



Volume V

By

Mark McGee

Chapter Forty

God did not speak to Israel for 400 years between the time of the prophet Malachi and the prophet John the Baptist. What happened to Judah and the lineage of the promised Seed during that time? Did the Seed ever appear? If so, when and how? What happened when the Seed appeared? When will a king from the lineage of David sit again on the throne of David?

Those are some of the questions we'll address in the next several parts of our series.

Silence

Malachi prophesied during the 5th century BC, possibly after the time that Ezra and Nehemiah were leaders in Israel. We know from what we read in Ezra 10 that the Jews responded to God's Word and put away their pagan wives. We know from what we read in Nehemiah 13 that Nehemiah instituted many godly reforms in Judah. However, what God told Malachi to prophesy to Israel was not positive, though it was hopeful.

God called the offerings the people made to Him 'defiled,' 'profaned,' and 'blemished.' That sounds nothing like what we read at the end of Ezra and Nehemiah's ministries in Judah. According to Malachi's prophecy the priests had become corrupt because of the worship of 'a foreign god.'

Judah has dealt treacherously, And an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem, For Judah has profaned The Lord's holy institution which He loves: He has married the daughter of a foreign god. May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob The man who does this, being awake and aware, Yet who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts! Malachi 2:11-12

The 'hopeful' part of Malachi's prophecy comes in chapter 3

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Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,' Says the Lord of hosts. Malachi 3:1

A 'messenger' would precede the 'Messenger of the covenant' to prepare the way before God. However, as hopeful as that sounds, the coming of the 'Messenger' would not be easy for Israel –

But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire And like launderers' soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the Lord An offering in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem Will be pleasant to the Lord, As in the days of old, As in former years. And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness Against sorcerers, Against adulterers, Against perjurers, Against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, And against those who turn away an alien – Because they do not fear Me," Says the Lord of hosts. Malachi 3:2-5

The 'hope' is that God would send His 'Messenger,' but His coming would not be easy for Israel. Imagine being a member of Israel from the end of the 5th century BC and these are the last words you read from a true prophet of God. This is the last thing your God tells you before He goes 'silent' for hundreds of years –

For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,' Says the Lord of hosts, 'That will leave them neither root nor branch. But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings; And you shall go out And grow fat like stall-fed calves. You shall trample the wicked, For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet On the day that I do this,' Says the Lord of hosts. 'Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, With the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the

children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.’ Malachi 4:1-6

This is where the Old Testament prophecies end. There is a promise of ‘The Sun of Righteousness’ who would ‘arise With healing in His wings,’ but when would that happen? When would God ‘save’ Israel?

Israel During God's Silence

God did not talk to His people for more than 400 years, but that doesn't mean the people of Israel stopped living. We know something about how Israel lived because of the Apocryphal writings. One of the most important to understanding Jewish history during that period is 1 Maccabees. Several times in the book we read that the people were going about their lives waiting for a prophet of God to come along and show them what to do. The prophet never came. These are the only verses in 1 Maccabees that mention a prophet.

They thought it best to pull it down, lest it should be a reproach to them, because the heathen had defiled it: wherefore they pulled it down, And laid up the stones in the mountain of the temple in a convenient place, until there should come a prophet to shew what should be done with them. 1 Maccabees 4:45-46

So was there a great affliction in Israel, the like whereof was not since the time that a prophet was not seen among them. 1 Maccabees 9:27

Also that the Jews and priests were well pleased that Simon should be their governor and high priest for ever, until there should arise a faithful prophet. 1 Maccabees 14:41

Also, the name of God is used only a few times in 1 Maccabees and never in relation to His speaking to anyone. This is important. God spoke hundreds of times in the Old Testament and usually through prophets. Where are the prophets in 1 Maccabees? Where is God guiding His people by Voice? He was silent and 1 Maccabees is proof of that.

The reason I mention this is that many scholars believe 1 Maccabees is the most important historical writing in the Apocrypha. It details the Jewish revolt against the Seleucid Empire, which was established by one of the leading army officers who served under Alexander the Great (Seleucus I Nicator) during the 4th century BC. At its height, the Seleucid Empire included much of Mesopotamia, Persia, Central Asia, Asia Minor, and the Middle East. However, by the early to middle part of the 2nd century BC, the Seleucid “empire” had lost much of the eastern part of the empire to the Parthians. The Seleucids did continue to control parts of its western areas, including Syria and Judea, but the empire was unstable. That instability gave a small army of Jews the opportunity to take control of Judea.

Three religious groups formed during this time in Israel’s history: Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. The Sadducees came from the wealthy and priestly families and supported the Hasmoneans. The Hasidim were opposed to the Sadducees. The Pharisees and Essenes came from the Hasidim. The Pharisees believed in strict adherence to the Mosaic Law, but continued to live within Jewish society. The

Essenes were so opposed to the Hasmoneans that they lived apart from society in desert communities. The Sadducees and Pharisees were the primary religious groups that Jesus Christ dealt with during the early part of the 1st century AD.

As for 2 Maccabees – 2 Maccabees deals with a short period of time in the history of Jewish revolt against the Seleucids, specifically 180 – 161 BC. The name of the author of 2 Maccabees is not known, though the writer states it is based on the five volumes written by Jason of Cyrene (2 Maccabees 2:23). Jason's larger document has not been discovered, so there is no way to compare 2 Maccabees to what Jason of Cyrene may have written. There is also no way to confirm that Jason of Cyrene was a prophet through whom God spoke His Word. Jesus and His Apostles did not mention Jason nor quote from his writings. They also did not mention nor quote from 2 Maccabees in the New Testament.

God did not speak to Israel during the Silent Period (also know as the Intertestamental Period) because He had already spoken clearly to Israel for centuries. The people of Israel needed to obey the prophets God had already sent to them. They had the words of the prophets in their Bible. All they had to do was read Malachi to see what God expected and promised. They had Isaiah, and Micah, and Zechariah, and Ezekiel, and Daniel, and Zephaniah, etc. The people had all the Words of God they needed. They just had to do what God told them to do – they needed to be obedient to His revealed Word.

Chapter Forty-One

The Christian Bible is divided into two major parts: Old Testament and New Testament. The Greek word for 'testament' is διαθήκη (diathéké) and means 'a covenant, a will.' The idea of the word is of a covenant or agreement between two parties.

The 'Old' Testament ends with Malachi 4:6 - "And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."

Turn the page and you'll read this –

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.

Do these two verses connect in some way? If so, how and what does it mean in our 'training to reign?'

The Connection

The connection for Christians is simple – Jesus Christ is the ‘Seed’ who God promised Abraham almost four thousand years ago. The genealogy shows that the physical lineage of Jesus is through the tribe of Judah, through King David, through King Solomon, through all the kings of Judah, through Zerubbabel (the son of Shealtiel) who brought the children of Israel out of captivity in Babylon back to Judah to rebuild the Temple and Jerusalem, through ancestors living during the Silent Years, to “Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ.” The genealogy of Matthew 1 is important because it clearly shows Jesus’ lineage from Abraham to Joseph. It is a royal lineage that would be expected of someone who would become Israel’s King.

Another important lineage for Jesus Christ is found in Luke 3. Remember that God's promise of the 'Seed' of the woman who would destroy the 'seed' of the serpent was made to Eve, the wife of Adam – “the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God” (Luke 3:28). It is a human lineage that would be expected of someone who would be the 'Seed' of the woman.

Matthew 1 and Luke 3 are evidence that Jesus of Nazareth, born to a virgin, will be both Israel's next King and the Seed who will destroy the serpent's seed.

Then the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end. Luke 1:30-33

The Preparation

Malachi prophesied about an event centuries before it occurred. He wrote –

Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,' Says the Lord of hosts. Malachi 3:1

Malachi said that God would send His ‘messenger’ (מַלְאָךְ – malak) to prepare the way before God – not a man. God spoke and said that His messenger would prepare the way before “Me.” The ‘Me’ in that context points back to the source of the prophecy – God.

Here's more evidence. The 'Lord, whom you seek,' would suddenly come to His temple. It's important that we note the 'messenger' would prepare the way before the Lord (יְהוָה – adon – masculine noun singular). The term 'Lord' is another word for God and it is consistent within the context of Malachi 3:1.

We also need to look at a prophecy of Isaiah written many years before Malachi prophesied –

The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough places smooth; The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see it together; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.
Isaiah 40:3-5

Jewish people have been waiting for thousands of years for these prophecies to be fulfilled, but Christians believe they've already been fulfilled. Here's why –

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!' For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.' Matthew 3:1-3

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the Prophets: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.' 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.'

Mark 1:1-3

Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias

tetrarch of Abilene, while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight

And the rough ways smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.' Luke 3:1-16

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world ... Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, 'I am

not the Christ.’ And they asked him, ‘What then? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you the Prophet?’ And he answered, ‘No.’ Then they said to him, ‘Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?’ He said: ‘I am ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ ‘as the prophet Isaiah said.’ Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees. And they asked him, saying, ‘Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?’ John answered them, saying, ‘I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.’ These things were done in Bethabara beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing. The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.’ John 1:6-9, 19-30

John the Baptist was older than Jesus of Nazareth by several months, but he said that Jesus ‘was before me.’ That’s because Jesus of Nazareth is the Eternal Son of God. He was ‘born’ miraculously to a virgin –

And the angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible.’

Luke 1:35-37

Elizabeth was the mother of John the Baptist. The angel Gabriel announced the birth of John to Elizabeth's husband Zecharias the priest –

But the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.' Luke 1:13-17

It is for these reasons that Christians believe John the Baptist was the ‘messenger’ who God sent to ‘prepare the way’ for Him (God) to appear in the Flesh as the ‘Messenger of the covenant.’ Jesus Christ is that Messenger and He brought with Him a ‘new covenant,’ which is why the New Testament is called ‘New.’

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, ‘This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.’ And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. John 1:14-18

Chapter Forty-Two

Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ (Anointed One), the Eternal Son of God who rules over the universe. He is also the promised future King of Israel who will sit on the throne of David. There has never been, nor will ever there ever be anyone in a better position to ‘train to reign.’ The angel who told Mary she would give birth to Jesus said this –

Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end. Luke 1:30-33

Wise men from the East came to Jerusalem searching for 'He who has been born King of the Jews' (Matthew 2:2). They knew some of the ancient prophecies concerning Messiah and had seen 'His star in the East' and had 'come to worship Him.'

Herod, who was a Roman proxy king in Israel, heard what the wise men were saying and took action to kill the Christ Child before He could become King. He ordered that all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from the age of two years old and under, were to be killed. However, an angel warned the wise men to return home on a different route, and also warned Joseph to flee to Egypt with Mary and Jesus. They remained in Egypt until the death of Herod, 'that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, 'Out of Egypt I called My Son' (Matthew 2:15). After Herod died, an angel told Joseph to return to Israel. Joseph heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, so Joseph did not return to Bethlehem. An angel warned him and he took his family 'into the region of Galilee.' They lived in Nazareth, 'that

it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, 'He shall be called a Nazarene' (Matthew 2:23).

Jesus' Training as a Child

Everything you read about Jesus as a child contains some insights into His training to reign. Let's remind ourselves about the five 'basic training' principles I chose for this series:

1. Believe in the Only True God (Monotheism)
2. Fear God and Obey Him
3. Worship God and Serve Him
4. Listen to God and Trust Him
5. Love God and Devote Your Life to Him

We've seen that Joseph and Mary's responses to angelic messages demonstrate their commitment to these basic principles. We also see how others responded to the birth of Jesus –

So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.' And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. Luke 2:15-17

And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom

of the law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: 'Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel.' Luke 2:25-32

Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. Luke 2:36-38

The next time we see Jesus is when He was twelve years old. He visited Jerusalem with his parents every year at the Feast of the Passover. However, this time was different. Instead of going home with them, He went to the Temple to converse with the 'teachers.' These learned men were 'astonished at His understanding and answers.' Jesus' parents went looking for Him and found Him in the Temple. Mary asked Jesus 'why have You done this to us?' Jesus answered, 'Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?' Jesus knew that He had work to do in the Temple and elsewhere in Israel to accomplish the work God had sent Him to do. Jesus went home with his parents and 'was subject to them.' Jesus 'increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men' (Luke 2:52).

Jesus' Training as a Man

We know that Jesus worked with His earthly 'step-father' as a carpenter (Mark 6:3). Jesus built things with His hands. He would later build His 'Church.' Lessons learned as a young person who is committed to the five 'basic training principles' are important for future ministry. Jesus demonstrated His obedience to God and to His parents, both important for Christian children and young people.

God sent His Son from Heaven to earth on a special 'Mission.' Jesus was determined to glorify His Father and finish the work He had sent Him to do (John 17:4). That's what we find Jesus doing as He approached John the Baptist. Jesus was Israel's rightful King, yet He demonstrated humility and obedience as He began His public ministry –

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?' But Jesus answered and said to him, 'Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he allowed Him. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' Matthew 3:13-17

John tried to prevent Jesus from being baptized because John's baptism symbolized 'repentance,' (Matthew 3:8) – something John did not believe Jesus needed to do (repent). John was correct that Jesus did not need to repent because He was sinless (spotless Lamb of God, John 1:29). However, Jesus said He wanted John to baptize Him 'to fulfill all righteousness.' Jesus 'identified' Himself with the sinners He would save by bearing their sins on the Cross. People would become 'righteous' through Christ Jesus.

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. 2 Corinthians 5:21

Jesus humbled Himself in every way we might imagine. He was born to a poor family. He grew up in a small and poor village. Though He was the Eternal Son of God, the rightful King of Israel, and the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world, Jesus humbled Himself to be baptized. Jesus set aside His position for the sake of saving lost people. He was obedient to the will of His Heavenly Father.

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Philippians 2:5-8

We know that God was pleased with Jesus because of what happened immediately following His baptism – ‘and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’

Jesus' Training in the Wilderness

Keep in mind that Jesus did not need to be 'trained to reign.' He is God. However, what Jesus did as a Man demonstrates many of the aspects of what we need to know to reign with Him. The Spirit of God immediately led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted (tested) by the devil. Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights. That is an amazing physical feat in itself, but what followed was even more difficult. The 'tempter' (devil) came to Jesus and began to tempt Him.

We are given three specific temptations in Matthew 4. Here are the temptations and the Lord's responses to those temptations. Keep in mind as you read this that Jesus had not eaten anything for forty days and forty nights –

Temptation #1

Tempter – ‘If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.’

Jesus – ‘It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’

Temptation #2

Tempter – ‘Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.’

Jesus – ‘It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’

Temptation #3

Tempter – ‘Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, ‘All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.’

Jesus – ‘Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’

The devil left Jesus and angels came and ministered to the Lord. Luke 4:13 reads, ‘Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.’ The devil was not finished with Jesus and would return later to cause more trouble.

What do we learn from this amazing scene of a physically weak Jesus facing the devil's temptations? We are not God, so what do we learn that might help us 'train to reign?' Notice that Jesus relied on God's Word for His responses to the devil's temptations. We see that than angelic host was waiting nearby to minister to Jesus' needs. Jesus could have easily called on them to attack the devil, but He didn't. He relied on, trusted in, God's Word in His response to the devil's temptations. That's important for us to learn as we 'train to reign.'

Our strength to reign with Christ will not come from our power, but from our reliance on and obedience to the Word of God.

Chapter Forty-Three

John the Baptist was the ‘voice crying in the wilderness’ and the ‘messenger’ who would prepare the way for the Lord (Isaiah 40; Malachi 3). Jews living in Israel in the early part of the 1st century AD had never seen a real prophet of God. They read about the prophets in their Bible who had lived centuries before, but it had been more than 400 years since one had walked in Judah (Malachi).

- It was John the Baptist who preached ‘repentance’ and called the people of Israel to return to their God.
- It was John the Baptist who called the religious leaders of Israel a ‘brood of vipers’ and called on them to ‘bear fruits worthy of repentance’ (Matthew 3).
- It was John the Baptist who told them that ‘He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry.’
- It was John the Baptist who said that, ‘He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.’ It was John the Baptist

who said that the One to come would have ‘His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.’

- It was John the Baptist who saw Jesus of Nazareth and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me’ (John 1).
- It was John the Baptist who baptized Jesus and testified that he ‘saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.’

It was also John the Baptist who later sent two of his disciples to Jesus to ask – ‘Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?’ (Matthew 11:2) Why would John do that? He knew that Jesus was the Messiah, the Lamb of God when he baptized Him, so why would he ask such a question of Jesus?

Answering John

John was in jail when he sent two of his disciples to question Jesus. John had rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of his relationship with his brother's wife, 'and for all the evils which Herod had done' (Luke 3:18-20). For that reason Herod had John the Baptist thrown into jail.

John's ministry was in a similar vein to the prophetic ministries of the Old Testament prophets. He was preparing the way for the Lord to come to Israel, rule it, and judge it. While John was still baptizing in the Jordan he had prophesied that every tree that did not bear good fruit would be cut down and thrown into the fire. John told the Pharisees and Sadducees that the One coming after him would be mightier than him. John said that He (Jesus Christ) would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. 'His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire' (Matthew 3:10-12).

John saw what many Jews saw when they read the prophetic writings in the Hebrew Bible. God would send the Messiah, the ‘Messenger of the covenant,’ suddenly come to His temple.

‘Behold, He is coming,’ Says the Lord of hosts. ‘But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire And like launderers’ soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the Lord An offering in righteousness. Malachi 3:1-3

What John was hearing from his disciples about Jesus’ ministry would not have sounded like Malachi’s prophecy. Jesus was not at the Temple in Jerusalem at the time. In fact, He was in Galilee which was far north of Jerusalem. Jesus was not judging or ruling as King of Israel. Instead, He was healing and teaching far from Jerusalem. John may have wondered if he had misunderstood or missed something in his own prophetic preaching, so he sent two of his disciples

to ask Jesus – ‘Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?’ Here’s how Jesus answered the question –

Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.’ Matthew 11:4-6

John would have recognized that from Isaiah and other prophets as also being part of Messiah’s ministry. Jesus quoted from Isaiah 61 at His home synagogue in Nazareth –

And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed;

To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. Luke
4:17-19

Complimenting John

John's question did not offend Jesus. In fact, Jesus complimented John the Baptist to the people following Him –

As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.' Matthew 11:7-10

Jesus supported John the Baptist and reminded people that he was the promised 'messenger' who God had sent to prepare the way of the Lord. Of course, Jesus is the Lord. Jesus is also King, which means there is a 'Kingdom.' Interestingly, Jesus said that 'he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.' What did Jesus mean by that?

Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear! Matthew 11:11-14

John was a 'greater' prophet because he 'prepared the way' for the Lord to come from Heaven to earth, met the King in person, and participated in the beginning of the King's earthly ministry. However, those who were the 'least' in the Kingdom of Heaven would be greater than John? Why? Because of what Jesus would do for those who would enter the Kingdom. He was going to demonstrate His superior power and glory through healing, preaching, teaching, dying, and rising.

Notice that Jesus said that – 'from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.' Luke wrote this –

The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it. Luke 16:16

The Jews who heard John the Baptist preach and later heard Jesus were ‘pressing’ (βιάζομαι, laying hold of with positive aggressiveness, forcing one’s way in) ‘into it.’ There was a sense of desperation on the part of 1st century Jews to see the promised Kingdom of God to come to Israel. The people were suffering greatly under Roman occupation and they were looking to the day when God would send salvation through the promised Messiah King. Many believed Jesus was the Messiah and wanted to use force to make Him King

—

Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, ‘This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.’ Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone. John 6:14-15

Jesus did not allow this to happen because it was not how He was going to begin His earthly reign. He knew the 'eternal plan' and His Father's will. The 'plan' was for Jesus to die on the Cross, rise from the dead, and return to Heaven to await the 'appointed time.' Jesus would not become King any other way.

Jesus referred to John the Baptist as – 'if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come.' This would be reminiscent to Jews of the last words God spoke to Malachi the prophet –

Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, With the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse. Malachi 4:4-6

Jews knew that Elijah was the great prophet who went to Heaven without dying. Some believed Malachi's prophecy would be fulfilled by Elijah returning from Heaven to earth. We do see Elijah conferring with Jesus and Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9). We also see the possibility of Elijah and Moses returning in the future during the Tribulation (Revelation 11). Elijah played a significant role in Jewish thinking during the 1st century AD.

Jesus was fully supporting the divinely appointed ministry of John the Baptist. John was the 'messenger' who Malachi said would prepare the way for 'the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight' (Malachi 3:1). As Jesus pointed out – 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear!'

Jesus didn't stop there because He wanted to make an important point to the Jews who were 'pressing' themselves upon Him as well as the religious leaders who opposed both John and Jesus –

But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, and saying: 'We played the flute for you, And you did not dance; We mourned to you, And you did not lament.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children."

Matthew 11:16-19

Jesus addressed the thinking of the generation of Jews and their leaders as 'childish' – 'like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions.' It was a powerful rebuke to the Pharisees and Sadducees. They had accused John the Baptist of having a demon. They accused Jesus (The Son of Man) of being a glutton and drunk, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. True wisdom would be known through the true children of wisdom – those who came to the King and His Kingdom. They would know that John was a true and righteous prophet of God. They would know that Jesus as not a glutton and drunk. They would know why

Jesus ministered to the spiritual needs of tax collectors and sinners. Wisdom triumphs over the evil and unwise beliefs of those who opposed John and Christ. Their training to reign would overcome the world.

Chapter Forty-Four

Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords and has called us to 'reign' with Him. What do Christians need to know to 'reign' with Christ?

The King and His Kingdom

From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'

Matthew 4:17

Jesus began His preaching ministry after John baptized Him and the devil tempted Him. His message was clear –

- Repent – μετανοέω, metanoéo, to change one's mind or purpose (think differently after being with)
- Kingdom – βασιλεία, basileia, royal power and authority, sovereignty (the realm in which a king reigns)
- Heaven – οὐρανός, ouranos, visible or spiritual heavens
- At Hand – ἐγγίζω, eggizó, come near, come close, extremely close

Jesus came from Heaven to earth to change hearts and minds, to change the way people thought about spiritual things. He was King of His Kingdom. He was Sovereign and had royal authority. His Kingdom was a spiritual Kingdom, though it would one day expand to become the earthly Kingdom prophesied in Scripture. His Kingdom was extremely close, possibly because He was on earth as King or because God views time differently than we do. A thousand years is as a day to the Lord (e.g. 2 Peter 3:8; Psalm 90:4).

People are often confused about the Kingdom of the King. The Jews who Jesus preached to in the early 1st century had their difficulties understanding it. So did the Roman prefect (governor) of Judea –

Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, 'Are You the King of the Jews?' Jesus answered him, 'Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?' Pilate answered, 'Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?' Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.' Pilate therefore said to Him, 'Are You a king then?' Jesus answered, 'You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.' John 18:33-37

Jesus was King, but His Kingdom was 'not from here.' The Lord's Kingdom is from Heaven. That's the location of His Kingship. He was born (to the virgin Mary) to 'bear witness to the truth.' People would have no idea about what kind of Kingdom the Lord was King of except that He came from Heaven to earth to tell them the truth about it.

Changing Minds

The ministry of King Jesus on earth was to ‘change minds.’ The people’s thinking about God’s Word was wrong. Jesus came to change their thinking. The people’s thinking about salvation was wrong. Jesus came to change their thinking. The people’s thinking about their spiritual position was wrong. Jesus came to change their thinking.

The need for ‘repentance’ is as true today as it was two thousand years ago. The fact that many church leaders no longer preach a message of repentance goes to show how bad things have become within Christianity. Without the message of repentance – what message do you have? People cannot be saved without a change of mind, a change of thinking. People cannot think of salvation as ‘adding’ something to what they already believe. Salvation is based on repentance and we are commanded by our Lord to preach it!

Then He said to them, 'Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Luke 24:46-48

The Lord's apostles preached repentance before conversion (salvation), so why has much of the modern 'church' stopped preaching it? I ask that to our shame –

Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call. Acts 2:38-39

But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

Acts 3:18-21

Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead. Acts 17:29-31

You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Acts 20:18-21

Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance. Acts 26:19-20

And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? Romans 2:3-4

For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. 2 Corinthians 7:10

Until pastors and teachers return to the preaching of repentance, we will not see God's great blessings upon His people. We cannot preach a 'partial' message that makes people feel good about themselves and expect God's Spirit to move powerfully among us. Jesus and His apostles have made it abundantly clear that preaching a message of 'repentance' toward God is foundational to His moving among us.

Obeying to Reign

‘Training to reign’ with Christ begins with obedience to His commands.

If you love Me, keep My commandments. John 14:15

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen. Matthew 28:18-20

Chapter Forty-Five

Jesus of Nazareth was known as a ‘Rabbi,’ even though He had no formal training in a rabbinical school. His disciples called Him ‘Rabbi’ (e.g. Mark 9:5; John 1:49; 4:31; 9:2; 11:8). Even a Pharisee and member of the ruling Sanhedrin called Jesus ‘Rabbi’ (John 3:2).

Rabbi Jesus

The word ‘Rabbi’ means ‘my teacher, my master.’ They had special training in the Mosaic Law and how to be a Jewish religious leader. Several religious groups developed during the years after Malachi prophesied (e.g. Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes). That would have been during the years of the Babylonian exile and afterward. The Pharisees and Sadducees developed as different ‘sects’ within the religious and political life of Jews. The Sadducees were made up of Jewish priests. The Pharisees divided into two groups (sometimes called schools, factions, or houses): Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel. Saul of Tarsus, for example, trained

in the House of Hillel ‘at the feet of Gamaliel’ (Acts 22:3). Gamaliel was the grandson of Rabbi Hillel and cautioned the Sanhedrin to be careful in how it treated the Lord’s apostles saying, ‘for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God’ (Acts 5:38-39).

Jesus was not a Pharisee of either ‘house,’ even though some Pharisees (like Nicodemus) thought He might be the promised Messiah. After Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to Heaven some Pharisees believed in Him (e.g. Acts 15:5). Even though the Book of Hebrews teaches that Jesus Christ is the ‘great High Priest who has passed through the heavens’ (Hebrews 4:14), Jesus was not a member of the Sadducees either.

Jesus was a One-of-a-Kind 'Rabbi.' He proved Himself through miracles and healings that He was who He said He was –

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, 'Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.' John 3:1-2

Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, 'Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!' Nathanael said to Him, 'How do You know me?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.' Nathanael answered and said to Him, 'Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these.' And He said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels

of God ascending and descending upon the Son of
Man.' John 1:47-51

The Rabbi's Disciples

A disciple (μαθητής, mathétés) was a 'learner, a pupil' of a Rabbi. Some disciples would choose to learn from one Rabbi, while others learned from multiple Rabbis. Religious disciples had a desire to learn God's Word and live a more righteous life. They turned to Rabbis who were seen as being authoritative in both. Disciples would ask permission to learn from a Rabbi with the understanding that they would submit to the authority of the Rabbi's authority in interpreting Scripture.

Rabbis met with his disciples regularly to discuss various questions about life and how various interpretations of Scripture might affect it. Disciples would debate the various interpretations, sometimes over a period of weeks since Rabbis were in no particular hurry to resolve the questions. When the Rabbi did make an interpretation and declare his authority, the disciples would follow the decision from that point forward.

Jesus broke the mold of being a 1st century Rabbi in so many ways. Rabbis didn't work miracles. Jesus did. Rabbi's didn't heal people. Jesus did. Rabbis didn't live with their disciples. Jesus did. Rabbis didn't claim to be Messiah. Jesus did. Rabbis didn't claim to be 'Son of Man.' Jesus did. Rabbis didn't claim to be God. Jesus did. The Rabbis did not have authority over demons. Jesus did.

Jesus was not the type of Rabbi that Jewish people were used to seeing. Because of that, many people followed Jesus in ways they would not follow the Rabbis of their time.

Then He went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbaths. And they were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority. Luke 4:31-32

And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Matthew 7:28-29

The Rabbi's Followers

Jesus chose the men who would become His closest disciples. Some had been disciples of the Apostle John. Jesus chose them to 'follow Him' and become those He would 'send out' (ἀπόστολος, apostolos) to carry on His work. As part of their 'training to reign' with Christ, He gave them power over demons and sickness –

And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him. Matthew 10:1-4

I recommend you read all of Matthew 10 because it outlines what following Jesus would mean for the twelve apostles, as well as other followers of Jesus Christ. Here's one example –

Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. Matthew 10:16-20

‘Following’ Jesus Christ was not easy in the past, is not easy now, and will not be easy in the future. In order for us to learn how to ‘reign’ with Christ, we must go through a period of training. The apostles did and so must we. When the apostles were brought before the ‘council’ and ‘high priest, they were commanded not to teach in the name of Jesus. How did the apostles respond?

‘But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men.’ The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.’ Acts 5:29-32

Obedience is an important key to ‘training to reign’ with Christ. Obedience is not easy because what the Lord requires of us is often in opposition to what the world believes or wants. Their reaction may sometimes even lead to violence –

Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’ He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it. Matthew 10:34-39

I realize that is not a ‘seeker friendly’ type of message these days, but it is what Jesus said. Either you believe it or you don’t. Jesus also said, ‘Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves’ (Matthew 10:16). Here we are in the

'midst of wolves' in this life. We need to be wise and harmless. How do we learn to do that? By following Jesus – being His faithful disciples – training to reign.

Chapter Forty-Six

When the Eternal Son of God left Heaven, made Himself of no reputation, took the form of a bondservant, and came in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:7), He had a reason for doing that. As we 'train to reign' we need to understand that reason and how it plays a significant role in our lives as Christians.

The Reason of Christ

I worked with a ministry for many years known as Ratio Christi. That's Latin for 'the reason of Christ.' I liked the name and the purpose of the ministry. We met with students on college campuses to help them understand 'reasons' for believing in Jesus Christ. The reason we could discuss 'the reason of Christ' was because Christ came to earth from Heaven with a reason. That reason is presented in the early chapters of Genesis when God spoke harshly to the serpent (Satan) –

And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel. Genesis 3:15

John the Apostle said the same thing in his first church letter –

For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. 1 John 3:8

That's why the Holy Spirit took Jesus into the wilderness after the Lord's baptism – to face the devil (e.g. Matthew 4:1-11). Jesus won that battle and every other battle with the devil. Even when the devil entered into one of Jesus' apostles and led Judas Iscariot to betray the Lord to his earthly enemies, Jesus was victorious. His death and resurrection are at the very core of the Gospel of Christ and the Christian faith (e.g. 1 Corinthians 15:1-8)

I started working with Christian and non-Christian college students 50+ years ago. My, how things have changed. Christian students in the early to mid 70s had similar views about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, Satan, the Bible, etc. However, I began to see a theological shift in the late 70s, on into the 80s and 90s, and then accelerating in the 2000s. The need for apologetics within Christian churches became more necessary because of a 'falling away' among those who identified as 'Christian. They were forgetting or didn't know what the Bible taught about essentials of Christian beliefs. When I say 'essentials, I mean those things that the prophets, Jesus, and His apostles identified as essential beliefs for disciples of Christ.

Here is part of a research statement concerning Christian beliefs about the devil from 2009. [Barna](#) surveyed 1,871 self-described Christians about their beliefs concerning ‘spiritual beings’ –

Four out of ten Christians (40%) strongly agreed that Satan “is not a living being but is a symbol of evil.” An additional two out of ten Christians (19%) said they “agree somewhat” with that perspective. A minority of Christians indicated that they believe Satan is real by disagreeing with the statement: one-quarter (26%) disagreed strongly and about one-tenth (9%) disagreed somewhat. The remaining 8% were not sure what they believe about the existence of Satan.

Many of the surveyed ‘Christians’ were also wrong about Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit –

Although a core teaching of the Christian faith is the divinity and perfection of Jesus Christ, tens of millions of Christians do not accept that teaching. More than one-fifth (22%) strongly agreed that Jesus Christ sinned when He lived on earth, with an additional 17% agreeing somewhat. Holding the opposing view were 9% who disagreed somewhat and 46% who disagreed strongly. Six percent did not have an opinion on this matter.

Much like their perceptions of Satan, most Christians do not believe that the Holy Spirit is a living force, either. Overall, 38% strongly agreed and 20% agreed somewhat that the Holy Spirit is “a symbol of God’s power or presence but is not a living entity.” Just one-third of Christians disagreed that the Holy Spirit is not a living force (9% disagreed somewhat, 25% disagreed strongly) while 9% were not sure.

I joined Ratio Christi the next year for the purpose of reaching college students on campus. It was evident that if students who identified as Christians were so wrong about faith essentials, views on college campuses would be even worse – which they were.

Keep in mind that Barna's survey was done in 2009 – 17 years ago. Do you think things have gotten better or worse since that time? If you said 'worse,' you are correct. Driving the 'great theological decline' (apostasy) in the last 20+ years has been a spiritually toxic mix of pastors, Bible teachers, seminar professors, denominational leaders, authors, song writers, and musicians (e.g. Emergent Church, Emerging Church, Progressive Christianity, New Age church, False church, etc). I call that the devil's 'full-court press' to draw people of all ages (especially the young) away from the truth of God's Word.

None of this will come as a surprise to anyone who actually reads their Bible –

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron. 1 Timothy 4:1-2

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. 2 Timothy 3:1-7

But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber. 2

Peter 2:1-3

The Battles of Christ

Jesus Christ is a Fighter on a scale we cannot fathom. We saw Him stand before Joshua as the ‘Commander of the Lord’s army’ in Joshua 5. Joshua was about to lead the armies of Israel into battle to their God-given places in the ‘promised land.’ Joshua looked up and saw a ‘Man’ standing ‘opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand.’ Jesus Christ defeated the devil through His death on the Cross and in His resurrection from the dead. Christ will take up His mighty sword again in the future as He returns to earth again to defeat the devil and his forces –

Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean,

followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, 'Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great.' And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which

proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.

Revelation 19:11-21

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while ... Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and

the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Revelation 20:1-3, 7-10

When we become 'disciples' of Jesus Christ, we are joining the 'battles' of Christ. We are 'soldiers' in Christ's army. That's why the Apostle Paul told Christians to 'Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil' (Ephesians 6:11). That's why Paul told Timothy to 'be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.' (2 Timothy 2:1-3)

So, we understand Christ's 'reason' for coming from Heaven to earth, and we understand the spiritual 'battles' He and we are fighting. As Paul told Timothy, we must be 'strong' in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. We must put on the 'whole armor' of God – 'For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places' (Ephesians 6:12).

Our Part

Real Christians (those who actually believe in the ‘essentials’ as presented in Scripture) have an important part to play in both the ‘Reason’ of Christ and the ‘Battles’ of Christ. If we didn’t, then God’s Word wouldn’t tell us we do.

God is sharing this [epic journey through time and space](#) with us. He created us to ‘subdue and have dominion’ with Him in this world (Genesis 1:28). God has chosen us to ‘rule and reign’ with Him. God has ‘raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus’ (Ephesians 2:6-7). Paul wrote that in Christ ‘we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will’ (Ephesians 1:11).

When Christians look at all they have ‘in Christ,’ they (we) should understand that our part in all God is doing is important for now and the future. ‘In the ages to come’ God will show the ‘exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.’ Is it so much to ask that we agree with God about the essentials of being disciplined followers of Christ? Is it too much to ask that we obey God’s Word? Is it too much to ask that we thank and praise God for His great ‘gift’ of salvation? No, that is not too much to ask. In fact, it’s the least we can do.

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,’ says the Lord, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’
Revelation 1:5-8

Chapter Forty-Seven

You would expect someone's 'message' to be in line with their 'purpose.' Right? Well, that's exactly what you find in the Gospels concerning the Message of Jesus of Nazareth. His Message always lined up with His Purpose. That's helpful to any student of the Bible, any Christian, to see that.

Jesus came to 'destroy the works of the devil' (1 John 3:8). The Apostle John, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit wrote – ' For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.' That seems clear and definitive. Since that was the Lord's purpose in leaving Heaven and coming to earth 'in appearance as a man' (Philippians 2:8), we would expect His Message to support that Purpose – and it does.

The Lord's Message

One of the things I remember while researching the Gospels as an atheist was that Jesus of Nazareth was consistent in His words and deeds. He seemed to me to be the kind of person who was on a mission and nothing was going to deter Him from that mission. In the years since becoming a Christian almost 55 years ago I learned that my initial thoughts about Jesus are supported by logic and reasoning. Jesus Christ was on a Mission and His Message remained true to His Purpose.

We know what Jesus said because of four Gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John), along with Acts and Revelation. However, the Gospels are the primary source of the Lord's Message leading up to His death on the Cross and in the days following His resurrection from the grave. Keep in mind that Jesus is the King of the Universe. Whether accepted or rejected, the words of Jesus are the Words of God.

I think it's important that we remember that God's people have been rejecting His Words and Actions for thousands of years –

Then the Lord said to Moses: 'How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them? Numbers 14:11

And the Lord said to Samuel, 'Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.' 1 Samuel 8:7

We should not be surprised that when the Eternal Son of God came to earth in appearance as a man that His people would reject Him. The prophet Isaiah said that's what would happen when He came –

He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Isaiah 53:3

The religious leaders of Israel did reject the Teachings of Jesus and He called them on it –

He answered and said to them, ‘Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.’ He said to them, ‘All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ But you say, ‘If a man says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban’—’ (that is, a gift to God), then you

no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.’ Mark 7:6-13

Jesus knew that His strong Message to the leaders of Israel would lead to their killing Him. While knowing that might stop some people from speaking so strongly, it didn’t deter Jesus because He had come to earth with the Purpose of dying. That was a vital part of His destroying the works of the devil –

And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. Mark 8:31

Messaging Through Parables

Jesus taught the people following Him, including the religious leaders who were always trying to find ways to charge and arrest Him for something He said, a series of parable (stories). Though many people didn't understand the deep truths behind the parables, the religious leaders knew that Jesus was often addressing His words at them. Here's one example –

Then He began to speak to them in parables: 'A man planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a place for the wine vat and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that he might receive some of the fruit of the vineyard from the vinedressers. And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again he sent them another servant, and at him they threw stones, wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully treated. And again he sent another, and him they killed;

and many others, beating some and killing some. Therefore still having one son, his beloved, he also sent him to them last, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But those vinedressers said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they took him and killed him and cast him out of the vineyard. 'Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vinedressers, and give the vineyard to others. Have you not even read this Scripture: 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes'?' And they sought to lay hands on Him, but feared the multitude, for they knew He had spoken the parable against them. So they left Him and went away. Mark 12:1-12

As you follow the parables and the fallout that came from the religious leaders who Jesus was targeting, you'll see that Jesus didn't change His Message. His Message always supported His Purpose.

Training Disciples to Reign

As we've seen in previous part of this series, Jesus was also training His disciples in how to 'reign' as they would continue His Work after He returned to Heaven. Jesus would often take his closest disciples (apostles) aside to train them for their service. The apostles knew that Jesus was the rightful King of Israel and would one day reign over Israel and the world. That sometimes led them to jockey for special positions in the coming Kingdom. Jesus' Message to them was consistent with His Purpose. These situations also became 'teachable moments' for the disciples as they learned what it would mean to 'reign' with Christ –

Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him. And He said to her, 'What do you wish?' She said to Him, 'Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom.' But Jesus answered and said, 'You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' They said to Him, 'We are able.' So He said to them, 'You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father.' And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but

to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.'

Matthew 20:20-28

If you are interested in learning more about how to 'train to reign,' I recommend you read the Gospels carefully and look at the consistency of Jesus' Messaging – to the crowds, to the religious leaders, and to His apostles. An important aspect of 'reigning' with Christ is the consistency of our message. The unfortunate fact that many preachers and teachers in churches and denominations have 'changed' the Gospel message (Christ's message) should tell anyone who cares about truth that much of what we hear today is ['false preaching and teaching.'](#)

Chapter Forty-Eight

As a journalist I pay attention to all the words a person says – but I focus on the first words and last words because they often identify ‘purpose and perspective.’

First Words

When Jesus of Nazareth started His earthly ministry after facing the devil in the wilderness, the Gospels record these words –

From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’
Matthew 4:17

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.’ Mark 1:15

Luke's Gospel account says that when Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee – 'news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.' One of the synagogues Jesus taught in was where He had been brought up in Nazareth. What did He say and do?

And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.' Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.' So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which

proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, 'Is this not Joseph's son?' Luke 4:16-22

The people who knew Jesus as a boy and young man were taken by surprise by what the Lord said. They saw Him as just a man because of their familiarity with Him. Jesus made a point to them that 'no prophet is accepted in His own country.' He then reminded them that God had worked through Gentiles in the past when His own people (the Jews) would not believe. Example – 'And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian' (Luke 4:27).

This caused 'all those in the synagogue' to be 'filled with wrath.' They 'rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff. Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.'

Another good place to study the early days of the Lord's teaching ministry is Matthew chapters 5 – 7. Known as the 'Sermon on the Mount,' Jesus demonstrated His authority and skill in handling God's Word correctly – unlike the Pharisees and Sadducees. In the vein of 'training to reign,' you could look at this lengthy Message as 'principles of the Kingdom.' Notice how Jesus began with 'blessings' in chapter 5 and ended with 'warnings' in chapter 7. One of the last things Jesus said in the Sermon sums it up well –

Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. 'But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.' Matthew 7:24-27

It's no wonder that the people were 'astonished at His teaching' because 'He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes' (Matthew 23:28-29). As you read through His sermons and parables, you'll see how His words impacted the lives of people who supported Him and people who opposed Him. All of His words are important to someone wanting to 'train to reign.'

Final Words

As you read through the Gospel accounts you will find how Jesus developed His Message and how it eventually led to His arrest, mock trial, crucifixion, and resurrection. What I'd like to do now is focus on the 'final Words' of Jesus.

Jesus met privately with His closest disciples (the apostles) on the night before He was arrested and crucified. You'll find details in Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, and John chapters 14 – 17. All of the Gospel accounts are important to read, but I want you to pay special attention to John 14 – 16. It is the most extensive of all of the accounts and includes what I believe are the Lord's prescription for how we should 'train to reign.'

Here's a short outline you can use for your study. I'm repeating this from the New King James Version of the New Testament –

- The Way, the Truth, and the Life
- The Father Revealed
- The Answered Prayer
- Jesus Promises Another Helper
- Indwelling of the Father and the Son
- The Gift of His Peace
- The True Vine
- Love and Joy Perfected
- The World's Hatred
- The Coming Rejection
- Jesus Warns and Comforts His Disciples
- The Work of the Holy Spirit
- Sorrow Will Turn to Joy
- Jesus Christ Has Overcome the World

- Jesus Prays for Himself
- Jesus Prays for His Disciples
- Jesus Prays for All Believers

What do you think of when you hear the word 'reign?' I think many of us see what the Lord's disciples saw. They would sit on thrones next to Jesus as He and they ruled Israel and the world. There is a day when the Lord's apostles will rule and reign with Him, but did that day come while the apostles were alive on the earth? No, in fact most were martyred. None of them reigned in this lifetime. That's why Jesus told them what to expect before He went to the Cross –

“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept

My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. John 15:18-21

These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me. But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them. John 16:1-4

After Jesus died on the Cross and rose from the dead, He spoke with His disciples again. Notice what He did and said, and consider how His Words impact the disciples' training to reign –

- Meeting two disciples on the road to Emmaus – ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Luke 24:25-27
- Meeting His disciples in Jerusalem – ‘Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have. When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, ‘Have you any food here?’ So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. And He took it and

ate in their presence. Then He said to them, 'These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.' And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, 'Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.' Luke 24:38-49

- And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all

things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Matthew 28:18-20

- So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Feed My lambs.' He said to him again a second time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Tend My sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?/ Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love Me?' And he said to Him, 'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed My sheep.' John 21:15-17
- The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the

things pertaining to the kingdom of God. And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, 'which,' He said, "you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.' Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' And He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.' Acts 1:1-8

After spending forty days with His disciples, Jesus ascended from earth back to Heaven. He had glorified His Father and finished the Work He was sent to do (John 17:4). Jesus would later call Saul of Tarsus to become His apostle to the Gentiles and reveal many secrets to him. Jesus would also later visit the Apostle John and reveal more secrets to him about the Tribulation, Millennial Reign, Great White Throne Judgment, and the New Jerusalem. All of these events, recorded for us in the New Testament, are for our use in learning how to 'train to reign.'

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Next eBook

In the next part of our series we will look at how the Holy Spirit ‘trains’ His people to ‘reign.’

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