

- THE BOOK OF MATTHEW -

*"Hosanna to the Son of David;
Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord;
Hosanna in the highest!"*

(Matthew 21:9b)



Berean Lamp Ministries
For the Body of Christ

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The Seven Churches (Revelation 2-3)



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The Berean Lamp Ministry seeks to:

1. Encourage and strengthen the Body of Christ by providing the means for each of its members to share their spiritual gifts with one another, rooted in the Word of God, thereby growing into deeper union with one another and with Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).
2. Minister to non-believers; be a witness for Christ and a testimony to His Body in the world.

We would appreciate your help in contributing to the content and in spreading the work of this ministry. Thank you, and God bless.

- Pastor Scott Moller

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The Words of Jesus for the Last Days (Matthew 24)

SIGNS OF CHRIST'S RETURN

“Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. And He said to them, ‘Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down.’

“As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’

“And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying, “I am the Christ,” and will mislead many. You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.’

““Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.’

PERILOUS TIMES

““Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. Whoever

is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath. For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. Then if anyone says to you, “Behold, here is the Christ,” or “There He is,” do not believe him. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you in advance. So if they say to you, “Behold, He is in the wilderness,” do not go out, or, “Behold, He is in the inner rooms,” do not believe them. For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.’

THE GLORIOUS RETURN

““But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.’

PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE

““Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the

door. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.'

“‘But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left.’

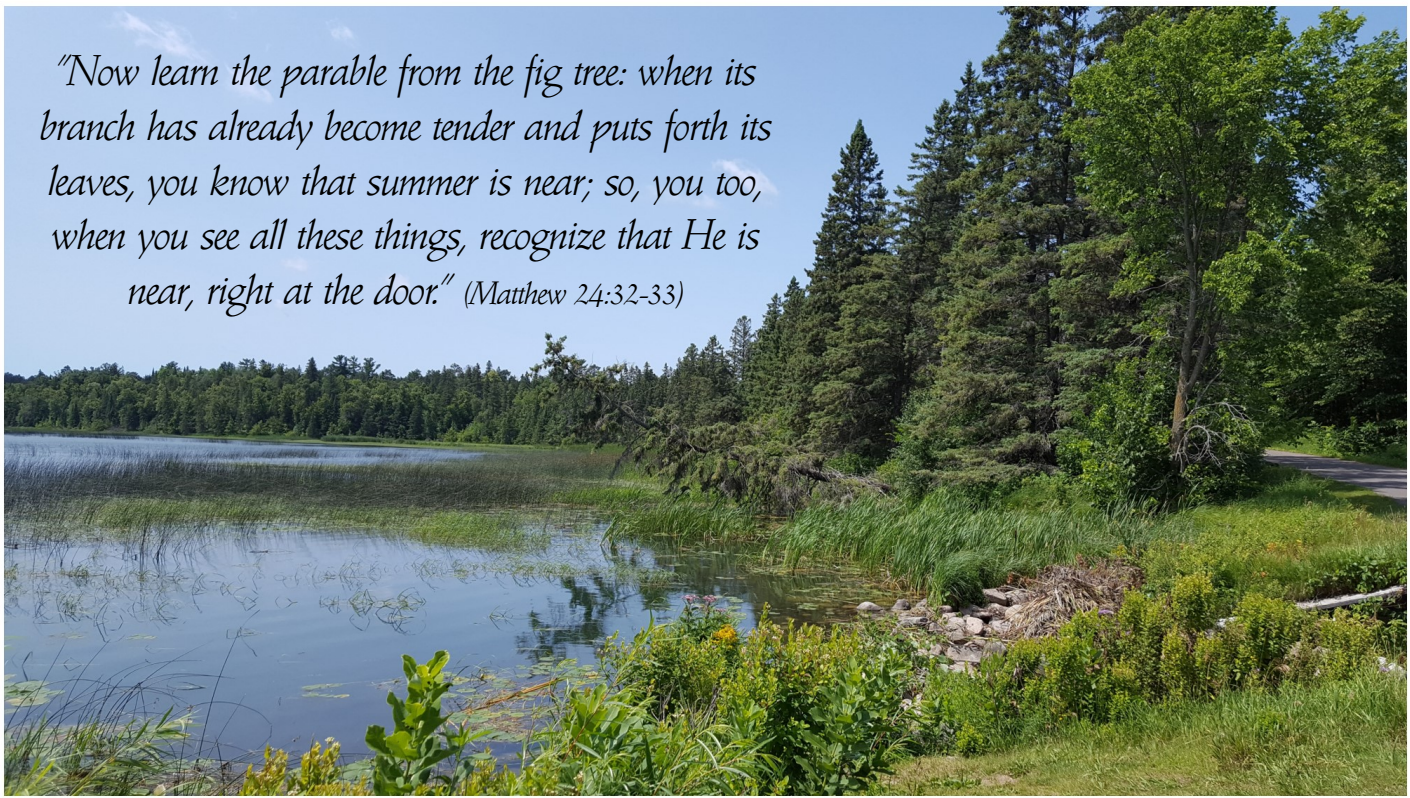
BE READY FOR HIS COMING

“‘Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you also must be ready;

for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.’

“‘Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But if that evil slave says in his heart, “My master is not coming for a long time,” and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

*“He who GATHERS in summer is a SON who acts wisely,
But he who SLEEPS in harvest is a SON who acts shamefully.”
(Proverbs 10:5)*



“Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door.” (Matthew 24:32-33)

By Jackie Hansen

The Golden Rule

By Nathan Warner

“In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”
(Matthew 7:12 NASB)

The Sermon on the Mount was revolutionary. There, on a Galilean mountain, Jesus shared some of God’s expectations for human behavior, which dealt with the heart and motivations, rather than the outward appearance. It was a harsh contrast, not only to the Jewish legalistic practices of the time, but also to the lawless ways of the entire pagan world.

WHAT IS PAGANISM?

Depending on your Bible translation, the term Paganism is equivalent to “Heathenism” and refers to the spiritual ways of the Gentiles: *“You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the mute idols, however you were led”* (1 Corinthians 12:2), *“and the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, in thee shall all nations be blessed”* (Galatians 3:8 KJV).

Boiled down very succinctly, paganism (or heathenism) means the worship of the creature, rather than the Creator—it is the worship of gods, angels, spirits, demons, men, animals, nature, ideas, philosophies, etc. All the ancient religions prior to Christ are considered “pagan.” God considers them “ignorant,” as Paul explained to the heathen Greeks, *“having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent”* (Acts 17:30 NASB).

As the Gospel light spread, unrepentant paganism was forced underground and into the shadows to become the “occult,” which means “to hide, conceal, or cover up.” It has served the “*god of this world*” (2 Corinthians 4:4b) who is the false “*ruler of this world*” (John 14:30b) from the shadows, ruling kingdoms from behind the curtain. But the occult is beginning to resurface in the mainstream in these last days.

PAGAN WORSHIP

Before we continue discussing paganism, let’s first clear up what it means to worship something. Now, to “worship” means most simply to show devotion to someone or something as the judge of what is good and right. In this way, the Believer worships the Creator and looks to Him as judge of what is good and



By Natalie Warner

right. This is because *“God Himself is judge. Selah”* (Psalm 50:6b). But from the beginning people have worshipped things other than God as judge. The ancient pagans, for example, worshipped all aspects of the creation, as we mentioned earlier. Contrary to modern thought, worship doesn’t have to take place before stone idols or temple altars. Today, we see people worshipping the cults of “stars” and celebrities, and we see them worshipping at the altars of media such as movies, videogames, and pop-culture with all its fragmented sub-cultures. They worship possessions and money—they worship the flesh and philosophies. Why do we say they are worshipping these things? Simply because these people devote themselves to these “idols” for inspiration in their daily living and for guidance on what is acceptable moral behavior—these idols become their judge of what is right and wrong.

In America today and around the world, we are seeing the resurgence of “paganism” — the worship of the creature, rather than the Creator. Whether self-worship, pop-star worship, media worship, or leader worship, the occult is seeping back into the mainstream. In the open, paganism is increasingly “in” and “cool” because it appeals to the flesh, because it is fleshly (of the creature). Their “truths” about right and wrong are preached as “gospel” by the idols that perform for them in theaters, on tv, on stage, on the radio, and on the internet. Because they are derived from the flesh, they titillate the fleshly senses of their devotees.

Even our “greatest” minds of today in universities, schools, and research centers teach us to worship the creation (i.e. nature). They tell us that the creation created us and we must look to it for guidance to understand what is right and wrong for us to do. This negates the concept of sin because all behavior is seen as a product of nature – your fleshly desires are how you were made, and therefore, they are not intrinsically wrong, if nature made you that way. This has given rise to sayings such as, “I was born this way” and “If it makes me happy, how can it be wrong?” Meaning, respectively, that you are not responsible for your actions, and if you desire “it” (whatever “it” is), it is right for you because you were made in the image of nature, and how could it be unnatural for you to want what you want?

Scientifically, this philosophy is bolstered by the “Theory of Evolution,” which states that the creation made the creature, and this holds sway in higher education, although it is neither a theory nor scientific. As Paul said of these sorts of men, *“professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen”* (Romans 1:22-25). Increasingly, we are seeing Paul’s words playing out before our eyes.

PRACTICAL EFFECTS OF PAGANISM

So, spiritually, we are seeing a return to pagan idolatry. But what does this return mean practically? Well, for one thing, a return to paganism means a break down in love and empathy in our culture and around the world. That might seem unconnected at first but not when we understand that love and empathy are Christian inventions.

Prior to Christ, the pagan world (Gentiles) was composed of vying groups or tribes serving a patron deity, which was a demon, for *“the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God”* (1 Corinthians 10:20a). It was a brutal time when only the strong survived and the spoils went to the victor. Kings ruled from thrones of abuse and slavery by divine right or by murderous intrigue. As Jesus reminded His disciples: *“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them”* (Matthew 20:25).

People sought protection in groups—families, tribes, and clans. You might not be treated very well inside your group, but it was generally better than how you’d be treated by the opposing group. There was little protection outside of your group. Opposing tribes made war on each other, killed the warriors, enslaved the women and children, and took their stuff.

There was no love or empathy for the people in the opposing group. It was “us” versus

“them.” And if you were in a different group, you deserved what you got, especially if you got the worst end of the stick.

THE GOSPEL CONTRASTED

Into this brutal culture, God sent His Son Jesus, and He shared the mind of God, teaching that God had different expectations for us than we had for ourselves. One of the most radical teachings Jesus shared was that in everything, you were to “*treat people the same way you want them to treat you*” (Matthew 7:12b). This was a revolutionary notion, because there was a hierarchy of rights and treatment even inside your group. The strongest by might or by birth deserved the best treatment, while the weakest by strength or blood deserved the worst treatment. But Jesus didn’t just mean the people in your group—He had explained earlier that it even extended to people outside your group—even to enemies:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:43-45). The way of pagan life was to love your neighbor (the person in your group) and hate your enemy (everyone else). But Jesus taught something different, and He laid it out in very practical terms: *“I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back”* (Luke 6:27-30).

Jesus was teaching that God expects us to have empathy for people around us, and what’s more, to love them—even our enemies. This had never been said before, but now God was revealing to mankind more of His mind through Jesus Christ, and the practical, tangible outcome of it was empathy and love.

“Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law” (Romans 13:8). *“Love does no*

wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:12). *“If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors”* (James 2:8-9). *“For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another”* (Galatians 5:13-15).

Many Jews agreed with these words, but we see that they (like the pagans) had a different definition than God of who was their “neighbor”: *“And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ And He said to him, ‘What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?’ And he answered, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.’ And He said to him, ‘You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.’ But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’”* (Luke 10:25-29) Here, the lawyer wanted to justify himself by pointing out that clearly a “neighbor” was someone of your own group or tribe (in this case, Jews) and did not extend to those outside your group. He did not have to love the Romans or the Greeks, did he? Surely not! He could use and abuse them every chance he got because they were “enemies” to his group, right? In response, Jesus told the parable of the good Samaritan to show that God’s definition of a “neighbor” extends even to your hated enemies, for *“there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”* (Galatians 3:28).

Of course, the only way love and empathy can sincerely be sustained inside us is if we have been born again by the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Only in this way do we truly receive the “mind of the Spirit” from within. *“For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those*

who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:5-8), “for He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:27). “‘For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him?’ But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16).

PRACTICAL EFFECTS OF THE GOSPEL

The practical outcome of the Gospel is love and empathy from Believers to their neighbors. Love means devotion, commitment, and faithfulness for the good of the one you love. Empathy is the idea that I should understand what you are experiencing and feel for what you are feeling. It is the foundation upon which western society was built and which all peaceful civilization rests. Without empathy, I will act solely for my own self-interest at the expense of all others. I will do things to you for my material benefit that may hurt you, but I will not care. Empathy proceeds from within, rather than being forced upon us from outside by laws or rules.

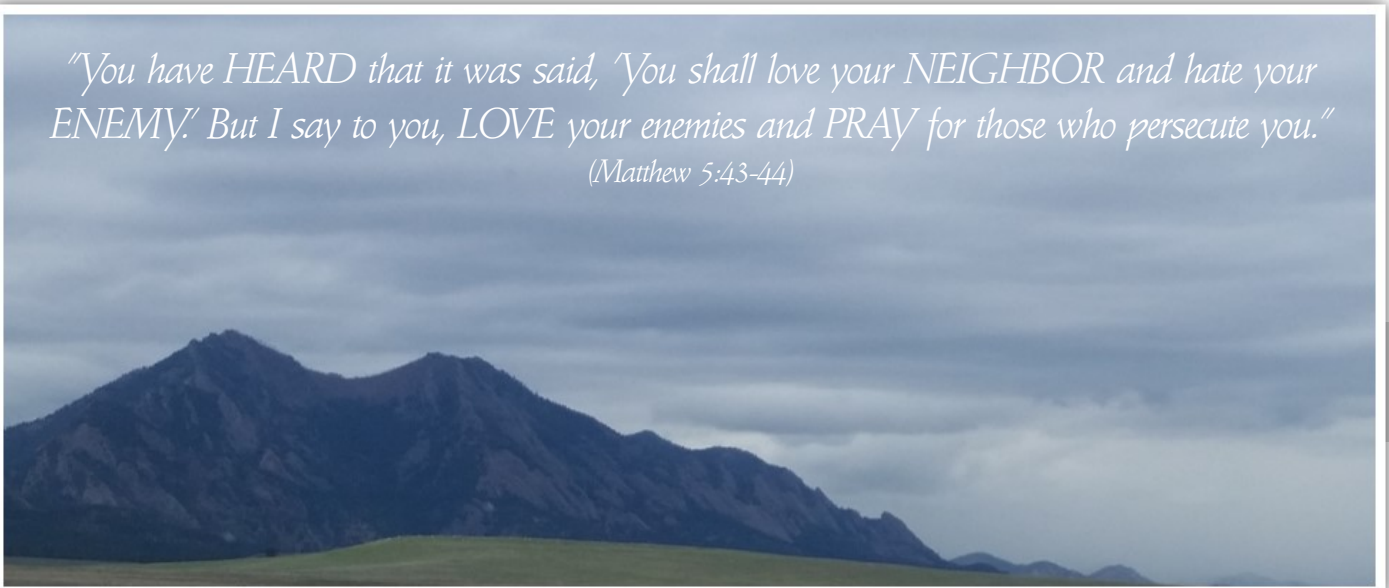
Christian restraint on human passions was universally understood in the west. This is the

restraint of the Holy Spirit, which society partakes of through the good works (fruit) of the Spirit in Believers who act out their faith to their neighbors.

The Founders of our western civilization recognized the very practical good of Christianity in society and the danger to any society that abandons Christianity. Though some were deists and some were even in the occult, they universally held that Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount was the best teaching on practical morality that the world had ever seen or was ever likely to and that it was essential to a free society.

Not long after the conclusion of the American Revolution (1829), Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story set the record straight on the real-world value of the Gospel: “One of the beautiful boasts of our municipal jurisprudence is that Christianity is a part of the Common Law [the basis of the western legal system]. There never has been a period in which the Common Law did not recognize Christianity as lying at its foundations.” Even those Founders who were deists respected the practical effects of the Word of God on people and promoted Christianity as being vital to the well-being of society. Though not a Believer in the deity of Jesus, Thomas Jefferson affirmed that “the practice of morality being necessary for the well being of society, He [God] has taken care to impress its precepts so indelibly on our hearts that they shall not be effaced by the subtleties of our brain. We all agree in the obliga-

“You have HEARD that it was said, ‘You shall love your NEIGHBOR and hate your ENEMY.’ But I say to you, LOVE your enemies and PRAY for those who persecute you.”
(Matthew 5:43-44)



tion of the moral principles of Jesus and nowhere will they be found delivered in greater purity than in His discourses.” Even as a deist, Constitutional delegate Benjamin Franklin shared what was necessary for a good society: “A Bible and a newspaper in every house, a good school in every district—all studied and appreciated as they merit—are the principal support of virtue, morality, and civil liberty.” The great French historian Alexis de Tocqueville came to America to learn about what made the new country such a blessed place, and this was his conclusion: “In the United States the sovereign authority is religious, . . . there is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America, and there can be no greater proof of its utility and of its conformity to human nature than that its influence is powerfully felt over the most enlightened and free nations on earth. . . . Christianity, therefore reigns without obstacle, by universal consent; the consequence is, as I have before observed, that every principle of the moral world is fixed and determinate. . . . I sought for the key to the greatness and genius of America in her harbors. . . ; in her fields and boundless forests; in her rich mines and vast world commerce; in her public school system and institutions of learning. I sought for it in her democratic Congress and in her matchless Constitution. Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits flame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her

genius and power. America is great because America is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great” (Democracy in America).

PAGAN RESURGENCE

Unfortunately, today, there are dangerous elements of our society that are growing in influence, attempting to dissolve the Christian foundation of western society. They labor to demolish our love and empathy by distracting our focus on the mind of the Spirit as revealed in the Word of God. They are working to fragment us all into “tribes” that have animosity and hate towards one another. In order to do this, they must get us all in the flesh, create opposition between people so they will form into groups (or tribes), and then demonize all the people in opposing groups. *“These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit”* (Jude 1:19).

By exciting our earthly fears and desires, they succeed in getting us to act out the deeds of the flesh towards others: *“immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these”* (Galatians 5:19-21a).

They entice some with lust — “you deserve what those people have!” ; “take what you deserve!” ; “hurt those that hurt you!” ; “oppress your oppressors!” ; etc.

“Owe NOTHING to anyone except to LOVE one another; for he who loves his NEIGHBOR has fulfilled the LAW.” (Romans 13:8)



Others they entice with fear: “those people will take all your stuff!” ; “they’ll hurt your children!” ; “they’ll treat you like Hitler treated people!” ; etc. They must make the “others” appear to be monsters, so that the people in your group will have no empathy or mutual love for them. Thus, we see comparisons being made of people and groups to such extremes as Hitler and the “devil,” or any other ultimate form of evil.

Whatever the ploy, they need you to set your mind on the flesh, not the Spirit, so that you will not be tempered by love and empathy in your attitude to the other group. If they succeed, they have weaponized you to spread hate and violence. Increasingly, we’ve all heard people saying, “There’s no such thing as a good ___!” (input lawyer, cop, politician, white person, black person, Republican, Democrat, etc—any group but your own).

How did we get here? Well, in our contemporary cultural mind, is there any room for you to empathize with or love absolute evil? Can you love Hitler? No. Can Hitler be redeemed? No. There is only room to defeat and destroy him, for he is irredeemable—an embodiment of evil. By drawing these sorts of comparisons, they are saying everyone in an opposing group is irredeemable, only worthy of being destroyed. And so, we bite and devour one another. This is fundamental paganism.

In this new scheme, the opposition is “evil” and there can be no good in them—the opposition deserves whatever it gets, because they are “Nazis,” “monsters,” and “the very demons from hell!” It is ironic that this is how Stalin and Hitler rose to power in the first place—by demonizing the “opposition” and then enticing the people they had weaponized through the lusts of the flesh. This is not the mind of God but that of demons!

These advocates have become very loud and violent in our culture. They’re openly advocating for a return to racism, sexism, and slavery of opposing groups—opposing Galatians 3:28, which tells us that God does not see people in groups of race, sex, or class (or blood).

PAGAN TRIUMPH, FOR AN HOUR

Scripture tells us in prophecy that they will succeed eventually, for there is coming a time

when the kings of the earth will conspire to throw off the restraint of God’s Spirit upon the world—the fetters and cords of God and His Anointed that keep the world from a “vain thing” they imagine: *“Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, ‘Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!’”* (Psalm 2:1-3)

The rulers of the earth have seen the light of Christ and heard the mind of God, but they want to throw off the restraint of the Spirit, so they can do the evil that they want to do. And there is a ruler coming who will do just that—the beast—the antichrist: *“And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way”* (2 Thessalonians 2:6-7). This will be the time when mankind’s unrestrained nature will supersede even the evil of pagan days, for they will have rejected the light after having seen it. While the ancient pagans did not have the mind of God, the modern occult knows what God expects, and they are still going to reject Him. How dark that darkness will be!

But the antichrist’s reign of darkness will be short, for Jesus will return to earth as a conquering King and will end this rebellion against God. Jesus will set up His eternal Kingdom and will rule the world from Jerusalem. *“He will delight in the fear of the Lord, And He will not judge by what His eyes see, Nor make a decision by what His ears hear”* (Isaiah 11:3), for *“the Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord”* (Isaiah 11:2)—the mind of God! What a blessed day that will be for the whole world!

Praise God that we have the mind of Christ dwelling in us today, through the Holy Spirit. May we be grateful to God for that beautiful gift of life and light through Jesus Christ our Lord! May we act out our faith to our neighbors—be they black or white, man or woman, near or far, friend or foe.

May we *“bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ”* (Galatians 6:2). Even so, Amen.

Facing the Darkness

By Ginny Larsen

“Jesus said to him, ‘Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ Peter said to Him, ‘Even if I must die with You, I will not deny You!’ And all the disciples said the same.”

(Matthew 26:34-35 ESV)

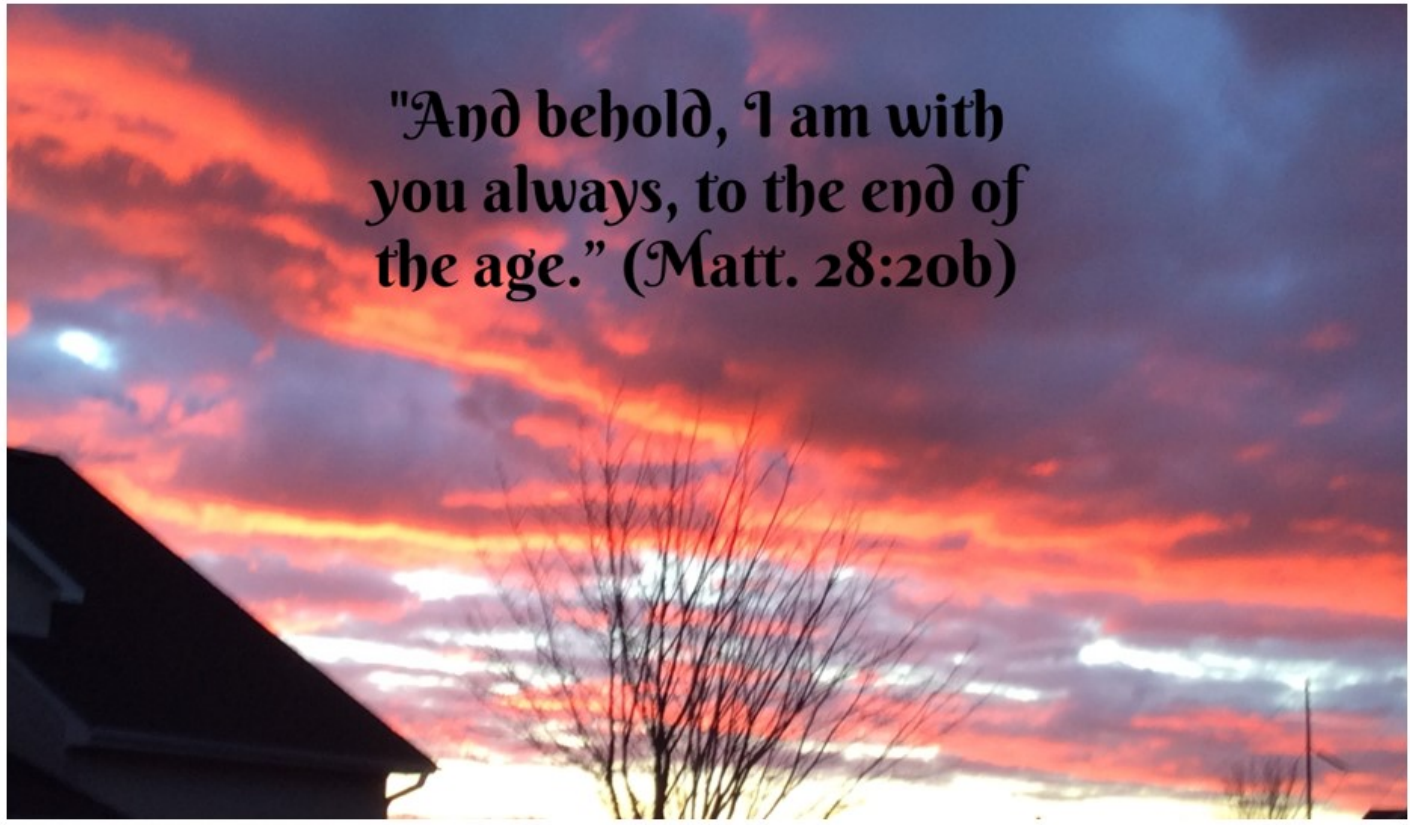
“And taking with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, He began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then He said to them, ‘My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with Me.’ And going a little farther He fell on His face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.’” (Matthew 26:37-39)

Jesus knew sorrow and grief that I don't think we can fully grasp. He knew pain and suffering (Isaiah 53:3-11) and knows how to share in ours. He knew, as man, what it was like to face the worst kind of evil. He knew

the powers of darkness that were about to come against Him and the unspeakable agony He was about to face as He took on our sins, even *“becoming a curse”* for us (Galatians 3:13) — He Who knew no sin, so that we might become *“the righteousness of God”* in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Even Jesus, being both God and man, knew the weakness of human flesh and that there was no power in the flesh alone, no matter the strength of the human will to do right. No matter the determination to stand, He knew only dependence on the power of God would enable us in the frailty of our flesh to stand against the evil and darkness of this world. A concept very difficult for us to understand is that Jesus was both fully God and fully man. I don't think I completely understand all that that means, but what struck me about this portion of Scripture is the sorrow of His soul, knowing that He, being God, would take on something so repulsive to Him, so unbearable—something that was repulsive to the Father and would cause the Father to turn His face from Him as man (Matthew 27:46).

Thomas Constable (Expository Notes of Dr. Constable) writes: “Jesus cried out the words



“And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:20b)

of Psalm 22:1 because His Father was abandoning Him. It was out of a similar sense of abandonment that David originally wrote the words of this psalm.

“Separation from the Father must have been the worst part of the Cross for Jesus who had never before experienced anything but intimate fellowship with His Father. Jesus became the center of God’s judgment on mankind’s sin (cf. Romans 3:21-26; 2 Colossians 5:21).”

This was so grievous and caused so much sorrow *“even to the point of death”* for our Savior. He cried out, *“If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.”* If there were any other way at all to obtain our salvation, surely the Father would not have sent His only begotten Son to the cross. If there was some way we could earn it ourselves, if there was some other sacrifice that would do it, or if there was any other remedy at all for our sin, Jesus would not have died for us. And so, He prayed, *“Not my will but Yours be done.”*

Peter was fully determined to go as far as to die for His Lord. His spirit was willing—even boldly determined! But Jesus knew the flesh. He knew, even He, the Son of God, though in the form of human flesh, must fully depend on the Father, on the power of the Spirit to overcome the flesh. *“Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak”* (Matthew 26:41).

Having a willing spirit is not enough to face the darkness and evil in this world. No matter how determined we are to stand against evil, it is not enough. We must learn to know our own flesh and see it for what it is. Once we do, we will never again trust it.

Thomas Constable (Expository Notes of Dr. Constable) states: “The contrast between the flesh and the spirit is not between the sinful human nature and the Holy Spirit (as in Galatians 5:17) but between man’s volitional strength and his physical weakness (cf. Matthew 26:35). We often want to do the right thing but find that we need supernatural assistance to accomplish it (cf. Romans 7:15-25).”

In a day when we are facing the darkness of human depravity, as we see it seeming to abound more and more and seeking to overcome all that is of God and all that is good in our world, how much we need to think on this portion of Scripture. What a blessing it is to

meditate on what our Lord endured, how much He loved us, and the sorrow and grief He bore for us. And what a sober reminder that if the Son of God Himself walked in such utter dependence on the Father, how much more do we? How little we should trust ourselves or put any hope in our own strength—our own determination or will power. It is never our willpower or faith in our faith that will keep us in the hour of trial. It is only our being *“strengthened in the power of His might”* (Ephesians 6:10-11) and dependence and trust in His provision, His promise, and His power indwelling us. Our will, our faith, our hope may all fail us in the darkest hour, but He will never fail us. Christ alone is the strength of our salvation and the strength of our hearts. We must look to Him and never trust in ourselves, neither for obtaining salvation nor to keep ourselves as we face the darkness (1 Peter 1:5).



Inclusio in Matthew

By Neal Mattison

My purpose is not to teach from some text in the Gospel of Matthew but rather to explain a literary device that will help one to better interpret Matthew where this device is present. I will use the Book of Matthew to illustrate this concept. Once aware of this device, when it is observed in this and other books of the Bible, it will help one to better interpret that book in light of the author's meaning.

This literary device is only one of many which authors use to help their readers properly interpret their writing(s). The device I am referring to is called an "inclusio." That is, a section that begins and ends with the same meaning. Sometimes it is referred to as "bookends." The opening sentence or paragraph usually contains the same wording as the ending sentence or paragraph. While this device does not always appear as the first and last sentence, they are somewhere close to the beginning and end. Authors use this device to key in their readers that what follows in between has to do with what was explained through both bookends. Now, let's go to Matthew to see how he uses an inclusio.

Matthew 1:23 reads, "*BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL, which translated means, 'GOD WITH US'*" (NASB). Now if we flip to the very last two verses of Matthew 28:19-20 we read, "*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*" Do you see Matthew's connection in the bookends? "*God with us*" in the first reference and "*I [Jesus] am with you*" in the last verse. So, we can conclude Matthew's book will have to do with what it will look and sound like to have God among humanity in the first century. If God came to the earth what would it be like? Read Matthew's Gospel and find out! It becomes very clear that Matthew wanted his readers to conclude Jesus is God and He will be with you if you are His follower! At the very close of the book, Matthew

wants his readers to know that when God (Jesus) calls a person to Himself and commissions them that **He** will go with them. The wisdom, power, and presence that God gave to His people (Josh. 1:5), prophets (Jer.1:8), and Apostles (Matt. 28:19-20) He will also give to us. By application, one could run this concept through the Scriptures and see how extensive it is, memorize them, and live by the promises He gives so one does not live by their own strength but by God's!

Now with that in mind, let's look at another example in Matthew that falls within that framework (God among His people). The first text is Matt. 4:23: "*Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.*" And the second is 9:35: "*Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.*" The texts are so close, they are almost verbatim because Matthew doesn't want us to miss that when God stepped to earth among men in the first century He was seen and heard by man! He was teaching/proclaiming the Gospel of the kingdom and healing every kind of disease. Now when you look closely at the text between these two bookends, you see these two subjects—in chapter 5-7, Jesus is proclaiming the Gospel of the kingdom and in chapter 8-9 He is healing various diseases. In this section then Matthew reveals what happens when God comes to earth, we hear the wisdom of God, and we see the power of God in the man Jesus Christ.

There is another inclusio found in 5:3 and 5:10: "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*"; "*Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" Look closely, what do both verses contain that are the same? Both contain, "blessed" and "the kingdom of heaven." If you read the verses in-between verse three and ten, all contain "blessed" but only verse three and ten contain the words "the kingdom of heaven." Therefore, the inclusio is indicating that **all** the virtues which God produces in His disciples demonstrate they belong to the kingdom of heaven. These verses contain no com-

mandments to be obeyed (they are not imperatives) — rather, they are declarations of the King to His earthly subjects who are promised nothing less than the King Himself in the age to come! So when God comes to earth as a man and calls a people to Himself, He produces these qualities which testify God is among them—they alone are truly blessed and are a part of God’s kingdom yet on earth. Do you see how this little section fits with the two larger inclusios?

I see another inclusio in the section of Matthew 5. The first bookend is in verse 20: *“For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven,”* and the last is in verse 48: *“Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* Now while the sayings are not very close in wording, the meaning is. To have your righteousness exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees (the most “holy” group of people in Christ’s day) is to be “perfect.” That is, as God is with you, as a follower of Christ, your life does not merely outwardly conform to the moral requirements of the law but you also live out the greater implications of the law from the

heart. It is not just an outward *“thou shall not murder”* (5:21) but also you are not angry with hatred in your heart toward your brother, issuing verbal words of contempt or scorn (5:22). Not only do you not physically commit adultery (5:27) but by implication, you do not *“lust in your heart,”* thereby violating the greater extent of the law—and so forth, as Jesus continues to expound that His followers must have more than just an outward conformity to the law (as the Scribes and Pharisees) but an inward disposition that carries out the greater implications of the law. This is what it means to be “perfect” or have *“your righteousness exceed that of the Pharisees.”*

Another much more subtle “inclusio” occurs in the genealogy of Matthew which is easy to miss unless we read very carefully the names of the women. The only time women are mentioned in the genealogy, they are introduced by the phrase *“by Tamar”* (1:3), *“by Rahab”* (1:5), *“by Ruth”* (1:5), and *“by her [who had been the wife—Bathsheba] of Uriah [or NIV’s, “whose mother was”].”* By this, Matthew is signaling them out for special attention. We ought to ask why He is doing this. To answer that question, we must review our



“Truly this was the son of God!”
(Matthew 27:54b)

history of what these four women have in common. They were all **non-Jews**: Tamar, a Canaanite (Gen. 38:2, 6, 11, 13), was denied Judah's son Shelah who was to raise up offspring to fulfill his levirate marriage obligations. While Er (38:7), Onan (38:8), and Judah (38:11) show total disregard for the promises given to Abraham, Tamar the Canaanite conceives (pun intended) a risky plan to "*propagate descendants of Abraham.*" Thus, "through her determination to have children, [she] secured for Judah the honor of fathering both David and the Savior of the world" (Wenham, p.365, 370, Word Biblical Commentary-Genesis). Rahab, the harlot of Jericho (Joshua 2:1), also receives honorable mention in the "*hall of faith*" (Heb.11:31). Ruth was a Moabitess (Ruth 1:4). Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:3) was the wife of Uriah the Hittite, the nation which was to be destroyed (Deut. 7:1, Joshua 1:4).

"In each case there were at least suspicions of some form of marital irregularity. [These four women] form an impressive precedent for Jesus' birth of an unmarried mother from an obscure background" (R.T. France, p.79, Matthew commentary). Why the mention of these four "Gentile" women when Matthew could have left them out? The answer becomes clearer when we see Matthew quote Jesus' great commission is to "**all the nations**" [ETHNE—the Greek term for "Gentiles"] (Matt.28:19) — not just Israel but the Gentiles as well. So, Matthew uses the bookends of Gentiles (the four non-Jewish women in the genealogy) in the beginning of the book and the word "all nations" (Gentiles) as the other bookend. R.T. France rightfully concludes this theme in Matthew as the final bookend when he states, "This then is the culmination of the theme we have noted throughout the Gospel, the calling of a people of God far wider than that of the Old Testament, in which membership is based not on race but on a relationship with God through His Messiah" (p.420).

So, when we look between the bookends in Matthew, what do we see? Astrologers from the east (2:1) who worshipped Jesus (2:11). Jesus comes to reside in "*Galilee of the Gentiles,*" fulfilling what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet (4:14-15). A **Gentile** centurion's servant is healed and Jesus marvels that

this man has greater faith than anyone in Israel (8:5-12). Jesus enters the **Gentile** country of the Gardarenes and casts out the demons of two men (28-34). Matthew quotes Isaiah as being fulfilled, listing the following: "*He shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles*" and "*in his name the Gentiles will hope*" (12:18, 21). He mentions the despised **pagan** city of Nineveh repenting and condemning this generation and the **Queen of the south** doing the same (12:41-42). He healed the **Canaanite** woman's daughter being demon possessed (15:21-28). He is the only Gospel writer to use the word "**church**" to describe His followers, which is later revealed to consist of Jews AND **Gentiles** (16:18, 18:17). Matthew records Jesus saying, "*This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come*" (24:14). "*And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other*" (24:31). "*Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her*" (26:13). Matthew records the testimony of the **Gentile** centurion: "*Truly this was the son of God*" (27:54). We know that we have interpreted Matthew's inclusions correctly because with just a sample of verses we can see they indeed support one of his major themes — Matthew sees Jesus as the fulfillment of the promises to the Jews now being extended to the Gentiles. Reading what is in-between the bookends will either confirm or deny we have interpreted the author correctly without trying to force what we read into a questionable inclusion interpretation.

Finally, see if you can identify the inclusion and the authors' theme and better interpret the authors' meaning in the following texts: Romans, Psalm 8, 103, 104, 113, 135, 145, 147, 148, 149, and this text. While this literary device is not prominent in the Bible and is only one of many, it does occur and if we would be Bereans, we must be aware of how authors in the first century used commonly accepted literary devices if we would properly interpret and live by God's inspired Word.

Matthew's Genealogy of Christ

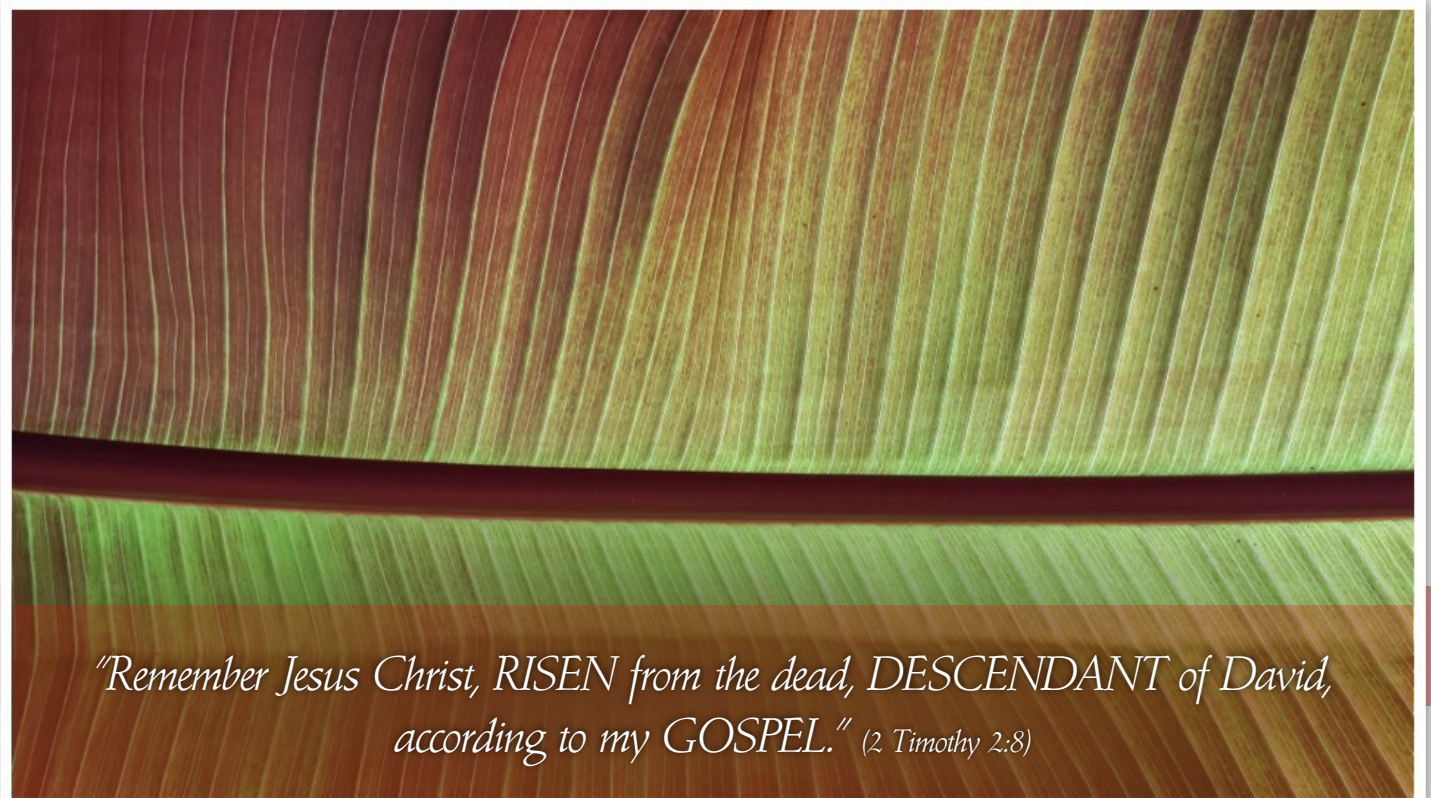
By Jane Titrud

The purpose of Matthew's Gospel is to present Jesus as the ultimate King of the Jews and their long-awaited Messiah. He boldly starts out by referring to Him as "*Jesus Christ*" (Matthew 1:1 NASB) — the term "Christ" meaning "the anointed one" — and then proceeds to show that this title is warranted.

Of primary importance in Matthew's mind is the need to establish the fact that Jesus had at least a right to be king. Thus, he begins by describing Jesus' ancestral relationship to both David and Abraham. Anyone claiming to be the Messiah would have to be a descendant of both. Yet, David had many descendants who would likewise have been descendants of Abraham simply because David himself was also his descendant. What makes Jesus different is that Matthew describes Him not only as a son but as "*the son of David*" and "*the son of Abraham*" (Matthew 1:1). This goes beyond mere descent. It has to do with fulfilling some special promises God made to these two

individuals. These in turn relate to the two greatest covenants in the Old Testament that pertain to Israel and would have to be fulfilled by anyone claiming to be Israel's true Messiah.

Matthew's list of ancestors begins with Abraham and works forward. Genesis records God promising to Abraham that "*in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*" (Genesis 12:3). Then again, after Abraham obediently went through the motions of offering up his only son Isaac, God once again confirmed: "*Indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies, And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice*" (Genesis 22:17-18). Indeed, Isaac was a type of Christ Whom God appointed to die for the sins of the world. Thus, Jesus Christ did become a special blessing to the entire world when He died on the cross and not just to Israel. Moreover, this is right in line with the Great Commission in which Jesus instructed His followers after His resurrection to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19).



"Remember Jesus Christ, RISEN from the dead, DESCENDANT of David, according to my GOSPEL." (2 Timothy 2:8)

By Maria Madsen

Matthew's list then proceeds to David the king (Matthew 1:6). David was devoted to the Lord, but he was also a warrior who had shed much blood. So, when he thought to build a house for God, God spoke through the prophet Nathan telling him that he would not be the one to build Him a house. Instead, God would make a house for him (2 Samuel 7:11). He went on to say that *"when your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever...And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever"* (2 Samuel 7:12-13; 16). This prophesy was partially fulfilled by Solomon, but it would not be completely fulfilled until the coming of the Messiah. The Messiah would be the only One capable of establishing an everlasting kingdom in that He alone would be eternal.

So far, the lineage presented in Matthew appears to show a direct line of descent from Abraham to David and then goes on to include Joseph (Matthew 1:6-16). This latter grouping shows some 14 generations from the time of David to the deportation to Babylon and then another 14 generations to the time of Christ (v. 17). Yet, there may well be some generations not recorded here for the sake of easier memorization. The generations compiled in Luke 3:23-38, for example, show some 15 more names between the time of David and the birth of Jesus. But the most important thing to realize for now is that the genealogical list in Matthew does not reflect the blood line of Jesus. Instead, it represents the case for Jesus's *legal* right to assume the throne of David. Joseph was not the true father of Jesus for Mary was a virgin when she was found to be with child (Matthew 1:18-25). Joseph merely became His stepfather. That is the reason Matthew refers to him as *"the husband of Mary, by whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ"* (1:16). However, the fact that Joseph was only His legal father would still have given Jesus the *legal* right to sit on the throne of David.

However, Jeconiah's inclusion in this line of ancestry would seem to challenge any legal claim to the throne that passed through him (Matthew 1:12). Jeconiah, also known as Je-

hoiachin, was an evil king who ruled over Judah shortly before its deportation to Babylon. At the time, Jeremiah prophesied over Jeconiah saying that none of his descendants would ever reign as king on the throne of David again: *"'As I live,' declares the Lord, 'even though Coniah [a shortened form of the name Jeconiah] the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were a signet ring on My right hand, yet I would pull you off' ... Thus says the Lord, 'Write this man down childless, A man who will not prosper in his days; For no man of his descendants will prosper Sitting on the throne of David or ruling again in Judah'"* (Jeremiah 22:24, 30). Indeed, none of his sons ever reigned as king over Judah. The king of Babylon made his uncle Zedekiah king instead, and he was the last of the Jews to rule as king in Judah (2 Kings 24:17).

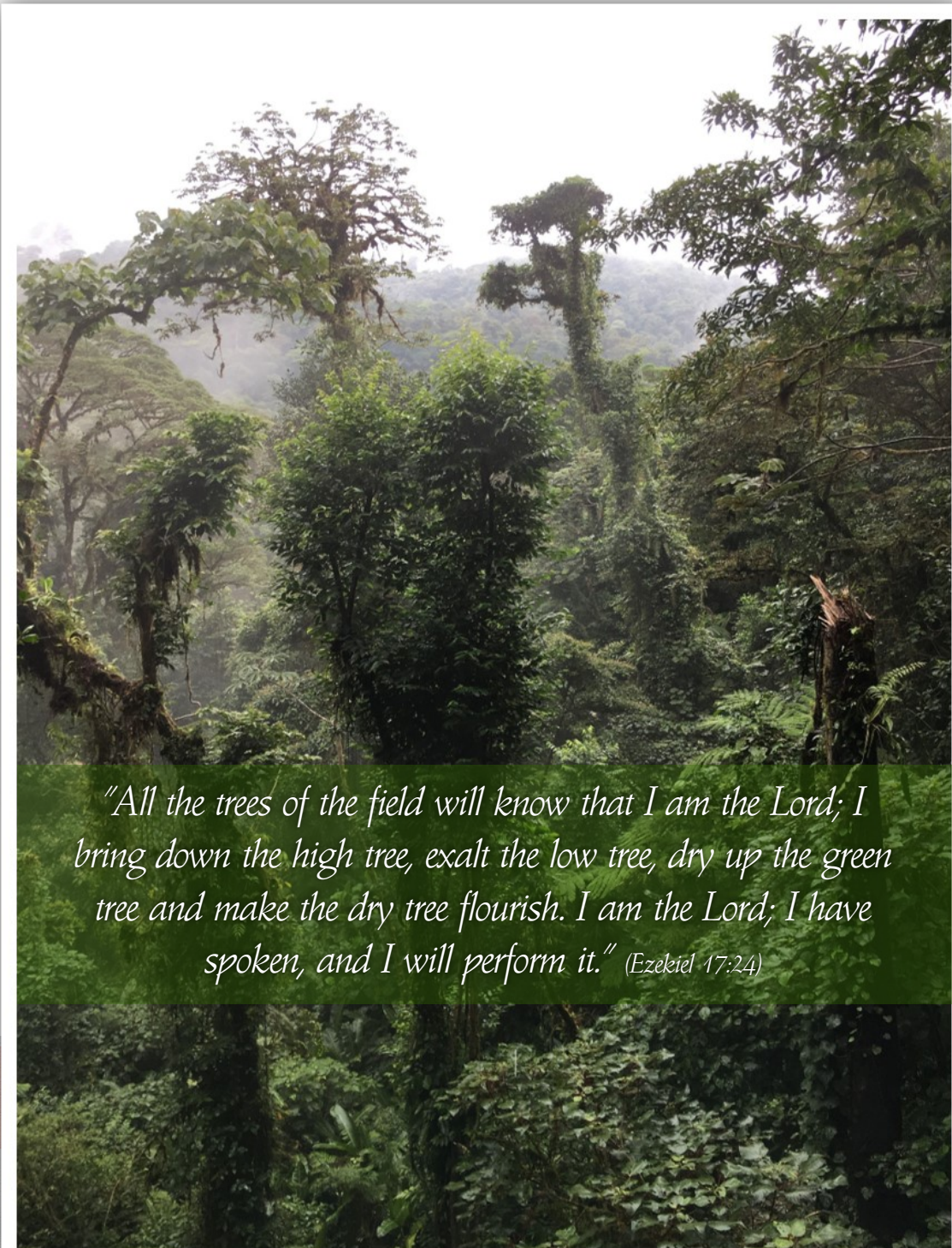
Sometime after the deportation of the Jews to Babylon, Jeconiah's grandson Zerubbabel returned to Judah, served as governor over the land, and helped to rebuild the temple. He was not made king, but he was of kingly descent and allowed to serve as a leader over Judah. He was also held in high regard for his accomplishments. God even prophesied through Haggai that He would someday overthrow all the kingdoms that had come against Israel and honor Zerubbabel in the process. *"'On that day,' declares the Lord of hosts, 'I will take you, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, my servant,' declares the Lord, 'and I will make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you,' declares the Lord of hosts"* (Haggai 2:23). Yet, this does not mean that the curse against Jeconiah was thereby negated. Instead, people look to the line of descent found in Luke 3 and try to resolve the problem within the physical lineage of Jesus rather than the legal line of descent recorded in Matthew.

The genealogical record found in Luke 3:23-38 supposedly solves the problem with respect to Jeconiah by tracing Jesus' blood-line connection to David back through David's other son Nathan rather than Solomon. This is thought to involve the ancestral line of Jesus' physical mother Mary while it avoids any legal connection with Jeconiah at the same time. True, the name Jeconiah is not even mentioned here. The names Shealtiel and Zerubbabel do, however, both appear in this record (Luke 3:27) as well as in Matthew 1, and this would

seem problematic.

Some believe that God's promise to make Zerubbabel like a signet ring refers to his inclusion in both lines of Jesus' descent as the lines appear to come together in the person of Zerubbabel as well as in the person of David. The convergence and divergence of ancestors

around these two points seem to make a circle when the two records are viewed side by side, which supposedly generates the appearance of a signet ring. The trouble, however, is that this interpretation of the data provides no real solution to the problem with respect to the curse on Jeconiah and his descendants but rather accen-



"All the trees of the field will know that I am the Lord; I bring down the high tree, exalt the low tree, dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will perform it." (Ezekiel 17:24)

By Patty Buswell

tuates it. For it appears to make what God intended as a blessing for Zerubbabel into something that once again ultimately disqualifies Jesus from being both king and Messiah.

It is, however, possible that the Shealtiel and Zerubbabel recorded in these two genealogical accounts are entirely different people. After all, Shealtiel is usually listed as the son of Jeconiah in the Scriptures, whereas the Shealtiel listed in Luke is called the son of Neri (Luke 3:27). Some have suggested that Neri was merely the father-in-law of Shealtiel. Yet, the fact that a daughter of Neri married into the family line of Jeconiah would not solve the problem that the descendants of such a union would still carry on the curse of Jeconiah. One cannot ignore the genealogy of the husband in such a case. And, to throw an additional confusing detail into the mix, 1 Chronicles 3:19 lists Zerubbabel as a son of Pedaiah instead of Shealtiel. Is this yet another man with the same name?

There are differing opinions about how to resolve this confusing situation, and we may never know the answer for certain. God's Word does not lie, nor is it in error. Yet, sometimes it contains details that we do not fully understand. The only thing that does seem to work for now is if these two genealogical lines of descent ultimately incorporate different people with the same names. Many commentaries take this position.

Something I have also come to appreciate is that most commentaries I consulted in connection with this subject do not use the genealogy of Matthew and Luke to explain the prophecy of the signet ring. Instead, they take the signet ring more as a symbol of authority and see Zerubbabel as a type of Christ. After all, signet rings were used by leaders and officials in the day to sign important documents and provide an official seal of authority. And, as for the kingdoms of the world mentioned in the prophecy, these will not be put down until the end of the age when this will finally be accomplished by the return of Christ. Therefore, Zerubbabel was likely not the one who God ultimately had in mind when it came to this prophecy. Zerubbabel was merely a type of Christ. The coming Christ is the true signet ring of God the Father. This means there is no need to equate the Zerubbabel in Luke's line of descent to the same man in Matthew's line of

descent just for the sake of this prophecy.

The important things to take away from all of this are, first, that Matthew's genealogy verifies Jesus' legal right to assume the throne of David through the line of Joseph. At the same time, the fact that Joseph was not Jesus' physical father rendered Him free from the curse of Jeconiah. There is no necessary reason to believe that the physical lineage of Christ through Mary must involve this curse either. Jesus was a physical descendant of David but through the line of Nathan rather than Solomon. Moreover, the eternal nature of Jesus Christ means that He can establish David's kingdom forever, just as promised. And, finally, as *the* son of Abraham, He has a unique relationship with the people of Israel, but He has also come to be a blessing to the whole world. Amen, Lord Jesus!



July-September Newsletter Theme

THE BOOK OF EXODUS

Submission Deadline: July 28

Publish Date: August 6

Themes to think about in the Book of Exodus:

How did Israel end up in Egypt? Was this part of God's plan?

How did the first Passover foreshadow God's eternal plan of Salvation?

Why did God force the generation that left Egypt to wander the desert for 40 years? What does the New Testament say about this?

How do the plagues that God sent upon Egypt relate to the worldwide plagues of Revelation?

What does "Egypt" mean in Scripture?

Do a study on Moses' character. Why did God choose him? Would he have been the choice of men?

What does the New Testament say about Mount Sinai?

What do we learn about human nature from Israel in Exodus?

Israel had proof of God's power and miraculous acts on their behalf. Did this make them believe and trust in God? If God proved He existed to the world, would they all worship Him?

How did Moses intercede for Israel?

What was the tabernacle and how does it relate to Believers in the New Testament?