Samuel to John, always to seek God. They said, ‘Seek God while he may be found.’ Such teachings should be taken to heart. However, I have come to show you that while you seek to find God, God is also seeking to find you.

“I have often told you the story of the good shepherd who left the ninety-nine sheep in the fold to search for the one that was lost. When the lost sheep was restored to the fold, the good shepherd called his friends and invited them to rejoice with him over the recovery of the sheep that had been lost. Again, I say there is more joy in heaven over one soul that is found than over the ninety-nine who are not lost.

“You have been taught that divine acceptance follows your repentance and is a result of your acts of penitence. However, our Heavenly Father accepts you even before you repent, and God seeks you out and brings you back to the fold. You are all like sheep that have gone astray, and God seeks all those who are lost.”

He then recounted the Story Of The Lost Silver:

“You should also remember the story of the woman who, after having ten pieces of silver made into a necklace, lost one piece. She lit a lamp, diligently swept the house, and continued her search until she found the lost piece of silver.

“As soon as she found the lost coin, she called her friends and neighbors together, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the lost piece!’ Similarly, there is always joy in heaven over one person who returns to our Heavenly Father’s fold.

“This story emphasizes that God actively seeks out those who are lost. In this pursuit, He utilizes all available influences to aid in the diligent efforts to locate them.

“Therefore, venture into the wilderness to search for the sheep that has gone astray; seek the coin that is lost within the house. The sheep wanders away unintentionally, while the coin is obscured by the dust of time and hidden beneath the accumulation of various belongings.

“And now I would like to tell you the Story Of The Parodical Son. A reckless young man from a prosperous farming family who intentionally left his father’s home and ventured into a foreign land, where he fell into much trouble. You may remember that the sheep wandered away unintentionally, but this young man departed from his home with deliberate intent.

“This story is about a man who had two sons. The younger son was lighthearted and carefree, always seeking enjoyment and avoiding responsibility, while his older brother was

serious, sober, hard-working, and willing to shoulder his duties. The two brothers did not get along well; they frequently quarreled and bickered. The younger son was cheerful and vivacious but also indolent and unreliable, whereas the older son was steady, industrious, self-absorbed, surly, and conceited.

“This association became so unpleasant that the younger son approached his father and said, ‘Father, please give me the portion of your possessions that would belong to me, and allow me to venture into the world to seek my own fortune.’ When the father heard this request, understanding how unhappy the young man was at home and with his older brother, he divided his estate, granting the youth his share.

The story continued.

“Within a few weeks, the young man gathered all his funds and embarked on a journey to a distant land. However, after finding nothing profitable that was also enjoyable, he quickly squandered his entire inheritance on extravagant living. When he had exhausted all his resources, a severe famine struck that country, leaving him in dire need. As he experienced intense hunger and great distress, he sought employment with one of the local citizens, who sent him into the fields to tend to the pigs. The young man would have gladly filled his stomach with the husks that the pigs ate, but no one offered him anything.

“One day, when he was starving, he came to his senses and said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, while I am here perishing with hunger, feeding pigs in a foreign land! I will arise and go to my father and say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; please make me like one of your hired servants.’ When the young man reached this decision, he got up and began walking to his father’s house.

“This father had grieved deeply for his son; he missed the cheerful, albeit thoughtless, young man. The father loved his son and was always hopeful for his return. Therefore, on the day the son approached his home, even while he was still far off, the father saw him and, filled with loving compassion, ran out to meet him. With an affectionate greeting, he embraced and kissed him.

“After their meeting, the son looked up into his father’s tearful face and said, ‘Father, I have sinned against you and in your sight; I am no longer worthy of being called your son.’ However, the young man did not have the chance to complete his confession because the overjoyed father instructed his helpers, who had by this time come running: ‘Quickly bring out the best robe, the one I have saved, and put it on him. Place the ring on his hand and fetch sandals for his feet.’

“After the joyful father had led the weary and footsore lad into the house, he called to his helpers, ‘Bring out the fatted calf and slaughter it. Let us eat and celebrate, for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they all gathered around the father to rejoice with him over the restoration of his son.

“About this time, while they were celebrating, the elder son returned from his day’s work in the field. As he approached the house, he heard the music and dancing. When he reached the back door, he called one of the helpers and inquired about the meaning of all the festivities. The helper replied, ‘Your long-lost brother has come home, and your father has killed the fatted calf to celebrate his son’s safe return. Come in so that you also may greet your brother and welcome him back into your father’s house.’

“However, when the older brother heard this, he was so hurt and angry that he refused to enter the house. When his father learned of his resentment towards the warm welcome given to his younger brother, he went out to persuade him.

“The older son would not yield to his father’s entreaties. He replied, ‘For many years I have served you, never once disobeying your commands, yet you never gave me even a young goat so that I could celebrate with my friends. I have remained here to care for you all these years, and you have never shown joy for my faithful service. But when my brother returns, having squandered your wealth on prostitutes, you hasten to kill the fatted calf and celebrate his return.’

“Since this father truly loved both of his sons, he tried to reason with the older one: ‘But, my son, you have been with me all along, and everything I have is yours. You could have celebrated with your friends whenever you wanted. However, it is only right that you join me in rejoicing over your brother’s return. Consider this, my son: your brother was lost and is now found; he has returned to us alive!’”

The followers observed that Jesus often shared these three stories simultaneously. He presented the story of the lost sheep, apparently to demonstrate that when individuals unintentionally stray from the path of life, true shepherds actively seek out those who are lost. Jesus then recounted the story of the lost coin to illustrate the thoroughness of divine searching for all who are confused, confounded, or spiritually blinded by the material concerns and accumulations of life. Finally, Jesus reiterated the story of the lost son to emphasize the completeness of the restoration of the lost son into his father’s house and heart.

Throughout his years of teaching, Jesus frequently shared and reiterated these stories, and the story of The Good Samaritan, as his preferred method of conveying the love of God and the compassion for God’s children.

14.10 THE SHREWD STEWARD

One evening, Simon Zelotes, reflecting on one of Jesus' statements, inquired about the meaning of Jesus' assertion that many of the individuals in the world are wiser than individuals of the new teachings, as they were skillful in making friends with the allure of unrighteousness? Jesus answered:

“Before joining me, many of you were quite astute in your dealings with business associates. Although you may have been unjust and unfair, you were nonetheless prudent and far-sighted, transacting your business with a focus on both immediate profit and future security. Similarly, you should now organize your lives to ensure present joy while also securing future enjoyment of the treasures stored in heaven. If you were so diligent in pursuing personal gains while serving yourselves, why should you exhibit any less diligence in winning souls for the new teachings, now that you are servants of God and stewards of the fellowship of God's people?

“You may all learn a valuable lesson from the story of a certain wealthy man and his cunning yet dishonest steward. This steward not only exploited his employer's clients for his own selfish benefit but also directly mismanaged and squandered his employer's resources. When these actions eventually reached the ears of his employer, he summoned the steward to confront him about the rumors and demanded an immediate accounting of his stewardship, instructing him to prepare to hand over his employer's affairs to another.

“Now, this unfaithful steward began to contemplate: ‘What shall I do, since I am about to lose this stewardship? I have no strength to dig, and I am too ashamed to beg. I know what I will do to ensure that, when I am removed from this stewardship, I will be welcomed into the homes of all who do business with my boss.’

“And then, calling in each of his boss's debtors, he asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my boss?’ The debtor

replied, 'A hundred measures of oil.' The steward then said, 'Take your wax tablet, sit down quickly, and change it to fifty.' He then inquired of another debtor, 'How much do you owe?' That debtor answered, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' The steward replied, 'Take your bond and write eighty.' He did this with numerous other debtors as well. Thus, this dishonest steward sought to make friends for himself after being discharged from his position. When the boss subsequently learned of this, he was compelled to acknowledge that his unfaithful steward had at least demonstrated shrewdness in his efforts to prepare for future days of need and hardship.

"And in this way, the children of this world often demonstrate greater preparation for a material future than for a spiritual one. I say to you who claim to be acquiring treasure in heaven: learn from those who befriend the allure of unrighteousness. Similarly, conduct your lives in such a manner that you forge eternal friendships with the forces of righteousness, so that when all earthly things fail, you may enter into eternal habitations.

Jesus continued the story.

"I affirm that he who is faithful in little will likely also be faithful in much, while he who is unrighteous in little can also be unrighteous in much. If you have yet to demonstrate foresight and integrity in the affairs of this world, how can you expect to be faithful and prudent when entrusted with the stewardship of the spiritual riches of the spiritual kingdom? If you are not good stewards and trustworthy custodians, and if you have not been faithful in that which belongs to another, it would be unwise to grant you great treasure in your own name.

"No one can serve two masters; either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will love to one while hating the other. You cannot love and serve both God and wealth."

When the Pharisees heard this, they began to sneer and scoff, as they were particularly focused on acquiring wealth. These antagonistic listeners attempted to engage Jesus in unproductive arguments, but he declined to debate with them. As the Pharisees began to quarrel among themselves, their loud discussions attracted a large crowd of onlookers nearby. When their disputes escalated, Jesus withdrew to his tent for the night.

14.11 TEACHINGS ON GOD

Saturday afternoon, March 11, Jesus delivered his final lesson at Pella. This address was one of the most significant of his public teachings, encompassing a discussion about God and the spiritual kingdom. While Jesus revealed the nature of God through his earthly living, he spoke sparingly about the nature of the Heavenly Father. He taught only two key teachings: that God is spirit and that he embodies the role of a Father in all relationships with humanity.

He was aware of the confusion that existed in the minds of his friends and followers regarding the meanings of the terms “heaven,” “heavenly kingdom,” “new kingdom,” and “spiritual kingdom,” which he used interchangeably - and later the term “fellowship of souls.” The concept of a temporal king was deeply ingrained in the people’s minds, so Jesus did not initially oppose this long-held notion of a “kingdom.” Jesus often struggled to explain to his followers that, while they proclaimed a “kingdom,” God was not a king, and the kingdom was a spiritual, not a place. During Jesus’ time, people primarily understood kings and emperors in the context of national governments. Jesus never referred to the Heavenly Father as a king.

Jesus never provided the followers with a systematic lesson on the personality and attributes of God. He did not ask people to believe in God; rather, he assumed that they already did. Jesus did not present arguments as evidence for the existence of God. His teachings about God emphasized that God is all-knowing and that God wanted Jesus to reveal God to humanity.

Jesus made no other pronouncements about God except to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, when he said: "God is spirit." When quoting the Hebrew scriptures, Jesus referred to God by only two names: "God" and "Heavenly Father."

To the Jews, Elohim represented the God of gods, while Yahweh was recognized as the God of Israel. Jesus broadened the Jewish understanding of Yahweh as a deified Father to encompass the idea of a Heavenly Father for all humanity - a Divine Father for each individual. Jesus taught that God is the Father who sends a spirit to dwell within the souls of individuals. As a spirit, God understands us through spiritual experiences. He indicated that people in this material world can best understand God in the role of a Father.

Jesus taught the followers that God can be known only through the realities of experience; he can never be fully understood through mere mental instruction. Jesus told his followers that, while on earth, they could never fully comprehend God; they could only partially know him, just as they had come to know Jesus.

His followers were instructed that one could understand God more profoundly by observing how Jesus lived rather than by merely listening to his words. Jesus never said: "He who has heard me, has heard God," but he did say: "He who has seen me, has seen the Father." The followers realized that hearing Jesus' teachings is not equivalent to knowing God; rather, experiencing Jesus' life is more like a revelation of God.

14.12 TEACHINGS ON HEAVEN

Jesus could not avoid using the traditional term "kingdom." In his public teachings, he introduced various concepts of the spiritual kingdom at different times and under diverse circumstances. Nevertheless, he consistently conveyed to his followers that the spiritual kingdom encompasses a fellowship of human souls. Jesus said: "The kingdom is within you. It is not a place."

Jesus never provided a precise definition of the spiritual kingdom. At one moment, he would discuss one aspect and at another, he would address a different facet. Jesus often referred to heaven using various terms, such as: the “Kingdom Of Life,” “God’s Fellowship,” an experience like the “Family Fellowship” with God as the Father, the “Family Of God,” the “Father’s Will,” the “Fellowship Of Followers,” the “Brotherhood Of Man,” the “Father’s Fold,” and the “In The Father’s Service.” Jesus aimed to offer multiple terms for the spiritual kingdom to enhance his followers’ understanding.

The Pella lesson aimed to translate the concept of the spiritual kingdom into the notion of following God’s will. During this lesson, Jesus earnestly encouraged his followers to abandon the term “spiritual kingdom” in favor of the more fitting phrase, “fellowship of souls.” He explained that this unseen community represented their ongoing personal experience of embodying the higher qualities of spiritual living. This spiritual experience was progressively elevated to new and higher levels of divine certainty through various heavenly “mansions.” *[Later generations interpreted this to mean that the spiritual fellowship’s emergence in the hearts of individuals was a gradual process, akin to the leaven in dough or the growth of a mustard seed.]*

On this afternoon, Jesus clearly articulated a new concept regarding the nature of heaven:

“The fellowship of souls represents the ultimate aspiration to fulfill the will of God, including the selfless love for God’s children, which in turn fosters enhanced ethical and moral behavior. It is the objective of mortal beings to reach a state of the soul in which the love of God is perfected and the will of God is executed.”

Jesus taught that two essential elements are necessary to attain the fellowship of souls:

- Belief and Sincerity - Approach life with the innocence of a child, embracing the gift of fellowship. Submit to the will of our Heavenly Father without question. Enter with an open heart, free

from prejudice and preconceived notions. Be open-minded and teachable, like an untrained child.

- Hunger for Truth - The thirst for righteousness, a transformation of the mind, and the motivation to seek God and to be like God.

With these two desires, seekers on earth will strive to serve all of God's children. Despite these teachings, some followers struggled to comprehend the true meaning of Jesus' statements about the fellowship. While some understood aspects of his teachings concerning the inner kingdom - the spiritual light within you - they also recognized that he had referred to a future kingdom. Consequently, some believed he was heading to Jerusalem to establish a new material kingdom.

[Later writers were influenced by the mistaken belief of some of the followers that Jesus would be absent from the world for a time, but that he would return to establish a kingdom on earth characterized by power and glory. They did not differentiate between a potential physical return and the concept of his return in a spiritual form. Although Jesus referred to and, on several occasions, explicitly promised that he would reappear after his death, he never promised his return would be anything other than in a spiritual form.]

14.13 ON THE WAY TO JERUSALEM

The day after this memorable Lesson On Heaven Jesus announced that he and the followers would depart for the Passover in Jerusalem the following day, visiting several cities in southern Perea along the way.

On this Sunday afternoon, Salome, the mother of James and John Zebedee, approached Jesus with her two sons, seeking to have him promise in advance to grant whatever request she might make, much like one would approach an empress. However, Jesus did not make any promises; instead, he asked her: "What do you want me to do for you?" Then Salome asked Jesus, now that he was going up to Jerusalem to establish a new kingdom, if he would promise in advance that her sons would have honor with him, the one to sit at his right hand and the other at his left in the kingdom.

When Jesus heard Salome's request, he said: "Woman, you do not know what you are asking." He explained that heaven is spiritual, not physical; there is neither a right hand nor a left hand. Then, looking directly into the eyes of the two ambitious followers, he continued: "Because I have long known and loved you; I have even lived in your mother's house. Andrew has assigned you to be with me at all times; therefore, do you permit your mother to come to me secretly, making this unseemly request? But let me ask you: Can you truly endure the cup of bitterness, shame, and humiliation?"

Without a moment's hesitation, James and John responded affirmatively, confirming that yes, they were able. Then Jesus said: "I am saddened that you do not understand why we go up to Jerusalem; you do not grasp the nature of the kingdom. I am disappointed that you brought your mother to make this request of me. However, I know that you love me in your hearts; therefore, I am confident that you will indeed drink from the bitter cup. Nevertheless, to sit at my right hand and my left hand is impossible."

By this time, someone had informed Peter and the other followers about the conference, and they were greatly indignant that James and John would seek to be favored above them and would secretly approach their mother to make such a request.

When they began to argue among themselves, Jesus called them all together and said: "You are well aware that the leaders of the Gentiles exercise dominion over their subjects and believe they possess great authority. However, it shall not be so in fellowship of souls. Whoever desires to be great among you must first become your servant. He who wishes to prosper must become the minister to the people."

When the followers heard these words, they withdrew to pray in solitude.

That evening, in response to the efforts of Peter, James, and John, suitable apologies were made to the other ten, and they were restored to the good graces of their brethren.

14.14 DEPARTURE FROM PELLA

On the morning of Monday, March 13, Jesus and his twelve followers took their final leave of the Pella encampment, heading south on their journey through the cities of southern Perea, where Abner's associates were active. They spent over two weeks visiting these cities before proceeding directly to Jerusalem for Passover.

When Jesus departed from Pella, the followers camped alongside approximately one thousand new adherents who had joined him. About half of this group left him at the Jordan Ford on the road to Jericho upon learning that he was heading to Heshbon. They went up to Jerusalem, while the other half continued to follow him for two weeks, visiting towns in southern Perea.

Acting on Andrew's instructions, David Zebedee closed the visitors' camp at Pella on Wednesday, March 15. At that time, nearly four thousand people were in residence, not including the more than one thousand individuals who stayed with the followers at what was known as the teachers' camp and who traveled south with Jesus and the twelve. Much as David disliked the decision, he sold all the equipment to various buyers and took the proceeds to Jerusalem, where he subsequently handed the money over to Judas Iscariot, the treasurer.

While waiting for Jesus and the followers, David stopped with Lazarus in Bethany. He found that Lazarus had become increasingly agitated by the persecution and harassment he faced from the Pharisees since his resurrection.

Andrew had advised David to discontinue the messenger service, leaving him without a job. David had nearly resolved to become the self-appointed defender of Lazarus until Lazarus soon fled in haste to Philadelphia.

[After Jesus' death, and also after the death of Jesus' mother, David traveled to Philadelphia, having first assisted Martha and Mary in managing their real estate. There, in collaboration with Abner and Lazarus, he spent the remainder of his life, becoming the financial overseer for all those interested in the new teachings. He was at the forefront of the Philadelphia teachings during Abner's lifetime.]

14.15 AT BETHABARA

When Jesus and the company of nearly one thousand followers arrived at the Bethany Ford of the Jordan, sometimes referred to as Bethabara, his followers began to understand that he was not heading directly to Jerusalem. As they hesitated and debated among themselves, Jesus ascended a large stone and delivered the discourse known as Counting The Cost. Jesus said:

“Those who wish to follow us from this moment forward must be prepared to pay the price of complete dedication to fulfilling our Heavenly Father’s will. To be a true follower, you must be willing to forsake your father, mother, spouse, children, brothers, and sisters. If any of you desire to be a follower now, you must be ready to give up even your life, just as I am about to offer up my own.

“If you are unwilling to pay the full price, you can hardly be a true follower. Before proceeding further, each of you should sit down and count the cost of being a follower. Which of you would undertake to build a watchtower on your property without first assessing whether you have sufficient funds to complete it? If you fail to consider the cost after laying the foundation, you may find that you cannot finish what you have started. Consequently, all your neighbors will mock you, saying, ‘Behold, this man began to build but was unable to finish his work.’

“Again, when one king prepares to wage war against another, which king does not first sit down and deliberate on whether he can confront an opponent who approaches with twenty-thousand men, given that he has only ten thousand at his disposal? If the king determines that he is unprepared to face his enemy, he sends an envoy to the opposing king, even while the latter is still a considerable distance away, seeking terms of peace.

“Now, you must sit down and count the cost of being a true follower. If the cost is too high, you will not be able to follow us. Each of you will be required to endure bitter persecutions and bear witness to this teaching in the face of overwhelming disappointment. If you have already conquered your own heart, you need not fear when the chief priests and the Sadducees reject me, and I am handed over to the derision of those who do not follow.

“Now, examine yourself to reflect on your motives for being a follower. If you seek honor and glory and are focused on worldly matters, you resemble salt that has lost its flavor. How can it be seasoned again when that which is valued for its saltiness has become tasteless? Such a condiment is useless.

“Now I have now warned you to return to your homes in peace if you are not willing to drink from the cup of bitterness, shame, and humiliation that is being prepared.”

Immediately after speaking these words, Jesus, accompanied by the twelve, started on the journey to Heshbon, followed by approximately five hundred individuals. After a brief delay, the other half of the crowd proceeded to Jerusalem. His followers, along with the prominent leaders among them, contemplated these words deeply; however, some continued to hold onto the belief that, following this short period of adversity and trial, the worldly kingdom would undoubtedly be established in accordance with their long-cherished hopes.

14.16 PEREAN TOUR

For more than two weeks, Jesus and the twelve, followed by a crowd of several hundred followers, traveled through southern Perea, visiting all the towns where the seventy had ministered. Many Gentiles resided in this region, and since few attended the Passover feast in Jerusalem, the teachers continued their work uninterrupted.

Jesus met Abner at Heshbon, and Andrew instructed that the labors of the seventy should not be interrupted by the Passover feast. Jesus advised the messengers to continue their work, regardless of what would transpire in Jerusalem. He also counseled Abner to allow those in the women's corps, at least those who wished, to go to Jerusalem for Passover.

This was the last time Abner ever saw Jesus in the flesh. His farewell to Abner was: "My son, I know you will be true, and I hope our Heavenly Father grants you the wisdom to love and understand your brethren."

As they journeyed from city to city, a significant number of their followers departed on the way to Jerusalem. By the time Jesus set out for the Passover, the number of those who accompanied him daily had dwindled to fewer than two hundred.

The followers understood that Jesus was traveling to Jerusalem for Passover. They were aware that the Sanhedrin had informed all of Israel that he had been condemned to die and had instructed anyone who knew his whereabouts to report to them. However, despite this, they were not as alarmed as they had been when he announced in Philadelphia that he was going to Bethany to see Lazarus.

This shift in attitude from intense fear to a state of hushed expectancy was primarily due to Lazarus's resurrection. They concluded that Jesus might, in a moment of crisis, demonstrate his divine power and put his adversaries to shame. Many of the new followers, along with his inner circle, did not believe that Jesus could die; they regarded him as "the resurrection and the life," viewing him as immortal and already victorious over death.

14.17 AT LIVIAS

On the evening of Wednesday, March 29, Jesus and his companions camped at Livias while en route to Jerusalem, having completed their tour of the cities in southern Perea. During their stay at Livias, Simon

Zelotes and Simon Peter conspired to acquire more than one hundred swords, which they received and distributed to all who were willing to accept and conceal them beneath their cloaks. Simon Peter was still carrying his sword in the garden on the night of Jesus' betrayal. Although Jesus was aware of the swords and knew which of his friends had received and were wearing these weapons, he never revealed to them that he possessed such knowledge.

Early on Thursday morning, before the others were awake, Jesus called Andrew and said: "Awaken your brethren! I have something to share with them." Once Andrew had roused his companions and they had gathered together, Jesus spoke to them:

"My children, you have been with me for a long time, and I have taught you much that is essential for this moment. However, I now caution you not to place your trust in the uncertainties of the flesh or in the frailties of human defenses against the trials and tests that lie ahead of us.

"I have gathered you here in solitude to clearly convey once more that we are going up to Jerusalem, where you know I have already been condemned to death. Again, I tell you that I will be handed over to the chief priests and the religious leaders; they will condemn me and then deliver me to the Romans. They will mock me, spit upon me, and scourge me, ultimately leading to my death. However, do not be dismayed when they kill me, for on the third day, I shall reappear in another form. Take heed of yourselves and remember that I have forewarned you."

Again, the followers were clearly amazed and astonished, yet many of them struggled to accept his words as literal; they could not grasp that Jesus meant exactly what he said. However, none of them dared to ask him questions regarding these statements. *[It was not until after his death that these bewildered followers recognized that Jesus had spoken to them plainly and directly in anticipation of his execution.]*

It was here at Livia's, shortly after breakfast, that a group of friendly Pharisees approached Jesus and urged him to flee quickly from the area: Herod, who had previously sought John, now seeks to kill you. He fears a potential uprising among the people and has resolved to kill you. We bring you this warning so that you may escape.

And this was partly true. The resurrection of Lazarus frightened and alarmed Herod. Knowing that the Sanhedrin had dared to condemn Jesus even before a trial, Herod resolved either to kill Jesus or to expel him from his territories. He genuinely preferred the latter option, as he feared Jesus so much that he hoped he would not be forced to execute him.

When Jesus heard the remarks of the Pharisees, he responded:

"I am well aware of Herod and his fear of these new teachings. However, do not be mistaken; he would much prefer that I go up to Jerusalem to suffer and die at the hands of the chief priests. He is not eager, having stained his hands with the blood of John, to take responsibility for the death of a representative of God. Go and tell that fox that I am teaching in Perea today, and tomorrow I will go into Judea. After a few days, I will have completed my mission and will be prepared to go to God.

"From olden times, prophets have perished in Jerusalem, and it is only fitting that an ambassador of God should go up to the city of the Father's house and perish. O Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone the teachers of truth! How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her own brood under her wings, but you were unwilling! You will desire to see me many times, but you shall not. You will seek me, but you will not find me."

And when he had finished speaking, he turned to those around him and said: "Nevertheless, let us go up to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover and fulfill the will of God." A confused and bewildered group of associates followed Jesus into Jericho on that day. The followers could

only perceive the unmistakable note of final triumph in Jesus' declarations regarding the new teachings; they failed to comprehend the warnings of this impending death.

When Jesus spoke of "appearing on the third day," some interpreted this statement as a sign of the imminent triumph of an earthly kingdom, following an unpleasant preliminary skirmish with the religious leaders. The phrase "third day" was a common Jewish expression meaning "presently" or "soon thereafter."

14.18 HEALING BARTIMEUS

On the afternoon of Thursday, March 30, Jesus and his twelve followers, at the head of approximately two hundred followers, approached the walls of Jericho. As they neared the city gate, they encountered a crowd of beggars, among whom was Bartimeus, an elderly man who had been blind since his youth. This blind beggar had heard much about Jesus and was aware of his healing of the blind man Josiah in Jerusalem. He had only learned of Jesus' last visit to Jericho after Jesus had departed for Bethany. Bartimeus had resolved that he would never again allow Jesus to visit Jericho without appealing to him to restore his sight.

News of Jesus' approach had been heralded throughout Jericho, and hundreds of the inhabitants flocked to meet him. When this great crowd returned, escorting Jesus into the city, Bartimeus, hearing the heavy tramping of the multitude, sensed that something unusual was occurring. He asked those standing nearby what was happening, and one of the beggars replied that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by.

When Bartimeus heard that Jesus was near, he lifted his voice and began to cry out: Jesus, have mercy on me! As he continued to shout louder and louder, some of those nearby approached him and rebuked him, asking him to be quiet; however, this only prompted him to cry out even more loudly. When Jesus heard the blind man calling out, he stopped. Upon seeing him, he said to his friends: "Bring the man to me." And then they approached Bartimeus and encouraged him to be of good cheer, for Jesus had summoned him. When Bartimeus heard these

words, he discarded his cloak and sprang forward toward the center of the road, while those nearby guided him to Jesus.

Addressing Bartimeus, Jesus asked: "What do you want from me?" The blind man requested the restoration of his sight. Upon hearing this request and witnessing his faith, Jesus replied, "You shall receive your sight; go your way; your belief has made you whole." Immediately, Bartimeus regained his sight and chose to stay near Jesus until the following day when Jesus began his journey to Jerusalem. He then went before the multitude, proclaiming to everyone how his vision had been restored in Jericho. Jesus never disclosed how the heavenly spirits had restored Bartimeus' sight.

14.19 VISIT TO ZACCHEUS

When Jesus' procession entered Jericho, it was nearing sundown, and he intended to stay there for the night. As Jesus passed by the customs house, Zaccheus, the chief publican or tax collector, happened to be present and greatly desired to see Jesus. This tax collector was very wealthy and had heard much about this prophet from Galilee. He had resolved to see what sort of man Jesus was the next time he visited Jericho. Accordingly, Zaccheus attempted to push through the crowd, but it was too large, and being short in stature, he could not see over their heads. Thus, the chief publican followed the crowd until they reached the city center, close to where he lived.

When he realized that he could not penetrate the crowd and feared that Jesus might continue through the city without stopping, he ran ahead and climbed into a sycamore tree whose spreading branches overhung the roadway. He knew that this would provide him with a good view of Jesus as he passed. He was not disappointed; as Jesus approached, he stopped, looked up at Zaccheus, and said: "Zaccheus, come down, for tonight I should stay at your house."

When Zaccheus heard these astonishing words, he nearly fell out of the tree in his eagerness to descend. Approaching Jesus, he expressed immense joy that Jesus should be willing to visit his home. They went

to Zaccheus's house immediately, and the residents of Jericho were greatly surprised that Jesus would choose to stay with the chief tax collector. Even as Jesus and his companions lingered at the door of Zaccheus's house, one of the Pharisees from Jericho, standing nearby, remarked on how they could see that this man had chosen to lodge with a sinner, an apostate son of Abraham, who was an extortioner and a thief among his own people.

And when Jesus heard this, he looked down at Zaccheus and smiled. Then Zaccheus stood upon a stool and proclaimed, O Jericho, hear me! I may be a publican and a sinner, but the great teacher has come to abide in my house. Before he enters, I tell you that I will give half of all my possessions to the poor, and starting tomorrow, if I have wrongfully exacted anything from anyone, I will restore it fourfold. I will seek a new life with all my heart and strive to do righteousness in the sight of God.

When Zaccheus had finished speaking, Jesus said: "Today belief has come to this home, and you have truly become a follower." Turning to the crowd gathered around them, Jesus continued: "Do not marvel at what I say, nor take offense at what we do, for I have come to seek and to save that which is lost."

They stayed with Zaccheus for the night. The following morning, they arose and made their way along the "road of robbers" to Bethany, en route to the Passover in Jerusalem.

14.20 AS JESUS PASSED BY

The followers began to recognize that Jesus spread joy wherever he went. His companions were continually amazed by his gracious words. Jesus had a profound understanding of people; as a result, he could express genuine sympathy and demonstrate sincere compassion. He truly loved every person, regardless of age or gender. His remarkable insight allowed him to be a true friend, as he fully understood what resided in each mind and soul.

They also recognized that Jesus was never in a hurry. He took the time to comfort those “as he passed by,” and he consistently made his friends feel at ease. Both friends and opponents observed that Jesus refrained from the intrusive probing of the thoughts of those around him. As he comforted hungry minds and ministered to thirsty souls, the recipients of his teachings did not feel as though they were confessing to him; rather, they felt they were conferring with him. His followers saw that those talking with Jesus had unwavering confidence in him because they perceived that he had immense faith in them. Jesus was able to discern genuine faith even amidst the gross superstition of the woman who sought healing by touching the hem of his garment.

His followers were occasionally frustrated by Jesus' readiness to stop a lesson or delay a gathering to attend to the needs of an individual, even a small child. This approach was integral to Jesus' mission, which lacked the characteristics of professionalism, meticulous planning, or premeditation in his earthly ministry. Indeed, he went about doing good. Many of the significant actions and statements of Jesus appeared to occur spontaneously, “As he passed by.”

14.21 LESSON ABOUT ARCHELAUS

The followers departed from Jericho around noon, having stayed up late the previous night as Jesus shared the new teachings with Zaccheus and his family. About halfway along the ascending road to Bethany, the group paused for lunch while the multitude continued on to Jerusalem, unaware that Jesus and the followers would spend the night on the Mount of Olives.

The Story Of The Pounds was communicated primarily to Jesus' followers. It was largely based on the experiences of Archelaus and his unsuccessful attempt to seize control of the kingdom of Judea - one of the few narratives of Jesus that was rooted in an actual historical figure. Jesus may have had Archelaus in mind, as the house of Zaccheus in Jericho was located very close to Archelaus' ornate palace, and his aqueduct ran along the road they took when departing from Jericho.

This time, Jesus said:

“You believe I am going to Jerusalem to receive the new kingdom, but you are destined for disappointment. Recall a certain noble who traveled to a distant land to claim a kingdom. Even before he could arrive, the citizens of his province, who had already rejected him in their hearts, sent an embassy to him, declaring: We will not have you reign over us. Just as this noble was rejected in the material rule, so too will I be rejected in the material rule.

“And now, as the rejected noble of this story called forth his special stewards, he placed one pound into each of their hands, admonishing them to heed his instructions carefully. He urged them to diligently utilize their trust funds while he was away, so that they could justify their stewardship upon his return, when an accounting would be required.

“Later, when these stewards were called together for an accounting, the first approached, saying: ‘Sir, with your pound, I have earned ten pounds more.’ And his boss said to him: ‘Well done; you are a good servant. Because you have proven faithful in this matter, I will grant you authority over ten cities.’ And the second steward then came forward, stating: ‘Sir, I have generated five pounds.’ And the boss said: ‘I will therefore appoint you as leader over five cities.’

“And so, one by one, the others were called to account until the last of the helpers reported: ‘Sir, behold, here is your pound, which I have kept safely wrapped in this napkin. And I did this because I feared you; I believed that you take up what you did not lay down and seek to reap where you have not sown.’ Then the noble said: ‘You unhelpful servant, you have condemned yourself with your own words. You knew that this reckoning would be required of you. Knowing this, you should have at least deposited my money with the banker, so that upon my return, I might have received it with at least some interest.’

“Then the nobleman said to those who stood by: ‘Take the money from this servant and give it to the one who has ten pounds.’ When they reminded this noble that this person already had ten pounds, he replied: ‘To everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.’”

The followers sought to understand the difference between the meaning of this story and that of the former story of the talents. However, Jesus responded to their numerous inquiries by saying, “Ponder these words in your hearts as each of you discovers their true meaning.”

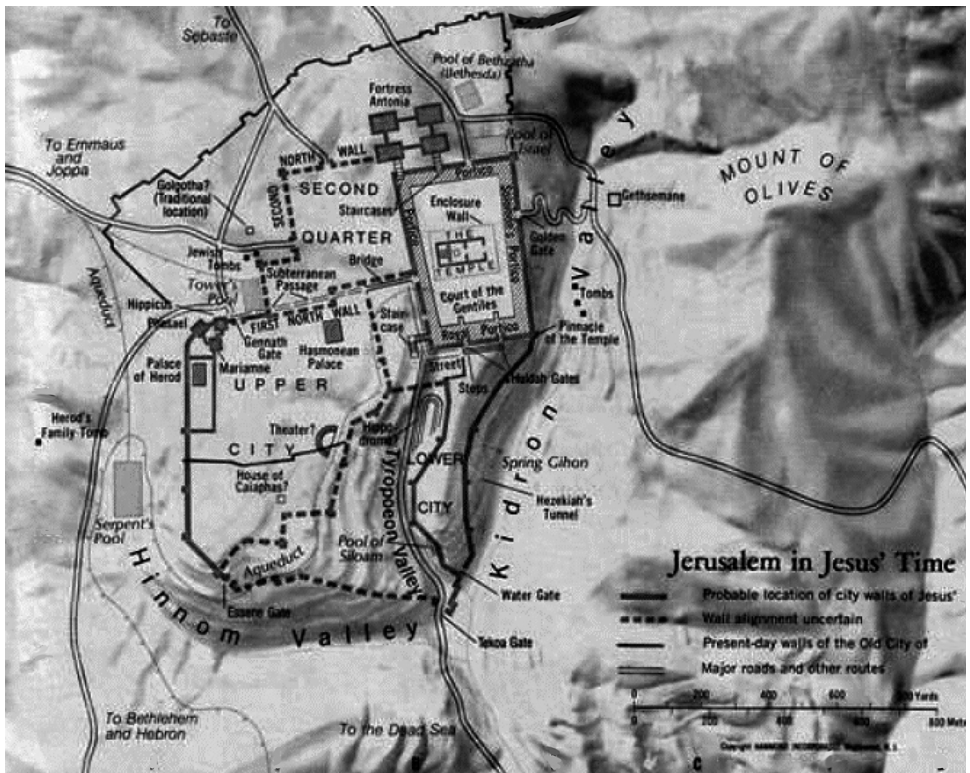
[In the later years, it was Nathaniel who endeavored to convey the significance of these two stories, summarizing his thoughts in the following conclusions:

- *Ability is a practical measure of life's opportunities. One cannot be held accountable for achieving what is beyond one's capabilities.*
- *Faithfulness is the unwavering measure of human trustworthiness. One who is faithful in small matters is also likely to demonstrate faithfulness in all aspects that align with their abilities.*
- *Grant a lesser reward for lesser faithfulness when the opportunity is similar, and grant a like reward for like faithfulness when the opportunity is reduced.]*

When they had finished their lunch and the multitude of followers had proceeded toward Jerusalem, Jesus stood before them in the shade of an overhanging rock by the roadside. With cheerful dignity and gracious majesty, he pointed his finger westward and said: “Come, my brethren, let us go into Jerusalem to receive that which awaits us; thus shall we fulfill the will of God.”

And so, Jesus and his friends resumed their final journey to Jerusalem.

Jerusalem



15.0 GOING INTO JERUSALEM

Jesus and the followers arrived in Bethany late in the afternoon on Friday, March 31, 30 CE. Lazarus, his sisters, and their friends were

eagerly anticipating their arrival. Due to the numerous visitors who came daily to speak with Lazarus about his resurrection, Jesus was informed that accommodations had been arranged for him with a neighboring follower, Simon of Bethany, a prominent citizen of the small village since the passing of Lazarus's father.

That evening, Jesus received numerous visitors, and the residents of Bethany and Bethphage made every effort to ensure he felt welcome. While some believed that Jesus was defiantly entering Jerusalem in violation of the Sanhedrin's death decree to declare himself the king of the Jews, the family from Bethany - Lazarus, Martha, and Mary - believed more profoundly that Jesus was not a king. They sensed, albeit vaguely, that this might be his final visit to Jerusalem and Bethany.

The chief priests were informed that Jesus was staying in Bethany, but they deemed it prudent not to attempt to seize him in the company of his friends; instead, they decided to wait for his arrival in Jerusalem. Jesus was aware of their intentions, yet he remained majestically calm; his friends had never seen him more composed and congenial. Even his followers were astonished by his apparent unconcern, especially since the Sanhedrin had conspired to deliver him into their hands. While Jesus slept that night, the followers kept vigil in pairs, many of them armed with swords. Early the next morning, they were awakened by hundreds of pilgrims who had come from Jerusalem, even on the Sabbath, to see Jesus and Lazarus.

15.1 SABBATH AT BETHANY

Pilgrims from outside Judea, along with the authorities in Jerusalem, were all asking: What do you think? Will Jesus come to the feast? Consequently, when the people learned that Jesus was in Bethany, they were pleased. However, the chief priests and Pharisees felt somewhat perplexed. While they were glad to have him under their jurisdiction, they were also slightly unsettled by his boldness. They recalled that during his previous visit to Bethany, Lazarus had been raised from the dead, which was becoming a significant issue for Jesus' opponents.

Six days before Passover, on the evening following the Sabbath, the communities of Bethany and Bethphage gathered to celebrate the arrival of Jesus at a public banquet hosted at the home of Simon of Bethany. This dinner honored both Jesus and Lazarus and was held in defiance of the Sanhedrin. Martha oversaw the serving of the food, while her sister Mary was among the women spectators, as it was against custom for a woman to sit at a public banquet. Although agents of the Sanhedrin were present, they hesitated to apprehend Jesus in the company of his friends.

Jesus spoke with Simon about Joshua of old, his namesake, and recounted how Joshua and the Israelites had journeyed to Jerusalem through Jericho. In reflecting on the legend of the walls of Jericho falling, Jesus said: "I am not concerned with such brick and stone walls; rather, I would allow the walls of prejudice, self-righteousness, and hate to crumble before the teaching of our Heavenly Father's love for all people." The banquet proceeded cheerfully and as usual, except that all the attendees were unusually sober. Jesus was exceptionally pleasant and had been playing with the children until it was time to come to the table. Nothing out of the ordinary occurred until near the end of the feast when Mary, the sister of Lazarus, stepped forward from among the group of women onlookers. Approaching where Jesus reclined as the guest of honor, she opened a large alabaster jar containing very rare and costly ointment. After applying some to Jesus' head, she began to pour it on his feet, using her hair to wipe them. The entire house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment, and everyone present was astonished by Mary's actions.

Lazarus remained silent, but when some of the onlookers murmured in indignation over the extravagant use of the ointment, Judas Iscariot approached Andrew, who was reclining nearby. He questioned why the ointment had not been sold and the proceeds used to feed the poor. Judas suggested that Jesus should rebuke such wastefulness.

Jesus, aware of their thoughts and hearing their words, placed his hand on Mary's head as she knelt beside him. With a gentle expression

on his face, he said: “Let her be, each one of you. Why do you trouble her about this, considering that she has performed this deed from her heart? To those of you who grumble and claim that this ointment should have been sold and the proceeds given to the poor, I say that you will always have the poor among you, so you can minister to them whenever it seems right to you. However, I will not always be with you; I will soon go to God. This woman has kept this ointment for my burial, and now that she has chosen to use it in anticipation of my death, she shall not be denied this fulfillment.”

Mary loved Jesus; she had purchased this precious ointment to anoint his body after death. Both Lazarus and Martha were aware that Mary had saved for a long time to buy this alabaster jar of spikenard, and they wholeheartedly supported her decision to act according to her heart in this matter, as they were well-to-do and could easily afford to make such a sacrifice.

However, it was this rebuke, which Judas Iscariot perceived as a personal affront, that seemingly motivated him to seek revenge for his public humiliation. Many others supported this mindset, as the cost of the ointment was equivalent to a year's wages, sufficient to provide bread for five thousand people.

15.2 FINAL INSTRUCTIONS

On this Sunday morning, in the beautiful gardens of Simon of Bethany, Jesus gathered his twelve followers around him and provided them with final instructions in preparation for their entry into Jerusalem. He informed them that he would likely deliver numerous addresses and teach many lessons before going to God. However, he advised the followers to refrain from engaging in any public work during their Passover stay in Jerusalem. He instructed them to remain close to him and to “watch and pray.”

This morning's instructions included a brief review of their teachings, from the day of their formal instruction near Capernaum to the time they were preparing to enter Jerusalem. The followers listened in silence and did not ask any questions.

Early that morning, David Zebedee had transferred the funds obtained from the sale of the equipment at the Pella encampment to Judas. In turn, Judas entrusted the majority of this money to Simon, their host, for safekeeping in preparation for the challenges they might face upon entering Jerusalem.

After the conference with the followers, Jesus spoke with Lazarus and advised him to avoid sacrificing of his life to the vengeance of the Sanhedrin. Consequently, a few days later, Lazarus left for Philadelphia just as the Sanhedrin's officers dispatched men to arrest him.

15.3 ENTERING JERUSALEM

Bethany was approximately two miles from the temple, and it was a Sunday afternoon when Jesus prepared to depart for Jerusalem. He felt a deep affection for Bethany and its inhabitants. While Nazareth, Capernaum, and Jerusalem had rejected him, Bethany had welcomed and believed in the teachings. In this small village, nearly every man, woman, and child was a follower.

All morning, Jesus had contemplated his entry into Jerusalem. Until now, he had consistently sought to downplay any public praise of himself. However, the situation had changed; he was approaching the culmination of his ministry, the Sanhedrin had pronounced his death sentence, and there was no danger in permitting his followers to openly express their emotions, much like what would happen if he chose to make a formal and public entrance into the city.

Having resolved to make a public entrance into Jerusalem, Jesus faced the challenge of selecting an appropriate method to fulfill this intention. He contemplated the numerous, often contradictory, prophecies, but only one seemed fitting for him to pursue. There was a particular scripture that had occasionally been linked to the Messiah by those who adhered more closely to the spiritual interpretation of his mission, which Jesus believed could serve as a consistent guide for his anticipated entry into Jerusalem.

This scripture is found in Zechariah, which states: Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, your king comes to you. He is just, and he brings salvation. He comes as the lowly one, riding upon an ass, upon a colt, the foal of an ass. It was believed that a warrior king would always enter a city riding a horse, while a king on a peace mission would enter riding an ass. Jesus chose not to enter Jerusalem on horseback; instead, he approached peacefully on a donkey. Immediately following the noon meal, Jesus called Peter and John. He instructed them to go to Bethphage, a nearby village located just off the main road and a short distance northwest of Bethany. He continued: "Go to Bethphage, and when you reach the junction of the roads, you will find a colt tied there. Untie the colt and bring it back with you. If anyone asks why you are doing this, simply say: 'The Master needs him.'" Jesus never disclosed how he knew about the colt.

When the two followers had gone into Bethphage as Jesus had instructed, they found the colt tied near its mother in the open street, close to a house on the corner. As Peter began to untie the colt, the owner approached and inquired why they were doing this. Peter responded as Jesus had instructed, and they returned, bringing the donkey with them. Several hundred pilgrims had gathered around Jesus and his companions by this time. Since mid-morning, the visitors passing by on their way to Passover had lingered. Meanwhile, David Zebedee and some of his former messenger associates took it upon themselves to hasten down to Jerusalem, where they effectively spread the news among the throngs of visiting pilgrims that Jesus of Nazareth was entering the city. Consequently, several thousand visitors greeted this much-discussed prophet and wonder worker. This multitude, coming from Jerusalem, met Jesus and the crowd entering the city just after they had passed over the crest of Olivet and begun their descent into the city.

As the procession began in Bethany, there was great enthusiasm among the festive crowd of followers and visiting pilgrims. Just before they started, the twelve women from the original women's corps,

accompanied by some of their associates, arrived and joined the procession as it joyfully made its way toward the city.

Before they began, the Alpheus twins placed their cloaks on the donkey and held it steady while Jesus mounted. As the procession ascended Mount Olivet, the jubilant crowd spread their garments on the ground and gathered branches from nearby trees to create a carpet for Jesus and the donkey. As the exuberant crowd continued toward Jerusalem, they began to sing, or rather to shout in unison, the Psalm: Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he who comes in the name of God. Hosanna in the highest!

Jesus was lighthearted and cheerful as he moved along until he reached the brow of Olivet, where the city and the temple towers came into full view. There, Jesus halted the procession, and a profound silence fell over everyone as they witnessed him weeping. Looking down at the vast multitude coming forth from the city to greet him, Jesus, with deep emotion and a tearful voice, said: "O Jerusalem, if you had only known, at least in this your day, the things that belong to your peace and which you could have so freely received! But now, are these glories about to be concealed from your eyes? You are on the verge of rejecting the gifts of God and turning your back on the Father's truths."

When he had finished speaking, they began their descent from Mount Olivet. They were soon joined by a multitude of visitors who had come from Jerusalem, waving palm branches, shouting, and expressing their joy and good fellowship. Along with the crowd that poured out to welcome Jesus, many Pharisees and other opponents accompanied them. They were deeply troubled by this sudden and unexpected outpouring of popular acclaim, fearing that any attempt to arrest him might provoke an open revolt among the people. They were particularly concerned about the large number of visitors who had heard much about Jesus, many of whom now believed his teachings.

As they approached Jerusalem, the crowd grew increasingly demonstrative, prompting some of the Pharisees to approach Jesus and said: Teacher, you should rebuke your followers and urge them to behave more appropriately.

Jesus answered: "It is only fitting that these children should welcome an ambassador of God whom the chief priests have rejected. It would be futile to stop them; otherwise, these stones by the roadside would cry out in their place."

The Pharisees hurried ahead of the procession to rejoin the Sanhedrin, which was in session at the temple. They reported to their associates that their efforts were futile, stating: The Galilean confounds us. The people have gone mad over him; if we do not stop these misguided individuals, the entire world will follow him.

Although joyous and sincere, this welcome did not reflect any genuine or deep-seated conviction in the hearts of the festive multitude. These same crowds were just as quick to reject Jesus later in the week when they realized that he would not establish the new kingdom according to their long-cherished expectations, especially when the Sanhedrin took a firm and resolute stand against him. Nevertheless, the entire city was greatly stirred, prompting those not informed to ask: Who is this man? And the multitude responded: This is the prophet from Galilee, Jesus of Nazareth.

15.4 VISITING THE TEMPLE

While the Alpheus twins returned the donkey to its owner, Jesus and the ten followers detached themselves from their immediate companions and wandered around the temple, observing the preparations for Passover. No attempts were made to disturb Jesus, as the Sanhedrin greatly feared the populace; this was, after all, one of the reasons Jesus permitted the multitude to acclaim him. Jesus aimed to provide the residents of Jerusalem and the tens of thousands of Passover visitors a final opportunity to hear his teachings, should they choose to do so.

As the evening progressed and the crowds sought nourishment, Jesus and his closest followers remained alone. The followers were contemplative yet silent. Never, in their years of association with Jesus, had they experienced a day like this.

They sat down by the treasury for a moment, watching as people dropped their contributions: the wealthy placing substantial amounts into the collection box. At the same time, everyone else contributed according to their means. At last, a poor widow approached, scantily dressed, and they observed her as she dropped two mites (small copper coins) into the trumpet-shaped receptacle. Jesus then called the attention of the followers to the widow, saying:

“Pay close attention to what you have just witnessed. This widow has given more than all the others, for those others, out of their abundance, contributed only a small token as a gift. However, this poor woman, despite her poverty, has given everything she had.

As the evening progressed, they walked quietly through the temple courts. After Jesus surveyed these familiar surroundings once again, recalling his emotions from previous visits, including the earlier ones, he said: “Let us go up to Bethany for our rest.” Jesus, accompanied by Peter and John, went to the home of Simon, while the other followers found lodging among their friends in Bethany and Bethphage.

As they returned to Bethany on Sunday evening, Jesus walked ahead of the followers. Not a word was spoken until they arrived at Simon’s house and parted ways. The twelve appeared confused and unsettled; they were unaware of Jesus’ plans for the following day and did not ask any questions. They went to their lodgings, though only the twins managed to sleep well. They did not keep armed watch over Jesus at Simon’s house.

15.5 MONDAY IN THE TEMPLE

Early on that Monday morning, by prior arrangement, Jesus and the followers gathered at the home of Simon of Bethany. After a brief conference, they set out for Jerusalem. The twelve were strangely silent as they journeyed toward the temple; they had not yet recovered from the experience of the previous day. They felt a mix of anticipation

and fear, profoundly affected by a sense of detachment stemming from Jesus' sudden change in approach, along with his instruction that they were not to engage in public teaching during the Passover week.

As the group journeyed down Mount Olivet, Jesus led the way, with his followers walking closely behind in meditative silence. One thought occupied the minds of all: What would the Master do today? It was mid-morning on this beautiful day when they arrived at the temple. They proceeded directly to the large court where Jesus frequently taught. After greeting the followers who were waiting for him, Jesus ascended one of the teaching platforms and began to address the gathering crowd. The followers withdrew a short distance and awaited further developments.

15.6 CLEANSING THE TEMPLE

Massive commercial traffic had increased in conjunction with the services and ceremonies of temple worship. There was a thriving business in supplying suitable animals for various sacrifices. Although it was permissible for a worshiper to provide their own sacrifice, the requirement remained that the animal must be free from all "blemish" in the meaning of the Levitical law, as interpreted by the official inspectors of the temple. Many worshipers had experienced the humiliation of having their supposedly perfect animals rejected by the temple examiners.

It subsequently became a more common practice to purchase sacrificial animals at the temple. Although several stations near Olivet offered these animals for sale, it became fashionable to buy them directly from the temple pens. Over time, the custom of selling various types of sacrificial animals in the temple courts expanded. This led to the establishment of a substantial business that generated enormous profits. A portion of these earnings was allocated to the temple treasury, while the majority was indirectly funneled to the priestly families.

This sale of animals in the temple thrived because, when a worshiper purchased an animal, although the price might be somewhat high, no

additional fees were required. Furthermore, the worshiper could be assured that the intended sacrifice would not be rejected due to any natural or technical blemishes.

At various points in history, systems of exorbitant overcharging were imposed on the general public, particularly during major national holidays. At one point, the priests went so far as to demand the equivalent of a week's wages for a pair of doves that should have been sold for just a few pennies.

However, the traffic in sacrificial animals and various merchandise was not the only means by which the temple courts profited. During this period, an extensive banking and commercial exchange system was established within the temple precincts. During the Asmonean Dynasty, the Jews minted their own silver coins, and it became customary to require that temple dues and all other fees be paid using this Jewish currency. This regulation necessitated the licensing of money changers to exchange the various types of currency in circulation throughout the provinces of the Roman Empire for this orthodox shekel.

The temple head tax, which was one-half shekel, was payable by all individuals except for women, enslaved people, and minors. By the time of Jesus, the priests had also been exempted from paying temple dues. Consequently, from the 15th to the 25th of the month preceding Passover, accredited money changers set up their booths in the principal cities to provide the Jewish people with the appropriate currency to meet the temple dues upon arriving in Jerusalem. After these ten days, the money changers relocated to Jerusalem and established exchange tables in the temple courts.

The money changers were allowed to charge a commission equivalent to three to four cents for exchanging a coin valued at approximately ten cents. If a coin of greater value was presented for exchange, they were permitted to collect double the commission. Additionally, these temple bankers profited from the exchange of all money intended for the purchase of sacrificial animals, the payment of head tax, and the making of offerings.

These temple exchangers not only conducted a regular banking business for profit by exchanging more than twenty types of currency that visiting pilgrims periodically brought to Jerusalem, but they also engaged in various other banking transactions. The temple treasury and the temple authorities profited tremendously from these commercial activities. It was not uncommon for the temple treasury to hold millions while the ordinary people continued to pay these levies.

Amid this noisy aggregation of money changers, merchants, and animal sellers, Jesus, on that Monday morning, sought to convey the teachings. He was not alone in his disdain for the desecration of the temple; the ordinary people, particularly the Jewish visitors from foreign provinces, also strongly opposed this commercial exploitation of their national house of worship. During this period, the Sanhedrin convened regularly in a chamber enveloped by the clamor and chaos of trade and barter.

As Jesus was about to begin his address, two things captured his attention. At the money table of a nearby exchanger, a heated argument erupted over the alleged overcharging of a Jew from Alexandria. Simultaneously, the air was filled with the bellowing of a herd of one hundred bullocks being driven from one section of the animal pens to another.

As Jesus paused, silently and thoughtfully contemplating the scene of commerce and confusion before him, he noticed a simple-minded Galilean, a man he had once conversed with in Iron, being ridiculed and jostled by arrogant Judeans. This situation stirred within the human Jesus one of those strange and periodic uprisings of indignant emotion. To the astonishment of his friends, who stood nearby and refrained from intervening in the events that soon unfolded, Jesus stepped down from the teaching platform. He approached the young boy who was herding the cattle through the courtyard, took the whip of cords from him, and swiftly drove the animals out of the temple. He then strode majestically before the astonished gaze of the thousands gathered in the temple court, making his way to the farthest cattle pen. There, he opened the gates of every stall and drove out the confined animals.

By this time, the gathered pilgrims were electrified, and with uproarious shouts, they moved toward the bazaars and began to overturn the tables of the money changers. All commerce had been expelled from the temple in less than five minutes.

By the time the nearby Roman guards arrived on the scene, all was quiet, and the crowds had become orderly. Jesus, returning to the speaker's stand, addressed the multitude: "You have this day witnessed that which is written in the scriptures: 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations, but you have made it a den of robbers.'"

Before he could utter any further words, the great assembly erupted in shouts of praise. Soon, a throng of youths emerged from the crowd to sing heartfelt hymns of gratitude for the expulsion of the profane and profiteering merchants from the temple.

By this time, some of the priests had arrived at the scene, and one of them asked Jesus if he had not heard what the children were singing. Jesus replied: "Have you never read, 'Out of the mouths of babes has praise been perfected'?"

Throughout the remainder of that day, as Jesus taught, guards appointed by the people stood watch at every archway, preventing anyone from carrying even an empty vessel across the temple courts. In the serene atmosphere of the temple courts, the people listened intently to Jesus' teachings and were captivated by his words.

This astonishing act of Jesus was beyond the comprehension of his friends. They were so taken aback by their teacher's sudden and unexpected action that they remained huddled together near the speaker's stand throughout the entire episode; they never lifted a hand to support the cleansing of the temple. Had this spectacular event occurred the day before, coinciding with Jesus' arrival at the temple following his tumultuous procession through the city's gates, they would have been prepared. However, as it happened, they were completely unprepared to participate.

[Upon further reflection, some followers believed that the cleansing of the temple represented a stance against the commercialization of

religious practices and a condemnation of exploitation and profiteering at the expense of the poor and the uneducated. Subsequently, some of the twelve afterwards thought that this episode illustrated a justification for using protest to defend the majority against the unjust practices of powerful minorities who concealed their actions behind financial or ecclesiastical authority.]

15.7 TEACHING AUTHORITY

This remarkable cleansing of the temple also effectively delayed Jesus' apprehension. The leaders of Jerusalem were increasingly determined to execute him, but they were hindered by two fears that conspired to postpone their actions. The chief priests and the Scribes were reluctant to arrest Jesus publicly, fearing that the crowd might turn against them in a surge of resentment. They also dreaded the possibility of Roman guards being summoned to suppress a popular uprising.

At the noon session of the Sanhedrin, it was unanimously agreed that Jesus must be executed swiftly, as no supporters of Jesus were present at the meeting. However, they could not reach a consensus on when and how he should be apprehended. Ultimately, they decided to form five groups tasked with engaging the public in order to entrap him in his teachings or to undermine his credibility in the eyes of his listeners.

Accordingly, in early afternoon, as Jesus began his discourse on The Liberty Of Sonship, a group of these elders of Jerusalem made their way up near Jesus and, customarily interrupting him, asked by what authority did he do these things. Who had granted him this authority?

It was entirely appropriate for the temple leaders and the officers of the Sanhedrin to question anyone who dared to teach in the temple. Prophets frequently caused unrest by audaciously assuming the role of teachers without proper authority, lacking formal instruction in the rabbinic academies and regular ordination by the Sanhedrin. The absence of this authority in public teaching suggested either ignorant presumption or outright rebellion.

At that time, only the Sanhedrin had the authority to ordain an elder or teacher, and this ceremony required the presence of at least three

individuals who had previously been ordained. Such an ordination conferred the title of Rabbi upon the teacher and qualified him to serve as a judge, “Binding and loosing matters that might be brought to him for adjudication.”

Therefore, Jesus responded to their inquiry by posing a counter-question: “I would also like to ask you one question, which, if you answer, I will likewise tell you by what authority I perform these works. Did John the Baptist receive his authority from God or from men?”

When his questioners heard this, they withdrew to one side to deliberate on what response they might provide. They had intended to embarrass Jesus before the crowd, but instead, they found themselves greatly confused in the presence of all assembled in the temple court. Their discomfort was even more evident when they returned to Jesus and said: We cannot answer; we do not know. And they so answered Jesus because they had reasoned among themselves: if we say it is from heaven, he will ask: Did you not believe him, and Jesus may even add that he received his authority from John. Conversely, if we say it is from men, the crowd might turn against us, for most of them believe that John was a prophet. Thus, they were compelled to approach Jesus and the people, confessing that they could not (or would not) express an opinion about John’s mission.

When they had finished speaking, Jesus looked down upon them and said: “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.” Jesus never intended to appeal to John the Baptist for his authority, as the Sanhedrin had never ordained John. It was this manner of addressing his adversaries that instilled fear in them. They posed no further questions that day; instead, they withdrew to confer among themselves.

But the people were quick to recognize the dishonesty and insincerity in the questions posed by the leaders of Jerusalem. Even the common folk could differentiate between Jesus’ moral majesty and the calculated hypocrisy of his opponents. However, the cleansing of the temple had united the Sadducees with the Pharisees in their efforts to devise a plan to execute Jesus. Consequently, the Sadducees now constituted a majority within the Sanhedrin.

15.8 FIRST TEMPLE STORY

As the Pharisees stood in silence before Jesus, he looked down at them and recounted the Story Of The Two Sons:

“Since you are uncertain about John’s mission and are in disagreement regarding my mission, listen closely while I share a story. A certain esteemed landowner had two sons. Desiring their assistance in managing his vast estates, he approached one of them, saying, ‘Son, go work today in my vineyard.’ This impulsive son initially replied to his father, ‘I will not go’; however, he later regretted his response and decided to go.” When he found his older son, he said, ‘Son, work in my vineyard.’ The hypocritical son replied, ‘Yes, my father, I will go.’ However, after his father departed, he did not go. Let me ask you, which of these sons truly fulfilled his father’s will?

And the people spoke with one voice, saying: The first son. Then Jesus replied:

“Even so, the publicans and harlots, despite their apparent refusal to heed the call to repentance, who recognize the error of their ways, will enter the fellowship of souls.

“However, you who make grand pretensions of serving our Heavenly Father refuse to fulfill the work of the Father. It was not you, the Pharisees and Scribes, who believed John, but rather the publicans and sinners. You do not believe the teachings, yet the common people hear the words gladly.”

All this time, the twelve followers stood near Jesus but did not engage in these transactions. Each of the twelve remained obedient to Jesus’ request to refrain from public teaching during Passover week.

[The followers later recognized that Jesus did not harbor personal animosity toward the Pharisees and Sadducees; rather, it was their systems of teaching and practice that he aimed to discredit. He bore no hostility toward any individual, but an inevitable clash was unfolding between a new teaching and the established traditions and authorities.]

15.9 SECOND TEMPLE STORY

When the chief Pharisees and the Scribes, who had sought to entangle Jesus with their questions, finished listening to the story of the two sons, they withdrew to confer further. Jesus then turned his attention to the attentive multitude and told the Story Of The Absent Landlord.

“There was a good man who owned a house and planted a vineyard. He surrounded it with a hedge, dug a pit for the wine press, and built a watchtower for the guards. Then he leased the vineyard to tenants before embarking on a long journey to another country. As the season for harvesting the fruits approached, he sent messengers to the tenants to collect his rent. However, the tenants conspired among themselves and refused to pay the money owed to the landlord. Instead, they attacked the householder’s helpers, beating one, stoning another, and sending the rest away empty-handed.

“When the owner learned of these events, he dispatched other, more trusted helpers to confront the unruly tenants. They received the same treatment. Subsequently, the householder sent his favorite assistant, his steward, and they killed him.

“And still, with patience and forbearance, the owner sent his son to confront these ungrateful tenants, saying to himself, ‘They may mistreat my messengers, but they will surely show respect for my beloved son.’ However, when these unrepentant tenants saw the son, they reasoned: ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and then the inheritance will be ours.’ So, they seized him, and after casting him out of the vineyard, they killed him.

“When the vineyard owner hears how they have rejected and killed his son, what should he do to those ungrateful tenants?”

When the people heard this story and the question that Jesus posed, they responded that the owner should remove those wretched men and lease his vineyard to other honest farmers who would give him his due.

And when some of those who realized that this story pertained to the Jewish nation, its treatment of the prophets, and the impending rejection of Jesus and the teachings, they expressed their sorrow, saying: Forbid that we should continue to engage in such actions.

15.10 THIRD TEMPLE STORY

Jesus observed a group of Sadducees and Pharisees making their way through the crowd. He paused momentarily until they approached him, at which point he said: “You are aware of how your fathers rejected the prophets, and now you are prepared to reject yet another representative of God?”

And then, gazing intently at the priests and elders standing nearby, Jesus said:

“Scripture speaks of the stone that the builders rejected, which, upon its discovery by the people, was made into the cornerstone. Therefore, I warn you once more, if you continue to reject these new teachings, the fellowship of souls will be accepted by those willing to accept the good news and bear the results of the spirit.”

When the Pharisees heard this Story Of The Cornerstone, they realized that Jesus was referring to them and the other leaders of the synagogue. They were eager to seize him on the spot, but feared the crowd. Nevertheless, they were so incensed by Jesus' words that they retreated to deliberate further on how to orchestrate his death. That night, the Sadducees and the Pharisees conspired together to entrap him the following day.

15.11 FOURTH TEMPLE STORY

After the Scribes and leaders had withdrawn, Jesus addressed the assembled crowd and recounted the Story Of The Wedding Feast. This parable tells of a king whose favored subjects declined to attend the wedding feast for his son. Consequently, his servants gathered together as many other subjects as they found, both good and bad, rich and poor, so that at last the wedding chamber was filled with willing guests.

After sharing this story, Jesus was about to dismiss the crowd when a sympathetic follower, making his way through the throng, asked: How shall we know about these things? How can we be prepared for the king's invitation? What sign will you give us to confirm that you are an ambassador of God?

When Jesus heard this, he said: "Only one sign shall be given to you." Then, pointing to his own body, he continued: "I will destroy this temple, and raise it in three days." However, they did not understand him, and as they dispersed, they talked among themselves, saying: This temple has been under construction for almost fifty years, yet he claims he will destroy it and raise it in three days. Even his own followers did not comprehend the significance of this statement. *[Only later, after Jesus' spirit appearances, did they realize that the reference was to the 'temple' of Jesus' body.]*

In the late afternoon, Jesus called to his friends and expressed his desire to leave the temple and go to Bethany for their evening meal and rest. As they made their way up Mount Olivet, Jesus instructed Andrew, Philip, and Thomas to establish a camp closer to the city, which they could occupy for the remainder of the Passover week.

Following this instruction, the following morning, they set up their tents in the hillside ravine overlooking the public camping park of Gethsemane, on a plot of land owned by Simon of Bethany.

Once again, a silent group made their way up the western slope of Mount Olivet on that Monday night. For the first time, these twelve individuals began to sense that something tragic was imminent. The dramatic cleansing of the temple earlier had sparked their hopes of witnessing Jesus assert his authority; however, the events of this afternoon served only as an anticlimax, as they all pointed to the inevitable rejection of the teachings by the Jerusalem authorities. The followers were engulfed in suspense; they all felt that something monumental was about to occur, yet they remained uncertain of what to expect. They sought refuge in various places to rest, but found it difficult to sleep. Even the Alpheus twins were awakened to the realization that the events of Jesus' life were rapidly approaching their final culmination.

15.12 FAREWELL TO THE TWELVE

Early Tuesday morning, Jesus met with the twelve, including the women's corps, and approximately two dozen other prominent followers at the home of Simon. During this meeting, he bid farewell to Lazarus, providing him with the instruction that prompted his swift departure to Philadelphia in Perea. Jesus also said goodbye to the elderly Simon and offered his parting advice to the women's corps, as he would never again formally address them.

When he had finished these greetings, he departed for Jerusalem with Andrew, Peter, James, and John. At the same time, the other followers began establishing the Gethsemane camp, where they would spend the night and where they would establish their headquarters for the remainder of Jesus' life. About halfway down the slope of Mount Olivet, Jesus paused and conversed with the four followers for more than an hour.

15.13 TEACHINGS ON UNDERSTANDING

For several days, Peter and James had been engaged in a discussion about their differing opinions on Jesus' teachings regarding God's mercy. They had both agreed to present the matter to Jesus, and Peter viewed this as a fitting opportunity to seek Jesus' counsel.

Accordingly, Simon Peter interjected into the conversation about the differences by stating: We are not in agreement regarding your teachings on forgiveness. James asserts that you teach that our Heavenly Father forgives us even before we ask, while I maintain that remorse and confession must precede forgiveness. Which of us is correct? What is your response? After a brief silence, Jesus looked meaningfully at all four and imparted a lesson on Divine Understanding:

“My brethren, you err in your opinions because you do not comprehend the nature of the intimate and loving relationships between people and God. You fail to grasp the understanding of sympathy that wise parents have for their immature and sometimes misguided child. It is indeed questionable whether affectionate parents are ever truly called upon to forgive a child. A deep understanding of relationships characterized by love effectively prevents the estrangements that might later necessitate forgiveness from a parent.

“A part of every parent lives in their child. Parents gain insight from experiences, particularly in matters related to the early child-parent relationship. A parent can perceive a child’s immaturity through the lens of their own greater maturity and more profound experience. In the relationship between the earthly child and our Heavenly Father, the divine parent embodies infinite sympathy and a boundless capacity for loving understanding.

“Divine understanding is inevitable; it is inherent and inalienable within God’s infinite wisdom regarding all matters related to a child’s mistaken judgments and poor choices. Divine love is eternally fair because it unfailingly embodies complete understanding.

“When wise individuals comprehend the inner motivations of their children, they develop a sense of love for them. Similarly, when you understand your siblings, you inherently love them.

“This ability to understand one’s true nature and to overlook apparent misdeeds is Godlike. If you are wise parents, this is how you will love and understand your children, demonstrating patience even when a temporary misunderstanding has created distance between you.

“The child, being immature and lacking a comprehensive understanding of the depth of the child-parent relationship, often experiences a sense of guilt stemming from a perceived lack of full approval from their parents. However, the true parent is never aware of any such separation. Spiritual mistakes are a manifestation of creature consciousness; they do not belong to God’s consciousness.

“Your inability or unwillingness to overlook the failures of others reflects your immaturity and your failure to develop adult sympathy, understanding, and love. You harbor grudges and nurture vengefulness in direct proportion to your ignorance of your fellow beings’ inner nature and true longings. Love is the manifestation of the divine and the intrinsic drive of life. It is rooted in understanding, cultivated through selfless service, and refined by wisdom.”

This lesson significantly enhanced the understanding of the four.

15.14 LESSON ON TAXES

On Monday evening, a council was convened between the Sanhedrin and approximately fifty additional leaders selected from among the Scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees. The consensus of this meeting was that it would be dangerous to arrest Jesus in public due to his strong influence over the ordinary people’s affections.

It was the consensus of the majority that a concerted effort should be made to discredit him in the eyes of the public before he was arrested and brought to trial. Consequently, several groups of scholars were designated to be present the following morning in the temple to entrap him with challenging questions and to seek to embarrass him before the people.

Ultimately, the Pharisees, Sadducees, and even the Herodians united in this endeavor to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the Passover crowds.

The previous day, the leaders had attempted to entrap him before the crowd regarding matters of ecclesiastical authority. Having failed in this endeavor, they now sought to involve him in a damaging debate over civil authority. At that time, both Pilate and Herod were present in Jerusalem. Jesus' adversaries speculated that if he dared to advise against paying tribute to Caesar, they could immediately approach the Roman authorities and charge him with sedition. Conversely, if he were to explicitly endorse the payment of tribute, they anticipated that such a statement would deeply offend the national pride of his Jewish audience, thereby alienating their goodwill and affection.

Tuesday morning, when Jesus arrived in the temple court and began to teach, he had spoken only a few words when a group of younger students from the academies, who had been rehearsed for this purpose, approached him. Their spokesman addressed Jesus: We know you are a righteous teacher, and we recognize that you proclaim the ways of truth and serve only God, for you fear no one and show no favoritism among people. We are only students, and we seek to understand the truth about a matter that troubles us: Our difficulty is this: is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar? Should we give, or should we not give?

Jesus, perceiving their hypocrisy and craftiness, said to them: "Why do you come to tempt me? Show me your money, and I will answer you." When they handed him a denarius, he looked at it and asked: "Whose image and inscription does this coin bear?" When they answered him: Jesus replied, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and render to God the things that are God's."

When he had answered the young Scribes and their Herodian accomplices, they withdrew from his presence, and the people, including the Sadducees, reveled in their discomfiture. The youths who had attempted to entrap him were greatly astonished by the unexpected wisdom of Jesus' response. In this encounter, Jesus' opponents were left

defeated, as it was a well-known ruling of the Sanhedrin, established for the guidance of Jews dispersed among the Gentile nations, that the right of coinage included the right to levy taxes.

15.15 SADDUCEE'S QUESTION

Before Jesus could begin his teachings, a group of learned and cunning Sadducees approached him to pose a question. Their spokesman, drawing near to him, said: Moses said that if a married man dies without leaving children, his brother should marry the widow and raise offspring for the deceased brother. There was a case where a man with six brothers died childless. His next brother took the widow as his wife but soon died, leaving no children. Similarly, the second brother married her, but he also died without producing offspring. This continued until all six brothers had married her, and all six passed away without leaving any children. Finally, the woman herself died. Therefore, we ask you: In the afterlife, whose wife will she be, since all seven of these brothers had married her?

Jesus and the people understood that the Sadducees were insincere in their inquiry, as it was improbable that such a scenario would genuinely arise. Furthermore, the practice of a deceased man's brothers marrying to produce offspring on his behalf had largely fallen out of favor among the Jews by this time. Nevertheless, Jesus graciously chose to respond to their mischievous question. He said:

“You all err in asking such questions because you neither know the scriptures nor the living power of God. You are aware that the sons of this world can marry and are given in marriage, but you do not seem to understand that those who attain the worlds to come neither marry nor are given in marriage.

“Those souls who experience the afterlife are akin to the spirits that never perish. They are eternally the children of God; they are God's sons and daughters, engaged in the journey of eternal striving and service.

“Even your Father, Moses, grasped this concept, for during his experience at the burning bush, he heard our Heavenly Father say, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’

“And so, along with Moses, understand that our Heavenly Father is not the God of the dead, but of the living. In him, you all live, reproduce, and possess your mortal existence.”

Jesus appealed solely to Moses in his encounter with the Sadducees because they recognized the authority of only the five so-called Books of Moses. They did not accept the teachings of the prophets as a valid foundation for doctrinal beliefs.

Jesus, in his response, while affirmatively acknowledging the survival of the soul, did not endorse the Pharisaic beliefs regarding the resurrection of the human body. After concluding this lesson on the afterlife, the Sadducees withdrew, refraining from posing any further questions, and the general populace marveled at the wisdom of his teachings.

15.16 PHARISEES’ QUESTION

It was the prearranged strategy of the Pharisees, Scribes, Sadducees, and Herodians to occupy the entire day with entangling questions. Their aim was to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the people while simultaneously preventing him from having any opportunity to proclaim his unsettling new teachings.

Another group of Sadducees had been instructed to pose challenging questions to Jesus regarding angels. However, upon witnessing the fate of their colleagues who had attempted to entrap him with inquiries about the afterlife, they wisely chose to remain silent and withdrew without asking a single question.

Then one of the groups of Pharisees approached to pose challenging questions. The spokesman, gesturing towards Jesus, said: Master, I am a lawyer, and I would like to ask you: in your opinion, what is the greatest rule?

Jesus responded by stating:

“There is but one rule, and it is the greatest of all: ‘God is one; and you shall love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first and greatest rule. The second rule is similar to the first; indeed, it springs directly from it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other rule is greater than these; on these two rules hang all the law and the prophets.”

When the lawyer realized that Jesus had adhered not only to the highest principles of the Jewish religion but had also acted wisely in the eyes of the gathered crowd, he deemed it prudent to openly commend Jesus' response.

When the lawyer replied, Jesus looked down upon him and said: “My friend, I perceive that you are not far from the will of God.” That very night, the lawyer went to the camp near Gethsemane, professed his belief in the teachings, and was baptized by Josiah, one of Abner's followers.

Two or three additional groups of Scribes and Pharisees were present and had intended to pose questions. However, they were either disarmed by Jesus' response to the lawyer or deterred by the discomfort of all who had attempted to entrap him. After this, no one dared to ask him another question in public.

A short time ago, the Pharisees had seemingly reveled in how Jesus had silenced the Sadducees. Now, the Sadducees were delighted by the Pharisees' failure. However, this rivalry was fleeting; they quickly set aside their long-standing differences in a united effort to stop Jesus' teachings. Despite these experiences, the ordinary people listened to him with great enthusiasm.

15.17 THE GREEKS' QUESTION

Around noon, while Philip was purchasing supplies for the new camp being established that day near Gethsemane, he was approached by a delegation of inquisitive Greeks from Alexandria, Athens, and Rome. Their spokesman requested to see Jesus.

Philip was taken by surprise to encounter these prominent and inquisitive Greek Gentiles in the marketplace. Since Jesus had explicitly instructed all twelve not to engage in any public teaching during Passover week, Philip felt somewhat perplexed about how to address the situation. He was also unsettled by the fact that these men were foreign Gentiles. Had they been Jews or local Gentiles, he would not have hesitated as much, so he asked the Greeks to remain where they were.

As he hurried away, they assumed he was searching for Jesus. In reality, however, he rushed to the home of Joseph, where he knew Andrew and the other followers were having lunch. After calling Andrew outside, he explained the purpose of his visit, and then, accompanied by Andrew, he returned to the waiting Greeks.

These Greeks had diligently attended Jesus' teachings in the temple. On Monday evening, they held a conference at the home of Nicodemus that lasted until dawn, during which thirty of them chose to pursue the will of God.

Since Philip had nearly completed purchasing supplies, he and Andrew returned with the Greeks to the home of Joseph, where Jesus welcomed them. They sat near him as he spoke to his friends and several prominent followers who had gathered for this luncheon. Jesus said:

“In this banquet chamber, I observe that there are approximately equal numbers of Jews and Gentiles assembled here, and I wish to address you so that I may instruct you in the matters of the new teachings.

“If you Gentiles will listen to me, you shall receive the words of life and enter into the joyous freedom that comes from the truth of fellowship with God. If some of my fellow citizens choose to reject me and refuse the teachings, do not sit in judgment of them. These words convey everlasting love and eternal life.

“You well know that, except when a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it is planted in good soil, it springs up again to life and bears much fruit. He who selfishly loves his life risks losing it, but he who is willing to lay down his life for these teachings shall enjoy a more abundant existence both on earth and in the spiritual fellowship of souls. If you truly follow these teachings, you will become sincere followers and helpers of your fellow mortals. I rejoice in welcoming you, truth-seeking Gentiles, who come here today inquiring about the way of light.”

While those assembled could not help but notice that Jesus had paused in his speech as if a message had come to him from a heavenly source. They all remarked to one another: a spirit has spoken to him.

Then Jesus resumed his discourse:

“All of this has not occurred for my sake, but for yours. I know that our Heavenly Father will accept my earthly mission; however, it is essential that you remain encouraged and prepared for the trial that lies ahead. Let me assure you that the new lessons will ultimately enlighten the world and liberate humanity. All people will be set free by the spiritual light of the spirit, which will pour out upon all flesh after I have gone to God. If you believe this will help draw all people into the fellowship of our Heavenly Father.

“Only a little while will I be with you; only a little time can I offer the spiritual light to this generation. Walk while you have this light, so that the impending fear and confusion do not overtake you. “He who walks in darkness knows not where he goes, but if you choose to walk in the light, you will all become enlightened individuals.

“And now, all of you, come with me as we return to the temple, where I will bid farewell to the chief priests, Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, and the misguided leaders of Israel.”

Having spoken, Jesus led the way through the narrow streets of Jerusalem back to the temple. They had just heard declare that this was his farewell discourse in the temple, and they followed him in silence, deep in thought.

15.18 LAST TEMPLE DISCOURSE

Mid-afternoon on Tuesday, Jesus, accompanied by eleven followers, Joseph of Arimathea, thirty Greeks, and several other followers, arrived at the temple and began delivering his final address in the temple courts. This discourse was intended to serve as his final appeal to the people and his would-be executioners.

Previously, various groups had the opportunity to question Jesus; however, this afternoon, no one posed a question. As Jesus began to speak, the court of the temple was quiet and orderly. The money changers and merchants had not dared to enter the temple again since Jesus and the agitated crowd had driven them out the previous day. Before commencing his discourse, Jesus tenderly looked down upon the audience and said:

“I have been with you for a long time, traveling throughout the land proclaiming our Heavenly Father’s love for all people and their fellowship. Many have seen the light and will enter into the spiritual kingdom. Many sick and afflicted individuals have been restored to health because they have embraced these teachings.

“However, this proclamation of truth and the healing of disease have not opened the eyes of some who refuse to see the truth or are resolute in rejecting these new teachings about God. “In every manner consistent with fulfilling our Heavenly Father’s will, my followers and I have endeavored to live in harmony with our brethren and to adhere to the reasonable requirements of the laws of Moses and the traditions of Israel. We have consistently sought peace, but the leaders of Israel refuse to accept it.

“Many of you have chosen to embrace the teachings and have already entered into the joy and freedom of fellowship with God. This same fellowship is offered to everyone, including those who currently seek my destruction. Even now, they would be welcomed if they would only turn and accept God. It is not too late for them to receive an invitation to God’s fellowship.

The teaching continued.

“Our Heavenly Father has long dealt with understanding toward these my people. Generation after generation, the Heavenly Father has sent us prophets to teach and warn, and generation after generation, we have killed these teachers. And now, do your high priests and leaders engage in the same actions? Just as Herod orchestrated the death of John, they too are now preparing to execute me.

“As long as there is a possibility that you will turn to our Heavenly Father and seek the truth, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will keep his hands of understanding outstretched toward you. However, the leaders are on the verge of rejecting the lessons that God has imparted to his people, as well as to all people throughout the ages and the world - the revelation of the love of our Heavenly Father for all creatures on earth.

“And when you reject this revelation from God, the spiritual fellowship of souls will be embraced by those who receive it with joy and gladness. Israel is on the verge of losing its status in the world as a standard-bearer and custodian of divine truth.

“You still have an opportunity to express your intention to seek God with all your hearts, to enter like little children, and to find the security of the spiritual fellowship of souls through sincere faith. This afternoon, my followers stand here before you in silence, but soon you will hear their voices resonating with the call to truth and the desire to unite with the fellowship of souls as the children of God. This invitation is once again extended to you and your leaders.

“But you all see how the messengers of truth are rejected. Nevertheless, these Scribes and Pharisees continue to occupy Moses’ seat, and I urge you to cooperate with these elders in Israel. You are not obligated to align with them in their plans to execute me, but in all matters concerning the physical peace of Israel, you shall remain subject to their authority. While you should honor your earthly leaders and show respect to your teachers, you should call no one of them ‘father’ in a spiritual sense, for there is but one who is your Heavenly Father.

“I harbor no personal animosity toward the chief priests and leaders who currently seek my destruction; I hold no ill will toward the Scribes and Pharisees who reject these teachings. I understand that many of you believe in secret, and I am confident that you will openly acknowledge your belief in the new teachings when the time is right.

“And now I take my leave of you. You have heard the message and made your decision. Those who have embraced the teachings are now safe within the fellowship of souls. To you who have chosen to reject the gift of God, I say that you will no longer see me teaching in the temple. My work is complete. Behold, I now go forth to God, and your house is left to you desolate!”

[Jesus understood that during his time, many Jewish leaders rejected him and conspired to orchestrate his death. However, he also recognized that later generations would be unjustified in harboring hatred or a vengeful attitude toward these Jews or Jews of any era. He consistently emphasized that God has never ceased to love Israel’s

people and that the eternal life of the soul is available to all: both Jew and Gentile.]

Then Jesus beckoned his friends to leave the temple. While listening to Jesus' last indictment of the Jewish leaders, Judas likely resolved to abandon the movement and distance himself from the entire endeavor. Nevertheless, he departed the temple alongside the twelve and accompanied them to Mount Olivet, where he stayed with them that Tuesday night at the new camp near Gethsemane.

At the home of Nicodemus, more than thirty prominent Jews who were secret followers of the teachings gathered to discuss their course of action in the event of an open break with the Sanhedrin. All present agreed that they would publicly acknowledge their allegiance to Jesus' teachings the moment they learned of his arrest. And that is precisely what they did.

15.19 SANHEDRIN MEETING

On the evening of Tuesday, April 4, 30 CE, the fateful meeting of the Sanhedrin was called to order. On numerous previous occasions, this supreme court of the Jewish nation had informally decreed the death of Jesus. This esteemed ruling body was often intent on halting his work, but never before had they resolved to arrest him and bring about his execution. Just before midnight, the Sanhedrin, as it was then constituted, officially and unanimously voted to impose the death sentence upon both Jesus and Lazarus.

The Sadducees, who now controlled and dominated the Sanhedrin, were eager to eliminate Jesus for the following reasons:

- They feared that the growing popularity he enjoyed among the masses could jeopardize the existence of the Jewish nation through potential entanglement with the Roman authorities.
- Jesus' zeal for temple reform directly impacted their revenues; the cleansing of the temple affected their finances.

- They felt a responsibility to preserve social order and feared the consequences of the further spread of the unfamiliar and novel doctrine of the fellowship of man.

The Pharisees had different motives for wanting to see Jesus put to death. They feared him because:

- He expressed opposition to their traditional influence over the people. The Pharisees were ultraconservative and bitterly resented these perceived radical attacks on their established authority as religious leaders.
- They maintained that Jesus was a lawbreaker who displayed complete disregard for the Sabbath and numerous other legal and ceremonial obligations.
- They accused him of blasphemy for referring to God as his Father.
- They were extremely angry with him due to his recent speech of denunciation, which he delivered today in the temple as the concluding part of his farewell address.

The officers of the Sanhedrin received orders for the arrest of Jesus early the following morning, with explicit instructions that he must not be apprehended in public. They were directed to devise a plan to capture him discreetly, preferably suddenly, and at night. Aware that he might not return that day (Wednesday) to teach in the temple, they instructed the Sanhedrin officers to “bring him before the Jewish high court sometime before midnight on Thursday.”

The Sanhedrin, having formally decreed the death of Jesus and issued orders for his arrest, adjourned on that Tuesday near midnight. They appointed a meeting for mid-morning at the home of Caiaphas, the high priest, to formulate the charges that would be brought against Jesus in his trial. A small faction of the Sadducees had actually proposed assassinating Jesus, but the Pharisees categorically refused to endorse such a course of action.

15.20 TUESDAY EVENING ON MOUNT OLIVET

This Tuesday afternoon, as Jesus and the followers exited the temple on their way to the Gethsemane camp to avoid the crowds moving through the Kidron Valley, Jesus and his associates decided to ascend the western slope of Mount Olivet for a short distance before following a trail to their private camp near Gethsemane, situated just above the public camping ground.

As they turned to leave the road leading to Bethany, they observed the temple, glorified by the rays of the setting sun. While they lingered on the mount, they saw the lights of the city emerge and beheld the beauty of the illuminated temple under the soft glow of the full moon.

As Jesus approached Olivet, he said, “You see these stones and this massive temple, but I tell you, in the days to come, not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.”

Matthew, drawing attention to the construction of the temple, remarked on the impressive architecture characterized by massive stones and exquisite adornments. He questioned how it was possible for such magnificent buildings to be destroyed. His comments about the temple’s impending destruction piqued the curiosity of all the followers as they walked behind Jesus. They could not imagine any event short of the end of the world that would lead to the temple’s destruction.

Jesus and the twelve sat down together. Jesus engaged in conversation with them, and soon Nathaniel inquired about how they would know when these events were about to happen.

Jesus paused as he gazed down upon the city. He understood that adhering to the material expectations of the anticipated deliverer, the Messiah, would inevitably lead the Jews into direct conflict with the formidable Roman armies, and such a confrontation could only result in the downfall of the Jewish nation.

Then Andrew inquired whether the Holy City and the temple were to be destroyed: If you are not here to guide us, when should we abandon Jerusalem? Jesus replied:

“You may remain in the city after I have departed, even during these times of hardship and bitter persecution.

However, when you finally see Jerusalem surrounded by the Roman armies following the revolt of the false prophets, you will know that her desolation is imminent; then you must flee. Let none who are in the city or its vicinity wait to save anything, nor should those who are outside dare to enter. There will be great tribulation, for these will be the days of vengeance.”

The followers sat silently in the moonlight for an extended period as the astonishing predictions of Jesus undoubtedly sank into their bewildered minds.

[Jesus did not want the followers to perish in the catastrophic overthrow of the Jewish leaders during the destruction of Jerusalem. He was deeply concerned that some of his followers might become entangled in these revolts and consequently suffer as a result of the city's downfall. Following this warning, nearly the entire group of followers fled Jerusalem at the first sighting of the Roman troops, seeking refuge in Pella to the north.]

Jesus continued:

“When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled, for although all these things will occur, the end of Jerusalem is not yet at hand. Famines and earthquakes should not disturb you; nor should you be concerned when you are handed over to civil authorities and persecuted for the sake of the teachings.

“You will be expelled from the synagogue and imprisoned for my sake, and some of you will be killed. When you are brought before governors and leaders, it will serve as a testimony to your faith and demonstrate your steadfastness in the teachings. When you stand before judges, do not be anxious about what you should say, for my spirit will teach you at that very hour what you should answer your adversaries. Be patient! Do not doubt that these new teachings will eventually be proclaimed to all nations.”

15.21 SECOND COMING

Even after this explicit warning, some of Jesus' followers interpreted these predictions as referring to the changes that would occur in Jerusalem when the Messiah established the New Jerusalem and expanded the city to become the world's capital. They were resolute in their belief that the destruction of the temple was linked to the destruction of the world.

They believed that the end of the world would be succeeded by the emergence of a new physical kingdom and a new earth - that a New Jerusalem would encompass the entire world. Therefore, it was not surprising that Peter would say: We know that all things will pass away when the new earth appears, but how shall we know when you will return to bring all this about?

When Jesus heard this, he reflected for a moment and then said: "You have erred because you consistently attempt to connect the new teachings to the old; you insist on interpreting the teachings through the lens of your established beliefs. Nevertheless, I will endeavor to enlighten you."

On several occasions, Jesus made statements that led his listeners to infer that, although he intended to leave this world temporarily, he would return to fulfill God's will. As the conviction grew among his friends that he was going to depart, and after he had left this world, it was only natural for his followers to cling tightly to these statements regarding his return.

These followers wasted no time linking the predicted destruction of Jerusalem with the promised second coming. They continued to interpret his words in this manner, despite Jesus' efforts throughout that evening of instruction on the Mount of Olives to prevent just such a misunderstanding. In response to Peter's question, Jesus further stated:

"Do not expect me to sit upon the throne of David and fulfill material aspirations. The fellowship of souls is not of this world. The physical things you currently see are coming to an end, but this marks a new beginning from which the

teachings will spread to all corners of the earth, and this truth will reach all people.

“So, I will continue to follow your fortunes and guide you in your affairs through the presence of my spirit. I will be with you in spirit. Very soon, I must leave you. However, be of good courage, for I will return in spirit form. You see me now in the flesh, but I will be in spirit form upon my return. The physical eye perceives me in the flesh, but only the spiritual eye will perceive me later.

“Each of you will lay down your struggles and pass through the portal of death. As individuals, you must each inevitably confront a personal experience at the end of your natural life, transitioning to face the conditions and demands inherent in the eternal progression toward the will of God.”

The followers were likely confused during the Tuesday evening lesson on the Mount of Olives, as it addressed the dual topics of the destruction of Jerusalem and the return of Jesus. *[There was little consensus among the subsequent written accounts, which were based on memories of what Jesus said during this extraordinary occasion. However, the Apostle John did not share this confusion.]*

As the thirteen resumed their journey toward the camp, they were left speechless and emotionally tense. It was late when David Zebedee, John Mark, and several of the leading followers welcomed Jesus and the twelve to the new camp. However, the followers were not ready to sleep; they were eager to learn more about the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus’ departure, and the so-called end of the world.

15.22 LATER DISCUSSION AT THE CAMP

As they gathered around the campfire, numbering about twenty, Thomas asked: Since you will return to complete the work of the new teachings, what should our attitude be while you are away? As Jesus surveyed them in the firelight, he responded:

“Even you, Thomas, fail to comprehend what I have been saying. Your connection with the kingdom is spiritual and individual, entirely a matter of personal experience in the spirit, rooted in the realization that you are a child of God. What more can I say?

“You who possess knowledge of God have already received the assurances of your soul’s eternal life. Since your lives have been lived in the spirit of our Heavenly Father, nothing should be of grave concern to you. What does it matter to you, who believe in these teachings, if nations fall, the age comes to an end, or all visible things collapse? You understand that your life is a gift from God, and your afterlife is eternally secure. Having experienced the temporal life and cultivated a righteousness rooted in loving service to your fellow beings, you can confidently anticipate the next step in your eternal journey with the same belief in survival that has guided you through your earthly adventure in fellowship with God.

“Each generation of followers should diligently continue the work of those who came before them, just as each individual pursues their life’s purpose in the face of the inevitable and ever-looming reality of natural death. Those of you who have participated in our Heavenly Father’s mission on earth may choose to abandon the will of God if you find that your love for him and your commitment to serving others has waned. God calls upon all his sons and daughters to grow in grace and the knowledge of the truth. Those of you who understand these truths must cultivate the results of the spirit and demonstrate an increasing devotion to the selfless service of your fellow beings. Remember, when you minister to one of the least of our brethren, you have done this service for our Heavenly Father.

“Therefore, you should diligently engage in the work of our Heavenly Father’s business, both now and in the future,

for all eternity. With faithfulness, fulfill what has been entrusted to you, and you will be prepared for the call to go to God. By living in accordance with our Heavenly Father's will, you will joyfully and abundantly enter into the eternal service of God's everlasting will.

"Freely you have received; therefore, freely you should give of the truth. This truth will multiply and reveal the spiritual light of saving grace as you minister it."

15.23 WEDNESDAY, THE REST DAY

When the demands of teaching did not weigh heavily upon them, it was customary for Jesus and his companions to take a break from their labors each Wednesday. On this particular Wednesday, they had breakfast somewhat later than usual, and an ominous silence enveloped the camp; little was spoken during the first half of the meal.

At last, Jesus spoke: "I desire that you rest today. Take time to reflect on all that has transpired since we arrived in Jerusalem and meditate on what lies ahead, which I have shared with you. Ensure that the truth resides in your lives and that you grow in grace each day."

After breakfast, Jesus informed Andrew of his intention to be absent for the day and suggested that the followers be allowed to spend their time as they wished, with the exception that they should not, under any circumstances, go within the gates of Jerusalem.

Then Jesus prepared to go into the hills alone, but David Zebedee approached him, saying: You know well that the Pharisees and leaders seek to execute you, and yet you are preparing to go alone into the hills. This is folly; therefore, I will send three well-prepared men with you to ensure that no harm befalls you.

Jesus looked over the three well-armed and stalwart Galileans and addressed David: "You mean well, but you err because you fail to understand that I need no one to defend me. No one will lay a hand on me until the moment I am prepared to lay down my life in accordance with God's will. They may not accompany me; I wish to go alone so that I may communicate with God."

15.24 IN THE HILLS

Upon hearing these words, David and his armed guards withdrew. However, as Jesus began to walk alone, John Mark stepped forward with a small basket containing food and water. He suggested that Jesus might find himself hungry if he intended to be away all day. Jesus smiled at John and reached down to take the basket. Just as Jesus was about to take the lunch basket from John Mark's hand, the young man ventured to say: But you may set the basket down while you turn aside to pray and continue on without it. Besides, if I carry the lunch, you will be freer to talk to God, and I will surely remain silent. I will ask no questions and will stay by the basket while you go apart to pray.

John Mark had boldly clutched the basket while delivering this speech, the audacity of which astonished most of the nearby listeners. There they stood, both Mark and Jesus, grasping the basket. Eventually, Jesus released his hold and, looking down at the boy, said: "Since you crave to accompany me with all your heart, it shall not be denied. We will go off by ourselves, enjoy a pleasant visit, and comfort and console one another. You may begin carrying the lunch, and when you grow weary, I will assist you. Follow me."

Jesus returned to the camp that evening after sunset. He spent his final day of tranquility on earth visiting a truth-seeking young man and conversing with God. *[This event has come to be known as "the day a young man spent with God in the hills." Forever, this occasion exemplifies Jesus' willingness to engage in fellowship with his followers.]*

Jesus spent considerable time with Mark, engaging in open discussions about the affairs of this world and the next. John expressed his deep regret for not being old enough to be one of the followers. He conveyed his immense gratitude for having been allowed to accompany them since their initial teachings at the Jordan Ford near Jericho, with the exception of the trip to Phoenicia. Jesus cautioned the young man not to become disheartened by the events that lay ahead and assured him that he would live to become a mighty messenger of the new teachings.

15.25 JOHN MARK'S HOME LIFE

During this visit with John Mark, Jesus compared their early childhood and later boyhood experiences. Although Mark's parents possessed more material wealth than Jesus' parents, many of their boyhood experiences were quite similar. Jesus shared insights that helped Mark gain a better understanding of his parents and other family members.

When the young man asked Jesus how he could be certain that he would become a "mighty messenger of the new lessons," Jesus replied:

"I know you will remain loyal to the teachings, as I can rely on your current faith and love, which are rooted in the early training you received at home. You are the product of a household where your parents share a genuine affection for one another, ensuring that you have not been overly indulged to the point of damaging your sense of self-importance. Furthermore, your personality has not been distorted by your parents' unloving attempts to gain your confidence and loyalty at the expense of one another.

"You have also been fortunate that your parents possessed both wisdom and love. Their wisdom led them to withhold most forms of indulgence and many luxuries that wealth can buy, while they sent you to the synagogue school alongside your neighborhood fellows. They also encouraged you to learn how to navigate this world by allowing you to have genuine experiences.

"You came to the Jordan, where we taught, and John's followers baptized, accompanied by your young friend Amos. Both of you expressed a desire to join us. When you returned to your parents, they consented; however, Amos's parents refused. They loved their son so much that they denied him the invaluable experience you have enjoyed. By running away from home, Amos could have joined us, but in doing so, he would have wounded the love of his parents and sacrificed his loyalty.

“Even if such a decision had been wise, it would have come at a terrible cost for the sake of experience, independence, and freedom. Wise parents, like yours, understand that their children do not need to harm love or suppress loyalty in order to develop independence and enjoy the invigorating freedom that comes with growing up to your age.

“Your young friend Amos shares these teachings as fervently as you do, but I am uncertain about his future actions. His early home life did not foster the development of a wholly dependable individual. Amos did not experience the normal, loving, and wise upbringing that is essential for personal growth. In contrast, your life will be happier and more reliable because you spent your formative years in a stable and nurturing environment. You possess a strong and cohesive character, having grown up in a home where love flourished and wisdom guided decisions. Such childhood training cultivates a loyalty that assures me you will persevere in the course you have embarked upon.”

Jesus and John continued their discussion of home life for over an hour. Jesus explained to Mark how a young child is entirely dependent on their parents and the surrounding home environment for all early concepts related to intellectual, social, moral, and even spiritual development. For a young child, the family embodies their initial understanding of both human and divine relationships. A child forms their first impressions of the universe through the care provided by their parents; they rely entirely on their earthly family for foundational spiritual ideas. The child's future happiness or unhappiness, as well as the ease or difficulty of their life, is shaped by their early mental and emotional experiences, which are influenced by the social and spiritual dynamics of the home.

Jesus emphasized that the loving atmosphere of a wise home and the loyal commitment to its spiritual values exert a profound reciprocal influence on one another. Such a home life enriches religious experience, and genuine religion, in turn, elevates the sanctity of the home.

John Mark was filled with joy at the memory of this day with Jesus in the hills, but he never forgot Jesus' final admonition, spoken just as they were about to return to the Gethsemane camp: "Well, John, we have had a good visit, a real day of rest, but make sure you tell no one what I have shared with you." *[John Mark never disclosed anything that occurred during the day he spent with Jesus in the hills.]*

Throughout the final hours of Jesus' earthly life, John Mark never allowed Jesus to be out of his sight. The young boy remained hidden nearby at all times, sleeping only when Jesus slept.

15.26 DAY AT CAMP

The twelve spent most of Wednesday walking around Mount Olivet and visiting with the followers who were encamped with them. However, by early afternoon, they became increasingly eager to see Jesus return. As the day progressed, their anxiety about his safety grew; they felt profoundly lonely without him. Throughout the day, there was much debate regarding whether Jesus should have been allowed to venture off alone into the hills, accompanied only by an errand boy. Although no one openly voiced their concerns, everyone of them wished to be in John Mark's place.

It was around mid-afternoon when Nathaniel delivered his speech on Supreme Desire to a large audience of followers. He concluded with: What is wrong with us is that we are only halfhearted. We fail to love the Master as he loves us. He would surely have taken us all if we had all wanted to go with him as much as the boy did. We stood by as the lad approached the Master and offered him the basket, but when the Master grasped it, the boy refused to let go.

Consequently, the Master departed, leaving us behind while he ascended the hills with the basket, the boy, and all.

Runners arrived at David Zebedee's location in the late afternoon, delivering news from his mother in Bethsaida and Jesus' mother. Several days earlier, David had concluded that the chief priests and leaders were intent on killing Jesus. He was increasingly convinced that Jesus would neither use his divine power to save himself nor allow his friends to resort to violence in his defense. Having reached these conclusions, he sent a messenger to his mother, urging her to come to Jerusalem immediately and bring Mary, the mother of Jesus, along with all her family members.

David's mother complied with her son's request. The runners returned to David, informing him that his mother and Jesus' entire family were en route to Jerusalem and were expected to arrive late the following day or very early the next morning. Since David had taken this initiative on his own, he deemed it prudent to keep the matter to himself.

Shortly after noon, more than twenty Greeks who had met with Jesus and the twelve at the home of Joseph of Arimathea arrived at the camp. Peter and John spent several hours in conference with them. At least some of these Greeks were well-versed in the new teachings, having been instructed by Rodan in Alexandria.

That evening, after returning to the camp, Jesus met with the Greeks. Had it not been for the potential disturbance to his friends and many of his prominent followers, he would have welcomed these twenty Greeks, just as he had the seventy.

While all of this was occurring at the camp in Jerusalem, the chief priests and elders were astonished that Jesus did not return to address the crowds. It is true that the day before, when he left the temple, he had declared: "I leave your house to you desolate." But they could not understand why he would choose to forgo the significant advantage he had gained from the favorable disposition of the people.

While they feared he would incite a tumult among the people, Jesus' final words to the multitude had been an exhortation to reasonably

conform to the authority of those “who sit in Moses’ seat.” However, it was a busy day in the city, as preparations for Passover coincided with the finalization of their plans to execute Jesus. Few people came to the camp, as its establishment had been a closely guarded secret among those aware that Jesus intended to stay there instead of returning to Bethany each night.

15.27 JUDAS AND THE CHIEF PRIESTS

Judas Iscariot departed from his companions shortly after Jesus, not returning until late afternoon. Despite Jesus’ explicit request to avoid entering Jerusalem, this follower hastily kept his appointment with Jesus’ adversaries at the residence of Caiaphas, the high priest. This informal gathering of the Sanhedrin had been scheduled for mid-morning. The purpose of the meeting was to deliberate on the nature of the charges to be filed against Jesus and to determine the procedure for presenting him before the Roman authorities to obtain the necessary civil endorsement of the death sentence they had already imposed upon him.

On the previous day, Judas had confided in some of his relatives and a few Sadducean friends from his father’s family that he had come to the conclusion that, although Jesus was a well-meaning dreamer and idealist, he was not the anticipated deliverer of Israel. Judas expressed a strong desire to find a way to withdraw gracefully from the entire movement. His friends’ flattering assurances persuaded him that the leaders of Jerusalem would celebrate his withdrawal as a great event and that nothing would be too good for him. They led him to believe that he would receive high honors from the Sanhedrin and would finally be able to erase the stigma of his well-intentioned but “unfortunate association with untaught Galileans.”

Judas was now fully convinced that Jesus would not use his power for self-aggrandizement. He believed that Jesus would allow himself to be executed by the leaders of Jerusalem, and he could not bear the humiliating thought of being associated with a movement of defeat - he refused to entertain the notion of apparent failure.

Deep down in his heart, Judas likely resented that Jesus did not save John the Baptist. Judas had been a follower of John before he became a follower of Jesus. He thoroughly understood John's strong character and derived pleasure from the notion that Jesus, while a well-meaning fanatic, was probably not entirely sound of mind; he had always seemed to be a strange and misunderstood individual.

And now, more than ever, Judas felt an unusual resentment that Jesus had never granted him a position of greater honor. Throughout his time as treasurer, he had valued the role, but now he began to sense a lack of appreciation for his contributions. He was suddenly overwhelmed with indignation that Peter, James, and John had been favored with a closer association with Jesus.

On his way to the high priest's residence, Judas was determined to exact revenge on Peter, James, and John, just as much as he was preoccupied with the idea of betraying Jesus. He aimed to secure honor for himself, and if he could achieve this while also settling the score with those who had caused him the greatest disappointment in life, all the better. It was not merely for money that Judas was heading to Caiaphas's home to orchestrate the betrayal of Jesus.

Judas was presented to Caiaphas and the leaders of Jerusalem by his cousin, who explained that Judas, having realized his error in being misled by Jesus' subtle teachings, sought to make a public and formal renunciation of his association with the Galilean. At the same time, he wished to request reinstatement in the confidence and fellowship of his Judean brethren.

This spokesperson for Judas further explained that Judas believed it would be in Israel's best interest for Jesus to be taken into custody. As a demonstration of his remorse for having participated in such a misguided movement and as proof of his sincerity in returning to the teachings of Moses, he offered to negotiate with the captain responsible for the orders to arrest Jesus. He intended to ensure that Jesus could be apprehended quietly, thereby avoiding the risk of inciting the crowds or delaying the arrest until after Passover.

When his cousin finished speaking, he presented Judas, who stepped forward near the high priest and said: As my cousin has promised, I will do. But what are you willing to give me for this service? Judas did not seem to notice the look of disdain and even disgust that crossed the face of the hard-heated Caiaphas. Caiaphas then looked down at Judas and said: Go to the captain of the guard and arrange with that officer to bring your master to us either tonight or tomorrow night. When he has been delivered into our hands by you, you shall receive your reward for this service.

When Judas heard this, he went out and conferred with the captain of the temple guards about how to apprehend Jesus. Judas was aware that Jesus was currently absent from the camp and had no knowledge of when he would return that evening. Therefore, they collectively decided to arrest Jesus the following evening (Thursday) after the people of Jerusalem and the visiting pilgrims had retired for the night.

Judas returned to his associates at the camp, undoubtedly intoxicated with thoughts of grandeur and glory that he had not experienced in many days. He had enlisted with Jesus, hoping to become a significant figure in the new earthly kingdom. However, he ultimately realized that the new earthly kingdom he had anticipated would not materialize. Judas's betrayal of Jesus likely stemmed from his desire for personal safety and glorification, regardless of the consequences his actions would have on Jesus and his former associates.

At last, the chief priests and elders could breathe easily for a few hours. They would not have to arrest Jesus in public, and securing Judas as an ally ensured that Jesus would not escape from their jurisdiction as he had done so many times before.

15.28 LAST SOCIAL HOUR

Since it was Wednesday, the evening at the camp was designated as a social hour. Jesus endeavored to uplift his downcast followers, but this proved nearly impossible.

They were beginning to grasp that disconcerting and devastating events were on the horizon. Even as Jesus recounted their years of meaningful and affectionate companionship, they struggled to find joy. He made careful inquiries about the families of all the followers and, glancing over at David Zebedee, asked if anyone had heard from his mother, youngest sister, or other family members recently. David looked down at his feet, afraid to respond.

This was the occasion when Jesus warned his friends to be cautious of the support of the multitude. He recounted their experiences in Galilee, where time and again, large crowds of people enthusiastically followed them, only to turn against them just as fervently and revert to their former ways. He then said:

“And so, you must not allow yourselves to be deceived by the large crowds who heard us in the temple and appeared to believe our teachings. These multitudes listen to the truth and accept it superficially with their minds, but few allow the word of truth to penetrate their hearts and take root. Those who understand the teachings only intellectually and have not experienced it in the heart cannot be relied upon for support when genuine trouble arises. When the leaders in Jerusalem conspire to execute me, and when they strike with one accord, you will witness the multitude either flee in dismay or stand by in silence.

“When adversity and persecution descend upon you, some individuals whom you believe love the truth will scatter, and some will renounce the lessons and abandon you. Some of those who have been very close to us have already decided to desert. You have rested today in preparation for the challenging times that are now upon us. Therefore, watch and pray that tomorrow you may be strengthened for the days that lie ahead.”

The atmosphere of the camp was charged with an inexplicable tension. Silent messengers came and went, communicating solely with David Zebedee. Before the evening had ended, some had learned that

Lazarus had made a hasty departure from Bethany. John Mark remained ominously silent after returning to camp, despite having spent the entire day in Jesus' company. Every attempt to persuade him to speak only made it clear that Jesus had instructed him to remain silent.

This Wednesday evening marked the low point of their spiritual state leading up to the hour of Jesus' death. Yet, Jesus remained with them, and they navigated these anxious hours with grace. Just before midnight, knowing this would be the last night he would ever spend with his chosen family on earth, Jesus said, as he sent them off for the night: "Go to your sleep, my brethren, and may peace be with you until we rise tomorrow, for one more day to fulfill our Heavenly Father's will and experience the joy of knowing that we are his sons."

Thursday

16.0 THURSDAY AT THE CAMP

Jesus planned to spend this Thursday, his last free day on earth, with his friends and a few loyal and devoted followers. Soon after breakfast on this beautiful morning, Jesus led them to a secluded spot a short distance from their camp, where he taught them many new lessons. Although Jesus delivered other discourses to the followers during the early evening hours, this talk on Thursday forenoon served as his farewell address to the combined group of associates and chosen followers, both Jews and Gentiles.

The twelve were all present except for Judas. Peter and several of the followers commented on his absence, with some speculating that Jesus had sent him into the city to attend to some matter, likely to arrange the details for their upcoming celebration of the Passover. Judas did not return to the camp until mid-afternoon, shortly before Jesus led the twelve into Jerusalem to partake in their last meal together.

16.1 MORNING TEACHINGS

Jesus spoke to approximately fifty of his trusted followers for nearly two hours, addressing numerous questions about the relationship between the spiritual kingdom and the kingdoms of this world, as well as the relation of fellowship with God and fellowship in earthly governments:

“The kingdoms of this world, being material, sometimes find it necessary to employ physical force in the execution of their laws and the maintenance of order. However, the spiritual kingdom does not resort to force. The spiritual kingdom, as a fellowship of all souls, can only be established through the power of the spirit. This distinction in procedure pertains to the relationship between the kingdom of followers and the kingdoms of secular government. It does not negate the right of social groups to maintain order within their ranks and administer discipline to unruly members.

“There is no inherent conflict between fellowship in the spiritual world and citizenship in secular or civil government. Followers must render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s. There should be no disagreement between these two requirements, material and spiritual, unless it should develop that a Caesar attempts to usurp the prerogatives of God by demanding spiritual homage and worship. In such cases, one should honor only God while striving to enlighten these misguided earthly leaders, guiding them toward recognizing our Heavenly Father.

Jesus’ lesson continued.

“Fellowship in the new teachings should help you become ideal citizens of the governments of this world, as fellowship and service are the cornerstones of these principles. The love will help counter any hatred and aggression of unbelieving and war-minded earthly kingdoms. As children of the spiritual kingdom, you bear a dual responsibility: a duty to both people and God. Additionally, you voluntarily embrace a third and essential obligation: service to humanity. Therefore, the leaders of earthly governments should strive to be like their spiritual followers in civil affairs, guided by their commitment to this teaching of service.

“You should not worship your temporal leaders, nor should you employ temporal power to advance the spiritual teachings. Instead, you should demonstrate the righteous ministry of loving service to both followers and non-followers alike. Within the new teachings resides a mighty spirit. The results of the spirit, your sincere and loving service, are the powerful social lever to uplift humanity, and this spirit will become your power-multiplying fulcrum.

“Demonstrate wisdom and exhibit discernment in your interactions with unbelieving civil authorities. Exercise discretion to become adept at resolving minor disagreements and addressing trivial misunderstandings. Strive to live peacefully with everyone. Always be as wise as serpents yet as harmless as doves.

“If the leaders of earthly governments attempt to exert authority of a religious nature, those who embrace these teachings can anticipate only trouble, persecution, and even death. However, the spiritual light you carry into the world, along with the manner in which you endure suffering and death for these new teachings, will ultimately illuminate the entire world and lead to the gradual separation of politics and religion. The enduring message of these teachings will one day grant all nations a new liberation, intellectual freedom, and religious liberty.”

Jesus continued to talk to the followers:

“Under the impending persecutions from those who oppose this teaching of joy and liberty, you will endure, and the spiritual fellowship of souls will persist. However, you may still face spiritual peril in future times when the majority will praise followers, and many in positions of power will only superficially embrace the teachings. It is essential to remain faithful to the lessons, even during periods of peace and prosperity.

“You are tasked with teaching this lesson: The supreme desire to do our Heavenly Father’s will, combined with the profound joy of fellowship with others. You must not allow anything to divert your commitment to this duty. Let all individuals benefit from the abundance of your loving spiritual ministry, enlightening intellectual communication, and uplifting social service. However, none of these humanitarian efforts, whether taken individually or collectively, should overshadow your faith in the teachings.

“You should not seek to promote the truth through the power of civil governments or the action of secular laws. While you may strive to persuade people’s minds, you should never attempt to compel them. Remember the fundamental principle of human fairness that I have positively taught you: Treat others as you would like to be treated. You should be gentle in your dealings with those who err, patient in your interactions with the less informed, and tolerant in the face of provocation.

The lesson continued.

“When a follower is called upon to serve the civil government, that individual should fulfill their duties as a secular citizen. However, this follower should also exhibit the qualities of good citizenship that have been enhanced by their spiritual enlightenment.

“You should not become dreamers and drifters, passively relying on a fictitious Providence to supply the necessities of life.

“This new teaching is a living truth. It is like the leaven in dough, a grain of mustard seed, or the seed of a living being, which remains unchanged from generation to generation. This living seed unfailingly unfolds in new manifestations and grows adaptively to meet the unique needs and conditions of each successive generation. These teachings

should show increasing vitality and exhibit a deeper spiritual power over time. Our teachings must not be allowed to become mere memories or traditions; they must remain living lessons.

“We have made no direct attack on the people or the authority of those sitting in Moses’ seat; we have only offered them new insights. We have challenged them solely based on their spiritual disloyalty to the very truths they claim to teach and protect. We have clashed with these established leaders only when they positioned themselves directly in opposition to the new teachings. Even now, it is not we who attack them, but they who seek to quiet us.

“You should focus on teaching only the new principles; do not attack the old ways. Instead, skillfully incorporate the leaven of new truths into existing beliefs. Allow your spirit to do its own work. Controversy should arise only when those who reject the truth impose other ideas upon you. However, when a willful individual attacks you, do not hesitate to stand firmly in defense of the new truth.”

Jesus stated that the concept of God as a Father was not original to him; however, he aimed to exalt and elevate this idea by demonstrating that every mortal being is a child of this loving Heavenly Father, a son or daughter of God.

Jesus contributed to his followers’ spiritual experience not by revealing new concepts about God, but by exemplifying a new type of living in relationship with God. They came to realize that in the midst of the natural challenges and temporal contradictions of human existence, he appeared to embody a profound tranquility rooted in unwavering trust in God, while also experiencing the thrill of living in God’s immediate presence. Simultaneously, Jesus did not shy away from life’s complexities; he maintained a well-balanced intellectual perspective on the relative importance of practical, everyday social, economic, and moral situations.

Only a few of Jesus’ listeners could fully grasp his address delivered in the morning.

Among all who heard him, the Greeks understood the most. Even the eleven followers were perplexed by his allusions to a spiritual kingdom and the successive generations of followers. Jesus' most devoted followers struggled to reconcile the imminent conclusion of his earthly ministry with these references to a prolonged future of teaching activities.

When Jesus concluded his teaching, it was early afternoon, and they promptly returned to the camp, where David and his associates had prepared lunch for them.

15.2 AFTER THE NOONTIME MEAL

Afternoon on that day, all the followers had learned about Lazarus's hasty flight from Bethany. They began to sense the grim determination of the Jewish leaders to silence Jesus and his teachings.

David Zebedee, through the efforts of his agents in Jerusalem, was fully informed about the progress of the plan to arrest and execute Jesus. Shortly after lunch, he took Jesus aside and, gathering his courage, asked him if he was aware of the situation, but he never completed his question. Jesus raised his hand to stop him, saying: "Yes, David, I know, and I know that you know, but ensure that you tell no one. Do not doubt in your heart that the will of God will ultimately prevail."

This conversation with David was interrupted by the arrival of a messenger from Philadelphia, who brought news that Abner had learned of the plot to kill Jesus and inquired whether Jesus should proceed to Jerusalem. The runner hastened back to Philadelphia with this message for Abner: "Continue with your work. If I depart from you in the flesh, it is only so that I may return in another form. I will not forsake you; I will be with you in spirit."

16.3 PREPARATION FOR SUPPER

About this time, Philip approached Jesus and inquired where he wanted to celebrate the Passover dinner. Jesus replied: "Go and bring Peter and John, and I will provide you with directions regarding the

dinner we will share this evening. As for the Passover, you will need to consider that after we have first completed this.”

When Judas heard Jesus speaking with Philip about these matters, he drew closer to overhear their conversation. However, David Zebedee, who was standing nearby, approached Judas and engaged him in conversation while Philip, Peter, and John stepped aside to speak with Jesus.

Jesus said to the three: “Go immediately into Jerusalem, and as you enter the gate, you will meet a man carrying a water pitcher. He will speak to you, and you should follow him. When he leads you to a certain house, go in after him and ask the good man of that house: ‘Where is the guest chamber where we are to eat dinner?’ When you have made this inquiry, the householder will show you a large upper room, all furnished and ready for us.”

All of this transpired as a result of an understanding reached between Jesus and John Mark during the previous day’s afternoon, when they were alone in the hills. Jesus wanted to ensure that he could have this one last meal undisturbed with his friends. He believed that if Judas learned of their meeting place in advance, he might conspire with Jesus’ adversaries to arrest him there. Therefore, Jesus made a secret arrangement with John Mark. Consequently, Judas did not discover their dinner location until later, when he arrived with Jesus and the other followers.

David Zebedee had numerous business matters to discuss with Judas, which made it easy for him to refrain from following Peter, John, and Philip, as he greatly wished to do. When Judas provided David with a specific sum of money for provisions, David suggested to Judas: Might it not be prudent, given the circumstances, to give me a small amount of money in advance of my actual needs?

After a moment of reflection, Judas answered: Yes, given the troubling circumstances in Jerusalem, it would be best for me to transfer all the funds to you. They are conspiring against the Master, and if anything were to happen to me, you would not be captured.

David received all the funds along with the receipts for the money on deposit. It was not until the evening of the following day that the other followers became aware of this transaction.

It was late afternoon when the three returned to inform Jesus that everything was ready for dinner. Jesus promptly prepared to lead the twelve along the trail to the Bethany Road and onward into Jerusalem. This would be his final journey with all twelve of them.

16.4 ON THE WAY TO SUPPER

Seeking to avoid the crowds traversing the Kidron Valley between Gethsemane Park and Jerusalem, Jesus and the twelve ascended the western slope of Mount Olivet to reach the road leading from Bethany down to the city.

As they approached the location where Jesus had spent the previous evening discussing the destruction of Jerusalem, they unconsciously paused, standing in silence as they gazed down upon the city. Since they had arrived a bit early and Jesus did not wish to enter the city until after sunset, he addressed his companions:

“Please sit down and rest while I discuss with you what is about to happen. For all these years, I have lived among you as a brother, teaching you the truth about God’s will and revealing to you the mysteries of living as brothers.

“God and the heavenly spirits have performed many remarkable works in connection with my mission. You have witnessed all of this and have participated in the experience of being laborers alongside me. You will bear witness that I have, for some time, warned you that I must soon go to God; I have plainly told you that I must leave you in the world to continue the work. For this purpose, I have set you apart in the hills of Capernaum. The experiences you have had and the lessons you have learned must now be shared with others. I am about to send you to represent God to the world and to complete the work we have begun.”

His subsequent remarks regarding the future of the city were not entirely comprehended:

“You look down upon that city in sorrow, for you have heard my words foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem. I have warned you in advance, lest you perish in her ruin and thereby delay the proclamation of the new teachings.

“I urge you to take caution, lest you unnecessarily expose yourselves to danger when they come to take me. I must leave, but you must remain to disseminate these teachings after my departure, just as I instructed Lazarus to flee so that he might live to share God’s teachings. If it is our Heavenly Father’s will for me to depart, nothing you do can thwart the divine plan. Be vigilant, lest they also take your lives. Be courageous in defending the teachings through spiritual strength, but do not be misled into any attempts to protect me. I require no defense from man.

“When you witness this city in ruins, remember that your soul will embark on the eternal journey of endless service in the ever-advancing fellowship of souls. In God’s universe, there are many abodes, and there awaits you the revelation of spiritual places whose architect is God, and spiritual worlds characterized by righteousness and joy in the truth. All of you shall undoubtedly ascend to these realms and be with me in the fellowship of souls of our Heavenly Father.

“But first, you must prepare yourselves and complete the work you have begun with me. You must endure much tribulation and face many sorrows; these trials are already upon us. When you have finished your work on earth, you shall experience heavenly joy, just as I have completed our Heavenly Father’s work on earth and am about to joyfully enter into God’s embrace.”

When Jesus had finished speaking, he rose, and all the ambassadors followed him down Mount Olivet and into the city. None of the followers, except for three, knew their destination as they navigated the narrow streets in the encroaching darkness. The crowds jostled them, yet no one recognized them or realized that Jesus was passing by. John Mark had followed them into the city, and after they entered the gate, he hurried down another street to wait and welcome them to his father's home upon their arrival.

16.5 LAST SUPPER

During the afternoon of Thursday, Philip reminded Jesus about the upcoming Passover and inquired about his plans for the celebration. He was aware that the Passover meal was scheduled to be eaten on Friday evening. It was customary to begin preparations for the Passover celebration no later than noon on the preceding day. Since the Jews considered the day to begin at sunset, this meant that the Passover meal for Saturday could be observed on Friday night, sometime before midnight.

The followers were, therefore, completely perplexed as to why Jesus appeared to celebrate Passover one day early. Some of them thought this was a special occasion that preceded the traditional Passover celebration. Others speculated that Jesus would be arrested before Passover on Friday night, prompting him to gather them for a special meal on Thursday evening.

The followers understood that Jesus had celebrated other Passovers without the paschal lamb; they were aware that he did not personally partake in the sacrificial services of the Jewish system. He had consumed lamb many times as a guest, but whenever he was the host, lamb was not served. It would not have been particularly surprising for the followers to see the lamb omitted even on Passover night, and since this meal was held one day earlier, they thought nothing of its absence.

After receiving the warm greetings extended by John Mark's parents, the followers immediately ascended to the upper chamber. Jesus lingered behind to converse with the Mark family. It had previously been understood that Jesus would celebrate this occasion solely with the twelve; therefore, no attendants were provided to serve them.

16.6 DESIRE FOR PREFERENCE

When the followers were shown upstairs by John Mark, they beheld a large and spacious chamber that was fully prepared for dinner. They noticed that the bread, wine, water, and herbs were all arranged at one end of the table. Except for the end where the bread and wine were placed, this long table was surrounded by thirteen reclining couches, similar to those typically provided for the celebration of Passover in an affluent Jewish household.

As the twelve entered the upper chamber, they noticed, just inside the door, the pitchers of water, basins, and towels for washing their dusty feet. Since no helper had been provided to perform this task, the followers began to glance at one another after John Mark had left, each contemplating who would wash their feet. Each thought that it would not be appropriate for him to take on the role of serving the others.

As they stood there, grappling with their thoughts, they surveyed the seating arrangement at the table. They noted the elevated dais of the host, flanked by one couch on the right and eleven seats arranged around the table, extending to the opposite side of the second seat of honor on the host's right. They anticipated Jesus' arrival at any moment, yet they found themselves in a dilemma about whether to take their seats or wait for him to designate their places.

While they hesitated, Judas approached the seat of honor at the host's left and indicated his intention to recline as the preferred guest. This action by Judas immediately sparked a confusion among the other followers. No sooner had Judas taken the seat of honor than John Zebedee claimed the next preferred position, the one on the host's right. Simon Peter, infuriated by the audacity of Judas and John in claiming

these choice seats, marched around the table and took his place on the lowest couch, at the end of the seating arrangement, directly opposite John Zebedee. Since others had occupied the higher seats, Peter chose the lowest as a form of protest against the unseemly pride of his brethren, but with the hope that when Jesus arrived and saw him in the place of least honor, he would call him up to a higher position, thereby displacing one who had presumed to honor himself.

With the highest and lowest positions thus occupied, the remaining followers chose their places, some near Judas and others near Peter, until everyone was seated. They arranged themselves around the U-shaped table on reclining divans.

They had gathered to celebrate, at least in spirit, an institution that predated even Moses and dated back to the times when their ancestors were enslaved in Egypt. This dinner marked their final meal with Jesus, and even in such a solemn setting, under Judas's leadership, the followers succumbed once more to their longstanding tendencies for honor, preference, and personal exaltation. They were still expressing recriminations when Jesus appeared in the doorway, hesitating momentarily as a look of disappointment gradually spread across his face. He took his place without comment and did not disrupt their seating arrangement. They were now ready to begin the meal, except their feet remained unwashed.

16.7 BEGINNING THE SUPPER

Not a word was spoken for a few moments after Jesus had taken his place. He looked over the group and, easing the tension with a smile, said: "I have greatly desired to eat this meal with you. I wanted to share this moment with you once more before I depart, and now that my time has come, I have arranged to have dinner with you tonight. As for tomorrow, we are all in the hands of our Heavenly Father."

After the wine and water had been mixed, they brought the cup to Jesus. When he received it, he held it while offering thanks. After finishing his prayer, he said: "Take this cup and divide it among

yourselves. When you partake of it, remember that I will not drink with you again, for this is our last meal. The next time we will be together, it will be in the fellowship of souls to come.”

16.8 WASHING THE FEET

After drinking the first cup, it was customary for the host to rise from the table and wash his hands. Later in the meal, after the second cup, all the guests would also stand and wash their hands. Since the followers were aware that their teacher did not adhere to these ceremonial hand-washing rites, they were very curious about his intentions when he stood up from the table after they had partaken of the first cup.

Jesus quietly approached the door, where the water pitchers, basins, and towels were arranged. Their curiosity transformed into astonishment as they witnessed Jesus remove his outer garment, wrap a towel around his waist, and begin to pour water into one of the foot basins. Imagine the amazement of these twelve men, who had recently refused to wash one another's feet, as Jesus prepared to wash Simon's feet. As he knelt, all twelve men rose to their feet in unison.

There stood Simon Peter, gazing down into the upturned face of his teacher. Jesus remained silent; he did not need to speak. His demeanor conveyed a willingness to wash Simon Peter's feet. Given Peter's deep reverence and honor for Jesus, it was understandable that he felt uncomfortable with the idea of Jesus kneeling before him in a servant's posture, proposing to wash his feet as a servant would. Once Peter gathered his thoughts sufficiently to address Jesus, he expressed the sentiments of all his fellow followers. After a moment of profound embarrassment, Peter asked; Do you really intend to wash my feet?

And then, looking up into Peter's face, Jesus said: “You may not fully understand what I am about to do, but in the future you will know the meaning of all these things.” Simon Peter, drawing a deep breath, replied: You shall never wash my feet! And each of the followers nodded in agreement with Peter's resolute refusal to allow Jesus to humble himself before them.

As they all stood there in breathless amazement, Jesus said: "Peter, if I do not wash your feet, you will not be part of what I am about to perform." When Peter heard this declaration, along with the fact that Jesus continued kneeling at his feet, he made a decision of blind acquiescence in compliance with the wishes of one he respected and loved. As it began to dawn on Peter that this proposed act of service carried significant implications for his future connection with Jesus' work, he not only reconciled himself to the idea of allowing Jesus to wash his feet but, in his characteristic and impetuous manner, exclaimed: Then wash not only my feet but also my hands and head.

As Jesus prepared to wash Peter's feet, he said: "He who is already clean needs only to have his feet washed. You who sit with me tonight are clean. However, the dust on your feet should have been washed away before you sat down to eat. And besides, I will perform this service for you as a way to illustrate the meaning of a new lesson that I will soon share with you."

Similarly, Jesus moved around the table, washing the feet of his twelve followers in silence. Once he had completed this act, he put on his cloak, returned to his position as host, and, after surveying his bewildered followers, said:

"Do you understand what I have done? You call me Master, and the Master has washed the feet of his students. Why were you unwilling to wash one another's feet? You should learn from this story in which the Master willingly performs the service that his brethren were reluctant to do for one another. A servant is not greater than his master, nor is the one who is sent greater than the one who sends him.

"You have witnessed the way of service in my life among you, and you are precious for having the gracious courage to serve. The ways of God's will differ significantly from the methods of power in the material world.

"When I entered this chamber tonight, you were not only unwilling to wash one another's feet, but you also began to

argue among yourselves about who should occupy the places of honor at the table. Such honors are sought by the Pharisees and the other children of this world, but it should not be so among our ambassadors. There is no place of preference at God's table. I love each of you equally. The place nearest to me, as people perceive such honors, holds no significance regarding your standing in the fellowship of souls.

“You know that kings hold authority over their subjects, and those who exercise this power are sometimes referred to as benefactors. However, it shall not be so in the spiritual kingdom. Whoever desires to be great among you must become like the youngest; and whoever wishes to be chief must become a servant. Who is greater: the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not commonly perceived that the one who reclines at the table is the greater? Yet, you will notice that I am among you as one who serves. If you are willing to join me as fellow servants in fulfilling our Heavenly Father's will, you shall be with me while continuing to do the Father's will.”

When Jesus had finished speaking, the Alpheus twins brought forth the bread and wine, accompanied by bitter herbs and a plate of dried fruits for the next course.

16.9 LAST WORDS TO JUDAS

For several minutes, the followers ate in silence. However, influenced by Jesus' cheerful demeanor, they soon engaged in conversation, and before long, the meal progressed as if nothing unusual had occurred to disrupt the good cheer and social harmony of this extraordinary occasion.

After some time had passed, approximately in the middle of the second course of the meal, Jesus, surveying the group, said: “I have expressed to you my deep desire to share this meal with you.

Aware of the opposing forces that conspire against me, I have chosen to partake in this meal with you in this secret chamber, one day before Passover, as I will not be with you by this time tomorrow night. I have repeatedly told you that I must go to God. Now, my hour has come, but it was not necessary for one of you to betray me into the hands of my adversaries.”

When the twelve heard this, having already been stripped of much of their self-assertiveness and self-confidence by the account of the feet washing and Jesus’ subsequent discourse, they began to look at one another. In disconcerted tones, they hesitantly inquired: Is it I?

When they had all asked, Jesus responded: “While I must go to God, one of you was not required to become a traitor to fulfill our Heavenly Father’s will. This is the culmination of the hidden spiritual mistakes in the heart of one who has failed to love the truth with his entire being. My friend of many years, who even now shares in the bread, is willing to betray me, even as he now dips his hand with me in the dish.”

And when Jesus had spoken these words, they all began to ask once more: Is it I? Judas, seated to the left of his teacher, repeated the question: Is it I? Jesus, dipping the bread into the dish of herbs, handed it to Judas, saying: “You have said.” But the others did not hear Jesus address Judas.

John, who reclined at Jesus’ right hand, leaned over and asked: Who is it? We should know who has proven unfaithful to this trust. Jesus answered: “Already I have told you; it is the one to whom I gave the bread.”

However, it was so natural for the host to offer bread to the person sitting next to him on the left that none of them noticed this, despite Jesus having spoken so plainly. Judas, however, was acutely aware of the implications of Jesus’ words about his actions, and he became fearful lest his fellow disciples might also realize that he was the betrayer. Peter, highly agitated by the conversation, leaned forward over the table and addressed John: Ask him who it is, or if he has already told you, please inform me who the betrayer is.

Jesus brought their murmurs to a halt by saying: "I would not have shared these matters with you, but I feel compelled to warn you of the sorrows that lie ahead and to prepare you for what is now upon us. I have conveyed this information to you because it is important for you to understand that I was aware of all these schemes. My intention in doing so is solely to strengthen you for the temptations and trials that await us."

When Jesus had spoken these words, leaning toward Judas, he quietly said: "What you have decided to do, do quickly." Upon hearing this, Judas rose from the table and hurriedly left the room, venturing out into the night to fulfill his intentions. When the other disciples observed Judas hastening away after Jesus had addressed him, they assumed he had gone to procure something extra for the meal or to run another errand for Jesus, as they believed he still carried the moneybag.

16.10 WINE AND BREAD

As they presented Jesus with the third cup of wine, known as the Cup Of The Blessing, he rose from the couch and, taking the wine in his hands, said: "Take this wine, all of you, and drink it. This is a new revelation of grace and truth. It symbolizes the life and ministry of the spirit. And I will not drink with you again until I am in a new form with you in our Heavenly Father's fellowship of souls."

The followers sensed that something unusual was occurring as they drank from the cup in profound reverence and complete silence. The traditional Passover commemorated the liberation of their ancestors from slavery to freedom; now, Jesus appeared to allude to new symbols, possibly marking the individual's release from the bondage of ceremonialism.

When they had finished drinking the wine, Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, and broke it into pieces. He directed them to pass it around and said, "Take this bread and eat it. I have told you that God is the spiritual bread; God's soul in you is indeed the source of life."

When they had partaken of the bread, they all sat down. After engaging in meditation for a few moments, Jesus continued speaking:

“When you eat and drink in this manner, remember to reflect on our lives here. Recall that we lived together, and rejoice in the knowledge that we shall all share in the spirit together in the eternal fellowship of souls.”

Jesus, as was his custom, often resorted to stories and symbols. He employed these symbols to convey spiritual truths in a way that encouraged his followers to interpret and derive meaning from them personally. Jesus frequently took great care to imply his intentions rather than commit to precise procedures or language. Consequently, his followers were often confused about whether this meal was a special farewell dinner on that Thursday evening or a new way to celebrate the traditional Friday night Passover. *[Later, they realized that the blessings of the wine and bread were the only instances in which Jesus appeared to suggest an ongoing form of remembrance.]*

They concluded the celebration, much like the ancient yet unblemished Passover, by singing together what was later called the one hundred eighteenth Psalm.

16.11 FAREWELL TEACHINGS

After singing the Psalm, the followers believed that Jesus intended to return immediately to the camp; however, he instructed them to sit down. He said:

“You will remember when I sent you out without a purse or wallet and even advised you to take no extra clothes. You will all recall that you lacked nothing. However, we have now entered troubled times. No longer can you depend on the goodwill of the multitudes. Henceforth, let him who has a purse take it with him. When you go out into the world to proclaim these teachings, make whatever provisions for your support seem best.

“My friends, I will be with you only a little longer. In a short time, I will leave you; you will see me no more on earth. However, you shall all see me in the age to come when you ascend to our fellowship of souls.”

16.12 AS I HAVE LOVED YOU

After a brief period of informal conversation, Jesus stood up and said:

“When I presented to you a story illustrating how you should be willing to serve one another, I expressed my desire to impart a new lesson; I will do so now as I am about to depart from you.

“You are familiar with the rule that instructs people to love one another and to love their neighbor as themselves. However, I am not entirely satisfied with even that genuine commitment from people. I desire for you to engage in even greater acts of love within this earthly realm. Therefore, I present to you this new rule: ‘That you love one another as I have loved you.’ By this, all people will recognize that you are my followers. When I offer you this new rule, I do not impose an additional burden upon your souls; rather, I bring you newfound joy and enable you to experience the profound pleasures that arise from expressing the affections of your heart toward all.

“When I invite you to love one another, just as I have loved you, I present the supreme measure of genuine affection, for no one can have greater love than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You have called me Master, but I do not refer to you as servants. We shall all be brothers if you simply love one another as I love you.”

16.13 BEAR MUCH FRUIT

Shortly thereafter, Jesus stood up once more and continued his teaching.

“The world is a vineyard, and our Heavenly Father is the husbandman. I am the vine, and you are the branches. The Heavenly Father asks only that you bear much fruit. The vine is pruned solely to increase the fruitfulness of its branches. The husbandman will cleanse every branch that bears fruit so that it may produce even more. You will bear abundant fruit if you maintain this spiritual cleanliness.

“The vine has many living branches, and each branch can bear much fruit. When the world observes these fruit-bearing branches - my friends who love one another just as I have loved them - all people will know that you are truly my followers.”

[The followers later recalled that the Jews had long taught that the Messiah would be “a stem arising out of the vine” of David’s ancestors. In commemoration of this ancient teaching, a large emblem of the grape and its attached vine decorated the entrance to the temple.]

16.14 I WILL NOT LEAVE YOU ALONE

The eleven had scarcely concluded their discussions on the discourse regarding the vine and the branches when Jesus, indicating his desire to speak with them further and aware that his time was short, said:

“After I have departed from you, do not be disheartened by the world’s animosity. Do not lose hope, even when timid followers turn against you and align themselves with the opponents of our teachings. If the world despises you, remember that it despised me even before it despised you.

“But always remember the words I have spoken to you: ‘The servant is not greater than his master.’ If they dare to persecute me, they will also persecute you. If my words offend the non-followers, your words will likely offend them as well. However, when you endure these tribulations, you should remember that I also suffered before you for the sake of these teachings.

“But I will not leave you alone in the world. Very soon, after I have departed, I will send you my spirit. My spirit will be with you, taking my place among you; my spirit will continue to teach you the way of truth and provide you with comfort.

“I have already informed you that there are many dwelling places in our Father’s house. I will soon be going to God’s house, to which you will one day ascend.”

However, this teaching was too profound for many of the followers, particularly for Philip, who stood up and asked Jesus to show them the Father. He believed that doing so would clarify everything. Jesus responded:

“Philip, again, I say: He who has seen my actions has seen the Father, so do not ask, ‘Show us the Father.’ The words I speak are not my own, but the words of the Father; I speak for the Father and not of myself. Believe me for the sake of the very life I have lived - for the sake of the work I have done.”

As Jesus stepped aside to refresh himself with water, the eleven engaged in a lively discussion about his teachings. When Jesus returned, he beckoned them to be seated as Peter began delivering an extended speech.

16.15 MY SPIRIT WILL BE WITH YOU

Jesus continued to teach, stating:

“When I have gone to God, I shall ask our Heavenly Father: ‘Having left our children alone on earth, I wish to send them another teacher.’ If God approves, I will pour my spirit upon them and all flesh. Already, our Heavenly Father’s spirit resides in your souls, and when that day comes, you will also have my spirit with you. This new gift is the spirit of living truth. You shall recognize this spirit when it arrives, just as you have known me, and you will receive this gift in your soul, where it will dwell with you.

“When I depart, I leave you in the flesh so that I may be with you more fully in spirit. My spirit will always be with you.

“Today, I can only be with you in person. Soon, I will be with everyone, wherever they may be, and with one simultaneously. The non-followers may not initially grasp the feelings of this new spirit, but some will embrace it wholeheartedly and with open hearts.”

[The followers recognized that Jesus’ teachings were fundamentally a spiritual declaration. His coming spirit would be both assertive and progressive, striving for genuine spiritual values: divine beauty, infinite goodness, heartfelt service, eternal truth, and brotherly love. Some followers eventually came to believe that Jesus was suggesting this spirit would fit each person’s individual needs and capacities.]

Judas Alpheus was bold enough to ask one of the few questions that either he or his brother had ever posed to Jesus in public. He inquired: You have always lived among us as a friend; how shall we recognize you when you no longer manifest yourself to us except through this spirit? If the world does not see you, how can we be certain of your presence? How will you reveal yourself to us?

Jesus looked down upon them all, smiled, and replied:

“My children, I am going away to God. In a little while, you will not see me as you do now, in flesh and blood. However, I will send you my spirit, which is like me, except for this material body. This new teacher is my spirit, which will dwell within each of you and among all people. In the same way, our Heavenly Father resides in the souls of each of you and in all, just as I now love you.”

Judas Alpheus did not fully comprehend what Jesus had said, but he understood the promise of a new teacher. From the expression on Andrew’s face, he sensed that his question had been satisfactorily answered.

16.16 I WILL LEAVE YOU FOR A SHORT TIME

After Peter, James, John, and Matthew had asked Jesus numerous questions, he continued his farewell discourse by saying:

“I am sharing all of this with you before I leave, so that you may be adequately prepared for what is to come, ensuring that you do not fall into serious error. The authorities will not be satisfied with merely expelling you from the synagogues; those who kill you will believe they are serving God. They will do all of these things to you and to those you guide into our teachings because they do not know the true Heavenly Father.

“I am telling you in advance about these matters so that, when your time comes, you may find strength in the knowledge that all was known to me and that my spirit will be with you in all your sufferings for the teachings. I have even cautioned you that a man’s adversaries may be those of his own household.

“Although the teachings of these new lessons consistently bring great peace to the individual’s soul, they will not bring peace on Earth until people are willing to wholeheartedly embrace these teachings and prioritize the practice of fulfilling our Heavenly Father’s will and serving God’s people as the primary purpose of mortal life.

“I am surprised that none of you have asked me: ‘Why do you leave us?’ Nevertheless, I know that you ponder such questions in your hearts. I will speak to you plainly, as one friend speaks to another. It is truly beneficial for you that I go away; the new spirit cannot enter your hearts if I do not depart. I must be divested of this mortal body and go to God before I can send this spirit teacher to dwell within your souls. When my spirit comes to you, it will illuminate the distinction between the ungodly and the righteous. When my

spirit arrives, it will ultimately guide you into all truth as you navigate the many abodes in heaven.

“In just a little while, I will leave you for a brief period. Afterward, when you see me again, I will already be on my way to God, which means that even then, you will not see me for long. I have much to share with you, but you cannot bear any more at this moment.”

While he paused for a moment, the followers began to talk with one another: What is this that he is telling us? What does ‘a little while’ mean? He says he will leave us, and then we will see him again. We cannot comprehend what he is saying. Jesus responded:

“Do you discuss among yourselves what I meant when I said that I would not be with you for a little while and that I would be on my way to God when you see me again? I have clearly told you that I must die, but that I will reappear.

“A woman in labor experiences great sorrow, but once she has delivered her child, she forgets much of her anguish in the joy of knowing that her child has entered the world. Similarly, you may feel sorrow over my departure, but I will see you again soon, and your sorrow will be transformed into joy.

“Mortals cannot see God; therefore, I have come to illustrate our Heavenly Father for your human eyes. However, you shall see God yourself once you have become perfected in spirit.”

When the eleven heard him speak, they said to one another: He speaks plainly to us. But why does he say he must go to God now? Many of the followers genuinely believed that this promise to return for a short time indicated that Jesus was going away for a brief visit with God, after which he would return to establish the new earthly kingdom. Jesus recognized that they still did not fully comprehend his message.

16.17 PEACE BE WITH YOU

After these discussions had been thoroughly examined and began to settle in their minds, Jesus once again called the followers to order and commenced imparting his final admonitions and warnings. Once the eleven had taken their seats, Jesus stood and addressed them:

“As long as I am with you in the flesh, I can be but one individual among you. However, once I have been liberated from this mortal existence, I can return as a spirit residing within each of you and all others. In this manner, my spirit will become a part of every soul.

“When I have returned to dwell within you and work through you, I can more effectively guide you through this life and lead you through the many abodes in the afterlife of heaven. Life in the Father’s eternal creation is not an endless rest of idleness and selfish ease, but rather a continuous journey of grace, truth, service, and glory. Each of the many stations in God’s house serves as a stopping point, a phase designed to prepare you for the next one ahead, until you reach the divine state in which you are spiritually perfected, just as God is perfect.

“As I prepare to leave you, I wish to offer words of comfort. Peace be with you. This gift is not given as the world gives - by measure - but each of you will receive all that you can receive. Let not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid. My hour has come.”

After he had given this peace to his followers, he could say to each: “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

[Most of the followers eventually came to believe that this “peace” represents the joy and satisfaction experienced by an individual who has successfully learned to fulfill God’s will while living the mortal life. They later recognized that Jesus possessed this profound comfort and confidence, which empowered him to pursue his life purpose with the full assurance that he was accomplishing God’s will. This peace transcends the understanding of the mortal mind, yet it can be deeply experienced by the human soul.]

16.18 INSTRUCTIONS TO FOLLOWERS

Jesus had completed his farewell instructions and imparted his final admonitions to the followers. He then bid each of them goodbye individually, offering personal advice along with his parting blessing. The followers remained seated around the table, just as they had been when they first gathered for the last meal. As Jesus moved around the table speaking to each of them, each one rose to his feet when addressed by Jesus.

16.19 JOHN ZEBEDEE

To John, Jesus said:

“You, John, are the youngest of my brethren. You have been very close to me, and while I love you all with the same love that a father has for his children, you have acted on my behalf and must continue to do so in many matters concerning my earthly family. I am going to God, John, with complete confidence that you will continue to watch over those who are mine in the flesh.

“No one should despise your youth, but I encourage you to remember that age often signifies experience, and nothing in human affairs can substitute for actual experience. Strive to live peacefully with everyone. And John, always strive to understand the souls you wish to win over to the new teachings.”

16.20 SIMON ZELOTES

Jesus then approached Simon, who stood up and attentively listened to this admonition

“You are a true son of Abraham, but I have faced great challenges in trying to guide you toward becoming a son of the fellowship of souls. However, you remain determined to shape this new fellowship of souls according to your own preferences. In time, you will come to reconcile your misconceptions with the reality of a different spiritual order.

“Dedicate your life, Simon, to demonstrating how an ordinary mortal can fulfill my directive regarding the simultaneous acknowledgment of temporal obligations to civil authorities and spiritual service within the spiritual fellowship. Therefore, Simon, I once again caution you that those who engage in violence perish by violence. Continue to believe what I have revealed to you, and your soul shall receive the gift of eternal life.”

16.21 MATTHEW LEVI

When Jesus had finished speaking to Simon, he approached Matthew and said: “No longer will it be your responsibility to manage the group’s treasury.” Then Matthew said: “But, Master, who will send us, and how shall we know where to go? Will Andrew show us the way?” Jesus answered:

“No, Levi, Andrew will no longer direct you in proclaiming the teachings. However, continue your efforts to win over your Jewish brethren until you find joy in it, and then turn with conviction to the Gentiles and others. See what our Heavenly Father can do for a despised tax collector who dared to follow and believe the teachings.”

“See what our Heavenly Father can do for a despised tax collector who dared to follow and believe the teachings. Therefore, Matthew, dedicate your entire future to demonstrating that God does not show favoritism; in the eyes of God, all people are equal - all are the children of God.”

16.22 JAMES ZEBEDEE

Jesus then approached James, who stood in silence as he spoke to him, saying:

“James, when you and your younger brother came to me seeking preferment in the honors of the kingdom, I asked if you were able to drink the cup of bitterness, shame, and humiliation.

“Both of you answered that you were. Even if you were not prepared at that moment you will soon be equipped for such a service through the experiences you are about to undergo. You and your brother John will follow different paths, and one of you may join me in the eternal fellowship of souls long before the other.”

16.23 ANDREW

When Jesus had finished speaking to James, he stepped around to the end of the table where Andrew was seated. Looking his faithful helper in the eyes, he said:

“Andrew, you have faithfully served as the head of our ambassadors. I have not intervened in your decisions regarding any other temporal matters. I intended to ensure effective leadership in guiding all your subsequent group deliberations.

“And now, Andrew, since you have been the chief of your brethren and as I am about to depart, you are hereby released from all responsibilities concerning these temporal and administrative matters. However, this release from your duties as the administrative head of this group does not diminish your obligation to do everything within your power to keep your brethren together with a firm and loving hand during the challenging times that lie ahead. Although these followers will soon be scattered to the four corners of the earth, you should strive to maintain their unity during the difficult period that is approaching.”

16.24 & 16.25 JAMES AND JUDAS ALPHEUS

Jesus then approached the Alpheus twins, James and Judas, and, standing between them, said:

“My children, you are part of one of the three groups of brothers who have chosen to seek the teachings. All six of

you have done well to work in peace with your own flesh and blood, but none have excelled more than the two of you.

“You have dedicated your lives to the improvement of everyday labor. Demonstrate to all how cheerfully and courageously mortal persons can return to the labors of former days after being called to serve in the special service of God for a season.

“If you believe that your work in the external affairs of the heavenly fellowship of souls is complete, you may return to your previous endeavors, enriched by the enlightening experience of fellowship with God. Approach your tasks with the elevated understanding that there is no such thing as common labor or secular toil. Demonstrate that all activities hold significance, and that every earthly labor can be a service to God the Father.”

16.26 PHILIP OF BETHSAIDA

And then Jesus approached Philip, who, while standing, heard this message from Jesus

“Philip, you have asked me many questions, and I have done my utmost to answer each one. You have always desired to be shown, and soon you shall see great things.

“Far better for you to have seen all of this through faith; however, since you have been sincere even in your material sightedness, you will live to see the fulfillment of these words. Philip, you have a great mission, for the world is filled with individuals who look at life in the same way you have tended to.”

16.27 NATHANIEL

Then Jesus approached Nathaniel. As Nathaniel stood, Jesus invited him to sit down. Taking a seat beside him, Jesus said:

“Nathaniel, you have learned to rise above prejudice and to cultivate greater tolerance since becoming a follower.

“However, when I am no longer present, your candidness may hinder your ability to maintain harmonious relationships with both your old and new brethren. It would be wise for you to understand that even the expression of a positive thought must be tailored to the intellectual capacity and spiritual maturity of the listener.”

“I have imparted much knowledge to you through spoken words and have lived my life in your midst. I have illuminated your mind and liberated your soul. What you have not been able to grasp from the teachings and my life, you must now prepare to acquire from the ultimate teacher, actual experience. Fear not; that which you currently fail to understand will be revealed to you by my spirit throughout your life and during your learning in the eternal ages.”

16.28 THOMAS DIDYHMUS

And then Jesus approached Thomas, who, standing, heard him say:

“Thomas, you have often struggled with faith; however, during your moments of doubt, you have never lacked courage. I am confident that false prophets and deceptive teachers will not mislead you. After I am gone, your peers will come to value your critical perspective on the new teachings even more.

“Your doubts have puzzled your peers, but they have never troubled me. I have faith in you, and my spirit will guide you even to the farthest reaches of the earth.”

16.29 SIMON PETER

Then Jesus approached Peter, who stood as Jesus spoke to him:

“Peter, I know you love me and are committed to the public proclamation of these teachings. However, I am troubled that your years of close association with me have not helped you to think before you speak. What experiences

must you endure before you learn to set a guard upon your lips? And you are likely to create much more trouble for yourself if you do not overcome this weakness.”

Then Peter said, placing his hand on Jesus' shoulder: No matter if all my brethren succumb to doubts, I promise that I will not falter in response to anything you may do. I will accompany you and, if necessary, die for you. Jesus looked directly into his tear-filled eyes as he replied:

“Peter, this night the rooster will not crow until you have denied me three or four times. Therefore, what you have failed to learn through peaceful association, you will learn through much trouble and many sorrows. This very night, I will ask our Heavenly Father to strengthen you for what you must soon endure.”

16.30 JUDAS ISCARIOT

And then Jesus, moving around his own seat, paused for a moment beside the vacant place of Judas Iscariot. The followers were somewhat surprised that Judas had not returned by this time, and they were very curious to understand the significance of Jesus' somber expression as he stood by the empty seat. However, none of them, except possibly Andrew, entertained even the slightest thought that their treasurer had gone out to betray their teacher. So much had been happening that, for the moment, they had completely forgotten about Jesus' announcement that one of them would betray him.

Then Jesus, turning to all of them, said:

“Do not be dismayed if you struggle to comprehend the full meaning of the teachings. You are finite, mortal beings, while that which you have been taught is infinite and eternal. Be patient and courageous, for you have the eternal ages ahead of you as you continue your progressive journey toward perfection, just as your Heavenly Father is perfect.”

After singing a hymn, they departed for the camp on the Mount of Olives.

16.31 IN GETHSEMANE

It was early Thursday night when Jesus led the eleven followers from the home of Elijah and Mary Mark back to the Gethsemane camp. Since that day in the hills, John Mark had made it his mission to keep a watchful eye on Jesus. Although John needed sleep and had managed to rest for several hours while Jesus was with his friends in the upper room, he arose upon hearing them coming downstairs. Quickly throwing a linen coat around himself, he followed them through the city, across the brook Kidron, and to their private encampment adjacent to Gethsemane Park. John Mark remained so close to Jesus throughout that night and the following day that he witnessed everything and overheard much of what Jesus said until the hour of the execution.

As Jesus and the eleven made their way back to camp, the followers began to ponder the significance of Judas's prolonged absence. They discussed Jesus' prediction that one of them would betray him and for the first time, they suspected that all was not well with Judas Iscariot. However, they only voiced their concerns about Judas once they reached the camp and noticed that he was not there to greet them. When they pressed Andrew for information about Judas's whereabouts, their leader simply replied: I do not know where Judas is, but I fear he has deserted us.

16.32 PRAYER FOR THE FOLLOWERS

A few moments after arriving at camp, Jesus said to them: "My friends and brethren, my time with you is now very short. I desire that we withdraw to a quiet place to ask God for the strength to sustain us in this hour and in all the work we must undertake in his name."

When Jesus had spoken these words, he led the way a short distance up Mount Olivet. In full view of Jerusalem, he instructed them to kneel on a large flat rock in a circle around him, as they had done previously. Standing in their midst, illuminated by the soft glow of the moonlight, he lifted his eyes and said:

“Father, I have endeavored to honor you on earth and fulfill my work; there remains only for me to lay down my life in the flesh.

“These men who were chosen from the world and given to me are now yours. I pray for them. Father, keep these men, my friends, faithful until we can send my spirit to comfort and strengthen them. I know, my Father, there is no need to ask you to watch over these brethren after I have gone.

“This world knows very little about you, but these friends will strive to make your name known to future generations. I now ask that you be with them in this world, just as you have been with me.”

The eleven remained kneeling in a circle around Jesus for several minutes before they rose and made their way back to the nearby camp in silence.

16.33 LAST HOUR BEFORE THE BETRAYAL

The followers were greatly shocked when they returned to camp and found Judas still absent. While the eleven engaged in a heated discussion, David Zebedee and John Mark took Jesus aside and revealed that they had been observing Judas for several days and knew he intended to betray him to his opponents. Jesus listened to them but replied: “My friends, nothing can happen to me unless our Heavenly Father wills it. Let not your hearts be troubled; all things will work together for God’s will.”

The cheerful demeanor of Jesus began to fade. As the hour progressed, he became increasingly serious, even sorrowful. The followers, visibly agitated, were reluctant to return to their tents, despite Jesus’ requests. Upon returning from his conversation with David and John, he delivered his final words to all eleven, saying: “My friends, go to your rest. Prepare yourselves for tomorrow’s work. Remember, we must all submit to God’s will. Peace be with you.”

Before they retired to their separate sleeping quarters, Simon Zelotes gathered everyone at his tent, where the swords and other weapons were stored, and provided each of them with this fighting equipment. All accepted the arms and equipped themselves, except for Nathaniel. In refusing to arm himself, Nathaniel stated: My brethren, the Master has repeatedly told us that his followers should not fight with the sword to establish it. I believe this; I do not think the Master requires us to use the sword in his defense. We have all witnessed his power and know he could defend himself against his adversaries if he chose to. If he does not resist his opponents, it must be that such a course reflects his attempt to fulfill his Father's will. I will pray, but I will not wield the sword. Then Andrew returned his sword to Simon Zelotes. Thus, nine of them were armed as they parted for the night.

As the followers were finally heading to their tents, Jesus called to Peter, James, and John, saying: "I desire that you remain with me for a little while." While they stood by, awaiting Jesus' instructions, he said to David Zebedee: "Send me your swiftest and most trustworthy messenger." David brought forth Jacob, who had previously served as a runner on the overnight messenger service between Jerusalem and Bethsaida.

Jesus addressed him, saying: "In all haste, go to Abner in Philadelphia and say: 'I send greetings of peace to you and declare that the hour has come when I will be delivered into the hands of my opponents, who will put me to death. However, I will reappear to you shortly before I go to God, and I will then provide you with guidance until the time when a new teacher spirit shall dwell in your hearts.'"

And when Jacob had rehearsed this message to Jesus' satisfaction, he continued on his way, with Jesus saying: "Fear not what any man may do to you, Jacob, for this night, an unseen messenger will run by your side."

Then Jesus turned to the chief of the visiting Greeks who were encamped with them and said: "My brothers, do not be troubled by what is about to occur, for I have already forewarned you. I will be put

to death at the instigation of the chief priests in Jerusalem, but I will reappear in spirit form and be with you for a short time before I go to God. When you witness all these events, love God and serve your brethren.”

The followers would have bid Jesus a personal good night under ordinary circumstances. However, that evening, they were preoccupied with the sudden realization of Judas' potential desertion and overwhelmed by the unusual nature of Jesus' farewell address. As a result, they listened to his goodbye salutation and departed in silence. The followers seemingly fell asleep only because they were exhausted, having been deprived of sleep since their arrival in Jerusalem.

Jesus said to Andrew as he departed that night: “Andrew, do what you can to keep your brethren united until I return to you in a new form. Strengthen your brethren, for I have already shared everything with you. Peace be with you.”

None of the followers anticipated anything unusual occurring that night, as it was already quite late. They sought rest in order to rise early the next morning and prepare for the worst. Only David Zebedee and John Mark were aware that the opponents of Jesus were approaching with Judas that night.

David had arranged to stand guard that night on the upper trail leading to the Bethany-Jerusalem Road, while John Mark was assigned to watch along the road approaching Gethsemane from the Kidron Valley. Before David commenced his self-imposed outpost duty, he bid farewell to Jesus, saying: Master, I have found great joy in my service with you. My brothers are your followers, but I have taken delight in performing the lesser tasks as they ought to be done. I will miss you with all my heart when you are gone.

Jesus said: “David, my son, others have fulfilled their directives, but this service you have performed from your own heart, and I have not been unmindful of your devotion. You, too, shall be with me someday in the eternal fellowship of souls.”

And then, as he prepared to go on watch by the upper trail, David said to Jesus: You know, Master, I sent for your family, and I have

received word from a messenger that they are in Jericho tonight. They will arrive early tomorrow morning, as it would be dangerous for them to travel the bloody way at night.

And Jesus, gazing down at David, simply said: “Let it be so, David.”

When David ascended Mount Olivet, John Mark took his vigil near the road that led down to Jerusalem by the brook. Although John would have preferred to remain at his post, he had a deep desire to be near Jesus and to understand what was happening. Shortly after David left, John noticed Jesus withdrawing into a nearby ravine with Peter, James, and John. Overcome by a mix of devotion and curiosity, he abandoned his sentinel post and followed them, concealing himself in the bushes. From that vantage point, he witnessed and overheard the events that transpired during those final moments in the garden, just before Judas and the armed guards arrived to arrest Jesus.

While all of this was unfolding at Jesus’ camp, Judas Iscariot was in conference with the captain of the temple guards, who had assembled his team in preparation for setting out, under Judas’ leadership, to arrest Jesus.

16.34 TALKING WITH GOD

After everything was still and quiet around the camp, Jesus took Peter, James, and John and went a short distance up a nearby ravine, a place where he often went to meditate and listen to God. The three followers could not help but notice that he was deeply troubled; they had never seen Jesus so burdened and sorrowful before. When they reached the place of his devotion, he instructed the three to sit down and watch with him while he went off, about a stone’s throw away, to meditate.

When he stopped and bowed, Jesus said: “Father, I came to do your will, and so I have. The hour has come for me to lay down this life in the flesh, and I do not shrink from that. However, I would like to know if it is your will that I drink this cup of bitterness, shame, and humiliation. Please send me the assurance that I will please you in my death, just as I have in my life.”

The divine mind of Jesus understood that he had done his utmost for the twelve followers, yet his human heart longed for more to have been accomplished for them before they were left alone in the world. He felt isolated from his earthly family; one of his chosen disciples was betraying him. The people of his father, Joseph, had rejected him. It was one of those harrowing human moments when everything seemed to weigh down with overwhelming cruelty and profound agony. After he had finished listening to God, he lay prostrate on the ground for a moment.

Jesus maintained a prayerful demeanor for a few moments. Then he approached his three followers and discovered that they were sound asleep, their eyes heavy and unable to stay open. As Jesus roused them, he said, "Please stay awake with me for one hour. My soul is deeply sorrowful, even to the point of death, and I long for your companionship."

After awakening the three from their slumber, Jesus withdrew once more to be alone. Falling to the ground, he prayed again, saying: "Father, I know that it is possible to avoid this cup - all things are possible with you - but I have come to fulfill your will. Although this cup is bitter, I will drink it if it is your will."

It had not seemed so difficult to drink from the cup earlier in the evening, but as the human Jesus bid farewell to his friends and sent them to their rest, the trial became increasingly appalling. Jesus experienced the natural ebb and flow of emotions common to all human experiences, and at that moment, he was weary from his work, exhausted from the long hours of strenuous labor, and burdened by painful anxiety regarding the safety of his friends. Perspiration streamed down his face in large droplets.

When Jesus returned to speak with the three followers, he found them fast asleep once more. He awakened them, saying: "In such an hour, I need you to stay awake with me. You must pray earnestly so that you do not fall into temptation. Please do not fall asleep while I am away."

And then, for a third time, Jesus withdrew and said: “Father, you see my sleeping followers; have patience with them. Their spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak. And now, Father, if this cup cannot pass, I will drink it. Not my will, but yours, be done.”

When Jesus had spoken these words, he realized that the Heavenly Father desired him to complete his earthly life by undergoing the human experience of death, just as all human beings must transition from the realm of time into the progression of eternity. Jesus understood that God wanted him to conclude his earthly mission in a natural manner. He was finally convinced that God intended to allow events to unfold as they would; he was fully resolved to refrain from using any of his powers to save himself. Ordinary men and women cannot expect their final hours on earth to be made easier by a special dispensation. Therefore, Jesus chose to lay down his life in the flesh in a way that aligned with the natural course of events.

When he rose and returned to his friends, he found them asleep. He surveyed them with a pitying gesture. As he reached down to shake them awake, he tenderly said: “Sleep now and take your rest; the time for decision has passed. Arise, let us return to the camp.”

Before Judas and the soldiers arrived, Jesus had fully regained his customary poise; his spirit had triumphed over his flesh, and belief had asserted itself over all human tendencies to fear or entertain doubt. The test of his human nature had been met and passed. Once more, Jesus was prepared to face his opponents with equanimity and the full assurance of his invincibility as a mortal dedicated to fulfilling his Father’s will.

16.35 TWO MESSENGERS

After Jesus had finally awakened Peter, James, and John, he suggested that they return to their tents to rest in preparation for the duties of the following day. However, by this time, the three followers were wide awake; their brief naps had revitalized them, and they were further stimulated by the arrival of two excited messengers who inquired about David Zebedee. Upon learning where David was keeping watch, Peter directed them to him.

Although eight of the followers were sound asleep, the Greeks encamped alongside them were more apprehensive about potential trouble. They had even posted a sentinel to sound the alarm in case danger arose. When the two messengers hurried into the camp, the Greek sentinel roused his fellow citizens, who were already dressed and armed, and they streamed forth from their tents.

The whole camp was now roused except for the eight followers. Peter wanted to call his companions, but Jesus forbade him. Jesus gently admonished them all to return to their tents, but they were reluctant to heed his suggestion. Unable to disperse his friends, Jesus left them and walked toward the olive press near the entrance to Gethsemane Park. Although the three followers, the Greeks, and the other camp members hesitated to follow him immediately, John Mark hurried around through the olive trees and concealed himself in a small shed near the olive press. Jesus had withdrawn from the camp and his companions to ensure that his apprehenders could arrest him without disturbing his followers. He was concerned that having his friends awake and present during his arrest might provoke their animosity, leading them to resist the soldiers and potentially be taken into custody alongside him. Additionally, he feared that they might suffer the same fate as he would if they were arrested. Jesus sat alone on the olive press, awaiting the arrival of Judas, and at that moment, he was seen only by John Mark.

16.36 JUDAS IN THE CITY

After Judas abruptly left the table, he went directly to his cousin's home. The two then proceeded to the captain of the temple guards, where Judas requested that the captain assemble the guards and informed him that he was prepared to lead them to Jesus.

Judas arrived on the scene slightly earlier than anticipated. There was a delay in departing for the Mark residence, where Judas expected to find Jesus still conversing with the followers. However, Jesus and the eleven left the home of Elijah Mark a full fifteen minutes before Judas and the guards arrived. By the time the apprehenders reached the Mark

home, Jesus and the eleven were already well outside the city walls and en route to the Mount Olivet camp.

Judas was greatly troubled by this failure to locate Jesus at Mark's residence. He recalled that, in the afternoon when they had departed from camp, Simon Peter and Simon Zelotes were armed with swords. Judas had hoped to apprehend Jesus when the city was quiet, minimizing the likelihood of resistance. He feared that if he waited for them to return to their camp, he would encounter more than the sixty devoted followers, and he was also aware that Simon Zelotes possessed a significant cache of weapons.

When they were unable to locate Jesus in the upper chamber, Judas requested the captain of the guard to return to the temple. By this time, the leaders had begun to gather at the high priest's residence in preparation for receiving Jesus, as their agreement with Judas stipulated that Jesus was to be arrested by midnight that day.

Judas informed the leaders that they had missed Jesus at Mark's home and that it would be essential to proceed to Gethsemane to apprehend him. He further stated that more than sixty followers were encamped with Jesus, and they were all well-armed. The Jewish leaders reminded Judas that Jesus had consistently taught the principle of nonresistance; however, Judas countered that they could not rely on all of Jesus' followers to adhere to such teachings.

He was genuinely afraid for his safety and, therefore, boldly requested the company of forty armed soldiers. Since the Jewish authorities did not have such a force of armed men under their jurisdiction, they immediately went to the Antonia Fortress. They asked the Roman commander to provide them with this guard. However, when the commander learned that they intended to arrest Jesus, he promptly refused their request and referred them to his superior officer.

In this manner, more than an hour was spent moving from one authority to another until they were ultimately compelled to approach Pilate himself to obtain permission to employ the armed Roman guards.

By the time they arrived at Pilate's residence, it was late, and he had retired to his private chambers with his wife. He was reluctant to involve himself in the matter, especially since his wife had urged him not to grant the request. However, given that the presiding officer of the Jewish Sanhedrin was present and making personal requests for assistance, the governor deemed it prudent to approve the petition, believing he could later rectify any wrongs they might be inclined to commit.

Accordingly, when Judas Iscariot left the temple just before midnight, he was accompanied by more than sixty individuals, including temple guards, Roman soldiers, and curious aides of the chief priests and leaders.

16.37 ARREST

As the company of armed soldiers and guards, carrying torches and lanterns, approached the garden, Judas stepped well ahead of the group to quickly identify Jesus, allowing the apprehenders to seize him before his associates could rally to his defense. Additionally, Judas had another motive for positioning himself in front of Jesus' opponents: he believed it would create the impression that he had arrived on the scene before the soldiers, preventing the followers and others gathered around Jesus from directly associating him with the armed guards closely trailing behind. Judas even considered pretending to have rushed out to warn them of the approaching apprehenders, but this plan was thwarted by Jesus' scathing greeting of Judas.

As soon as Peter, James, and John, along with approximately thirty of their fellow campers, spotted the armed band with torches rounding the hill, they realized that the soldiers were coming to arrest Jesus. They all hurried down to the olive press, where Jesus sat in moonlit solitude. As the soldiers approached from one side, the three followers and their companions advanced from the other. Judas strode forward to greet Jesus, and there the two groups stood motionless, with Jesus positioned between them and Judas preparing to kiss his brow.

Judas had hoped that after leading the guards to Gethsemane, he could simply point Jesus out to the soldiers or, at most, fulfill his promise to greet him with a kiss and then quickly withdraw from the scene. Judas greatly feared that all of Jesus' followers would be present and that they would focus their anger on him in retribution for his audacity in betraying their beloved teacher. However, when Jesus greeted him, Judas appeared so bewildered that he did not attempt to escape.

Jesus made one final effort to save Judas from betraying him. Before Judas could reach him, Jesus stepped aside and addressed the foremost soldier on the left, the captain of the Romans, asking: "Whom do you seek?" The captain replied: Jesus of Nazareth. Then Jesus stepped forward, standing before the officer in calm majesty, said: "I am he."

Many members of this armed band had heard Jesus teach in the temple, while others had learned about his miraculous works. When they heard him boldly declare his identity, those in the front ranks fell backward, overwhelmed by surprise at his calm and majestic proclamation. Consequently, there was no need for Judas to proceed with his plan of betrayal. Jesus had confidently revealed himself to his opponents, and they could have apprehended him without Judas's assistance.

However, Judas felt compelled to justify his presence with the armed band. Moreover, he sought to demonstrate his commitment to the betrayal agreement with the Jewish leaders, believing that doing so would earn him the great rewards and honors he anticipated. As the guards regained their composure and as the followers drew closer, Judas approached Jesus. He placed a kiss upon his brow and said: Hail, Master and teacher. Jesus asked: "Friend, is it not enough to do this? Would you even betray me with a kiss?"

The followers were undoubtedly stunned by what they witnessed. For a moment, no one moved. Then Jesus, disengaging himself from Judas's embrace, stepped forward to the guards and soldiers and asked once more: "Whom do you seek?"

The captain replied again: Jesus of Nazareth. And again Jesus answered: "I have told you that I am he. If, therefore, you seek me, let these others go their way. I am prepared to go with you."

Jesus was prepared to return to Jerusalem with the guards, and the captain of the soldiers was willing to allow the three followers and their companions to depart in peace. However, before they could begin their journey, as Jesus stood awaiting the captain's orders, a man named Malchus, the bodyguard of the high priest, approached Jesus and prepared to bind his hands behind his back. Nevertheless, the Roman captain had not instructed that Jesus should be restrained in this manner. When Peter and his associates witnessed their teacher enduring this indignity, they could no longer restrain themselves. Peter drew his sword and, along with the others, rushed forward to strike Malchus. However, before the soldiers could come to the defense of the high priest's assistant, Jesus raised a forbidding hand to Peter and, speaking sternly, said: "Peter, put away your sword. Those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword. I must drink this cup of bitterness, shame, and humiliation in accordance with the Father's will."

While Jesus effectively halted the display of physical resistance from his friends, it was sufficient to instill fear in the captain of the guards. With the assistance of his soldiers, the captain seized Jesus and swiftly bound him. As they tied his hands with heavy cords, Jesus addressed them: "Why do you come out against me with swords and clubs as if I were a robber? I was with you in the temple every day, publicly teaching the people, and you made no effort to apprehend me."

When Jesus had been bound, the captain, fearing that the followers might attempt to rescue him, gave orders that they be seized. However, the soldiers were not quick enough; having overheard the captain's orders to arrest them, Jesus' followers fled hastily back into the ravine. All this time, John Mark had remained secluded in the nearby shed. When the guards began their return to Jerusalem with Jesus, John Mark attempted to sneak out of the shed to catch up with the fleeing followers.

However, just as he emerged, one of the last soldiers who had pursued the fleeing followers passed nearby. Upon seeing the young man in his linen coat, the soldier gave chase, nearly overtaking him. The soldier got close enough to grab hold of the coat, but the young man managed to free himself from the garment, escaping naked while the soldier was left holding the empty coat. John Mark hurried along the upper trail to reach David Zebedee. After informing David of the events that had transpired, they both rushed back to the tents of the sleeping followers to relay the news of Jesus' arrest to all eight of them. Just as the eight followers were being awakened, those who had fled up the ravine began to return, and they all gathered near the olive press to discuss their next course of action.

In the meantime, Simon Peter and John Zebedee, who had hidden among the olive trees, had already followed the soldiers and guards who were leading Jesus back to Jerusalem. John followed closely behind the crowd, while Peter trailed far behind. After John Mark escaped from the grasp of a soldier, he donned a cloak that he found in the tent of Simon Peter and John Zebedee. Suspecting that the guards were taking Jesus to the home of Annas, the former high priest, he navigated through the olive orchards and arrived ahead of the crowd, hiding near the entrance to the gate of the high priest's palace.

16.38 DISCUSSION AT THE OLIVE PRESS

James Zebedee found himself separated from Simon Peter and his brother John, so he joined the other followers and their fellow campers at the olive press to deliberate on the appropriate course of action following Jesus' arrest. After a brief informal discussion, Simon Zelotes stood atop the stone wall of the olive press and, in an impassioned plea for loyalty to Jesus, urged his friends and the other followers to pursue the crowd and attempt to rescue Jesus.

The majority of the company would likely have been inclined to follow Simon's aggressive leadership had it not been for Nathaniel's intervention.

Nathaniel stood up immediately after Simon finished speaking and drew their attention to Jesus' frequently reiterated lessons on nonresistance. He further reminded them that Jesus had instructed them that very night to preserve their lives for the time when they would go forth into the world to proclaim the new teachings. Nathaniel was bolstered in this stance by James Zebedee, who recounted how Peter and others had drawn their swords to defend Jesus during his arrest, only for Jesus to command them to sheath their blades.

Matthew and Philip also delivered speeches; however, no concrete outcomes emerged from the discussion until Thomas highlighted that Jesus had advised Lazarus against exposing himself to danger. He pointed out that they could do nothing to save their teacher, as he refused to permit his friends to defend him and continued to refrain from using his divine powers to thwart his opponents. Thomas persuaded them to disperse, each man for himself, with the agreement that David Zebedee would stay at the camp to serve as a clearinghouse and headquarters for the group's messengers.

By a couple of hours after midnight, the camp was deserted; only David remained, accompanied by three or four messengers. The others had been dispatched to gather information about where Jesus had been taken and what would be done with him.

Five followers - Nathaniel, Matthew, Philip, and the twins - went into hiding in Bethphage and Bethany. Thomas, Andrew, James, and Simon Zelotes were concealed within the city. Simon Peter and John Zebedee accompanied them to the home of Annas.

Simon Peter returned to the Gethsemane camp, a dejected figure consumed by deep despair. David assigned him to accompany a messenger to join his brother, Andrew, who was at the home of Nicodemus in Jerusalem.

Until the very end of the execution, John remained close at hand, as Jesus had directed him. He provided David's messengers with information from hour to hour, which they carried to David at the camp in the garden. This information was then relayed to the hiding followers and Jesus' family.

Just after Peter had been sent to join his brother, Jude, arrived at the camp, almost breathless and ahead of the rest of Jesus' family, only to discover that Jesus had already been arrested. He quickly made his way back down Jericho Road to deliver this news to his mother, brothers, and sisters. David Zebedee sent word to Jesus' family, through Jude, to gather at the house of Martha and Mary in Bethany, where they would await updates from his messengers, who would bring them news regularly.

This was the situation during the latter half of Thursday night concerning the twelve followers and the earthly family of Jesus. All these groups and individuals remained connected through the messenger service that David Zebedee continued to operate from his headquarters at the Gethsemane camp.

Friday

17.0 THE TRIAL

Before departing from the garden with Jesus, a dispute arose between the Jewish captain of the temple guards and the Roman captain of the soldiers regarding where to take Jesus. The captain of the temple guards wanted Jesus to be taken to Caiaphas, the acting high priest. In contrast, the Roman captain directed that Jesus be taken to the palace of Annas, the former high priest and father-in-law of Caiaphas. He made this decision because the Romans typically dealt directly with Annas in all matters concerning the enforcement of Jewish ecclesiastical laws. The orders of the Roman captain were followed, and they took Jesus to the home of Annas for his preliminary examination.

About this time, John Zebedee, recalling his teacher's instructions to always remain close at hand, hurried to Jesus as he walked between the two captains. The commander of the temple guards, noticing John approach, said to his assistant: Take this man and bind him. He is one of the followers.

But when the Roman captain heard this, he looked around and saw John. He ordered that the follower be allowed to approach him and that no one should harm him. The Roman captain then addressed the Jewish captain: This man is neither a traitor nor a coward. I saw him in the garden; he did not draw a sword to resist us. He dares to come forward

to be with his teacher, and no one shall lay hands on him. Roman law permits any prisoner to have at least one friend stand by him before the judgment bar, and this man shall not be prevented from standing by the prisoner's side.

Judas had been marching near the captains, overhearing all that was said, but he took no part in their dispute, as neither the Jewish captain nor the Roman officer would speak to Judas. But when Judas heard the Roman captain speak about John, he felt such shame that he fell back behind the marchers and approached the palace of Annas alone.

Because of the Roman captain's comments, John was allowed to remain near Jesus during his harrowing experiences that night and the following day. The Jews were hesitant to speak to John or interfere with him in any way, as he held a status akin to that of a Roman counselor-designate, acting as an observer of the Jewish ecclesiastical court's proceedings. John's position of privilege was further solidified when, in handing Jesus over to the captain of the temple guards at the entrance of Annas's palace, the Roman addressed his assistant, saying: Go with this prisoner and ensure that these Jews do not harm him without Pilate's consent. Be vigilant to prevent any assassination attempts, and allow his friend, the Galilean, to stand by and observe all that transpires.

John was able to remain close to Jesus until the time of Jesus' death, while the other ten followers remained in hiding. John acted under Roman protection, and the Jewish authorities did not dare to harm him until after Jesus' death.

From the moment of his arrest until his appearance before Annas, Jesus spoke not a single word.

17.1 BEFORE ANNAS' COURT

Representatives of Annas had secretly instructed the captain of the Roman soldiers to bring Jesus immediately to Annas's palace after his arrest. The former high priest sought to preserve his status as the chief ecclesiastical authority among the Jews. He may have had an additional motive for detaining Jesus at his residence for several hours:

to allow time for the Sanhedrin court. It was unlawful to convene the Sanhedrin court before the morning sacrifice was offered in the temple, which occurred a few hours after midnight.

Annas was aware that a court of Sanhedrin members was convening at the palace of his son-in-law, Caiaphas. By midnight, approximately thirty members of the Sanhedrin had gathered at the high priest's residence, prepared to sit in judgment on Jesus when he was brought before them. Only those members who were vehemently and openly opposed to Jesus and his teachings were present, as a minimum of twenty-three members was required to constitute a trial court.

Jesus spent approximately three hours at the palace of Annas near Mount Olivet. John Zebedee felt secure in the court of Annas, as he and his brother James were well-known to the older attendants. They had often been guests at the palace since the former high priest was a distant relative of their mother, Salome.

Annas, enriched by the temple revenues, his son-in-law serving as the acting high priest, and his connections to the Roman authorities, was the most powerful individual in all of Jerusalem. He was a shrewd political strategist and schemer. Annas sought to control the proceedings regarding the disposal of Jesus; he was reluctant to entrust such a significant undertaking entirely to his brusque and aggressive son-in-law. He wanted to ensure that Jesus' trial remained under the jurisdiction of the Sadducees, as he feared the potential sympathy of some Pharisees, given that nearly all members of the Sanhedrin who had supported Jesus were Pharisees.

Annas had not seen Jesus for several years, not since Jesus visited his house and promptly departed upon noticing Annas's apparent coldness and reserve in receiving him. Annas had hoped to leverage this early acquaintance to persuade Jesus to abandon his claims and leave the area. He was reluctant to participate in the execution of an innocent man and reasoned that Jesus might choose to leave the country rather than face death. However, when Annas stood before the stalwart and resolute Galilean, he realized immediately that it would be futile to

make such proposals. Jesus appeared even more majestic and composed than Annas remembered.

When Jesus was young, Annas had taken a keen interest in him; however, his revenues were now threatened by Jesus' recent actions, in which he drove the money changers and other commercial traders out of the temple. This act had provoked the ire of the former high priest far more than Jesus' teachings had. Annas entered his spacious audience chamber, seated himself in an oversized chair, and commanded that Jesus be brought before him. After a few moments spent silently surveying Jesus, he said: You realize that something must be done about your teaching, as you are disturbing the peace and order of our country. As Annas looked inquiringly at Jesus, Jesus gazed deeply into his eyes but remained silent. Annas spoke again asking: What are the names of your followers, besides Simon Zelotes, the agitator? Jesus regarded him, yet he did not respond. Annas was clearly troubled by Jesus' refusal to answer his questions, to the extent that he remarked: Do you not care whether I am friendly toward you or not? Do you not recognize the power I hold in determining the outcome of your impending trial?

Jesus replied: "Annas, you know that you would have no power over me unless the Heavenly Father permitted it. Some may execute a representative of God out of ignorance; they simply do not know any better. However, you, my friend, are aware of what you are doing. How can you, therefore, reject the will of God?"

The gentle manner in which Jesus spoke to Annas nearly bewildered him. However, Annas had already resolved in his mind that Jesus must either leave the area or face death. Summoning his courage, he asked: Just what is it that you are trying to teach the people? What do you claim to be?

Jesus responded: "You know that I have spoken openly to the world. I have taught in the synagogues and many times in the temple, where all the Jews and many Gentiles have heard me. I have said nothing in secret; why, then, do you ask me about the teachings? Summon those

who have heard me and ask them. All of Jerusalem has heard what I have spoken, even if you have not heard these teachings.”

Before Annas could respond, the chief steward of the palace, who was standing nearby, struck Jesus in the face with his hand, saying: How dare you answer the High Priest with such words? Annas did not rebuke his steward, but Jesus addressed him, saying: “My friend, if I have spoken incorrectly, bear witness against my wrongdoing; but if I have spoken the truth, then why do you strike me?”

Although Annas may have regretted that his steward struck Jesus, he was too proud to acknowledge the incident. Confused, he entered another room, leaving Jesus alone with the household attendants and the temple guards for nearly an hour. When Annas returned, he approached Jesus and asked: Do you claim to be the Messiah, the deliverer of Israel? Jesus said: “Annas, you have known me since my youth. You know that I claim to be nothing other than that which our Heavenly Father has appointed - I bring new teachings to all people, both Gentile and Jew.”

Then Annas said: I have been told that you have claimed to be the Messiah; is that true? Jesus looked at Annas and replied: “Some may have said this.”

About this time, messengers arrived from the palace of Caiaphas to inquire when Jesus would be brought before the Sanhedrin court. As dawn approached, Annas decided it was best to send Jesus, bound and in the custody of the temple guards, to Caiaphas. He followed them shortly thereafter.

17.2 PETER IN THE COURTYARD

As the band of guards and soldiers approached the entrance to the palace of Annas, John marched alongside the captain of the Roman soldiers. Judas had fallen some distance behind, while Simon Peter trailed even further back. After John entered the palace courtyard with Jesus and the guards, Judas approached the gate but, upon seeing Jesus and John, continued on to the home of Caiaphas, where he knew the actual trial of Jesus would later occur.

Soon after Judas had departed, Simon Peter arrived. As he stood before the gate, John noticed him just as they were about to take Jesus into the palace. The portress who guarded the gate recognized John, and when he spoke to her, requesting that she allow Peter to enter, she readily agreed.

Peter, upon entering the courtyard, approached the charcoal fire to warm himself, as the night was chilly. He clearly felt out of place among the opponents of Jesus - he was out of place. Unlike John, who had been instructed to remain close, Jesus had not asked Peter to stay nearby. Peter had been specifically warned not to jeopardize his life during the trial of his teacher. Just before arriving at the palace gate, he discarded his sword, entering the courtyard of Annas unarmed. His mind was likely in a state of confusion.

Shortly after the portress admitted Peter, and while he warmed himself by the fire, she approached him and asked mischievously, Are you not also one of this man's followers? Peter should not have been surprised by this recognition, as it was John who had requested that the girl allow him to pass through the palace gates. However, he was in such a tense, nervous state that this identification as a follower unsettled him. With only one thought dominating his mind - the desire to escape with his life - he promptly responded to the maid's question by saying: I am not. Very soon, another person approached Peter and asked: Did I not see you in the garden when they arrested this man? Are you not one of his friends as well? Peter was now thoroughly alarmed; he saw no way to safely escape from these accusers. Consequently, he vehemently denied all connection with Jesus, saying: I do not know this man, nor am I one of his friends.

At about this time, the gatekeeper pulled Peter aside and said, 'I am certain you are a follower of this Jesus, not only because one of his friends instructed me to let you into the courtyard, but also because my sister has seen you in the temple with him. Why do you deny this? When Peter heard the maid's accusation, he once again denied any association with Jesus, stating: I am not this man's follower; I do not even know him; I have never heard of him before.

Peter stepped away from the fireside for a while and walked around the courtyard. He wished he could escape, but he was afraid of drawing attention to himself. Feeling cold, he returned to the fireside, where one of the men standing near him said: Surely you are one of this man's followers. This Jesus is a Galilean, and your accent reveals you, for you also speak like a Galilean. Peter denied any connection with his teacher. Peter was evidently so disturbed that he sought to avoid contact with his accusers by distancing himself from the fire and remaining alone on the porch. After more than an hour of isolation, the gatekeeper and her sister happened upon him, and both teasingly accused him of being a follower of Jesus once again. He denied the accusation once more. Just as he had again disavowed any connection with Jesus, the rooster crowed, and Peter suddenly recalled the words of warning spoken to him by Jesus earlier that same night.

As Peter stood there, heavy-hearted and overwhelmed by guilt, the palace doors opened, and the guards led Jesus past on his way to Caiaphas. As Jesus passed Peter, he saw, illuminated by the flickering torchlight, the expression of despair on the face of his once self-confident and superficially brave follower. Jesus turned to look at Peter, and Peter never forgot that gaze for the rest of his life. It was a glance filled with a unique blend of pity and love that no mortal man had ever witnessed on Jesus' face.

After Jesus and the guards exited the palace gates, Peter followed them for a short distance but was unable to go any farther. He sat down by the side of the road and wept bitterly. Eventually, he turned back toward the camp, hoping to find his brother, Andrew. Upon arriving at the camp, he encountered only David Zebedee, who sent a messenger to guide him to the location where his brother had gone into hiding in Jerusalem.

Having taken the first step along the path of compromise and least resistance, Peter saw no apparent option but to continue forward. He never fully believed that he could be forgiven until he encountered the spirit of Jesus during his reappearances and learned that he was received just as he had been before that tragic night of denial.

17.3 BEFORE THE COURT OF SANHEDRISTS

At about half past three this Friday morning, the chief priest Caiaphas convened the Sanhedrin court of inquiry and requested that Jesus be brought before them for his formal trial. On three previous occasions, the Sanhedrin had, by a significant majority vote, decreed the death of Jesus, determining that he was deserving of death on informal charges of law-breaking and blasphemy. Now, these chief priests, Scribes, Sadducees, and some Pharisees deluded themselves into believing that Jesus was securely in their hands.

This was not a regularly scheduled meeting of the Sanhedrin, nor was it held in the usual location, the chamber of hewn stone in the temple. Instead, this was a special trial court composed of approximately thirty Sanhedrists, convened in the palace of the high priest.

Jesus appeared before the court dressed in his customary garments, with his hands bound behind his back. The entire court was undoubtedly startled and somewhat perplexed by his majestic presence; they had never before encountered such a prisoner or witnessed such composure in someone on trial for his life.

Ordinarily, when the Jews tried someone on a capital charge, they proceeded with great caution. They ensured that every safeguard of fairness was in place in the selection of witnesses and the overall conduct of the trial. However, on this occasion, Caiaphas acted more as a prosecutor than as an impartial judge.

The Jewish law mandated that at least two witnesses must concur on any point before a charge could be brought against a prisoner. More than twenty witnesses had been called to testify against Jesus. However, their testimonies were so contradictory and evidently fabricated that the Sanhedrin members themselves were likely quite ashamed of their performances. Jesus stood there, gazing benignly at these perjurers, and his very demeanor unsettled the deceitful witnesses. Throughout all this false testimony, Jesus remained silent. John Zebedee was present with Jesus during this so-called trial.

The first instance in which any two of the witnesses approached a semblance of agreement occurred when two men testified that they had heard Jesus say in the course of one of his temple discourses that he would “destroy this temple made with hands and in three days make another temple without hands.” However, this was not precisely what Jesus had said, even though he pointed to his own body as a temple at that moment. Despite the high priest’s demand: Do you not answer any of these charges? Jesus remained silent while all of the witnesses provided their false testimonies.

Shortly after the testimony began, Annas arrived and took his seat beside Caiaphas. Annas then stood up and argued that Jesus’ threat to destroy the temple was sufficient to warrant three charges against him:

- That he was a dangerous detractor of the people, teaching them impossible concepts and deceiving them in various ways.
- That he was a fanatical revolutionary, advocating for violent actions against the temple; otherwise, how could he hope to destroy it?
- That he taught magic because he promised to build a new temple, and he would do so without using his hands.

The entire Sanhedrin had already agreed that Jesus was guilty of transgressions deserving of death under Jewish law. Now, they were primarily focused on formulating charges related to his conduct and teachings that would justify Pilate in issuing a death sentence. They understood that securing the consent of the Roman governor was essential before Jesus could be legally executed. Annas was determined to proceed by portraying Jesus as a dangerous teacher who posed a threat to the public.

But Caiaphas could no longer endure the sight of Jesus standing there in perfect composure and unbroken silence. He believed he knew at least one way to induce the prisoner to speak. Accordingly, he rushed to Jesus’ side and, shaking his accusing finger in his face, said: I command you, in the name of the living God, tell us whether you are a Son Of God.

Jesus answered Caiaphas: “I am.”

When the high priest heard Jesus utter these words, he was exceedingly angry. Rending his outer garments, he exclaimed: What further need have we of witnesses? Behold, you have all heard this man's blasphemy. What do you think should be done with this lawbreaker and blasphemer? All answered in unison: He is worthy of death; let him be crucified.

Annas desired that the trial proceed further and that specific charges regarding Jesus' relationship with Roman law and institutions be formulated for subsequent presentation to Pilate. The councilors were eager to bring these matters to a swift conclusion, as it was the preparation day for Passover. No secular work should be conducted in the afternoon, and they also feared that Pilate might return at any moment to the Roman capital of Judea, Caesarea, since he was in Jerusalem solely for the Passover celebration.

Annas failed to maintain control of the court. After Jesus unexpectedly responded to Caiaphas, the high priest stepped forward and struck him in the face. Annas was taken aback as other members of the court, while exiting the room, spat in Jesus' face, and many mockingly slapped him with the palms of their hands. Thus, in disarray and amidst unprecedented confusion, this first session of the Sanhedrin trial of Jesus concluded just before dawn.

17.4 HOUR OF HUMILIATION

The Jewish law mandated that, in cases involving the death sentence, there should be two court sessions. The second session was to take place on the day following the first, with the intervening time designated for fasting and mourning by the members of the court. However, they did not wait until the next day to confirm their decision that Jesus must die; they waited only one hour.

During this hour, Jesus was left in the audience chamber under the custody of the temple guards, who, along with the high priest's aides, amused themselves by subjecting Jesus to various forms of indignity. They mocked him, spat upon him, and struck him. They would hit him in the face with a rod and then taunt him, saying: Prophecies to us, you

Deliverer, who struck you? They continued to revile and mistreat him throughout this harrowing hour - Jesus remained silent.

During this time, John Zebedee waited in solitary terror in an adjoining room. When these abuses first began, Jesus signaled to John with a nod of his head, indicating that he should withdraw. Jesus understood that if he allowed his followers to remain in the room to witness these indignities, John's resentment would be so inflamed that it could lead to an outburst of protest that might ultimately result in his death.

17.5 SECOND MEETING OF THE COURT

Near daybreak, the court reconvened, and Jesus was led into the adjacent room, where John was waiting. In this space, the Roman soldier and the temple guards kept watch over Jesus while the court began to formulate the charges that would be presented to Pilate. Annas made it clear to his associates that the charge of blasphemy would hold no weight with Pilate. Judas was present during this second meeting of the court, but he provided no testimony.

This session of the court lasted only half an hour, and when they adjourned to appear before Pilate, they had prepared the indictment of Jesus, declaring him worthy of death on three counts.

- That he was a corrupter of the Jewish nation; he deceived the people and incited them to rebellion.
- That he taught the people to refuse to pay tribute to Caesar.
- That he claimed to be a king and the founder of a new sort of kingdom, therefore, he incited treason against the emperor.

No witnesses testified on behalf of the defense, nor was Jesus asked to explain his actions. The charges were established while the accused was absent, rendering the procedure contrary to Jewish law. The only basis on which the court could have consistently judged him was blasphemy, which would have relied entirely on his own testimony. After this, three of the Pharisees departed; they sought Jesus' execution but insisted that charges against him be formulated only with witnesses present and in his absence.

While Jesus was in the room with John and the guards, and as the court was in its second session, some women from the high priest's palace, accompanied by their friends, came to see the prisoner. One of them asked him: Are you a Son Of God?

Jesus answered: "If I tell you, you will not believe me; and if I ask you this question, you will not answer me." He had taught his friends the futility of casting their pearls before swine, and now he dared to practice what he had taught. His behavior at this moment exemplified the patient submission of human nature, combined with the silence and solemn dignity of divine nature.

Shortly thereafter, Jesus was taken from the home of Caiaphas to stand before Pilate in order to confirm the death sentence decreed by the Sanhedrin court.

17.6 TRIAL BEFORE PILATE

Early on Friday, April 7, 30 CE, Jesus was brought before Pilate, the Roman procurator who governed Judea, Samaria, and Idumea under the direct supervision of the Legatus of Syria. He was taken into the presence of the Roman governor by the temple guards, bound, and accompanied by approximately fifty of his accusers, including members of the Sanhedrin, the high priest Caiaphas, and John. Annas did not appear before Pilate.

Pilate was prepared to receive a group of early morning visitors, having been informed by those who had obtained his consent the previous evening to employ Roman soldiers in the arrest of Jesus. He was told that Jesus would be brought before him shortly. This trial was scheduled to take place in front of the Praetorium, an extension of the Fortress of Antonia, where Pilate and his wife established their headquarters during their stays in Jerusalem.

Though Pilate conducted much of Jesus' examination within the halls of the Praetorium, the public trial took place outside on the steps leading to the main entrance.

This arrangement was a concession to the Jews, who refused to enter any Gentile building where leaven might be present on this day of preparation for the Passover. Such an act would not only render them ceremonially unclean, preventing them from participating in the afternoon feast of thanksgiving. It would also require them to undergo purification ceremonies after sundown before they could partake in the Passover dinner. They were meticulous about adhering to these matters of ceremonial cleanliness and traditional observance.

17.7 PONTIUS PILATE

If Pontius Pilate had not been a reasonably effective governor of the minor provinces, Tiberius would hardly have allowed him to remain as procurator of Judea for ten years. Although he was a competent administrator, he lacked the insight necessary to understand the complexities of his task as governor of the Jews. He failed to recognize that these Hebrews possessed a profound religion - a faith for which they were willing to die. They regarded Jerusalem as the sacred center of their faith and held the Sanhedrin in high esteem as the ultimate authority on earth.

Claudia Procula, the wife of Pilate, had learned much about Jesus through her maid-in-waiting, who was a Phoenician follower of Jesus' teachings. *[After the death of Pilate, Claudia became prominently associated with the dissemination of the lessons.]*

None of the Roman provinces posed greater challenges for governance than Judea. Early in his tenure as governor, Pilate committed a series of nearly catastrophic and reckless mistakes. First, he underestimated the deep-seated aversion of the Jewish people to all images, which they regarded as symbols of idolatry. Consequently, he allowed his soldiers to enter Jerusalem without removing the images of Caesar from their banners, a practice that had been observed by the Roman soldiers under his predecessor. A large delegation of Jews petitioned Pilate for five days, imploring him to remove these images from the military standards. He flatly refused their request and threatened them with immediate death.

Pilate, being a skeptic himself, failed to comprehend that individuals with strong religious convictions would not hesitate to die for their beliefs. Thus, he was dismayed when the Jews defiantly presented themselves before his palace, bowed their faces to the ground, and communicated their readiness to die. It was at this moment that Pilate realized he had issued a threat he was unwilling to carry out. He surrendered, ordered the removal of the images from the standards of his soldiers in Jerusalem, and found himself, from that day forward, largely subject to the whims of the Jewish leaders, who had, in this manner, uncovered his weakness in making threats he feared to execute. Pilate subsequently sought to restore his lost prestige and, therefore, had the shields of the emperor, which were commonly used in Caesar worship, put up on the walls of Herod's palace in Jerusalem. When the Jews protested, he remained resolute. Ignoring their objections, they quickly appealed to Rome, prompting the emperor to order the removal of the offending shields. As a result, Pilate's reputation sank even lower than it had been before.

Another factor that led to his significant disfavor with the Jews was his audacity in taking money from the temple treasury to finance the construction of a new aqueduct. This aqueduct was intended to enhance the water supply for the millions of visitors to Jerusalem during the major religious festivals. The Jews believed that only the Sanhedrin had the authority to disburse temple funds, and they persistently protested against Pilate for this overstepping of his authority. This decision sparked numerous riots and considerable bloodshed, culminating in the massacre of a large group of Jews while they were worshiping at the altar.

It was these blunders that granted the Jews significant influence over him. Whenever they sought to sway his decisions, all they needed to do was threaten an uprising, and Pilate would quickly capitulate. The Jews understood that Pilate was fearful of them, concerned for his standing with Tiberius, and they exploited this knowledge to the considerable detriment of the governor on numerous occasions.

[Pilate was later deposed due to the unnecessary slaughter of Samaritans connected to the claims of a false Messiah, who led troops to Mount Gerizim, asserting that the temple vessels were buried there. Fierce riots erupted when Pilate failed to disclose the hiding place of these sacred vessels, as he had promised. Consequently, the Legatus of Syria ordered Pilate to return to Rome. Tiberius died while Pilate was en route to Rome, and he was not reappointed as procurator of Judea. Finding no favor in the eyes of the new emperor, Pilate retired to the province of Lausanne, where he ultimately committed suicide.]

This may explain why the Jews felt entitled to dictate to Pilate, urging him to rise early to try Jesus. It also clarifies why they did not hesitate to threaten him with charges of treason before the emperor if he dared to refuse their demands for Jesus' execution.

17.8 BEFORE PILATE

When Jesus and his accusers had gathered in front of Pilate's judgment hall, the Roman governor emerged and, addressing the company assembled, asked: What accusation do you bring against this man?

The Sadducees and councilors had resolved to approach Pilate to seek confirmation of the death sentence pronounced upon Jesus, without presenting any specific charges. Consequently, the spokesperson for the Sanhedrin responded to Pilate, stating: If this man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered him to you.

When Pilate noticed their hesitation to present charges against Jesus, despite knowing they had spent the entire night deliberating his guilt, he answered them: Since you have not reached a consensus on any specific charges, why do you not take this man and judge him according to your own laws?

Pilate was aware of Jesus' activities among the Jews and suspected that the charges against him were related to violations of Jewish ecclesiastical laws. Consequently, he sought to refer the case back to their own tribunal.

Then the clerk of the Sanhedrin court spoke to Pilate: It is not lawful for us to put any man to death, and this disturber of our nation is deserving of death for the things he has said and done. Therefore, we have come before you to seek confirmation of this decree.

Pilate would have preferred to postpone the hearing, but he recognized that the Jewish leaders were resolute in their decision to move forward with the case. He understood that this was not only the morning of preparation for Passover, but also that Friday was the preparation day for the Jewish Sabbath of rest and worship.

Pilate, acutely aware of the disrespectful manner in which the Jews approached him, was unwilling to comply with their demands to sentence Jesus to death without a trial. After waiting a few moments for them to present their charges against the prisoner, he turned to them and said: I will not sentence this man to death without a trial; nor will I consent to examine him until you have presented your charges against him in writing.

When the high priest and the others heard Pilate's statement, they signaled to the court clerk, who then presented the written charges against Jesus. The charges stated: We find in the Sanhedrin tribunal that this man is an evildoer and a disturber of our nation, as he is guilty of perverting our nation, inciting rebellion among our people, forbidding them to pay tribute to Caesar, and claiming to be the king of the Jews while teaching the establishment of a new kingdom.

Pilate summoned Jesus from the praetorium, where he was under the custody of the guards, and insisted that the charges be repeated in Jesus' presence. When Jesus heard these accusations, he was fully aware that he had not been given an opportunity to defend himself before the Jewish court, a fact known to both John Zebedee and his accusers. Nevertheless, he chose to remain silent.

Pilate was perplexed, troubled by the Jews in his heart, and deeply moved by the sight of Jesus standing before his accusers, gazing down at them with an expression of genuine pity and sorrowful affection. Astonished by the unfairness of the entire proceeding and profoundly impressed by Jesus' silent and dignified demeanor, Pilate decided to take the prisoner into the hall for a private examination.

17.9 PRIVATE EXAMINATION BY PILATE

Pilate took Jesus and John into a private chamber, leaving the guards outside in the hall, and requested that the prisoner sit down. Pilate sat beside him and asked several questions. He began his conversation with Jesus by assuring him that he did not believe the initial accusation against him: that he was a perverter of the nation and an inciter of rebellion. Then he asked: Did you ever teach that tribute should be refused to Caesar?

Jesus, pointing to John, said: "Ask him or anyone else who has heard the teachings." Pilate then questioned John regarding the issue of tribute. John testified about his teacher's teachings, explaining that Jesus and his followers paid taxes to both Caesar and the temple. When Pilate questioned John, he said: See that you tell no one that I spoke with you. *[And John never revealed this matter.]*

Pilate then turned to Jesus and asked about the third accusation against: Are you the king of the Jews?

Since there was a tone of possibly sincere inquiry in Pilate's voice, Jesus smiled at the procurator and asked: "Pilate, do you ask this for yourself, or are you repeating this question from my accusers?"

After that, in a tone of partial indignation, the governor answered: Am I a Jew? Your own people and the chief priests have delivered you to me and asked that I sentence you to death. I question the validity of their charges and am only trying to ascertain what you have done. Tell me, have you claimed to be the king of the Jews and sought to establish a new kingdom?

Then Jesus replied to Pilate: "That kingdom is not of this world? If the kingdom were of this world, my followers would surely fight to prevent my being delivered into the hands of the Jews. My presence here before you in these bonds is sufficient to demonstrate to all people that the kingdom is a spiritual dominion. Furthermore, this kingdom is for the souls of Gentiles as well as for the Jews."

Pilate asked: Are you a king, after all? Jesus replied, 'I am somewhat like a spiritual king, but my kingdom encompasses the souls of the

children of our Heavenly Father.’ For this purpose, I have endeavored to reveal our Heavenly Father to all people and bear witness to the truth of God. Even now, I affirm that everyone who loves the truth hears the words.” Then Pilate said, half in ridicule and half in sincerity: Truth, what is truth? Who knows? Pilate could not comprehend Jesus’ words, nor could he grasp the nature of a spiritual fellowship of souls. He believed he understood something of what Jesus meant when he referred to himself as a king, as he was familiar with the teachings of the Stoics, who proclaimed: The wise man is king.

One look at Jesus, face to face, was enough to convince even Pilate that this gentle, weary, yet majestic and upright man was not a wild and dangerous revolutionary aspiring to establish himself on the temporal throne of Israel. Pilate became thoroughly convinced that, instead of being a dangerous seditionist, Jesus was nothing more than a harmless visionary, an innocent fanatic. He was now certain that the prisoner had committed no act deserving of death.

After questioning Jesus, Pilate returned to the chief priests and the accusers and said: I have examined this man and find no fault in him. I do not believe he is guilty of the charges you have brought against him; he ought to be set free.

When the Jews heard this, they were filled with intense anger, to the point that they shouted fervently for Jesus to be executed. One of the members of the Sanhedrin boldly approached Pilate, saying: This man incites the people, starting in Galilee and spreading throughout all of Judea. He is a troublemaker and a wrongdoer. You will deeply regret it if you allow this wicked man to go free.

Pilate was uncertain about how to handle the situation with Jesus. When he heard the crowd mention that Jesus had begun his ministry in Galilee, he considered evading the responsibility of making a decision in the case. He thought that by sending Jesus to appear before Herod, who was in the city for Passover, he could at least buy himself some time to reflect on the matter.

Pilate believed that this gesture would help alleviate some of the longstanding animosities between himself and Herod, which had arisen from numerous misunderstandings regarding matters of jurisdiction. Pilate called the guards and said: This man is a Galilean. Take him immediately to Herod, and once he has examined him, report your findings to me.

And they brought Jesus before Herod.

17.10 BEFORE HEROD

When Herod Antipas visited Jerusalem, he resided in the ancient palace of Herod the Great, built by the Maccabees. It was to this residence of the former king that Jesus was brought by the temple guards, accompanied by his accusers and a growing crowd.

Herod had long been aware of Jesus and was very curious about him. When Jesus stood before him on that Friday morning, the Idumean did not once recall the young boy from years past who had appeared before him in Sepphoris, pleading for a fair decision regarding the money owed to his father, who had been accidentally killed while working on one of Herod's public buildings. As far as Herod was concerned, he had never seen Jesus, although he had worried extensively about him when his activities had been focused in Galilee.

Now that he was in the custody of Pilate and the Judeans, Herod was eager to see him, feeling secure against any future trouble from him. Herod had heard much about the so-called miracles performed by Jesus, and he genuinely hoped to witness some extraordinary act.

When they brought Jesus before Herod, the tetrarch was taken aback by his dignified appearance and the serene composure of his countenance. For approximately fifteen minutes, Herod posed questions to Jesus, but Jesus remained silent. Herod mocked him and challenged him to perform a miracle, yet Jesus did not respond to his numerous inquiries or taunts. Jesus was largely unconcerned with the specifics of his so-called trials. He refused to utilize even his purely human abilities of persuasive eloquence to sway the outcome.

Then Herod turned to the chief priests and the Sadducees, listening to their accusations. He heard all that, and more, than what Pilate had listened to regarding the alleged wrongdoings of Jesus.

Finally, convinced that Jesus would neither speak nor perform a miracle for him, Herod, after mocking him for a time, dressed him in an old purple royal robe and sent him back to Pilate.

Herod understood that he had no jurisdiction over Jesus in Judea. Although he was relieved to think that he would finally be rid of Jesus in Galilee, he was pleased that Pilate was responsible for executing him. Herod never fully recovered from the fear that haunted him after the execution of John the Baptist. He may have harbored some anxiety that Jesus was John, risen from the dead. However, he felt reassured upon observing that Jesus was a markedly different individual from the outspoken and fiery prophet who had dared to expose and denounce his private life.

17.11 RETURN TO PILATE

When the guards brought Jesus back to Pilate, he went out onto the front steps of the praetorium, where his judgment seat was located. He called together the chief priests and the Sanhedrin and said to them: You have brought this man before me with accusations that he misleads the people, prohibits the payment of taxes, and claims to be the king of the Jews. I have examined him and found no evidence to support these charges. I see no fault in him.

He continued: Then I sent him to Herod, and he must have reached the same conclusion, as he has sent him back to us. Certainly, nothing worthy of death has been committed by this man. If you still believe he needs to be punished, I am willing to administer a penalty before I release him.

Just as the Jews were preparing to voice their protests against the release of Jesus, a large crowd approached the praetorium to request that Pilate release a prisoner in honor of the Passover feast.

For some time, it had been customary for the Roman governors to permit the populace to select an imprisoned or condemned individual

for pardon during the Passover. Now, as the crowd gathered before him to request the release of a prisoner, and given that Jesus had recently enjoyed considerable favor among the multitudes, Pilate realized he might extricate himself from his predicament by proposing to the group that, since Jesus was now a prisoner at his judgment seat, he would release this man from Galilee as a gesture of goodwill for Passover.

As the crowd surged up the steps of the building, Pilate heard them calling out the name of Barabbas. Barabbas was a notorious political agitator and violent robber, the son of a priest, who had recently been apprehended while committing robbery and murder on the Jericho Road. This man was sentenced to die as soon as the Passover festivities concluded.

Pilate stood up and explained to the crowd that Jesus had been brought to him by the chief priests, who sought to have him executed on specific charges. He did not believe the man was deserving of the death penalty. Pilate asked: Which, therefore, would you prefer that I release to you: this Barabbas, the murderer, or this Jesus of Galilee? As Pilate spoke, the chief priests and the members of the Sanhedrin shouted at the top of their voices: Barabbas, Barabbas!

When the crowd saw that the chief priests were intent on having Jesus put to death, they quickly joined in the clamor for his life, loudly demanding the release of Barabbas. Just a few days earlier, the multitude had stood in awe of Jesus; however, the crowd no longer revered the man who now found himself in the custody of the chief priests and leaders, on trial before Pilate for his life. Jesus could be viewed as a hero in the eyes of the populace when he drove the money changers and traders out of the temple. Still, their admiration vanished when he became a prisoner at the mercy of his opponents, facing trial for his life.

Pilate was incensed at the sight of the chief priests clamoring for the pardon of a notorious murderer while simultaneously demanding the blood of Jesus. He recognized their malice and hatred, as well as their prejudice and envy. Consequently, he addressed them, saying:

How could you choose the life of a murderer over that of this man, whose only ‘crime’ is that he figuratively refers to himself as the king of the Jews?

However, Pilate’s statement was unwise. The Jews were anticipating the arrival of a Messiah who would liberate them from Gentile oppression with a display of immense power and glory. They resented, more than Pilate could comprehend, the suggestion that this humble teacher of unconventional doctrines could be referred to as the king of the Jews. They perceived such a remark as an affront to everything they held sacred and honorable in their national identity. Consequently, they unleashed their fervent cries for the release of Barabbas and the execution of Jesus. Pilate was aware of Jesus’ innocence regarding the charges against him, and had he been a just and courageous judge, he would have acquitted him and set him free. However, he feared defying the wrath of the angry crowd.

While he hesitated to fulfill his duty, a messenger presented him with a sealed letter from his wife, Claudia. Pilate signaled to those assembled before him that he wished to read the communication he had just received before proceeding further with the matter. Upon opening the letter from his wife, Pilate read: I pray you have nothing to do with this innocent and just man whom they call Jesus. I have suffered many things in a dream this night because of him.

This note from Claudia not only greatly upset Pilate, thereby delaying the adjudication of this matter, but it also provided considerable time for the Jewish leaders to circulate freely among the crowd, urging the people to call for the release of Barabbas and to clamor for the execution of Jesus.

Finally, Pilate once again turned his attention to the dilemma before him, posing a question to the diverse assembly of Jewish leaders and the crowd seeking pardon: What shall I do with him who is called the king of the Jews? The crowd all shouted with one accord: Crucify him! Crucify him! The overwhelming consensus of this demand from the mixed multitude startled and alarmed Pilate.

Then once more, Pilate asked: Why would you crucify this man? What evil has he done? Who will come forward to testify against him? However, when they heard Pilate speak in defense of Jesus, they only cried out all the more: Crucify him! Crucify him!

Then again, Pilate appealed to them regarding the release of the Passover prisoner, saying: Once more, I ask you, which of these prisoners shall I release to you at this, your Passover time? And again, the crowd shouted: Give us Barabbas! Then Pilate said: If I release the murderer Barabbas, what shall I do with Jesus? And once more, the multitude shouted in unison: Crucify him! Crucify him!

Pilate was terrorized by the relentless clamor of the mob, which was directly led by the chief priests and the councilors of the Sanhedrin. Nevertheless, he resolved to make at least one more attempt to appease the crowd and save Jesus.

17.12 PILATE'S LAST APPEAL

In all that transpired early Friday morning before Pilate, only the opponents of Jesus were present. Pilate made one final appeal to their sense of compassion. Fearing to defy the outcry of the crowd demanding the blood of Jesus, he ordered the Jewish guards and Roman soldiers to take Jesus and whip him. This action was, in itself, unjust and illegal, as Roman law stipulated that only those condemned to death should be subjected to scourging.

The guards led Jesus into the open courtyard of the praetorium for this ordeal. Although his opponents did not witness the whipping, Pilate did. The scourgers lashed Jesus with their knotted whips while he was bound to the whipping post, they draped a purple robe over him and placed a crown of thorns upon his brow. Then, they put a reed in his hand as a mock scepter, knelt before him, and mocked him, saying: Hail, king of the Jews! Then they hit him and struck him in the face with their hands. Before returning him to Pilate, one of them took the reed from his hand and struck him on the head. Before the scourging was

complete, Pilate instructed the scourgers to stop and signaled for Jesus to be brought to him. Then Pilate brought forth the bleeding and lacerated Jesus and presented him before the mixed multitude, said: Behold the man! I declare to you once more that I find no crime in him. After punishing him, I intend to release him.

However, nothing resonated with the crowd. Once they had recovered from the initial shock of witnessing Jesus' suffering, they only shouted louder and longer: Crucify him! Crucify him! Crucify him!

And now Pilate understood that it was futile to appeal to their supposed feelings of pity. He stepped forward and said: I perceive that you are determined for this man to die, but what has he done to deserve death? Who will declare his crime?

Then the high priest himself stepped forward and, going up to Pilate, declaring angrily: We have a sacred law, and according to that law, this man ought to die because he has made himself out to be a Son Of God. When Pilate heard this, he became increasingly afraid, not only of the Jews but also because he recalled his wife's note and the Greek mythology of gods descending to earth. He trembled at the thought that Jesus might be a divine figure. He gestured to the crowd to remain silent while he took Jesus by the arm and led him back inside the building for further examination. Pilate appeared to be confused by fear, bewildered by superstition, and troubled by the obstinate attitude of the mob.

17.13 PILATE'S LAST EXAMINATION

As Pilate, trembling with fear, sat down beside Jesus, he inquired: Where do you come from? Who are you really? What is this they say about you being the Son Of God?

But Jesus could hardly respond to such questions when posed by a weak and indecisive judge who was unjust enough to subject him to flogging, even after declaring him innocent of all charges and before he had been formally sentenced to death. Jesus looked Pilate directly in the eye but did not answer him.

Pilate then said: If you refuse to speak to me, do you not realize that I still have the power to release you or to execute you?

Jesus said: "You would have no power over me unless it had been granted from above. You could exercise no authority unless the Heavenly Father allowed it. However, you are not as guilty since you are not aware of the new teachings. Those who delivered me to you bear the greater guilt."

This final conversation with Jesus deeply unsettled Pilate. This moral coward and judicial weakling now bore the dual burden of superstitious fear of Jesus and the profound dread of the Jewish leaders.

Again, Pilate addressed the crowd, saying: I am certain this man is merely a religious offender. You should take him and judge him according to your own laws. Why do you expect me to consent to his death simply because he has challenged your traditions?

Pilate was on the verge of releasing Jesus when Caiaphas, the high priest, approached the Roman judge. Shaking an accusatory finger in Pilate's face, he declared in a voice loud enough for the entire crowd to hear: If you release this man, you are not a friend of Caesar, and I will ensure that the emperor is informed of your actions.

This public threat proved overwhelming for Pilate. His fear for personal fortunes now overshadowed all other considerations, prompting the governor to order Jesus to be brought before the judgment seat. As Jesus stood before them, Pilate pointed at him and tauntingly said: Behold your king.

The crowd answered: Away with him! Crucify him! Then asked, with considerable irony and sarcasm: Shall I crucify your king? The Jewish leaders responded: Yes, crucify him! We have no king but Caesar.

And then Pilate ultimately recognized that there was no hope of saving Jesus, as he was unwilling to defy the crowd. Fearing a tumult or riot, Pilate dared not risk a disturbance during Passover in Jerusalem. Having recently received a reprimand from Caesar, he was determined not to risk another. The crowd erupted in cheers when he ordered the release of Barabbas.

Then he ordered a basin and some water, and there, before the multitude, he washed his hands, saying: I am innocent of the blood of this man. You are determined that he shall die, but I have found no guilt in him. See to it. The soldiers will lead him away.

And then the crowd cheered, and some replied: His blood is on us.

Before Pilate, Jesus spoke only when he believed that Pilate or another sincere individual could gain a better understanding of the truth through his words. Jesus was fully willing to engage with Pilate on any questions related to the political charges brought against him - any question that he recognized as falling within the governor's jurisdiction. However, Jesus showed no interest in Pilate's earnest yet halfhearted attempts to secure his release; instead, he felt genuine pity for Pilate.

17.14 FRIDAY MORNING

As Jesus and his accusers set off to see Herod, Jesus turned to John Zebedee and said: "John, you can do no more for me. Go to my mother and bring her to see me before I die." Although John was reluctant to leave Jesus alone among his adversaries, he quickly made his way to Bethany, where the entire family of Jesus was gathered at the home of Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus.

Several times during the morning, messengers brought news to Martha and Mary regarding the progress of Jesus' trial. However, Jesus' family did not arrive in Bethany until just a few minutes before John came with Jesus' request to see his mother before his execution.

After John recounted all that had transpired since the midnight arrest of Jesus, Mary, his mother, immediately accompanied John to see her eldest son. By the time Mary and John reached the city, Jesus, accompanied by Roman soldiers, had already arrived at Golgotha.

When Mary set out with John to visit her son, his sister Ruth insisted on accompanying them instead of staying behind with the rest of the family. Determined to be with her mother, her brother Jude joined her.

Meanwhile, the rest of Jesus' family remained in Bethany under the direction of James.

17.15 END OF JUDAS ISCARIOT

It was still early morning on that Friday when the hearing of Jesus before Pilate concluded, and Jesus was placed in the custody of the Roman soldiers assigned to execute him. As soon as the Romans took possession of Jesus, the captain of the Jewish guards marched back to their temple headquarters with his team. The chief priest and his Sanhedrin associates followed closely behind the guards, heading directly to their usual meeting place in the hall of hewn stone within the temple. There, they found many other members of the Sanhedrin waiting to learn what had transpired with Jesus. While Caiaphas was engaged in reporting to the Sanhedrin about the trial and condemnation of Jesus, Judas appeared before them to claim his reward for his role in Jesus' arrest.

Most of those present apparently loathed Judas; many regarded him with feelings of utter contempt. Throughout Jesus' trial before Caiaphas and during his appearance before Pilate, Judas was plagued by his conscience regarding his actions. He was unsettled by the coldness and aloofness of the Jewish authorities.

Nevertheless, Judas expected to be generously rewarded for his actions. He anticipated being summoned before the full assembly of the Sanhedrin, where he envisioned hearing himself praised while they conferred upon him appropriate honors in recognition of the great service he believed he had rendered to his nation.

He was taken aback when a helper of the high priest, tapping him on the shoulder, called him just outside the hall and said: Judas, I have been appointed to pay you for the betrayal of Jesus. Here is your reward. The helper of Caiaphas handed Judas a bag containing thirty pieces of silver. Judas was stunned and dumbfounded. He rushed back to enter the hall but was barred by the doorkeeper. He wanted to appeal to the Sanhedrin, but they would not admit him. Judas could not believe that these leaders of the Jews would allow him to betray his friends and his teacher for a mere thirty pieces of silver. He felt humiliated, disillusioned, and utterly crushed.

He walked away from the temple, as if in a trance. Automatically, he dropped the money bag into his deep pocket, the same pocket where he had long carried the bag containing the group's funds. He then wandered through the city, following the crowds who were on their way to witness the executions.

From a distance, Judas saw them raise the crossbeam with Jesus nailed to it. Upon witnessing this, he rushed back to the temple, forcing his way past the doorkeeper, and found himself standing before the Sanhedrin, which was still in session. Judas was nearly breathless and deeply distraught, but he managed to stammer out: I have sinned by betraying innocent blood. You have insulted me. You offered me money as a reward for my service. I repent for what I have done; here is your money. I want to escape the guilt of this deed.

When the Jewish leaders heard Judas, they scoffed at him. One of them, sitting near where Judas stood, gestured for him to leave the hall and said: Your master has already been put to death by the Romans, and as for your guilt, what is that to us? Attend to that matter yourself, be gone!

As Judas exited the Sanhedrin chamber, he took the thirty pieces of silver from the bag and threw them across the temple floor. Upon leaving the temple, he was nearly beside himself. He was now confronting the profound realization of the true nature of his actions. All the glamour, fascination, and intoxication of wrongdoing had dissipated. Now, he stood alone, face to face with his disillusionment and disappointment.

Judas then walked through the streets of Jerusalem, forsaken and alone. He journeyed through the city and beyond its walls, descending into the profound solitude of the Valley of Hinnom. There, he climbed the steep rocks and, taking the girdle of his cloak, fastened one end to a small tree, tied the other around his neck, and cast himself over the precipice. Before he died, the knot that his trembling hands had tied gave way, and Judas's body was shattered as it fell onto the jagged rocks below.

17.16 DAVID ZEBEDEE

Shortly after Jesus was handed over to the Roman soldiers following the hearing before Pilate, a detachment of temple guards hurried to Gethsemane to arrest the followers. However, long before their arrival, they had already scattered. They had retreated to designated hiding places; the Greeks had separated and gone to various homes throughout Jerusalem, while the other followers had likewise disappeared.

David Zebedee believed that Jesus' opponents would return, so he promptly set up six tents in the ravine near the location where Jesus frequently retreated to converse with God. Here, he intended to hide while simultaneously establishing a center, or coordinating station, for his messenger service.

David remained at the camp when the temple guards arrived. Finding no one present, they resorted to burning the camp and then hastened back to the temple. Upon hearing their report, the Sanhedrin was reassured that the followers of Jesus were sufficiently frightened and subdued, eliminating any risk of an uprising or an attempt to rescue Jesus from his executioners. They finally breathed a sigh of relief and adjourned, with everyone going their separate ways to prepare for Passover.

As soon as Jesus was handed over to the Roman soldiers for execution, a messenger hurried to Gethsemane to inform David. Within five minutes, runners were dispatched to Bethsaida, Pella, Philadelphia, Sidon, Shechem, Hebron, Damascus, and Alexandria. These messengers conveyed the news that Jesus was about to be executed by the Romans at the request of the religious leaders of Jerusalem.

Throughout this tragic day, David sent messengers approximately every half hour to deliver reports to the followers, the Greeks, and Jesus' earthly family, who were gathered at the home of Lazarus in Bethany.

After the messengers departed with the news of Jesus' burial, David dismissed his corps of local runners in preparation for the Passover celebration and the upcoming Sabbath of rest. He instructed them to report to him discreetly on Sunday morning at the home of Nicodemus, where he planned to hide for a few days with Andrew and Simon Peter.

David Zebedee was apparently the only one of the followers who was inclined to take a literal interpretation of Jesus' assertion that he would die and appear again on the third day. David proposed to gather his messengers early Sunday morning at the home of Nicodemus so that they would be ready to spread the news if Jesus reappeared.

And so, the followers of Jesus, scattered throughout Jerusalem and its surroundings, partook of the Passover that night and remained in seclusion the following day.

17.17 PREPARATION FOR THE CRUCIFICATION

After Pilate had washed his hands before the crowd, attempting to absolve himself of guilt, he ordered that Jesus be turned over to the Roman soldiers and instructed their captain to execute him immediately. Upon taking charge of Jesus, the soldiers led him back into the courtyard of the praetorium. After removing the robe that Herod had placed on him, they dressed him in his own garments. These soldiers mocked and derided him but did not inflict any further physical punishment. Jesus was now alone with the Roman soldiers; his friends were hiding, his opponents had dispersed, and even John Zebedee was no longer by his side.

Pilate handed Jesus over to the soldiers in the mid-morning as they prepared to proceed to the execution site. Throughout the more than half an hour, Jesus remained silent, not uttering a single word. By the time the soldiers were ready to depart with Jesus for Golgotha, they had begun to be struck by his remarkable composure, extraordinary dignity, and uncomplaining silence.

Much of the delay in commencing the execution of Jesus was attributed to the last-minute decision of the captain to include two thieves who had been condemned to die. Since Jesus was scheduled to be executed that morning, the Roman captain reasoned that these two might as well die alongside him rather than wait for the conclusion of the Passover festivities. Once the thieves were prepared, they were led into the courtyard, where they beheld Jesus, one of them seeing him for the first time, while the other had frequently heard him speak.

17.18 THE TWO THIEVES

After the two thieves were prepared, the soldiers, under the direction of a centurion, proceeded to the execution site. The centurion in charge of these twelve soldiers was the same captain who had led the Roman soldiers the previous night to arrest Jesus in Gethsemane.

The Roman custom was to assign four soldiers for each person to be executed. The two brigands were whipped before their execution, but Jesus received no further physical punishment; the captain undoubtedly believed he had already been sufficiently scourged. The two thieves executed alongside Jesus were associates of Barabbas and would have been put to death with their leader had he not been released under Pilate's Passover pardon.

It was still mid-morning when the soldiers led Jesus from the praetorium on the way to Golgotha. They were followed by many who secretly sympathized with him. However, most of the group, numbering two hundred or more, consisted of either his opponents or onlookers who were merely eager to witness the spectacle of the executions. Only a few Jewish leaders ventured out to see Jesus die. Aware that he had been handed over to the Roman soldiers by Pilate and was condemned to die, they deliberated on what actions should be taken regarding his friends.

17.19 ON THE WAY TO GOLGOTHA

Crucifixion was not a method of punishment used by the Jewish people. Both the Greeks and the Romans adopted this form of execution from the Phoenicians. The Romans never crucified their own citizens; only enslaved individuals and subjugated peoples were subjected to this dishonorable method of death.

It was a Roman custom to compel the condemned individual to carry the crossbeam to the site of crucifixion. The condemned person did not carry the entire cross, only this shorter timber. The longer, upright pieces of timber for the three crosses had already been transported to Golgotha and, by the time the soldiers and their prisoners arrived, had

been firmly implanted in the ground. Therefore, before leaving the courtyard of the praetorium, the soldiers placed the crossbeam on Jesus' shoulders.

According to custom, the captain led the procession, carrying small white boards on which the names of the criminals and the nature of their crimes had been inscribed in charcoal. For the two thieves, the centurion had notices that displayed their names, beneath which was written the single word: Brigand.

It was customary for a notice to be affixed to the top of the cross, just above the head of the criminal. The notice that the centurion carried to be placed on Jesus' cross had been inscribed by Pilate himself in Latin, Greek, and Aramaic, and it read: "Jesus of Nazareth - King of the Jews." Some Jewish authorities who were present when Pilate inscribed the title on Jesus' board vigorously protested against referring to Jesus as the King of the Jews. However, Pilate reminded them that this title was part of the charge that led to Jesus' condemnation. Feeling disrespected and humiliated by their demeanor, Pilate sought a petty form of revenge. He understood that they would be deeply offended by seeing this executed Galilean referred to as the King of the Jews.

When the leaders realized they could not persuade Pilate to change his mind, they requested that it at least be modified to read: He said, 'I am the King of the Jews.' But Pilate remained resolute; he would not alter the inscription. In response to all further pleas, he only replied: What I have written, I have written.

Ordinarily, it was customary to travel to Golgotha via the longest route, allowing many people to witness the condemned criminal. However, on this particular day, they took the most direct path to the Damascus Gate, which led north out of the city. Following this road, they quickly arrived at Golgotha, the official execution site of Jerusalem. Beyond Golgotha lay the villas of the wealthy, while on the opposite side of the road were the tombs of many affluent Jews.

As the death procession moved through the narrow streets of Jerusalem, many tenderhearted Jewish women, who had heard Jesus' words of comfort and compassion and were familiar with his life of loving ministry, could not help but weep upon seeing him led to his death. As he passed by, numerous women lamented and mourned. When some of them even dared to follow him, Jesus turned his head toward them and said: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but for yourselves and your children. My work is nearly complete - soon I will go to God - but the times of great trouble for Jerusalem are just beginning."

These women of Jerusalem displayed remarkable courage in expressing sympathy for Jesus, as it was strictly against the law to show any friendly feelings toward someone being led to execution. While it was permissible to jeer, mock, and ridicule the condemned, expressing sympathy was prohibited. Although Jesus appreciated their compassion, when his friends were in hiding, he did not want these kindhearted women to risk incurring the authorities' displeasure by daring to show compassion on his behalf.

As Jesus trudged along the path to his execution, he was weary and nearly exhausted. He had neither food nor water since the last meal at the home of Elijah Mark, nor had he been allowed a moment of sleep. Furthermore, he had endured one hearing after another leading up to the hour of his condemnation, not to mention the brutal whipping and significant loss of blood.

Shortly after passing through the gate on the way out of the city, Jesus staggered under the weight of the crossbeam. His physical strength momentarily faltered, and he fell beneath the heavy burden. The soldiers shouted at him and kicked him, but he was unable to rise. Recognizing the extent of Jesus' suffering, the captain commanded the soldiers to cease their actions. He then ordered a passerby, one Simon from Cyrene, to take the crossbeam from Jesus' shoulders and compelled him to carry it the rest of the way to Golgotha.

This man, Simon, had traveled all the way from Cyrene in northern Africa to attend Passover. He was staying with other Cyrenians just

outside the city walls and was on his way to the temple services when the Roman captain commanded him to carry Jesus' crossbeam.

Simon lingered through the hours of Jesus' crucifixion, conversing with many of his friends and adversaries. Following Jesus' spirit reappearances and before departing from Jerusalem, Simon emerged as a courageous teacher of the new teachings. Upon returning home, he inspired his family to embrace these beliefs. His two sons, Alexander and Rufus, became highly effective teachers in Africa. However, Simon remained unaware that Jesus, whose burden he carried, and the Jewish tutor who had once befriended his injured son were, in fact, the same individual.

When the procession arrived at Golgotha, the Roman soldiers began nailing the two brigands and Jesus to their respective crosses.

17.20 THE CRUCIFIXION

The soldiers first bound Jesus' arms with cords to the crossbeam and then nailed his hands to the wood. After hoisting the crossbeam onto the post and securely nailing it to the upright timber of the cross, they bound and nailed his feet to the wood, using a single long nail to penetrate both feet. The upright timber featured a large peg inserted at the appropriate height, serving as a saddle to support his body weight.

After Jesus was hoisted on the cross, the captain nailed the title board above his head. The cross was not high; Jesus' feet were only about three feet from the ground. Consequently, he could hear all the derisive remarks made about him and could clearly see the expressions on the faces of those who mocked him. Additionally, those present could easily hear everything Jesus said during these hours.

The Roman custom involved removing all clothing from individuals who were to be crucified. However, due to the strong objections of the Jews to the public exposure of nakedness, the Romans consistently provided a suitable loincloth for all individuals crucified in Jerusalem.

Consequently, after Jesus' clothes had been removed, he was clothed with a loincloth before being placed on the cross.

Crucifixion was a cruel and protracted form of punishment, with victims sometimes lingering for several days before succumbing to death. In Jerusalem, there was significant opposition to executions, and a society of Jewish women existed who consistently sent a representative to offer drugged wine to the condemned, aiming to alleviate their suffering. However, when Jesus tasted this narcotized wine, despite his thirst, he chose to refuse it. Jesus opted to maintain his human consciousness until the very end, desiring to confront death and ultimately conquer it through voluntary submission.

Before Jesus was crucified, the two brigands had already been affixed to their crosses, cursing and spitting at their executioners. Jesus' only words, as they nailed him to the crossbeam, were: "Father, be understanding of them, for they know not what they do."

John, accompanied by Mary, the mother of Jesus, Ruth, and Jude, arrived at the scene shortly after Jesus had been raised to the cross, just as the captain was nailing the inscription above Jesus' head. John was the only one of the eleven followers to witness the execution. He was not present for the entire event, as he had briefly gone into Jerusalem to escort his mother and her friends back to the scene after bringing Jesus' mother there.

As Jesus saw his mother, accompanied by John and his brother and sister, he smiled but remained silent. Meanwhile, the four soldiers assigned to execute Jesus, following custom, divided his clothing among themselves: one took the sandals, another the turban, a third the girdle, and the fourth the cloak. This left the tunic, or seamless garment that extended to just above the knees, which they considered cutting into four pieces. However, upon recognizing the uniqueness of the garment, the soldiers decided to cast lots for it instead. Jesus looked down upon them as they divided his garments.

The Roman soldiers took possession of all of Jesus' clothing. Had his friends acquired these garments, they might have been tempted to engage in relic worship. Jesus wished for his followers to refrain from worshipping him or any material objects associated with his life; he intended to leave people only the memory of his teachings.

17.21 WITNESSES

Jesus was hung upon the cross at mid-morning on Friday, and by late morning, over one thousand people had gathered to witness this spectacle.

Standing near the cross at various times during the execution were Mary, Ruth, Jude, John, Salome (John's mother), and a group of devoted women followers, including Mary, the wife of Clopas and sister of Jesus' mother, Mary Magdalene, and Rebecca, a former resident of Sepphoris. These friends of Jesus remained silent as they witnessed his remarkable fortitude and observed his profound suffering.

Many who passed by shook their heads and, railing at him, said: You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are a Son Of God, why do you not come down from your cross? He saved others, but he cannot save himself. If you are the King of the Jews, come down from the cross, and we will believe you. He trusted in God to deliver him. He even claimed to be a Son Of God - look at him now - crucified between two thieves.

Since Jesus did not respond to any of the taunts, and as it was approaching noon on this special preparation day, most of the mocking and jeering crowd had dispersed; fewer than fifty people remained at the scene.

The soldiers were now prepared to eat lunch and drink their wine as they settled down for the long deathwatch. As they partook of the wine, they mockingly offered a toast to Jesus, saying: Hail and good fortune to the King of the Jews!

When Jesus saw them eating and drinking, he looked down upon them and said: "I thirst." When the captain of the guard heard Jesus say this, he took some wine from his bottle and, placing a saturated sponge on the end of a javelin, raised it to Jesus so that he could moisten his parched lips.

17.22 THIEVES ON THE CROSS

One of the thieves mocked Jesus, saying: If you are a Son Of God, why do you not save yourself and us? But the other thief, who had often heard Jesus teach, said: Do you not have any faith in a Son Of God? Do you not see that we are suffering justly for our deeds, while this man suffers unjustly? We should seek forgiveness for our mistakes and eternal life for our souls.

When Jesus heard the thief say this, he smiled approvingly and turned his face toward him. Upon seeing Jesus looking at him, the thief mustered the courage to say: Teacher, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Jesus said: "You shall be with me in heaven."

Jesus, amidst the throes of mortal death, took the time to listen to the confession of the believing brigand. Many times before this, the robber had considered Jesus' teachings, but it was only in these final hours of consciousness that he fully embraced the truth with a sincere heart.

This young man had been led into a life of violence and wrongdoing by those who praised a career of robbery as an effective patriotic protest against political oppression and social injustice. He had once viewed Barabbas as a hero, but now he seemingly realized that he had been mistaken. In witnessing Jesus, an overwhelming sense of love, loyalty, and genuine greatness sprang up in his heart.

During this conversation with the thief, John was absent, having gone into the city to bring his mother and her friends to the scene of the execution. *[Luke subsequently heard this account from the Roman captain of the guard. Subsequently, John recounted the execution as he remembered the event two-thirds of a century after it occurred.]*

John returned from the city, accompanied by his mother and nearly a dozen women followers. He positioned himself near Mary, the mother of Jesus, offering her support. Her son Jude stood on her other side. As Jesus looked down upon this scene at noon, he said to his mother: "Woman, behold your son!"

In speaking to John, he said: "My son, behold your mother!" Then addressed them both, saying: "I desire that you depart from this place."

And so, John and Jude led Mary away from Golgotha. John took Mary to the location where he stayed in Jerusalem and then hurried back to the scene of the execution. After Mary departed, the other women withdrew a short distance but remained nearby, attending to Jesus until he breathed his last on the cross. They were still present when the body was taken down for burial.

[Later, Mary returned to Bethsaida, where she resided in John's home for the remainder of her natural life. She lived for less than one year following the death of Jesus.]

17.23 LAST HOUR

Although it was early in the season for such a phenomenon, the sky darkened due to fine sand suspended in the air. The people of Jerusalem recognized this as a sign of an impending hot-wind sandstorm originating from the Arabian Desert. Shortly after noon, the sky became so dark that the sun was obscured, prompting the remaining crowd to hasten back to the city. The intensity of the sandstorm increased, and the sky grew progressively darker. Nevertheless, the soldiers and a small group of followers remained in place. The soldiers crouched near the cross, huddled together to shield themselves from the abrasive sand. Meanwhile, the mother of John and others observed from a distance, somewhat sheltered by an overhanging rock.

A midst the encroaching darkness of the fierce sandstorm, Jesus began to fade from human consciousness. His final expressions of care for his mother had already been expressed. The last conscious thought of the human Jesus was the repetition of passages from the Book of Psalms, specifically the 20th, 21st, and 22nd Psalms. Although his lips often moved, he was too weak to articulate the words of these passages that he had memorized so well. Only a few times did those standing nearby catch a faint utterance. In his diminishing consciousness, he recited a portion of the twenty-second Psalm that begins with, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus did not, for a moment, entertain the slightest doubt that God had abandoned him.

The final request made by the mortal Jesus to his companions occurred in the early afternoon when, for the second time, he said: "I thirst." The same captain of the guard once again moistened his lips with a sponge soaked in the sour wine of that era, which is now commonly referred to as vinegar.

It was mid-afternoon when Jesus cried out in a loud voice: "It is finished! Father, into your hands, I commend my soul." After he had spoken these words, he bowed his head and gave up the life struggle.

When Jesus gave up his life, fewer than thirty people were present - only the thirteen Roman soldiers and a group of approximately fifteen followers. All of these followers were women, except for two: Jude, Jesus' brother, and John Zebedee, who returned to the scene just before Jesus expired.

When the Roman centurion witnessed the noble manner in which Jesus died, he said: This was indeed a righteous man; truly, he must have been a Son of God.

Because this was the preparation day for both Passover and the Sabbath, the Jews did not want the bodies to remain exposed on Golgotha. Therefore, they went before Pilate, requesting that the legs of the three men be broken and that their bodies be taken down from the crosses and placed in the criminal burial pits before sundown.

When Pilate heard this request, he sent three soldiers to break the legs of the three individuals and to ensure their deaths. Upon arriving at Golgotha, the soldiers carried out this order on the two thieves; however, they found Jesus already dead, much to their surprise. To confirm his death, one of the soldiers pierced his left side with his spear. Although it was common for victims of execution to linger alive on the cross for two or three days, the overwhelming emotional agony and acute spiritual anguish experienced by Jesus resulted in his mortal life ending in just under five and a half hours.

17.24 AFTER THE EXECUTION

During the darkness of the sandstorm in the mid-afternoon, David Zebedee sent out the final messengers bearing the news of Jesus' death. He dispatched his last runner to the home of Martha and Mary in Bethany, where he believed the mother of Jesus was staying with the rest of her family.

After the death of Jesus, John sent the women, in charge of Jude, to the home of Elijah Mark, where they stayed over the Sabbath. John, now known to the Roman centurion, remained at Golgotha until Joseph and Nicodemus arrived with an order from Pilate authorizing them to take possession of Jesus' body.

17.25 THE TOMB

The Jewish authorities had intended to dispose of Jesus' body in the open burial pits of Gehenna, located south of the city, as was customary for the victims of execution. Had this plan been executed, the three bodies would have been left vulnerable to wild animals.

However, prior to this, Joseph of Arimathea, accompanied by Nicodemus, approached Pilate and requested that the body of Jesus be released to them for a proper burial. It was not uncommon for friends of executed individuals to offer bribes to the Roman authorities to gain possession of such bodies. Joseph presented himself before Pilate with a substantial sum of money, anticipating that payment might be necessary to secure permission for the removal of Jesus' body to a private burial tomb. However, Pilate refused to accept any money for this purpose. Upon hearing the request, he promptly signed the order that authorized Joseph to proceed to Golgotha and take immediate and full possession of Jesus' body.

17.26 BURIAL

When Joseph and Nicodemus arrived at Golgotha, they found the soldiers removing Jesus from the cross, while representatives of the Sanhedrin stood by to ensure that none of Jesus' followers interfered with the transfer of his body to the criminal burial pits. When Joseph presented Pilate's order for the body to the centurion, the leaders raised a tumult, clamoring for possession of it. In their raving, they attempted to seize the body by force. In response, the centurion summoned four of his soldiers to his side, and with drawn swords, they positioned themselves protectively around Jesus' body as it lay on the ground.

The centurion ordered the other soldiers to leave the two thieves while they drove back the angry group of infuriated people. Once order had been restored, the centurion presented the permit from Pilate and, stepping aside, said to Joseph: This body is yours to do with as you see fit. My soldiers and I will stand by to ensure that no one interferes.

A person who had been crucified could not be buried in a Jewish cemetery, as strict Jewish law prohibited such an act. Joseph and Nicodemus were aware of this law. On their way to Golgotha, they decided to inter Jesus in Joseph's new family tomb, which had been hewn from solid rock and was located a short distance north of Golgotha, across the road leading to Samaria. No one had ever been laid to rest in this tomb, and they felt it was fitting for Jesus to be placed there.

As the burial procession began its journey from Golgotha to Joseph's tomb, Jesus' body was wrapped in a linen sheet by four men: Joseph, Nicodemus, John, and the Roman centurion. They carried the body into the tomb, a chamber approximately ten feet square, where they hastily prepared it for burial. The women who had been watching followed them closely.

The Jews of that era did not really bury their dead; they actually embalmed them. Joseph and Nicodemus brought large quantities of myrrh and aloes, with which they wrapped the body in bandages saturated with these substances.

Once the embalming was completed, they tied a cloth around the face, wrapped the body in a linen sheet, and reverently placed it on a shelf in the tomb. There was a sense of urgency surrounding the burial of Jesus, as this was the preparation day for the Sabbath.

After placing the body in the tomb, the centurion signaled to his soldiers to assist in rolling the stone door into place at the entrance of the tomb. The soldiers then departed for Gehenna to dispose of the thieves' bodies. Meanwhile, the men in the funeral procession hurried back to the city in sorrow to observe the Passover feast following the laws of Moses.

The women were nearby and witnessed everything, including where Jesus had been laid. They felt that Jesus had not been properly prepared for burial, so they agreed to return to Joseph's home, rest over the Sabbath, prepare spices and ointments, and return on Sunday morning to properly prepare Jesus' body. The women who lingered by the tomb that Friday evening included Mary Magdalene, Mary, the wife of Clopas, Martha, another sister of Jesus' mother, and Rebecca of Sepphoris.

17.27 SAFEGUARDING THE TOMB

If Jesus' followers were unaware of his promise to appear from the grave on the third day, his opponents were certainly not. The chief priests, Pharisees, and Sadducees recalled having received reports of his claim that he would rise from the dead. On that Friday night, after the Passover meal, around midnight, a group of Jewish leaders convened at the home of Caiaphas to discuss their concerns regarding Jesus' assertions that he would rise from the dead on the third day. This meeting concluded with the appointment of a committee of Sanhedrin members tasked with visiting Pilate early the following day, carrying the official request of the Sanhedrin to station a Roman guard at Jesus' tomb to prevent his friends from tampering with it.

The spokesman for the committee said to Pilate: Sir, we recall that this deceiver, Jesus of Nazareth, claimed while he was alive, 'After three days, I will rise again.'

Therefore, we have come before you to request that you issue orders to secure the tomb against his friends, at least until after the third day. We are greatly concerned that his followers come and steal his body by night, then proclaim to the people that he has risen from the dead. Allowing this to happen would be a far greater mistake than permitting him to live.

When Pilate heard the request of the Sanhedrin, he said: I will provide you with a guard of ten soldiers. Go and secure the tomb. They returned to the temple, gathered ten of their own guards, and then proceeded to Joseph's tomb, accompanied by the ten Roman soldiers. Even on this Sabbath morning, they positioned themselves as watchmen before the tomb.

The soldiers rolled yet another stone before the tomb and placed the seal of Pilate on and around it to prevent any disturbance without their knowledge. Twenty soldiers remained on watch, while the Jews provided them with food and drink.

Saturday

18.0 SABBATH DAY

Throughout this Sabbath day, the followers remained in hiding while all of Jerusalem discussed the death of Jesus. At that time, nearly one and a half million Jews were present in Jerusalem, coming from various regions of the Roman Empire and Mesopotamia. This marked the beginning of Passover week, and these pilgrims would learn about Jesus and share their experiences with others back at home.

Late Saturday night, John Mark secretly summoned the eleven followers to his father's home, where, just before midnight, they all gathered in the same upper chamber where they had shared the last meal with their teacher two nights earlier.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, along with Ruth and Jude, returned to Bethany to join their family on Saturday evening, just before sunset. David Zebedee stayed at the home of Nicodemus, where he had arranged for his messengers to gather early Sunday morning. Meanwhile, the women of Galilee, who were preparing the spices for embalming, lingered at the home of Joseph of Arimathea.

18.1 JESUS' DEATH

Jesus experienced the same natural death as any other mortal in similar circumstances. During the approximately thirty-six hours from mid-afternoon on Friday to early Sunday morning, the human consciousness of Jesus was in a state of sleep. The human Jesus was unaware of the events that occurred during this period. To his mortal consciousness, there was no perception of the passage of time.

Upon death the physical body of Jesus experienced near-instantaneous dissolution; it appears that heavenly spirits accelerated the decaying process within the tomb. God granted the body a special and unique dissolution - a return to dust without delay and the ordinary, visible processes of mortal decay. It seemed that the mortal remains of Jesus underwent the same natural process of elemental disintegration that characterizes all human bodies, except that this natural mode of dissolution occurred almost instantaneously.

[After a while, the followers came to believe that Jesus' teachings were not dependent his death; most believed that it was his life that exemplified the teachings; that Jesus' teachings were not contingent upon his subsequent spiritual reappearances; the lessons would have been equally effective even if Jesus had not appeared again. Most followers believed that Jesus did not die as a sacrifice for sin; he did not atone for some inborn moral guilt of the humans; he did not offer himself as a sacrifice to appease God's wrath; he was not a sacrifice that paid a debt owed to God; and he did not die to ransom people from the grasp of the supposed devil.]

Sunday

19.0 RESURRECTION

Early on Sunday, April 9, 30 CE, a new spirit form of Jesus emerged within the tomb. This was a transitional form of Jesus - a personality existing between a material and a spiritual being. It appears that God had permitted this spirit form of Jesus to be visible to people.

19.1 OPENING THE TOMB

At the same time that the women at the home of Joseph of Arimathea began preparing to give Jesus' body a dignified burial, heavenly spirits, with God's approval, rolled away the stone from the entrance of the tomb. The larger of the two stones was a massive circular object, resembling a millstone, and it moved within a groove carved out of the rock, allowing it to be rolled back and forth to open or close the tomb.

When the Jewish guards and Roman soldiers observed the massive stone rolling away from the entrance of the tomb, seemingly on its own, they were overcome with fear and panic, prompting them to flee the scene in haste. The Romans retreated to the fortress of Antonia and reported their observations to the centurion as soon as he arrived for duty.

When faced with this embarrassing situation, the Jewish leaders resorted to bribing the guards and Roman soldiers instead of punishing

those who had deserted their posts. They paid each of the twenty soldiers a sum of money and made solemn promises to defend them before Pilate if it ever came to the governor's attention that they had accepted a bribe. They instructed the soldiers to say to everyone: While we slept during the night, his followers came upon us and rolled the stone away.

19.2 ENTERING THE TOMB

On this early Sunday morning, ten followers gathered at the home of Elijah and Mary Mark, where they had slept in the upper chamber, resting on the very couches on which they had reclined during their last meal together. The followers were not so much afflicted by doubt and despair as they were by fear, grief, and shame.

This Sunday morning, everyone was gathered except for Thomas. He had been with them for a few minutes late Saturday night when they first convened, but the sight of the followers and the thought of what had happened to Jesus overwhelmed him. He glanced at his companions and promptly left the room, heading to the home of Simon in Bethphage, where he intended to mourn his troubles in solitude.

At the home of Nicodemus, approximately fifteen of the other followers gathered, including David Zebedee and Joseph of Arimathea. Additionally, at the residence of Joseph of Arimathea, there were around twenty leading women followers. The women in Joseph's house were unaware of the military guard stationed at the tomb; they also did not know that a second stone had been rolled in front of the tomb and that Pilate had these stones sealed.

As the first light of dawn began to break in the east, five women set out for the tomb of Jesus. They had prepared a generous supply of special embalming oils and carried numerous linen bandages with them. Their intention was to properly anoint the body of Jesus for burial and to wrap it carefully in the new bandages. The women on this mission were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, Salome, the mother of Zebedee's sons, Joanna, the wife of Chuza, and Susanna, the daughter of Deltaeus from Alexandria.

It was still early morning when the five women, laden with their ointments, arrived at the tomb. As they passed through the Damascus Gate, they encountered several soldiers fleeing into the city, appearing somewhat panic-stricken. This sight caused them to pause for a few moments; however, when nothing further developed, they resumed their journey.

They were greatly surprised to find the stone rolled away from the entrance, as they had been asking one another on their way there: Who will help us roll away the stone? They set down their burdens and began to look at each other in fear and astonishment. While they stood there, Mary Magdalene approached the smaller stone and bravely entered the open sepulcher.

The tomb of Joseph was located in his garden on the hillside, on the eastern side of the road, facing east. By this hour, the dawn light was sufficient for Mary to look at the place where Jesus' body had lain and to discern that it was gone. In the stone recess where they had laid Jesus, Mary saw only the folded napkin that had covered his head and the bandages with which he had been wrapped, lying intact as they had rested on the stone. The covering sheet lay at the foot of the burial niche. After Mary lingered in the doorway of the tomb for a few moments, having not seen clearly when she first entered, she realized that Jesus' body was missing. In a moment of alarm and anguish, she cried out. The other women were exceedingly nervous; they had been on edge ever since encountering the panicked soldiers at the city gate. When Mary let out her scream of despair, they were filled with terror and fled in haste. However, Joanna felt guilty for abandoning Mary; she rallied her companions, and they returned to the tomb.

As they approached the tomb, the terrified Magdalene, who was even more distressed upon discovering that her sisters were not waiting for her outside, rushed up to them, excitedly exclaiming: He is not there; they have taken him away!

And she led them back to the tomb, where they all entered and discovered it was empty. The five women then sat down on a stone

near the entrance and discussed the situation. They had been alone during the Sabbath and speculated that the body might have been moved to another resting place. However, as they contemplated this possible explanation for their dilemma, they were perplexed by the orderly arrangement of the grave cloths. How could the body have been removed when the very bandages in which it was wrapped remained in place and apparently intact on the burial shelf?

19.3 APPEARANCE TO THE WOMEN

As these women sat in the early hours of dawn, they glanced to one side and had the vision of a silent, motionless stranger. For a moment, fear gripped them again, but Mary Magdalene, rushing forward to speak, speculated that he might be the caretaker of the garden. She asked: Where have you taken the Master? Where have they laid him? Please tell us so that we may go to him.

When the stranger did not answer, Mary began to weep. Then they heard the spirit of Jesus say: "Whom do you seek?" Mary said: We seek Jesus, who was laid to rest in Joseph's tomb, but he is gone. Do you know where they have taken him?

Mary was not the officially recognized leader of the women followers, but she emerged as their primary teacher and public spokesperson. A woman of great circumspection, Mary's boldness in addressing a man she regarded as the caretaker of Joseph's garden revealed the depth of her horror. It was the intensity of her love that momentarily caused her to overlook the conventional constraints typically observed by a Jewish woman when approaching a stranger.

Then all the women heard: "Did not this Jesus tell you that he would die, but that he would appear again?" These words startled the women. The spirit of Jesus was so different that they did not recognize him. As they pondered his words, Magdalene heard a familiar voice say: "Mary." And when she heard that familiar word of sympathy and affectionate greeting, she thought it sounded just like the voice of Jesus. She rushed to kneel at his feet, exclaiming: My teacher and my master!

Then all the other women realized that the spirit of Jesus was standing before them, and they quickly knelt before him.

As Mary sought to embrace his feet, the spirit of Jesus said: "Touch me not, Mary, for I am not as you knew me in the flesh. In this new form, I will remain with you for a while before I go to God. But go now, all of you, and tell the followers - and Peter - that you have seen my spirit and that you have spoken with me."

After the women recovered from their initial shock and amazement, they hurried back to the city and to Elijah Mark's home, where they recounted everything that had transpired. However, the ten followers were skeptical of their account. When Mary Magdalene repeated the words she had heard, and Peter recognized his name, he rushed out of the upper chamber, closely followed by John, eager to reach the tomb and see these things for themselves. The women shared their experience of talking with Jesus' spirit with the other followers, but they remained unconvinced. Unlike Peter and John, they were unwilling to investigate the matter for themselves.

19.4 PETER AND JOHN AT THE TOMB

As the two followers raced toward Golgotha and the tomb of Joseph, Peter's thoughts oscillated between fear and hope. He was apprehensive about meeting Jesus, yet his hope was ignited by the news that Jesus had sent a special message to him. He was partially convinced that Jesus was indeed alive, recalling the promise to appear on the third day. This promise had not crossed his mind until this moment as he hurried north through Jerusalem.

As John hurried out of the city, a strange ecstasy of joy and hope welled up in his heart. He was half convinced that the women had truly seen Jesus. Being younger than Peter, John outran him and arrived first at the tomb. He paused at the entrance, observing the tomb, which was just as Mary had described it.

Very soon, Peter rushed in and saw the same empty tomb with the grave cloths arranged in a peculiar manner. After Peter exited, John

entered to witness the scene for himself. They then sat down on a stone to contemplate the meaning of what they had seen and the stories they had heard. While sitting there, they reflected on everything that had been shared with them about Jesus.

Peter initially suggested that the grave had been disturbed, implying that opponents may have stolen the body, possibly by bribing the guards. However, John argued that the grave would not have appeared so orderly if the body had indeed been taken. He also questioned how the bandages had been left behind and remained seemingly intact. Once again, they both returned to the tomb to examine the grave cloths more closely.

As they emerged from the tomb for the second time, they found Mary Magdalene at the entrance, weeping. Mary had gone to the followers, believing that Jesus had risen from the grave. However, when they dismissed her report, she became disheartened. She yearned to return to the tomb, where she recalled hearing the familiar voice of Jesus.

As Mary lingered after Peter and John had departed, she once again saw the spirit of Jesus and heard: "Be not afraid; have the courage to return to the followers and tell them that I have reappeared, that I will appear to them shortly, and that I will lead them to Galilee, as I promised."

Mary hurried back to Mark's home and informed the followers that she had spoken with Jesus' spirit once more, but they still refused to believe her. However, when Peter and John returned shortly thereafter, the followers stopped their ridicule and were filled with fear and apprehension.

19.5 AT NICODEMUS' HOME

The ambassadors did not want Jesus to leave them; therefore, they dismissed all his statements about dying, as well as his promises to appear again. They were not anticipating his reappearance and refused to believe until they were confronted with proof through their own experiences.

The five women returned to Joseph's house, where they shared their experiences with his daughter and the other women present. The women believed their account. Later that evening, the daughter of Joseph of Arimathea, along with the four women who had witnessed Jesus' spirit, visited the home of Nicodemus. There, they recounted all these events to Joseph, Nicodemus, David Zebedee, and the other men and women gathered there.

Nicodemus and the others also questioned the validity of their story, doubting that Jesus had risen from the dead. They speculated that the religious leaders had removed the body. However, Joseph and David were inclined to believe the report, to the extent that they hurried to inspect the tomb, where they found everything as the women had described. They were the last to view the sepulcher, for the high priest had sent the captain of the temple guards to the tomb early in the morning to remove the grave cloths. The captain gathered them up in a linen sheet and discarded them over a nearby cliff.

From the tomb, David and Joseph went directly to the home of Elijah Mark, where they convened a meeting with the ten followers in the upper chamber. Only John Zebedee was inclined to believe, even slightly, that Jesus had reappeared. Peter had initially believed, but when he was unable to find Jesus, he succumbed to doubt. They all tended to believe that the Jewish leaders had taken the body away.

David did not argue with them; however, as he departed, he said: You are the followers, and you ought to understand these matters. I will not contend with you; nevertheless, I am returning to the home of Nicodemus, where I have arranged for the messengers to assemble this morning. Once they have gathered, I will send them forth on their final mission to tell of Jesus' reappearance. I heard the Master say that after he dies, he will appear on the third day, and I believe him.

And so, addressing the dejected and forlorn ambassadors, this self-appointed chief of communication took his leave of the followers. As he descended from the upper chamber, he entrusted the bag of Judas, which contained all the group's funds, to Matthew Levi.

It was still morning when the last of David's twenty-six messengers arrived at Nicodemus's home. David promptly gathered the group in the spacious courtyard and addressed them. The majority of those present attempted to persuade David against this course of action, but they were unable to sway him. They then sought to dissuade the messengers, yet the messengers remained resolute and would not heed their words of doubt. Thus, by mid-morning on this Sunday, these twenty-six runners set out with the first stories of the reappearance of Jesus. They embarked on this mission as they had on many previous occasions, fulfilling their oath to David Zebedee.

These men had great confidence in David, and even those who harbored some doubts conveyed the message with equal certainty and speed. These twenty-six individuals were dispatched to the home of Lazarus in Bethany and to all the teaching centers, spanning from Beersheba in the south to Damascus and Sidon in the north, and from Philadelphia in the east to Alexandria in the west.

When David had taken leave of his messengers, he went to the home of Joseph. He then traveled to Bethany to join the waiting family of Jesus. *[David stayed in Bethany with Martha and Mary until they had disposed of their earthly possessions, and he accompanied them on their journey to reunite with their brother, Lazarus, in Philadelphia.]*

[In approximately one week, John Zebedee took Mary, the mother of Jesus, to his home in Bethsaida. James, Jesus' eldest brother, stayed with his family in Jerusalem. Ruth remained in Bethany with Lazarus's sisters. The rest of Jesus' family returned to Galilee. David Zebedee left Bethany with Martha and Mary for Philadelphia early in June, the day after his marriage to Ruth, Jesus' youngest sister.]

19.6 FIRST APPEARANCE AT BETHANY

From the time of his death until he went to God, his followers experienced nineteen separate visions of Jesus in his transitional form. His spirit did not manifest to those who were unable to derive spiritual benefit from his reappearances.

His first appearance was to the five women at the tomb; his second was to Mary Magdalene, also at the tomb. The third vision occurred around noon on Sunday, April 9, 30 CE, in Bethany.

Jesus' oldest brother, James, stood in the garden of Lazarus before the empty tomb, contemplating the news delivered to them about an hour earlier by a messenger from David. Although James had always been inclined to believe his eldest brother's mission, he had long since lost touch with Jesus' work. He had drifted into deep skepticism regarding the claims of those followers who believed that Jesus was the Messiah.

The entire family was startled and nearly confounded by the news delivered by the messenger.

Just as James stood before Lazarus's empty tomb, Mary Magdalene arrived and excitedly recounted her experiences from the early morning hours at Joseph's tomb. Before she had finished, David Zebedee and his mother arrived. Ruth, of course, believed the report, and so did Jude after he had spoken with David and Salome.

In the meantime, as they searched for James and before they found him, he stood in the garden near the tomb and became aware of a nearby presence, as if someone had touched him. When he turned to look, he beheld the gradual emergence of a form by his side. He was too astonished to speak and too frightened to flee.

Then he heard a voice calling his name. When James recognized his name being spoken, he knew it was his eldest brother, Jesus, who had addressed him. Although they all experienced varying degrees of difficulty in recognizing Jesus' spirit form, few had any trouble identifying his voice or his charming personality once he began to communicate with them. Spirit Jesus said: "James, I come to call you to the service of the fellowship of souls. Join earnest hands with your brethren and follow."

When James realized that Jesus was speaking to him, he began to kneel, exclaiming: My father and my brother! Jesus instructed him to stand while they conversed.

They went through the garden and talked for nearly three minutes; they talked over experiences and anticipated the events of the near future. As they approached the house, James heard the spirit of Jesus say: "Farewell, James, until I greet you all together."

James rushed into the house while they were searching for him in Bethphage, exclaiming: I have just seen Jesus, spoken with him, and visited with him. He is not dead; he has risen! He vanished before me, saying: "Farewell until I greet you all together."

He had scarcely finished speaking when Jude returned and recounted his experience of meeting Jesus in the garden for Jude's benefit. As a result, they all began to believe in the spiritual appearances of Jesus. James then declared that he would not return to Galilee, and David exclaimed: He is seen not only by excited women; even men have begun to see him. I expect to see him myself.

19.7 SECOND APPEARANCE AT BETHANY

And David did not wait long, for the fourth appearance of Jesus occurred in the mid-afternoon in the very home of Martha and Mary. Jesus' spirit appeared visibly before his earthly family and their friends, totaling twenty individuals.

They envisioned the spirit of Jesus appearing in the open back door and heard him say: "Peace be with you. Greetings to those who were once near me in the flesh and will be again in the spiritual fellowship of souls. Do not doubt. Therefore, come, all of you, into the fellowship of our will of God."

As they began to recover from the initial shock of their amazement and moved toward him as if to embrace him, he vanished from their sight. They all wanted to rush to the city to inform the skeptical followers about what had transpired, but James restrained them. He forbade them from publicly disclosing the fact of this spiritual visitation due to certain things said to him during their conversation in the garden. However, James never revealed any further details about his encounter with the spirit of Jesus on that day.

Mary Magdalene was the only one permitted to return to Joseph's house.

19.8 APPEARANCE AT JOSEPH'S HOME

The fifth vision of Jesus, witnessed by mortal eyes, occurred in the presence of approximately twenty-five women followers who had gathered at the home of Joseph of Arimathea in the late afternoon of that same Sunday. Mary Magdalene had returned to Joseph's house just a few minutes prior to this appearance.

James, the brother of Jesus, had requested that nothing be shared with the ambassadors regarding Jesus' appearance in Bethany. However, he did not ask Mary to withhold this information from her sister followers. Consequently, after Mary had sworn the women to secrecy, she recounted the recent events that had transpired while she was with Jesus' family in Bethany.

She was in the recital when a sudden and solemn hush fell over them; they had a vision of a spiritual form of Jesus among them. They heard him say:

"Peace be with you. In the fellowship of the Heavenly Kingdom, there shall be neither Jew nor Gentile, rich nor poor, free nor enslaved, man nor woman. You have been called to spread the good news of liberty for all people through the teachings of the Heavenly Father's love and the fellowship of God's children.

"Go into all the world and proclaim this teaching. While you do so, do not forget to minister to the sick and to strengthen those who are fainthearted and filled with fear. My spirit will be with you always, even to the ends of the earth."

The spirit then vanished from their sight, while the women fell to their faces and prayed in silence.

Of the five spirit visions of Jesus that had occurred up to that time, Mary Magdalene had witnessed four.

19.9 APPEARANCE TO THE GREEKS

Late in the afternoon, at the home of Flavius, the sixth vision of Jesus appeared to approximately forty Greek followers who were gathered there.

While they were engaged in discussing the accounts of Jesus' reappearances, they experienced a vision of his spirit among them, despite the fact that the doors were securely locked. They heard him say:

“Peace be with you. While I was on earth among the Jews, I minister to all people. In the fellowship of souls of our Heavenly Father, there shall be neither Jew nor Gentile; you are all sons and daughters of God. Therefore, go into all the world, proclaiming this teaching as you have received it from the ambassadors, and I will be with you in the fellowship of our Heavenly Father’s house.”

And when he had thus challenged them, they saw him no more. They remained in the house all evening, too overwhelmed with awe and fear to venture outside. None of these Greeks slept that night; they stayed awake discussing these events and hoping that Jesus might revisit them. Among this group were many of the Greeks who had been at Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested by the soldiers.

Naturally, reports about Jesus' reappearances spread rapidly, causing the entire city to become highly agitated. Following the dispatch of messengers in the afternoon and Jesus' appearance at Joseph's house, news began to reach the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem by early evening. It was reported that Jesus had risen, and many individuals claimed to have seen him.

The Sanhedrin promptly addressed the new challenges that had been unexpectedly presented to them. Following a brief consultation with Annas, Caiaphas summoned a meeting of the Sanhedrin to convene that evening.

It was during this meeting that action was taken to expel any individual who mentioned the visions of Jesus from the synagogues. It was even proposed that anyone claiming to have seen him should be executed; however, this proposal did not come to a vote, as the meeting

ended in confusion bordering on actual panic. They had dared to believe they were finished with Jesus, but they were about to discover that their real troubles with the man from Nazareth had only just begun.

19.10 ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

At Emmaus, located approximately seven miles west of Jerusalem, there lived two brothers who were shepherds. They had spent the week of Passover in Jerusalem, participating in the sacrifices, ceremonies, and feasts. Cleopas, the elder brother, was a partial follower of Jesus, while his brother Jacob, although not a follower, was deeply intrigued by the teachings and works of Jesus.

On this Sunday afternoon, approximately three miles outside of Jerusalem, two brothers were traveling along the road to Emmaus. They engaged in earnest conversation about Jesus, discussing his teachings, his work, and particularly the rumors surrounding his empty tomb and the reports that some women had spoken with him. Cleopas was somewhat inclined to believe these accounts, while Jacob remained adamant that the entire situation was likely a fraud.

While they argued and debated on their way home, they were now accompanied by the spirit manifestation of Jesus. Cleopas had often heard Jesus teach and had shared meals with him at the homes of followers in Jerusalem on several occasions. However, he did not recognize his spirit form, even as they spoke to one another freely. After traveling a short distance together, they heard the spirit ask: “What words did you exchange so earnestly as I approached you?”

Not recognizing the spirit form as Jesus, Cleopas said: Could it be that you have sojourned in Jerusalem and are unaware of the events that have recently transpired?

Then they heard Jesus’ spirit ask: “What things?” Cleopas replied: If you do not know about these matters, you are the only one in Jerusalem who has not heard the rumors concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in word and deed before God and all the people.

The chief priests and our leaders delivered him to the Romans and demanded that they crucify him. Many of us had hoped that he would deliver Israel from the yoke of the Gentiles. But that is not all. It is now the third day since he was crucified, and certain women have amazed us by declaring that they went to his tomb very early this morning and found it empty. These same women insist that they spoke with this man; they maintain that he has risen from the dead. When the women reported this to the men, two of his followers ran to the tomb and likewise found it empty.

And here, Jacob interrupted his brother to say: But they did not see Jesus. As they walked along, they heard the spirit of Jesus say: "When you tell me that it is about the teachings and work of this man, I can confidently say that I am familiar with these teachings. He consistently emphasized the existence of a spiritual fellowship of souls that is not of this world, asserting that all people, as children of God, should seek liberty and freedom in the spiritual joy found in the fellowship of those engaged in loving service within this fellowship of souls of our Heavenly Father's love."

Soon, they arrived in front of their modest home and were about to take their leave. Instead, they invited the stranger to come in, insisting that it was nearly nightfall and that he should stay with them.

Finally, their fellow traveler consented, and shortly thereafter, the brothers entered the house and sat down. Cleopas then recognized that the guest was Jesus himself. When he said: It is the Master... But the spirit of Jesus then vanished from their sight. They said to one another: No wonder our hearts burned within us as he spoke to us while we walked along the road!

The brothers did not stop to eat; they rushed from the house, hurrying back to Jerusalem to share the news of their encounter with the spirit of Jesus. In the early evening, just before Jesus appeared to the ten ambassadors, these two enthusiastic brothers burst into the upper room, proclaiming that they had seen Jesus and spoken with him. They recounted everything said to them and explained how they had not recognized the stranger until they were seated.

19.11 AT MARK'S HOME

Sunday was a dreadful day for the followers; the ten spent most of the day in the upper chamber behind locked doors. They considered fleeing Jerusalem, but they feared being arrested by the agents of the Sanhedrin if they were discovered. Meanwhile, Thomas was brooding over his troubles alone in Bethphage.

Their isolation significantly contributed much with their troubles. John Mark kept them informed about developments regarding the temple and shared with them the many rumors circulating in the city. Still, it did not occur to him to gather news from various groups of followers to whom Jesus had already appeared.

That was the type of service provided by David's messengers; however, they were all absent during their last assignment, which involved describing Jesus' appearances to the groups of followers residing outside of Jerusalem. For the first time in many years, the followers likely recognized how much they had relied on David's messengers for their daily information.

19.12 APPEARANCE TO PETER

Mid-evening this Sunday, a vision of Jesus appeared to Simon Peter in the garden of the Mark home. This marked his eighth spiritual manifestation. Peter had been carrying a heavy burden of doubt and guilt since his denial of Jesus. Throughout Saturday, he struggled with the fear that he might no longer be considered a follower. He shuddered at the fate of Judas and even contemplated the possibility that he, too, had betrayed his teacher.

It was in this frame of mind that Peter had a vision of Jesus as he strolled among the flowers and shrubs. He stood still, clenching his fists, and spoke aloud: I believe he has risen from the dead; I will go and tell my brethren. As he uttered these words, a spiritual Jesus suddenly appeared before him, and he heard familiar tones:

“Peter, our opponents wished to have you, but I could not relinquish you. I knew that your disavowal of me was not heartfelt. I understand your position. However, you must now set aside your own concerns and the troubles of the moment as you prepare to share the teachings with those who have not heard.

“No longer should you be preoccupied with what you can gain from the fellowship of souls; instead, focus on what you can offer to those who are in dire spiritual poverty. ‘Prepare yourself, Simon, for the battle of a new day and the struggle against the doubts in the minds of people.’”

Peter and the spirit of Jesus walked through the garden, discussing matters of the past, present, and future for nearly five minutes. Then, the spirit vanished from his sight, and Peter heard the words: “Farewell, Peter, until I see you with your brethren.”

For a moment, Peter was overwhelmed by the realization that he had conversed with the spirit of Jesus and could be certain he was still an ambassador. He had just heard Jesus urge him to continue teaching the lessons. With all this emotion surging within his heart, he rushed to the upper chamber and where his companions were, exclaiming in breathless excitement: I have seen the Master; he was in the garden. I spoke with him, and he has forgiven me.

Simon Peter’s declaration that he had seen the spirit of Jesus in the garden made a profound impression on his followers, and they were nearly ready to surrender their doubts when Andrew stood up and cautioned them not to be overly influenced by his brother’s report. Andrew implied that Peter had previously experienced visions that were not real. Although Andrew did not directly reference the dream from the night on the Sea of Galilee, during which Peter claimed to have seen Jesus walking on water, he said enough to indicate to everyone present that he had this incident in mind.

His brother's insinuations deeply hurt Peter, causing him to fall into a crestfallen silence. The twins felt a strong sense of sympathy for Peter, and they both approached him to express their support, affirm their belief in his words, and reiterate that their mother had also seen Jesus.

19.13 FIRST APPEARANCE TO THE FOLLOWERS

In the early evening, following the departure of Cleopas and Jacob, while the Alpheus twins consoled Peter, the ten followers were there assembled in the upper room, with all the doors securely bolted for fear of arrest. Suddenly, they had a vision of Jesus appearing in spirit form in their midst, and they heard his spirit say:

“Peace be with you. Why are you so frightened, as though you have seen a ghost? I told you about these things when I was with you in the flesh. I said that the chief priests would hand me over to be killed and that on the third day I would reappear again. Why do you doubt and engage in discussions about the reports from the women, Cleopas, Jacob, and even Peter? How long will you continue to doubt my words?

“And now that you see, will you believe? Have faith in God; have faith in one another; and thus shall you enter into the new service. Wait in Jerusalem until you are prepared to go into Galilee and beyond. Peace I leave with you.”

Then the vision of Jesus vanished instantly. They all bowed, praising God and honoring their vanished teacher. This was Jesus' ninth spiritual appearance.

Later Appearances

20.0 APPEARANCE AT PHILADELPHIA

The tenth vision of Jesus' spirit manifestation occurred early on Tuesday morning, April 11, in Philadelphia. Abner, Lazarus, and one hundred and fifty of their associates, including more than fifty members of the corps of the seventy, witnessed a vision of his spirit. This appearance occurred immediately after the commencement of a special meeting in the synagogue, which had been convened by Abner to discuss the execution of Jesus and the recent report of his reappearances brought by David's messenger.

Since Lazarus had been resurrected and was now a member of this group of followers, it was not difficult for them to believe the report that Jesus had risen from the dead.

The meeting in the synagogue was just beginning, with Abner and Lazarus standing together in the pulpit. Suddenly, the audience of followers had a vision of Jesus' spirit. He appeared to move forward from the space between Abner and Lazarus, neither of whom had noticed him. He greeted the assembly, and they all heard:

“Peace be with you. You all know that we have one God and that there is a new teaching regarding the will of God - the

news of the gift of eternal life, which signifies that souls are welcomed into heaven. As you rejoice in your commitment to these teachings, ask our Heavenly Father to open your hearts to a new and greater love for your brethren.

“You are to love all people as I have loved you; you are to serve all people as I have served you. Love with understanding, sympathy, brotherly affection, and fellowship for all your brethren, whether they are Jew or Gentile, Greek or Roman, Persian, or Ethiopian.

“I will soon send forth my spirit into the souls of those brethren who have selflessly dedicated their lives to the enlightenment of others, and ultimately to all humanity. If you are noble enough to love your followers, should you not also love equally those who do not follow? Remember, as you love one another, all people will know that you are true followers.

“Go, then, into all the world, proclaiming this new teaching of the fatherhood of God and the fellowship of humanity to all nations and cultures. Always be discerning in your choice of methods for presenting the good news to the diverse cultures and tribes of people. Freely you have received these teachings, and so you shall freely give the message with all nations. Do not fear the resistance of wrongdoers, for my spirit will always be with you. Peace I leave with you.”

Then his spirit vanished from their sight. Aside from one appearance in Galilee, where over five hundred followers witnessed a vision of him simultaneously, this group in Philadelphia represented the largest number of individuals who beheld his new form on any single occasion.

Early the next morning, the followers in Philadelphia went forth, proclaiming the new teachings.

20.1 SECOND APPEARANCE TO THE FOLLOWERS

Thomas spent a solitary week in the hills near Olivet. During this time, he saw only the residents of Simon's house and John Mark. It was early on Saturday, April 15, when two followers discovered him and brought him back to their meeting place at the Mark home.

The following day, Thomas listened to the accounts of Jesus' various appearances, yet he steadfastly refused to believe them. He insisted that Peter had excited them into thinking they had seen Jesus. Nathaniel attempted to reason with him, but to no avail. An emotional stubbornness accompanied his habitual skepticism, and this mindset, combined with his embarrassment at having abandoned the group, created a sense of isolation that even Thomas himself did not fully comprehend. He had distanced himself from his companions, chosen his own path, and now, even when he was back among them, he unconsciously adopted a stance of disagreement. He was reluctant to yield; he disliked conceding. Unintentionally, he relished the attention directed toward him; he derived an unconscious satisfaction from the efforts of his companions to persuade him.

They were having their evening meal, with Peter sitting on one side of Thomas and Nathaniel on the other, when the doubting follower said: I will not believe unless I see the Master with my own eyes and put my finger in the mark of the nails.

As they sat at dinner, with the doors securely shut and barred, they suddenly had a vision of the spirit of Jesus appearing within the curvature of the table and standing directly in front of Thomas. They all heard:

"Peace be with you. For an entire week, I have waited to appear again when you were all present to hear once more the request to go into all the world and spread the teachings of God's will and humanity's spiritual fellowship. Just as I have revealed God, so shall you reveal divine love, not merely through words, but through your daily living. When you receive power from my spirit, you will not conceal your light behind closed doors; you will make it known to everyone.

“Through fear, you currently flee from an unpleasant experience; however, when you receive my spirit, you will courageously and joyfully embrace new experiences. You may remain here and in Galilee for a brief period as you recover from the shock of transitioning from the false security of traditional authority to the new order of factual knowledge.

“Let faith illuminate your light for the world; let the revelation of truth open the eyes blinded by tradition; let your loving service effectively dismantle the prejudice fostered by ignorance. The Jews have extolled goodness; the Greeks have exalted beauty; the Hindus teach devotion; the Ascetics promote reverence; the Romans emphasize loyalty, but what I seek in followers is a life of loving service for all.”

He then looked down at Thomas and said: “And you, Thomas, who said you would not believe unless you could see me and put your finger in the nail marks in my hands, have now beheld me and heard my words. Although you see no nail marks on my hands, as I am in spirit form, what will you say to your brethren? You will acknowledge the truth, for already in your heart you had begun to believe, even when you so vehemently asserted your unbelief. Your doubts, Thomas, always most stubbornly assert themselves just as they are about to crumble. Thomas, I urge you to embrace not just faith, but believing - and I know you believe, even with your whole heart.”

When Thomas heard these words, he fell to his knees and exclaimed: I believe! My Master! Then they heard Jesus’ spirit say to Thomas: “You believe, Thomas, because you have truly seen and heard me. Blessed are those in the ages to come who will believe, even though they have not seen with the eye of flesh nor heard with the mortal ear.”

And then, as Jesus’ form moved near the head of the table, he addressed them all, saying: “And now go all of you to Galilee, where I will soon appear to you.”

Very early the next morning, before dawn, they set out for Galilee.

20.2 AT ALEXANDRIA

While the eleven followers were en route to Galilee, approaching the end of their journey, near mid-evening on Tuesday, April 18, Rodan and approximately eighty other followers in Alexandria witnessed a vision of the spirit of Jesus. This marked Jesus' twelfth appearance.

Jesus' spirit appeared before the Greeks and Jews following the report from David's messenger about his execution. As the fifth runner in the Jerusalem-Alexandria relay, this messenger arrived in Alexandria late that afternoon. Upon delivering his message to Rodan, he decided to gather the followers to convey this tragic news directly from the messenger.

The messenger, Nathan of Busiris, approached the group and recounted in detail everything that the previous runner had conveyed to him. Nathan concluded his poignant narrative with these words: But David, who sends us this message, reports that the Master, in foretelling his death, declared that he would return. Even as Nathan spoke, the spiritual form of Jesus became visible to everyone.

When Nathan sat down, they all heard the spirit Jesus say:

"Peace be with you. That which our Heavenly Father seeks to establish does not belong to a specific culture, nation, or particular group of teachers or leaders. These teachings are meant for both Jew and Gentile, for the rich and the poor, for male and female, for the bond and the free, and even for little children. All of you should proclaim this teaching of love and truth through the lives you lead in the flesh.

"You shall love one another with a new and profound affection, just as I have loved you. Just as I have served you, you can serve others with a new and extraordinary devotion. When people witness the depth of your love for them and observe how passionately you serve them, they will recognize that you have become followers of the will of God and will be inspired to follow. You are all asked to share this message with those who do not know.

“Soon will my spirit will come upon you, and it shall guide you. Therefore, go into all the world and spread this teaching, for I am with you always, even to the end of the ages.”

Then the vision vanished from their view. Throughout the night, the followers stayed together, sharing their experiences and listening to the many insights of Rodan and his associates.

David’s next messenger, who arrived the following day, was taken aback when they responded to his announcement, saying: Yes, we know, for we have seen him. He appeared to us the day before yesterday.

20.3 APPEARANCE BY THE LAKE

Early Monday morning, April 19, as the followers departed for Galilee, John Mark trailed behind. He followed them out of the city, and when they had passed well beyond Bethany, he boldly approached them, feeling confident that they would not send him back.

The followers paused several times on their journey to Galilee to recount the story of their reappearing teacher, which caused them to arrive in Bethsaida very late on Wednesday night. All eleven followers had traveled down from Jerusalem together; however, Simon Zelotes became increasingly despondent as they approached Galilee. Consequently, when they reached Bethsaida, he abandoned his companions and returned home. It was not until noon on Thursday that they were all awake and ready to partake in breakfast.

After the followers spent Thursday afternoon and early evening waiting at the Zebedee home, Simon Peter suggested they go fishing. When Peter proposed the fishing trip, all the followers, except for John Mark, decided to join him. They toiled with the nets all night but caught no fish. However, they were not overly concerned about their lack of success, as they had many exciting experiences to talk over, things that had recently occurred in Jerusalem.

When daylight arrived, they decided to return to Bethsaida. As they approached the shore, they noticed what seemed to be a figure on the beach, near the boat landing, standing by a fire. Initially, they believed it was John Mark, who had come to greet them upon their return with their catch. However, as they got closer to the shore, they realized their mistake; the figure was too tall to be John. None of them had considered that the presence on the beach might be the spirit of their teacher.

They did not fully understand why Jesus wished to meet with them in the familiar settings of their past, surrounded by nature, far removed from the confining atmosphere of Jerusalem, which was laden with tragic memories of fear, betrayal, and death.

As they dropped anchor and prepared to board the small boat to go ashore, they heard the man on the beach call out to them: "Lads, have you caught anything?" They answered: No. Then they heard: "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find fish."

It was a common experience for fishermen on the Sea of Galilee to be approached by the fish merchants of Tarichea as they came ashore. These merchants were typically present to purchase the fresh catches for the drying establishments. Although the fishermen were unaware of who had directed them, they cast their nets as instructed, and immediately, the nets were filled to the point that they could hardly draw them up.

Now, John Zebedee when he saw the heavily laden net, he realized that it was the spirit of Jesus who had spoken to them. When this thought entered his mind, he leaned over and whispered to Peter: It is the Master. Peter was always a man of thoughtless action and impetuous devotion. Therefore, when John whispered this in his ear, he quickly rose and cast himself into the water to reach Jesus as soon as possible. His brethren followed closely behind, having come ashore in the small boat while hauling the net of fish after them.

By this time, John Mark was awake and, noticing the followers coming ashore with the heavily laden net, ran down the beach to greet them.

When he saw eleven men instead of ten, he surmised that the unrecognized individual was the spirit of Jesus. As the astonished ten stood by in silence, the youth rushed forward and, kneeling, said: Master. And then he heard the spirit Jesus speak, not as he had in Jerusalem when he greeted them with “Peace be with you,” but in a more ordinary tone. He addressed John Mark: “Well, John, I am glad to see you again in carefree Galilee, where we can enjoy a good visit. Stay with us, John, and have breakfast.”

The ten were so astonished that they neglected to haul the net of fish onto the beach. Now, the fully recognizable spirit of Jesus was heard to say: “Bring in your fish and prepare some for breakfast. We already have the fire and plenty of bread.”

When they landed their catch, they counted the fish and found that there were 153 large ones. *[Again, the mistake was later made by referring to this catch as a supernatural miracle. In reality, it was simply a matter of the spirit of Jesus knowing where the fish were and directing the followers on where to cast the net.]*

Then they heard his spirit say: “Come now, all of you, to breakfast. Even the twins should sit down while I visit with you; John Mark will dress the fish.” John Mark brought seven good-sized fish, which he placed on the fire, and when they were cooked, he served them. John distributed the bread to the hungry followers. The spiritual manifestation of Jesus did not eat, but as the followers dined, he conversed with them and recounted their many experiences in Galilee and by this very lake.

20.4 WORDS FOR THE FOLLOWERS

The visit with the ten followers and John Mark lasted for over an hour. Then, in his new spiritual appearance, he went down the beach, conversing with them in pairs, though not the same couples he had initially sent out together to teach.

When the followers had finished breakfast and while the others sat by the fire, the spirit of Jesus beckoned to Peter and John to accompany

him along the beach. Upon their return to the others, the spirit figure of Jesus accompanied Andrew and James along the shore. Next, Jesus' spirit conversed with Thomas and Nathaniel. Following this, he met with Matthew and Philip. Then, he spoke with the Alpheus twins, James and Judas. It was mid-morning when the vision of Jesus returned from his visit with the Alpheus twins.

Before departing this morning, the spirit of Jesus instructed that two followers should volunteer to go to Simon Zelotes and bring him back that very day. Peter and Andrew complied with this request.

Upon leaving, the spirit of Jesus said: "Farewell, until I meet you all for your blessing tomorrow at noon." After he had spoken, he vanished from their sight.

20.5 BLESSING

At noon on Saturday, April 22, the eleven followers gathered by appointment on the hill near Capernaum, where they experienced a vision of the spirit of Jesus appearing among them. This meeting took place on the same mount where the physical Jesus had designated them as ambassadors of God. This event marked Jesus' fourteenth spiritual manifestation.

At this moment, the eleven followers knelt in a circle around the spirit figure, listened as he reiterated the charges, and observed him reenact the earlier instructions, just as they had when they were first designated for this special work.

The spirit of Jesus was heard in tones of majesty and with words of power that the followers had never encountered before. These eleven men would always remember this experience of rededication to their former promises of ambassadorship. Jesus spent only one hour on this mount with his followers, and after taking an affectionate farewell, his presence vanished from their sight.

No one saw the spirit of Jesus for an entire week. The followers were uncertain about what to do, unsure whether Jesus had gone to God. In this state of confusion, they lingered in Bethsaida. They were hesitant to go fishing, fearing that he might visit them and they would miss the opportunity to see him.

20.6 SEASIDE APPEARANCE

The news of Jesus' appearances was spreading throughout Galilee, and each day, an increasing number of followers arrived at the Zebedee home to inquire about his reappearances. Early in the week, Peter announced that a public meeting would be held by the seaside the following Sabbath in the afternoon.

[From this point onward, until the increasing tide of persecution scattered the followers, Peter was widely acknowledged as the leader of the group. Although Jesus never conferred any authority upon him, and his fellow apostles did not elect him to this position of responsibility, he naturally assumed the role and maintained it through common consent, largely due to his status as their chief teacher.]

Accordingly, on Saturday, April 29, more than five hundred followers from the vicinity of Capernaum gathered at Bethsaida to hear Peter deliver his first public lesson since the execution of Jesus. He was at his best, and after concluding his compelling discourse, few of his listeners doubted that Jesus had reappeared. Peter concluded his lesson, saying: We affirm that Jesus of Nazareth is not dead; we declare that his spirit has risen from the tomb; we proclaim that we have seen and spoken with him.

Just as he finished, a vision of Jesus appeared beside him, visible to all those present. In a familiar voice, Jesus said, "Peace be with you." After speaking, he vanished from their sight. This was the fifteenth manifestation of Jesus in spirit form.

Because of certain statements made to the eleven during their conference with Jesus at the recent meeting, the followers were left with the impression that Jesus would soon make a public appearance before a group of Galilean followers. After this appearance, they were to return to Jerusalem. Consequently, the eleven departed from Bethsaida for Jerusalem early the following day, Sunday, April 30. They engaged in considerable teaching along the way down the Jordan River, arriving at the home of the Marks in Jerusalem late on Wednesday, May 3.

This was a somber homecoming for John Mark. Just a few hours before his arrival, his father, Elijah Mark, suddenly passed away due to a brain hemorrhage. While the belief in a spiritual afterlife provided some comfort to the mourners, they deeply grieved the loss of their dear friend, who had been a steadfast supporter during times of great adversity and disappointment.

John Mark did everything he could to comfort his mother and, speaking on her behalf, invited the followers to continue making her house their home. Consequently, the eleven made this upper chamber their headquarters.

The followers deliberately entered Jerusalem after nightfall to avoid detection by the Jewish authorities. They also refrained from publicly associating with the funeral of Elijah Mark. Throughout the following day, they remained in quiet seclusion in the upper chamber.

In their discussions, they unknowingly began the first steps toward altering Jesus' teachings from a focus on following God's will and fostering fellowship among the people of earth to emphasizing his post resurrection appearances. Nathaniel opposed this shift in their public message. Unfortunately, the others were swayed by Peter's enthusiasm, including those who understood that Jesus did not wish to be venerated as a person, but rather to have his teachings honored.

20.7 APPEARANCE AT NICODEMUS

The sixteenth manifestation of the spirit of Jesus occurred on Friday, May 5, in the courtyard of Nicodemus during the late evening. On this night in Jerusalem, most of the followers made their first attempt to gather since Jesus' last appearance. Present at this time were the eleven followers, the women's corps and their associates, along with approximately fifty other prominent followers, including several Greeks. This group had been conversing informally for more than half an hour when, suddenly, they all saw a vision of the spirit of Jesus and heard:

“Peace be with you. This is the most representative group of followers, both men and women, to whom I have appeared since my deliverance from the flesh. Now, you should listen carefully to my words, lest you repeat the mistake of understanding the teaching intellectually while failing to grasp its meaning in your hearts. From the beginning of my life with you, I have taught you that my purpose is to reveal our Heavenly Father to children on earth.

“I have lived a life that reveals God so that you may experience a career that fosters a deep understanding of him. I have shown God as your Heavenly Father and have revealed you as God’s sons and daughters. It is a fundamental truth that God loves you, as children. I urge you to always remember that your mission among people is to proclaim the new teachings of the fellowship of souls - the reality of God’s fatherhood and the truth of the fellowship among the children of God.

“Proclaim the entire truth, not merely a portion of the teachings. My recent appearances do not alter your message. You are to go forth, teaching the love of the Heavenly Father and serving God’s children. Therefore, go into all the world, sharing this new lesson of God’s will with everyone.

“Freely you have received; freely give. Wait here in Jerusalem while I go to God. Then I will send you my spirit; it shall lead you into the greater truth and accompany you throughout the world. I am with you always; peace be with you.”

When Jesus’ spirit had spoken to them, he vanished from their sight. They remained together all night, earnestly discussing Jesus’ admonitions and contemplating all that had befallen them. James Zebedee and other followers also shared their experiences with the spirit of Jesus in Galilee, recounting how he had appeared to them three times. It was near daybreak before these followers dispersed.

20.8 APPEARANCE AT SYCHAR

Late in the afternoon on Sabbath, May 13, the vision of the spirit of Jesus appeared to Nalda and approximately seventy-five Samaritan followers near Jacob's well at Sychar. They regularly gathered at this location, where Jesus had previously spoken to Nalda about spiritual water.

On this day, just as they had concluded their discussions regarding the reported reappearances, a vision of the spirit of Jesus appeared before them, saying:

“Peace be with you. If you are the faithful children of our Heavenly Father, you shall never die; your spirit shall not perish. This good news regarding the love of our Heavenly Father for children on earth, as well as the love of earthly children for one another, must be shared with the entire world.

“Eternal life is the gift of God to all souls. However, do not be deceived; while eternal life is indeed a free gift from God, it is bestowed upon those souls who choose to accept it.

“Embracing the doctrine of the fatherhood of God implies that you also willingly acknowledge the accompanying truth of the fellowship among all people. If they are your siblings, they are much more than your neighbor. As a member of your own family, you will not only love them with familial affection but also serve them as you would serve yourself. Consequently, you will love and serve your brothers and sisters because, as brethren, you have all been loved and served in the same manner.

“The time has come when you will no longer pray at Gerizim or Jerusalem, but rather wherever you are, as you are. Therefore, go into all the world, telling this message to all creatures of every culture, tribe, and nation. My spirit will be with you always.”

These Samaritans were greatly astonished by this appearance, and they hurried to the nearby towns and villages to announce the news that they had seen the spirit of Jesus and heard him speak. This marked the seventeenth appearance of Jesus' spirit.

20.9 AT TYRE

Jesus' eighteenth spiritual appearance occurred in Tyre on Tuesday, May 16, during the late evening. Once again, his vision manifested to all at the conclusion of a gathering of followers. Jesus had previously been with these followers in the flesh, and they quickly recognized his voice when he began to teach them. They heard:

“Peace be upon you. Rejoice, for you and your brethren shall survive mortal death as you have sought God. You may enter fellowship of souls as a child, but our Heavenly Father requires that you eventually mature to the full stature of spiritual adulthood. Therefore, I send you forth to teach this truth of fellowship.

“Eternal life is the free gift of God. However, you must begin to demonstrate the results of your spirit to your fellows: loving service, selfless devotion, courageous loyalty, sincere fairness, enlightened honesty, unwavering hope, trusting confidence, compassionate ministry, steadfast goodness, forgiving tolerance, and lasting peace.

“Our Heavenly Father asks God's children to bear much spiritual fruit. When you go forth to share this teaching with all nations, I will go with you, and my spirit shall dwell in your hearts. Peace be with you.”

The vision of Jesus then vanished from their sight.

The following day, they departed from Tyre, sharing this story with Sidon and even reaching Antioch and Damascus.

21

Holy Spirit

21.0 LAST APPEARANCE

Early Thursday morning, May 18, Jesus made his final appearance on earth as a spiritual being. As the eleven followers were preparing to sit down for breakfast in the upper room of Mary Mark's home, he appeared to them, and they all heard him say: "Peace be with you. I have asked you to remain here in Jerusalem until I go to God."

Simon Zelotes interrupted Jesus, asking: Then, Master, will you restore the kingdom, and will we see the glory of God manifested on earth? Jesus responded:

"Simon, you continue to hold onto your outdated beliefs regarding the Messiah and the material kingdom. However, you will receive spiritual power once my spirit has descended upon you, and you will soon travel throughout the world, disseminating this new teaching of the spiritual kingdom, rather than the physical one.

"You know that I do not allow myself to be alone for extended periods. From the very beginning of our association, I have always had two or three of you constantly by my side or very close at hand, even when I commune with God. In the scripture, it is written: 'It is not good for one to be alone; no one lives for himself.'

“Additionally, it states: ‘He who would have friends must also be friendly himself.’ I sent you out to teach, two by two, so that you would not become lonely and fall into the mischief and miseries of isolation. Therefore, trust and confide in one another. This is especially important since I am about to leave you alone in the world today. The hour has come; I am going to God.”

When he had finished speaking, he beckoned for them to follow him and led them to the Mount Olivet, where he bid them farewell. This was a solemn journey. No words were exchanged from the moment they left the upper chamber until the spirit Jesus paused with them on the Mount.

21.1 ASCENSION

After they arrived on the western slope of Mount Olivet, about two-thirds of the way up the mountain, they could gaze out over Jerusalem and look down upon Gethsemane.

As spirit Jesus stood before them, they knelt in a circle around him, without being prompted, and they heard:

“I instructed you to remain in Jerusalem until you are endowed with a new power from on high. I am now preparing to take my leave; I am about to go to God, and soon, very soon, I will send my spirit into the world. When my spirit arrives, you shall begin to proclaim the new teachings again, first in Jerusalem and then to the farthest corners of the world.

“Love God with the love with which I have loved you, and serve your fellow beings just as I have served you. The spiritual results of your lives will inspire souls to believe that all people are children of God and, therefore, all are brethren. Remember all that I have taught you and the life I have lived among you. My love overshadows you, my spirit will dwell within you, and peace shall abide with you. Farewell.”

When the spirit of Jesus had spoken, he vanished from their sight. The followers realized that this was his final reappearance. His disappearance was no different from his other disappearances during the forty days of his reappearance. It was early this morning when the vision of Jesus disappeared from the view of his eleven followers for the last time.

21.2 PETER'S MEETING

Acting upon the instructions of Peter and John Mark, the others went forth to summon the leading followers to the home of Mary Mark. By mid-morning, one hundred and twenty of the foremost followers of Jesus residing in Jerusalem had gathered to hear the report of Jesus' farewell message.

Among those present in this company was Mary, the mother of Jesus. She returned to Jerusalem with John Zebedee after the followers returned from their recent sojourn in Galilee. Mary went to the home of Salome in Bethsaida. James, the brother of Jesus, was also present at this meeting, which was the first conference of Jesus' followers convened after the conclusion of his earthly career.

Peter took it upon himself to speak on behalf of his fellow ambassadors. He delivered an engaging report on the most recent meeting of the eleven with their teacher, poignantly depicting Jesus' final farewell. This part of the meeting lasted just under one hour.

21.3 COMING OF JESUS' SPIRIT

In the early afternoon, while the one hundred and twenty followers were engaged in prayer, they became aware of a strange presence in the room. This presence instilled in them a profound sense of spiritual joy, security, and confidence. Almost immediately, this newfound spiritual strength was accompanied by a compelling urge to share the new teachings publicly.

Peter stood up and said that this must be the arrival of Jesus' spirit that he had promised them. These followers felt their souls being suddenly transported into a different emotional realm, a new existence filled with joy, power, and glory. Peter proposed that they go to the temple to begin proclaiming the good news, and they followed his suggestion.

These followers had been instructed to teach the fatherhood of God and the fellowship of humanity. However, apparently at this moment of spiritual ecstasy and personal triumph, they could only think of Jesus' reappearances after his death. It was easier for them to recall their personal associations with Jesus and to be exhilarated by the assurance that he still lived spiritually.

They had forgotten that just before their last meal with him, he had stated that the teachings should not center around him but rather on his lessons. They should not venerate the person over the wisdom he imparted.

Nevertheless, they proceeded, empowered by the influence of his subconscious spirit, sharing their personal experiences with Jesus. Inadvertently, they replaced the facts of Jesus' life with the teachings themselves. Peter unwittingly took the lead, and others followed in his footsteps.

The followers had been in hiding for forty days. Now, Jesus' associates emerged from their weeks of seclusion to boldly appear in the temple, where they began to teach a different message about a risen Messiah.

21.4 PENTECOST

This day happened to be the Jewish festival of Pentecost, attracting thousands of visitors from around the world to Jerusalem. Many had come specifically for this feast, while others had remained in the city since Passover. It was mid-afternoon when Peter stood in the very spot where his teacher had last taught in the temple and delivered an impassioned appeal.

Pentecost was traditionally a Jewish festival of baptism, a time for fellowship among converts - those Gentiles who wished to serve Yahweh. Consequently, it was easier for large numbers of both Jews and Gentiles to submit to baptism on this day. The followers recognized that it was coincidental for Jesus' spirit to descend upon them on this day of Pentecost; however, the Jewish ceremony significantly enhanced receptivity to their new message.

Jesus had departed, but the followers soon realized that the narrative of the human Jesus held significant influence over the people. Six followers attended this meeting: Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, and Matthew. They engaged in a discussion for more than an hour and a half, delivering messages in Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic, as well as a few words in other languages with which they were familiar. Less than a month after the spirit's coming, the followers made more individual progress than they had during their nearly four years of personal association with Jesus.

Their efforts resulted in the conversion of over two thousand individuals. The leaders in Jerusalem were astonished by the boldness of the followers, yet they hesitated to confront them due to the substantial number of believers. By mid-afternoon, more than two thousand new followers joined the original ambassadors at the Pool of Siloam, where Peter, Andrew, James, and John baptized them. It was dark by the time they completed the baptism of this multitude.

The women followers naturally embraced Jesus' spirit and shared these teachings equally with all who were willing to listen, regardless of gender. As a result, some of the followers felt that these new teachings would eventually eradicate all forms of religious discrimination based on sex, racial distinctions, cultural differences, or social caste prejudices.

The new followers also received a profound subconscious spiritual endowment of insight and power. They felt empowered to be independent of traditional forms, ceremonies, religious institutions, and societal norms. The followers cried out: Where the spirit of God is, there is liberty.

21.5 THE SPREADING SPIRIT

When the heavenly spirit of Jesus descended upon the followers in Jerusalem, a similar occurrence took place in Philadelphia, Alexandria, and all other locations where followers resided.

Shortly thereafter, the spirit descended upon all the inhabitants of the world. This spirit enabled individuals of various faiths to discover a true personification within their own souls. *[The followers eventually came to believe that the mission of this heavenly spirit was to prepare people's souls for their subsequent life with God.]*

Jesus had taught that his spirit would not “speak of itself.” However, some followers mistakenly expected it to manifest in their conscious minds. They discovered that this spirit does not create a direct awareness, but rather fosters a subconscious sense of spiritual reality, enhancing the divine communication between their soul and God. They learned that this spirit could guide all individuals toward a living and evolving spiritual awareness.

[Later generations would come to understand that some individuals could clearly feel this internal force, while others might struggle to see this spiritual light within themselves, and some would outright reject hearing this still small voice that speaks to them. However, they found that all adults can find this living guidance if they genuinely make the effort. They learned that this energizing power of the spirit is available to all who sincerely seek it.]

Epilogue

22.0 AFTERWARDS

After Pentecost, Jesus' followers went their separate ways.

* **Andrew** began documenting a personal account of many of the teachings and actions of his departed teacher. Following Andrew's death, additional copies of this private record were made and circulated among the early followers. These informal notes of Andrew's were subsequently edited, amended, altered, and expanded until they formed a relatively coherent narrative of Jesus' life. The last of these modified copies were destroyed by fire in Alexandria about one hundred years after the original was written.

Andrew journeyed through Armenia, Asia Minor, and Macedonia. After bringing many thousands to the new teachings, he was ultimately apprehended and crucified in Patrae, Achaia. This robust man endured for two full days on the cross, and throughout these tragic hours, he continued to proclaim the new teachings of God's will with unwavering resolve.

* **Simon Peter** became a beacon of hope for thousands after he was fully assured that Jesus had forgiven his denials. His letter, later known as the First Epistle of Peter, exemplifies his teaching style.

However, he persisted in the mistaken belief that he could convince the Jews that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. Even up to the day of his death, Peter continued to grapple with the confusion between the concepts of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah and Jesus as the revelation of the loving Father of all.

He departed from Jerusalem and emerged as the foremost teacher among the Gentile followers. He traveled extensively, visiting cities ranging from Babylon to Corinth. Peter considered himself to be honored when his captors informed him that he must die as his teacher had died - on the cross. He was crucified in Rome.

* **James Zebedee** lived his life to the fullest. When the end came, he conducted himself with such grace and fortitude that even his accuser and informer, who attended his trial and execution, was so moved that he rushed away from the scene of James's death to join the followers. James was genuinely prepared to drink the cup, as Jesus had asked of his followers. He was executed by the sword at the command of Herod Agrippa, thus becoming the first of the twelve to lose his life. Herod feared James more than any of the other followers.

* **John Zebedee** was closely associated with Peter in establishing the early churches, becoming one of the principal supporters of the Jerusalem church. He traveled extensively, worked tirelessly, and after emerging as a leader in the Asian churches, eventually settled in Ephesus.

John was imprisoned several times and was exiled to the Isle of Patmos for four years until a new emperor ascended to power in Rome. During his time in exile on Patmos, John wrote the enigmatic Book of Revelation, which was later significantly abridged and reinterpreted. This book preserves the remaining fragments of his strange revelations, although many portions were lost, and other sections were omitted from John's original writing.

Later, he instructed his associate, Nathan, to compose the so-called Gospel of John in Ephesus when he was ninety-nine years old. During the last twenty years of his life, he was cared for by a devoted granddaughter. He died a natural causes in Ephesus in 103 CE, at the age of one hundred and one.

* **Philip** endured the challenging period surrounding Jesus' death, took part in the reorganization of the twelve, and was the first to venture beyond the immediate Jewish community to win souls, achieving notable success among the Samaritans. Ultimately, Philip was crucified for his faith and laid to rest in Hierapolis.

Philip's wife, a dedicated member of the women's corps, became actively involved in her husband's teaching efforts following their escape from the persecutions in Jerusalem. She was fearless, standing at the foot of Philip's cross and encouraging him to proclaim the new teachings up to his execution. When Philip's strength waned, she took up the recital of the new teachings, being silenced only when the enraged listeners rushed her and stoned her to death. Their eldest daughter, Leah, continued their work, later became the renowned prophetess of Hierapolis.

* **Nathaniel** traveled through Mesopotamia and India, sharing the new teachings and baptizing followers. The eleven followers never knew what became of this former philosopher and humorist. Nevertheless, he significantly contributed to the dissemination of his teacher's lessons, despite not being involved in the establishment of the subsequent churches. Nathaniel passed away in India.

* **Matthew Levi** journeyed north, teaching the lessons and baptizing followers. Although he became estranged from his former followers, he continued his mission of teaching and baptizing throughout Syria, Cappadocia, Galatia, Bithynia, and Thrace. In Thrace, at Lysimachia, certain unbelievers conspired with Roman soldiers to ensure his death.

- **Thomas Didymus**, who endured a challenging period during the trial and execution, initially fell into deep despair. However, he summoned his courage, remained loyal to the followers, and was present to welcome Jesus during his appearance at the Sea of Galilee. Following Jesus' final appearance, Thomas again succumbed to doubt and depression, but ultimately regained his faith and courage.

When persecution scattered the followers, he traveled to Cyprus, Crete, the North African coast, and Sicily, where he taught and baptized new followers. Thomas continued his ministry of teaching and baptizing until he was apprehended by agents of the Roman government and executed in Malta. Just a few weeks prior to his death, he had begun writing about Jesus.

- * **Simon the Zealot** entered a period of temporary retirement following the dispersion of the eleven. He felt utterly defeated. As a nationalist patriot, he had relinquished his ambitions in deference to Jesus' teachings; now, with everything seemingly lost, he found himself in a state of despair.

But after a few years, he rekindled his hopes and proclaimed the new teachings. He traveled to Alexandria and ventured into the heart of Africa, following the course of the Nile - teaching new lessons and baptizing followers everywhere. He continued his labor until he became an older and frail man. Eventually, he died and was buried in Africa.

- * **James and Judas Alpheus** served faithfully; they never wavered in their faith. They were among the first to believe the accounts of Jesus' reappearance. Soon after their teacher departed from this world, they returned to their families and their fishing nets. They lived and died conscious of having been honored with four years of close and personal association with Jesus. They recalled that he had told them:

“You have dedicated your lives to the improvement of everyday labor. Demonstrate to all how cheerfully and

courageously mortal persons can return to the labors of former days after being called to serve in the special service of God for a season.

“If you believe that your work in the external affairs of the heavenly fellowship of souls is complete, you may return to your previous endeavors, enriched by the enlightening experience of fellowship with God. Approach your tasks with the elevated understanding that there is no such thing as common labor or secular toil. Demonstrate that all activities hold significance, and that every earthly labor can be a service to God the Father.”

CHRONOLOGY OF JESUS' LIFE

August 21, 7 BCE to October, 8 BCE - First Years

1.0 Birth, 1.1 WiseMen, 1.2 Flight to Egypt, 1.3 Parents, 1.4 Elizabeth's Vision, 1.5 Mary's Vision, 1.6 Joseph's Dream, 1.7 Mary and Joseph, 1.8 Home in Nazareth, 1.9 Trip to Bethlehem

October, 8 BCE to April, 7 CE - Childhood

2.0 Early Childhood, 2.1 Back in Nazareth, 2.2 Fifth Year, 2.3 Sixth Year, 2.4 Seventh Year, 2.5 School Days in Nazareth, 2.6 Eighth Year, 2.7 Later Childhood, 2.8 Ninth Year, 2.9 Tenth Year, 2.10 Eleventh Year, 2.11 Twelfth Year, 2.12 Thirteenth Year, Map of Galilee, 2.13 Journey to Jerusalem, 2.14 In Jerusalem, 2.15 Visit to the Temple, 2.16 Passover in Jerusalem, 2.17 Departure of Joseph and Mary, 2.18 First and Second Days in the Temple, 2.19 Third Day in the Temple, 2.20 Fourth Day in the Temple

April, 7 CE to August, 15 CE - Adolescence

3.0 Two Critical Years, 3.1 Fourteenth Year, 3.2 Death of Joseph, 3.3 Fifteenth Year, 3.4 First Teachings in the Synagogue, 3.5 Financial Struggle, 3.6 Adolescent Years, 3.7 Sixteenth Year, 3.8 Seventeenth Year, 3.9 Eighteenth Year, 3.10 Nineteenth Year, 3.11 Rebecca, 3.12 Twentieth Year

August, 15 CE to April, 22 CE - Adulthood

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January 14, 26 CE to January 19, 27 CE - The Twelve

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7.5 Choosing Philip and Nathaniel, 7.6 Visit to Capernaum, 7.7 At Cana, 7.8 Back in Capernaum, 7.9 The Sabbath Day, 7.10 Four Months of Teaching, 7.11 First Public Lesson, 7.12 Training His Followers, 7.13 Final Instructions, 7.14 Choosing the Second Six, 7.15 Call of Matthew and Simon, 7.16 Call of the Twins, 7.17 Call of Thomas and Judas, 7.18 Week of Intensive Training, 7.19 Another Disappointment, 7.20 First Work of the Twelve, 7.21 Five Months of Testing, 7.22 Organization of the Twelve, 7.23 The Twelve, 7.24 Andrew, 7.25 Simon Peter, 7.26 James Zebedee, 7.27 John Zebedee, 7.28 Philip of Bethsaida, 7.29 Nathaniel, 7.30 Matthew Levi, 7.31 Thomas Didymus, 7.32 Simon the Zealot, 7.33 and 7.34 James and Judas Alpheas, 7.35 Judas Iscariot, 7.36 Instruction of the Twelve, 7.37 Morning Instructions, 7.38 The Blessing, 7.39 Afternoon Instructions, 7.40 The Sermon on the Mount, 7.41 Evening Instructions, 7.42 The Week Following, 7.43 Teachings on the Lake, 7.44 The Dedication, 7.45 Evening After

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May 18, 30 CE - Holy Spirit

21.0 Last Appearance, 21.1 Ascension, 21.2 Peter's Meeting, 21.3 Coming Of Jesus' Spirit, 21.4 Pentecost, 21.5 The Spreading Spirit

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This book is a revision of a 2024 publication titled “Jesus’ Life and Lessons, Second Edition,” by IngramSpark.com, 1 Ingram Blvd, La Vergne, TN 37086. That book was a 6 x 9 inch hardcover consisting of 796 pages in New York Layout Style. It aimed to modernize the text for the 21st century by utilizing “Grammarly Desktop, 2024 Version” software from Grammarly.com, 548 Market Street, # 35410, San Francisco, CA 94104.

The first edition of “Jesus’ Life and Lessons” contained 1,228 pages in three volumes, in a 6 x 9 inch hardcover format by Story-Worth.com, 1080 Philadelphia Pike, Claymont, DE 19703. That book utilized a 10-point Merriweather font without italics, bold or underlining. It condensed a previous publication to adhere to the printer’s page limit for each volume. It reorganized the chapters and enhanced the language to make it more accessible to readers not raised in a Christian tradition.

The first edition of the text was from “Part IV, The Life and Teachings of Jesus ” in a book published in Chicago in 1955. That 7 x 10 inch hardcover 770-page volume contained contributions from several authors each exhibiting their own unique writing style - the subsequent editions aimed to unify these diverse styles.

Two of the maps are adapted from the 2008 “Crucible of History, the Eastern Mediterranean,” published by National Geographic Maps, 212 Beaver Brook Canyon Rd., Evergreen, Colorado 80439. One map was adapted from the October 9, 2013, “Map of Jerusalem & Mount Olives” by Ronald W. Leigh, <http://ronleigh.com/bible/olivet/herods-temple.htm>. Another map is an edited version of “Israel During the Times of Jesus,” found at <https://maps-Jerusalem.com>.

In this edition the names of individuals and locations utilize twenty-first century English equivalents. The dates referenced in this book adhere to the revised Gregorian calendar, incorporating the Common Era (CE) and Before Common Era (BCE). Units of measure are expressed in the United States Customary System.

Some of Jesus’ teachings were conveyed through stories that allow for multiple interpretations. When the meaning of a story is ambiguous, a contemporary explanation may have been provided. Similarly, descriptions have been included to clarify certain customs and daily life during Jesus’ time. *[Occasionally, the impact of Jesus’ travels and teachings on subsequent generations is included.]*

Comments and suggestions for a second edition can be sent to JesusTravelsandTeachings@gmail.com. This book may be translated into other languages without permission or compensation. This English edition is copyright (c) 2026.

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