­*"Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day." Psalm 119:97*

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# Genesis

## Gen 4:1-17 - Cain and Abel

[[@Bible:gen 4:1-2]]Gen 4:1-2

1. The first time "sex" is described in the Bible, it is with the word "knew". This reflects both the caution with which the Bible describes sex, but also the intimate and personal closeness that two spouses feel for each other through their marital life together. It is certainly a great contrast to the way our society describes sex.
2. The name "Cain" is almost identical to the Hebrew word "received". Eve named her firstborn "Cain" because she was happy that she had "received" him from the Lord. Eve understands and acknowledges that the child she has given birth to has been given to her by God. Every child is a miracle and a gift from the Lord.
3. Perhaps Eve thought that the child she had was a fulfillment of God's promise that Eve's offspring would crush the serpent's head (Gen 3:15). But this promise was fulfilled when Eve's offspring Jesus Christ died on the cross.
4. The name "Abel" means "breathing", "temporary" or "meaningless", alluding to Abel's short life and meaningless death.

[[@Bible:gen 4:3-5]]Gen 4:3-5

1. Cain and Abel each brought an offering to the Lord from their respective work. God accepted Abel's offering, but not Cain's. However, this is not because animal sacrifices are better than plant sacrifices, but because Abel offered his sacrifice in "faith" (Heb 11:4), which Cain did not. God does not accept religious sacrifices without faith simply because they are "religious". On the other hand, God accepts sacrifices in faith, whether they are performed in a proper "religious" manner or not.
   1. Cain's sacrifice of crops certainly looked more beautiful than Abel's limp and bloody animal fat. But God is not interested in beautiful, but empty and meaningless, religion. God wants to receive the faith and genuine worship of our heart.
      1. The difference between Cain and Abel's sacrifice is the universal difference between the faith of the heart and empty religious rites. It is better to worship God in spirit and truth in solitude in one's sleeping chamber, than to perform religious rites without faith in a beautiful church in a beautiful costume.

[[@Bible:gen 4:6-7]]Gen 4:6-7

1. Cain was jealous of his younger brother Abel when God accepted Abel's offering but not Cain's. Cain could not accept that God considered Abel righteous but not Cain.
   1. Sin began to grow in Cain's heart, he became angry and his eyes became dark. But God has not rejected Cain, but instead is lovingly trying to speak to him. God warns Cain that the anger he still holds inside could quickly lead to violence if he does not repent.

[[@Bible:gen 4:8]]Gen 4:8

1. Despite God's warning, Cain completed the sin that he had allowed to grow in his heart. Cain lures his younger brother into the field and kills him. This was neither an accident nor a spur of the moment, it was a planned and premeditated murder.
2. Cain's sin as a whole consisted of carrying out empty religious acts without faith, becoming jealous of a true believer, which led to murder and finally lying before God.
   1. This sin is called "the way of Cain" in Jude verse 11. Paul describes it as having a "semblance of godliness but denying its power" (2 Tim 3:5). Being religious without faith risks leading to jealousy and persecution of the true believers.

[[@Bible:gen 4:9]]Gen 4:9

1. God knew the answer to his question, of course, but he wanted to give Cain a chance to confess his sin. But as if Cain's murder wasn't enough, now Cain hardens his heart as he continues his sin by lying to God as well.
   1. Once you start sinning, sin continues to hold you in its grip until you confess your sin and God helps you to find a way out through forgiveness and restoration.
2. Cain tries to hide his sin by saying: "Shall I keep track of my brother?" This attitude towards his fellow man is a direct consequence of trying to live a life of sin far from God. When we humans no longer care about God, we no longer care about our fellow human beings.
   1. But the fact is, yes, Cain should keep track of his brother. All of us humans have a responsibility to care for one another (Matthew 25:35-40).

[[@Bible:gen 4:10-12]]Gen 4:10-12

1. Abel's blood cried out from the ground to God for sin and murder. Much later, the blood of Jesus will cry out from the cross to God for forgiveness and atonement (Heb 12:24).
2. The blood of Abel cried out from the land where Cain had previously grown crops. God's punishment will be linked to the sin Cain committed, and he will no longer be able to cultivate the land. The curse on Cain is an amplification of the curse on Adam when he sinned (Gen 3:17-19). While Adam would be allowed to till the soil "by the sweat of his brow" and live by "toil", Cain would not even be able to till the soil at all. While Adam was driven from Eden, Cain would find no home on earth.

[[@Bible:gen 4:13-14]]Gen 4:13-14

1. Cain is more distressed by the punishment God is about to give him than by the harm he has done to his brother. Of course, it would have been better if Cain had been more despondent about his own sin than about God's punishment, because then God could have given him forgiveness and restoration.
   1. It is rare that God gives a judgment in the Old Testament that is immediately executed. There is almost always time and opportunity for repentance when God gives a judgment.

[[@Bible:gen 4:15-16]]Gen 4:15-16

1. Even though Cain's sin was very great, God did not want Cain to suffer the same terrible fate that Cain had inflicted on Abel. After all, God cares about Cain and makes sure that no one can murder him.

[[@Bible:gen 4:17]]Gen 4:17

1. Adam lived 800 years after he had his child Seth, and during that time he had many sons and daughters (Gen 5:4). Perhaps it was one of all these daughters of Adam that Cain married, i.e. his own sister.
   1. Although the Bible later forbids marriage between siblings, it was not forbidden at that time. Since Adam and Eve were the first humans, there were not many other women to choose from.
      1. Abraham married his half-sister Sarah (Gen 20:12).
      2. Moses forbids marriage between siblings when Israel received its law (Leviticus 18:9).
2. It is interesting that even though God condemns Cain to a life of wandering homelessness, Cain builds a city to live in. Most likely, the city is the "sign" that God gave Cain for protection, similar to the Israelite "sanctuaries" where people could flee to avoid blood vengeance and the like (Numbers 35:9-34).

# Exodus

## Exodus 2:11-25 - Moses Flees to Midian

[[@Bible:exo 2:11-12]]Ex 2:11-12

1. Moses was at this time 40 years old and a very learned man. He was Pharaoh's grandson (Heb 11:24-29) and had been "taught all the wisdom of the Egyptians" at the Egyptian court (Acts 7:22-23), while his Hebrew mother had told him of his Hebrew background.
2. The Egyptians were a very racist people at this time. For example, they considered it "abominable" to even eat with Hebrews (Genesis 43:32). The Egyptians do not even eat with Joseph, when he was one of the leaders of the Egyptians.
3. Moses, who holds a very high position in the Egyptian empire, goes out into the country to inspect the situation of his countrymen and to get a picture of the whole picture.
4. Moses sees the unjust Egyptian treatment of his Hebrew brother, but chooses to act outside the framework of Egyptian law. Moses knows he is acting illegally because before the murder he *"looks in all directions"* to see if anyone sees him, and then after the murder he *"hides him in the sand"*.
   1. Moses had a high position at the Egyptian court and could have ordered the Egyptian guard to stop the beating, or call for help. But Moses chooses to take matters into his own hands and not only stop the beating, but also take revenge by killing the Egyptian (Acts 7:25).
   2. Moses faces a classic dilemma; how do you stop injustice when it comes from the authorities? Should you take matters into your own hands? Should you revolt? Should you protest? Should one comply?
      1. In short, the New Testament principle is this: submit to authorities (Rom 13:1) and pray for them (1 Tim 2:1-2), but if they command us believers to go against God's will, we must "obey God more than men" (Acts 5:29), even if that means going to prison as a consequence. If one is mistreated, one should not take revenge, but leave the judgment to the Lord (Rom 12:19) because even if we live in this world, we believers, who belong to the kingdom of God and have our citizenship in heaven (Phil 3:20), should not fight in the ways of the world (2 Cor 10:3-5).
      2. In my opinion, Moses was right to react to the unjust treatment of the Hebrews by the Egyptian authorities, but he chose the wrong way to react. Moses should not have taken matters into his own hands and murdered the Egyptian. Probably it would have been enough if Moses, who was part of the Egyptian court, had ordered the Egyptian to stop mistreating the Hebrew. However, given the widespread racism in Egyptian society, there is some risk that Moses himself would have been offended and considered a Hebrew traitor. He would probably have had to flee to Midian anyway, but at least he would not have been a murderer.
      3. The reason Moses takes matters into his own hands and murders the Egyptian instead of simply commanding him to stop is because Moses had the ambition to become the leader of the Hebrews. Moses believed that the Hebrews "would understand that God wanted to save them by his hand" (Acts 7:25). By saving a Hebrew himself with his own hands, he wanted to become the "savior" of the Hebrews. But this was not part of God's plan and so it fails. For it is God who is the saviour of the Hebrews, and God wants to save Israel in a way other than by violence and rebellion.
5. Even we today can recognize the Egyptian racism Moses saw the Hebrews suffer. When we Swedes see the racism immigrants and refugees face, we may be tempted to retaliate against the racists. But our struggle is not against flesh and blood, and we need instead to turn to God in prayer while trying our best to help vulnerable people enter and become part of society.

[[@Bible:exo 2:13-15]]Ex 2:13-15

1. Moses knew he was a Hebrew, and he believed that God wanted to use him as a leader to save the people of Israel (Acts 7:25). And in a way, that is true, but God's plan was never to make *Moses* the savior of Israel, or to save Israel through violence and rebellion. God's plan was not to save Israel through the violent sword, but through the humble shepherd's staff.
2. When Moses realizes that his murder has been exposed, he flees for his life to the land of Midian. Moses probably thought that his ambition to save Israel had now completely failed and that there was now nothing more Moses could do.
   1. In this Moses is absolutely right and he has now arrived exactly where God wants him to be. God can use Moses as an instrument to save Israel only when Moses realizes that it is not *Moses,* but *God,* who will save Israel.
   2. Leadership in God's kingdom is about letting God lead, or as John the Baptist puts it, *"He must become greater and I less"* (John 3:30). If you are big in yourself and think out your own plan, God needs to humble and rebuild.
   3. After 40 years of humanly perfect training and preparation, Moses fails to become the leader of God's people at the first attempt. But after 40 years of God's training among the sheep of Midian, Moses will be ready to enter into his task of rescuing Israel from slavery in Egypt.
      1. What would have happened if God had communicated his plan to Moses from the beginning? What if God had told Moses that he will go to Pharaoh and demand Israel's deliverance by turning a rod into a snake, or turning the waters of the Nile into blood, or that all of Israel will walk through the Red Sea dry-shod while Pharaoh's soldiers drown?
         1. Probably Moses would never have agreed to this because he didn't have the patience and it was too strange and distant for a prince of Egypt to behave in that way. Moses needed to step down from his lofty position and humble himself out in the desert. Moses needed to understand that it was God who would deliver Israel, not Moses.

[[@Bible:exo 2:16-19]]Ex 2:16-19

1. Reguel, also called Jethro, was a priest in Midian and probably, like Moses, a relative of Abraham. In Genesis 25:1-2 we see that Midian was Abraham's child with Keturah. The priest of Midian was thus a worshipper of the true God and it is no coincidence that God brings Moses to him precisely to learn more about the God of Abraham.

[[@Bible:exo 2:20-22]]Ex 2:20-22

1. God's plan for Moses was that he would be the leader of Israel. But how do you become a good leader? Is it through the best education in the land? Is it through the right connections at court? Is it through getting the finest title? Or is it among the sheep in the desert?
   1. Like Jesus, Moses left his royal palace to live simply and humbly among ordinary people. Moses went from being a prince of one of the most powerful kingdoms in the world to herding someone else's sheep. Moses went from owning everything, to not even owning the sheep he was herding.
   2. After 40 years at the Egyptian court, Moses learned that *he* was special. Now it's time for Moses to spend 40 years in the desert of Midian learning that *God* is special. Moses had to learn for 40 years not to have himself and his position as the focus. Moses had to learn how to care for sheep in order to be a *shepherd of* God to the people.

[[@Bible:exo 2:23-25]]Ex 2:23-25

1. When Israel is tormented by slavery, they cry out to their God. Often suffering and trouble lead us to turn desperately to God in prayer. Even if God has not sent us suffering, suffering indirectly brings us closer to God, and in that sense suffering can be good for our spiritual well-being.
   1. Sometimes it's hard to know why answers to prayer don't come immediately when you pray, but you need to learn that God answers prayer when it's God's time. Sometimes you have to humbly still yourself and wait for the right time.
2. God answers Israel's prayer, not because of Israel itself, but because of God's covenant with Abraham. God's promises are eternal and he does not renege on his covenant.
   1. In the same way, we can be confident that if we confess Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, we belong to God and he will listen to our prayers, not because we are so righteous in ourselves, but because God has made a covenant with us in Christ.
3. Just as Moses 40 years earlier, in verse 11, "saw" the situation of the Hebrews and tried to intervene and save Israel, so God "saw" the situation of Israel now in verse 25, and decides to save them. After Moses' awkward attempt to become a human savior, it is now God's turn to step onto the historical stage and show what he is made of. In the next chapter, God introduces himself to Moses by his name, "I am who I am" (Exodus 3:14), showing both Moses and Israel that it is GOD who IS the savior of Israel, and not someone else.

## Ex 17:1-7 - Water from the Rock

[[@Bible:exo 17:1]]Ex 17:1

1. Israel had done exactly as the Lord had commanded, they wandered from campsite to campsite in the wilderness. Yet they had nothing to drink.
   1. It is quite possible to be in God's will and obey His commands, yet go through a difficult period of drought. Obeying God does not automatically mean that you will not have problems.

[[@Bible:exo 17:2-3]]Ex 17:2-3

1. The people lacked water and their complaint is perfectly legitimate, but at the same time misguided. It was not Moses' fault that they did not have water, he had only obeyed the Lord's command. The people should have turned their cry of complaint to God instead.
   1. We can make the same mistake when we wrongly blame the pastor for the poor spiritual climate when we should instead be praying to God for an outpouring of the Spirit.
   2. Of course, a spiritual leader can mislead his congregation, but if the pastor has done what God has commanded without any revival, it is not the pastor's fault and the congregation should turn to God in prayer instead of complaining about the pastor.
2. If the people had been more spiritually experienced, they could have trusted that if God had brought them into the wilderness, he would also provide them with water at the right time. The people are thus testing God's patience by their complaint.
   1. In a way, one might think that Israel should actually have been more spiritually experienced than they appear to be here. After all, they had witnessed the incredible miracle of God bringing them through the sea dry.

## Ex 17:8-16 - Israel Defeats Amalek

[[@Bible:exo 17:8]]Ex 17:8

1. The Amalekites were a people of the Negev and the Sinai desert, descended from Amalek, grandson of Esau (Gen 36:12).
   1. Possibly the Amalekites are worried that the people of Israel are about to take over their territory and therefore attack as a preventive measure. Since Israel was descended from Jacob, Esau's brother, the Amalekites should therefore have been well aware that God had promised Jacob that his descendants would receive the land of Canaan (Gen 28:13), and should therefore not have been concerned that Israel would also take the Negev and Sinai.
2. For no real reason, the Amalekites attack the people of Israel. Israel had lived as slaves for 400 years in Egypt and had of course not been trained in war by the Egyptians. The Amalekites probably also know that the Israelites are battle-weary and thus should be an easy match.
   1. Moreover, the Amalekites used a particularly cowardly method of fighting when, instead of facing Israel face to face in an honorable battle, they attacked the rear guard from behind, i.e. those who had fallen last in the crowd and were weak, tired and exhausted (Deuteronomy 25:17-19) and thus included children, women, the old and the sick.

[[@Bible:exo 17:9]]Ex 17:9

1. When God had led Israel out of Egypt, He had fought for Israel against the Egyptians, but this time God would let Israel fight.
   1. There are times when it is right for us to be passive and let God take the fight to our enemies, but there are also times when God calls us to fight in different ways.

[[@Bible:exo 17:10]]Ex 17:10

1. This is the first time Joshua is mentioned in the Bible.
   1. Joshua's name means "YHWH the Savior" or "God the Savior".
      1. The Greek version of the Hebrew name Joshua is "Jesus". In many ways, Joshua is a model of the Messiah.
2. Moses, his brother and his (possible) relative go up the mountain to get a view of the battle.

[[@Bible:exo 17:11]]Ex 17:11

1. Standing with uplifted hands was the common prayer form in biblical times (2 Chron 6:12-13, Ps 63:5, 1 Tim 2:8).
2. Moses does not go up the mountain to avoid the battle, but to back up God's people through prayer. As long as Moses held up his hands and prayed, Israel had the upper hand in the battle, but when he couldn't, Amalek got the upper hand.
   1. In the same way, you and I can support someone who serves God in public by praying in the background. The task of the pray-er is at least as important as that of the evangelist.
3. The welfare of God's people at this time depended on the prayers of Moses. Today, too, we should remember that the success and health of the Church depends on the prayers of God's people.
4. When Moses was young, he wanted to free Israel by fighting himself (Exodus 2:11-15). Now that he is led by God, he has understood that it is more important and significant to pray to God and let God lead the battle.
5. Moses is a model of Jesus on the cross as he defeats the enemy by stretching out his hands and suffering for God's people.

[[@Bible:exo 17:12]]Ex 17:12

1. The prayer task Moses had was not as easy as one might think. The task was heavy and Moses could not do it alone. Aaron and Hur cannot take over Moses' task, but they can support Moses so that he completes the task.
   1. When we see someone who is struggling against the wind and is having difficulty completing his or her God-given task, we should first try to support the person so that he or she can complete the task.
   2. Although we are to bear one another's burdens, at the same time we have some burdens that only we can bear (Gal 6:2-5).

[[@Bible:exo 17:13]]Ex 17:13

1. Joshua defeated Amalek because Moses prayed for Israel in the background. If it had not been for Moses' prayer, Israel would have been defeated, not entered the land of Canaan, and history would have been very different. The importance of prayer in this case is hard to overestimate.
   1. God's people are easily defeated if they are not ready to pray at the same time. A church's prayer meetings may often be seen as boring and something to be skipped, but without them and the church's faithful home ministers, the church will soon lose the battle against the devil and slowly but surely be relegated to a position of insignificance.
2. But even though the battle was won by prayer, Joshua still had to fight.
   1. A congregation cannot just engage in prayer and introverted fellowship, but must go out among the people, evangelize and help people with diaconal needs.

[[@Bible:exo 17:14]]Ex 17:14

1. Not only is God angry with the Amalekites, He is VERY angry! God is so angry that he tells Moses to write this down in the book so that Israel really won't forget what the Amalekites did.
   1. God is angry with the Amalekites because they were the first nation to go to war against Israel, and they did it in such a cowardly way.
   2. The Amalekites continued to be a nuisance to Israel until King David defeated them (1 Sam 30) and the Simeonites finally killed the last of the Amalekites (1 Chron 4:42-43).
2. The Amalekites have become the archetype of the enemies of God's people as they try to prevent God's people from entering the Promised Land by unprovoked attacks on the weakest.
   1. The Amalekites can also be seen as representatives of the "flesh" who are constantly at war with the "spirit" and who must be fought until they are finally defeated (Gal 5:17).

[[@Bible:exo 17:15]]Ex 17:15

1. Even though Moses understood that Israel won the battle because of his prayers, he still gave the glory to God.
   1. When we have the opportunity to serve God successfully, it is important that we always remember that the success was not due to our own brilliance, but to God.
      1. It was Moses who struck the rock, but it was God who made the water flow. It was Joshua who fought the Amalekites and Moses who prayed, but it was God who gave the victory.

# Numbers

## Numbers 13:1-34 - Spies Sent into Canaan

[[@Bible:Num 13:1-3]]Num 13:1-3

1. God's promise to give the promised land of "Canaan" to the people of Israel, the land overflowing with "milk and honey" (Exodus 3:8), had first been given to Abraham (Genesis 15:18-21), then confirmed to Isaac (Genesis 26:3) and to Jacob (Genesis 28:13).
   1. The "promised land" of the Old Testament can be symbolically likened to the "kingdom of heaven" of the New Testament. In this, and many other similar stories, we can learn what it means to believe in God and enter heaven.
2. According to Deuteronomy 1:20-25, it was actually the people of Israel who suggested that Moses send scouts ahead of time into the land to explore the land and see what roads they will take and what cities they will encounter. Moses thought it was a good suggestion and God then gave instructions that in that case it must be "leaders" who go out as scouts.
   1. Actually, one can question the need for spies, since God had already promised Israel both that they would receive the land of Canaan and that it would "overflow with milk and honey". If Israel had truly trusted God's promises, they could have entered the land in faith, they could have trusted that the land was good and that with God's help they would defeat their enemies.
   2. Perhaps for this reason God wanted it to be "leaders" who were sent out as scouts. That is, reliable people who were used to leading the way, breaking new ground and not afraid to face difficulties.
   3. But whether this was the plan of the people, the plan of Moses, or the plan of God, it led to the testing of Israel's faith.

[[@Bible:Num 13:17]]Num 13:17

1. The name "Hosea" means "salvation" and the name "Joshua" means "salvation of *God*". Perhaps Hosea introduced himself to Moses and said his name was "Salvation" and Moses replied "GOD'S salvation"! Hosea went from being called "Hoshea" in Hebrew to being called "Ya-Hoshea" (where "Ya" is an abbreviation of "Yahweh"). This name, Ya-Hoshea/Joshua, was later assigned to the Messiah, which in a Greek variant becomes "Jesus".

[[@Bible:Num 13:18-21]]Num 13:18-21

1. Moses' instruction to the scouts was a good one, humanly speaking; to see if the land is good to live in and how strong its defences are. But at the same time, God had already promised that the land was good and that he would help them to take it. From that perspective, Moses' instructions echo with unbelief.
   1. But on the other hand, can we really expect the people of Israel to trust God completely when they did not yet have much spiritual experience? The idea of sending out scouts may have been an expression of unbelief, but God in His mercy allowed it. Before one is fully ready to enter the Promised Land, one sometimes needs to be strengthened in one's faith and to develop one step at a time.
   2. When we are spiritual beginners, we sometimes need a little extra confirmation that God's promises are indeed true. God is patient with us. But the more we learn to walk by faith, the more we learn to trust God's word.

[[@Bible:Num 13:22-25]]Num 13:22-25

1. The mission of the spies took 40 days, which is an indication that this was a "test" from God.
2. The huge cluster of grapes becomes a sign that God's promises that the land is good are true.

[[@Bible:Num 13:26-29]]Num 13:26-29

1. The spies return and report to Moses and the people. They confirm God's promise that the land is good, BUT, they believe that the land's defenses are too strong for Israel to overcome.
   1. The word "but" has prevented many believers from having their lives blessed by God.
      1. Yes, I believe in God's promise of grace, BUT, I have a hard time receiving forgiveness for my particular sins.
      2. Yes, I believe in Jesus, BUT, I don't want to do as he says or live as he teaches.
      3. Yes, I believe in God's mission to witness to Jesus, BUT, not me.
      4. Yes, I believe in God's promise of the power of the Spirit, BUT, I don't think I can speak in tongues.
   2. The Christian life is more than just confessing your faith with your mouth and then going on living an ordinary life like everyone else. The Christian life is also about starting to live here and now as Jesus teaches us and doing what God tells us to do.

[[@Bible:Num 13:31]]Num 13:31

1. Caleb, and also Joshua we see a little later in the text, saw the same things as the other spies, but believed that with God's help it would be possible to take the land.
   1. With God's promises behind us and problems ahead, our faith in God is tested. Do we dare to take a step of faith, face our problems and trust that God is with us?
   2. God has not promised us a life without problems and struggle, but he has promised to be with us in the struggle and through the problems.
2. The people of Israel were faced with the choice of believing in the humanly accurate and negative report, or believing in God's promises of victory.
   1. The same challenges and trials face us as God's people today. Do we look at our reality with human eyes or with spiritual eyes?
      1. What if someone prophesies to our congregation that there will be a revival, and we gratefully receive it in joy. And then we sit and wait for people to automatically come to church and be saved, but no one comes. Do we then stop believing God's promises or do we try to work for people to be saved?
      2. Or we try to go out into the city and witness to Jesus, but find it difficult, they are secular and uninterested in the message of salvation in Jesus. Do we then give up and stop believing in God's promises? Or do we realize that it will be a struggle to win every person for Christ?
      3. Or God has given you a calling to go on mission, but all the financial circumstances suggest that it is impossible. Do you then stop believing in God's promise to you or do you continue to walk by faith and work to make it possible?

[[@Bible:Num 13:32]]Num 13:32

1. It was true that Israel's opponents were stronger than Israel, but it was not true that Israel could not defeat these peoples. Often a mixture of lies and truth is the most dangerous creator of unbelief.

[[@Bible:Num 13:33-34]]Num 13:33-34

1. All the twelve spies saw the same grapes, the same cities, the same land, the same enemies. But in the end, what separated them was whether they had faith in God or not.
   1. In the same way, you and I can face circumstances in life either with God or without God. We all have a choice to believe in God or not.
2. Given the exaggerations reported by the scouts, one can imagine that even the size of the "giants" is an exaggeration.

## Numbers 14:1-10 - The People Rebel

[[@Bible:Num 14:1-4]]Num 14:1-4

1. The amazing word "knota" comes originally from the word "stay", in the sense of "to spend the night" or "to stay permanently". The word is used to describe how someone gets stuck in a state of complaining and being obstinate.
2. The people of Israel are complaining about Moses and Aaron, but they are really complaining about God, because it was God who had given Moses this promise to take the land of Canaan.
   1. If the ordinary parishioner feels that things are quiet or not working properly, it is easy to criticise the pastor or the leadership and think that things will get better if you change the pastor. But that may not be the problem.
   2. In this case, Moses was acting on behalf of God, but the people of Israel were frightened and became afraid when they saw the problems ahead. Israel decided that they would rather go back to their old life as slaves in Egypt than face the enemy in the land of Canaan.
      1. In the same way, you and I may feel anxious about the obstacles that stand between us and God's promises, because we do not believe that it is possible to overcome the obstacles. Perhaps we give up and forsake all the good things God has promised us and go back to an ordinary life without faith in God.
3. Israel's rebellion against God's plan is great. They accuse God of wanting to murder them and their children. But ironically, their rebellion led to their own death in the desert and their children's entry into the land of Canaan.
4. When you realize that it can actually be a struggle to enter into the blessings God has promised, it's easy to shy away and abandon the idea of walking by faith and walking in the Spirit. But sometimes the very struggle against evil can be part of the promise God has made. For God has promised both to be in the fight against evil and to overcome evil.
5. As a culmination of Israel's rebellion, Israel says no to God's plan, no to God's leader, and no to God's promised land.

[[@Bible:Num 14:5-9]]Num 14:5-9

1. In response to the people's rebellion, the older leaders, Moses and Aaron, begin to pray to God, and the younger leaders, Joshua and Caleb, begin to preach to the people. The older ones are wise by experience and the young ones are enthusiastic about what God can do. Here we see that both the older and the younger serve an important function. Prayer and preaching are a good combination!
   1. Joshua and Caleb proclaim that one half of God's promise, that the land will be a good land, is true. Therefore, they can also trust that the other half of the promise, that they will take the land with God's help, will also be true.
      1. The miracles God has performed in our lives in the past often serve as a reminder that God is capable of performing more miracles in our lives.

[[@Bible:Num 14:10]]Num 14:10

1. Nothing can be more irritating to a believer without faith than a believer with faith.

## Numbers 14:11-45 - Moses Intercedes for the People

[[@Bible:Num 14:11-12]]Num 14:11-12

1. God now gives up speaking to the people of Israel and speaks directly to Moses. If Israel did not listen to what God said before, they will not listen to what God will say now.
   1. Sometimes, as a believer, I wonder why God no longer speaks to me. It could be for a variety of reasons, but one of the reasons could be that God has spoken in the past, but we have refused to listen.
2. God considers fulfilling Israel's prayer to "*die here in the wilderness"* rather than enter the Promised Land, and then to create a new people from Moses. There is a real possibility that God will do this, depending on what Moses will now answer God.

[[@Bible:Num 14:15-19]]Num 14:15-19

1. Moses' response to God shows great leadership! Moses shows that he knows God's heart.
   1. Moses is the leader of the people and as a consequence defends the people, despite their rebellion.
   2. Moses is a servant of God and as a consequence defends the glory of God, despite God's suggestion.
2. Moses knows that if God kills all the people of Israel, Egypt will think that God is a weak god who was not able to bring the people into the land of Canaan, which he had promised to do. Moses does not want the other nations around to have the slightest chance of believing that God is not a God who keeps his word.
3. The key to Moses' success in "persuading" God to forgive is that Moses refers to what God himself has said. Moses reminds God that God is a forgiving God, and that God cannot renege on his own word or deny himself.
   1. In the same way, we should learn to pray by referring to who God is. For example:
      1. "God, I know that you are a forgiving God full of love, forgive me now for the sins I have done."
      2. "God, I know you are the God of miracles, now I need a miracle from you."
      3. "God, I know that you want to give the power of the Spirit to those who testify about Jesus, fill me now with your Holy Spirit so that I dare to testify boldly!"
4. The way Moses responds to God, i.e., invoking God's own love for God's people, shows that Moses has come to know God so much that he has also come to have God's heart for God's people.
   1. The more we spend time with God, the more we get to know God and become more and more like God in his way of being.

[[@Bible:Num 14:20-24]]Num 14:20-24

1. God's response to Moses' defense of the people is to let the people of Israel die but preserve Caleb who believed in God. In this way, everyone gets what they wanted, Israel, God and Moses.
2. God forgave Israel "according to the word of Moses". Clearly, Moses' prayer for Israel was decisive in how God would act.
   1. Sometimes it's hard to see exactly the consequences of our prayers, but we can trust that they are always important and that God hears and acts in some way.
3. For the moment, and for the next 40 years, there was not much difference between Caleb and the rest of Israel; they all had to wander in the desert for 40 years. But in the long run, Caleb's strong faith and stance was the difference between seeing God's promises fulfilled or not.
   1. Our faith and the choices we make here and now affect our future and whether or not we will enter heaven.

# Judges

## Judges 4:1-16 - Deborah

[[@Bible:judg 4:1-3]]Jdg 4:1-3

1. When Israel made a covenant with God on Mount Sinai, they agreed that obedience would lead to God's blessing, and disobedience would lead to God's curse (Deuteronomy 28). The blessing would lead to a good harvest, protection from enemies, sanctification and many children. But the curse would lead to punishment, sickness, war, confusion and starvation.
   1. In a way, perhaps it would be nice to have a covenant of blessing and curse? When you get a little lax in your faith, you get punished, realize your sin, repent and come back to the Lord.
      1. The problem with this way of receiving salvation is that, in order to avoid the curse, one must keep all of God's commandments, which is impossible in principle. In the new covenant that Jesus instituted, Jesus took the curse of the old covenant upon himself when he died on the cross, and all who believe in Jesus are redeemed from the curse and can share in the blessing instead (Gal 3).
2. The stories of the book of Judges follow a pattern in which Israel promises to be obedient to God, is blessed, falls away and begins to worship idols, is cursed by God, cries out to God for help, is rescued by God, promises to be obedient to God, is blessed, falls away, etc., etc.
   1. When Israel is in trouble because of its apostasy, God usually calls a new "judge", a leader, who receives God's power to save Israel.
3. Because of Israel's disobedience, God allowed them to suffer war and oppression. The Canaanite king Jabin keeps Israel in an iron grip by blocking the important trade routes (Judges 5:6), and plundering and raping Israelite women (Judges 5:30).
   1. One might think that Israel should have repented as soon as possible, but it took 20 years of oppression before they finally repented and cried out to God for help.

[[@Bible:judg 4:4-5]]Jdg 4:4-5

1. Although Israel as a whole had turned away from God, there was a godly woman in the hill country of Ephraim who continued to live righteously. Deborah, whose name means "bee," described herself as "a mother in Israel" (Judges 5:7) and sat under a palm tree in Ephraim, receiving people who needed advice and guidance. God spoke through her, both by wisdom and by direct address. One of the prophetic words she received was that the time had come for God to deliver Israel through the military leader Barak.
2. It is not common for God to call a woman to be a prophetess and judge in Israel. But what is clear is that it was Deborah who was the judge in Israel at this time, not Barak.
   1. The Bible has many examples of women who had the prophetic gift: Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), Hannah (Luke 2:36), and Philip's four daughters (Acts 21:8-9).
   2. However, there are not as many biblical examples of women leaders. Therefore, the story of Deborah becomes especially important in understanding God's will for female leadership.
      1. Other examples of female leadership include Miriam (Mic 6:4), Esther (Esther), Mary (Luke 10:39), Jesus' female disciples (Luke 8:1-3), Priscilla (Acts 18:26), Phoebe (Rom 16:1), Junia (Rom 16:7).
3. A so-called "judge" in the Judges' Book was not necessarily a judge who sits in a court and judges. Rather, the Hebrew word "shaphat" means a "leader" or "hero". A judge is a God-appointed leader who leads Israel to victory and delivers God's judgment on Israel's enemies.
   1. Whether you become a leader in the kingdom of God does not depend on whether you are male or female, but on whether you receive God's call or not. In this case, Deborah had undeniably received God's call to be one of Israel's leaders, which she carried out in a most exemplary manner.

[[@Bible:judg 4:6-7]]Jdg 4:6-7

1. It seems that there is a part of this story that is not in the Bible. One gets the impression that God had told Barak to go to battle with Sisera on a previous occasion, but for some reason Barak did not do so. Deborah now repeats God's word to Barak and tells him to go to battle.
   1. When one receives a great and life-changing call from God, it does not hurt if that call is confirmed by a prophet. Even if the first experience was clear, one can be uncertain, and then it is very strengthening to have one's experience confirmed.

[[@Bible:judg 4:8-9]]Jdg 4:8-9

1. It was not necessarily wrong for Barak to ask Deborah to come along. Perhaps Barak still felt insecure in himself, and needed Deborah's strong faith by his side. Perhaps Barak felt that the men would fight more bravely if Deborah came along and boosted morale.
   1. But it was not good of Barak to refuse to go unless Deborah went with him. In this way, Barak reveals that he does not really believe that God will be with him, unless Deborah also goes with him.
   2. Barak is thus an example of a servant of the Lord who is weak in his faith, and dependent on the faith of others. The good thing about this weakness is that God was able to use Barak anyway, and in Hebrews 11:32-33 he is mentioned as one of the heroes of faith.
2. The negative thing about Barak's weak faith is that he does not trust God's word to him. He believes that God has spoken to Deborah, but he seems to think that God only stands by his word if Deborah is present, which is not true. If God has said that he will be with Barak, then God will follow through.
   1. Because of Barak's weak faith, a woman would get the credit for the victory over Sisera instead of Barak. At first, one might think that it would be Deborah who would receive this honor, but eventually it would turn out to be another woman.
   2. By giving a "woman" the credit for this military victory over Sisera, God shows that it is not gender that determines whether one is willing to courageously obey God. Rather, it is the faith in the heart, whether male or female, that is decisive.
3. Although Barak was weak in his faith and dependent on Deborah's strength, he obeyed God's call in the end. An important lesson from this is that weakness and doubt are not an obstacle to God. Rather, human weakness reveals God's greatness even more.

[[@Bible:judg 4:10-11]]Jdg 4:10-11

1. That Barak was insecure was not so surprising, humanly speaking. Sisera and the Canaanites had 900 chariots, which made them vastly superior to the Israelites, especially considering that at this time there were hardly any weapons in Israel (Judges 5:8, 1 Sam 13:19-22).

[[@Bible:judg 4:12-16]]Jdg 4:12-16

1. Before the battle begins, Barak has gathered his men atop Mount Tabor and Sisera has his men and tanks down in the field. Up on the mountain, Barak has an advantage because it will be extremely awkward for tanks to get up there and fight. But down on the field, Sisera has the advantage because he can then make full use of his tanks.
   1. So when Barak goes down from the mountain to meet Sisera in an open field, he is going down on enemy ground where he has all the odds against him.
      1. In the same way, it may be easier for us Christians to shut ourselves away in the church where we feel safe and secure, than to go out into the world and witness to our faith. Out in the world the odds are against us and we have the advantage of home ground, but on the other hand the victory will be greater than if we just shut ourselves away in church.
   2. In Judges 5:4-5, it seems that God sent a heavy rain in connection with the battle. If this was the case, it is quite possible that the advantage the chariots provided suddenly became a serious disadvantage when the rain turned the ground into mud and caused the chariots to get stuck in the mud. That would explain why Sisera "got down from his chariot and fled on foot".

[[@Bible:judg 4:17-21]]Jdg 4:17-21

1. Women and men each had a tent (Gen 24:67, Gen 31:33) and Sisera hides in a woman's tent because he thinks no one will look for him there.
2. Pitching tents was a woman's job at the time, so Jael was well versed in pounding tent pegs into the ground, which she now uses to brutally kill Sisera.
3. By killing his guest, Jael violates the all-important principle of hospitality. But she could do this in good conscience because her people the Kenites were distant relatives of Israel (Gen 25:1-4) and her husband Heber should never have invited Sisera in the first place, because he was an enemy of God's people.
4. On this day, Israel, the land flowing with milk and honey, was saved by the woman Deborah, whose name means "bee", and by Jael, whose name means "mountain goat". Because of their disobedience, Israel could not enjoy the milk and honey that God had promised them, but thanks to two faithful and strong women, Israel regained the honey of the bee and the milk of the goat.

[[@Bible:judg 4:22-24]]Jdg 4:22-24

1. Although the Israelites won a great victory that day, the war was not yet over. The fighting continued, but eventually Israel had finished off its enemy Jabin completely.
   1. In the same way, today we can occasionally experience great breakthroughs in our spiritual life, even if we are not completely freed from all problems just because of this. But sometimes it is the right time and the right opportunity to give one's life completely to God again, or to take new steps in life together with God.
2. In summary, we learn a lot about the role of women in Judges chapters 4 and 5. The men of Canaan raped defenseless Israelite women for 20 years, until Israel repents and God speaks to Israel's leader Deborah. When the man Barak is afraid to go into battle without the woman Deborah, God allows the woman Jael to defeat the enemy Sisera. So in these two chapters we learn that God can use both men and women as prophets and leaders. What matters is not what gender you are, but whether you are willing to believe God's word and obey the call you have received, whether you are male or female.

## Judges 6:1-6 - Midian Oppresses Israel

[[@Bible:judg 6:1]]Jdg 6:1

1. The time is about 300 years after God has delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt.
   1. Israel has no king yet, but is led when necessary by various leaders called *judges*, hence the title "The Book of Judges".
   2. Israel had been doing well and living in peace and wealth, but unfortunately they had also begun to live in sin.
2. The Midianites were descended from Midian, one of Abraham's sons (Genesis 25:2).
   1. The Bible does not make it clear exactly where the land of the Midianites was.
   2. Joseph was sold to the Midianites (Genesis 37:28).
   3. Moses lived 40 years in Midian and married the daughter of Jethro, a Midianite priest (Exodus 2:11ff).
   4. God commanded Moses to fight against Midian (Numbers 31:1ff).
   5. Israel is oppressed by Midian during the time of Judges and Gideon is called by God to deliver Israel.
3. Israel forsook God and did what was evil in God's sight. Because of Israel's sin, God allowed the Midianites to ravage Israel. The purpose of this was for Israel to repent of their idolatry and return to God. God loved Israel and therefore did not leave them when Israel forsook God.
   1. Even today, God can put us through trials to draw us closer to Him.
   2. If you are in the midst of a trial, you may be angry with God and wonder why things have turned out the way they have. But then remember that there is something worse than going through a trial, and that is God leaving you.
   3. *"Count it the greatest joy, my brethren, when you encounter all kinds of trials. For you know that when your faith is tested, the test makes you persevere."* (Jas 1:2-3)

[[@Bible:judg 6:2]]Jdg 6:2

1. Israel was humiliated and on its knees.
   1. It is difficult to humble oneself and repent when one lives in sin. Often you need to go through a difficult period before you realize how wrong you have gone.
      1. It would have been much better for ourselves if we had been humble before God from the beginning.
      2. The life of a believer is characterized by occasional trials, which bring him even closer to God.

[[@Bible:judg 6:3]]Jdg 6:3

1. The Midianites did not occupy Israel, but came when it was time to harvest and took their fill. So Israel did not even get to keep what they themselves had produced.
   1. In the same way, sin can make all the work we put in fruitless.

[[@Bible:judg 6:5]]Jdg 6:5

1. This is the first time camels used in battle are mentioned in the Bible. Israel stood no chance against these, for the time, "sophisticated" weapons.

[[@Bible:judg 6:6]]Jdg 6:6

1. Only when it has come to the point where Israel is living in caves, has no food and is totally outnumbered militarily, then they cry out to the Lord.
2. It is a common human trait that we often try to solve all our problems ourselves, and only when there is no other way out do we ask God for help. If Israel had stuck to God from the beginning, or cried out to God immediately when the problems started to arise, they would not have had to get into this difficult situation.

## Judges 6:7-10 - God's answer

[[@Bible:judg 6:8]]Jdg 6:8

1. Before God would send the savior, Israel needed to be prepared through a prophet.
2. The same thing happened just before the coming of Jesus; the Jewish people were prepared by the preaching of John the Baptist.
3. Sometimes it's good to have time to reflect on your mistakes before you're ready for a big change.
4. I myself have brought you up out of Egypt and brought you out of the house of bondage.
5. When Israel thought that God had abandoned them, God reminded Israel of His love for Israel and that He had saved them from Egypt in the past.
6. When we feel that God is far away, we also need to think back to what God has done for us in the past. But we should not remember Egypt, we should remember the cross and what Jesus has done for us.

[[@Bible:judg 6:10]]Jdg 6:10

1. But you did not listen to my voice.
2. Israel's problem was not really the Midianites, Israel's problem was that they did not listen to God.
3. In the same way, today we should also consider whether the problems we face are really our own fault?

## Judges 6:11-27 - The Call of Gideon

[[@Bible:judg 6:11]]Jdg 6:11

1. So bad was it for Israel that Gideon threshes wheat in a *winepress*.

[[@Bible:judg 6:12]]Jdg 6:12

1. Gideon found it hard to believe in the angel. Was the angel ironic? It must have felt like a slap in the face because Israel was de facto living in caves, had no food and was constantly under attack from Midian.
2. Even though Gideon may have felt weak, he was strong because the Lord was with him. Even today, every Christian has access to the same power and blessing as Gideon: "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever."* (Heb 13:8)

[[@Bible:judg 6:13]]Jdg 6:13

1. Gideon believed that God had forsaken Israel, but the truth was that Israel had forsaken God. The Midianites ravaging Israel was a consequence of Israel worshipping other gods.
2. Gideon complained that things weren't the same and he wanted a change.
   1. Here I think many of us can identify with Gideon's situation.
      1. Sweden is not what it once was.
      2. The awakening is long over.
      3. Christianity is drastically declining.
      4. Many complain about the situation.
      5. We want to see a change.
   2. But for the change to happen, Gideon himself first had to change. A little later in the text, we will see that Gideon has to come to terms with his own and his family's idolatry before he could begin the transformation of Israel at large.

[[@Bible:judg 6:14]]Jdg 6:14

1. At first, one might think that the angel is mocking Gideon; what power did Gideon have? After all, he was the least of all, poor and insignificant.
2. But what God counts as power is not always the same as what we count as power. What Gideon had:
   1. He had been *humbled* by his poor work.
   2. He *cared*.
   3. He had *knowledge* of God's past works.
   4. He was *spiritually hungry* and wanted to see what God would do.
   5. He *listened* to God.
3. All of this shows that Gideon had a tremendous strength that **God** could use.
4. We humans often think that strength lies in being good at leadership, charismatic, strong, good-looking and good at playing the guitar. But that's not how God sees it.

[[@Bible:judg 6:15]]Jdg 6:15

1. Gideon didn't think he could save Israel, and in a way he was right. ***Gideon*** couldn't save Israel, but ***God*** could.
   1. A mighty God can use the smallest man

[[@Bible:judg 6:16]]Jdg 6:16

1. When God is with us, no matter how small and weak we are or how big and strong the enemy is, God will still prevail.
2. The willingness of one person to obey God can affect the entire surrounding community.
3. God wasn't trying to cheer Gideon up and give him some confidence. We don't need to believe in ourselves, but we need to look beyond ourselves and believe that God will do it through us.
4. God not only *sent* Gideon, He also promised to be *with* Gideon.

[[@Bible:judg 6:17]]Jdg 6:17

1. At first, we might think that Gideon had a very weak faith and therefore needed confirmation that God will indeed be with him. But God actually gives Gideon a deadly mission, to lead the people of Israel into a deadly battle for survival, and it is not necessarily wrong for Gideon to ask God for a confirmation in this way.
2. God gives Gideon a miracle and he receives confirmation. But a miracle in itself is not enough to guide our lives.
3. Miracles and healings can happen even if it is not God who has done it.
4. But Gideon had had a **meeting with God**, he had received the **word of God** and now a **miracle from God**, and now he should feel secure.

[[@Bible:judg 6:22]]Jdg 6:22

1. There are many indications that this was not just an ordinary angel who met Gideon, but that it was God himself who appeared:
   1. Verse 14: "Then YHWH turned to him and said...".
   2. Verse 16: "YHWH said to him...".
   3. According to Exodus 33:20, no man can see the face of God and live, so when Gideon realized that it was God he had seen, he was worried that he was about to die.
2. Since no man has seen God the Father (John 1:18), it is quite possible that this was God the Son revealing Himself in human form to Gideon.

[[@Bible:judg 6:24]]Jdg 6:24

1. In response to God's call and affirmation, Gideon worships God. A response we should all emulate.

[[@Bible:judg 6:25]]Jdg 6:25

1. "Baal" was a Canaanite fertility god and the name can be translated as "lord".
   1. Baal worship was a recurring problem for the people of Israel who were tempted by the idolatry of the surrounding nations.
   2. Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18.
2. "Asera" was a female deity who, according to Cananese belief, was married to the Cananese god El.
3. Where Gideon lived, ***both*** God and Baal were worshipped.
   1. I think this is one of the devil's tricks. The devil doesn't always try to get us to stop worshipping God, he wants to get us to worship something else *too.*
   2. Jesus warns us and says. *"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will stick to the one and look down on the other. You cannot serve both God and mammon."* (Matt 6:24)
   3. We Christians need to make sure that God is always first in our lives and that we do not worship anything other than God.
4. The first thing God gives Gideon to do is to ***clean his own house***. Earlier in the text, Gideon complained that things were not as they used to be, that God had left Israel and that he wanted a change. But for that change to happen, Gideon ***himself*** first had to change.
   1. I think there are many of us in Sweden today who long to see more of God and for a great revival to break out, but perhaps God first wants us to go through a trial and change.
5. Before this village would begin to worship God, they would tear down the altar of Baal. Not because it is not *possible to* worship God in the same place as a pagan altar, but because we often don't *want to*.
   1. In the same way, there may be things in our lives today that get in the way of our worshiping God. Maybe you have a hard time worshipping God? Maybe there is something in your life that is more important than God? In that case, you need to ask God if there is something you need to repent of.

[[@Bible:judg 6:27]]Jdg 6:27

1. One explanation for why Gideon waited until night to tear down the altar might be the most obvious; that he was a coward. But after all, it is better to obey God cowardly, than not to obey God at all.
2. Another interpretation is that it doesn't matter *how* you do God's command, as long as you *do* it. If God gives you a command, it is up to you to decide how you want to carry it out. Nowhere does it say that God complained to Gideon because he waited until night.

## Judges 6:28-32 - Gideon Destroys the Altar of Baal

[[@Bible:judg 6:29]]Jdg 6:29

1. In the hard times that Israel found themselves in, Baal became very important to them, they would probably have worshipped Baal even more now that the Midianites were fighting with them.
2. When Gideon destroys Baal's altar, the villagers get angry, but one can ask why they didn't get angry when they *built* Baal's altar.

[[@Bible:judg 6:30]]Jdg 6:30

1. Because Gideon tore down Baal's altar, the people want to kill Gideon.
2. Gideon's father, however, gives the people a logical argument; if Baal minds his altar being destroyed, then he must do something about it himself. Otherwise, he is hardly worthy of worship.
3. According to an old story, something similar happened in the South Pacific in the 19th century. A tribal chief had become a Christian so he gathered the people and all the statues of the gods. He told the statues that he was now going to destroy them and if they wanted to, they could run away. No one ran away so the chief destroyed all the gods and the people became Christians.

[[@Bible:judg 6:33]]Jdg 6:33

1. Presumably, Israel's enemies are now gathering to finally crush Israel.
2. This shows us what perfect timing God has; at just the right time, God calls Gideon to lead Israel.

[[@Bible:judg 6:34]]Jdg 6:34

1. In Old Testament times, God filled certain chosen people with his Spirit, to empower them to carry out a special mission.
2. In the new covenant, God has promised to fill everyone with his Holy Spirit:
   1. *"And it shall come to pass after this, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. And upon the servants and handmaids I will pour out my Spirit in those days."* (Joel 2:28-29)

## Judges 6:36-40 - The Sign of the Fleece

[[@Bible:judg 6:36]]Jdg 6:36

1. Gideon asks God for another sign that God is with him.
2. It is easy to understand that Gideon wanted a confirmation of his calling, but this is the second time he has asked for a sign. This shows us that Gideon's faith is still weak and that he was also longing.
3. It's not wrong to ask God for confirmation if you get a big assignment or if you're facing a big new step, but it can be wrong to do what Gideon did here.
   1. If it's something you *don't* want to do, then you make up something completely illogical for God to do:
      1. "If someone deposits 322 000 SEK in my account tomorrow at 13.00 then I know that it is your will God". "You *can* do it God... Nothing is impossible for you".
   2. And if it's something you *want to* do, then you find something easy that God will do:
      1. "When I drive to Stockholm on Thursday, a red car will overtake me, then I know that it is your will God".
4. Gideon's mission was great and God was merciful to Gideon.
   1. Remember that Gideon was a poor, simple man with low self-esteem who was called by God to lead an army in a war that was about the survival of the nation.
   2. Even if Gideon had a weak faith, it is still better than having no faith at all.

## Judges 7:1-18 - Gideon’s Three Hundred Men

[[@Bible:judg 7:1]]Jdg 7:1

1. Gideon's army of 32,000 was much smaller than the Midianite army of 135,000 (Judges 8:10), but even though it was small, it was still too big for God.
   1. If Gideon had had a larger army than the Midianites and then won the victory, he could have taken credit for the victory.
   2. If Gideon had defeated the Midianites with an army of 32,000, people could claim that Gideon was a military-strategic genius. It has happened in the past that a small army won over a large army thanks to a good general.
   3. But God does not want there to be any doubt that the victory is due to the God of Israel, and not to the many soldiers of Gideon. By reducing Gideon's army to ridiculous proportions, God proves that it is He who wins the victory for Israel.
2. There are many Bible verses on this theme:
   1. *"A king is not conquered by his great army, a hero is not saved by his great power."* (Ps 33:16)
   2. *"Then he said to me: "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord of Hosts."* (Zech 4:6)
   3. *"Others rely on chariots and horses, but we glory in the name of the Lord our God."* (Psalm 20:8)

[[@Bible:judg 7:6]]Jdg 7:6

1. Perhaps those who had drunk water from their hands were better soldiers than those who had fallen to their knees because they were still supervised when they drank water.
   1. So God let the Israelis go home first, and then God let the inexperienced soldiers go home.
   2. In the same way, we can learn today that if we want to actively serve God, we should not be afraid of the enemy, but rather focus on the task at hand.
2. When Israel's army finally numbered only 300, it was suddenly down to just 1% of what it originally was.
   1. This means that each Israeli personally needs to deal with more than 400 Midianites to win the battle.
   2. Now Gideon and his tiny army had to rely on God.

[[@Bible:judg 7:10-11]]Jdg 7:10-11

1. In Judges 6:14-16, God not only ***sent*** Gideon, but He also promised to ***be with*** Gideon. Here we see this in practice.
2. When God calls us to a life-threatening mission, he does not leave us alone but continues to guide us.

[[@Bible:judg 7:13]]Jdg 7:13

1. Barley was the food of the poor and the barley loaf symbolized the oppressed and poor Israel.
2. In the past, Gideon has been unsure of his calling and therefore asked for confirmation, but this time it is not Gideon who asks for it, but God who in his mercy gives it to him.
   1. In total, God affirms Gideon's calling as many as four times!
   2. Probably Gideon was a very insecure person who needed this extra reassurance.
3. When you go into battle, it's certainly easy to imagine that the enemy you're facing is much braver and stronger than you are, but often it's just an illusion. The Midianites were also fearful and insecure.

[[@Bible:judg 7:18]]Jdg 7:18

1. There is nothing in the text to suggest that God would have commanded Gideon to do this, but since Gideon has been filled with the Holy Spirit (Judges 6:34), he is naturally guided by God's Spirit.

## Judges 7:19-25 - Gideon Defeats Midian

[[@Bible:judg 7:20]]Jdg 7:20

1. The vast majority of the Midianite camp was asleep but was suddenly awakened by a scream and chaos that led to confusion.
2. Since Gideon found out that the Midianites were already afraid of Gideon's sword (Judges 7:14), Israel uses this to further intimidate the Midianites.

[[@Bible:judg 7:22]]Jdg 7:22

1. Just as during the Exodus, when God delivered Israel from Egypt, the Lord Himself fought for His people. Gideon only had to watch as the Midianites were defeated.
   1. *"The Lord shall fight for you, and you shall hold your peace."* (Exodus 14:14)

[[@Bible:judg 7:24]]Jdg 7:24

1. When God proved to Gideon and to Israel that it was He and not Gideon who defeated the Midianites, then more Israelis were allowed to join the battle.
2. In the same way, today God may use a select few to perform miraculous feats, but once the work is begun and everyone gives glory to God, many more people are called into God's work. The result of this is that God gets the glory while many people get the opportunity to serve God.

## Judges 8:1-21 - Final victory over the Midianites

[[@Bible:judg 8:1]]Jdg 8:1

1. The patriarch Jacob (who was named Israel) had 12 sons who became 12 tribes. Ephraim and Manasseh were sons of Jacob's son Joseph but were considered two separate tribes (Genesis 48:5).
   1. Although Manasseh was older than Ephraim, Ephraim was considered the leader (Gen 48:14-20) and there was an old jealous conflict between the two (Isa 9:21). Since Gideon was from the tribe of Manasseh, Ephraim's men now react and are upset that they were not allowed to be part of the battle.
   2. Humanly speaking, the leader of the war against the Midianites should have been a person from the tribe of Ephraim, but since Gideon was chosen by God, he did nothing wrong. Gideon pointed out to God that he was actually from the tribe of Manasseh (Judges 6:15), but since God does not have respect for persons (1 Sam 16:7, Acts 10:34, Rom 2:11), God chose Gideon anyway.
2. Gideon acts wisely when he "appeases their anger with a soft answer" (Proverbs 15:1), thus avoiding a potential civil war in Israel.
   1. In the same way, the vast majority of intra-church conflicts can be resolved by a wise leader.

[[@Bible:judg 8:4-5]]Jdg 8:4-5

1. Gideon and his small army are exhausted, so Gideon asks the city of Succoth for food.
   1. Gideon doesn't ask them to join the battle, only to be there to support those who are fighting.
2. Suckot don't want to contribute any food, they don't want to support Gideon until he's won.
   1. Gideon, with God's help, has just defeated an army of 135,000 Midianites with the help of 300 men, but now when they are about to finish the job, they get no help.
3. Most of the time it is not our enemies who make us give up, but the unwillingness of our friends.
   1. When you are a young and passionate Christian, you often want to go out and evangelize or activate yourself for the Kingdom of God in some way.
   2. It is extremely important that the elderly are supportive and helpful, rather than uttering discouraging words such as "You start off on fire but then it cools down..."
4. But while you may be discouraged by your friends' reluctance, it's important not to give in to it.
   1. Gideon knew he would win the battle with or without Suckot.
   2. It was only Suckot who lost by not helping Gideon.

[[@Bible:judg 8:10]]Jdg 8:10

1. As we see from this verse, the Midianite army totaled 135,000 men.
2. Gideon attacks an army of 15,000 men with his 300 soldiers. The Midianite army is not as large as last time, but it is still 50 times larger than Gideon's.
   1. Gideon was previously unsure of his own calling, but is now encouraged by the fact that he saw God blessing him last time, so now it is easier for him to believe.
   2. In the same way, today we may be unsure whether we really dare to evangelise, for example, but if we hear other people's experiences and testimonies, our faith is strengthened and we become bold.

[[@Bible:judg 8:15]]Jdg 8:15

1. After Gideon has defeated the Midianites, he returns to Succoth.
   1. Sukkot didn't want to trust God and Gideon and now Gideon is going to punish them for it.
   2. Gideon lashes Succot's leadership with thorns and thistles and tears down the tower in the city, killing the men.
   3. It's hard to understand why Gideon punishes them so severely, and the text doesn't show it either. Presumably Gideon considered Succoth to be traitors and therefore treated them in this way.
2. What you have to remember when you read texts like this in the Bible is that the Bible describes *real* people, people who do both right and wrong.
   1. The Bible is not a fairy tale, the Bible is true and realistic.
   2. Not everything in the Bible has to be a model for us, it can also be a warning example for us.

[[@Bible:judg 8:18]]Jdg 8:18

1. Gideon discovers that the Midianite kings have murdered Gideon's brothers.
   1. Gideon first wants his own son to execute the kings, but he doesn't dare, so Gideon has to do it himself.

## Judges 8:22-27 - Gideon Refuses to Become King

[[@Bible:judg 8:22-23]]Jdg 8:22-23

1. The longing for a king was already great among the people of Israel in Gideon's time.
   1. Only hundreds of years later, Israel gets Saul as its first king (1 Sam 8ff).
2. Gideon refuses to be king of Israel.
   1. It was right for Gideon not to want to be king, because God was the king of Israel (1 Sam 8:7, 1 Sam 12:12).
   2. Gideon is humble in his words, but unfortunately not so humble in his actions.
      1. Gideon says he doesn't want to be king, but acts like a king anyway.
3. I think it's a very human behaviour to want to have a "king" over you.
   1. In the Christian community, Jesus is our king.
   2. Pastors and other leaders exist to lead, help and serve believers in their relationship with God, but never to "rule" over.

[[@Bible:judg 8:24-25]]Jdg 8:24-25

1. The Midianites had gold earrings and now Gideon gets them all.
   1. The people were more than happy to give this fortune to Gideon; after all, he had delivered his country from annihilation.
   2. However, this treasure lifted Gideon above the people, he became richer than all the others. Gideon said he didn't want to be king, but now he acts like a king.

[[@Bible:judg 8:27]]Jdg 8:27

1. An "ephod" was a shirt worn by the priests.
2. Gideon made an ephod of gold and placed it in his hometown of Ophrah, which unfortunately caused the people to come and worship at the ephod.
   1. It is difficult to know why Gideon did this, but at this time Israel did not have Jerusalem as its capital, but the tabernacle, and the religious center was in the city of Shiloh, which was in Ephraim (Judges 18:31, Judges 21:19).
   2. It is not impossible that Gideon was angry with the men of Ephraim and therefore wanted to out-compete Shiloh in favor of his own city of Ophrah.
   3. The ephod became a snare for Gideon and the people and it seems that the ephod became more important than God himself.
3. Often in religious contexts, we want to express our faith in fine paintings, impressive church buildings, or as in this case, a beautiful gold foot.
   1. The goal of these fine works of art is to bring glory to God, but too often these works of art take us away from God.
   2. Because of these beautiful works of art, we lose focus on what is important and central.
   3. Often God comes to us in *simplicity*.
      1. Gideon was a poor, simple and insignificant man (Judges 6:15).
      2. King David was a little shepherd boy (1 Sam 16:10-11).
      3. Jesus was born into a simple family and was not even given a place in the shelter (Luke 2:7).
      4. God commanded that the Ten Commandments be carved into tablets of *stone* (Exodus 31:18), even though the Israelites could undeniably carve fine gold statues (Exodus 32:4).
   4. When we meet God, we often want to reciprocate this love by doing something nice for God, but God has never really asked us to do that.
      1. What God wants is that we love God with all our heart and our fellow man as ourselves.
      2. God wants us to praise and worship him and to care for our fellow human beings.
      3. The nicer the church we build, the more the focus will be on the church instead of Jesus.

## Judges 8:28-35 - Gideon Dies

[[@Bible:judg 8:28]]Jdg 8:28

1. Just as God had promised, Gideon's war was a success!
   1. Midian was totally defeated and Israel as a nation was much stronger.
   2. God had done his part in the agreement.
   3. If God promises something, we can trust his promises, God does not disappoint.
2. For Gideon personally, however, the end was a spiritual failure.
   1. First, Gideon's golden foot leads to idolatry.
   2. Secondly, Gideon takes many wives, something that in the Old Testament almost always ends in misery and which Paul advises against (1 Tim 3:2).

[[@Bible:judg 8:31]]Jdg 8:31

1. Although Gideon undeniably said he did not want to be king, he acted like a king. When Gideon has a son, he names him "Abimelech" which means "father is king".

[[@Bible:judg 8:32]]Jdg 8:32

1. When Gideon eventually dies, he dies at an old age.
   1. Gideon began well with God.
      1. Then he was poor and dependent on God.
      2. Now he was rich and self-sufficient.
   2. Sometimes it is easier to live for God when you are poor and in need.
      1. From a spiritual perspective, getting rich and having a good life can be absolutely devastating.
2. In order for Gideon to remember God and all that God had done in his life, he had to *look back*.
   1. I think many believers recognize themselves in this. But I don't think it is God's purpose for our lives that our spiritual peak is when we are 20 years old.
   2. I believe that God wants to use us more and more as we get older and more experienced.
   3. My advice to you is that if God leads you to great success, continue to be a simple person even after the victory.

[[@Bible:judg 8:33]]Jdg 8:33

1. After Gideon died, Israel fell back into idolatry again. This is in line with the tragic cycle in the book of Judges (Judges 2:19).
2. "Baal-Berit" means "lord of the covenant", which shows that the Israelites saw Baal as their covenant god.
3. This shows us that we all depend on God's Holy Spirit to remain with God.
   1. Gideon was filled with the Spirit of God and empowered to act according to God's will, but eventually his devotion seems to have waned.
   2. The people of Israel, who were not filled with the Spirit of God, fell back into idolatry as soon as Gideon was dead.
   3. Paul urges all believers to "be filled with the Spirit" (Eph 5:18) and to "walk in the Spirit" (Gal 5:16), which I believe is necessary to live a devoted life for God. We need to be repeatedly filled with the Spirit of God.

# 1 Samuel

## 1 Sam 1:1-7 - Elkanah's family

[[@Bible:1 sam 1:1]]1Sam 1:1

1. Ramathaim-Sophim was located on a hill about 4 miles north of Jerusalem and may be the Arimathea from which Joseph of Arimathea came (Mark 15:43).
2. The prophet Samuel is born into a very difficult period in Israel's history, between the time of Judges and the time of Kings, about 3000 years ago.
3. The Philistines had immigrated from the island of Crete (Amos 9:7) and were militarily superior to Israel because of their modern weapons; swords, shields and spears.
4. Of course, God himself could have come down to earth and helped Israel, but in most cases God wants to use us humans to save us.
   1. In this particular situation, God intends to use Samuel to save Israel, but Samuel is not yet born and his mother Hannah cannot have children...

[[@Bible:1 sam 1:3]]1Sam 1:3

1. The city of Shiloh was the religious centre of Israel for 400 years before Jerusalem. In Shiloh was the tabernacle and the ark.

[[@Bible:1 sam 1:2]]1Sam 1:2

1. Elkanah was actually a Levite, but was called an Ephraimite because he lived in Ephraim (1 Chron. 6:16-30).
   1. Even though Elkanah had two wives, the Bible does not advocate polygamy, but on the contrary, God wants there to be *one man and one woman* in a marriage (Genesis 2:24).
   2. Almost every time someone in the Bible takes more than one wife, it ends in some form of misery (Genesis 21:8-21).
      1. The Bible is not a story about perfect people who never do anything wrong, but on the contrary, the Bible is full of stories about people who very often do things that God *does not* want them to do.
2. At first, it's easy to think that God is being unfair when he gives Peninnah the bully lots of children, while Hannah, who seems to be a pious woman, doesn't get any children.
   1. But fortunately for all of us, God is good and may well consider blessing even people who are not perfect, even those who behave badly.
   2. If God were to leave us and completely stop blessing us as soon as we are mean to someone, no human being could have any relationship with God at all.
3. It was the *Lord* who had made Hannah childless (see more examples of this: Genesis 20:18, Genesis 29:31, Genesis 30:22).
   1. God is not a distant God who only listens to our prayers if we shout loud enough. God is not just the God of kings and pastors. God is involved even in the life of a simple, childless woman.
   2. At first it may seem heartless of God to make Hannah childless, but God always has a purpose in what he does and always looks beyond what we do.
   3. Imagine a hungry child screaming for sandwiches. Your child's favourite food is in the oven and will soon be ready, and if they just wait, it will soon become their favourite food. If the child eats its fill of sandwiches, it will miss out on the tastiest dinner of the week. If you don't take the long view, it's easy to miss what God wants to give.
4. Many people can probably relate to some extent to Hannah's situation; being bullied and being childless. But to fully understand Hannah's plight, we need to understand that the situation for a woman in Israel at that time was not the same as for a woman in Sweden today.
   1. Today, a woman can get an education and a job and have a good and full life even without children. But in Hannah's time, life was about having children for her husband so that he would have heirs to carry on his name.
   2. For Hannah, being childless was not only a personal grief, but she probably felt the pressure from her husband, family and people around her.

## 1 Sam 1:8-18 - Hannah's Desperate Prayer

[[@Bible:1 sam 1:8]]1Sam 1:8

1. Elkana probably tries to be nice and comforts Hannah by saying "Why are you sad, you have me?"
   1. Not only was Hannah childless and bullied, she was also misunderstood by her husband.

[[@Bible:1 sam 1:10]]1Sam 1:10

1. Hannah found herself in a very difficult situation, and when things are at their worst, she does the right thing; she turns to God in prayer.
2. Maybe you are in a difficult situation? Do what Hannah did; turn to God.

[[@Bible:1 sam 1:11]]1Sam 1:11

1. Lord of Hosts means "Lord of hosts" or "Lord of armies".
   1. Hannah felt attacked by Peninnah and misunderstood by her own husband, and she calls God Zabaoth because she knows that no matter how much she is attacked, God is always stronger.
2. That "no razor shall come upon his head" means that Hannah made a "vow of repentance" as described in Numbers 6:1-8.
   1. Being a Nazarite meant letting one's hair grow, abstaining from strong drink and being "holy to the Lord".
   2. An almost identical story is the story of Samson whose parents were also childless but who had Samson and made him a Nazarite (Judges 13:2-5).
   3. Four Christians conclude their vow in Acts 21:23-24.
3. Hannah makes a promise to God; if God gives her a son, she will give the son back to God.
   1. But God already had a plan, God wanted to use Samuel to save all of Israel from the Philistines, but God never forces himself on us humans.
      1. God wants us to freely give what we own and have to God so that he can use it.
      2. Hannah had probably prayed this prayer to have a child many times, but it is only now that she is truly surrendering everything to God, and that is exactly what God has been waiting for all along.
   2. I don't think Hannah would have been prepared to give her son away in this way if she hadn't been so desperate and desperate.
      1. So even though it may seem difficult at the moment, God can actually push us to a place where you and I are ready to give everything to God.
      2. Of course, the best thing would have been to give everything to God before we got down on our knees, but most of the time we humans work in such a way that as long as everything in life works well and life is wonderful, we don't think much about God.
      3. But when life crashes and things get tough, we're usually quick to turn to God.
      4. As slow as we humans are to turn to God when life is going well, we are just as quick to turn to God when life is difficult.
      5. We should learn to find a balance and turn to God both when things are going well in life and when they are not.

[[@Bible:1 sam 1:15-17]]1Sam 1:15-17

1. Hannah defends herself and says that she has not been drinking at all, but that she is praying in sorrow.
   1. Then a surprised Eli replies that God will give her what she asked for!
   2. Hannah is happy and lets go of her grief.
2. Imagine what would have happened if Hannah had not turned to God?
   1. By then she had locked up her grief and despair in her heart.
   2. Then she would not have received her answer to prayer.
   3. Then, over time, she would have become a bitter and angry person.
3. Do you have a grief or something similar that you are carrying?
   1. Let it out!
   2. Turn to God and cry it out, hand over your prayer to God, don't shut it inside you.

[[@Bible:1 sam 1:18]]1Sam 1:18

1. Hannah believes the priest's words and walks away happy!
   1. Somehow Hannah understood that it was not just the priest Eli's words but that God was behind them.
   2. Just because a priest or pastor says something doesn't mean it's true, but Hannah seems to have had a supernatural realization that this was a promise from God!

## 1 Sam 1:19-28 - Hannah receives Samuel and gives him to the Lord

[[@Bible:1 sam 1:20]]1Sam 1:20

1. From something small, something great can be born.
   1. Hannah could not have children, but she turned to God and her prayer was answered.
   2. Do you have a grief or a problem?
      1. Leave your problem to God.
      2. Then God will bless you.
2. The name Samuel means "heard by God".

[[@Bible:1 sam 1:22]]1Sam 1:22

1. Hannah stands by her promise to God and intends to raise Samuel with Eli the priest.
2. In Israel at this time, it was routine to breastfeed the child until they were three years old (2 Macc 7:27).

[[@Bible:1 sam 1:23]]1Sam 1:23

1. Here Elkanah sets a spiritual example when he gives very good advice to Hannah.
   1. Elkanah himself had not experienced God in the same way as Hannah, but he understood that she had.
   2. Elkanah does not try to control Hannah's decision to give away Samuel, who is after all also Elkanah's child. Elkanah bows to God's will, even though he himself had not heard God's voice but must trust that Hannah knows what she is doing.

[[@Bible:1 sam 1:28]]1Sam 1:28

1. Elkanah's family had the habit of worshipping the Lord. In positive, as well as in negative, they worshipped the Lord.

## 1 Sam 3:1-21 - The LORD Calls Samuel

[[@Bible:1 sam 3:1]]1Sam 3:1

1. The boy Samuel grows up with the priest Eli because his mother Hannah was actually barren but miraculously became pregnant. Since Hannah had been given her child by God, she chose to give Samuel back to God and thus let him grow up among the priests (1 Sam 1).
   1. In the same way, today we should also hand over our children to the Lord and ask God to bless them (Mark 10:13-16).
      1. Compared to Eli's two sons, Samuel is a stark contrast. Eli failed to raise his own two sons but does a good job with Samuel.
   2. We do not know exactly how old the boy Samuel was at this time, but according to the Jewish historian Josephus, he was twelve years old.
   3. Probably Samuel served by performing various practical tasks such as "opening the doors of the house of the Lord" as we read in verse 15.
2. The only time God spoke in the book of Samuel before this occasion is when God judges the priest Eli and his sons for their sinful lives (1 Sam 2:27).
3. If God's people honestly and humbly seek God, he will answer (Jer 29:12-13), so presumably God did not speak because both the people and the priesthood were so far removed from God that they were uninterested in God's voice.
4. Part of the reason Israel was in a dark period was that Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, abused their priesthood and slept with women who served at the tent of meeting (1 Sam 2).
   1. Eli was warned by a man of God because of this behavior (1 Sam 2:27ff), but he could not get his sons to stop.
   2. Eli was both a parent and a manager of his two sons, and thus had a dual responsibility to rebuke his sons.
      1. Parents have the greatest responsibility, but also the greatest influence, over the spiritual development of their children. A child is far more influenced by the religiosity of his or her parents than by that of the pastor or Sunday school. A parent who does not read the Bible or pray with their children, but leaves it to Sunday school, is unlikely to see their children learn to read the Bible and pray.
   3. When God sends a prophet with a word of judgment, there is always time to repent before the judgment comes (Jonah 3:10).
   4. It is probably no coincidence that Samuel and Eli's two sons are mentioned alternately in these chapters. Samuel's pious life is in stark contrast to the unrighteous life of Eli's two sons. It is not possible to live a selfish and covetous life if one intends to serve God.
      1. Samuel did as God said and lived a life that honored God, which resulted in God entrusting his word to Samuel and allowing him to be a prophet.
      2. Eli's two sons lived a corrupt and lustful life which resulted in their eventual disappearance from the scene.

[[@Bible:1 sam 3:2]]1Sam 3:2

1. Just as Eli the priest had begun to go blind, Israel was also spiritually blind.
2. For the one who seeks God with all his heart, God will allow himself to be found.

[[@Bible:1 sam 3:4]]1Sam 3:4

1. Eli the priest didn't listen to the man of God, so now God speaks through a little boy. God has many ways of speaking to us and if we don't listen the first time, it's not impossible that he will speak to us a second time in a new way.
2. God speaks to us humans in different ways. Among other things, God can speak to us through a clear and audible voice, through Bible words or through our thoughts.
   1. How do you know that it is actually God's voice you are hearing and not your own thoughts? Personally, I sometimes find it hard to tell. Sometimes I have a clear sense that it is God speaking, but sometimes I find it hard to know if it is not my own thoughts I am hearing. The best way to find out if it is God speaking or not is to try! Present what you think is God's message to the person in question and be sure to point out that you are unsure whether it is God's voice or not and ask the person in question to test whether the message was from God or not. The more you practice and listen, the more God tends to speak and the more confident you become.
3. Judging from Samuel's reaction, it seems that God spoke to Samuel with an audible voice.
4. Even if Samuel doesn't understand that it is God who is speaking, his response to God's call is perfectly good!
5. Abraham (Genesis 22:1), Jacob (Genesis 46:2), Moses (Exodus 3:4), Isaiah (Isaiah 6:8) and Ananias (Acts 9:10) also responded in this way.

[[@Bible:1 sam 3:5]]1Sam 3:5

1. Even if Samuel misunderstood the situation, he still does the right thing based on his knowledge. Samuel didn't understand that it was God speaking, so he dutifully rushes to Eli, who is blind and may be in need of help.

[[@Bible:1 sam 3:6]]1Sam 3:6

1. Samuel was not dissing God when he ran away to Eli, he simply did not understand that it was God speaking. God saw Samuel's heart and spoke again.
2. It is not uncommon that once God speaks to us, he also confirms it by either saying it again, that a friend has received the same message, or in some other way. If you are unsure whether God has spoken or not, it is not wrong to ask God for some kind of confirmation that you have indeed heard correctly.
   1. Being unsure whether you have heard correctly or not does not necessarily mean that you doubt that God can *speak*, but that you doubt that you can *hear*.

[[@Bible:1 sam 3:7]]1Sam 3:7

1. Although Samuel grew up among priests, served before the Lord, and seems to have been a pious little boy, he still did not know the Lord.
2. In the same way, today you can grow up in a Christian family, go to church every Sunday and know the message of the Bible, and still not have given your life to God.
3. It is right and proper to raise one's children in the best righteous way possible, but it is still up to each individual to give his or her life to God and become a disciple of Jesus.
4. We see in this text that it was God who first sought Samuel, not the other way around. According to Jesus, no man can come to Jesus unless the Father "draws him" (John 6:44) and surely Samuel's mother Hannah had prayed many times for her little son Samuel, and now she is getting answers.

[[@Bible:1 sam 3:8-9]]1Sam 3:8-9

1. Here, Eli the priest gives Samuel the boy good advice. Eli tells Samuel to make himself available to God's voice, to wait for God's word, and to respond humbly and respectfully if God should speak again.
   1. In order to listen to God's voice, it is good to make yourself available. Samuel goes back to his room and waits for God to speak. If you live too busy a life and can never sit still, there's a good chance you'll rarely hear God's voice.
   2. Once God spoke, Eli wanted Samuel to say, "Your *servant* is listening." It is important to understand that it is God who has power and that we are very small compared to God.

[[@Bible:1 sam 3:10]]1Sam 3:10

1. It is very interesting that it says "Then the Lord came and *stood* there". So it seems that this was a physical manifestation of God. Perhaps it was Jesus who somehow appeared to Samuel?

[[@Bible:1 sam 3:11]]1Sam 3:11

1. That what God will do will "echo in both ears" was an expression that what is to come is great and terrible (2 Kings 21:12).
2. The message that God wants Samuel to convey to Eli is a terrible judgment on Eli and his family.

[[@Bible:1 sam 3:14]]1Sam 3:14

1. Eli has previously received a word of warning from the man of God, yet has not repented and now it is too late.
2. In the same way, we should think today that as long as we live, we have time to repent and start believing in Jesus. But when this life is over and we have to come before the Lord, it is too late to repent. Now is the time for reconciliation, now is the time for repentance, take care while grace is still offered!
3. What then happened to Eli and his family was that he himself fell backwards and broke his neck (1 Sam 4:18), his two sons died in the war (1 Sam 4:17), many of his descendants were killed at Nob (1 Sam 22:17-19), and the high priesthood was transferred to the family of Zadok (1 Kings 2:26-27, 35).

[[@Bible:1 sam 3:17-18]]1Sam 3:17-18

1. Little Samuel must have trembled at the prospect of saying this. It's much easier and more fun to deliver happy, positive messages from the Lord, but a prophet must also be able to deliver a word of warning. A prophet who never dares to tell it like it really is runs the risk of tempting the people concerned to continue living a life of sin.
   1. A prophet who does not tell the whole truth is like a doctor who examines us and finds that we have a deadly disease, yet tells us that we are perfectly healthy. Just as a doctor has a responsibility to communicate the whole truth about our health, so a prophet and a sermon have a responsibility to proclaim the whole word of God, not just the positive.
2. What would you do if someone told you that you are a sinner? Would you shrug it off and say, "You're only human!"?
   1. When we are convinced that we are sinners, it is important that we repent and confess our sin. Then we can have our sins forgiven and have a new and better life.
   2. The positive thing about Eli was that he was open to God's word, he wanted to listen to God, the negative thing is that he unfortunately did not change his life in response to God's word.

[[@Bible:1 sam 3:20]]1Sam 3:20

1. Dan was a city in the far north of Israel and Beer-Sheba a city in the far south. The expression "from Dan to Beer-Sheba" was thus an expression similar to our English "from north to south". The expression means "all of Israel".

[[@Bible:1 sam 3:21]]1Sam 3:21

1. God reveals himself most often through his "word", that is, through the Bible.
2. Listening to a sermon or reading the Bible not only means learning more about the Christian faith, it means first and foremost that you can meet God through the words of the Bible.
3. If you want to meet the Lord through the words of the Bible, you should listen to Eli's advice to Samuel in verse 9; to make yourself available to God's voice, to wait for God's word, and to respond humbly and respectfully if God speaks.

## 1 Sam 7:1-17 - Samuel Judges Israel

[[@Bible:1 sam 7:1]]1Sam 7:1

1. The ark of the Lord was a gilded chest that contained, among other things, the stone tablets with the commandments (Exodus 25:10-22).
2. Many other peoples around Israel carried various symbols of their gods with them when they went into battle, and unfortunately Israel imitated this when they believed that they would be victorious as long as they carried the ark of the Lord (1 Sam 4:3). As a result, they lost both the battle and the ark for a period of time. What we can learn from this is that God cannot be controlled by symbols, relics, rituals or the like. It is not possible to say a spell and believe that these very words will heal, you do not become a Christian just because you carry a cross, God does not defeat the enemy just because you carry the ark. God blesses those who humbly believe in God and turn to him directly, not those who try to control God through various rituals.

[[@Bible:1 sam 7:2]]1Sam 7:2

1. After Israel had lost the ark, it was in the possession of the Philistines, which caused them great trouble (1 Sam 5) and eventually led to their being forced to return the ark to Israel (1 Sam 6).
2. Instead of bringing the Ark to its proper place in Silo, the Ark is in Abinadab's house for 20 years. It seems that Israel needed this long time to repent and come to terms with God.
   1. Although it is not explicitly stated in Samuel, it may also be that the city of Shiloh had already been destroyed by the Philistines at this point and that it was therefore not possible to bring the ark to Shiloh (Jer 26:6, 9, Ps 78:60).

[[@Bible:1 sam 7:3]]1Sam 7:3

1. Even though Israel had now gotten the ark of the Lord back, they still had problems with the Philistines. Here the prophet Samuel shows that God's blessing does not depend on whether or not you have the ark, but on whether you have your heart set on the Lord.
   1. Previously, Israel had been more interested in God's *ark* than God himself.
2. Repentance is partly about turning to God in one's "heart", but also about getting rid of the "foreign gods". Repentance *begins* in the heart, but does not stop there, but has concrete consequences in how one lives. But it is also important to remember that conversion without one or the other is a false conversion.
   1. This conversion, which began in the heart and eventually turned out in practice, has similarities with "faith and baptism". To become a disciple of Jesus, one must first "believe in one's heart" and then "be baptized". The faith one has within is confirmed by being baptized.
3. Every person who repents of a past life of sin needs to review his or her life and consider what needs to be made up and possibly left.
   1. There are always things in one's life, culture and tradition that are either "ungodly", "neutral" or "righteous". If one has lived ungodly or worshipped other gods in the past, one must of course stop doing so if one wants to follow God, but there are also neutral things that one does not necessarily have to stop doing just because one repents.
      1. For example, there is not necessarily anything wrong with celebrating the Swedish holiday "Midsummer", even if that holiday is not biblical. Gathering together, eating good food and celebrating that it is summer is not necessarily wrong, this is "neutral" so to speak. However, there are certain elements of Midsummer celebrations that seem undeniably derived from paganism, such as dancing around an "ungodly" phallus symbol. I would advise against this aspect of Midsummer celebrations. To make the celebration more "righteous", one could, for example, treat the poor to good food or something similar.
4. We also understand from this text that Israel's problem was not *the Philistines*, but their own *heart*. No enemy is surmountable if one's heart is turned to the Lord.
5. Israel probably did not consider that they abandoned God when they began to worship other gods, since they continued to worship God. But God does not tolerate sharing his faith with anyone but himself and wanted Israel to serve him *alone.*
   1. Even today, it may be worth considering whether there is anything in life that you hold higher or as high as God, because then it risks acting as an "idol". God wants to be number one in our lives and does not want us to allow anything else in our lives to be more important than Him. For example, if you only think about God on Sunday morning and then totally ignore God for the rest of the week, it might be worth considering what is most important in life.

[[@Bible:1 sam 7:4]]1Sam 7:4

1. "Baal" was a Canaanite god of weather and fertility and the name translates as "lord".
2. "Astarte" was a fertility goddess of the Phoenicians and the other peoples around Israel.
   1. The people of Israel probably prayed to these gods for good weather so that they would have good harvests and so that they would have good love lives. Income and love are probably what people today struggle to achieve as well. Of course, there is nothing wrong with wishing for a good income and someone to marry, but one should not seek help with this from the wrong direction. God has the power to give us what we need and there is no need whatsoever to ask any idol for help with this.
3. Israel has had countless troubles with idolatry throughout its long history, but at least on this occasion it seems that they actually did get rid of the idols and turned to the Lord.

[[@Bible:1 sam 7:5]]1Sam 7:5

1. Mizpah was located in central Israel, not far from Jerusalem, and was the place where Jacob and Laban were reconciled, but also separated (Gen 31:49). It was also a place where Israel had previously gathered to go to battle after they had repented (Judges 20:1).
2. Israel had repented and is now beginning the new life of prayer. Simply stopping doing *wrong* is not enough, one must also start doing *right*.

[[@Bible:1 sam 7:6]]1Sam 7:6

1. Pouring out water before the Lord symbolized that they poured out their heart and truly repented (Lam 2:19). The fact that they also fasted reinforces this symbolism (Joel 2:12).

[[@Bible:1 sam 7:7-8]]1Sam 7:7-8

1. The Philistines hear that Israel has repented and humbled itself before the Lord. Perhaps they saw this as a sign of weakness and thought it would be an opportunity to strike at Israel and defeat them.
   1. But what the Philistines did not understand was that a weak and humble Israel with God on its side is infinitely more difficult to defeat than a militarily strong Israel without God (2 Corinthians 12:10).
2. However, even Israel had not fully understood this and is horrified when they hear that the Philistines are about to attack.
   1. When we are weak in ourselves but trust in the strength of the Lord, we are infinitely stronger than when we think we are so strong that we no longer need the Lord.
3. Don't let it come as a surprise that the devil attacks you when you are right with God. When you live far away from God, it's no wonder the devil never attacks you, but that's because you're exactly where he wants you to be.
4. In the past, Israel was confident when they trusted the ark of the Lord to give them victory, but then they lost (1 Sam 4). Now they have learned their lesson and understand that God cannot be controlled by carrying the ark with them. Now they repent and humble themselves before the Lord, asking for God's help to win the victory.
   1. Instead of relying on a symbol or a ritual (the ark of the Lord), they now turn directly to God for help.
5. Even if we are small and weak in ourselves, we are strong if God is with us. Even if we face an overwhelming enemy, we need not be afraid as long as God is with us.

[[@Bible:1 sam 7:10]]1Sam 7:10

1. Before Samuel prayed, he offered a sacrificial lamb to atone for the sins of the people. In the same way, we can draw closer to God because Jesus, our sacrificial lamb, died on the cross and took away our sins.
2. Previously, Israel had turned to the weather god Baal for help, but now that they have rejected Baal and turned to the Lord, God is showing them who is the real God and the only one who has real power over the weather.
3. Although it was Israel who did the fighting, this victory was won by God, not by Israel. Without the thunderstorm and the confusion among the Philistines, Israel would never have won.

[[@Bible:1 sam 7:12]]1Sam 7:12

1. "Eben-Haezer", also better known as "Ebeneser", means "stone of help" and symbolizes that God helped Israel.
2. The help stone symbolized that God had helped Israel so far, but also that he will help Israel in the future.
3. There is a great difference in the use of symbols when comparing the ark of the Lord and this stone. Here Samuel shows that it is good to let a symbol *remind us* of God's blessing, but it is not okay to think that the symbol itself automatically leads to blessing.

[[@Bible:1 sam 7:13]]1Sam 7:13

1. Samuel was not a mighty military man, he was just a man who turned to the Lord, yet he accomplished more than any wicked general could do.

## 1 Sam 8:1-22 - Israel Demands a King

[[@Bible:1 sam 8:1-3]]1Sam 8:1-3

1. Until this time, Israel had not had a king, but had been ruled by judges from time to time. Throughout Samuel's adult life, he has served as Israel's leader, but now he has grown old and tried to pass on the leadership to his sons.
   1. The difference between a judge and a king was that a judge was called by God to lead Israel through specific events, such as a crisis. A king, on the other hand, was a much firmer form of leadership with an administration, court and palace. Moreover, the royal office was hereditary in comparison to the judge who often returned to his former life when the crisis was over.
   2. When Gideon the judge is offered to be king on an earlier occasion, he replies: "I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you, but the Lord will rule over you." (Judges 8:23).
2. Samuel was a very good judge who stuck to God throughout his life. Here, however, he seems to make one of the few documented mistakes; he appoints his ungodly sons as judges.
   1. There was really no reason for Samuel to appoint his sons as judges, the office had never been inherited before. Rather, judges were chosen by God to lead the people of Israel through a difficult period.
   2. Although Samuel was one of the most godly people in the Bible, there is unfortunately no automatic way for this godliness to be passed on to one's children. You should raise your children as best you can, but in the end, everyone is free to choose the path they want to take.
   3. Since Samuel himself was so devout, one can almost assume that for some reason he did not really realize that his own sons were living ungodly lives. Perhaps Samuel suffered from the well-known phenomenon of not seeing the faults and shortcomings of his own children.

[[@Bible:1 sam 8:4-5]]1Sam 8:4-5

1. It was good of Israel's elders to dare to question poor leadership. Too often I think we humans fall in line and would rather avoid trouble than question a bad leader.
2. Deuteronomy 17:14-20 describes the procedure for Israel to choose a king, so it was not necessarily wrong for the elders of Israel to ask for a king, but their *reason* for wanting a king is clearly wrong.
   1. Wanting a king because "everyone else has one" is almost a childish argument. Israel is making the unfortunately all-too-common mistake of wanting to be like the rest of the world. Being God's people has and always will mean being *different*. The more the believer wants to be "like everyone else", the less one becomes what God wants one to be.
      1. Israel's fault in this case was that they were jealous of the other nations around them and were not satisfied with what God gave them.
   2. Even we Christians today must be careful not to try to be "like everyone else". Paul writes "do not conform to this world" (Rom 12:2) in his letter to the believers in Rome. As long as we live here on earth, we must somehow relate to the society around us, but we should be careful not to try to become like "everyone else" because we are called to be different and to be a "light in the darkness" (Matt 5:13-16).
3. Israel desires a king, but actually they already had a king; God! In other words, their request shows that they are indirectly dissatisfied with God acting as their king (1 Sam 12:12).
   1. Israel wanted a human king to fight their wars, an argument that is very strange because God has proven time and again that he is the one who wins wars for Israel (Ex 23:27, Joshua 10:10, 1 Sam 7:10).
   2. So Israel already had a king to fight their wars and judge between them, but what they didn't have was someone who *looked like* a king*,* a man with a crown and a mantle. They wanted to be like all the other peoples around them who had a stately and pompous king. In other words, they seem to be more interested in the *surface* than in the *content*.
      1. We Christians today must also be vigilant so that we do not fall into the trap of choosing a church or a pastor just because they superficially meet our expectations. A pastor may be good at speaking, have a nice jacket and talk a lot about leadership, but when you talk to him about Jesus, you notice that his spiritual relationship with God is almost non-existent. Even a church may look on the surface to be flashy or cool, but when you get to know the church members, you notice that Jesus is not at the center. Of course, it is not wrong for a pastor to be good at speaking, but the most important thing is that he has a good relationship with God. Of course it is not wrong that a church is cool, but the most important thing is that the church has Jesus at the center.

[[@Bible:1 sam 8:6]]1Sam 8:6

1. Samuel was a prophet who should certainly be listened to, but the people of Israel chose to insist on getting their own way. How do you know when to listen to someone who claims to be a prophet or prophetic?
   1. First, Samuel was a *well-known and proven* prophet who throughout his lifetime proved himself to be a man of God to be trusted. He had many times before conveyed God's word to the people and also led Israel to repentance that led to God's defeat of the people's enemies. In other words, Samuel could be trusted.
   2. Secondly, one needs to compare what a prophet says with the *word of God*. Even a prophet can mishear or at worst go astray. Paul urges in the New Testament that we should not "despise prophecy", but rather "test all things" and "keep what is good" (1 Thess 5:20). Even if a prophet has prophesied correctly many times in the past, we still need to compare it with the Bible and make sure it agrees with God's written word. A prophecy that does not agree with the Bible is not a message from God.
   3. If, despite having tried the message of a well-known prophet, you are still unsure whether the message is really from God or not, my advice is to simply *wait and see*. Rushing into something that you think is from God but is not can lead to a lot of trouble in the future and if you are unsure, it is better to ask God for some kind of confirmation of the message.
2. However, Samuel is not strictly speaking "prophetic" when he tells Israel that this is a "bad proposal". Samuel has come to know God's will so well that he understands that this is not good for Israel, and so Samuel speaks as a "shepherd who knows his sheep" rather than as a "prophet".
   1. The fact that Israel could one day, at least theoretically, have a king was written down in the Book of Genesis, so Israel's request was in accordance with God's word. The mistake Israel makes is to *ask for a king itself* instead of *waiting for the king God wants to give*.
   2. There was a suitable person, a man after God's own heart (1 Sam 13:14, Acts 13:22), whom God probably intended to eventually make king of Israel, but he was not yet born and the time was not yet ready. Had Israel restrained themselves and waited for *God's time*, they would most likely have had a king, but not Saul, but David.
   3. But since Israel insists on having their own king, just like all the other nations around them, God will give them a king, but to really show Israel that Saul is not the king God wanted to give Israel, he says "*your* king" in verse 18.
3. When Samuel prays to the Lord, he is actually doing the right thing, taking his concerns to God. Samuel, of course, was unhappy both that the people rejected his own sons, but also that they rejected God. But instead of throwing a tantrum, he turns to God for advice.
   1. The Lord was Samuel's king, and here Samuel sets an example of how the rest of Israel should relate to God.
   2. In the same way, today we can turn to God with all our worries and ask for help, guidance and advice.

[[@Bible:1 sam 8:7]]1Sam 8:7

1. In a similar way, Israel rejects Jesus when Pontius Pilate says to the Jews, "Here you see your king!" to which the people replied, "We have no king but Caesar." (John 19:14-15).
2. To this verse it is appropriate to make a reflection on leadership in today's church. My personal view is that (1) *God* and no one else should be our king and that (2) the leaders, pastors, and priests who exist should serve to *help the* believer. In other words, these two points mean that every believer can approach God himself without going through the pastor or anyone else. Every believer, thanks to the Holy Spirit, has the possibility of direct contact with God, just as Samuel so admirably shows in verse 6. What, then, should leaders be for? Well, it is the job of the Christian leader to *train* the believer to become a disciple of Jesus. Not everyone is equally advanced in their Christian faith and therefore needs the help and guidance of, for example, a pastor. Not everyone has the time and opportunity to study the Bible in depth and preach God's Word into our time, and so it is good that there are people with that opportunity, and then you would do well to listen to the knowledge they impart. But each person is ultimately responsible for his or her own faith and certainly should not see the pastor as a "king". This approach, however, requires each believer to take responsibility and have their own living personal relationship with God and not to laxly leave this to the pastor.

[[@Bible:1 sam 8:10]]1Sam 8:10

1. God warns Israel of all the rights a king will have and all the negative things it will mean for the people, but still Israel wants a king.
2. Israel asks God for something that is bad for them and God gives them an answer to teach them a lesson.
   1. If a small child asks you to play with a chainsaw, you would obviously not allow it, but if a teenager asks you to drink a whole bottle of Tabasco, you would probably allow it so that the teenager would learn the negative consequences and hopefully not do it again.
   2. I think most of us have probably asked God for things that aren't really good for us, and then we've gotten mad at God for not giving us what we ask for. We should probably be grateful that God doesn't always give us answers to prayer!
   3. But sometimes it can actually be that God also answers our bad prayers to teach us the consequences of our own stupidity so that hopefully we don't do it again and instead learn something useful from it.

[[@Bible:1 sam 8:22]]1Sam 8:22

1. Even when Israel tries to evade God's leadership by asking for a human king, it is still God who appoints the king.

## 1 Sam 10:1-8 - Saul Anointed King

[[@Bible:1 sam 10:1]]1Sam 10:1

1. Saul was *chosen* by God to be king over Israel and leader of God's people.
   1. Even you and I can receive a mission from God. In general, all Christians are commissioned to tell people about Jesus and spread the kingdom of God, but God can also call each of us to specific individual tasks.
   2. How do I know if God has given me a specific task?
      1. If you often think and/or are bothered that, for example, "the congregation should pray more!" or "the church should evangelize more!", then this is probably because God has called you to do just that. You are experiencing these feelings because God is calling you to "pray more" or "evangelize more".
         1. Personally, I believe that God has called me to different tasks at different times. At the age of 18, when I was a new disciple, my heart burned for *evangelism* and I witnessed about Jesus to everyone and everything, at all times. While studying at the Bjärka-Säby Bible School, God led me into a time of *prayer* and I often took long prayer walks where I had long conversations with God about everything and nothing. When I worked as a youth pastor in Bankeryd, God developed me into a *shepherd*, I learned to take care of the young people and help them grow in faith. At Örebro Mission School, God opened my eyes to biblical *teaching* and I spent much of my time trying to get better at preaching.
      2. Often it is easier for people around you to see what gift and task you have been given by God. Ask your loved ones what they think God has called you to do and what gifts God may have given you.
         1. God has given all human beings *natural* and innate gifts, such as musicality, humour or dexterity. God wants you to use these natural gifts in the service of his kingdom.
         2. God can also give *supernatural* gifts to all believers in Jesus. These gifts are not innate but are given by the Holy Spirit according to what He considers best (1Corinthians 12:4-11).
      3. If you really have no idea what task God has called you to, you can seek God's will by praying and fasting. Simply talk to God and ask him to give you a task and equip you with the right gifts for the job. If you do not receive any answer from God at all and you have no idea what God has called you to, then generally prepare yourself to serve God in the best way possible and wait for God's right time. When the time is right, God will show you what you are to do.
2. In Old Testament Israel, one *was anointed* king in much the same way as one is "crowned" king in Europe.
   1. Being anointed with oil, as Saul is here, is a symbolic act that demonstrates what the Holy Spirit is doing in Saul's heart. Saul is here anointed with oil on the *outside*, but in a few verses will be anointed by the Holy Spirit on the *inside* (1 Sam 10:10).
      1. When God gives someone a mission, he also gives the power needed for the task at hand. Now that Saul is to be king over Israel, he too will receive the power of the Holy Spirit.
   2. When God gave someone an important task, it was common for these people to be "anointed" for the task. For example, priests were anointed for their office (Exodus 28:41) and prophets (1 Kings 19:16).
      1. Sometimes the oil was poured on the priests (Exodus 29:7), sometimes it was sprinkled on the priests (Exodus 29:21).
      2. The recipe for anointing oil is found in Exodus 30:22-33.
   3. Jesus was anointed with the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38) and we Christians today can also be anointed with the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:20).
      1. In the new covenant, EVERYONE can be anointed! God wants us to live a Christian life that is really more than we can handle on our own, thus making us dependent on God's power. God wants to empower us to live a spiritual and miraculous life.
         1. We have several examples of this in the Bible: the little shepherd boy David defeats the giant Goliath in a duel, Paul, the forerunner of Christians, becomes a devoted missionary, Hannah served God with fasting and prayer night and day at the temple (Luke 2:36-38).
      2. Being anointed with the Holy Spirit is, as in the Old Testament, about being empowered by God for the task at hand. Just as Saul was empowered by God to be a good king over Israel, so we can be empowered by God to be good at the task we are given by God.
      3. According to Paul in 1 Corinthians 12, all of us Christians belong to one body (Christ), but we are different parts of this body and in other words have different tasks. In order to function well in these tasks, the Holy Spirit equips us with various gifts of grace.
      4. In the same way that an engine without oil goes bad and risks wearing out, one can experience the Christian life as "sluggish" if one is not anointed by the Holy Spirit for the task at hand. Without the Holy Spirit, it can feel like you are struggling against the wind and the blessing is missing, but with the Holy Spirit, things go more smoothly, you get more power and different kinds of blessings flow over.
      5. Do you want to be anointed with the Holy Spirit and empowered for your Christian life and mission? Then ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit.
      6. Don't you know what task God has given you? Then pray that God reveals it to you or gives you a mission.
3. Not only did Samuel anoint Saul king, he *kissed* him too. In doing so, Samuel shows that it is not only God who will bless Saul, but Samuel will also support him.
   1. The prophet Samuel was at Saul's side until Saul eventually broke God's commandments (1 Sam 13:13-15).
4. Samuel reminds Saul of the necessary fact that Israel is *the Lord's inheritance. The* people of Israel do not belong to Saul, they belong to God. Saul may rule over Israel, but he must never forget to whom Israel belongs.

[[@Bible:1 sam 10:3]]1Sam 10:3

1. The prophet Samuel gives Saul a detailed sign from God that will *confirm* what God has done with Saul. This confirmation will give Saul the assurance that God has indeed anointed him king. If Samuel's sign had somehow not matched reality, then Saul could understand that what Samuel had done was not from God.
   1. If someone comes to you with a prophetic message, how do you know it's really from God and not made up? If you're not sure, it's very good to ask God for some kind of confirmation, just like Saul did here.
   2. If in the future you begin to doubt that God has really called you to a certain task, it may be good to remember that it was confirmed.
2. Christians can learn to listen to the voice of God. At first, you may hear more general messages, such as "I feel that someone is feeling a little bad right now". If you are a group of people, it is not very strange if that particular message would hit at least someone. The prophet Samuel has learned through years of training to hear God's voice in detail.

[[@Bible:1 sam 10:9-10]]1Sam 10:9-10

1. These prophets were a bunch of people who had given themselves wholeheartedly to God. There were many such groups at that time (2 Kings 5:22).
2. Saul was anointed king before, but now he is anointed by the Holy Spirit!
3. Being filled with the Holy Spirit and being transformed go together.
   1. All of us have faults and shortcomings in our lives, and God wants to change us for the better, so that we become more and more like Jesus (Romans 8:29). It is important for the Christian to allow himself to be filled with the Holy Spirit again and again (Eph 5:18-19).
4. Compared to the prophet Samuel or King David, Saul was not a very spiritual person. This does not mean that Saul was necessarily a bad person, but if you want to be a leader of God's people, it is good to train yourself in the spiritual life.
5. The prophet Samuel could only anoint Saul with oil as a symbol of what the Holy Spirit would do. Only God can transform Saul's heart.
   1. In the same way, we Christians can only bear witness to Jesus, share our faith and baptize those who confess their faith, but we cannot change a person's heart. It is important to understand and accept one's part in events and trust God to do His part.

## 1 Sam 10:17-27 - Saul Proclaimed King

[[@Bible:1 sam 10:24]]1Sam 10:24

1. Saul was chosen, anointed, confirmed and endowed with the Holy Spirit. Now he is also finally *made public*.
   1. Saul demonstrates a healthy approach to leadership. Saul is in hiding and does not really aspire to the royal office. It is good that Saul does not put himself forward but waits for God to make him public.
   2. Similarly, we may not aspire to a nice job in the church, but if God wants to lift us up, we should accept the challenge.
2. How many, chosen by God, are "hiding among the faithful"? What if there are many men and women of God whom God has chosen and equipped for a fine task, but who never get the chance to serve God because too many whom God has not chosen elbow their way in and snatch up the fine tasks in the church?
   1. Saul was a handsome and stately young man who "looked" like a king. When choosing leaders in the church, it is important to look at the spiritual attributes. Perhaps there are excellent spiritual leaders "hidden among the faith".

## 1 Sam 11:1-15 - Saul Defeats the Ammonites

[[@Bible:1 sam 11:1]]1Sam 11:1

1. Saul is the new king of Israel, but as we see in verse 12, before this event he did not yet have all the people with him. The people observed him and wondered if he was really the right man in the right place.
   1. This is something that many leaders recognise, especially at the beginning of their leadership. Just because you've been hired as a pastor, for example, doesn't automatically mean you have the trust of all the congregants right away. You need to earn trust by showing those you are appointed to lead that you are a capable shepherd who cares for both God and people.
   2. Now, however, a situation arises in which Saul has the opportunity to prove himself a capable leader of Israel.
2. The Ammonites were descended from Lot, Abraham's nephew (Gen 19:38), were settled east of Israel (Josh 12:2) and had previously attempted to conquer Israelite land (Judges 11:4ff). While Israel is preoccupied with the Philistines in the west, the Ammonites in the east take the opportunity to prey on a weakened Israel.
3. The name "Nahaz" means "serpent" and there are many similarities between his approach and that of the devil, who appears as a serpent in the first book of the Bible when he deceives the first humans into sinning (Gen 3:1-20) and who is then thrown into prison in the last book of the Bible (Rev 20:2).
   1. Nahaz was the enemy of earthly Israel, just as the devil is our spiritual enemy.
      1. According to Paul, we Christians do not fight against *"flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers and rulers of the world here in darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens."* (Ephesians 6:12)
      2. Israel's battles against earthly enemies often serve as an example for us how to fight against our spiritual enemies.
4. The Israelis in Jabesh were suddenly surrounded by hostile forces and are doing what they can to survive. In one way this is understandable, but on the other hand, perhaps they should have gone to their king first?
   1. In the same way, today we too can give up too easily. When we face difficulties in life, we often try to solve them on our own before asking God for help. You can't always help the situation you find yourself in, but you can help the way you handle it.
   2. If you want to see a lot of God's miracles in your life, it is not necessarily wrong to find yourself in situations where you are actually in great need of God's miracles.

[[@Bible:1 sam 11:2]]1Sam 11:2

1. This condition from Nahas probably came as a shock! The people of Jabesh had probably expected to pay taxes to Nahas or something similar, not to be maimed in this way!
2. In the Dead Sea Scrolls, a text fragment (4QSam) has been found where the following can be read: "Nahaz, king of the children of Ammon, oppressed the children of Gad and Reuben severely, and he put out all their right eyes and struck terror and fear into Israel. There was not one of the children of Israel on the other side of the Jordan whose right eye had not been pierced by Nahaz king of Ammon, except the seven thousand men who fled from the children of Ammon and came to Jabesh of Gilead." (*Understanding the Dead Sea Scrolls,* Vintage Books, 1993, p.156ff).
3. By gouging out one eye of the Israelites, he removes their ability to rebel at a later time because they become useless warriors. Both sword and bow handling are greatly impaired with only one eye.
   1. But Nahaz not only wanted to wipe out the fighting ability of the Israelites, he also wanted to *shame* them.
4. The devil wants to do to you and me what Nahaz wanted to do to the Israelites, and that is why this Bible text serves as an excellent instruction on how to deal with our enemy.
   1. If the devil has surrounded you and besieged you with problems, don't be fooled by his proposals for peace that will blind you and take away your fighting ability. Turn to the Lord and ask for help. Do not let the devil frighten you because he cannot defeat you if God is on your side.
   2. If the devil succeeds in "shaming" us, as Nahaz wanted, then there is a risk that we as believers will not dare to approach God. If you have ever fallen for a temptation, you know that it is not easy to go and have a prayer immediately afterwards. Just like Adam and Eve who hid from God after eating of the forbidden fruit, we hide from the Lord when we have given in to the temptations of the devil.
      1. The remedy is to repent wholeheartedly and turn from sin and ask God for forgiveness.
   3. Being besieged by a hostile force, like the Israelites, was not necessarily the worst situation to be in, as it gave them an opportunity to witness the miracles of God. So an "attack from the devil" need not always be a wholly negative experience, as the situation hopefully leads to a more desirable state of dependence on God.
      1. Unfortunately, I think too many of us Christians live a life that is pleasing to the devil and he finds no reason to attack us. After all, if we are not in the habit of praying to God or reading the Bible, why would he want to attack us? If we are not a threat to him, he will probably leave us alone.
      2. It is only when we are made aware that we really need Jesus that we fully turn to him.

[[@Bible:1 sam 11:3]]1Sam 11:3

1. The people of Jabesh did not know where to find someone to rescue them, so they sent messengers "throughout the land of Israel".
   1. What is positive about this is that the people of Jabesh knew that they could not save themselves and that they were dependent on a "saviour"; i.e. a "saviour".
      1. The name "Jesus" means "God saves" and this whole chapter points to Jesus. Being in extreme distress can sometimes be positive if it leads to the realization that you need to be saved by Jesus. It is more common for people to pray to Jesus when they have big problems that they cannot sort out themselves than when everything is under control and they are not in need of a saviour.
      2. The people of Jabesh don't know where to find their savior, so they try to send messengers everywhere. It is the same for the person who has not heard of Jesus; they do not know where to find salvation, so they try all sorts of things. The best thing would be if we Christians witnessed so much that when unbelieving people get into deep trouble they turn directly to Jesus because they have heard that there is help to be had there.
2. Why did Nahaz allow them to go out into all Israel and seek help? Because then all Israel would hear of Nahaz and his power, i.e. more glory to Nahaz and more humiliation to Israel.

[[@Bible:1 sam 11:5]]1Sam 11:5

1. Saul does not yet seem to have really started living like a king, but lives like an ordinary man of the people, taking care of his oxen.
   1. Perhaps this was because the people did not yet trust in Saul's abilities, or perhaps Saul was not yet ready to live up to his role as king.
   2. It can be the same with leadership. It's only when you start to gain people's trust that they start to contact you with their problems and ask for your help.
   3. In a way, it was probably wise of Saul to go back to his old job even though he had become king. In this way he humbled himself and let God exalt him at the right time instead of the other way around.
      1. As a Christian leader, it is important not to exalt oneself and take credit for something that God does.

[[@Bible:1 sam 11:6-7]]1Sam 11:6-7

1. Often we Christians think that it is sinful to be angry, but this view can sometimes prevent us from properly confronting the devil and sin. It is not wrong to be angry at the evil in the world.
   1. Saul was not only "angry", he was even "very angry". When was the last time you were so angry with the devil that you cut up a couple of oxen? Oxen are big powerful animals that are very valuable, then as now.
   2. It doesn't always have to be wrong to show the world how we feel about sin, especially when it shows up in our own lives. Daring to be "holy angry" is not a sign of weakness, but a sign that you take your faith seriously and really want to serve God.
2. The Spirit of God fell on Saul to empower her to defeat Nahaz. In the same way, we can receive power from the Holy Spirit to defeat the devil.
   1. The Spirit of God is not an "experience" that we can seek in order to get a "kick" in our Christian life. According to Jesus, the Spirit of God wants to empower us to become "witnesses" (Acts 1:8). If you pray to God for the courage to witness your faith to others, he will fill you with the power of his Holy Spirit.
3. Saul's method of "awakening" the people may have been a bit odd, sending pieces of meat around the country sounds more like something the Mafia does than a man of God, but it certainly had an effect, the whole people rallying around their leader!
   1. Sometimes we Christians need to put aside our internal strife and unite around a leader or a current issue. Sometimes it's wrong to just sit quietly and watch as something important is happening around us.

[[@Bible:1 sam 11:9]]1Sam 11:9

1. Saul had made up his mind, he would, with God's help, become the king and leader he was called and chosen to be.

[[@Bible:1 sam 11:11]]1Sam 11:11

1. The victory was total! The Ammonites are defeated, Jabesh is saved and Saul wins the confidence of the people!

[[@Bible:1 sam 11:12-13]]1Sam 11:12-13

1. Saul could have taken revenge on those who did not believe in him, but he chooses to forgive them instead. Although Saul eventually becomes a worse and worse king, at least on this occasion he was a good king who gives *God the* glory for the victory.
   1. In the same way, we too should remain vigilant even after we have experienced a great spiritual victory. We are not immune to the devil's attacks just because we have won once; we must continue to grow in our faith and draw closer to God day by day.

[[@Bible:1 sam 11:14]]1Sam 11:14

1. Saul was king over Israel even before this renewal, but with this the people began to serve him for real.
   1. In the same way, you and I can have Jesus as our King while, in all honesty, not exactly living as if we were his wholehearted servants. If that is the case, it can sometimes be good to "renew" our allegiance to Jesus and pray for a fresh start.

## 1 Sam 12:1-5 - Samuel’s Farewell Address

[[@Bible:1 sam 12:1-2]]1Sam 12:1-2

1. In the previous chapter, the new king Saul won an important victory over the Ammonites, a victory that won Saul the confidence of the people. This means that from now on the people will consider King Saul to be the leader of Israel, and not the prophet Samuel as before. To make this transition as smooth as possible, Samuel now makes this speech, whereupon he intends to step down from the leadership role and hand it over to Saul instead.
2. Even though Samuel stepped down from official leadership, he continued to be some kind of leader, or "judge" as it is often called in this part of Israel's history (1 Sam 7:15).
   1. A man of God who has been called by God does not abruptly end his calling even if someone else formally takes over the leadership role. If you have received a gift from God that you are actively using in church work, for example, that does not mean that God is withdrawing His gift from you just because someone else gets your job. You can and should continue to be a blessing through the gift God has given you for as long as you are able (Rom 11:29).
   2. Like John the Baptist, Samuel steps back from his leadership position when he sees God raising up a new leader. In this, a leader needs to be humble and seek God's will and plan for his life. We should not cling to a position for selfish reasons, but be open to the fact that God wants to lead us into something new from time to time (John 3:30).
3. The fact that Israel had a king was actually against both Samuel's and God's will, and Samuel now wants to make this clear to the people. God agreed to this wish and chose Saul, but this worthy wish originally came from Israel itself.
4. The book of Samuel is very much a handbook on the subject of leadership and Samuel is undoubtedly one of the main role models in the book. But why is it that Samuel sometimes actually goes against both his own will and God's when he lets the people have their way? Isn't that a sign of bad leadership? Well, it's possible, at least humanly speaking. But Samuel does this because his primary loyalty is to God, and if God says something, Samuel obeys God's will. Samuel can do this because he lives in a close relationship with God.
   1. In the same way, Christian leaders today should strive for a close relationship with God. It is not always the case that the best human decision is the one that God wants us to make, and so it is important to seek God's will in important matters.
5. When Samuel realized that he was getting old, he made his sons "judges" and successors to Samuel (1 Sam8). However, the sons were not as good leaders as Samuel, so the people did not want them as leaders and instead demanded a king.
   1. It was great of Samuel to listen to the wishes of the people even when they clashed with his own sons. Now Samuel's sons were in the midst of the rest of the people, i.e. no longer leaders.
6. Since his youth, Samuel has been a man of God and a good leader of God's people Israel. What a joy it is to look back on your life at an old age and see that you were able to run the whole race, that you persevered and were faithful to God all your life!
   1. I have a feeling that our society today is very transient and it's often hard to imagine going into something that lasts for years, let alone a lifetime! The great challenge for us today is to embrace Samuel's lifelong perspective, to have the attitude that one should serve God all one's life and be faithful to him even unto death. This is no easy task, but if we take one day at a time and focus on Jesus, the rest should work itself out as we go along.
7. In James' letter we read that: *"My brothers, not many should become teachers. For you know that we shall be judged more severely."* (James 3:1).
   1. It is not always easy to be a Christian leader, and one should be well aware of that. Anyone who seeks leadership out of a desire for power or attention will not last a lifetime as a leader. As a Christian leader, it is important to teach correctly from the whole Bible, but also to *live* according to the Bible's teachings. As a leader, you are constantly in the eye of everyone, and it is often obvious quite quickly if you have become a leader for selfish reasons.
   2. As a congregation, it is important to choose leaders according to the right criteria. One must be careful not to go solely by appearances, i.e. speaking skills, singing qualities, gender, age, degree, etc. This is not always unimportant, but the most important thing is to go by the potential leader's inner character, faith, prayer life, morals, etc. No one is perfect, but it is important to go through all these aspects when choosing a leader for something as important as God's own church.

[[@Bible:1 sam 12:3]]1Sam 12:3

1. Can you imagine the Swedish Prime Minister asking the people of Sweden a similar question?
2. It's not that Samuel is now trying to boast about how good a leader he has been, but he wants to make it absolutely clear to everyone that he is not handing over a mess to Saul. Israel's leadership, thanks to Samuel, is in good order and if Saul just continues in Samuel's footsteps, he has every chance of doing a good job.
3. Every Christian leader should strive to be able, at the end of his life, to be publicly examined in this way, with honour intact. How many would de facto pass this kind of scrutiny I do not know, but we should all strive for it.
4. In Old Testament Israel, one was anointed king in much the same way as one is "crowned" king in Europe.
   1. In this case, being anointed with oil is a symbolic outward act that demonstrates what the Holy Spirit is doing inwardly. Saul was anointed with oil on the *outside* (1 Sam 10:1), but was also anointed by the Holy Spirit on the *inside* (1 Sam 10:10).
   2. When God gives someone a mission, he also gives the power needed for the task at hand. When Saul becomes king over Israel, he also receives the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish the great task.

[[@Bible:1 sam 12:4]]1Sam 12:4

1. The people agree with Samuel's words, Samuel has not treated them wrong in any way but has been a good leader.
2. If Saul or the people should at any time later blame any of Israel's problems on Samuel, then this statement will testify against them.

[[@Bible:1 sam 12:7]]1Sam 12:7

1. If you compare the history of Israel with the history of Sweden, the Swedish history is very focused on wars and kings, while Israel's is more about how God helps his people. Sure, the Old Testament also contains a lot of war, but the focus is not on the genius of the kings but on their relationship with God. When the OT describes a war, it is usually not the war itself that is the focus, but the relationship of the people involved to God.
   1. In the same way, when we look back on our own lives or on the history of the church, we too should remember and pay attention to "the righteous deeds of the Lord", rather than to what we ourselves have accomplished. Often the Lord's story is far more positive than our own story.
2. Now that Saul has recently won a mighty victory over the Ammonites, it is important for the people to understand that it was not really a human achievement but that it was *God* who won the victory *for* Saul, a realization that Saul has made in the past (1 Sam 11:13).
   1. I think all of us humans have a tendency to want to praise a person for something that God has done. So what Samuel does is very good, he stops for a moment and lets the people think, and in doing so he invites them to give glory to God and not to men.
   2. Every time we worship and sing praises to God, we give glory to God for the salvation he has given us through the death of Jesus on the cross. Worshiping God is a good way to shift the focus from man to God.

[[@Bible:1 sam 12:8]]1Sam 12:8

1. Samuel reminds the people of Israel of the first of the Lord's righteous deeds, namely, that God has brought them out of the slavery of Egypt and into the Promised Land.
   1. It is also important for us today to remind ourselves from time to time that God has brought us out of the slavery of sin and into the kingdom of God. Personally, I think the Eucharist is a good time to remember this.

[[@Bible:1 sam 12:9]]1Sam 12:9

1. It may be difficult to understand, but the second righteous act is that God "sold" the people of Israel to Sisera, the Philistines and the Moabites. Because Israel forgot the Lord, God allowed this misery in order for them to realize their foolishness and return to God.
   1. It is often easier to accept the first "righteous act", that God saved Israel from Egyptian slavery, than it is to accept the second, that God can actually allow misery if the people are rebellious.
      1. People in general often enjoy hearing a sermon about God's love, but have a harder time accepting a sermon about God's wrath. But it is important to understand that we human beings are indeed sinful creatures, and even though God has freed us from the bondage of sin with Jesus' death on the cross, we still sometimes continue to sin, and we need to repent of this. Sometimes, therefore, it is good to hear about God's wrath, so that we understand what God actually thinks about sin in our lives. Now, fortunately, God is a gracious and merciful God, who shows us patience and love time and time again, but that does not take away from the fact that God wants us to repent of all sin in our lives.
   2. Even today, God can lead us into difficulties that have some kind of purpose, such as that we need to repent or that God wants to make us stronger in our faith in some way. The fact that God sometimes lets us go through difficulties does not mean that it is some form of God's "punishment", because Jesus has already died for all our sins. However, God can let us go through difficulties that will ultimately bring us closer to God. Personally, I have gone through many such difficulties and I have always considered myself lucky to be so loved by God that He "corrects" me.

[[@Bible:1 sam 12:10-11]]1Sam 12:10-11

1. "Baal" was a Canaanite fertility god and the name can be translated as "lord".
   1. Baal worship was a recurring problem for the people of Israel who were tempted by the idolatry of the surrounding nations.
2. "Astarte" was a fertility goddess of the Phoenicians and the other peoples around Israel.
   1. The people of Israel probably prayed to these gods for good weather so that they would have good harvests and so that they would have good love lives. Income and love are probably what people today struggle to achieve as well. Of course, there is nothing wrong with wishing for a good income and someone to marry, but one should not seek help with this from the wrong direction. God has the power to give us what we need and there is no need whatsoever to ask any idol for help with this.
3. The third of the "righteous acts of the Lord" was that once Israel cried out to God, confessed their sin and humbled themselves, God also sent salvation.
   1. In the same way, we can be sure that if we cry out to God, confess our sin and humble ourselves, God will save us too!
   2. No matter how unrighteous we humans are, God is still righteous. Even if we humans sin and turn away from God, God continues to be good and loving to us and if we turn back, he forgives us.
4. Samuel's mention of Jerubbaal, Bedan, Jephthah and himself shows us that God is not dependent on human leaders, but can raise up a new leader at any time. God is not dependent on us, we are dependent on him.

[[@Bible:1 sam 12:12]]1Sam 12:12

1. As Israel enters a new stage and becomes a monarchy, it is important to remember all that God has done in the past.
   1. When was the last time you reflected on all that God has done in your life? This is something to remind yourself of from time to time so that you don't forget all the good God has done.
2. Samuel is also careful to point out that this transition to monarchy is actually negative for Israel and had its origins in Israel's desire to be like all the other peoples around, instead of God's chosen people (1 Sam 8:5).
3. When Israel asked for a king, they rejected God as king, but God did not reject Israel, He continued to lead them.

[[@Bible:1 sam 12:13]]1Sam 12:13

1. It is hard to escape Samuel's irritation at the people's desire for a king: "the king whom ***you*** have chosen, whom ***you*** asked for".
   1. Israel wanted a king for *worldly reasons*, and that's what upset both Samuel and God. Israel wanted to be like all the other nations around them, instead of gratefully recognizing that they are God's chosen people and that he is their king.
      1. We should also learn from this today. We who believe in Jesus are God's people and we have Jesus as Lord, King and Saviour. When we confessed Jesus as our Lord, he saved us *from* this world and allowed us to enter the kingdom of God.
      2. Belonging to the *kingdom of God* automatically means that one has left the *kingdom of the world*. In other words, to be jealous of all that belongs to the world is a return to something worse and something that one has hopefully left behind and put behind.
      3. I think it's important to try to look at everything in your life from the perspective that you now belong to the kingdom of God and not the kingdom of the world. For example, you handle your money, your relationships and your time differently in the kingdom of God than in the kingdom of the world. We should not be jealous of the world's selfishness, lust for power and deprivation, but instead live patiently according to the principles of God's kingdom.
   2. Saul had all the "worldly attributes" the people wanted. He is described as *"a stately young man. No one among the children of Israel was more handsome than he. He was head and shoulders above all the people."* (1 Sam 9:2).
      1. Israel wanted a king *"as all nations have"* (1 Sam 8:5), and now they got just that. This king Israel had asked for themselves according to worldly desires, and now they got what they wanted. Eventually, God would give them a king "after his own heart" (1 Sam 13:14), namely King David.
      2. From this we can learn that we should beware of "worldly desires" and of wanting to be like "everyone else". We Christians are not like everyone else and we should focus on trying to do God's will.
   3. Probably Samuel hoped that Israel would eventually realize its mistake and learn from it.
      1. In the same way, we should learn from all the mistakes we make. Even if we do something against God's will, there is always grace and opportunity for repentance.

[[@Bible:1 sam 12:14-15]]1Sam 12:14-15

1. Samuel gives the people a choice; either you serve the Lord or you are rebellious. Israel had been rebellious in the past when they wanted a king, yet God now offers them a way forward.
   1. Even if we deviate from God's plan, it doesn't mean that everything is finished. There is always hope for reconciliation and a fresh start. Instead of digging ourselves into our past sin, it's good if we are reconciled with God so we can move on. God can forgive even the worst sinner, it's never too late.
   2. For example, in our youth we may feel worldly desires for a love relationship with someone who is not a Christian, and this is not to be recommended, but it is quite possible that God will actually give us what we ask for. Then, after a while, when we realize that perhaps it was not a good idea to get together with someone who did not share the Christian faith and ask God for wisdom, it is quite possible that he will help the relationship in some way, rather than calling for a breakup (Rom 8:28).
2. Of course, it would have been best if Israel had never asked for a worldly king, but now they have one, and God wants to make the best of the situation.
   1. Even if you have made wrong decisions in the past and sinned against God, it does not mean that your life is over. Turn to God for guidance and he will show you what to do.

[[@Bible:1 sam 12:16]]1Sam 12:16

1. God will now confirm what Samuel has said through a miracle. Unfortunately, this shows how far away from God the people really were. Had they been close to God, they would have been satisfied with the words of the prophet Samuel, but unfortunately a miracle is the only thing that will make them understand the gravity of the moment.
   1. To long only for miracles but to be uninterested in the Word of God shows an immaturity in Christian development. Miracles are good, but it is far more important to base one's faith on the Word of God than on miracles, signs and experiences.
      1. Moreover, a skilled manipulator can easily make it look like he is performing miracles and thus deceiving a congregation, but it is much more difficult to manipulate God's Word. After all, most people today have their own Bibles that they can read and thus form their own opinions about what is right and wrong.
   2. As we draw closer to God and come to know him, the Word will become more and more important to us. Miracles will always be a wonderful manifestation of God's love, but it is the Word that is central and important.

[[@Bible:1 sam 12:17]]1Sam 12:17

1. It did not rain in Israel during the wheat harvest, so this thunderstorm was certainly unexpected! The fact that the thunder came when Samuel asked for it made the people realize their sin.
   1. The rain also served as a warning to Israel. Rain during the time of the wheat harvest could easily destroy the entire harvest and now the people realized that God has the power to destroy their entire harvest if they turn away from Him again.
   2. Israel had problems with the fact that they sometimes began to worship the weather god Baal, but here God shows that it is really the Lord who has power over the rain, not Baal.
2. Why didn't God do this sign for Israel *before* they had Saul as king? Then maybe they would have realized their mistake before it was too late?
   1. First, God often lets us go our own way, even when he knows it's wrong. We humans are not God's robots that he controls down to the last detail.
   2. Secondly, our mistakes hopefully lead us to really *understand* how foolishly we have acted in the past. Of course, it is not wrong to obey God even when we don't really understand why, but it is better to obey God when we really understand why we should do it.
3. This thunder that convicted God's people of their sin can be likened to the Holy Spirit and the inner conviction of sin that only he can give us.
   1. It would be best if we read God's Word about what is right and wrong and then lived accordingly, but often that is not the reality. Often it takes the Holy Spirit to convict us with some kind of spiritual experience for us to realize that we have sinned (John 16:8).
   2. Personally, I have experience of a friend pointing out a sin in my life which led to me getting really angry and scolding him, saying that he should mind his own business! I certainly wasn't going to change just because some so called pious person said I was doing wrong! But after a few weeks, the Holy Spirit convinced me that what I was doing was actually wrong and I quit right away! Unfortunately, we humans often work like this, it's not enough for the prophet Samuel or some pious friend to tell us that we are doing wrong, we only understand it when God convinces us of it in our inner being.

[[@Bible:1 sam 12:18]]1Sam 12:18

1. The people should have known that God has the power to make it thunder and rain, yet they were surprised and seized with fear before this power. It is often easier to believe in God's miracles in *theory*, but not in *practice*.

[[@Bible:1 sam 12:19]]1Sam 12:19

1. There's not much you can do about what's already happened, other than repent and ask for forgiveness, but you can always choose how to deal with the future.
2. Israel realizes here its need for *prayer*. Unfortunately, I think it's very human to want to pray only when you have big problems that you can't solve yourself. If we learned to pray even when we don't have problems, then maybe we wouldn't have so many problems.
   1. When we encounter God, the natural reaction is often to want to *pray more.* If you want to live a life close to God, prayer is an essential ingredient.
3. Finally, Israel realizes its mistake and confesses its sin. The problem, however, is that they now have Saul as their king and there's not much they can do about it. Had they realized this earlier, when Samuel first warned them, they would have avoided the problems they were going to have with Saul. Fortunately, God will still guide them if they choose to follow God.
   1. In the same way, we should pay attention when God's word is preached or a pious man or woman of God points out something we are doing wrong. If we listen in good time, we may avoid many of the problems that can arise. But even if we defy God and go our own way, there is the possibility of turning back to God for help in dealing with the situation.
4. We can't do much about yesterday, and we don't know much about the future, but what we do know is that we can serve God today!

[[@Bible:1 sam 12:21]]1Sam 12:21

1. Often it takes a lifetime of mistakes and repentance before we realise that it is only with God that we can find help and deliverance. My advice is to start walking that path now, devoutly following God and obeying his command to love God with all your heart and your fellow man as yourself (Mark 12:29-30). Then you won't have to go through a lot of unnecessary trouble.
   1. It is always good to listen to people who have lived a sinful life talk about their conversion to Jesus, but perhaps it is even better to listen to those who have lived a pious life and rather draw inspiration from them. Unfortunately, we don't highlight these people as often because their life story is not considered as "exciting".

[[@Bible:1 sam 12:22]]1Sam 12:22

1. Although Israel has sinned against God, God loves His chosen people and will not abandon them.
   1. This is very important to remember if we ever walk away from the Lord! *Even if we have rejected God, He has not rejected us!* God loves us more than we can understand and He always offers us His love, no matter how gross our sin against Him has been.
   2. This love can only be compared to the love a parent feels for his child. No matter how much foolishness a child invents, the parent will always love his child, it is impossible to do anything else. It is hardly a coincidence that Jesus calls God our *Father*.
2. Our salvation is not of our own making. We have in no way earned salvation. We have been saved because of the Lord's *decision*, because he *has freely chosen* to give us his salvation.

[[@Bible:1 sam 12:23]]1Sam 12:23

1. With Saul now stepping in as political leader of Israel, Samuel is stepping back from that role, but he is not stepping back from the spiritual influence he has always had. Samuel will continue to pray for Israel and teach them the right way.
   1. In the same way, we should look at ourselves, for example, when we grow old and no longer have the energy to be as involved in the Church, we can continue to pray for the younger ones and guide them by being good role models.
   2. Anyone who is any kind of leader in God's church should learn from Samuel and make it a habit to pray for those they are called to lead.
   3. Even though Samuel was annoyed and disappointed with his people, he was still going to continue praying for them.

[[@Bible:1 sam 12:24]]1Sam 12:24

1. Samuel wants the people to serve God because of the "great things" he has done with them. In other words, don't serve God because you want him to do great things for you, but serve God because he HAS done great things for you. God has saved you and given you a new life and that is reason enough to serve him.

[[@Bible:1 sam 12:25]]1Sam 12:25

1. Despite this clear warning, Israel turned away from God with the result that God dislocated the 10 northern tribes and sent the tribe of Judah into exile in Babylon, which can be read more about in the books of Kings and the prophets.

## 1 Sam 13:1-7 - Saul Fights the Philistines

[[@Bible:1 sam 13:1]]1Sam 13:1

1. We often think of Saul as the failed king and David as the successful king, but at least Saul's first years as king were seemingly okay. Had it not been for the events of this chapter, Saul's kingship would have lived on.
2. The situation in Israel was not very good. In verses 19-22 we see that the Philistines controlled the people of Israel and did not allow them to work as blacksmiths because they were afraid that the Israelites would forge swords.
   1. The Philistines were militarily and technologically totally superior to the Israelis. The situation could be compared to that of the Indians when the Europeans arrived in North America.
   2. In order for the Israelis to sharpen their axes or plowshares, they had to go down to the Philistines.
   3. In the army of Israel, only Saul and his son Jonathan had swords and spears.

[[@Bible:1 sam 13:2]]1Sam 13:2

1. When Israel has been at war in the past, the people have been summoned according to need, but now Saul selects 3,000 men to be part of a standing army.

[[@Bible:1 sam 13:3-4]]1Sam 13:3-4

1. Israel had been at peace with the Philistines for some time, but this was only because they had bowed to the Philistines and let them rule. All was peace and quiet, the Philistines let Israel be as long as they bowed to the Philistines and made no trouble.
   1. But is it really right for God's people to bow down to their enemy just to get some peace and quiet? Is this what God had in mind when he promised the land of Israel to Abraham? Didn't God choose Saul to be king over Israel? Hasn't God delivered his people many times before?
      1. Jonathan was not content to be cowed by his enemies, he was courageous and knew that God is with the people of Israel.
   2. We Christians do not have the Philistines as enemies, but we do fight against "principalities and powers and rulers of the world here in darkness, against the spirit powers of evil in the heavens." (Ephesians 6:12)
      1. Just as Israel had peace of mind as long as they bowed to the enemy, so we have peace of mind when we do not challenge the devil. As long as we are weak and stay in our place, they leave us alone, but as soon as we show some boldness, we are considered "hateful"!
      2. When we boldly testify to our faith in Jesus and do what we can to spread the kingdom of God, we challenge our enemy and it is very possible that he will become angry and retaliate. We must be careful not to let our desire for a little "peace and quiet" be more important to us than spreading the gospel.
      3. It can sometimes be difficult to tell if the situation you are in makes the devil happy or angry. If you encounter resistance, is it because you've gone wrong or because you've gone right, or is it purely for objective reasons?
         1. If it suddenly starts raining, is it because God sent the rain, the devil sent the rain, or is it raining because it's autumn?
         2. If you have no idea whether you have gone right or wrong, you should pray, study the Bible and talk to a spiritual leader.
2. It is interesting to note that in verse 3 it says that it was "Jonathan" who attacked the Philistine outpost, but in verse 4 it says that it was "Saul". When Saul spreads the news of Jonathan's heroism, he simply takes credit for the deed himself. How do you think it would have sounded if Jonathan had lost the battle?
   1. Here we see the first sign that all is not quite right with Saul's leadership. He was jealous and did not want anyone else to be praised more than himself, a problem he will wrestle with even more in the later comparison with David (1 Sam 18:5-9).
   2. We also see another problem in Saul's leadership, he takes matters into his own hands, even though he doesn't really have the right to do so.

[[@Bible:1 sam 13:5]]1Sam 13:5

1. Jonathan won't settle for a little peace and quiet in exchange for submission. But Jonathan's heroics have upset the Philistines, and now the armies of both Israel and the Philistines are gathering on opposite sides.
2. The Philistines must have been very upset because with an army of this enormous size, the aim is probably to finish off the Israelis once and for all!
3. Biblical scholars disagree whether it was really 30,000 chariots that the Bible translates, or whether, due to a translation error, it was 3,000 chariots that the Bible 2000 translates. The more likely case is that it was 3000 chariots because there were only 6000 horsemen. It is more likely that there were 2 riders on each chariot than that each rider had 5 chariots each.

[[@Bible:1 sam 13:6-7]]1Sam 13:6-7

1. It was indeed a miserable situation for Israel: most are fleeing and hiding in pits, those who remain with Saul are "trembling" and they have only two swords to share against an overwhelmingly large army bent on their destruction.
   1. Although Israel could hardly have worse odds, they should remember that if God is on their side, they can defeat any enemy.
      1. In the same way, today we need not be unduly afraid of our enemy, the devil, even if he comes at us with a seemingly insurmountable mountain of problems (Matthew 17:20-21).
2. The people of Israel had many times in the past had problems with warlike people who wanted to destroy them, but perhaps they had hoped that now that they have a king, he will solve their problems. But just as before, it is God who must intervene and help them.
   1. From this we can learn the important lesson never to rely blindly on men, but on God. Perhaps you have felt at some point that as long as you are allowed to be in this or that church, your problems will be solved, but after a while you hopefully realise that your problems are not really solved by the church or its pastor, but by God.
   2. Today's believers need to learn not to rely blindly on the priest or pastor for our own personal relationship with God. God's intention for our lives is not that our spirituality consists of going to church from time to time to receive communion and then being content with that.
   3. If you only pray and read the Bible when you are in church on Sundays, then you are in danger of having surrendered your entire spirituality to the pastor. Remember that God loves you and wants to have a personal relationship with you.

## 1 Sam 13:8-23 - Saul’s Unlawful Sacrifice

[[@Bible:1 sam 13:8-9]]1Sam 13:8-9

1. The Philistines had the most soldiers and the best equipment. The only thing Saul had in his favour was God and the element of surprise. Perhaps Saul thought that the only way to have any microscopic chance of defeating the Philistines was to surprise them before they had time to gather for battle.
   1. That strategy probably wasn't wrong per se, but Saul messes with the first and most important advantage: God. Saul knows he can't perform the burnt offering but must wait for Samuel, but with each passing day the opportunity to make a surprise attack diminishes and eventually Saul takes matters into his own hands.
   2. The mistake Saul makes is that he arbitrarily performs the sacrificial service that only the priests were allowed to do. A king is a king and not a priest and vice versa.
      1. Even though Saul was king and ruler in Israel, he could not do whatever he wanted with what belonged to the priesthood. A later king of Judah, Uzziah, made a similar mistake when he burned incense in the temple and was punished with leprosy by the Lord (2 Chron 26:16-23).

[[@Bible:1 sam 13:10]]1Sam 13:10

1. Just as Saul finishes the sacrifice, Samuel arrives. Saul becomes like a child caught with his hand in the cookie jar. This is hardly a coincidence, most likely God planned this to test Saul's loyalty.
2. As if trying to hide or mitigate his sin, he goes out and meets Samuel in the best possible way! But Samuel is not fooled by silliness, if Saul has sinned, so has he.

[[@Bible:1 sam 13:11-12]]1Sam 13:11-12

1. The prophet Samuel knows very well what a grave sin Saul has committed, but he gives Saul the chance to confess his sin and repent. However, Saul does not take that chance and instead defends his sin. Had he repented, Samuel would surely have responded in some other way.
   1. All people make mistakes from time to time and sin from time to time. This is not good, of course, but it only gets worse if you don't repent and turn around.
   2. Even King David, who was much loved by God, sinned grievously on several occasions, but God still loved him because he repented when he realized what he had done.
   3. When God confronts you with your sin, either prophetically, through repentance, or by being exposed, be sure to repent of your sin, ask for forgiveness, and repent. Then God will receive you with open arms and forgive you all your sins.
2. Saul's first explanation was that he blamed the people for the fact that they were becoming more and more dispersed and that he felt he had to do something to prevent them from leaving. That may be true in human terms, but Saul should know better than to rely more on human strength than on God's power.
   1. Even if all the soldiers had left Saul alone, God could have defeated the Philistines with only one Saul. God shows this to Saul at a later point when little David alone drives the Philistine army into flight by defeating the giant Goliath (1 Sam 17).
3. Saul's second explanation was that Samuel was late. Exactly why Samuel was late we don't know, but it's important not to blame your own sin on someone else. Even IF Samuel did something wrong by being late, that doesn't excuse Saul from making mistakes too.
   1. Have you ever felt wronged and treated others badly because of it? Don't let the sin of others "justify" your own sin.
4. Saul's third explanation was that he was trying to "appease" God through this sacrifice. But one cannot appease God by doing something that God has forbidden.
   1. For example, it is not okay for a leader to run people over or treat certain people badly in order to win many people to God. The end does not justify the means.
   2. Had Saul really wanted to "appease" God, he could have bowed his knees and prayed to God for help. No doubt God would have listened to Saul's prayer and helped him.
   3. The fact that Saul chose burnt offerings as a method to appease God shows us that Saul probably did not actually perform the burnt offering to appease God, but to appease the people.

[[@Bible:1 sam 13:13]]1Sam 13:13

1. Ultimately, Saul's sin was that he did not keep the commandment that God had given him. God had said one thing and Saul did another. Saul's sin was that he disobeyed God, but his real problem was that his heart was in the wrong place.
   1. Isn't there then a chance for the forgiveness of sins? Yes, but it also requires repentance and turning from sin. Instead of repenting when he was caught, Saul blames himself, showing that his heart is in the wrong place. He cares more about himself than about God.
2. The punishment Saul receives is that the kingdom will not continue in his line. However, Saul himself will continue to reign for another 20 years after this.
   1. When God gives a judgment, He almost always gives plenty of time before the judgment is carried out so that one has a chance to repent. Saul did not do that and the sentence was thus carried out.

[[@Bible:1 sam 13:14]]1Sam 13:14

1. Saul was a man after *Israel's own* heart, but David was a man after *God's* own heart. So what was the difference between Saul and David?
   1. Saul is described as "a stately young man"; he certainly looked like a king (1 Sam 9:2). David was more like a small, shy boy who no one cared about (1 Sam 16:11).
   2. Both David and Saul had thought it important to offer burnt offerings to God before an important battle, but Saul sacrificed to bring *the people* along, David sacrificed because he wanted to honor *God*.
   3. Both David and Saul sinned, but when Saul is caught with his sin, he blames himself, when David is caught with sin, he cries out: "I have sinned against the Lord." (2 Sam 12:13).
      1. This text is not really about who is the most sinful, Saul or David, because then David would probably be the most guilty, since he was both an unfaithful and a murderer. This text is about where one's heart is, with oneself or with God.
      2. So Saul is not deprived of the kingdom because he sinned, but because of his heart.

[[@Bible:1 sam 13:15]]1Sam 13:15

1. Saul's standing army was originally 3,000 men but has now been reduced to 600, or one-fifth. The odds even before the drastic reduction were deplorable, but are now totally disastrous, at least in human terms.
   1. Had Saul trusted God to give him victory, the reduction in the number of soldiers would have made Saul happy because victory at these odds would have brought great glory to God, but as he ponders how to defeat the Philistines himself, he becomes anxious to say the least!
      1. Saul's 600 men are actually exactly twice as many as Gideon's 300, but the difference between these leaders is that Gideon had a strong faith in God (Judges 7:1-7).
   2. When we see great mountains of impossible problems before us, let us remember that it may be impossible for a man, but for God nothing is impossible! When we trust in God, no enemy is too great for us. However, always remember to give God the glory for the victory He gives you in your life!

[[@Bible:1 sam 13:17]]1Sam 13:17

1. The Philistines are so militarily superior that they split up and ravage. They don't even seem to bother to line up for battle against Saul.

[[@Bible:1 sam 13:19-22]]1Sam 13:19-22

1. The Philistines were a Greek people and had many trade contacts beyond the Mediterranean.
2. Archaeologists agree that it was the Philistines who introduced iron forging to this part of the world.
3. Not only did the Philistines outnumber the Israelis by a considerable margin, but they were also militarily and technologically superior to the Israelis. The Philistines had swords and spears, while the Israelis had slings, bows and working tools.

## 1 Sam 14:1-46 - The Heroic Deeds of Jonathan

[[@Bible:1 sam 14:1-3]]1Sam 14:1-3

1. Saul had not prepared anything special for this day, but sat under his pomegranate tree and pondered the poor odds against the Philistines and how to resolve this tricky situation.
   1. Saul himself had 600 men, while the Philistines had *"6,000 horsemen and footmen as numerous as the sand on the seashore"* (1Sam 13:5). Not only that, but the Philistines were vastly superior in terms of military equipment. The Philistines had made sure that there was no blacksmith in Israel so that the Israelites could not make either swords or spears (1 Sam 13:19). In Israel's army, only Saul and Jonathan had swords; the rest had slingshots, farming tools, and the like.
   2. But despite the enormously bad odds, Jonathan suggests to his weapon bearer that they go over to the enemy outpost. The contrast between King Saul and his son Jonathan could not be greater. Saul sits under his pomegranate tree and ponders how to resolve this situation, while Jonathan heads off to the enemy to see what God has in mind.
      1. Jonathan strongly resembles a young, free-spirited, ardent Christian who wants to go out and witness to Jesus, pray for the sick and cast out demons, but who feels trapped in the church and therefore goes out on his own initiative to the streets and taverns to obey the missionary commandment.
      2. Tired of his father's inactivity, Jonathan knows that God wants to save Israel, but that God needs someone who is willing to trust God.
      3. If you're annoyed that nothing is happening in your church or that no one is doing anything, it's probably because God has called you to do just that. For example, if you feel your church is not evangelising enough, it may well be because God has put it on your heart to get involved in this very thing and inspire others to be better at evangelising.
         1. So before you complain, think again if the reason no one is doing anything is because you are the one not doing anything.
2. Probably Jonathan avoided telling his father about his plans because Saul would have forbidden him this risky adventure.
   1. If a congregation has unhealthy leadership, it can sometimes be better to do the right thing before you get a no, because then you have not gone against the leadership and have not been guilty of defiance, but have only obeyed God's word.
3. Jonathan had a kind of assistant, a "weapon bearer", who assisted him in various ways, including carrying his weapon.
   1. The task of the weapon bearer should not be underestimated, he had to be at least as brave as Jonathan because he followed all the adventures.
   2. In Ecclesiastes 4:12 it says: *"Where the lonely one is overcome, two can resist. And a threefold thread is not easily broken."*
      1. Going off alone on adventure, mission, evangelism, or whatever, is not recommended. Having someone by your side to support, encourage, question, etc., is invaluable. It is no coincidence that Jesus always sent his disciples off two by two (Mark 6:7, Luke 10:1).

[[@Bible:1 sam 14:4-5]]1Sam 14:4-5

1. If Jonathan had never set out to meet the enemy, he would never have found this excellent strategic position either.
   1. Often God does not let us see our whole future, but leads us step by step. When God calls us to something, he shows us a door we can enter, but it's only when we obey God's call that God opens the next door for us to enter.
   2. If it turns out that you have misunderstood God's call, it's not the end of the world if you go back a step.
2. During the First World War, British forces under the command of General Allenby would meet the Turks at Mikmash. One of the British army majors sat reading the Bible as he pondered the nearby battle. As he reread these verses, he realized that the British would be able to outmaneuver the Turks through this pass. The British found their way through and successfully captured the city.

[[@Bible:1 sam 14:6-7]]1Sam 14:6-7

1. For Jonathan, this adventure was more than just spying on his enemy, he wanted to see what God would do!
   1. Jonathan was not stupid, he knew that Israel was in a very difficult situation and that the enemy was overwhelming.
   2. Jonathan knew the word of God, and knew that many times before God had used a few simple people to do great and mighty things.
   3. Jonathan knew that God needed to use a bold person. Saul sat under his pomegranate tree and pondered how *Saul* would resolve the situation, while Jonathan went off to see how *God* would resolve the situation.
      1. Sometimes there is a danger that we free church people shut ourselves away in our churches and pray to God for revival, instead of being bold and going out and sharing our faith with our friends.
      2. God WANTS revival, God WANTS us to triumph over the Enemy, but sometimes all it takes is a pair of willing feet ready to go out and witness to Jesus (2 Chron 16:9, Isa 52:7).
2. Jonathan knew that humanly speaking it is impossible to defeat the Philistines, but with God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26, Romans 8:31).
   1. There may have been others in Israel who knew this, but it was only Jonathan who dared to believe it was true. It is one thing to believe what the Bible says in theory, quite another to follow it.
3. It is important to remember that Jonathan did not do this for himself in order to become a hero. He did this for God's sake, he wanted to see what God would do through him.
4. What would have happened if Jonathan's weapon bearer had been negative about this dangerous adventure? Would Jonathan have wavered and perhaps reconsidered and finally realized that this would never work?
   1. Sometimes it is of great value that we encourage each other to do what God puts on our hearts. A word of encouragement can sometimes be the difference between daring to follow God's call or not.
      1. This does not mean, of course, that we should always encourage each other to do exactly what we think God wants us to do. For example, you should never encourage someone to do something that goes against God's word or something similar.
      2. But if someone is selflessly following God's call according to God's Word, then one should be careful to encourage and support, especially if, as in the case of the weapon bearer, one is ready to go along and help out himself!

[[@Bible:1 sam 14:8-10]]1Sam 14:8-10

1. One gets the impression from Jonathan that it was important for him to listen to what his weapon bearers thought of this dangerous adventure. Had the weapon bearer not been as keen as Jonathan, the mission would probably never have happened.
2. Since Jonathan had not heard God's clear voice, but instead believed that this was what God wanted, he is humble enough to realize that he does not actually know with 100% certainty that this is God's will.
   1. So Jonathan is not doubting God's word through this test, but he is doubting his own ability to understand God's will.

[[@Bible:1 sam 14:11-14]]1Sam 14:11-14

1. The Israelites in general were so afraid of the Philistines that they hid themselves in "caves and dens" (1 Sam 13:6).
2. God confirms to Jonathan and the weapon bearer that he is with them and then Jonathan understands that nothing can stop them!
   1. Even though God is with Jonathan and even though God has promised victory, there are still some obstacles to overcome, such as Jonathan having to climb up a difficult cliff before he can enter the battle that God has promised he will win.
      1. In the same way, when God gives us a promise of something, there can still be some awkward moments and struggles before we get to the end of what God has promised.
      2. Although God has promised victory, the road to it is not necessarily a bed of roses, but one must be prepared to use both hands and feet to reach the goal.
3. Although the victory belonged to God, it was Jonathan who had to fight.
   1. In the same way, we must realize that we cannot simply pray for revival without also being prepared to go out de facto and bear witness to Jesus.

[[@Bible:1 sam 14:15]]1Sam 14:15

1. At the time of Jonathan's victory over the outpost, God sends a "terror" upon the Philistine camp so that they become confused and turn on each other.
2. Saul must have wondered how on earth he could defeat the mighty Philistines without any swords, and eventually gave up and realized that it was impossible.
   1. But for God nothing is impossible, and if the Israelites have no swords to kill the Philistines, then he must make the Philistines kill themselves with their own swords.

[[@Bible:1 sam 14:16-19]]1Sam 14:16-19

1. When the guards scouting the Philistine army see that they have begun to kill each other, they tell their king what is happening.
2. Saul, more interested in taking credit for the win than defeating the Philistines, tries to find out who caused all this. When Saul realizes it's his son Jonathan, he calls the priest and the ark.
   1. Saul should have realized that God is fighting for Israel right now and commanded his army to attack the Philistines, but Saul is unsure and wants to find out God's will by asking the priest. But eventually the alarm is so loud in the Philistine camp that he has to interrupt the priest and go to battle.
      1. If it is obvious that it is God who is acting, then it is not always the right time to pray and seek God's will, because we see God's will right in front of us. Then it is time to act and do what is God's will.

[[@Bible:1 sam 14:20-23]]1Sam 14:20-23

1. Even though Saul was king over Israel, it took him a long time to lead Israel. Now he has to accept that God and Jonathan are one step ahead.
2. In the Philistine army there were Israelites who for various reasons had gone over to the enemy's side, perhaps they had given up hope that God would save Israel, or they had been forced into the enemy's army because their territory had been taken over by the Philistines. Either way, they now saw their chance to get back on the right side.
   1. In a similar way, Christians who have stopped going to church or the like may suddenly come back when they see God doing miracles in their midst.
      1. Of course, it is better never to have stopped going to church even if times have been dull, but it is still better than not returning to church at all.
3. Even if it was Jonathan who had set the ball rolling, this was God's victory! Without God's calling, confirmation and action, Israel would never have defeated the Philistines.

[[@Bible:1 sam 14:24]]1Sam 14:24

1. Jonathan had just won a victory over the Philistines and now all that remained was for King Saul to finally defeat the fleeing enemy. But even though the soldiers are tired, Saul pronounces a curse on those who eat food before victory is won.
   1. This enforced fast may seem spiritual and good, but when we examine Saul's words, we see that he is not really doing this because God has told him to, but because he wants to take revenge on HIS enemies.
   2. There are times when fasting is necessary and important, but this occasion was not one of them. God appreciates it when we spend time with him in prayer and fasting, but he appreciates it even more when we obey him and actually do what he says. God had given Israel victory over the Philistines and they now needed to complete the victory by fighting, not by fasting.
2. Saul's spirituality was misguided. Instead of focusing on God when he fasts, Saul focuses on taking revenge on HIS enemies.
   1. When we pray and fast, we should not focus on ourselves, but instead listen to God's voice, read our Bible and ask God to show us the path he wants us to walk.
3. Even though Saul was king, he had no automatic right to curse people who disobeyed him. Once again we see how Saul puts himself first and thinks more of himself than he should.

[[@Bible:1 sam 14:25-27]]1Sam 14:25-27

1. God had given Israel victory over the Philistines, but the soldiers were tired, so God gave Israel honey to restore their strength.
   1. This shows us again how wrong and misguided Saul's oath was. God wanted to provide Israel with all the resources they needed to defeat their enemies, but Saul stopped them.
   2. From this we can learn that when God gives us a victory, he also gives us all the resources we need to win the ultimate victory. When we are in the midst of God's will, he provides us with everything we need to accomplish the mission he has given us.
2. Since Jonathan had not heard Saul's oath, he of course ate of the honey God provided, and immediately his eyes cleared and he regained his strength!
   1. This is exactly what God had in mind when He provided Israel with the resources they needed to accomplish the mission He had given them!

[[@Bible:1 sam 14:28-30]]1Sam 14:28-30

1. When Jonathan hears that his father King Saul had bound the people to the oath, he notes that Saul has brought misfortune on the land and that Israel could have won a much greater victory if they had eaten of the honey that God had provided for them!
   1. Jonathan is absolutely right in his assessment, but one can definitely wonder if it was really right of Jonathan to openly criticize his father and king in front of all the soldiers? Perhaps it would have been better if he had first taken this up with Saul in private?

[[@Bible:1 sam 14:31-35]]1Sam 14:31-35

1. In Deuteronomy 12:23-25, God had given clear instructions to Israel that they were to let all the blood flow out and absolutely not eat the blood with the flesh.
   1. Because the soldiers were so hungry due to King Saul's misguided fasting, the soldiers broke God's commandment.
   2. It would have been better for the soldiers to break King *Saul's* oath than to break *God's* commandment.
   3. When our spirituality becomes misguided and selfish, there is a great danger that we will think we are doing the right thing when we are clearly breaking God's commandments.
      1. If, in a misguided piety, we forbid all parishioners to go to the movies, for example, there is an obvious risk that members will go to the movies anyway and then lie about not having been to the movies. Then we have forbidden something that is not sin while leading our members into lying, which is worse than going to the movies.

[[@Bible:1 sam 14:36-39]]1Sam 14:36-39

1. At first glance, we might think that King Saul has humbled himself before the Lord and is doing the right thing by asking God for guidance, but once again we see how Saul's spirituality is misguided. Saul receives no answer from God because Saul should have understood from Jonathan's victory that God had already given the Philistines into Israel's hand (1 Sam 14:12).
   1. Given Saul's previous self-absorption, it is quite possible that he is well aware that God has already given the Philistines into Israel's hands because of Jonathan's victory, but that he does not want to act until he hears it from God himself because he does not want to give the glory to Jonathan but to himself.
      1. As a senior leader, it is important not to be afraid to let others who are good and led by God come forward.
   2. When God opens a door for us to spread the gospel, it is not necessarily the right time to pray and fast about whether or not we should enter through the door God has opened. Instead, we should simply walk through the door and do what God is calling us to do.
      1. Sometimes it is a time for prayer and fasting, sometimes it is a time for witnessing and preaching.
2. Because of the lack of response from God, King Saul believes that someone among the people has sinned. Actually, Saul is quite right in this assessment, but he does not understand that it is he himself who has done wrong!
   1. When a spiritual leader fails in his or her mission, it can be easy to blame the lack of success on "a harsh spiritual climate" or "unspiritual members". While this may be true, at the very least one should first examine one's own heart and see if one has been unresponsive to God or has committed any sin. It is easier to blame than to repent.
3. When Saul pronounces another curse, the people fall silent even though they know who has eaten the honey.
   1. Unlike his father, Jonathan was a good spiritual role model, and although the people accepted Saul as their king, there were limits to Saul's spiritual abuse!

[[@Bible:1 sam 14:40-44]]1Sam 14:40-44

1. Through the lot, probably Urim and Thummim (Ex 28:30, 1 Sam 28:6), a procedure with stones to find out God's will, God shows that it was Jonathan who ate of the honey.
   1. Probably Saul was shocked by this! Saul probably would not have imagined that his son had gone against his will, but Saul did not know that Jonathan had not heard Saul's oath and curse.
   2. Instead of stopping for a second and sorting this out with Jonathan, the only one who dared to tell the truth about Saul's unfortunate oath, Saul hardens himself even more in his stupidity!
   3. From this we can learn that if we see that the consequences of our decisions are getting worse and worse, we need to stop at some point and think about whether we have gone in the wrong direction?

[[@Bible:1 sam 14:45-46]]1Sam 14:45-46

1. The people of Israel obeyed their king even when they disagreed with him in everything, but now we see that they have finally had enough! After all, Jonathan was one of the few who had actually acted according to God's will that day!
   1. Jonathan was a brave spiritual role model for the other soldiers, and when Saul wants to kill an innocent Jonathan, that's it! The people speak out and Jonathan is saved from death.
   2. From this we can learn that following your spiritual director is not necessarily wrong, even if you don't agree with everything, but that there is a limit. When the madness has gone too far, one must dare to speak out and prevent the leader from destroying other people.
   3. Even if a leader is called and anointed by God, as King Saul was, this does not mean that that leader is automatically free from the temptation to abuse his power.
   4. As a spiritual leader and pastor, it is important to dare to let people like Jonathan come forward. If God is calling someone in the church to lead a certain ministry or do something special, then the leadership should not be afraid to give that person space and room in the church. Pastors and spiritual leaders are servants of the church and should lift up the members and help them blossom in the calling God gives each one.
2. When Saul no longer has his soldiers with him, he has to retreat, as do the Philistines. Had Saul not been so selfish, he could have finally defeated the Philistines at this point.

[[@Bible:1 sam 14:47-52]]1Sam 14:47-52

1. In the conclusion of this chapter we see how Saul further reinforces his egoism and puts himself at the centre. Saul wages war against HIS enemies, not necessarily against God's enemies. Saul does mighty things, not God. Saul takes the best men in HIS service.
2. Although Saul was successful in his victories, he never managed to finally defeat the Philistines and had to live with war all his life.

## 1 Sam 15:1-35 - The Lord Rejects Saul

[[@Bible:1 sam 15:1-3]]1Sam 15:1-3

1. In Exodus chapter 17, we read how the Amalekites were the first people to attack Israel after their exodus from Egypt. Even then, God promised Moses that he will punish the Amalekites for this (Exodus 17:14-16).
2. The reason for God's tremendous wrath and punishment on the Amalekites was that they unnecessarily attacked Israel at its weakest, and also attacked the weakest part of Israel; the rear guard, which consisted of the weak, weary and exhausted (Deuteronomy 25:17-19).
3. God hates it when the strong prey on the weak, simply because they want to take advantage for their own gain.
4. God waited 400 years to execute his judgment on the Amalekites. This deadline gave the Amalekites plenty of time to repent and appeal to God for mercy.
5. It is not uncommon for God to judge in a way that corresponds to sin. Therefore, it is also understandable that the Amalekites' *war sin* against Israel now means a *military* judgment carried out by Israel.
   1. Does this mean that God still allows his people to carry out similar judgments against other peoples? No, because we Christians live in a new covenant in which we are clearly urged not to take up the sword (Matt 26:52) but rather to hand over judgment to the Lord (Rom 12:19).
6. "Cherem" is a Hebrew word that can be translated as "annihilation", "destroy", "exterminate", "wipe out" and is used when it is not just a question of ordinary war but of a "holy war of extermination".
   1. An example is from Deuteronomy 7:2: *"When the Lord your God delivers them to you, and you defeat them, you shall consecrate them to destruction."* 
      1. A second example is found in 1 Samuel 15:3: *Go out and strike the Amalekites and destroy all they have. Do not spare them, but kill both men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys."*
   2. God sometimes commanded Israel to perform cherem because of the sins of different peoples, but not because they were of a different race, but because of their sins (Deut. 9:5). Since only God can know a person's sin, only God can command cherem.
   3. Since only God can command cherem, and since sin has been resolved by Jesus' death on the cross, we now live in an age when cherem is no longer relevant. Now a completely different solution than cherem is offered to the problem of sin. Today God has given a new commandment to us humans, now we live in a new age, "now is the day of salvation".

[[@Bible:1 sam 15:4-6]]1Sam 15:4-6

1. Saul prepares the attack in a very good and exemplary way. He gathers a large army, ambushes them and warns the innocents to leave before the battle begins.

[[@Bible:1 sam 15:7-9]]1Sam 15:7-9

1. In a normal war at that time, the plunder after a victory was often the reward for the soldiers. But this was not a normal war, but a judgment of God on the Amalekites. Therefore, according to God's command, everything was to be destroyed.
2. Saul did obey God's command, but only partially. Saul destroyed the Amalekites but pardoned the Amalekite king Agag on his own initiative. Perhaps Saul didn't want to kill another king because he was king himself, or perhaps Saul wanted to be able to show Agag off as a triumph to the people.
3. Because of Saul's disobedient leadership, the people do the same. God had commanded that everything be destroyed, but because Saul let Agag live, the people let the best livestock live.
   1. Neither good leadership nor bad leadership should be underestimated. People see their leader and are inspired to do what the leader does.
   2. A leader needs to set a good example. One personal decision I have made is to abstain from alcohol for as long as I work as a pastor. Not because it is a sin in itself to drink alcohol, but because I do not want to lead anyone to ruin by inspiring them to start drinking. If people see their leader drinking alcohol in moderation, it might lead them to start drinking alcohol too but not really knowing how to drink in moderation. On the other hand, if people see their leader abstaining from drinking alcohol, it may lead them to abstain from drinking alcohol and thus inspire other people around them.
4. The people of Israel obeyed God half-heartedly, as long as it suited them.
   1. Before we sneer at the Israelites' half-hearted imitation, we should consider that we are probably doing exactly the same thing. We obey God, but only as long as it suits us. But when God shows us something in our lives that he wants us to stop doing, we hide it from God rather than sanctify ourselves. How many times have we passed by a fellow human being in need, even though God has commanded us to love our fellow human being? How many times have we failed to praise God with all our heart, even though Jesus has commanded us to do so? How many times have we stayed home on Sunday because we did not feel like going to church, even though God has told us not to abandon our gatherings? How many times have we skipped Bible reading and blamed it on being too tired? And so on...

[[@Bible:1 sam 15:10-11]]1Sam 15:10-11

1. God has feelings, and here God shows that he regrets making Saul king because Saul disobeyed his command. Saul started out very well as a humble and good king, but became more and more self-centered and eventually stopped obeying God.
   1. When God gives us a call, it is still up to us and our free will to obey God or not.
2. The prophet Samuel was very close to God and it pained him that God had been so disappointed in Saul. Being close to God leads to feeling the same things that God does.

[[@Bible:1 sam 15:12-13]]1Sam 15:12-13

1. Samuel, the spiritual leader of Israel, goes to Saul, the political leader of Israel.
2. Both King Saul and King David made mistakes and sinned, but the difference between them was that when Saul sinned, he erected a monument over himself, but when David sinned, he repented (2 Sam 12:13). David was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam 13:14), but Saul was a man after his own heart.
   1. It is important to try to avoid sins and mistakes, but when they do occur, it is important not to try to hide your sin or be proud of it, but instead to humble yourself and repent of the sin you have committed.
3. When Saul became king, he was a humble man who did not necessarily seek his own glory (1 Sam 9:21), but after many years as king, something has happened to his heart. Perhaps his ego has been strengthened? Perhaps he has allowed the bad aspects of his heart to flourish? Perhaps he has neglected time in prayer before the Lord?
   1. All people, even pastors, have bad sides. But if you spend a lot of time in prayer and Bible reading, your heart is shaped by the heart of God. You become who you are around, and the bad parts are allowed to recede and make room for what God gives. But if you as a spiritual leader do not spend time in prayer and Bible reading, there is a risk that the bad sides of your heart will flourish and make room and eventually take over completely.
      1. Sometimes it's important as a spiritual leader to step back, go away and spend time with God in solitude. Then you can humble yourself and find your way back to the heart of God.

[[@Bible:1 sam 15:14-15]]1Sam 15:14-15

1. As Saul tells Samuel that he has carried out the Lord's command to destroy the Amalekites and their livestock, Samuel hears the Amalekites' livestock roaring in the background!
2. First Saul blames the disobedience on the people when he says "them", and then he highlights himself in obedience when he says "we". Then he blames the disobedience to God on the fact that he did it for God. You don't have to be a lawyer to see that his defense speech is flawed!
3. When Saul describes God as "YOUR God" to Samuel, it reveals Saul's own poor relationship with God. Of course, God should also be Saul's God, but since Saul has no personal relationship with God, he describes God as "Samuel's God".
   1. Who is YOUR God? Who sits on the throne of your heart? Who do you obey? Who do you serve? Who comes first in your life?
4. That Saul has killed all the Amalekites and given them "to waste" was a lie:
   1. David had to fight against the Amalekites (1 Sam 27:8, 30:1, 2 Sam 8:12).
   2. Haman, the man who tried to exterminate the Jewish people during their captivity in Babylon, was a descendant of Agag, king of the Amalekites (Est 3:1).
   3. Ironically, the man who later killed Saul was an Amalekite (2 Sam 1:8-10).
   4. When we do not fully deal with sin in our lives, it will continue to plague us in the future. It is better to confess sin and spend time with God so that we stay close to God's heart.

[[@Bible:1 sam 15:16-21]]1Sam 15:16-21

1. Samuel has had enough of Saul's poor excuses and outright lies and tells him to shut up!
2. Samuel returns to the moment when God chose Saul to be king over Israel. At that time, Saul was "small in his own eyes" and an excellent tool in God's hands. But now Saul has become great in his own eyes and raises monuments above himself.
3. Saul is so caught up in his lie that he can say in the same sentence that he has obeyed God's command to kill all the Amalekites while there is an Amalekite standing next to him.
4. After Saul has tried to prove his innocence, he blames the people. It is true that the people let the cattle live, but they did so because Saul let Agag live. Saul, as king, is responsible for what the people do and should have stopped the people when they disobeyed God's command. But by not doing so, he shows that he accepted what they did.

[[@Bible:1 sam 15:22-23]]1Sam 15:22-23

1. Religious acts are meaningless when one lives in disobedience to God. In that case, it is better to obey God than to perform religious acts.
2. You are not a Christian because you go to church once a year at Easter. You are a Christian when you have repented in your heart and confessed your faith in Jesus.
   1. You don't obey God by going to church more, but by repenting your heart.
3. Because Saul has rejected God, God consequently rejects Saul. God's rejection of Saul was not because Saul spared Agag, but because Saul had rejected God.
   1. God does not turn away from us because of the sins we may commit. God turns away from us because we have turned away from him.
   2. Saul is like a dog on a leash, constantly pulling and refusing to walk beside his master or mistress. Eventually you get tired and let go of the leash and let the dog go where it wants.
4. God rejected Saul as king, but it would be another 25 years before David was anointed as the new king. Saul thus had plenty of time to repent of his egocentric heart.

[[@Bible:1 sam 15:24-25]]1Sam 15:24-25

1. Faced with this fact, Saul is forced to admit that he has sinned, but cannot help but still blame his own sin on the people, showing that his confession is empty words.
2. If Saul had loved God more than himself and feared God more than the people, he would never have found himself in this precarious position.
3. Saul wants God to forgive him for letting Agag live, but doesn't understand that the real sin is Saul's disobedient heart.

[[@Bible:1 sam 15:26-31]]1Sam 15:26-31

1. Although Saul has now learned that God has rejected him, he is more concerned about his own image and how the people will view him.
2. This chapter contains two inexplicable contradictions. The first contradiction is that Samuel tells Saul in verse 26 that he will not return with Saul, only to return with Saul in verse 31.
   1. My interpretation of this contradiction is that Samuel will not return to legitimize Saul as king over Israel, but he might consider returning to help Saul worship the Lord. Even though Saul has lost his kingship, there is still the chance to have peace with God.
3. The second contradiction is found between verse 11, where it says that God "repents" of making Saul king, while in verse 29 it says that God is not a "man, so that he could repent".
   1. The word *"regret"* can mean both "mourning" something or changing your decision. My interpretation of this contradiction is that God shows in verse 11 that he is emotionally grieving over making Saul king but that in verse 29 he emphasizes that he will stand by his decision that Saul's time as king is over.

[[@Bible:1 sam 15:32-33]]1Sam 15:32-33

1. God's command stood firm, and even though Saul had not obeyed God, Samuel was now going to obey God. Samuel makes it clear to Agag that he is not an innocent man who is now being punished, he is the leader of a people who have committed many atrocities against Israel.
2. Having escaped alive from a war with the warrior Saul, Agag thinks he has escaped death when he now happily walks up to meet the old prophet Samuel, whom he probably thinks poses no great danger. But what Agag doesn't know is that Samuel is a priest of God who is both zealous of the Lord's commands and knowledgeable about how to sacrifice animals to the Lord. Samuel knew exactly how to dismember a sacrificial animal and now uses those skills on Agag.

[[@Bible:1 sam 15:34-35]]1Sam 15:34-35

1. Ramah and Gibeah were only 1.5 miles apart, yet Saul and Samuel never visited each other again.
2. In the 25 years that remained of Saul's life, he had the opportunity to repent of his heart and return to Samuel. It would not have led to his regaining his kingship, but it would have led to his being forgiven for his sins and re-establishing his relationship with the Lord.
3. But the fact that Saul did not go the 1.5 miles to Samuel proves that God did the right thing in rejecting Saul. Saul's sin was that he had rejected God and made himself his own god. Saul had turned his heart away from God and did not want to establish the relationship with God, and therefore God could not restore the relationship with Saul either. God's rejection of Saul was thus a consequence of Saul's rejection of God.

## 1 Sam 16:1-13 - David is Anointed King

[[@Bible:1 sam 16:1-3]]1Sam 16:1-3

1. The prophet Samuel was naturally saddened that King Saul had failed as king and had been rejected by God. But as it says in Ecclesiastes chapter 3, there is a time for everything; "*4 There is a time for weeping, and a time for smiling. There is a time to mourn, and a time to dance.* "(Ecclesiastes 3:4). Samuel has mourned for a while and now it's time to move on with his life.
   1. When you are going through sad events, it is good to grieve, but not for long. Exactly how long that time is is often individual, but it's never good to spend the rest of your life stuck in grief. Sometimes you need a friend to humbly but firmly inform the mourner that now is the time to move on.
2. It is good to know that God does not allow His plan for Israel to stand or fall with the failure of one man. Saul has failed as king, so God calls David to be the new king.
   1. When a person falls into sin and fails, there is always time for repentance and restoration. For example, it took 25 years from the time Saul was rejected by God to the time he died, and it was only 1.5 miles from Saul to the prophet Samuel. In other words, Saul had plenty of time and opportunity to repent.
   2. But if a person with a mission falls into sin and no longer has God's confidence to be a leader, God can raise up a new leader.
3. God sends the prophet Samuel to Jesse in Bethlehem to anoint one of Jesse's sons as king of Israel.
   1. Jesse was the grandson of Ruth and Boaz (Ruth 4:17).
4. The prophet Samuel hesitates to go to Bethlehem because Saul will perceive the anointing of a new king as treason if he finds out. The road from Ramah, where Samuel lived, to Bethlehem went through Givah, where Saul lived.
   1. But the prophet Samuel should know better than to question God's plan. Samuel should know that it is always safer to be in God's will, even if it means danger, than to disobey God.
   2. Perhaps Samuel hesitates because he doesn't really want to anoint a new king but instead still hopes Saul will repent.
5. In response to Samuel's hesitation and fear, God tells Samuel a little more of his plan.
   1. Most of the time, God leads us step by step without telling us his whole plan, because otherwise we might not dare at all or find it hard to believe that God will do such great things in our lives.
   2. When God gives us a mission or a calling, we rarely see the mission in its entirety. It is better for us to know only the next steps and therefore to depend on God's continued guidance.
   3. But with every step that God leads us, he shows that he is faithful and will continue to lead.
6. When Saul was chosen as king, Israel got a king *they* wanted, but now God chooses a king *He* wants. Saul was a king after his own heart, but David is a king after God's heart.
   1. When looking for a new leader in the church, it is easy to choose leaders according to "human" criteria. People look for a pastor who looks like a good pastor, is a charismatic speaker, can play the guitar and sing, etc. These are not negative qualities for a pastor or church leader, of course, but the most important thing is "character", i.e. having a pure heart that loves God and puts other people higher than oneself.

[[@Bible:1 sam 16:4-5]]1Sam 16:4-5

1. In the previous chapter, Samuel killed King Agag of the Amalekites and broke with King Saul (1 Sam 15:33-35), and it is quite possible that this is why the people of Bethlehem are uncertain about Samuel's intentions. But Samuel assures them that he comes with peace.
2. Some offerings were burned completely, while many other offerings, such as community offerings, were partially burned and the rest eaten by the assembled.
   1. This sacrificial ceremony was a combination of a religious ceremony and a meal, much as the Lord's Supper originally was (1 Corinthians 11:17-34).

[[@Bible:1 sam 16:6-10]]1Sam 16:6-10

1. When Samuel sees Eliab, one of Jesse's sons, he makes the same mistake as the people did when they asked for a king who outwardly "looked" like a king (1 Sam 9:1-3).
   1. The last time, Israel got a king they wanted, a handsome young man who "looked" like a king on the outside, but on the inside thought more of himself than of God. Now, when God gets to choose a king, he does just the opposite; he chooses a little boy who doesn't look like a king at all, but who has a good heart turned toward God.
2. As close as Samuel was to God, he falls short when it comes to seeing into another person's heart. Not even a prophet can see into a man's heart, only God can.
   1. God states a fact, i.e. that "*a man sees what is before his eyes, but the Lord looks to the heart".* We should do our best not to judge other people by their appearance or external talents. But we should also realize that it is impossible for us to see into another person's heart and that no matter how hard we try, we cannot see if a person is inwardly honest, faithful, saved, etc.
   2. Saul is therefore forced to leave the selection of a new king to God and trust that God knows best. Therefore, prayer and fasting should never be underestimated when looking for new leaders for various church activities.
3. Jesse's other sons were not necessarily "bad" just because God did not choose them to be king, but ultimately it is God's right to choose whom He wants and He had decided on David.

[[@Bible:1 sam 16:11]]1Sam 16:11

1. God had told the prophet Samuel that he would choose one of Jesse's sons to be the new king, but when Samuel sees Jesse's sons, it is not one of them. Since Samuel knows that God's word is true, there must be a missing son.
   1. In the same way, today we may find ourselves in situations where what we see before us does not correspond to God's word. But then we can be sure that it is what we see in front of us that is not right and that God's word will in time prove to be right. At least if we have interpreted God's word correctly.
      1. A good example of this is the Assyrian king Sargon mentioned in Isaiah 20:1. Although the Bible mentions this king, no archaeologist had found any evidence that Sargon had ever existed. For critical scholars and scientists, this became an important argument that the Bible is not reliable as far as historical facts are concerned. Since his name could not be found on any inscription or text anywhere outside the Bible, they could not believe that a king with this name had ever existed and that the Bible was therefore a book of fairy tales. But lo and behold, during an 1843 excavation in the Iraqi village of Khorsabad, archaeologist P. E. Botta found 2,500-year-old inscriptions proving that Sargon was one of the first kings of Assyria. Not only that, but Israel is also mentioned, as well as the Assyrians' conquest of Samaria in one of King Sargon's inscriptions: 'I besieged and conquered Samaria and carried off 27,290 inhabitants from there as booty'. For scholars who had held to the Bible's reliability, this was of course a great success and a good example of how God's word can be trusted even if the Bible does not seem to be correct.
2. It is clear that Isai's youngest son, David, was not well liked by his family. Jesse does not even mention him by name, he was not invited to the sacrificial meal and is only allowed to come after Samuel insists that he be present.
   1. Taking care of the sheep was the task of a servant in biblical times. Presumably Jesse could not afford servants, so he had his youngest son do the servants' chores.
      1. David's worldly father certainly did not think so highly of his son, but David's heavenly father did! Jesse made David a servant while God made David a king!
      2. But even though people in Bible times saw shepherding as a low-wage job for servants, God saw that job as a perfect illustration of a good leader! A shepherd must care for his sheep, lead them to green grass and fresh water, must guard them and defend them from wolves, and find them if they run away. A pastor (the Latin word for "shepherd"), in the same way, must care for his parishioners, lead them to the Word of God and the Spirit of God, and he must guard them against error and defend them against false prophets and seek out those who are no longer visible in the church.
      3. Although David was forced to perform the task of a servant, he does not seem to have complained, but rather performed his task faithfully. This gave him time to sing songs of praise to God and to practice his tongue, which he undoubtedly benefited from later. So David's time as a shepherd was not just something he did in *anticipation of* becoming king, but an opportunity for David to *train* to become king.
         1. David is an excellent example of a person who is "faithful in a small way" and is therefore "set over many things" by God (Matthew 25:14-30).

[[@Bible:1 sam 16:12]]1Sam 16:12

1. When people saw Saul, they saw a tall, stately man who looked just like a king should! But when people saw David, they saw a sweet little innocent boy. At first glance, no one could believe that David could be as good a king as he became. But what set David apart from Saul and all the other young men in Israel was that he was "a man after God's own heart" (1 Sam 13:14).
2. Exactly how old David was at this time we do not know, but according to Psalm 89:20 he was a "youth" and according to most scholars and historians he was between 10 and 15 years old.
3. David was undoubtedly a man after God's own heart, but who taught him about God we do not know. Probably it was not his father Jesse, but perhaps, if they were still alive, it was his grandfather's parents Ruth and Boaz (Ruth 4:17-22), or his mother, whom he calls "the handmaid of God" in Psalm 86:16.
   1. Regardless of who taught little David about God, the importance of parents' spiritual care for their children cannot be overemphasized, as David's son Solomon teaches us in Proverbs, *"Train up a child in the way he should go, and he will not depart from it when he is old."* (Proverbs 22:6)

[[@Bible:1 sam 16:13]]1Sam 16:13

1. Neither David, Jesse, nor anyone else really understood what happened when Samuel anointed David with oil. Only God and Samuel knew that Samuel was anointing David to be the new king of Israel. But from that moment on, God's Spirit bet with David and further developed and blessed him on his way to the throne.
2. Just as the Spirit of the Lord came upon David with the anointing of oil, so the Spirit of God feeds us anew with baptism. It is not baptism itself that is saving, but baptism is an outward sign that salvation has taken place on the inside.
3. After Samuel has anointed David as the new king of Israel, he goes home. Samuel does not try to make David king by force, but waits patiently for God to do what he has promised.
   1. If God has a specific plan for your life and has given you a specific calling, you can wait in peace for God's right time. Prepare yourself as best you can for the mission God has given you, but don't try to take matters into your own hands, wait until God opens the door and calls you to go!

## 1 Sam 17:1-11 - David and Goliath

[[@Bible:1 sam 17:1-3]]1Sam 17:1-3

1. The Philistines were a Greek people who originally came from "the island of Caphtor", which is probably Crete (Jeremiah 47:4, Amos 9:7). They had settled on the coast of Israel, including the Gaza area.

[[@Bible:1 sam 17:4-7]]1Sam 17:4-7

1. Since it is a bit uncertain how to interpret the measurement "six cubits and a quarter", the estimate of Goliath's length varies between 180 cm and 290 cm. Since the normal height at this time was about 165 cm, Goliath was in any case very much larger than everyone else. But not only was Goliath tall, he was also strong. His armour weighed at least 50 kg, which is twice as much as a normal piece of Greek armour
   1. The tallest man in modern times is Robert Wadlow, who was 272 cm tall when he died at the age of 22 in 1940.
2. Goliath was from Gath, a city not far from Gaza. In Joshua 11:22, it appears that some of the unusually tall Anakim (Numbers 13:29, Numbers 13:33-34, Deuteronomy 9:2) were still living there.

[[@Bible:1 sam 17:8-11]]1Sam 17:8-11

1. It was not uncommon for Greek peoples to settle wars through chosen fighters who met in a duel. In this way, the will of the "gods" was decided and unnecessary bloodshed was avoided.
2. Goliath challenges Israel to a duel, explicitly mentioning Saul when he mocks Israel. This must have been difficult for King Saul because he was known in Israel as a "great man" who was "head and shoulders above all the people" (1 Sam 9:2). After all, the one who should have taken up the challenge of the giant Goliath was the tall Saul, but neither he nor any other Israelite dares.
3. In the past, King Saul has been a brave warrior (1 Sam 14:52), but now he is horrified and terrified. Perhaps this is because the Spirit of God left him in the previous chapter (1 Sam 16:14). The opposite of "faith" is usually not "unbelief", but rather "fear".

[[@Bible:1 sam 17:12-20]]1Sam 17:12-20

1. For forty days, Goliath challenges Israel to a duel. Since this was not a professional army but rather a collection of volunteers, the food ran out after a while, and then relatives had to help contribute.
2. David was Jesse's youngest son and had the task of looking after the family's sheep. In David's day, taking care of the sheep was really a servant's job. Presumably Jesse could not afford servants, so he had his youngest son do the servants' chores.
   1. But even though people in Bible times saw shepherding as a low-wage job for servants, God saw it as a perfect illustration of a good leader! A shepherd must care for his sheep, lead them to green grass and fresh water, must guard them and defend them from wolves, and find them if they run away. A pastor (the Latin word for "shepherd"), in the same way, must care for his parishioners, lead them to the Word of God and the Spirit of God, and he must guard them against error and defend them against false prophets and seek out those who are no longer visible in the church.
   2. Although David was forced to perform the task of a servant, he does not seem to have complained, but rather performed his task faithfully. This gave him time to sing songs of praise to God and to practice his tongue, which he undoubtedly benefited from later. So David's time as a shepherd was not just something he did in *anticipation of* becoming king, but an opportunity for David to *train* to become king.
   3. David is an excellent example of a person who is "faithful in a small way" and is therefore "set over many things" by God (Matthew 25:14-30).
   4. In verse 20, we see that young David was not just a shepherd who did his job because he had to, but he really cared for his sheep. When he had to leave them, he made sure that someone else watched over them and took care of them. David was a caring shepherd.

[[@Bible:1 sam 17:21-24]]1Sam 17:21-24

1. The Israelites and the Philistines gathered opposite each other on opposite mountains and prepare for battle. But when Goliath taunts and challenges Israel to a duel, the Israelites are frightened and dare not fight.

[[@Bible:1 sam 17:25-27]]1Sam 17:25-27

1. King Saul is so desperate to find someone who dares to fight Goliath that he is prepared to give that person money, his daughter and tax exemption! But while Israel focuses on the size of Goliath and the royal reward, David focuses on the glory of God. David is a man after God's own heart, focusing not on the carnal or the material, but on the spiritual.
2. When David calls Goliath an "uncircumcised Philistine", he is not doing so primarily to mock Goliath, but to state that Goliath does not belong to God's people and can therefore be defeated.

[[@Bible:1 sam 17:28-30]]1Sam 17:28-30

1. The most painful criticism usually comes from those closest to you. Presumably David's eldest older brother Eliab reacts in this way because he felt hit and singled out. After all, Eliab was tall and stately and perhaps should have volunteered to fight Goliath.
2. You can tell that David was offended by his older brother's criticism, but he stands his ground because he knows he's right! Perhaps Eliab's friends laughed at little David when Eliab tried to reprimand him. But even though David was probably saddened, he doesn't let his emotions get the better of him, and keeps his focus on God. If David had listened to his big brother's criticism, he would have lost his courageous belief that God can defeat Goliath. In some ways, David's battle with his brother was a harder battle to win than David's battle with his enemy.
   1. In the same way, ordinary members of a congregation may feel when they express something they think is wrong but only get unfair criticism back from the congregation's leaders. In such cases, it is important to stand up wisely and keep trying to explain what you mean, while also being prepared to take action and make the situation better. If you are not prepared to take responsibility yourself, you should not criticise those who do take responsibility.

[[@Bible:1 sam 17:31-32]]1Sam 17:31-32

1. Just as King Saul's cowardice and fear spread to the army of Israel, so little David's courage and faith in God began to spread.
   1. A leader in the Kingdom of God should lead the way by being courageous and believing in God.
2. There is a difference between saying "Someone should fight Goliath" and "I will fight Goliath"! David was not only prepared to talk, he was also prepared to act.
   1. In a congregation, it is very easy for ordinary members to have critical opinions about this and that. This is not automatically wrong, as long as you are also prepared to act and make the situation you are criticising better. If you are not, it is probably better to keep quiet.

[[@Bible:1 sam 17:33-37]]1Sam 17:33-37

1. You can almost touch Saul's disappointment when he realizes that when someone FINALLY volunteers to fight Goliath, it's a little shepherd boy!
   1. Saul looks at David's age, size and inexperience and therefore judges that he is not fit to face Goliath. In human terms, of course, Saul is right, but if you count on God, as David does, victory depends not on worldly conditions, but on God's power and will.
   2. David is wise from his experience as a shepherd. David knew that God has saved him before, and therefore walks in bold faith that God will also save David now.
      1. The opposite of "faith" is often not "unbelief", but rather "fear". What prevents us from doing God's will is often not that we do not believe in God's power and will, but that we do not dare.
2. When David had gotten a job as the family's servant, he didn't look down on his job as a shepherd, but took it very seriously. Therefore, God was able to train and prepare David for his future tasks.
   1. In the same way, we should not look down on tasks that may be considered unimportant or unprestigious, but rather see these tasks as important in God's eyes and an opportunity for us to prepare for future tasks. He who is faithful in small things will also be faithful in great things (Matthew 25:21).
   2. If David had not dared to face the lion and the bear then, he would not have dared to face Goliath now. But when David faced the lion and the bear, he didn't know that one day he would face Goliath.
      1. In the same way, the challenges and trials we face today can prepare us for the trials we will face in the future. Therefore, it is important to dare to take on even the small challenges we face in our daily lives today, otherwise there is a big risk that we will not dare to take on the big challenges we will face tomorrow.

[[@Bible:1 sam 17:38-40]]1Sam 17:38-40

1. From a human perspective, it was natural for King Saul to want to offer David the best battle equipment available, namely King Saul's own. But Saul's armor is not suitable for little David, who prefers to use the weapons he knows best. If God saved David with a slingshot and a stone before, then a slingshot and a stone will do against Goliath as well.
   1. In the same way, Christians today can try to take on the vocation and spiritual equipment of another person. They may look up to a successful pastor and leader, and therefore try to imitate and do something similar. But it rarely works because that is not the armor God has given you.
2. Not only did David believe that SOMEONE should face Goliath, he also believed that HE himself would do it if necessary, and now that he is the only one who dares, he DOES it too!
   1. Faith is not only about believing *rightly,* but also about *doing* right and *living* rightly (Jas 2:14).

[[@Bible:1 sam 17:41-48]]1Sam 17:41-48

1. When Goliath sees that Israel is finally sending a champion to the duel, he and his shield-bearer go out to meet David. But when Goliath realizes that it is actually David he is about to face and that David is not just the shield bearer of a great Israelite warrior, he is insulted!
2. It must have been a bizarre sight to see the great Goliath yelling and screaming at little David, who then pepped back with his goal-breaking voice! But even though it was seemingly an uneven battle, no giant is big enough as long as David has God on his side!
3. "The Lord of Hosts" means "God of Armies".
4. The closer David gets to the battle, the more his faith grows. Now he has gone from saying to his brother Eliab that *someone* should fight Goliath, to saying to King Saul that *I* should fight Goliath, to now saying to his enemy Goliath that the *Lord* will strike you down TODAY.
5. Almost everyone on earth has heard of David and Goliath, but it was not to make himself famous that David went against Goliath, but so that "the whole world will know that Israel has one God".
   1. In the same way, we should be careful not to get involved in the church just to be known and liked, but rather to serve because we love God and our fellow human beings.
6. As Goliath approaches, David is faced with the inevitable question, "Will God fight Goliath or will David fight Goliath?" David knows that God will win the victory THROUGH David, so he rushes towards Goliath to start the battle.
   1. Sometimes it's easy for us Christians to get a little clumsy and think that God will do all the work for us. God has rightly promised to be with us, but we must also dare to believe that he is, otherwise nothing will happen.

[[@Bible:1 sam 17:49-51]]1Sam 17:49-51

1. When David was out grazing the sheep, there was plenty of time to practice with the slingshot and harp. He seems to have practised to perfection, and hits Goliath right on the nose!
   1. When everyone else was thinking, "Goliath is so big I can't beat him," David was thinking, "Goliath is so big I can't miss him!"
2. A skilled slunger could hurl the stone at 100 miles an hour!
3. David's victory over Goliath is a model of Jesus' victory over the devil.
   1. Both David and Jesus were sent to battle by their Father and rejected by their brothers.
   2. Both David and Jesus entered the battle in a way that seemed humanly impossible to win.
   3. Both David and Jesus won a vicarious victory for their people. Just as all Israel shared David's victory over Goliath, so the whole church shares Jesus' victory over the devil.

[[@Bible:1 sam 17:52-54]]1Sam 17:52-54

1. David's bravery infected the army of Israel in the same way that King Saul's fear had done before.

[[@Bible:1 sam 17:55-58]]1Sam 17:55-58

1. Saul knew who David was because David played and sang at court. But since Saul had promised his daughter to the one who defeats Goliath, he now needed to get to know David's father and family as well.
2. At this time Jerusalem had not yet been taken and become the capital of Israel. This would later be done by David himself (2 Sam 5:1-9).

## 1 Sam 22:1-5 - David in the Cave of Adullam

[[@Bible:1 sam 22:1]]1Sam 22:1

1. David went from being a celebrated hero to having to flee in haste and hide in a cave. He has recently been anointed the future king of Israel, killed Goliath, become commander of Israel's army, defeated the Philistines, married the king's daughter and made a covenant with the king's son Jonathan. But now he has fallen out of favour with King Saul and is forced to flee for his life.
2. When David has to hide, he goes to Adullam's cave.
   1. The cave of Adullam was an underground cave system of limestone that was probably located about a mile from Bethlehem, near the border with Philistia at the beginning of the mountains of Judea. The cave is located on a hill with a long view of the landscape, ideal for seeing if enemies begin to approach.
   2. The word "Adullam" means "refuge". Perhaps David found these caves when he was herding sheep as a young boy, and thought he could hide there if he ever found himself in danger. Now these caves come in handy!
   3. When David went from the city of Gath to the cave of Adullam, he had to pass by the place where he had defeated Goliath. Surely David thought about how quickly he had gone from being a celebrated hero to having to flee for his life.
3. When David hid in Adullam's cave, he wrote Ps 34, Ps 57, and Ps 142.
   1. When David found himself in a life-threatening and very vulnerable situation, he began his prayer by crying out to the Lord. David opens his heart to the Lord and tells of all his troubles, that his enemies are pursuing him and that there is no longer any refuge for him anywhere, but that he trusts God to be his refuge. Finally, David asks God to deliver him from his enemies.
      1. There is much to learn from David's prayer in a difficult situation. When you and I are surrounded by enemies and have to retreat, where do we go? We can learn from David that we can "hide" with the Lord and pray for his help and deliverance.
      2. Running to God when you are in a difficult situation is like when a child hits himself and runs straight to his mother or father. No matter what happens, it's always safest with mom or dad. In the same way, we should run to God when we find ourselves in trouble or difficulty.
   2. When David is on the run and hiding in Adullam's cave, it seems that God is working on David's heart. In this song, we see David humbling himself, praying to God, trusting in the Lord's protection and singing praises boldly.
      1. It is often when we find ourselves in difficult situations that we humble ourselves before the Lord and grow in our faith. Therefore, difficult situations are not necessarily negative, at least not for our spiritual well-being.
4. When David was little, his father and brothers didn't care much for him. So it must have been a very good feeling for David that now, when he is in dire straits, his family comes to him. It's when life gets hard that you find out who your real friends are.
   1. Maybe his family can't do much to save him from King Saul, but they can be by his side now that David is in a very difficult and vulnerable situation.
   2. In the same way a congregation can function. When life gets difficult, we need to be there for each other and support each other. Even if the church cannot free you from your pain, the church can be there for you, pray for you and support you.

[[@Bible:1 sam 22:2]]1Sam 22:2

1. David must have been very surprised when different kinds of disgruntled people started coming to him. If David himself had been given 400 men to choose from, he might not have chosen these people, but now it seems that God sent them to him.
   1. These people "were in trouble". They had their own problems and worries.
   2. These people were "in debt". They had failed in life and got into financial trouble.
   3. These people were "dissatisfied". Their lives were difficult and they saw no possibility of a better life unless they left it and followed David instead.
   4. Even today, people in difficulty, with financial worries and dissatisfied with life, come to the Church and ask God to be their refuge and deliverance.
2. David becomes the leader of these 400 people. David could certainly have turned these 400 into a band of robbers, but instead he turned them into brave heroes and warriors (2 Sam 23:8-39).
   1. In the same way, you and I can come to church and appeal to God for deliverance from a difficult situation. At first we are in difficulty and discontent, but gradually God changes our situation and makes us heroes and warriors for the kingdom of God.
   2. As church leaders, it is our task to lead people from a difficult and vulnerable situation to become heroes for God.
   3. These 400 men came to David not when he was rich and celebrated, but when he was in the most difficult time of his life. These men remained loyal to David for the rest of his life.
   4. One of these brave heroes was Eleazar (2Sam 23:9-10).
      1. When the men of Israel withdrew from the battle against the Philistines, Eleazar was left to fight alone until his hand became so tired that he could not let go of the sword.
         1. In the same way, God's heroes today need to fight for God's kingdom, standing firm on the Bible, for example, when God's word is attacked by enemies. Even if faithful Christians back out of the fight, heroes need to keep fighting the good fight with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17).
         2. When the battle of one is won, the others come back to partake of the sweetness of victory. But only the one who has fought the battle is remembered as a hero.
   5. Anyone who wants to be a "hero of God" today and do great deeds for the Lord, needs to be as loyal to Jesus as David's heroes were to David. A hero of God needs to come to God when life is difficult, let God be his refuge and be transformed from a miserable refugee to a hero of God.
3. When God is going to do his great works on earth, he usually first calls a leader after his heart, whom he anoints with his Holy Spirit, and then secondly also makes him a leader for people who want to follow God.
   1. But in the process of forming a leader after God's heart, one must sometimes pause the life of success to retreat to the cave of Adullam and spend time alone with the Lord.

# 1 Kings

## 1 Kings 17:1-7 - Elijah at Cherith the Brook

[[@Bible:1 kings 17:1]]1Kings 17:1

1. The name "Elijah" means "Yahweh is my God". It is very common for the names of biblical characters to indicate the purpose of their lives. For example, Jesus' name means "God saves", which was Jesus' mission, to save us humans. Elijah's name thus becomes a clear signal to the people of Israel to stop worshipping Baal and return to worshipping Yahweh.
   1. Elijah is called as a prophet at a time when virtually all of Israel had forsaken God and had begun to worship the idol Baal (1 Kings 19:10). Israel's King Ahab and his Queen Jezebel incurred God's wrath *"*more *than any of the Israelite kings who had gone before him"* (1 Kings 16:33).
      1. During this ungodly time in Israel's history, only 7,000 men had not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:18).
2. The idol "Baal" was a Canaanite fertility god and the name can be translated as "lord". Israel worshipped Baal for rain, good harvests, etc.
   1. Baal worship was a recurring problem for the people of Israel who were tempted by the idolatry of the surrounding nations.
   2. It is no coincidence that God punishes Israel with *drought* because Baal was considered to have power over *the weather*. In doing so, God shows Israel that Baal is powerless in comparison to Yahweh and that Israel should therefore return to him, even if they don't really want to, at least to get rain, which was the reason they worshipped Baal in the first place.
3. It's easy to think that Elijah was some kind of superman who just needed to pray a little prayer and it stopped raining for over 3 years, but in James' letter we see that Elijah was just an ordinary man like us (James 5:16-18).

[[@Bible:1 kings 17:2-3]]1Kings 17:2-3

1. Because Elijah had caused a severe drought in Israel, his life was in danger and God sent Elijah to a small stream to hide him.
   1. Elijah had quickly become a well-known prophet in the land, and by hiding Elijah by a brook, God teaches Elijah the importance of being alone with God.
      1. Perhaps Elijah would have preferred to continue preaching to the people and telling them about God's plan for Israel, but at the brook Cherith, Elijah learns that *working for God* must never be more important than *living with God*.
      2. It is probably no coincidence that Jesus compares streams of water to the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39). Those who want to work for God need to find their own hidden place where they can be alone with God and draw strength.
2. Even though God knew all this beforehand, he did not tell Elijah all at once, but let Elijah know one thing at a time. Only when Elijah obeyed God and did what God had commanded did he learn the next step.
   1. Even today, God leads us step by step, letting us know one thing at a time. This can be very frustrating but it leads us to depend on God and to trust in his care.
      1. What would have happened if we had known God's whole plan in advance? Probably we would have backed out because we don't feel we can handle something that big.
      2. It is often only in retrospect that we can see how wonderfully God has led us all along. It is often only when we look back on our lives that we realise that many of the difficulties we went through were actually good for us and made us grow in our faith or learn to trust in God more.
3. God uses Elijah's time at the brook Cherith to teach Elijah even more about being a servant of God. But Elijah didn't have to be fully trained before God called him into ministry; God developed Elijah as he went along.

[[@Bible:1 kings 17:4]]1Kings 17:4

1. In a time of drought, Elijah had to sit by a stream of water. In this way, God taught Elijah to depend on God for his sustenance.
2. Ravens were an "abomination" according to the Law (Leviticus 11:15), and now God allows Elijah to be served his food by "unclean animals". An overzealous literalist might find it hard to accept that God does this, but here Elijah is forced to realize what Jesus taught the Pharisees: God is *"Lord of the Sabbath"* (Mark 2:28) or what Paul taught the Corinthians: *"the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life"* (2 Cor 3:6). If Elijah had followed the "letter" he would have died of starvation, but because he understood that it was God who gave him the food, he ate and was given life.
   1. In the same way, we need to learn today that even if it is wrong, for example, to drink drunk on alcohol, we should not consider those with alcohol problems so "impure" that we cannot even associate with them. Or how would we react if someone with a snuff under his lip preached to us?
   2. One lesson from the raven is that God can use even an unclean tool for his holy will. For example, even if a preacher preaches God's word in a wonderful way, that does not necessarily mean that the preacher is a saint and thus we should not exalt the preacher.
      1. Nor should we consider ourselves so impure that we do not believe God can use *us*. If God can use unclean animals to feed God's servants, he can use us sinners to give God's word to God's people.
3. The name "Cherith" means "to cut off" or "to cut down", which could mean that God had the opportunity to shape and refine Elijah by removing the negative and destructive character traits that Elijah had.

[[@Bible:1 kings 17:6]]1Kings 17:6

1. Just as God provided food for Israel when they were in the wilderness, God now provides for Elijah. God not only does his miracles with the nation of Israel, but also with the individual Elijah.
   1. In the same way, we can expect God to work great miracles even with people who do not work as pastors or missionaries. Sure, God wants to do great miracles with us as a whole, but he also wants to do great miracles in your personal life.
2. If we look at Elijah's stay at Cherith as a symbolic place where every believer can be alone with God, then the bread symbolizes the Bible and the water the Spirit. Every morning and every evening it is useful and good for every person who wants to serve God to be still in solitude and read the Bible and be filled with the Spirit of God.

[[@Bible:1 kings 17:7]]1Kings 17:7

1. It must have been a difficult test for Elijah to maintain his trust in God's providence as he watched the brook slowly but surely dry up. But Elijah persevered, trusting that God would eventually reveal something new when the time came.
2. Elijah knew that it would not rain until he "said so", yet Elijah refrains from praying to God for water even though he risks dying of thirst himself.

## 1 Kings 17:8-24 - Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath

[[@Bible:1 kings 17:8-9]]1Kings 17:8-9

1. At just the right time, when it was time for Elijah to move on, God tells Elijah to go to Sidon.
   1. Again we see that God leads one step at a time. If we are told too much of God's plans far in advance, there is a great risk that we will not dare to accept God's mission because it feels too big, too distant, or too difficult to understand.
   2. God leads Elijah to a pagan area, in present-day Lebanon just north of Israel, and to a pagan woman. Through this we understand that while we may think it smarter to use an Israelite, God has the right to choose whomever he wants as his instrument for his plan.
      1. We should never look down on those whom God calls as his servants, even if they do not look or behave as we wish.
2. Widows had a very hard time in Bible times. With children to support and care for, but without a husband to work and earn money, life was extremely difficult. Add to that the fact that there was a drought in the land and most people understand that this widow was not even able to provide food for her own son, let alone Elijah. So it probably seemed rather illogical, almost ironic, that this poor widow would be able to offer food to Elijah.
   1. But in this way, God shows Elijah that God can use whomever he wants to do whatever he wants. We humans, who often look on the outside, would probably have dissed this widow beforehand and never given her a chance. But God, who sees her heart, knows that she may have nothing to offer, but that she is willing to serve God if he makes it possible.
   2. In the same way, we humans should be careful not to look only at appearances when judging whether a person is capable of doing this or that. After all, since the power and blessing is from God, it makes no difference whatsoever whether we are humanly weak or strong, good-looking or ugly, charismatic or dull, etc. What matters is the attitude of our heart and whether we are ready to serve God or not.

[[@Bible:1 kings 17:10-12]]1Kings 17:10-12

1. When Elijah arrives at Zarephath and encounters a widow, he asks her for some food and water. But not only is she poor, she is in such a desperate and desperate situation that she prepares to eat her last piece of bread and then die!
2. The widow understands that Elijah is an Israelite and shows that she respects Elijah's God, but that Yahweh is not her God because she is not an Israelite.

[[@Bible:1 kings 17:13-14]]1Kings 17:13-14

1. The widow, of course, was afraid of the situation she knew awaited her after she and her son had eaten the last piece of bread. But God had seen her heart and came to save her at the very last moment!
2. Elijah challenges the widow to give Elijah bread *first* and *then* to her son, something he could do because God had told him that he would bless abundantly. This must have been extremely difficult for the widow, but in doing as Elijah says, she shows that she believes in the God of Israel.
   1. In the same way that the widow would *first* give to Elijah the man of God and then be blessed abundantly, the principle of tithing works. God commanded Israel to *first* tithe their harvest and then keep the rest for themselves (Ex 23:19, Deut 18:4, Neh 10:35). If they did as God said and gave their tithe, "blessings would flow out in abundance" (Mal 3:10).

[[@Bible:1 kings 17:15-16]]1Kings 17:15-16

1. The widow believed in God's promise and acted on God's word and was thus richly blessed.
2. Again, we see that God did not give all that was needed at once, but only what was needed for the day. In this way, God ensures that the widow and the prophet continue to depend on God.
   1. It is probably no coincidence that poor people are more likely to believe in God's miracles and to trust in God's care. It is easy to stop depending on God when you are rich and have no greater need for God's miracles.
   2. In a way, being poor is an advantage, at least spiritually (Matthew 19:23).

[[@Bible:1 kings 17:17-18]]1Kings 17:17-18

1. In the midst of all this miraculous blessing that the widow had received from God, she is struck by an unimaginable tragedy when her son dies of illness.
   1. The death of the widow's son was a double tragedy that affected not only himself but also, by extension, the widow, since he was her guarantee of support when she grew old.
2. The widow blames herself and her own sin for her son's death and is angry with Elijah because she believes that he has somehow made God punish her for her sin.
   1. Exactly what sin is meant is not clear, but obviously she had something on her conscience that comes to mind when she suffers an accident.
   2. It's easy to blame yourself and your own sin when you're faced with disappointment. But not everything negative that happens to us is automatically a punishment from God.
      1. If it suddenly starts raining, does that mean it was God who sent the rain, or was it the devil who sent the rain, or is it raining because it's autumn?
      2. Sure, God can send things our way that we are not always so happy about and that can serve as a lesson for us, but not everything that happens to us has to be from God. Especially not when, like the widow in this story, you have just been miraculously blessed.

[[@Bible:1 kings 17:19-21]]1 Kings 17:19-21

1. Elijah is dismayed by the death of the widow's son and does the only thing he can do; cries out his despair to God!
   1. The dilemma facing Elijah and the widow is really the Theodicy problem: "how can a good God allow evil?"
      1. The answer to that question is not given in this chapter, but a good instruction on how to deal with tragedy is to cry out to God in despair.
2. Elijah prays for the dead boy in a very strange way, he reaches out over the boy three times. Exactly why he did this is not clear from the text. But it was not Elijah's somewhat strange approach that led to the answer to the prayer, but his desperate prayer. We cannot try to imitate Elijah's *way of* praying for the boy and think that it automatically leads to an answer to prayer, but we can usefully imitate Elijah's *faith* when he turns to God and prays.

[[@Bible:1 kings 17:22-24]]1Kings 17:22-24

1. This was the first time in the Bible that someone returns from the dead. Once again, God shows that he is vastly more powerful than the idol Baal.
2. This miraculous miracle allows the widow to state that she now *knows* that Elijah is a man of God and that he conveys the truth of God.
   1. Although God did not send this tragedy to the widow, he did use it for something positive (Rom 8:29).

# 2 Kings

## 2 Kings 1:1-18 - Elijah Denounces Ahaziah

[[@Bible:2 kings 1:1]]2Kings 1:1

1. Moab was a land east of the Dead Sea. King David had defeated the Moabites in his time and Moab had been under Israel's control ever since (2 Sam 8:2). When Ahab dies, Moab takes the opportunity to rebel and free themselves from Israel's sovereignty.

[[@Bible:2 kings 1:2]]2Kings 1:2

1. King Ahaziah had an accident and was seriously injured when he fell from the second floor of his palace. At this time, many houses had upper floors with balconies fitted with wooden grills to prevent view, but which could break easily.
   1. Jesus is clear in Luke 13:4-5 that you don't suffer misfortune just because you are a sinner. Accidents can happen to anyone, whether you are a king or a slave, righteous or unrighteous. What determines whether one is righteous is not whether or not one suffers an accident, for everyone does so sooner or later, more or less, but rather how one deals with the accident that has befallen one.
      1. The first thing King Ahaziah does when he is struck by misfortune is to seek advice from the idol Baal-Sebub. This is despite the fact that Yahweh is the God of Israel and despite the fact that there is a mighty prophet and man of God in the land.
2. Ekron was an important Philistine city about 4 miles west of Jerusalem.
3. "Baal-Sebub" means "lord of the flies". Baal was sometimes portrayed as a god who healed people by expelling flies. This was because flies flew between feces and spread diseases to people. If Baal-Sebub was considered a god of healing who could heal people of disease, it makes more sense why King Ahaziah turned to that particular god for advice about his illness.
   1. "Baal-Sebub" could also be a derogatory play on words by the Israelites on "Baal-Sebul" which means "lord of the (heavenly) dwelling".
   2. In the New Testament, the devil is sometimes called Beelzebub (Luke 11:15-23).

[[@Bible:2 kings 1:3-4]]2Kings 1:3-4

1. In Old Testament times, it was not uncommon to worship several different gods depending on what was needed. People prayed to one god for a good harvest, another god for a good marriage and a third god to be cured of their illness. So when Ahaziah turns to Baal-Sebub for healing, it does not necessarily mean that he has completely abandoned faith in the Lord God. Many of the Israelites prayed both to the Lord God and to other gods.
2. King Ahaziah's prayer and appeal to the idol Baal-Sebub was not hidden from the Lord. God has an interest in having a relationship with his people and does not want them to turn to any other god. The Lord God does not want any competition but wants to be the only God of Israel.
3. Neither God nor Elijah has been asked, but they respond anyway. God's word through the prophet Elijah is that King Ahaziah will die. This is not a "punishment" from God but a consequence of Ahaziah falling. Because Ahaziah is told what will happen, he is offered an opportunity to repent before he dies.

[[@Bible:2 kings 1:5-8]]2Kings 1:5-8

1. King Ahaziah's emissaries do not complete their mission but return after encountering Elijah, who must have made a strong impression on the emissaries.
2. Prophets at this time sometimes seem to have dressed in some kind of "hair cloak" (Zech 13:4). Even John the Baptist wore a hair cloak with a leather belt around his waist, which, among other things, led people to associate John with Elijah (John 1:19-21).

[[@Bible:2 kings 1:9-10]]2Kings 1:9-10

1. It seems that both King Ahaziah and his commanders understand that God is real and that Elijah is his prophet and "man of God", but at the same time they do not want to humble themselves before God but instead arrogantly seize Elijah by force. This shows that neither King Ahaziah nor his commanders have any respect for Elijah or God. The fact that the king sends a command with as many as fifty soldiers to seize an old man shows that they truly understand how potentially powerful the Lord God is.
2. If you come against God with fifty men and are ready to fight, then perhaps you should not be surprised if God shows his power.
3. Notice that Elijah himself does not send down any fire from heaven, but leaves it to God. As a prophet, Elijah has no right to kill 50 soldiers on his own accord anyway. Elijah left the judgment to the Lord (Rom 12:19).
4. It is ironic that when the commander commands Elijah to "come down", fire instead came "down from heaven".

[[@Bible:2 kings 1:11-12]]2Kings 1:11-12

1. Instead of letting the death of the fifty soldiers lead to the realization of how impossible it is to fight against the Lord, King Ahaziah hardens himself even more and sends fifty more men!
2. Instead of humbling himself and approaching Elijah with respect, King Ahaziah chooses to take an even harder line. When commander number two arrives, he repeats the same mistake as his predecessor, but adds "come down at once!"
   1. Neither God nor his prophets can be made to obey. If you realize that you are de facto fighting against God, you should humble yourself and repent.

[[@Bible:2 kings 1:13-15]]2Kings 1:13-15

1. The third commander approached the prophet Elijah with humility and a realization that he was indeed a man of God. He had no desire whatsoever to fight either the Lord or the Lord's prophet.
2. King Ahaziah vainly tried to subdue God with human military might and failed. But when the third in command approaches the prophet with humility, he is received by God.
3. An important lesson from this episode is to always approach God with humility and respect. We have no right to either silence God's word or demand that God heal us. God is God and man is man.

[[@Bible:2 kings 1:16]]2Kings 1:16

1. Elijah delivers exactly the same message to King Ahaziah that he delivered to the king's emissaries. Elijah did not change or embellish his message depending on who he was speaking to. Whether he was speaking to the king or to ordinary people, he was equally clear and courageous.
2. When the first two commanders approached God with military might and aggressiveness, it led to their deaths. When the third commander approached God with humility and respect, he was allowed to live. This shows us that if King Ahaziah had chosen to humble himself and approach God with respect, he would have lived. Instead, he chose to approach God with military might and aggressiveness and died.

[[@Bible:2 kings 1:17-18]]2Kings 1:17-18

1. King Ahaziah lost control of Moab, he fell in a botched accident, he turned to idols for help, and he tried to use military force against God. In the end, he died because of his own clumsiness. King Ahaziah stands out as a good example of a bad leader.
2. King Ahaziah's brief appearance in the Bible begins with his involvement in a botched accident and ends with his death. Between the beginning and the end of his story is the spiritual lesson that the way to life is to approach God with humility and respect.

## 2 Kings 2:1-18 - Elijah Taken to Heaven

[[@Bible:2 kings 2:1-3]]2Kings 2:1-3

1. In the Old Testament, it was very unusual to speak of "being taken up to heaven". Only the deaths of Elijah and Hanoch are really described in this way. About Hanoch it says: "*After Hanoch had thus walked with God, he was no more, for God took him away.* " (Genesis 5:24)
   1. The more normal thing was to "gather to your people" (Abraham in Gen 25:7-8) or "go to rest with your fathers" (David in 1 Kings 2:10) when you died.
      1. Perhaps these men of God ended up in the kingdom of death, resting and waiting for the death and resurrection of Jesus, when they will have the opportunity to enter heaven.
2. The fact that the prophet Elijah's disciple is called "Elisha", an almost identical name, testifies to the connection between them and how a calling and task can be passed on to a devoted and faithful disciple who wants to work in the same spirit.
   1. The name "Elijah" contains both of the two most common Hebrew words for "God", namely "El" and "Yahweh". "Elijah" means "Yahweh is God" or "Yahweh is my God".
   2. The name "Elisha" means "God is salvation" and is in this way very similar to the name "Joshua/Jesus" which means "Yahweh is salvation". In Hebrew, God is usually called "El" or "Yahweh".
3. Elijah takes his prophet's apprentice Elisha on a journey to Bethel, Jericho and the Jordan River, and then Elisha goes back alone from the Jordan River to Jericho and Bethel.
4. Elijah knew that his last hour had come and that the Lord would soon call him home. Elijah therefore wants to make a final farewell journey and say a final goodbye to his prophet disciples in Gilgal (2 Kings 4:38), Bethel (2 Kings 2:3) and Jericho (2 Kings 2:5) before he leaves earthly life. Elijah wants his important work for the Lord to continue even after his death, so he intends to hand over the leadership to Elisha, who may therefore accompany him in order to both test and strengthen his faith and loyalty.
5. It was customary for a dying man to pronounce blessings on his loved ones just before they died (Genesis 49), and when Elisha understood that Elijah was going to go away and die, he did not want to miss the opportunity to receive such a blessing from Elijah.
   1. How did Elisha know that Elijah was about to die? It seems that the disciples of the prophets also knew this, so perhaps they had all experienced this prophetically, or perhaps Elijah had told them at some earlier time.

[[@Bible:2 kings 2:4-7]]2Kings 2:4-7

1. Although Elijah, and probably Elisha, already knew that Elisha was called by God to be Elijah's prophetic successor (1 Kings 19:16-21), Elijah asks Elisha to leave him three times. Clearly, this is Elijah's way of testing Elisha's devotion, zeal and loyalty. Each time Elisha replies that he will not leave Elijah, clearly showing that he wants nothing more than to continue in Elijah's footsteps as a prophet of the Lord.
   1. A wise man once said to me: "If you can do anything else, anything at all, do it instead of becoming a pastor." Answering God's call means many hard things, and if you're not prepared to go all in, maybe you should do something else.
2. Elisha replies to the prophet disciples that he is well aware of Elijah's imminent death and that they should "keep quiet" about it. The Hebrew word for "keep quiet" is "chachshâh" and sounds like someone "shushing" someone or the Norse inhalation sound "schoo".
   1. Elisha seems to calm the prophet disciples' concerns by confirming that he knows what is about to happen and that the situation is under control. Elisha does not want the prophet disciples to make a big fuss about Elijah's death, but to let him go in the way he wants.
3. It certainly seems that the disciples of the prophets knew that God would now bring Elijah home in a spectacular way. They follow and observe from a distance.

[[@Bible:2 kings 2:8]]2Kings 2:8

1. A prophet's cloak was "hairy" (Zech 13:4) and symbolized his office and mission from the Lord. The reason Elijah strikes his prophet's cloak on the water, and not any other garment, etc., is that Elijah wants to clearly show Elisha the connection between God's miracles and the mission as God's prophet. It is not Elijah himself who performs the miracles, but they are God's miracles that he performs through his faithful servant.
   1. When Elijah meets Elisha for the first time, he places his cloak over him as a sign that he will become a prophet's apprentice (1 Kings 19:19).
   2. John the Baptist was also dressed in a cloak of hair with a leather belt around his waist, which among other things led people to associate John with Elijah (John 1:19-21).

[[@Bible:2 kings 2:9-10]]2Kings 2:9-10

1. It was only after Elisha had refused to leave Elijah three times that Elijah asked Elisha what he wanted him to do for him.
   1. Although both Elijah and Elisha knew that it was God's plan that Elisha should succeed Elijah as the prophet of the Lord, Elijah wanted Elisha to say it in his own words.
2. According to the Law of Moses, the birthright of the firstborn meant that the firstborn son would receive a double lot as an inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:17). So when Elisha asks for a double inheritance, he is asking to be heir to the prophetic office of Elijah in order to continue Elijah's calling and mission.
   1. But while the concept of "double inheritance" does not necessarily mean that Elisha would inherit twice as much "spiritual power" as Elijah had, it is interesting to note that Elisha actually witnessed exactly twice as many miracles as Elijah; namely, 28 miracles compared to Elijah's 14!
      1. Miracles of Elijah: 1 Kings 17:1, 1 Kings 17:4, 1 Kings 17:14, 1 Kings 17:22, 1 Kings 18:38, 1 Kings 18:45, 1 Kings 21:22, 1 Kings 21:23, 2 Kings 1:4, 2 Kings 1:10, 2 Kings 1:12, 2 Kings 2:8, 2 Kings 2:10, 2 Kings 2:11.
      2. The miracles of Elisha: 2 Kings 2:14, 2 Kings 2:21, 2 Kings 2:24, 2 Kings 3:17, 2 Kings 3:22, 2 Kings 4:4, 2 Kings 4:16, 2 Kings 4:34, 2 Kings 4:41, 2 Kings 4:43, 2 Kings 5:14, 2 Kings 5:26, 2 Kings 5:27, 2 Kings 6:6, 2 Kings 6:9, 2 Kings 6:17, 2 Kings 6:18, 2 Kings 6:20, 2 Kings 7:1, 2 Kings 7:2, 2 Kings 7:6, 2 Kings 8:1, 2 Kings 8:10, 2 Kings 8:12, 2 Kings 9:7, 2 Kings 13:17, 2 Kings 13:19, 2 Kings 13:21.
3. Since both Elijah and Elisha knew that Elisha was called by God to be Elijah's successor, I interpret Elijah's response "you have asked for something difficult" as Elisha asking for something more than just to be a successor and heir. Given that Elisha witnessed exactly twice as many miracles as Elijah, I interpret this to mean that Elisha was actually asking to succeed Elijah with double power!
   1. It is not enough for the Lord to let the successors inherit the work of the predecessors, but God also wants to bless abundantly and multiply the work of the Lord. But this presupposes loyalty to one's predecessor and a willingness to continue the mission in the same spirit.
4. Elijah's response "you have asked for something difficult" also shows Elijah's humility that no matter what he thinks of Elisha, it is ultimately up to God to decide who will be his successor.

[[@Bible:2 kings 2:11-13]]2Kings 2:11-13

1. Elijah is taken up to God in heaven by a storm wind. When Elisha sees this, he utters an expression that testifies that Elisha looked to Elijah, and not, for example, the king of Israel, as Israel's protection against enemies. King Joash utters the same expression when Elisha dies (2 Kings 13:14). Then he mourns Elijah by tearing his clothes in half (Gen 37:34, 2 Sam 13:31).
   1. When Elisha tears his own clothes and then puts on Elijah's prophet's cloak, it may also symbolize that he is now leaving his old life and entering into his new calling as a prophet of the Lord.
2. Elijah's cloak did not fall on Elisha's shoulders, it fell to the ground in front of Elisha. So when Elisha saw Elijah's cloak lying there on the ground, he had to make his own decision whether he wanted to pick up the prophet's cloak or walk away empty-handed. Entering the call of the Lord is always a conscious choice one must make, an affirmative response, an acceptance of a mission.

[[@Bible:2 kings 2:14]]2Kings 2:14

1. God did not need Elisha to be charismatic, miraculous or a great speaker in order for him to be a prophet of the Lord. *God* would do all that through Elisha. No, what God needed from Elisha was his loyalty, devotion and faithfulness.
2. Elisha could have taken Elijah's cloak as a memento of her good master and then put it on a nice shelf in her home. But Elisha didn't do that, but he shouldered Elijah's prophet's mantle in a double sense; he put it on AND he used it.
3. Elisha was called by God to succeed Elijah as the prophet of the Lord. It was therefore a natural first step to call out to "the God of Elijah" and then to perform as a first miracle the same as Elijah had just done. In this way, God confirms the continuity between Elijah and Elisha and their common calling.
   1. It was probably on purpose that Elijah had taken Elisha on a journey that ended with the miracle of sharing the waters of the Jordan. In this way Elisha had seen his master act and was able to imitate his teacher at the beginning of his mission as a prophet. He had only recently seen Elijah perform a miracle and could therefore learn from him and do the same.
      1. Going in as a leader without first being given the opportunity to walk alongside is difficult and unnecessary. God bless us with a good teacher who can show us how to work for the Lord and what we are expected to do. Then you get to try doing the same for a while, before you are ready to lead independently.

[[@Bible:2 kings 2:15]]2Kings 2:15

1. When Elisha returns to the disciples of the prophets, they immediately recognize him as their new leader and confess that the same Spirit that was with Elijah is now with Elisha.
   1. Succeeding a valued and talented leader is no easy task. Therefore, having a congregation that accepts and recognises the new leadership is a prerequisite for being a leader. But this depends on everyone involved, both the new leader and the congregation, recognizing that good leadership depends on the leader's responsiveness and humility before the Spirit of the Lord.

[[@Bible:2 kings 2:16-18]]2Kings 2:16-18

1. Elisha's first task as a new leader is to decide whether or not the disciples of the prophets should go and look for Elijah's body. Elisha knows it's useless, because he's seen Elijah go up to heaven. But the disciples have only seen this from a distance and so do not know for sure exactly what has happened. They respect Elisha as their new leader, but don't yet feel enough confidence in him to trust his word blindly. They insist on seeing for themselves. Elisha probably wants to go ahead and begin the Lord's work, but if he doesn't allow the disciples to go off and look, he risks them going off anyway and then his authority as leader is destroyed. In order not to lose his authority while building trust when they realize he is right, he sends the disciples off on a futile search. Elisha lost three days but won the trust of the prophet disciples.
   1. At the beginning of a leadership, it is easy for the congregation to have formally accepted who the leader is, but they still mentally cling to the old leader. By sometimes allowing the congregation to make their "mistakes", time is lost, but hopefully trust is gained when they realize that the old leader is no longer with us and we must trust the new leader. As a leader, you can't go faster than the congregation can go, you can't go further than they can go.

## 2 Kings 2:19-22 - The waters of Jericho

[[@Bible:2 kings 2:19]]2Kings 2:19

1. The ancient city had recently been rebuilt (1 Kings 16:34) but was still in need of good water. Joshua had sworn an oath over Jericho in his day that became a curse for the city (Josh 6:26).

[[@Bible:2 kings 2:20]]2Kings 2:20

1. By using a "new" and "unused" bowl, Elisha is probably referring to the ceremonial practice of using a hitherto "unused" and "unclean" heifer or donkey that is found in both the Old and New Testaments (Numbers 19:2, Deuteronomy 21:3, Luke 19:30). In the Old Testament, "salt" was symbolically associated with the covenant, as the meat offered to the Lord was often salted (Leviticus 2:13, Numbers 18:19, 2 Chronicles 13:5).
2. By ceremonially using a "new" bowl of water and "salt", Elisha's action symbolizes that God is now breaking the curse on Jericho that Joshua had sworn to bring about. Elisha, who has just parted the Jordan River and, like Joshua before him (Josh. 3:14-17), has gone dry, thus becomes a "new" Joshua who enters the Holy Land as a new savior of the Lord.
   1. The name "Joshua" means "the Lord saves" and the name "Elisha" means "God saves".

## 2 Kings 2:23-25 - The Boys of Bethel

[[@Bible:2 kings 2:23-24]]2Kings 2:23-24

1. The "little boys" were probably teenage boys, judging from the Hebrew words. It is not clear from the basic text that these young people "died", but rather that they were "torn", or "split".
2. The Canaanite peoples sometimes mourned their dead by cutting and tearing themselves with knives and shaving off their hair (Leviticus 21:5). This ceremonial tradition was forbidden by God when the Israelites took the land of Canaan (Deuteronomy 14:1) and one of the punishments that would befall the Israelites if they broke this commandment was that the Lord would "*send upon you beasts that shall kill your children"* (Leviticus 26:14-22).
   1. When the young people say "up with you," they are probably referring to the passing of Elijah by the Lord lifting him "up" into heaven. Perhaps Elisha had lost his hair at a young age and the youth believe that he shaved off his hair in order to mourn Elijah's death. God firmly rejects the practice of this pagan tradition by sending wild beasts to "tear" the boys.

## 2 Kings 3:1-3 - Moab Rebels Against Israel

[[@Bible:2 kings 3:1-3]]2Kings 3:1-3

1. Jehoram was king of Israel around the years 852-841 BC. Joram was the son of Ahab and Jezebel, some of the most wicked leaders in Israel's history.
2. When Israel was divided into two kingdoms, Israel in the north and Judah in the south, Jeroboam was the first king of northern Israel. Jeroboam was worried that if the Israelites continued to worship God in the Temple in Jerusalem, which was in Judah, they would turn their hearts back to the king of Judah and eventually kill Jeroboam. So he had two calves made of gold and placed them in the Israelite cities of Bethel and Dan. Then he forbade his people from going to Jerusalem, saying that they should worship God through these golden calves instead. In addition to this, Jeroboam also instituted a system where virtually anyone could become a priest, whether they were a Levite or not (1 Kings 12:25-31).
   1. The sin into which Jeroboam led Israel was not to worship other gods, but to continue to worship the God of Israel, but in the wrong way: in places other than Jerusalem, through two golden calves, and with unauthorized priests. This false worship was instituted not for religious reasons but for political ones.
      1. But while Jeroboam may have felt that he was still worshipping the Lord God through these golden calves, God apparently interpreted this as idolatry in a prophetic word through the prophet Ahijah: *"You have done more evil than all who have gone before you. You have made other gods for yourself, yes, cast idols to arouse my wrath, and you have cast me behind your back."* (1Kings 14:9)
3. Joram abolished the apparent worship of the idol Baal but continued Jeroboam's false worship of God.

[[@Bible:2 kings 3:4-8]]2Kings 3:4-8

1. The Moabites lived on the east side of the Jordan River and were forced to pay taxes to Israel. When King Ahab died, King Mesha of Moab took the opportunity to free the Moabites from Israel's sovereignty.
2. Jehoshaphat was a good and righteous king who reigned in Jerusalem in Judah and had made peace with the northern kingdom of Israel (1 Kings 22:41-44).
3. Even though Israel was divided into two parts, Israel in the north and Judah in the south, they were now willing to go into battle together to defeat a common enemy.
4. Israel and Judah could not have defeated Moab if they had attacked from the north, where the Moabites had strong fortifications. But together they can surprise Moab from the other direction, by going from Judah into the desert of Edom the way south of the Dead Sea.

[[@Bible:2 kings 3:9]]2Kings 3:9

1. The military forces of Israel, Judah and Edom are about to perish for lack of water. Whether this was due to poor planning or chance is not clear, but they are certainly in trouble!

[[@Bible:2 kings 3:10-11]]2Kings 3:10-11

1. Only after the Israelites fail in their own plans do they turn to a prophet to listen to God's plan. If they had turned to Elisha right away, they would have avoided the trouble of failure
   1. It is a common human phenomenon to want to fend for oneself and pray to God only when problems pile up. But if you make a habit of praying and reading the Bible daily, you will avoid many of these worries.
2. King Jehoram of Israel sees the concrete reality realistically and interprets it as the judgment of the Lord. He must have had a guilty conscience! Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, also sees the concrete reality, but instead sees it as an opportunity for God to bless and save them.
   1. We should think the same way today. If we suffer an accident or crisis, does it mean that God has sent us a judgment or is it an opportunity for blessing?
   2. For a spiritual man, divine hope always remains, even when all hope is gone, humanly speaking.
3. It seems that Elisha took care of and assisted Elijah in a very practical way. Elisha's training to become a prophet also included simple and practical tasks.

[[@Bible:2 kings 3:12]]2Kings 3:12

1. You can be described as "He's the fastest in the world" or "She sings beautifully" or something else nice. But to be described as "With him is the word of the Lord" is probably the finest description I can think of.
2. Normally, of course, the three kings would have called Elisha and heard his words, but now they had to humble themselves and go down to him.

[[@Bible:2 kings 3:13-14]]2Kings 3:13-14

1. Elisha is as brave and outspoken with the king as Elijah once was. Although Elisha's words could easily get him executed, he is not afraid to tell the truth.

[[@Bible:2 kings 3:15]]2Kings 3:15

1. Perhaps Elisha is so holy upset with the wicked King Jehoram that he feels he needs to calm down with some praise to hear God's voice.
   1. In order to hear God's voice, we must sometimes turn off all worldly impressions and open our hearts to the Lord. For example, Jesus often went away in solitude when he prayed (Mark 6:46) and he urged us to pray in our chambers (Matthew 6:6).
2. Paul writes to the churches in Ephesus and Colosse that we should be filled with the Spirit, so that we speak to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and playing to the Lord in our hearts (Eph 5:19, Col 3:16).
   1. It's no coincidence that we sing praises to the Lord every service. There is a close connection between our singing to the Lord and the Lord's words to us. Prayer and praise are our words to God and the Bible and prophetic greetings are God's words to us.

[[@Bible:2 kings 3:16-19]]2Kings 3:16-19

1. It is likely that the Israelites were in an area with a "wadi", an Arabic word for a "valley". A wadi is normally dry, but can overflow and become temporarily waterlogged during heavy rains or when water flows from the mountains.
2. God's word to the three kings is that they should dig pits in the valley so that when God sends water, the pits will be filled.
   1. Without any visible sign, but only by faith in God's word, the Israelites had to start working and preparing for God's blessing.
   2. The miracle would not come in the way the Israelites had imagined.
   3. Even though God promised to send water, the Israelites had to dig the pits themselves, so that they could benefit from the water when it came.
   4. Ordering exhausted, exhausted and thirsty soldiers to dig pits in the desert must have seemed like madness.
3. God wants us to prepare ourselves for the blessing he wants to give us. God wants us to listen to his voice and start working on the task he gives us. Notice that God did not give the Israelites a task they could not do, such as bringing rain. No, God gave the Israelites the task of digging pits, something that was perfectly possible for them to start doing right away. When the Israelites did what was possible for them, God did the impossible that was possible for him.
4. Flowing water is often symbolic of the fulfillment of the Holy Spirit (John 4:14, 7:37-38). If we want to live a life in the Spirit and be continually filled with the Holy Spirit, we must also "dig pits". We need to make it possible for God to fill us. If we are constantly filling ourselves with all sorts of worldly things, then it will be difficult for us to even notice when God wants to touch us with His Holy Spirit. But if we live a life of regular time for prayer, Bible and worship, then we are digging pits that the Holy Spirit can fill with his presence.

[[@Bible:2 kings 3:20]]2Kings 3:20

1. Probably water suddenly poured down from the surrounding hills. If the Israelites had not dug their pits, the water would have rushed past and they would have missed out on the blessing God had prepared. The water became available because they had dug the pits that God had commanded.
   1. Sometimes it is easy for a church to think that it should build for revival only when it sees that revival has come. But then it may be too late! Better to prepare for the blessings that God has promised and expect God to send a revival.
   2. What "pits" do you need to build in your life and in your congregation to receive the spiritual blessings that God will send your way?
      1. Perhaps you need to expand the church to accommodate more people?
      2. Maybe you need to hire another pastor?
      3. There may not be any children in your church, so you need to start a Sunday school.
      4. Maybe God is calling you to Bible school? You may not understand today what it would be good for, but when the time comes you will understand what spiritual blessings you will be able to receive because you were obedient to God and "dug your pit", i.e. went to Bible school.
      5. In its most basic form, every time you read the Bible and pray a prayer, you are "digging a pit". It creates a space in your soul to receive spiritual gifts from the Lord.
2. The amount of water the Israelites received was in direct proportion to the pits they had dug. If they dug 10 pits, the water would fill 10 pits. If they dug 100 pits, the water would fill 100 pits.
   1. In the same way, we will be able to receive the multitude of spiritual blessings for which we are preparing ourselves. If we pray and read the Bible daily, we can receive more from God than if we only read and pray once in a while.
3. The three kings came to Elisha to ask God for water, but God gave them more than they asked for! Not only did God give them water, he also gave them victory over their enemies. When we pray to God for what we need most, he also, in his goodness, wants to give us more than we can ask for.

[[@Bible:2 kings 3:21-24]]2Kings 3:21-24

1. When the morning sun shone on the water in the pits, the water looked red and the Moabites thought it was the blood of the Israelites fighting among themselves. But it wasn't!
2. The Moabites think that most of the Israelites are dead and that they can now rush in and plunder. Presumably they ran unorganized and unprepared straight into a prepared army and were thus horribly defeated.
3. God used the water in the pits both to bring blessing and victory to God's people and to bring confusion and defeat to God's enemies.

[[@Bible:2 kings 3:25]]2Kings 3:25

1. The Israelite army now follows the instructions of the prophet Elisha to the letter, except for Kir Hareset. It would take many years for the Moabites to economically recover from this destruction.

[[@Bible:2 kings 3:26]]2Kings 3:26

1. When the king of Moab sacrifices his own son to an idol, the Israelites are so upset that they want nothing to do with Moab and leave.

## 2 Kings 4:1-7 - Elisha and the Widow’s Oil

[[@Bible:2 kings 4:1]]2Kings 4:1

1. There were many "prophet disciples" in Israel at this time, including Gilgal (2 Kings 4:38), Bethel (2 Kings 2:3), and Jericho (2 Kings 2:5).
   1. The disciples of the prophets were trained in the prophetic profession probably much like a pastor or church leader today. Prophetic disciples learned to be prophets from, for example, Samuel (1 Sam 19:20), Elijah (2 Kings 2:1-18) or Elisha (2 Kings 4:38). There were also many false prophets (1 Kings 22:6).
2. Because of the climate in the Middle East, it was not uncommon for farmers and agriculturalists to fall into debt. If there was a prolonged drought that led to a poor harvest, it was difficult to repay the debt.
   1. If things got really bad, they had to sell their land and in the worst case, according to the Law of Moses, they had to sell themselves as slaves to pay off their debt (Matthew 18:25).
   2. However, the Mosaic Law is clear that the "owner" was not allowed to use his Hebrew slave for "slave labor" (Leviticus 25:39) and he was allowed to serve as a slave for a maximum of six years (Exodus 21:2-4).
3. The prophet's disciple who has died is described as "a servant who feared the Lord". The prophet Obadiah is described in exactly the same way (1 Kings 18:12), so a not unreasonable guess is that it is Obadiah who has died. This Obadiah had at one time hidden away one hundred prophets in a cave and provided them with food and drink. This must have been very costly for Obadiah, so if he was the one married to this woman, it is not difficult to understand why she is now in debt after he has died.
4. Since the widow's husband had been one of the disciples of the prophets and Elisha was the leader of the disciples of the prophets, it is natural that the widow of one of the disciples of the prophets comes to Elisha and asks for help in her time of need. If there is no good government system to help people who are in financial need, the church needs to be involved in helping as much as it can.
   1. Moreover, if Obadiah was the widow's husband, Elisha has a special responsibility to help the widow because she has become indebted to Obadiah's tremendous care for the disciples of the prophets.

[[@Bible:2 kings 4:2]]2Kings 4:2

1. The basic Hebrew text shows that the bottle of oil the woman had at home was not a large bottle of cooking oil, but a small bottle of oil to be used, for example, when anointing someone in service to God.
2. When the widow asks for help, Elisa asks what she has at home. Sometimes God doesn't want to give us something brand new, but rather bless what we already have. In this way, God's miracles in our lives are built on our active participation.
   1. One question we can all ask ourselves is what do we own that we can put at God's disposal so that he can bless it?

[[@Bible:2 kings 4:3-4]]2Kings 4:3-4

1. When Elisha asked her to go around knocking on her neighbors' doors and asking for empty vessels, she had to be an active part in making the miracle happen, and the only limit on the amount of blessing God wanted to give this widow was how much she had the capacity to receive. If she borrowed ten empty vessels, she would receive ten vessels full of oil; if she borrowed a hundred empty vessels, she would receive a hundred vessels full of oil. In this way, the blessing she would receive was directly related to her own belief in what God would give her and the extent to which she was prepared to work to make it happen.
   1. In the same way, God still wants to give you and me as many blessings as we have the capacity to receive. The more we grow in our faith, the more we learn how God wants to bless and the more receptive we become.
      1. For example, God has promised in His Word to work miracles when we go out and preach about Jesus to new people (Mark 16:9-20). If we witness to ten people about Jesus, we will see miracles in the lives of ten people; if we witness to a hundred people about Jesus, we will see miracles in the lives of a hundred people.
   2. In order to receive spiritual gifts and blessings, we ourselves are often the greatest obstacle. God wants to give us gifts in abundance, but we receive too little. If we want to see more miracles and spiritual blessings, it is often not God who is the problem, but our prayers, which are too small and limited.
      1. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says to his disciples, "How little faith you have!" no less than five times (Matt 6:30, 8:26, 14:31, 16:8, 17:20)!
2. If the widow had believed in Elisha's words but had not also acted according to her confession, she would not have received God's blessing.
   1. It is easy to have a high confession and preach great sermons about what God can do, but then not live according to what you preach.
3. Elisha wanted the widow to "shut the door" and let only the sons be present when God performed the miracle. God did not want this miracle to be a public spectacle but a private blessing for her (Matt 6:6).
   1. In a similar way, Jesus sometimes acted when he performed miracles (Mark 5:35-43).

[[@Bible:2 kings 4:5-6]]2Kings 4:5-6

1. Wouldn't it have been easier if Elisha had just given her a number of vessels full of oil? Why did the poor widow have to go through all this trouble to receive God's blessing?
   1. If the widow had received the oil from Elisha immediately, her financial problems would have been solved, but she would not have been able to take active steps in growing in her faith and she would have believed more in Elisha than in God. But by having to act in faith herself according to God's promise, she gets her own personal experience of God's miracles. When she received God's blessing, Elisha was not even there. God is not content to just give us our bread for the day, he also wants to help us grow in our faith.
      1. Similarly, Jesus had the wedding servants scoop up wine from jars for water, and when they served it, it was wine (John 2).
2. The oil bottle from which the widow poured the oil was a small bottle and the vessels were large. This means that God performed a miracle in the oil bottle so that oil flowed out of the bottle as long as she poured.
3. It was important to Elisa that the vessels were "empty". The miracle would be complete and God did not need any help with half-full vessels. The oil had to be new, fresh and new!
   1. In the same way, God can fill us with his Holy Spirit if we come to him as empty vessels and ask to be filled. If we are already filled with other things, then it is harder for us to receive the blessing God wants to give us.
4. Just as God's miracle of water in the previous chapter was in proportion to the number of pits the Israelites dug, so the widow received the blessing in accordance with the preparatory work she had done in collecting the vessels. Her faith certainly grew when she saw the miracle, but by then it was too late to run and get more vessels.
   1. In the same way, we need to start "preparing" to receive the blessings God wants to give us. The fact that God wants to give us miracles always means that we also have to be involved in working with God and never means that we can be lazy.
      1. God has given us the mission to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all people and miracles and signs will follow in our footsteps. But if we want to see these spiritual blessings realized, we must also raise money, train willing workers and send out missionaries. If we send out ten missionaries we will see a tenfold blessing, but if we send out a hundred missionaries we will see a hundredfold blessing.

[[@Bible:2 kings 4:7]]2Kings 4:7

1. Both the widow's debt and her future livelihood were now resolved.
   1. The encounter with God frees us from our old debts and gives us blessings for the future already here and now.
2. This story shows us God's faithful love for his people at a time when Israel had abandoned the Lord. God has a special heart for orphans, for strangers and for widows (Deuteronomy 10:17-19).

## 2 Kings 6:8-23 - Chariots of Fire

[[@Bible:2 kings 6:8-10]]2Kings 6:8-10

1. The prophet Elisha was no fan of Israel's wicked king Jehoram (2 Kings 3:1-2), who was the son of the now-dead king Ahab, who was married to Jezebel. Ahab and Jezebel saw the prophet Elijah as an enemy and persecuted God's people. While Joram is also wicked, he is not quite as bad as Ahab and Jezebel. Elisha therefore has the opportunity to help Israel by prophetically conveying to King Jehoram the location of the Aramean army.
   1. Through prayer, you can gain knowledge from God that you can pass on to other people. In the New Testament, this is called "the word of knowledge" (1 Corinthians 12:8).
   2. God's time of judgment on King Jehoram and Israel has not yet come, and therefore there is still time for repentance. Even though King Jehoram lived in sin and far from God, God was not far from Jehoram. It was not too late for Jehoram to repent.
2. When King Jehoram sends his servants to verify the prophetic words of the prophet Elisha, he shows that he believes in God's word, but still wants to verify that it is true. This is actually a healthy and balanced approach to prophetic words. One should not just blindly obey what prophets say, but check it for accuracy and compare it with God's word in the Bible.

[[@Bible:2 kings 6:11-13]]2Kings 6:11-13

1. Ben-Hadad, the king of Aram, is angry at his failure to surprise Israel, does not understand how King Jehoram can know the positions of his army all the time, and therefore suspects that there must be a traitor in their midst. But one of the king's servants knows the truth; that it is Elisha the prophet who supernaturally conveys the prophetic knowledge to King Jehoram.
   1. After the servant informed Ben-Hadad of the spiritual truth, Ben-Hadad should have realized that God was protecting Israel and that he was fighting against the Lord himself. But instead of repenting, Ben-Hadad decides to try to arrest God's prophet Elisha.

[[@Bible:2 kings 6:14-17]]2Kings 6:14-17

1. The fact that Ben-Hadad gets the idea that it is a good idea to try to surprise the prophet Elisha after he has learned that Elisha has repeatedly received knowledge from God about Ben-Hadad's attempts to surprise Israel, shows that Ben-Hadad does not want to convert to the true God but rather wants to try to defeat Him.
2. Elisha's servant looks at Ben-Hadad's army with human eyes and is terrified, thinking that all hope is gone. But Elisha looks at the army with God's eyes and knows that God is with them. If God has helped Israel against the Arameans before, he will do so now. With human eyes Elisha was surrounded, but with spiritual eyes the Arameans were surrounded. The eyes of faith see the spiritual reality, the presence and protection of God.
   1. People of God have always seen spiritual reality through the eyes of faith:
      1. Abraham ate with angels (Gen 18).
      2. Moses met God at the burning bush (Ex 3).
      3. Joshua meets an angel outside Jericho (Josh 5).
      4. Ezekiel saw spiritual visions (Ezek 1).
      5. Daniel was protected by an angel in the lion's den (Dan 6).
      6. Peter is rescued by an angel from prison (Acts 12).
      7. Paul was protected by an angel in the storm (Acts 27:23).
3. God has a great grand plan of salvation for all mankind that includes Israel and the Messiah. God uses many different means to protect his people, including angels and supernatural miracles. God will see to it that his plan comes to fruition, even if humanly speaking it looks dark at times. The prophet Elisha had insight into this and was used to seeing God's actions "behind the scenes", but now Elisha's servants were seeing this too.
   1. In the same way, today we can trust that God has a great plan to spread the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus all over the world. When we participate in this mission of God by, for example, witnessing to someone about our faith, we often find that God has already prepared that person for the message, and that God is working miracles in that person's life. This is part of the spiritual reality that goes on "behind the scenes", and that the person with the eyes of faith can see.
4. However, the spiritual world does not consist only of angels serving God. The devil and many of his angels rebelled against God and fell like a star from heaven to earth (Isaiah 14:12, Luke 10:18, Revelation 9:1). Possibly as many as a third of all the angels followed the devil in his fall (Revelation 12:3-9). These fallen angels of the Devil (Matt 25:41) are considered by many Christians to be synonymous with the "demons" of the New Testament.
5. In church work, it is important to see with both human and spiritual eyes. Of course, one always needs to look at the stark reality and talk about all the practical issues. But one must not forget to also pray to God to see the possibilities that God has planned. Maybe God will then put a vision on someone's heart, which they can believe in even if the reality is different. Through continued prayer and steps of faith, the spiritual vision will eventually be realized even in human reality and one will realize that *"he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world"* (1 John 4:4).

[[@Bible:2 kings 6:18-20]]2Kings 6:18-20

1. The Aramaeans go towards Elisha without seeing the spiritual army that is on Elisha's side, ready to fight. After Elisha's prayer, the Arameans are suddenly blinded because it is Elisha who is standing before them. Elisha can then easily lead the Arameans to King Jehoram in Israel's capital city of Samaria.
   1. What Israel could not do with its army, a man of God could do with a simple prayer. No matter how hopeless a situation may seem, we should never underestimate the power of prayer (Jas 5:12-18).
2. Once in Samaria, the Arameans' eyes are opened after Elisha's prayer, and they realize that they are defenseless and at the mercy of Israel.

[[@Bible:2 kings 6:21-23]]2Kings 6:21-23

1. King Joram's instinctive reaction when he sees enemy soldiers in the middle of his own capital city is to want to kill them all. But God, not Jehoram, has captured these soldiers, and God's plan was to save the Israelites, not to kill the Arameans. By giving the enemy food and water, he responds to evil with goodness, an action that led to Israel's subsequent avoidance of more Aramean marauders inside its own land.
2. Through this victory, Elisha showed that God is the protector of Israel, not the soldiers of Israel.

## 2 Kings 7:1-20 - The Lepers at the City Gate of Samaria

[[@Bible:2 kings 7:1-2]]2Kings 7:1-2

1. The background to this incident is that Israel and Aram are at loggerheads. In the previous chapter, Elisha, through God's intervention, managed to put an end to the Aramean raids inside Israel, but now the Aramean king Ben-Hadad comes with his entire army and lays siege to the Israelite capital of Samaria. The siege becomes so difficult that the Israelites engage in cannibalism (2 Kings 6:26-30).
2. King Jehoram of Israel blames God for the extremely difficult situation and sends an officer to arrest the prophet Elisha so that the king can execute him. But even though the king blames God for his own failure, God still has a prophetic word of hope for King Jehoram.
3. God's prophetic word to King Jehoram is that within 24 hours the situation will be completely reversed; from siege and starvation to freedom and an abundance of food. Within a day there would be so much food in Samaria that the price of flour and barley would drop dramatically.
4. The officer who hears this prophetic message does not believe the word of God. Since Samaria is under siege, the officer believes that food can only enter the city from above, and does not believe that God can perform such a great miracle.
   1. When God gives us a word of hope and a promise of a solution to the problems we face, it can be easy to doubt God because it is hard to imagine how God will solve the situation. But the good thing is that a person of faith does not have to understand everything that God does, but only trust in God's promises.
      1. Many times I have met people who face a "mountain" of problems, yet trust that God will somehow solve the problem, even if they don't yet know exactly how. At first you might think these people are naïve and spiritually exaggerated, but often it turns out that their faith held and could move mountains.
      2. I have also met people who give up at the first sight of a mountain. They don't understand how the problems can be solved so they are not even willing to try. They don't trust that they have a God who can move mountains. Oh how much good they miss out on.
5. One can have some understanding if the officer doubted that God WILL help Israel, but the officer's unbelief goes further; he even doubts that God CAN do anything. Because of this unbelief, Elisha conveys a judgment on the officer: he will see God's promises fulfilled, but he will not share in its blessings.
   1. In the same way, all those who do not believe in Jesus on the Day of Judgment will learn that God's promises of salvation are indeed true, but they themselves will not share in the blessings of heaven.

[[@Bible:2 kings 7:3-4]]2Kings 7:3-4

1. If you took away all the stories in the Bible about small, weak, sick, outcast or poor people, there wouldn't be many stories left. If the ordinary history books are the book of kings and heroes, then the Bible is the book of the small and weak.
2. These leprous men were outside the city gate of Samaria because they were not allowed inside the city.
   1. In the past, leprosy (or "leprosy" as it is known today) was thought to be a highly contagious and incurable disease, so people isolated the sick in leprosy colonies outside towns. Leprosy is a chronic infection that can lead to loss of sensation, which in turn can lead to more frequent injuries. Leviticus chapters 13 and 14 contain the laws of the Book of Genesis concerning leprosy.
3. The four lepers realise they have two choices: either stay at the city gate and die of starvation, or hand themselves over to the Arameans and hope for their mercy. Since the chances of survival in option one are zero, they choose option two, even though the chances of survival there are very slim.
   1. In the same way, the chances of eternal salvation are zero without Jesus, but if you go to Jesus and ask for grace, the chances are at least a little better. And just as the four lepers in this story experience God's grace, so too does everyone who comes to Jesus receive grace and salvation.
   2. When a person faces death, most people begin to pray to God, even if they have not believed in God during their lifetime. If you know that you are going to die soon anyway, then you might as well start getting religious because you are going to die anyway and it is better to be on the safe side.

[[@Bible:2 kings 7:5-7]]2Kings 7:5-7

1. When the four lepers arrive at the Aramean camp, it is empty. The army that has been besieging Samaria for months is now suddenly completely gone! God had worked a miracle and made the Arameans flee.
   1. Israel's army was no match for the Arameans. But God is so powerful that he defeated the Arameans only by the sound of an army.
2. While God had defeated Israel's enemies, the Israelites are hiding inside Samaria, trapped, afraid and hungry. Because of their fear, they don't know what miracles God has done outside the walls.
   1. In the same way, the Christian life can be. Because of fear, ignorance or something else, we don't know the miracles God has done for us. God has defeated the enemy outside our "church" walls, but we are too afraid to go out and look.

[[@Bible:2 kings 7:8-9]]2Kings 7:8-9

1. After months of starvation, the lepers gorge themselves on all the food left behind. They also stash away some valuables that they think will come in handy in time. The lepers don't know if the Arameans will be back soon, so they watch out as best they can.
2. But after a while they realize that it would be wrong of them not to let more people share in these miraculous blessings of God. More people need to hear the good news that the siege is over and that there is an abundance of food! After all, the king and the Samaritans would have eventually discovered that the Aramaeans were gone sooner or later, and by then the lepers would probably have been punished for not telling the city. The lepers realise that they would probably rather be seen as heroes than criminals.
   1. It was right for the lepers to enjoy God's blessings, but they also had a responsibility to share with others. To remain silent about this miracle and selfishly keep it to oneself would be a sin.
   2. In the same way, we who have experienced God's salvation today are "not right" if we keep the "good news" to ourselves. Certainly we Christians should enjoy God's blessings and spiritual gifts in the church, but we also have a responsibility to share what God has given to us.
      1. Evangelism can be likened to a beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. "Evangelism is just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread." (D.T. Niles)

[[@Bible:2 kings 7:10-15]]2Kings 7:10-15

1. The lepers tell the first person what they have been through, nothing more. Then the word spreads like wildfire until it reaches the king. The lepers didn't mess up the message and didn't try to tell the guards what to do.
   1. In the same way, we should evangelize. It is enough for us to tell those around us about what we have experienced, what we have seen and heard. We don't have to make things complicated, we don't have to explain to those who are listening how they should think. The best testimony is simply to tell what you have experienced.
   2. *"That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our own eyes, that which we have beheld and touched with our hands - to the Word of Life we bear witness."* (1John 1:1)
      1. See also Luke 7:22, John 3:32, Acts 4:20, Acts 22:15, Phil 4:9, 1 John 1:3, Rev 22:8.
2. When the king hears that the Arameans are gone, he first suspects that it is a trap. He thinks that since the Arameans have not been able to get into Samaria, they are now trying to trick the Samaritans into coming out.
   1. The first thing the king thinks when he hears the good news is that it must be the enemy's trap. Similarly, when some people hear the gospel, they refuse to believe the good news and instead claim that the message comes from the devil.
   2. But although the king didn't take the good news immediately, he decided to try it anyway. The king sends out some servants and when they return, the lepers' good news is confirmed to be true.

[[@Bible:2 kings 7:16]]2Kings 7:16

1. When there was no longer any obstacle between the people and the food, nothing could stop the Israelites from rushing out of Samaria and into the deserted camp of the Arameans. They knew very well their problem; they were hungry, and they also knew God's solution; the empty camps of the Arameans.
   1. In the same way, many people react when they understand that the good news of salvation in Jesus is true; they rush to receive God's salvation and blessings!
   2. When we realize that we are sinners and hear that forgiveness is in Jesus, we rush to receive salvation!

[[@Bible:2 kings 7:17-20]]2Kings 7:17-20

1. The same officer who was sent by King Jehoram to capture Elisha is now given the task of keeping order at the city gate. But in the midst of the chaos, he is trampled to death. In this way, Elisha's prophetic judgment on his life is fulfilled; he saw God's miracles but did not share in the blessings himself.
   1. The tragic fate of the officer shows us how serious the gospel is. People hearing about Jesus and the Good News is a matter of life and death.
2. This story shows us two different reactions when faced with the threat of imminent death: either, like the officer, to lose faith in God altogether and start persecuting the believers, or, like the four lepers, to throw themselves on the mercy of God in the hope that God can save.

# 2 Chronicles

## 2 Chron 20 – Jehoshaphat Defeats Moab and Ammon

[[@Bible:2 chron 20:1-2]]2 Chron 20:1-2

1. In the previous chapter, King Jehoshaphat narrowly escaped death from a situation where he had not listened to the Lord enough and had made a mess of things for himself. But in this chapter, he is instead taken by surprise by an attack from behind.
   1. The Moabites, the Ammonites and a third group join forces and attack Judah via En-Gedi on the Dead Sea. Judah was better defended further west (2 Chronicles 11:5-10), so King Jehoshaphat is caught off guard by the attack. Jehoshaphat realizes that he is outnumbered and has no chance.
      1. In the Christian life, temptation or misfortune can catch us by surprise where we least expect it. You may have prepared and built a strong defence in one part of your life, but then something happens to you that you were not prepared for in another part of your life.
         1. You may have built your spiritual strength through the Bible and prayer and be in the midst of your calling to serve God with your gifts, but then suddenly you are struck with an illness that leaves you completely overwhelmed and incapacitated, unable to serve God.

[[@Bible:2 chron 20:3]]2 Chron 20:3

1. When King Jehoshaphat realizes that things are not looking good, he does the right thing, he prays to God!
   1. Jehoshaphat “consulted”, i.e. “sought” the Lord, something the Bible constantly urges believers to do (Deuteronomy 4:29, 1 Chronicles 16:11).
   2. When it came down to it, Jehoshaphat had more faith in God than in his own army. Perhaps he had to because he was facing an overwhelming enemy. Sometimes, therefore, it can be good for one’s faith to face an overwhelming enemy, so that one is forced to trust in the Lord, because that is all that remains. Hopefully, you will learn to trust in the Lord even when you face lesser troubles and let God guide you even then.

[[@Bible:2 chron 20:4]]2 Chron 20:4

1. When Judah realizes the gravity of the situation, they all gather in Jerusalem to do as their leader Jehoshaphat did and seek the Lord through prayer and fasting.
2. Before Judah was gathered, King Jehoshaphat set a good example, not wanting to urge his people to do something that he himself was not prepared to do at first.
3. When the leader seeks the Lord with his congregation, the answer from the Lord is just around the corner.
4. Prayer and fasting is a powerful spiritual weapon when used to seek the Lord. Not because there is anything magical about abstaining from food, but because it causes us to concentrate intensely and focus on the Lord.

[[@Bible:2 chron 20: 5-12]]2 Chron 20:5-12

1. Jehoshaphat begins by confessing that God is the God of the whole earth and universe, in contrast to the local gods of the pagan peoples. Ammon had its god, Moab its god, but Israel had the God of the whole world. If God is the God of the whole earth, he is also able to defeat Ammon and Moab. If God is the God of all life, he is also able to conquer diseases, financial problems and other troubles that affect us.
   1. Jehoshaphat goes on to recall God’s previous miracles, how he gave the land where they live to the people of Israel.
      1. If God has saved God’s people before, He can do it again!
      2. If God has answered your prayers before, He can do it again!
   2. Jehoshaphat reminds God that it was he who prevented Israel from fighting against Ammon and Moab when they took the land of Canaan (Deuteronomy 2:8-9, 2:19), because these people were descendants of the patriarch Jacob’s brother Esau. The problem that Jehoshaphat and Judah now face, then, is a problem not of their own making, but rather of God’s.
      1. Jehoshaphat humbly asks God not to let Judah perish because they had previously obeyed God. Since it was God who told them not to attack Moab and Ammon, God should now help stop Ammon and Moab.
      2. If God has given you a calling and a mission, but you are prevented from carrying it out by circumstances beyond your control, then you can pray to God to remove your worries, since it is God who has asked you to do what you can no longer do.
   3. King Jehoshaphat concludes his prayer by openly admitting to all the people that as their leader he does not know what they should do.
      1. But in his recognition of human weakness lay Jehoshaphat’s spiritual strength. For while he acknowledged his own weakness, he showed that he had only God left to go to. When we come to a point in life when our only hope is in God, that is when we are at our spiritually strongest.
         1. “Therefore I will rather glory in my weakness, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” (2 Corinthians 12:9b)
         2. It is when we are in desperate need that we cry out to God for a miracle and he in his goodness answers our prayer. If we could learn to live an everyday life dependent on God, we would also see more miracles in everyday life.

[[@Bible:2 chron 20:13]]2 Chron 20:13

1. How long did all Judah stand before the Lord waiting for answers to prayer? We don’t know. But we can imagine silence, panic, hope, anticipation, impatience. It was certainly a time of impatience and anxiety. But had the assembled not waited for the Lord’s answer, perhaps Jahaziel would not have been able to listen properly to the Lord’s words. Sometimes silence is part of the prerequisite before the answer to prayer.

[[@Bible:2 chron 20:14]]2 Chron 20:14

1. While the people are waiting for an answer from the Lord, the Holy Spirit comes upon one of the Levites, Jahaziel. He is moved by the Spirit of God and begins to prophesy God’s message to Judah.
   1. The Levites had been commissioned by King David to prophesy with songs of praise and musical instruments (1 Chronicles 25:1-3).

[[@Bible:2 chron 20: 15-17]]2 Chron 20:15-17

1. Jahaziel’s approach strongly resembles how prophets sometimes stand up in a church service and say, “Thus says the Lord!” and then a prophetic message. Even today, God speaks through and to his people.
   1. Jahaziel’s prophecy is 1) that Judah will not be afraid, 2) that the battle is not theirs but God’s, 3) that God will be with them, and 4) instructions on how they will experience God’s salvation.
      1. When you are overwhelmed by misfortune, illness, financial worries, broken relationships, don’t be afraid! God will be with you even in that situation. Seek God and wait for His instructions on how to rescue you. Some battles we need the courage to fight ourselves, but other battles God wants to fight for us.
   2. God knew exactly which way the enemy would go and what God’s people needed to do to win victory.
      1. God knows the enemy, he knows what their plans are, what path they intend to take and how they will be defeated. It’s the same with your worries; your job situation, your relationships, your finances, your health, your future.
   3. God wins victory over the enemy in different ways. What they all have in common is that God involves his people and they need to believe God’s instructions and act on them.
      1. Joshua took Jericho after first being instructed by God to walk around the city for six days and then blow his horn, shout and rush into the city when the walls fell (Josh 6).
      2. Gideon defeated the Midianites after first being instructed by God to take only 300 men into battle (Judges 7).
      3. Here Jehoshaphat defeated the Ammonites and Moabites by simply standing up to fight and then witnessing God’s victory over the enemy. It took a great deal of both faith and courage to stand up in the face of an overwhelming enemy, trusting that God will prevail for them.
      4. To learn to walk by faith, one needs to seek God, listen to his instructions and act in the way God shows. But the instructions vary and are never the same, otherwise we would begin to rely on traditions rather than on the living relationship with the Lord. Answers to prayer do not depend on repeating previously successful concepts, because then it would be magic. Answering prayer depends on starting from the Word and being led by His Spirit.

[[@Bible:2 chron 20:18-19]]2 Chron 20:18-19

1. Why did Jehoshaphat and Judah worship and praise, even though their enemies were not yet defeated? Well, because in their hearts they began to believe in the future victory of God. They trusted so strongly that God would do what he had promised, so they began to praise the Lord for his future victory even now.
   1. In the same way, you and I can rejoice and praise the Lord for his victory over death and sin right here and now. We know that God has conquered death and that we will go to heaven, and we can begin to celebrate that future victory right here and now through praise and thanksgiving.

[[@Bible:2 chron 20:20]]2 Chron 20:20

1. It was one thing to praise the Lord in the midst of the assembly when a prophet had just announced God’s imminent victory. But not necessarily to be as faithful and inspired the morning after. But then it’s up to the leaders to step forward and continue to instill courage, hope and faith in the congregation.
   1. There is also a risk of settling for God’s victory and then staying in Jerusalem. But even if the battle was not theirs, God’s people still had to face their enemy.
      1. There is a certain risk that belief leads to paralysis of action. You can pray for revival at the prayer meeting, someone prophesies that God will do something, and everyone in the congregation cheers. But then you go home and do nothing and the prayer meeting is repeated the same way again the next week. What is missing to see the prophetic promises fulfilled is to also act according to God’s word and instructions.
      2. If God puts something on your heart, pray about it and thank the Lord. But also act on what God has begun. Start taking small tentative steps in the right direction, consult those who have gone before and act.

[[@Bible:2 chron 20:21]]2 Chron 20:21

1. King Jehoshaphat consulting the people does not mean that he does not have a clear plan or does not know what to do, but that he involves the people and makes decisions and implementation a common cause.
2. The praise singers would go BEFORE the army against the enemy. If God would not intervene and defeat the enemy, the praise singers would be the first to be destroyed when the enemy attacked. They would be completely crushed between two fighting armies. This was truly a “No Turning Back!” moment.
   1. In my experience, worship is often what brings one into the presence of God and makes one open to God’s word.

[[@Bible:2 chron 20:22-23]]2 Chron 20:22-23

1. Just as God had promised, he fought for his people and defeated the enemy. The Ammonites, the Moabites and the people of Seir were attacked from behind by some unknown invaders, whereupon mutual fighting ensues.
2. God’s people had obeyed God’s instructions and done what he had said. They had lined up and when they began to sing worship, it became the public confession of their faith in God. The church’s faith interacted with God’s Word and led to victory over the enemies of God’s people.
3. It is ironic that God defeats the enemy in the same way that the enemy intended to defeat God’s people, i.e. by attacking from behind.

[[@Bible:2 chron 20:24-25]]2 Chron 20:24-25

1. Because Jehoshaphat and Judah believed in God and obeyed His instructions, they were able to reap great wealth when God won for them.
   1. In the same way, God’s victory over our troubles often leads to the gaining of great spiritual riches and experiences that would not have been gained had we not had to go through hardship and distress.

[[@Bible:2 chron 20:26]]2 Chron 20:26

1. “Beraka” comes from the Hebrew word “barak” which means “bless”. In the Valley of Berachah, the people gathered to bless the Lord by worshipping and exalting Him.
2. The people had gathered to cry out their distress to the Lord, and it is only right that they also gather to cry out their thanks to the Lord.
3. It is not uncommon for a congregation to call a special prayer meeting to pray over important matters. But how often do we call a thanksgiving meeting when we have something to rejoice and give thanks for? Perhaps we should do that more often!

[[@Bible:2 chron 20:27-30]]2 Chron 20:27-30

1. God’s victory over the enemy led to joy and peace.
2. In many ways, God’s victory in this chapter is reminiscent of Jesus’ victory on the cross of Calvary.
3. In this amazing chapter hidden in one of the Bible’s least-read books, we see how God fights for his people as they pray, trust his word and worship him.

# Psalms

The Psalter, with its five books of songs, stands as a parallel to the Torah, the five books of Moses. If the Torah is God's word to his people, the Psalter is the people's response to God. The texts of the Psalms are often in the form of songs/prayers/confessions and although, due to the passage of time, we no longer know exactly how these psalms were sung, their words and content are timeless and people throughout the ages have read the Psalms as prayers in worship services and in personal prayer life. The texts of the Psalms have a way of putting into words feelings and thoughts that people of faith throughout the ages and in all places can identify with and make their own.

## Ps 1 - The Way of the Righteous and the Wicked

[[@Bible:ps 1:1]]Ps 1:1

1. The word "blessed" is "esher" in Hebrew and means something like "happy" and "content" and is closely related to the Hebrew word "ashar" which means "to be straight".
   1. The Christian life is often compared to a "road" (Acts 9:2) and being "blessed" means staying on the road and going "straight", avoiding both ditches and moving forward.
   2. To be blessed, then, means both that one is right with God, but also that this leads to both happiness and contentment.
   3. My own personal testimony is that I have never felt so good as from the day I consciously chose to enter wholeheartedly into God's way and become a follower of Jesus. I am not saying that everything in life has been perfect, far from it, but there has always been a sense of security and a feeling that God is with me, a feeling that has enabled me to be "calm in the storm" and to walk through difficulties with my head held high.
2. The blessed one neither "follows", "walks on" nor "sits among" the wicked. It is important to understand that the believer not only follows God's way, the believer also *renounces* something.
   1. Accepting Jesus means at the same time saying no to the sins in which we have lived in the past. To become a disciple of Jesus, one must first repent (Acts 2:37-41).
   2. According to Paul's letter to the Romans, all men have sinned (Romans 3:23). We all wrestle with different sins, but none of us comes away unscathed. In the process of becoming a disciple of Jesus, it is good to go through your life, reflect on the sins and wrongs you have committed, confess them to God and ask for forgiveness of sins. If you do that, God will forgive you and cleanse you from all unrighteousness: *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* **(1 John 1:9**)
3. It's probably not lost on anyone that the media bombards us daily with views on how we should look, behave and live our lives. The person of faith does not let this source of inspiration (or any other for that matter) be the deciding factor.
   1. For example, the man of faith does not get his view of sex from Hollywood but from the Bible.
   2. The believer respects the laws of his country but does not bow to the unjust laws of the politicians, but instead has his highest loyalty to the kingdom of God rather than to Sweden or the country he now lives in.
   3. The believer does not let family and its traditions be more important than God.
   4. The believer remembers that even one's own inner self can actually play tricks on us. Even the believer still wrestles with sin (Rom 7:15).
4. Jesus says in the Gospel of Matthew that: "Enter through the narrow gate. For the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who pass through it." (Matthew 7:13)
   1. The Christian life is described as a way that leads to God (John 14:6), but according to Jesus, the life of the wicked is also a "way". The ungodly live their lives with a certain focus, such as the pursuit of money, women or happiness. The believer knows that one does not become blessed by walking that path, but knows that true happiness and blessedness can only be found by walking in God's way.
5. A person of faith does not necessarily have to withdraw from society and become a hermit just to avoid the risk of "sitting among scoffers". However, it is important that in a context where one behaves badly or sinfully, it should be noticed that *the believer is different*.
   1. For example, it may not be wrong for a Christian to go to the pub, but it is definitely wrong for a Christian to drink drunk.
   2. For example, if a colleague is being bullied at work, it should be obvious that the believer is not participating in the bullying, and it is not enough to simply not participate, because then you become a passive bully. A believer does not participate in the bullying but speaks out in an effort to stop the bullying.
   3. The exhortation not to sit among scoffers also means that as a Christian one should not participate in bullshit, buffoonery and defamation of other Christians. Thanks to the possibility of anonymity, internet forums are overflowing with people of faith who talk trash about other believers. As a Christian, one should not participate in such a debate if it is only about talking shit about other people.

[[@Bible:ps 1:2]]Ps 1:2

1. Where in English it says "teaching", in Hebrew it says "torah", which is often translated into English as "the Law". The word "torah" originally means "instruction", "teaching" or "law" and can therefore be translated slightly differently depending on the context. Sometimes the word torah is used to mean "the law", "the five books of Moses", "the Old Testament" or "God's teaching".
   1. The believer has joy in the whole "teaching of the Lord", not just the five books of Moses. The whole word of God is happiness and bliss for the believer. But not only that, God's personal address to the believer is of course also joy for the believer.
   2. What gives you joy? The answer to that question probably shows what's closest to your heart. For the blessed, "joy" means taking part in the "teaching of the Lord".
      1. I can personally testify to this! When I really began to see that the Bible is indeed "God's Word", a kind of love for the Word slowly but surely began, which has led me to devote my whole life to studying and preaching God's Word, among other things. What you are reading right now, as you can imagine, is part of this "joy in the Lord's teaching".
      2. If you find the Bible dry and boring to read, then you should ask a more experienced believer for help. The Bible is not boring, but it can sometimes be difficult to understand. Don't miss the chance to discover the joy to be found in God's Word!
      3. The challenge for those who preach and proclaim from God's Word is to make the Bible understandable to ordinary people. A preacher who preaches so intricately that no one understands him has failed in the task of proclaiming the Word of God. My experience is that it is possible to preach both deeply and simply at the same time.
   3. According to Edmund Calamy, Martin Luther is reported to have said in a speech, "I cannot live in Paradise without the Word, but with it I could live well in Hell."
   4. There is, of course, nothing wrong with feeling joy in things other than God's Word, but to feel no joy at all when reading the Bible suggests that the believer has much more to discover in his or her relationship with God.
   5. Notice that it says *the Lord's* teaching, not *the preacher's* teaching. Hopefully the pastor is preaching the Lord's teaching in a right and biblical way, but unfortunately that is not always the case. The believer should therefore always be careful not to be led astray into a doctrine that is not in accord with the Bible and the Lord's teaching.
      1. The believer should also take the opportunity to encourage those preachers who do their best to preach the *whole* word of God and the gospel of truth without falling into the temptation to speak only what people want to hear.
2. The one who wants to be saved "ponders" the word of God. This means not only "reading" or "listening" to the Word of God, but also "thinking about" Scripture and letting the Word sink into the heart and perhaps even influence the life one lives.
   1. Personally, I like to read a whole chapter in the morning and read a short verse in the evening. This gives me the opportunity to both read through the whole Bible but also to delve into a shorter context. In between, I have the great privilege of working with God's Word and preparing my sermons by writing these Bible commentaries. This gives me a fantastic insight into God's Word, which I am more than happy to share with anyone who wants to listen or read, free of charge.
   2. Does this Bible verse mean that you have to walk around constantly thinking about God's Word? No, it does not. But it does mean that you adjust your life so that the Bible affects your whole life. When new situations or opportunities come up, you think about what God wants you to do in the new situation. You simply let the Bible be a "guide" for your life.
      1. A few years ago, the phrase "What Would Jesus Do?" (WWJD) was popular. It's not wrong to wonder what Jesus would do if he were in my situation. Often this can lead to hopefully at least making more correct and biblical decisions than if one had not thought this way.

[[@Bible:ps 1:3]]Ps 1:3

1. This image of the tree is made more vivid by the fact that the climate in the Middle East meant that Israel's waterways dried up, which of course led to the greenery around it dwindling, only to reappear when the waters returned. But the trees planted along the irrigated canals did not dry up because they had constant access to the water of the great rivers.
   1. A tree planted by a watercourse can be sure to always have access to water. Such a tree is *stable, full of life and fruit-bearing* because the tree is well cared for and has the right conditions. But not only can the tree provide good fruit for anyone who is hungry, the tree can also provide shade for anyone who suffers from the heat.
      1. Those who want to be saved make the Bible a natural part of everyday life. Like the tree that always has access to water, the believer should always have access to the Word. Such a life leads to being stable in one's faith and not wavering back and forth through the various periods of life, one can give good vital Biblical teaching to people at well-chosen times, one can give "shade" to people who are struggling, one can give reassuring advice to the despairing, and one can give answers to life's questions to those who hunger for eternal life.
      2. Paul's list of the fruits of the Spirit reads, *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Such things the law is not against."* (Gal 5:22-23)
      3. Trees that are not planted by watercourses only receive water at special times, such as when it rains, and do not become a stable and fruit-bearing tree. Christians who only receive God's word on special occasions do not become stable in their faith and do not bear fruit at the right time, instead they blossom from time to time and then dry up again.
2. A tree does not produce fruit all year round, but only when it is in season. So the believer should not despair if he does not always see fruit in his life but should patiently go through all the periods of life and be thankful for the season that is now. Sometimes it is a time for quiet, reflection and deeper Bible study, while at other times it is a time for energetically fighting for the spread of God's kingdom through evangelism and miracles, for example.
   1. If you have seen God do great miracles in and through your life in the past, but don't see this anymore, don't give up! In fact, you may be going through a period in your life where you're not seeing much fruit, but that doesn't necessarily mean something is wrong.
3. Just because you are a believer, you no longer suffer from sadness, failure and boredom. However, God can always turn any difficult situation into something good: *"We know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."* (Romans 8:28)
   1. The success you have is linked to the Word of God and the fruits described in the Bible. It is not the case that God allows fruits of *goodness* and *self-control to* grow while you are *successful* in luring money. What we humans see as success is not necessarily what God sees as success. What one succeeds well at is living a life that is good before God.

[[@Bible:ps 1:4]]Ps 1:4

1. All the positive things described about the believer, all that the ungodly lack. The ungodly person does not live close to God's word, is unstable, does not bear fruit in due season and is not successful in living as God wants. For the moment, it may seem that the wicked is living a successful life, but in an eternal perspective, things look quite different (Ps 73).
   1. *"1 God is indeed good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. 2 But my feet were about to stumble, my steps were about to falter,3 for I envied the proud, when I saw that the wicked prospered. ...16 When I tried to understand this, it seemed too difficult to me,17 until I entered the sanctuary of God and saw how they fare in the end."* (Ps 73:1-3, 16-17)*.*
2. The husk is the thin shell around a grain that must be removed before the grain can be ground into flour. The chaff is so light and thin that it is often enough to throw the grain into the air and the chaff blows away in the wind.
3. Consider the difference between a tree and chaff.

[[@Bible:ps 1:5]]Ps 1:5

1. When Jesus returns, all believers will be "saved" (1 Peter 1:5) and all dead believers will be "raised to life" while all dead unbelievers will be "raised to judgment" (John 5:29). Because Jesus sacrificed himself by dying on the cross, at his return he will not condemn believers but will instead save "those who wait for him" (Heb 9:28). However, according to Paul, Christians will also stand before the judgment seat of Christ and "receive recompense for what he has done in this life, good or bad" (2 Cor 5:10) but it is only the ungodly who "will be judged and condemned." (2 Peter 3:7).
2. According to Matthew, Jesus will sit on his throne and "separate the sheep from the goats". Believers will "take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world" (Matthew 25:34), while unbelievers will go "to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). Those who do not belong to Jesus will "go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." (Matt 25:46).
3. After this day of judgment, "the heavens will disappear with a violent roar, and the heavenly bodies will be dissolved by heat, and the earth and the works that are in it will be no more." (2 Pet 3:7-10) and there will be a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness will dwell (2 Pet 3:13, Rev 21:1).

[[@Bible:ps 1:6]]Ps 1:6

1. Jesus warns in the Gospel of Matthew against walking on the "broad road": "Enter through the narrow gate. For the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who go through it. And the gate is narrow, and the way is strait that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." (Matthew 7:13-14)
   1. It may feel easier for the moment to go the wide way, to go with the flow and to be part of a large group. But when you get to the end of that road, it won't have been worth it. Better to take the narrow road right now.
   2. The first Christians were called "that way". The way that leads to heaven is Jesus. (Acts 9:2, John 14:5-6).

## Ps 4 - Answer Me When I Call

[[@Bible:ps 4:2]]Ps 4:2

1. When you and I pray, how often do we insist that God answer? My personal experience is that more often than not, we just present our prayer topics to God and then hope that he answers at least something.
   1. David begins his psalm with "Answer me." David doesn't just pray for the sake of praying, David prays his prayer because he is in a tight spot and *needs* an answer!
   2. Unfortunately, it is a human phenomenon that we turn to God only when we are faced with a number of unsolvable problems and fail to save ourselves in any way. What if we learned to pray to God even when life was good and everything was working? Then maybe we wouldn't so often find ourselves in those desperate situations that force us to pray.
   3. Sometimes it may even be that it is God himself who leads us into trials that hopefully lead us to learn to depend on God always, not just when there is no other way out, and to be prayerful always, not just when we desperately *need* something.
   4. It is good to depend on God and we all need to practice this.
2. How to pray so that God will be pleased? Should you shout louder than everyone else? Should you imitate the tone of voice of successful pastors? Does God respond more often if you use the word "just" here and there and then end the prayer with the words "in Jesus' name, Amen!"?
   1. God can of course answer our artificial prayers, but it is my personal experience that God wants our prayer to be honest and genuine. Talk to God as you would to a loving parent or a good friend. God loves you and wants to hear your voice!
3. David knew that he himself was not 100% perfect and intrinsically righteous before God. David knew that it is *God* who is David's righteousness!
   1. Sometimes it can be hard to come before God because Satan does everything he can to remind us of our sin, but then it's time to remember that with Jesus' death on Calvary, all our sin is forgiven (Matt 26:28, Eph 1:7, Heb 10:17, 1 John 1:9) and we are now righteous before God (Rom 4:5)!
      1. When you and I repent, start believing in Jesus and confess our sin, God takes away all our sin and gives us of His righteousness instead.
      2. If you find it difficult to approach God because you have so much sin in your life, then you should ask God for forgiveness for those sins and possibly go and actually make amends for your sin (Mark 11:25).
   2. All people, even the pious, go through struggles with sin from time to time, and there is a danger that this will lead to a lack of courage to approach God or to withdrawal from the church because of shame.
      1. Don't we all want to live a successful life with constant spiritual victories? But that's not always the way life is and the question is how do we deal with life's difficult episodes? What do we do if we get into financial difficulties, have alcohol problems, fail in our relationships? Do we feel so ashamed that we stop praying and stop going to church?
      2. Don't get me wrong, but the church has to be a place where you can feel bad. If you have failed, you should be able to get the care and comfort you need so that you can be restored. If you fall ill, you should know that the church will support you in every possible way. The church is a community that cares for every member and takes care of those who are weak and need help.
      3. Who knows, next time you might be the one who gets into trouble for various reasons and how do you want the church to treat you?
      4. Jesus once said: *"Whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do ye also unto them."* (Matthew 7:12).
4. David knew from experience that God used to help him when he was in a tight situation and therefore he dared to trust that God would also hear this prayer.
   1. It is always important to remember all the wonderful things God has done in our lives in the past. These situations can be very helpful the next time we are in a difficult situation. You can then remember that God has been faithful in the past and therefore feel confident that He will be faithful in the future.

[[@Bible:ps 4:3-4]]Ps 4:3-4

1. When you look at the world around you, it's easy to get depressed by all the evil that's everywhere. How long will this go on before God intervenes?
   1. There will indeed come a day when the Lord Jesus will return to earth and that day will come as a surprise to everyone. Therefore, it is good to put away all your sins as soon as possible (Matt 24).
   2. There will come a day when the Lord Jesus returns to earth (Acts 1:11, Luke 21:27, 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:2), a day often referred to in the Bible as "the day of the Lord" or "the day of Christ".
   3. When Jesus returns, on the "day of the Lord", all believers will be "saved" (1 Peter 1:5) and all dead believers will be "raised to life" while all dead unbelievers will be "raised to judgment" (John 5:29). Because Jesus sacrificed himself by dying on the cross, at his return he will not condemn believers but will instead save "those who wait for him" (Heb 9:28). However, according to Paul, even Christians will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and "receive recompense for what he has done in this life, good or bad" (2 Cor 5:10) but it is only the ungodly who "will be judged and condemned." (2 Pet 3:7).
   4. According to Matthew, Jesus will sit on his throne and "separate the sheep from the goats". Believers will "take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world" (Matthew 25:34), while unbelievers will go "to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). Those who do not belong to Jesus will "go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." (Matt 25:46).
   5. So there will come a day when the Lord Jesus himself will set everything right. Even if at the moment it seems that the wicked are doing well, we pious believers should not be jealous of them because we know that God will judge sin and evil.
2. In other words, it may be relevant to examine one's own life from time to time. If you are living in some kind of sin, how much longer do you plan to go on? If you know it's sin, why not stop your sin and instead do right by yourself right now?
   1. However, one must remember the important difference between being a "sinner" and "sinning". All people, even devout Christians, sin from time to time, but this does not necessarily mean that one has automatically lost one's salvation. On the other hand, anyone who lives as a conscious and obvious sinner should repent and pray for salvation and forgiveness of sins.
3. David asks his enemies, *"How long will you insult my honor?"* It is not uncommon for a Christian trying to live a pious life to be mocked and questioned for trying to do what is right.
   1. What do you do when your colleagues fiddle with your company tax, when your friends tease you for not wanting to drink alcohol or have sex before marriage? It's not easy to stand up for what you think is right when people around you are constantly mocking you. But even though it's hard, keep seeking your strength from the Lord and you'll see how "*wonderfully the Lord deals with the pious"*!
4. *David knew that "the Lord hears when I cry out to him."* How sure are you that God hears your prayers? In the Bible we can find some clues to answering prayer:
   1. Remain in Jesus (John 15:7), pray in faith (Matthew 17:20-21), fast (Matthew 17:21), confess your sins (James 5:16), love the word of God (Proverbs 28:9), don't just rabbit on empty words but pray in earnest (Matthew 6:7).

[[@Bible:ps 4:5]]Ps 4:5

1. When you see with your own eyes all the evil and sin that is all around you, it is easy to get so angry that you do something rash and stupid. David warns against this and urges us instead to calm down, think it over, sleep on it, ask God for guidance and then trust that the Lord will show us how to do it.

[[@Bible:ps 4:7-9]]Ps 4:7-9

1. Perhaps Israel had experienced a severe drought, which had led many Israelites to turn to the Canaanite gods of weather and fertility for help. Perhaps they had then received "grain and wine in abundance" and thus believed that these gods were better than the God of Israel.
   1. It seems that those who, in their hour of need, abandoned their faith in God and sought help elsewhere said to David, *"Who can make us see the good?"* These people had lost their faith in God when life became too difficult.
      1. But David chooses to stand firm in his belief in God's goodness even when life around him looks dark and difficult. David knew that the Aaronic blessing (Numbers 6:24-26) was true; God will give us his peace and light eventually. Even if we don't see it right now, we can trust God to eventually intervene in our situation, and so we don't abandon our faith in God and stay despite all the difficulties.
   2. Believers complaining about how well the wicked are doing is common in the Bible:
      1. *2 But my feet were about to stumble, my steps were about to fail,3 for I envied the proud, when I saw that it went well with the wicked.*..*16 When I tried to understand this, it seemed too difficult to me,17 until I entered the sanctuary of God and saw how they fare in the end.* (Ps 73:2-3, 16-17)
2. Have you ever felt that the wicked are doing so well in everything in life while you as a Christian are struggling to make ends meet? Why does it seem that the ungodly are so successful while you who are pious and have chosen not to cross the line to make money are always struggling financially?
   1. Here David shows us that even though the wicked have "plenty of grain and wine", David has something better because God has given him joy and allows him to live in peace and security. My personal experience is that it is far more valuable to have joy and peace than to be rich.
   2. Many Christians have testified that even when the world around them is falling apart, they have been filled with a "peace that surpasses all understanding" (Phil 4:7).
   3. The wicked may be happy when they have "plenty of grain and wine," but as soon as the money and supplies run out, trouble quickly piles up. The believer can be constantly happy because of the peace that God gives, a peace and joy that nothing in the world can ever take away.
3. David could go to bed with a clear conscience and sleep in safety, because he trusted in the Lord, not in his emotions, his money or anything else.
   1. When Peter was imprisoned and was to be executed the next day, he should perhaps have been afraid for his life or at least had trouble sleeping, but no! Peter was not even awakened by the sudden appearance of an angel from heaven in a blaze of light, Peter was so deeply asleep that the angel had to nudge him to wake him up (Acts 12:6-7).

# Isaiah

## Isa 6:1-13 - The Call of the Prophet Isaiah

[[@Bible:isa 6:1]]Isa 6:1

1. Uzziah, or Azariah as he is sometimes called, was king of Judah for 52 years between about 792-740 BC (2 Chron 26, 2 Kings 15:1-7).
   1. Uzziah was only 16 years old when he became king over Judah, and generally receives a very good report from God:"*3 Uzziah was sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jecholah, and she was from Jerusalem. 4He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father Amaziah had done. 5He consulted God all the days of Zechariah, who taught him to understand God's visions. As long as he sought the Lord, God prospered him.* "(2Chronicles 26:3-5)
      1. It is worth noting that as long as Uzziah *"sought the Lord, God prospered him"*. Being anointed king or some spiritual office does not automatically mean that all goes well. Good spiritual leadership is based on trying to live a righteous life to the best of one's ability and seeking the Lord.
   2. At the end of Uzziah's reign, he made a fatal mistake: "*16 But when Uzziah had strengthened his power, his heart became haughty, to his own ruin. He acted unfaithfully to the Lord his God by entering the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense.* "(2Chronicles 26:16)
      1. Although Uzziah ruled Judah for the most part in a godly and good way, unfortunately it did not end quite so well. Uzziah became arrogant and went into the temple of the Lord and burned incense, even though only priests were allowed to do this. As a result, God let leprosy strike Uzziah and he had to live the rest of his days in an isolated house. (2Chronicles 26:16-21)
2. This important chapter of Isaiah begins by stating that a righteous king, who sinned at the end of his life, has now died.
   1. You get a sense of uncertainty about the future. Who will rule the kingdom of Judah now? If even a righteous king can fall into sin, who will be a good next king?
      1. Similarly, a congregation today can suffer from uncertainty and discouragement if the pastor of the congregation or some other leader suddenly leaves or falls into sin. Was everything he did wrong? What happens now? Who will lead the congregation back on the right track?
3. While Isaiah notes that King Uzziah has died, he sees the Lord God sitting on the throne in heaven! In the midst of all the uncertainty, discouragement and confusion, Isaiah sees that God is still in power.
   1. Some people believe that there is no faith in heaven, that there is no God who has power and to whom we humans are accountable.
   2. Other people think there is a throne, but that they themselves are sitting on it! They think they can do whatever they want without God having any opinion about it.
   3. However, the Bible is clear that there *is* a throne in heaven and it is the *Lord God* who sits on the throne! We humans are right to confess that God exists and that he has power, both in the whole universe and in our hearts.

[[@Bible:isa 6:2]]Isa 6:2

1. To look into heaven and describe what you see, like Isaiah and even the apostle John in Revelation chapter 4, is about as difficult as it is for a fish looking up at the surface of the water to describe what is happening on land. It is a very different world that is difficult for us humans to understand.
2. The seraphim are some kind of angelic creatures who worship the Lord day and night without ceasing (Rev 4).
3. The seraphim covered their face and feet with four of their wings and flew with two.
   1. Because of God's holiness, being in God's presence is an incredibly powerful experience. Seeing God is like staring into the sun, and the seraphim cover their faces in order to be in God's presence at all without perishing.
      1. God says to Moses, "*20 But you cannot see my face, for no man can see me and live.* " (Exodus 33:20)
   2. Covering one's feet shows respect for God. Just as you take off your shoes when you enter someone else's house because it would be disrespectful to just barge into someone's home with dirty shoes, so the seraphim cover their feet to show God respect.
      1. *"5 Then God said, "Don't come here! Take off your shoes, for the place where you stand is holy ground.""* (Exodus 3:5)
   3. The seraphim confessed God's holiness and their own humility with four of their wings, and used two wings to serve the Lord. It's a good balance that we should learn from. We serve God best when we humbly recognize our own smallness and confess God's greatness.

[[@Bible:isa 6:3-4]]Isa 6:3-4

1. To confess that God is holy three times is partly a reference to God's trinity, but above all it is a Hebrew way of expressing God's immense holiness. If in English we would say "most holy", in Hebrew we say "holy, holy, holy" instead.
2. On the day we come face to face with God, we will first of all be amazed at God's *holiness,* not necessarily God's *kindness, or any of* God's other attributes.

[[@Bible:isa 6:5]]Isa 6:5

1. If Isaiah, who was a prophet and a man of God, realizes his own impurity when he encounters the holiness of God, how should we respond?
2. Isaiah, in the presence of God, cannot even utter one of the seraphim's beautiful confessions of God's holiness, but instead experiences his own shortcomings and his own impermanence. As good and righteous as Isaiah was, he was nothing compared to God.
   1. Even if you've had a good tan and are really happy with it, you'll still realise you're a paleface when you get to the beach and compare yourself to everyone else. In the same way, Isaiah may have been a holy man of God compared to most of the others in Israel, but compared to God's holiness, he has nothing to offer.
   2. No matter how good we humans are at living righteously and doing good deeds, we will never be able to boast about it in the presence of God. We can only rely on God's grace if we are to survive an encounter with God's holiness. If we believe in Jesus, we have the promise of grace and eternal life with the Lord God in heaven.

[[@Bible:isa 6:6-7]]Isa 6:6-7

1. The glowing coals that the seraphim brought from God's altar were so hot that the angel had to use tongs. With this tremendous heat, the coal touched Isaiah's lips, one of the most sensitive areas of the human body. Isaiah, however, does not seem to have felt any pain or burns.
2. The glowing coals burned away Isaiah's sin. Of course, this was a symbolic act. To think that one's sin is forgiven by burning one's mouth with hot coals is not to be recommended.

[[@Bible:isa 6:8]]Isa 6:8

1. The prophet Isaiah received this call to ministry in chapter six, when he had already prophesied for five chapters. This shows us that God can lead us on or give us a new calling even if we have been in the Church all our lives or already have a ministry.
2. Despite God's immense power and holiness, he asks for *volunteers to* carry out his mission. Couldn't he just send an angel to proclaim his will for Israel and humanity? Well, theoretically they could, but God has given that mission to us humans. We as Christians have a mission and a missionary mandate to fulfill, and we should not think that anyone else will do it unless we do it.
   1. As a pastor, it can sometimes be very easy to decide that we as a congregation should do this and that, but if you can't find volunteers who want to do this mission, then it can't be done. Therefore, it is better to ask those who wholeheartedly want to serve the Lord and then carry out the mission together with them. It is not possible to force someone to do something voluntarily, because then it is no longer voluntary.
3. Serving God as a preacher, missionary, pastor, leader, or as in Isaiah's case; prophet, means both that you are *sent by God*, but also that you have *decided to go*.
4. Isaiah responds immediately to God's call and is eager to volunteer! What created this attitude in Isaiah? Well, he had first *met* God, secondly been *convicted* of his sin, thirdly been *reconciled* to God, and now fourthly is ready to *serve the* Lord.
5. An important aspect of Isaiah's response to God's call is that he did not go his own way, but waited for God to send him.

[[@Bible:isa 6:9-13]]Isa 6:9-13

1. God told Isaiah to preach to a people who would neither understand nor comprehend. The reason for this was that God would judge Israel for their disobedience and rebellion. Israel's negative response to Isaiah's prophetic preaching then becomes a confirmation that Israel does not listen to the Lord and will consequently be judged by God.
2. When the word of God is preached, it always has an effect, whether it is received or rejected. Had Israel listened to the Lord and turned back, they could have been healed, understood in their hearts, heard with their ears and seen with their eyes.
3. God's judgment on his disobedient people in Judah came a number of years later when Judah was defeated by Babylon and sent into exile.
4. Even if almost everyone in Judah disobeyed and would not listen to Isaiah, there would be a small, small remnant left; a small stump, which listened to God's word and was preserved by the Lord.

## Isa 54:1-8 - Enlarge the Place of your Tent

[[@Bible:isa 54:1-3]]Isa 54:1-3

1. Isaiah receives prophetic messages from the Lord in the middle of the 7th century BC, a time when both Israel and Judah were in very troubled times. Israel was conquered by the Assyrians in the 7th century and Judah by the Babylonians in the 5th century. The prophetic writings of Isaiah were of great comfort to the Jews who survived the war and were taken captive by the Babylonians to Babylon. Isaiah's writings provide comfort and hope for a return to their Jewish homeland.
2. The "woman" described in this prophecy symbolizes the Jewish people after the Babylonian exile. The Jewish people are described both as a barren woman (verse 1), as a widow (verse 4), as an "abandoned woman in heartbreak" (verse 6) and as a "disfigured wife of youth" (verse 6). God is described as the woman's "husband" (verse 5).
3. After the Babylonian exile, the Jewish people were like a barren widow without children, sitting alone and abandoned in her tent. The prophetic message given to the Jews in this very vulnerable situation is: "enlarge the place of your dwelling" and "stretch out the tent cloths"; i.e.: make the tent bigger so that it can accommodate more children.
   1. In the Old Testament culture, having many children was considered a sign of God's blessing, and on the contrary, being childless was very shameful. One was considered to be under some god's punishment and unable to fulfil one's most important task. A barren woman thus did not serve her purpose and could be abandoned by her husband, who had to take a new wife to carry on his name and inheritance. One consequence of childlessness for the woman was that she had no children to care for her in old age. In addition, being a widow made the situation completely hopeless, as one did not have a husband to support one either.
   2. There are many examples in the Bible of women who cannot have children, but one of them is Hannah. In 1 Samuel, we read about how Hannah's barrenness leaves her devastated, mocked and saddened. But when she is blessed by God with a child, she bursts into joy and song.
   3. When God likens the Jewish people to a childless woman and urges her to "burst out in joy and shout for joy", it is because God will bless the Jews with many "children". Moreover, the Jews will have more children than the one who has a husband.
   4. Paul quotes Isaiah 54:1 in Galatians 4:27 when he explains that the new covenant with Jesus will have more "children" than the old covenant.
4. For the small Jewish community that survived the Babylonian captivity, thoughts may have turned to Abraham's nomadic life when they heard Isaiah's prophecy about expanding the tent. God's promise to Abraham was that he, who was also childless, would become a great nation that would be a blessing to the whole earth (Genesis 12:1-3).
   1. When the Jewish people, broken down, ashamed and in Babylonian captivity, are told that they will expand their settlement, they understand that they will return to their homeland and that God's people will once again be a numerous people. These prophetic words encouraged the Jews and gave them hope for a better future.
   2. It is no coincidence that the prophetic text of the barren woman who will have children is preceded by the prophecy of the Messiah, the suffering servant, in Isaiah chapter 53. After Jesus comes to earth and dies for our sins, the kingdom of God is opened wide for the "Gentiles" to be grafted into Israel and become children of God. The tent in which the Jewish people live is too small and the kingdom of God will be expanded to be a spiritual kingdom without borders.

[[@Bible:isa 54:4-8]]Isa 54:4-8

1. The Jewish people are compared to a barren widow who was shamed, humiliated and despised. But despite this state, God tells the Jewish people that He is their "man". God, in His mercy, will take back His "abandoned woman" and have mercy on her with "everlasting grace". The Jewish people will be fully restored and live in joy and blessing again.
2. The 70-year captivity in Babylon probably felt like an eternity to the broken-down Jewish population that had survived the horrors of war. But to God, this human "eternity" was like "a small moment".
   1. When we go through difficult trials, we often experience it as an eternal hell. But with God's infinite perspective, our hardships are but a brief moment in comparison to the mercy and blessing to come.
   2. It's easy to become introverted, feel sorry for yourself and despair when you're going through difficulties. But prophetic messages like Isaiah 54 comfort and encourage us to lift our eyes and look at our lives from God's eternal perspective.
3. Today we live in the midst of this "enlargement". In place after place, the Gospel is being preached and people are being saved. God's children are multiplying.
   1. But enlargement does not happen by itself. God calls his grieving "woman" to begin to work in faith for the eventual birth of new children. In the same way, God urged Noah to build a boat in faith on dry land. In the same way, we need to start building our church's ministry to accommodate more new people.
   2. Since we are compared to a "barren woman", we understand that we cannot produce the children ourselves, there must be a miracle of God. But if we do our part and "enlarge our dwelling place", God will do His part by leading people to salvation so that they are born again and become children of God.

# Obadiah

Obadiah was the first of the so-called "minor prophets" in the Bible. The name "Obadiah" means "worshiper of Yahweh" or "servant of Yahweh". There are a number of people with the name Obadiah in the Bible (e.g. in 2 Chronicles 17:7), but it is highly unclear whether any of these are the same person who wrote down this text.

Obadiah's prophetic writing is undated and we do not know exactly when it was written. Possibly verses 11-14 deal with the conquest of Jerusalem by the Philistines and Arabs sometime during the reign of King Joram (853-841 BC), which would make Obadiah a contemporary of the prophet Elisha. Another possibility is that these verses deal with the Babylonian attack on Jerusalem (605-586 BC), which would make Obadiah contemporary with the prophet Jeremiah.

## Obadiah - Judgment of Edom

[[@Bible:obad 1]]Obadiah 1

1. Obadiah's prophecy is unique in the Bible in that it is not primarily addressed to God's people, but to the enemies of God's people, in this case *the Edomites*.
2. The Edomites were a people descended from Esau, the son of Isaac and Rebekah and the older brother of Jacob, also known as "Israel" (Gen 25:19-34).
   1. Just as Jacob is better known as "Israel", so Esau was called "Edom", which means "red". Perhaps Esau was a redhead and was therefore called Edom?
   2. Israel settled in the land of Canaan with Jerusalem and Mount Zion as its central city. Edom settled south of the Dead Sea with Mount Seir as its central city.
      1. The capital of the Edomites was called "Sela", which is "stone" in Hebrew and "petra" in Greek. It is quite possible that the Edomite capital of Sela was located where the Nabataean rock city of Petra is now.
   3. When Israel left slavery in Egypt and wanted to enter the land of Canaan through the Edomite territory, the Edomites did not allow it (Num 20:14-21).
   4. In the time of King Saul and King David, Israel waged war against Edom and occupied their land (1 Sam 14:47, 2 Sam 8:14, 1 Kings 9:26).
   5. Israel and Edom warred back and forth on several occasions (2 Chron 20:1-27, 2 Kings 8:16-22, 2 Kings 14:9-11, 2 Chron 28:17).
   6. In New Testament times, Herod the Great, the king of the Jews, was an Edomite (Luke 1:5).
3. The message that the prophet Obadiah receives from the Lord concerning Edom is, in short, that God will judge Edom by gathering various nations to fight against them because of their sin against Israel. The sin that Edom committed was not helping their brother nation Israel when their enemies attacked them. Instead of helping Israel, Edom watched and rejoiced in the defeat of Israel and also took the opportunity to profit from Israel's fall.

[[@Bible:obad 2-4]]Obadiah 2-4

1. Edom was a small and insignificant people with little to be proud of. But they liked to brag about how difficult it was to take the mountainous territory of Edom. They thought they were safe and relied on the impregnable terrain of the area.
   1. Edom's gorges are reminiscent of the Titanic, a ship that boasted to be unsinkable, but sank on its maiden voyage.
   2. God's message to Edom is that they cannot rely on their own strength, but will fall no matter how much they boast about their impregnable mountain gaps.

[[@Bible:obad 5-9]]Obadiah 5-9

1. The riches that Edom acquired for themselves by trading or plundering Judah, they hid in the rock crevices of their mountainous region.
2. God judges Edom by striking at the very points Edom thought they were safe; their mountain gaps, their wise men and their allies.
   1. Not only will the treasures of the clefts be plundered by thieves, but the entire Edomite people would disappear from their mountains.
   2. Edom, like the ancient Greeks, was known for its great wisdom, but today this is hardly something one associates the Edomites with. Their wisdom is forgotten in history.
   3. Edom was condemned by Edom's allies and friends going behind their backs.

[[@Bible:obad 10-14]]Obadiah 10-14

1. Edom and Israel were brother nations because their ancestors, Esau and Jacob, were twins. This made Edom's sin against Israel even worse.
   1. To sin is always wrong, but to sin against one's own family or against Christian brothers and sisters, is worse.
2. When Judah was attacked by enemies and suffered greatly, Edom stood by and did not help. Not only were they passive in Israel's hour of need, they were malicious at Judah's fall. And if that wasn't enough, they also helped kill or hand over the Jews who fled and stole the Jewish wealth they came by. Edom's sin escalated something like this:
   1. At first, Edom stood by without helping a brother nation in need.
   2. Then Edom rejoiced at the fall of Judah.
   3. Then Edom began to take advantage of Judah's misery
   4. Finally, Edom itself actively participated in the killing of God's people, handing over captured Jews to the Jews' enemies.

[[@Bible:obad 15]]Obadiah 15

1. God announces to Edom through the prophet Obadiah that there will be a "day of the Lord" when Edom's sin against Israel will be punished.
   1. God's judgment on Edom is in line with God's promise to Abraham concerning Israel: *"I will bless those who bless you and curse the one who curses you."* (Genesis 12:3a)
      1. Over the years, countless nations have tried to destroy Israel and the Jewish people. This has never succeeded, and instead the nation that tried to destroy the Jews has instead been lost. For example, ancient Egypt, Persia, Nazi Germany, etc.
   2. When God gives a judgment, there is almost always an offer of grace included, if one repents. God's judgments therefore often do not come immediately after they have been pronounced, in order to give the people a chance to repent.
      1. For example, God says through the prophet Jeremiah, *"I speak of a nation and a kingdom, that I will uproot them, break them down, and destroy them. But if the nations of which I have spoken turn from their wickedness, I will repent of the evil that I have purposed to do to them."* (Jer 18:7-8)
      2. An example of God "repenting" of his judgment is Jonah's judgment on Nineveh: *"When God saw what they did, that they turned from their wicked way, he repented of the evil which he had threatened to do to them, and he did not do it."* (Jon 3:10)

[[@Bible:obad 16-17]]Obadiah 16-17

1. True, Israel is going through difficult times right now, but their distress is temporary and salvation is on the way. For Edom it is the opposite, they are happy now, but their judgment will come soon and it will be eternal.
2. Obadiah's prophecy was fulfilled in the context of the Jewish rebellion against Rome in 66-70 AD. In that uprising, the Jews and the Edomites fought side by side. When the rebellion was crushed, the Jews completely lost their land and dispersed into the Jewish diaspora, while the Edomites instead completely disappeared from history and ceased to exist as a people.

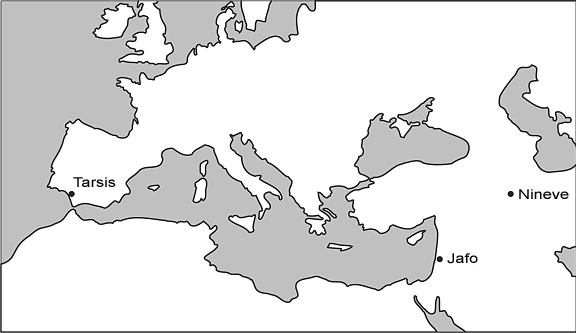
[[@Bible:obad 18-20]]Obadiah 18-20

1. Here Obadiah prophesies of a future in which Israel holds a larger area of land than they do today.

[[@Bible:obad 21]]Obadiah 21

1. "Mount Zion" and "Mount Esau" contrast each other, with Zion representing God's people and salvation, while Mount Esau represents God's enemies and judgment.
2. The message of Obadiah's prophecy can be summarized in the "double outcome":
   1. For those who belong to God's people and read Obadiah, the text becomes a comfort and a call to perseverance and trust in God. We may suffer temporarily now, but soon we will have eternal salvation.
   2. For those who *do not* belong to God's people and read Obadiah, the text becomes a call for urgent repentance, because God's enemies may rejoice temporarily right now, but will soon receive an eternal judgment.
3. Obadiah concludes his short little writing by stating that in the end the kingdom will belong to the Lord God. Even though God's people may suffer here and now, we know that God will ultimately prevail. We don't have to take matters into our own hands, fight our oppressors, or fight back against those who beat us. We can turn the other cheek and leave the judgment to the Lord. God will deal with our enemies at just the right time, and we can rest assured that God has the whole world in His hand.
4. In conclusion, Obadiah teaches us that:
   1. God judges those who attack God's people
   2. He who belongs to God will be saved
   3. God is in control of history
   4. God will ultimately establish his kingdom fully

# Jonah



## Jonah 1:1-16 - Jonah's Call and escape

[[@Bible:jonah 1:1]]Jonah 1:1

1. Jonah, son of Amittai, was a prophet (contemporary with the prophet Amos) in the northern kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 14:25) during the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 BC).
   1. The name "Jonah" means "dove" and his name fits well with his mission, as God sends Jonah as a "dove of peace" to the warring Assyrians in Nineveh in order to try to prevent the judgment God will soon execute if the people there do not repent.
   2. The name "Amittaj" means "truth" or "truth teller" and is a very fitting name for a prophet of judgment.
2. The expression "the word of the Lord came to Jonah" shows us that God called Jonah to be a "prophet". The English word "prophet" is "nabi" in Hebrew and originally meant a "spokesman" or a "mouthpiece".
   1. There was no one in Nineveh who could hear God's voice, so Jonah is sent to Nineveh to speak for God there.
   2. An example of an early "nabi" is Aaron, who was Moses' nabi when he pleaded Moses' case before Pharaoh (Exodus 7:1).
   3. A prophet is often a mediator between God and God's people. The prophet speaks for God before his people (Jer 26:16-18) and can also speak for the people before God (Amos 7:2-3).
   4. According to Paul, hearing God's voice and communicating God's word is a gift from God that we should strive for because it builds up the church (1 Corinthians 14:1-5).
3. During Jonah's time as a prophet in Israel, the land flourished, grew in size and was very rich. Even though King Jeroboam II did what was *"evil in the sight of the Lord"*, Jonah was commissioned to prophesy that Jeroboam would win back *"the territory of Israel from the place where the road goes to Hamath to the Sea of Hedge"* and that God would protect Israel and prosper them because He had promised that Israel's name would not be *"blotted out of the earth"*. Jeroboam reconquered large tracts of land and also took Damascus for Israel (2 Kings 14:23-29).
   1. At the same time, we can see that the contemporary prophet Amos condemned Israel's social injustices due to the wealth of the land, and not only that; the prophet Hosea also condemned Israel's "spiritual unfaithfulness" and idolatry.
      1. So we see that the Lord blessed Israel even though they did not love God or their fellow man very much. So success does not always depend on everything being right. God does not automatically bless as soon as we become pure or act rightly. In other words, we cannot sit back and think that everything is right just because we experience success and growth.
   2. However, there is nothing in the Bible to suggest that Jonah made any criticism of King Jeroboam II; on the contrary, he seems to believe strongly in the success of his country and not at all inclined to help other countries. Perhaps that is why he is commissioned to prophesy over Nineveh.

[[@Bible:jonah 1:2]]Jonah 1:2

1. Nineveh is a very old city that was made the capital of Assyria by the Assyrian king Sanherib around 700 BC.
2. Although many in Israel certainly knew that God is the God of the whole world, he was still strongly connected to Israel because of the promises made to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The other nations, including the Assyrians, had their own gods, and there was no strong missionary zeal among the Israelites to spread faith in God to other lands. On the contrary, there is rather a reluctance in at least Jonah.
   1. Throughout the Bible, it is very clear that although God has a special covenant with the nation of Israel, God is the God of all nations and cares for the whole world. So it shouldn't surprise Jonah that God wants to lead the Assyrians in the right direction, even though Nineveh is as far as 80 miles from Jonah's hometown, Gath-Hefer, as far as Timrå and Kalmar.
   2. In the prophet Amos, contemporary with Jonah, we read: *"Are you not in my sight like the Nubians, O children of Israel? says the Lord. Did I not bring up Israel out of the land of Egypt, the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Aramaeans from Kir?"* (Am 9:7)
   3. This must have been very provocative for Jonah, who was commissioned to prophesy a blessing over Israel. So now he must realize that God cares about Nineveh too.
3. What caused God's call to proclaim to the Assyrians in Nineveh was, according to God, that *"their wickedness has come up before my face"*. Aside from "violence," Jonah does not mention exactly what kind of evil the Assyrians were engaged in, but in the book of the prophet Nahum we find that it involved evil plots against the Lord (Nah 1:11), plunder (Nah 3:1), prostitution and sorcery (Nah 3:4), and commercial exploitation (Nah 3:16).
   1. Sometimes we can get the idea that God is only the God of Christians, but in fact he is the God of the whole world. God is even God to those who have not yet bowed to him, God sees them too.
   2. Here we also see that if a nation is sufficiently wicked and violent, God will eventually respond.
   3. Jonah's mission is to tell the Assyrians that God will judge them for their wickedness if they do not repent.
   4. God rarely gives a judgment in the Old Testament that is directly enforced. There is almost always time and opportunity for repentance when God gives a judgment.

[[@Bible:jonah 1:3]]Jonah 1:3

1. The port city of Jafo, today's Jaffa just outside Tel Aviv, did not belong to Israel in Jonah's time. The reason Jonah avoids an Israeli port city is because he wants to get as far away from the God of Israel as possible.
2. Why does Jonah flee as soon as he receives the call?
   1. First of all, the Assyrian capital Nineveh was a very dangerous place for Jonah. To go there and preach God's judgment and urge them to repent is like a Jew going to Berlin during World War II and preaching God's judgment if they don't repent.
   2. Secondly, Jonah did not want the Assyrians to repent because then they would not receive God's punishment. Jonah had a hard time accepting that God is not only the God of Israel but the God of the whole world.
3. Why did Jonah flee to Tarshish?
   1. Nineveh was located 80 miles east of Israel (present-day Iraq) and Tarshish 400 miles west of Israel (present-day Spain). Nineveh was the easternmost city in the Levantine trade area, while Tarshish was the westernmost. In other words, with the ships of the day, Tarshish was as far away from both Israel and Nineveh as possible.
      1. Jonah tries to escape from Israel, the place where God is in control, and Nineveh, the place where God is calling him. Soon, however, Jonah comes to realise that God is in control even beyond the borders of Israel.
4. God has never stopped calling different people to small and large missions. Perhaps you have received a call from God to do something special? Maybe you have tried your hardest to get away from what God has called you to do? Maybe you recognize that your escape just messed things up and caused problems? If so, it's time for you to listen to God and do what he's calling you to do.

[[@Bible:jonah 1:4]]Jonah 1:4

1. It was God Himself who sent a violent storm that almost destroyed the ship. Sometimes it's easy to think of God as a kind Santa Claus who gives us things when we ask for them, but in the book of Jonah we see that God is also a judgmental God who doesn't hesitate to start a violent storm in our lives if we don't do what he says.
2. God can both calm the storms in our lives and cause the storms in our lives. God is a person, and there is no automatic way to make this happen. If we want to know why our lives are the way they are, we need to seek God and ask him to show us.
3. Jonah's disobedience was leading to other people's misery as well.

[[@Bible:jonah 1:5]]Jonah 1:5

1. Tarsus was a Phoenician colony and port city and it is very likely that these sailors were Phoenicians, in other words experienced and skilled seamen. If these sailors were frightened, it was indeed a serious storm.
2. The vast majority of people become religious when they find themselves in some kind of life crisis or violent storm that they cannot get out of on their own. The problem is that these sailors had not been told about the God of Israel and therefore cried out in vain, at least until Jonah told them about the cause of the storm.
   1. That's why it's so important to spread God's word as much as possible, because even if they're not interested in becoming a Christian right now, hopefully they'll turn to God if they find themselves in a life crisis.
   2. This verse is a reminder to us not to postpone our spiritual development indefinitely. We never know when we need God most, and so we do well to try to know him here and now.
3. How could Jonah sleep so deeply in the midst of a violent storm that frightened experienced sailors? Probably because the storm inside him was much worse than the storm outside.
4. It is ironic that a pagan captain has to wake a sleeping man of God and call him to prayer! This verse is a clear call to us Christians, who have come to know God, not to sleep when there are plenty of people around who are crying out to God without knowing who he is.
   1. There are people everywhere who long for God, but if none of us who have come to know God tells them about him, they will have a very hard time finding him.
5. How do you know if you are a "sleeping Christian" in need of "revival"?
   1. Jonah slept in a place where he thought no one would disturb him. Perhaps you avoid other Christians in the hope that no one will disturb your spiritual sleep?
   2. Jonah slept while the others worked. Perhaps you are staying away from all the work that other Christians do in church?
   3. Jonah slept while the others prayed. Maybe it's been a long time since you went to a prayer meeting?
   4. Jonah had no idea of the violent storm raging outside. Perhaps your spiritual sleep has caused you to lose sight of all the distress around you?

[[@Bible:jonah 1:7-8]]Jonah 1:7-8

1. For some reason, these experienced sailors seem to have understood that this was no ordinary storm, so they cast lots, a common method in the Middle East of the time, to find out God's will.
2. God often speaks to us in a language we can understand. It is not uncommon, for example, for God to give us pictures with such a simple and ordinary message that we do not believe that it is really from God.

[[@Bible:jonah 1:9]]Jonah 1:9

1. Although Jonah was on the run from God, he becomes a blessing to the people around him. God can use even a disobedient prophet to spread the message about himself.
2. Jonah's confession sounds very good! But his life doesn't exactly match his words. It is important for every Christian to do the best he can to live up to the faith he professes. At least one should not do just the opposite.

[[@Bible:jonah 1:10]]Jonah 1:10

1. Even pagan sailors understand that if God tells someone to "go and preach", they should obey!
2. In the same way, we Christians should think about trying to spread the gospel of Jesus to the people around us. It would be unfortunate if, after many years, our friends and acquaintances heard the gospel from someone else and then asked us why we didn't tell them the good news?

[[@Bible:jonah 1:11-12]]Jonah 1:11-12

1. Why did Jonah want the sailors to throw him overboard? Perhaps because he was distressed and wanted to kill himself.
2. Knowing God's calling but struggling against it is very difficult and there is a great risk of feeling very unwell.

[[@Bible:jonah 1:13-16]]Jonah 1:13-16

1. Now that the sailors have realised that Jonah's God is powerful, they really don't want to throw Jonah into the sea and risk making God even more angry, so they row and fight like never before. But in the end they see no other way out and ask the God of Israel not to be angry.
2. There are a lot of similarities between Jonah and Jesus. For example, both Jesus and Jonah were gone for three days and three nights (Matthew 12:40). Here we also see a similarity between the sailors and Pontius Pilate, who both send a man of God to his death while not wanting innocent blood on their hands (Matt 27:24).
3. After the sailors see that God has calmed the storm, they are seized with a great fear of the Lord. It seems that this event led to the salvation of the sailors.
   1. Normally, we humans are very prone to promise God anything *before* he has helped us, as long as he answers our prayer, but these sailors made promises *after* God had helped them.

## Jonah 2:1-11 - Jonah's Prayer and salvation

[[@Bible:jonah 2:1]]Jonah 2:1

1. Jesus says in Matthew 12:40, "For as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish three days and three nights, so shall the Son of Man be in the bowels of the earth three days and three nights."
   1. The difference between Jonah and Jesus, however, is that Jonah ended up there because he was disobedient, but Jesus ended up there because he was obedient to the point of death.
   2. The phrase "three days and three nights" was an expression that did not necessarily have to mean exactly 3 full days, but could just as easily mean one day plus parts of two other days.
2. What kind of fish did Jonah devour? There are two fish in particular that are mentioned as having swallowed animals the size of humans that have also been found alive in their stomachs, and these are the sperm whale and the whale shark.
   1. However, trying to find natural explanations for all the details misses the point of this Bible. The point of the book of Jonah is that God has power over everything, not just Israel. God has power over the sea and the fish, and if he wants to, he can perform an impossible miracle, such as allowing Jonah to miraculously survive in the belly of a fish for three days.
      1. In other words, there is a small scientific possibility that this could have happened naturally, but if you stare at this, you miss the point that God has power and can do the supernatural. So you do yourself a disservice if you try to explain a miracle scientifically, because then it is automatically no longer a miracle, which in turn contradicts the point of the book; namely that God has power over everything.

[[@Bible:jonah 2:2]]Jonah 2:2

1. What happens when you are called by God but don't want to do God's will?
   1. From Jonah we can learn that God has many different ways of making us want to do God's will in the end. Jonah struggles as much as he can, but in the end he realizes that he is no match for God and bows to God's will.
   2. I remember when I myself was called by God to be a disciple of Jesus. I was 18 years old and experienced how God called me to go to church to be baptized. I struggled for two weeks and finally had to give up because I realized that I could not say no to God. In theory I had free will and could say no, but in practice there was really no choice but to do what God wanted. At the time it was a difficult decision, but today it is the best decision of my life.

[[@Bible:jonah 2:3]]Jonah 2:3

1. Jonah knew that God had heard his prayer even though he was still in the belly of the fish. Although Jonah's situation is as miserable as ever, he now knows that his life will soon change. God can give us an inner peace despite an outer storm.
2. When our lives are at their most miserable, it can be a tremendous blessing to receive confirmation from God that He has seen my situation and will save me. Even if salvation is not instantaneous, it is extremely liberating and hopeful to live in faith that the situation will soon get better. Then you can even thank God despite being in the most claustrophobic and disgusting situation any human being could ever imagine; i.e. inside the belly of a fish.

[[@Bible:jonah 2:4]]Jonah 2:4

1. Jonah realizes that it wasn't really the sailors who threw him into the sea, it was God. Even though Jonah tried to escape from God, he couldn't.
2. Jonah experiences Psalm 139 with his own eyes:
   1. *"7 Where shall I go before thy Spirit, and where shall I flee before thy face? 8If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in hell, you are there. 9If I take the wings of the morning glory, if I make my dwelling in the uttermost parts of the sea,10 there also your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. 11If I say: "Let darkness fall upon me, and let light become night around me,"12 then darkness is not dark to you; night shall shine as day, and darkness be as light."* (Ps 139:7-12)

[[@Bible:jonah 2:5]]Jonah 2:5

1. Jonah quotes several Bible verses from the Psalms when he prays (Ps 18:7, Ps 42:8, Ps 31:22). This shows us two things:
   1. The Psalter is an excellent prayer book! Sometimes it can be difficult to formulate your prayers and it's not wrong to use the Psalter, it contains a huge register of feelings, situations and circumstances that we can all relate to.
      1. The Bible is God's word to us, prayer is our words to God, and the Psalms are both.
   2. Jonah was well versed in the word of God. When he was at his most difficult, it was in the Bible that he found his comfort. Even if you don't always feel a hunger for God's word, you will definitely benefit from reading and studying the Bible regularly.
2. Jonah's greatest concern is not his miserable circumstances, but that he has strayed from God.

[[@Bible:jonah 2:10]]Jonah 2:10

1. Jonah confesses that salvation is with the Lord God! But Jonah does this even though he is in a miserable situation; inside the belly of a fish. Jonah knew that his life would not end there, but God would save him.
   1. In the same way, we can confess that salvation is in the Lord Jesus, even though our situation may not be the most perfect. Even if life is difficult and miserable, we know that God will save us on the day of the Lord.
2. It's a bit comical that when God speaks to the fish, the fish immediately does exactly what God wants, as opposed to when God spoke to the prophet Jonah, who did exactly the opposite of what God wanted.
   1. God has control and power over the whole world; both sea and land, people and animals. But it is only humans who deliberately resist God's will.
3. The prophetic book of Jonah has two main purposes: (1) to show Israel and the world God's love and care for all his creation, but also (2) to show the relationship and interaction between God and a person who has been given a mission by God.

## Jonah 3:1-10 - Jonah in Nineveh

[[@Bible:jonah 3:1-2]]Jonah 3:1-2

1. The beginning of the third chapter is almost identical to the beginning of the first chapter. In this way we understand that Jonah is back where it all began and is offered a fresh start.
2. Although Jonah did everything in his power to resist God's call, he is immediately given a second chance once he has repented. God is merciful and gracious!
   1. When God describes himself in his own words, he describes himself like this:
      1. *"6b "Gentlemen! Gentlemen! - a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and great in mercy and truth,7 who preserves mercy for thousands and forgives transgression, sin and guilt, but who leaves no one unpunished, but inflicts the punishment for the iniquity of the fathers on the children and grandchildren, even the third and fourth generation.""* (Exodus 34:6-7)
      2. This self-description of God is repeated 7 times in the Old Testament (Numbers 14:18, Neh 9:17, Ps 86:15, 103:8, 145:8, Joel 2:13, Jonah 4:2), especially the summary: *"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and great in mercy."*
   2. We humans are not nearly as "merciful and gracious" as God is, but we should learn from God and imitate him as much as possible.
3. The difference between the first and second call is that in the first call God told Jonah more precisely what to say to the Assyrians in Nineveh, while this time he only tells Jonah to preach "the message I give you".
   1. We often find it hard when God gives us only minimal information, but God does so out of concern for us. When Jonah was told what to say to Nineveh, he fled, so we see what too much information can lead to. Sometimes it is better for us to know as little as possible because then we have to trust God more, while not risking becoming so afraid of the mission that we flee.
   2. If you receive a call from God, do what God calls you to do and you will receive more instructions as you go along.

[[@Bible:jonah 3:3]]Jonah 3:3

1. In the first half of the story, Jonah escaped God's call and ended up inside the fish for three long days, now when he follows God's call, he ends up inside the three-day city of Nineveh instead.
   1. It was potentially just as deadly for Jonah the Israelite to enter the heart of the enemy Assyrian capital of Nineveh as it was to be inside the belly of a fish in the depths of the sea.
2. Jonah has now learned that it is useless to resist God's call; God gets what he wants in the end anyway.
   1. However, instead of simply writing "then Jonah went to Nineveh", the expression "then Jonah rose up and went" suggests that he nevertheless obeys God reluctantly, like a tired old man who reluctantly gets up slowly and demonstratively out of the couch to fetch something his old lady asks him for.
3. Nineveh, according to Jonah 4:11, had 120,000 inhabitants and was undoubtedly a very large city by the standards of the day.
   1. Presumably Jonah includes all the surrounding communities and suburbs of Nineveh in the expression "three days' journey long".
4. In Jonah's time, when making an official state visit to a king or capital, it was normal under Middle Eastern hospitality rules for such a visit to be divided into three days; the first day for arrival, the second day for business, and the third day for return. Possibly, then, the expression "three days' journey long" can be interpreted as meaning that the city of Nineveh received Jonah as an official visitor and allowed him to speak before the king.
   1. However, it is not very likely that it is this custom that is meant, but rather the size of the city, since it says that Jonah "went a day's journey into the city".

[[@Bible:jonah 3:4]]Jonah 3:4

1. The Hebrew word that we translate as "desolate" is the same word that describes what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:25).
2. God's starting point is that he is "slow to anger and great in mercy", i.e. that he takes his time before executing a judgment, and if one repents, he forgives immediately. This is partly because God is merciful and gracious, but also because he loves us and does not want to punish us.
   1. When God gives a judgment, such as the one he gives to Nineveh, there is always a chance for repentance.

[[@Bible:jonah 3:5]]Jonah 3:5

1. By foregoing food and dressing in simple and poor clothing, the people of Nineveh show that they truly repent of their sin and ask God for forgiveness (Dan 9:3).
   1. Genuine repentance is always wholehearted and the repentant is ready to give up everything to come to terms with God.
   2. Simply saying that you are repenting without being prepared to radically change your life is not true repentance.
2. It is never explicitly stated in the text that the people of Nineveh repented, but their actions show that they did.
   1. Just saying that you are repenting is just empty words as long as your words do not also lead to action and that you are repenting in practice as well.
3. The conversion of the people began with "believing God". Just because one stops sinning does not necessarily mean that one has also repented.
   1. An alcoholic who stops drinking alcohol is not saved just because he has stopped his problems, he is saved only when he turns to God and believes in him.
4. This conversion would never have happened if Jonah had not preached the word of God to the people.
   1. Genuine revival always starts with people hearing God's Word, realizing their sin and repenting.
      1. A so-called "revival" that is based on a gimmick, or that only attracts people with miracles without preaching the Word of God, may attract a lot of people, but will never lead to repentance.
5. What made Jonah such a good "revivalist" or "prophet of doom"? Perhaps there were people in Nineveh who initially didn't want to listen to Jonah because he himself had sinned, but that failure only made Jonah's message even stronger because he knew what he was talking about. He had repented himself and knew what that meant.
   1. Often it is the people who have failed in life that God can use the most. When God restores and forgives a person who has sinned and failed, that person becomes a living billboard that proves that the message being preached is true.
6. Nineveh escaped God's judgment this time, but was destroyed 150 years later, in 612 BC, by the Chaldeans and Medes (Zeph 2:13-15).
   1. After the total destruction of Nineveh, the city was forgotten and first discovered by archaeologists in the 1840s just outside Mosul in modern-day Iraq.
      1. That the city was forgotten is consistent with Nahum's prophecy, *"This is what the Lord has decreed about you: no one will carry on your name."* (Nah 1:14, Bible 2000).
      2. A curious fact is that many scholars and scientists in the 19th century were very sceptical about the reliability of the Bible because no archaeologists had found any extra-biblical evidence that King Sargon, mentioned in Isaiah 20:1, had ever existed. But during the archaeological excavations of Nineveh, led by the Frenchman Paul-Émile Botta, they found not only inscriptions with King Sargon's name but also a description of the Assyrian conquest of Samaria (2 Kings 17:5-6).
         1. The believer trusts that the Bible is correct, even when there is no evidence, but the unbeliever will always find alleged "errors" in the Bible. Until scientists find evidence that the Bible was right after all.
   2. There are also archaeologists who believe they have found evidence of two shorter periods of monotheism in Nineveh roughly contemporary with the prophet Jonah (7th century BC).

[[@Bible:jonah 3:8]]Jonah 3:8

1. That the animals were also clothed in sackcloth follows the pattern of the book of Jonah that God is the God of all the earth, not just Israel. God is the God of all people, not only the Israelites but also the Assyrians. God is not only the God of Israel but also has power over the sea and the storms, over the fish of the sea and over the animals of Nineveh. God is the God of the whole universe and even cares about the animals.
2. This is the heart of what repentance means, turning from one's evil ways and crying out to God with all one's might.
3. Based on the book of Jonah, repentance can be described as follows:
   1. Faith in God (verse 5a)
   2. Show your repentance (verse 5b)
   3. Cry out to God with all your might (verse 8a)
   4. Stop doing evil (verse 8b)
   5. Hope that God will forgive you (verse 9)

[[@Bible:jonah 3:10]]Jonah 3:10

1. When we humans are to judge a murderer, he will receive his punishment even if he repents. When God saw how Nineveh repented, he refrained from the punishment that in the name of justice they should have received for the sins they committed. It is fortunate for us humans that God gives us *grace* instead of *justice* when we repent.
   1. Because Jonah spent three days and three nights in the depths of the sea preaching repentance to the Gentiles, they repented and received God's grace and were spared God's judgment. In the same way, Jesus was dead for three days and three nights so that all who believe in Jesus and repent will have their sins forgiven and be saved from judgment.
   2. It is important to remember that God does not punish the one who has repented. We should not accuse ourselves unnecessarily and feel bad about something that God has forgiven.
      1. On the other hand, God can allow us to go through a period of transformation in the context of our conversion. But this is not as a punishment but as a way for God to make a fresh start in our lives and get rid of the sins we have committed and instead give us something new in life.
2. When God gives a judgment, that judgment always includes an offer of grace, if one repents. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God says:
   1. *"7 At one time I speak of a heathen nation and a kingdom that I will uproot, break down, and destroy it. 8But if the heathen people of whom I have spoken turn from their wickedness, I repent of the evil that I had purposed to do to them."* (Jer 18:7-8)

## Jonah 4:1-11- Jonah’s Anger and the Lord’s Compassion

[[@Bible:jonah 4:1]]Jonah 4:1

1. The second God stops being angry with Nineveh, Jonah becomes angry with God.
2. Jonah is here a very strong contrast to how God is described throughout the Old Testament: *"merciful and gracious, slow to anger and great in mercy"* (Ex 34:6-7, Num 14:18, Neh 9:17, Ps 86:15, 103:8, 145:8, Joel 2:13).
   1. One of the points of the book of Jonah is to try to teach God's people not only to believe in a merciful God but also to be a merciful people.
3. Normally, a preacher is happy when his message reaches people, but Jonah is angry. Jonah does not want the Assyrians to repent because Jonah wants Israel to keep its special status as God's people.
   1. But just because God has a special relationship with Israel does not mean that God cannot also have a special relationship with the Assyrians. God loves all people and is the God of the whole earth, not just Israel.

[[@Bible:jonah 4:2]]Jonah 4:2

1. It's probably more common not to dare to testify about your faith because you're afraid that those you testify to won*'t* listen, but Jonah is afraid that his listeners *will* listen.
2. The reason Jonah was so angry is because God forgave the Assyrians when they repented. You almost get the feeling that Jonah hated the Assyrians and wished them nothing less than God's judgment. Jonah knew from the very beginning that if he preached God's message to Nineveh they would repent and God would forgive them, which is why he fled to Tarshish to avoid this scenario.
3. Jonah knew that God is a merciful and gracious God, but he didn't want Israel's enemies, the Assyrians, to know it. For Israel's part, it would have been better if the God of Israel had been angry with Nineveh and destroyed the city because then Israel could win over them in war.

[[@Bible:jonah 4:3]]Jonah 4:3

1. Jonah himself had experienced God's mercy when Jonah inside the fish's belly turned over and God saved him from certain death. But now, when the Assyrians repent and are saved from certain death, Jonah cannot treat them to God's mercy and becomes so angry that he would rather die than live.
2. It is abundantly clear that Jonah's reaction to God's mercy is patently wrong, and anyone reading the book of Jonah who recognizes Jonah's reaction should take the message personally and try to look at other people through God's loving eyes.
   1. If someone has committed the worst possible crime against you, it is natural to feel hatred towards that person. The challenge to everyone who reads the book of Jonah is to offer full grace to all people in the same way that God does, even to those people who have treated you terribly.

[[@Bible:jonah 4:4]]Jonah 4:4

1. God completely ignores Jonah's wish to die and doesn't even answer that prayer.
   1. Fortunately, God does not answer all our prayers but gives us what we need when we need it.
2. God is okay with us sharing even our wrong and negative feelings with him. God is even okay with us being angry with him.

[[@Bible:jonah 4:5-6]]Jonah 4:5-6

1. Jonah does not answer God's rhetorical question, but just angrily leaves the city of Nineveh and builds himself a hut.
2. Again we see how inconsistent and selfish Jonah is when he is "very happy" when God is good to him but refuses to be anything but angry when God is good to the Assyrians.
3. One of the main messages of the book of Jonah is that God is the God of the whole world, not just Israel. God also has power over the forces of nature, the animals, the pagans and even the plants. God shows this by sending a storm, letting a fish swallow Jonah, pardoning Nineveh and now by letting a castor bush miraculously grow up right next to Jonah!

[[@Bible:jonah 4:7-8]]Jonah 4:7-8

1. The word for "angry" is the same as "hot" in Hebrew. God used to feel Jonah's angry heat, but now Jonah feels God's "heat" instead.
2. Jonah did what so many angry people do; he gave up, he withdrew from people and he became a bystander with strong and bitter opinions.

[[@Bible:jonah 4:9]]Jonah 4:9

1. This is *Jonah's* last word in the book of Jonah, but fortunately it is *God* who has the last word. Even if we humans refuse to repent, we can rest assured that God still has the power to get his way.

[[@Bible:jonah 4:10-11]]Jonah 4:10-11

1. Jonah was a prophet with a good knowledge of God's word, but the whole book of Jonah clearly shows us that he still did not know God as well as he might have thought.
   1. In 2 Kings 14:25, we see that Jonah was a "prophet of the court" who prophesied blessing and success over Israel as they defeated their enemies and conquered new lands. Now, however, we see that it is even more important to show God's love and mercy to other people than to wield one's Bible knowledge and spiritual gifts like a sword.
2. Did Jonah finally understand that God loves even our enemies? We'll never know because the book of Jonah is really about us reading. Now that we have reached the end of the story, we must answer that question for ourselves. Do you love your enemies?
   1. *"44 Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. 45Then you are your heavenly Father's children. He makes his sun rise on the wicked and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."* (Matthew 5:44-45)
   2. *"34 Then Peter began to speak, "Now I truly understand that God does not discriminate between people,35 but accepts anyone who fears him and does what is right, no matter what nation he belongs to."* (Acts 10:34-35)

# Haggai



## Hag 1:1-2 - The Command to Rebuild the Temple

[[@Bible:hag 1:1]]Hag 1:1

1. King Darius was the Persian king who ruled over large parts of the Middle East, including Judah and Jerusalem.
   1. To be precise, the date is August 29 in 520 BC.
2. The background to Haggai's prophecies can be found 66 years earlier. The Jewish people, after a devastating defeat in war with the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, have been carried away into captivity in 586 BC.
   1. The reason for the captivity is given by God Himself in the text of the prophet Jeremiah: *"And if they ask, 'Why has the LORD our God done all this to us?' you shall answer them, 'Because you have forsaken me, and served strange gods in your own land, you shall serve strangers in a land that is not yours.'"* (Jer 5:19).
3. The curses suffered by Judah are described in Deuteronomy, where it says that if Israel forsakes God, God will cause foreign armies to take all the cities and carry the king and the people away into captivity (Deuteronomy 28:15-68).
   1. All this happened to Zerubbabel's grandfather, King Jeconiah (2 Kings 24:8-17).
4. Although God sent the Jewish people into captivity, He promised through the prophet Jeremiah that He would see to it that after 70 years in captivity they would return to their own land (Jer 29:10).
   1. This return is made possible by God when he instructs the Persian king Cyrus to invite the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-3).
   2. In 536 BC, Zerubbabel, the Jewish governor, is in Jerusalem and begins the rebuilding of the Temple. Unfortunately, Zerubbabel runs into trouble almost immediately when the new locals, the Samaritans, want to help rebuild the Temple, which the Jews do not agree to (Ezra 4:1-5). The Samaritans send a letter of complaint to the Persian king, who banned all construction in the city of Jerusalem with the immediate result that temple building was halted and lay dormant for 15 years (Ezra 4:21).
5. When the Persian king Darius in 520 B.C. gives the Jews new favorable directives, Haggai simultaneously receives four prophetic messages, which have the combined effect of spurring the people and Zerubbabel to resume and complete the building of the temple (Ezra 6:14).
6. ***Prophet*** is a Greek word which in Hebrew is "nabi" and in English means "preacher"; i.e. a person who speaks for someone else.
   1. An example of an early "nabi" is Aaron, who was Moses' nabi when he pleaded Moses' case before Pharaoh (Exodus 7:1).
   2. A prophet is a mediator between God and God's people.
      1. A prophet of God speaks for God before his people (Jer 26:16-18).
      2. A prophet can also speak for the people before God (Amos 7:2-3).
   3. According to Paul, hearing God's voice and communicating God's word is a gift from God that we should strive for because it builds up the church (1 Corinthians 14:1-5).
7. There is not much intrabiblical information about Haggai, as he is mentioned only twice in addition to his own book (Ezra 5:1, 6:4). We therefore know nothing concrete about his family, ancestry or profession.
   1. What we do know is that Haggai's name *חגי* means *"feast"* or *"festival"* in Hebrew, which may indicate that he was born during a festival or that his parents may have thought he looked festive when he was born.
8. Serubbabel's name *זְרֻבָּבֶל,* means *"descendant of Babylon"* or *"born in Babylon"*, indicating that he was probably born in the captivity in Babylon.
   1. Zerubbabel was of royal lineage, but there is some uncertainty about his exact relationship to King Jeconiah (also called Jehoiachin and Coniah). Zerubbabel is called the *son of Shealtiel* on several occasions, for example in Hag 2:24. According to Chronicles, Shealtiel is the son of King Jeconiah (1 Chron 3:17). However, problems arise if one reads further in Chronicles, which describes Zerubbabel as the son of Jeconiah's third son *Pedaiah* (1 Chron 3:19). Possibly this problem can be solved if one assumes that Shealtiel died childless and then Pedaiah took Shealtiel's widow as his wife who then gave birth to Zerubbabel. This would then make Zerubbabel Pedaiah's biological son but Shealtiel's heir according to Deuteronomy 25:5-6. But regardless of whose son Zerubbabel was, it appears that he was in any case the grandson of King Jeconiah of Judah.
9. ***Joshua*** is the son of Jehoshaphat, who was high priest when Nebuchadnezzar carried the Jewish people away into captivity (1 Chron 6:15).

[[@Bible:hag 1:2]]Hag 1:2

1. ***The Lord of Hosts*** actually means "*Yahweh of hosts"* and signals that God has all power.
   1. Haggai uses this very name of God very frequently in his relatively short writing; no less than 14 times.
2. When Jerusalem was captured in 586 BC by Nebuchadnezzar, the temple was destroyed.
3. Because of the difficulties the people encountered when they started building, they seem to have interpreted this as the time not being right to build the temple and chose rather to focus on building their own houses.
   1. They could not deny the very idea of rebuilding the temple, so instead they excused their neglect by saying that the *time was not right*. This explanation may have sounded spiritual, but it was valuable!

[[@Bible:hag 1:3]]Hag 1:3

1. Earlier Haggai had addressed the Jewish leadership, now he addresses the whole people.
2. Again Haggai shows that he is only a spokesman for God, it is not his own words that he speaks, it is *the Lord's*.

[[@Bible:hag 1:4]]Hag 1:4

1. The people had stopped building on the temple and instead invested in building luxurious houses for themselves.
   1. It's hard not to draw parallels with the Swedish Free Church movement, which invests a lot of money in its homes but not in the church.
2. [[@Bible:hag 1:5]]Hag 1:5
3. The fact that the Jewish people preferred to build their own houses upset God, who sent various economic troubles in the form of inclement weather that made the vital harvest difficult.
   1. It is ironic that although the people had invested in their own economy, it was precisely *economic* hardship that they experienced.
   2. When we don't put God first, God doesn't bless what we put first.
   3. The Israelis' biggest problem was not the devil's attacks but their own priorities.
4. Ultimately, this is a question that affects all believers; is our focus on ourselves or on God?
   1. If God gives us a clear mission but we choose to do something else, perhaps we shouldn't be surprised if we fail to do it?

[[@Bible:hag 1:8]]Hag 1:8

1. God gives the people a solution to their problems; if they complete the temple, their other problems will be solved.
2. Jesus addresses the exact same problems the Jewish people had in Haggai's time; food, drink and clothing, when he teaches us the same principle: *"Therefore do not be anxious, and do not ask, 'What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, What shall we wear? For all these things the Gentiles seek, but your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and you will have all these things also."* (Matt 6:31-33).
3. It should be added, however, that there is nothing necessarily wrong with having a nice house, but not as long as God's house is in ruins.
   1. King Solomon first built the house of the LORD and then his own royal house (1 Kings 9:10, 6:38, 7:1).

[[@Bible:hag 1:11]]Hag 1:11

1. It was God himself who had made it difficult for the people.
   1. Not every problem you face has a given cause, but sometimes it's worth stopping and listening to God if he has something to say about the situation you're in.

## Hag 1:12-2:1 - The People Obey the Lord

[[@Bible:hag 1:12]]Hag 1:12

1. *"Quarrel"* is an expression often applied to the righteous of the people of Israel who survived God's judgment. The Kvarlevan were not bad people, they had left the comfort of Babylon to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. Many other Jews had stayed in Babylon because they were better off there.
   1. Noah and his family were the "remnant" of God's judgment on the earth (Genesis 6:5-8).
   2. Lot was saved from the judgment of Sodom (Genesis 18:17-33).
   3. God saved Elijah and 7,000 righteous people (1 Kings 19:17-18).
2. The people of Israel thought they would all be saved from Nebuchadnezzar, but God told them instead to repent because He will indeed judge sinners (Amos 5:14-15).
3. For Isaiah, the "remnant" theme was so important that he even named his son *"A remnant shall return"* (Isaiah 7:3).
4. Paul quotes Isaiah when he teaches that even though the people of Israel are as numerous as the sand, only a remnant of Israel will be saved (Romans 9:27).
5. Before the Free Churches were established in Sweden, virtually all Swedish people were members of the State Church. However, this does not guarantee that one will escape judgment, but only those who have turned to God will be saved from judgment.
6. It is not common for people to listen to their prophets, but that was the case here.
7. What caused the people to change was that they understood that what Haggai said was the word of *God.*
   1. The same thing can happen to us today; when we read the Bible and understand that it is *God's word*, it can transform our lives.

[[@Bible:hag 1:13]]Hag 1:13

1. Where it says *"the Lord*" in English, in the Hebrew basic text it says *"YHWH"*; that is, God's name *"Yahweh"*.
   1. "Yahweh" means "I am who I am" and is sometimes shortened to "I am"
   2. "I am" + "with you" says a lot about the relationship between God and God's people.

[[@Bible:hag 1:14]]Hag 1:14

1. Even though the people had done wrong, God was quick to bless them as soon as they turned back. God is not slow.
2. God stirred up an eagerness both in the leadership and in the people.
   1. In today's parlance, we might call this "revival".
   2. Without this zeal from God, the people would probably have grown weary.
   3. The first to hear this message were the king and the priest. Leadership needs to respond first. God began by awakening the leadership and then touching the people.
3. Not only did they turn their hearts around, but they began to take a firm grip on the mission.
   1. Even Jesus urges us not only to *listen to* God's word but also to *do* God's word (Matt 7:24-26).
   2. We should not only *pray* for revival, but also *work* for revival!
4. *In summary:* When God's people listen to God's word, God is with his people and stirs up a zeal that makes God's people start working for God.
   1. This fine principle also applies today!

## Hag 2:2-6 - Be Bold and Work

[[@Bible:hag 2:2]]Hag 2:2

1. On October 17, 520 B.C., a month after the temple construction had begun, Haggai receives another message.

[[@Bible:hag 2:4]]Hag 2:4

1. It was 70 years between the destruction of the first temple and the dedication of the second temple, so there were still some elders left who had seen the beautiful and stately Temple of Solomon.
   1. Of these, Ezra 3:12 says that they *"wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this house being laid."*
   2. Many of those who were around when the revival was at its height here in Sweden may weep when they compare it to what they see today, but it is never good or edifying to compare the new things God is doing today with the old things God did in the past. The important thing is to obey God and do what he has commanded and let the temple be filled with God's glory once again.
   3. What makes the temple beautiful and magnificent is not the gold and silver, but the *glory of* God.

[[@Bible:hag 2:5]]Hag 2:5

1. When David gave his son Solomon instructions to build God's temple, he gave almost exactly the same words, "Be strong and courageous and go to work. Do not be afraid or dismayed! For the LORD God, my God, will be with you." (1 Chronicles 28:20).
2. The pattern is clear:
   1. God commissions the remnant of his people, is with his people, and stirs up a zeal in his people.
   2. God's people listen to God's word, are bold and work.

[[@Bible:hag 2:6]]Hag 2:6

1. Just as God was with his people when they came out of Egypt and eventually built the first temple in Jerusalem, so God is with his people now that they have come out of Babylon and are building the second temple.
2. When God's people look back at past promises and see that they have been fulfilled, it is easier to believe in future promises as well.

## Hag 2:7-10 - The Glory of the New Temple

[[@Bible:hag 2:7]]Hag 2:7

1. God shaking the heavens and the earth is a recurring description of the *"day of the Lord"*, which means that when the time comes, God will deal with the unrighteous, judge them and restore those who have faithfully followed God.
2. When Jesus returns to earth, it says, *"The stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the signs of the Son of Man will be seen in the sky, and all the peoples of the earth will groan when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with great power and glory."* (Matt 24:29-30).
3. Just before Jesus gives his disciples the task of going out to work, Jesus says, "*I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth."* (Matthew 28:18).

[[@Bible:hag 2:8]]Hag 2:8

1. This may refer to the battle of Armageddon, when God will gather all the nations and fight against them himself (Zech 14:1-4).

[[@Bible:hag 2:10]]Hag 2:10

1. Although the first temple was magnificently beautiful and filled with the glory of God (1 Kings 8:10-11), this second temple was honored with a personal visit from the Lord Jesus Himself (Luke 2)!
2. Today, the Temple in Jerusalem does not exist and Christians are divided on the question of whether a third temple will be built.
3. Paul asks a question of all who believe in Jesus, *"Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?"* (1 Corinthians 3:16).
   1. Just as the first temple was filled with the glory of God and the second temple had a personal encounter with Jesus, so God wants his church today to be filled with the Spirit of God and have a personal encounter with Jesus.

## Hag 2:11-20 - Blessing

[[@Bible:hag 2:11]]Hag 2:11

1. To be precise, this is December 18 in 520 BC.

[[@Bible:hag 2:12]]Hag 2:12

1. God urges the prophet to ask the priests what the Torah (the Law, the five books of Moses) says about ritual purity and impurity.
2. Even if the cloak that has touched holy flesh becomes holy, that which touches the cloak does not become holy.
3. A sick person does not get well just by being around healthy people, but a healthy person can get sick by being around sick people.
4. The point that God is trying to make is that even though the sacrifice that the priests give to God is holy, it becomes unclean if they do it in disobedience. It is not enough to simply be in Jerusalem performing sacrifices and rituals before God if one is living in disobedience.

[[@Bible:hag 2:20]]Hag 2:20

1. Even though the people had been disobedient when they did not build the temple before, God is now quick to bless as soon as they do what God says.
   1. Many Christians think that blessing means getting rich and having a nice house, but in Haggai we see that blessing means first and foremost being involved in building the temple of the Lord.
   2. When God's people neglect the temple of the Lord and instead build their own houses and acquire valuable wealth, they fail. But when God's people repent and prioritize God's temple first, then God will first bless the building of the temple but also bless their private houses.

## Hag 2:21-24 - The Lord's Signet Ring

[[@Bible:hag 2:21]]Hag 2:21

1. The first message that Haggai received from God on this day was addressed to all the people, but this second message is only addressed to Zerubbabel the governor.
2. That God will shake *"heaven and earth"* indicates that *everything* will change. God will execute a divine judgment on foreign kingdoms which will result in them losing their kingdoms and their armies.
3. Haggai's fellow prophet Zechariah follows the same line, describing a future kingdom of peace in which all armies are a thing of the past and God reigns as king (Zech 9:9-10).
4. When Jesus appears on the world stage, he uses Haggai language to inform us that he has been given *"all authority in heaven and on earth"* (Matthew 28:18) and that his Father has left judgment to him (John 5:22).
5. The author of Hebrews also quotes Haggai when he says that God shook *"the earth"* when he gave Moses the Sinai covenant, but that in the future God *"will shake not only the earth, but also the heavens"* (Heb 12:18-27)*.*
6. In other words, it can be concluded that the New Testament conveys a picture that the Messiah has come in Jesus and that the future kingdom of peace has begun to come, but that at the same time we are waiting for its completion.
7. John writes in his Revelation that the heavens will thunder and the earth will shake at the battle of Armageddon just before Jesus comes back to conquer the nations (Rev 16:16-18, 19:11-21).
8. The conclusion we can draw is that we have not yet seen the end of this prophecy.

[[@Bible:hag 2:23]]Hag 2:23

1. Here Haggai links to the concept of the "*Day of the Lord",* which fits well with the message that God has judged his people and brought them into captivity on the Day of the Lord and now goes on to reveal some information about the future Day of the Lord which will be a blessed period.
2. When God describes himself as *Yahweh of hosts* (the Lord of hosts), this shows that he wants to convey to Zerubbabel that he does have power behind these words.
3. A signet ring was used by kings and rich men and was usually a ring or necklace with a seal on it that could be used as a stamp to approve, for example, a law or a document. Today, a signet ring can be compared to a signature.
   1. It is remarkable that on the two occasions when *the Lord's signet ring* is mentioned in the Bible, it is first when Zerubbabel's grandfather Jeconiah loses that role and then when Zerubbabel receives that role. That there is a connection here must be beyond reasonable doubt.
   2. The lives of Yekonya and Serubbabel contrast with each other:
      1. Jeconiah loses his post as king of Judah, Zerubbabel becomes governor of Judah.
      2. The son of Jeconiah may not become the new king of Judah, but the descendant of Zerubbabel may become the Messiah.
      3. The temple is plundered in the time of Jeconiah, the temple is rebuilt in the time of Zerubbabel.
      4. Jeconiah is taken away into captivity, Zerubbabel returns from captivity.
      5. The people of Jeconiah are taken into captivity; Zerubbabel leads his people back from captivity.
      6. The curses of the Law (Deuteronomy 28:15-68) afflicted Zerubbabel's grandfather Jeconiah and the restoration of the Law afflicts Zerubbabel (Deuteronomy 30:1-14).
   3. The fact that Zerubbabel is not appointed king but only governor could be explained by the image of the signet ring. The fact that the signet ring is on *God's* finger indicates that God sees himself as king over Israel and that he gives his authority to a person who may act in his name as king. That God saw Himself as King over Israel and that He did not really want a human being to have that role can be seen from 1 Samuel 8. What title the deputy is given is thus of less importance since it is God who is the actual king after all.
   4. The fact that Zerubbabel is not appointed king may also indicate that even though the prophecy was primarily addressed to Zerubbabel, the message is ultimately about a future king; the Messiah.
4. Finally, in 515 BC, exactly 70 years after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and the carrying away of the Jewish people into captivity, the temple is rededicated and the Babylonian captivity is brought to a symbolic end (Ezra 6:15).
   1. Although the opening of the temple was a great celebration and a great day of joy (Ezra 6:16) for many, this temple could not be compared to the formerly magnificent Temple of Solomon (Ezra 3:12).

# Matthew

## Matt 4:1-11 - The Temptation of Jesus

[[@Bible:matt 4:1]]Matt 4:1

1. The Holy Spirit is a person and part of the Trinity.
   1. When the Son was born as a man, he renounced his divine attributes, with the result that he could do nothing in himself, in his own divinity (Phil 2:6-8). Thus, he became dependent on his Father to know what to do (John 5:19) and he became dependent on the Holy Spirit to do what the Father commanded (Acts 10:38).
      1. Jesus did this to fully share our human condition and to lead the way. We are Jesus' disciples when we imitate Jesus, listen to the Father and live in the power of the Holy Spirit.
2. Satan tempts Jesus with the same temptations that Eve fell to, the difference is that Jesus resists.
   1. Jesus was tempted, which shows that he is a man.
   2. Jesus resisted temptation and did not sin, which shows that he is God.

[[@Bible:matt 4:2]]Matt 4:2

1. The parallels to the Old Testament are many
   1. Moses was on Mount Sinai for 40 days without eating or drinking (Exodus 34:28).
   2. Elijah walked 40 days after a meal (1 Kings 19:8).
   3. Goliath mocked Israel for 40 days (1 Sam 17:16).

## Matthew 4:12-17 - Jesus Begins His Ministry

[[@Bible:matt 4:12]]Matt 4:12

1. As soon as Jesus heard that John the Baptist had been imprisoned, he began his ministry in Galilee.
   1. The enemies of the gospel can silence individual preachers, but they cannot silence the gospel as a whole. As soon as John was silenced, Jesus took over.
2. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, at that time there were a lot of people living in the fertile Galilee, up to 3 million people.
   1. Galilee was a border area where both Jews and Gentiles lived.

[[@Bible:matt 4:13]]Matt 4:13

1. Although Jesus was born in Bethlehem and later settled in Capernaum, we still say "Jesus of Nazareth". In Jesus' day, Nazareth was a despised city up north and Jesus has no problem being associated and identified with despised people.
   1. The reason Jesus left Nazareth was because they did not receive him (Luke 4:16-30).
   2. Even today, Jews call Christians "Nazarenes" (Acts 24:5).
2. Capernaum is the city that Matthew describes as "Jesus' own city" (Matthew 9:1) and is located on the shores of Lake Gennesaret.In Jesus' time, it was a relatively large city with about 30,000 inhabitants.
   1. Capernaum is actually called *Kfar Nahum*, which means *the village of Nahum,* and is probably named after the prophet Nahum.
   2. Capernaum was a suitable base for Jesus' activities because it had a mixed population, was a thoroughfare for trade, was relatively large and had a synagogue, a Roman military barracks and a customs house.
   3. Five of Jesus' disciples were from Capernaum; Simon Peter, Andrew, Matthew (Levi), John and James.
   4. Today, only the ruins of Capernaum remain and it is a typical destination for Christian pilgrims.
      1. Among the ruins are the remains of a 3rd century synagogue, said to have been built on top of the synagogue that existed in Jesus' time.
      2. The Catholic Church has also built a basilica above what is believed to be Peter's house.

[[@Bible:matt 4:14]]Matt 4:14

1. Matthew has a habit of basing everything Jesus does in the Old Testament and this is a reference to Isaiah 9:1-7.
2. One of the reasons Jesus moved to Capernaum was so that "the Gentiles would see a light in the darkness", in other words, that the whole world, not just the Jewish people, would hear about salvation.
3. Just as Jesus moved into a "dark" and "pagan" area, so we Christians today are called to be a "light" in a dark world. Wherever there is darkness, we Christians should go there to spread the light of Jesus.

[[@Bible:matt 4:17]]Matt 4:17

1. Jesus proclaims the same message as John the Baptist, which sends a clear signal to King Herod: "you can stop a preacher of the gospel, but you cannot stop the gospel!"
   1. Although John and Jesus proclaim the same thing, there is a difference in that John announced that the Messiah will come soon, while Jesus IS the Messiah.
2. The first word in the Gospel is "converted". This is the first word that John the Baptist, Jesus and the disciples proclaimed.
   1. Peter's first exhortation to the newly saved after his first sermon is that they need to *repent* (Acts 2:38).
   2. To repent means to "change direction in life", to "turn around". If one has previously walked a path that has led to destruction, one needs to turn around and go to God instead.
      1. If you are in Stockholm and want to go to Gothenburg, you first need to leave Stockholm to go to Gothenburg. In this parable, turning around means first leaving the place you are in and then going to the new place.
         1. Just as you can't enter the kingdom of God without first repenting, you can't come to Gothenburg unless you first leave Stockholm.
3. In the other Gospels it says "the kingdom of God" instead of "the kingdom of heaven" (Mark 1:15). This is because a pious Jew avoided mentioning the word "God" and said instead the place where he lived, i.e. "heaven".
   1. Matthew was a Jew who wrote his gospel to Jews and therefore he writes "the kingdom of heaven" instead of "the kingdom of God", which is the same thing.
   2. This language usage is still alive in our Swedish language today. We talk about going to *heaven* when we die, but what we really mean is not the blue and cloudy atmosphere, but that we go to *God* when we die.

## Matthew 4:18-22 - Jesus Calls the First Disciples

[[@Bible:matt 4:18]]Matt 4:18

1. This was not the first time Peter, Andrew, James and John met Jesus, but it was the first time Jesus called them to leave their work and follow him.
2. Jesus could have talked to them about this when they met in the synagogue, but he deliberately chooses to call them when they are in the middle of their work, a pattern not uncommon when God calls his servants.
   1. David was called when he was shepherding his sheep.
   2. Moses was herding his sheep when God was in the burning bush.
   3. Matthew was called while collecting money as a customs official.
   4. It certainly seems that God likes responsible workers.
3. These fishermen now became "disciples" of Jesus, which was not an uncommon system of learning in those days.
   1. Those who wanted to become rabbis often did so by first following a rabbi to learn. Instead of just sitting in a schoolroom, they got to see, learn and practice.
   2. However, there is a difference; the one who wanted to become a rabbi sought out a rabbi himself to become a disciple, but Jesus did the opposite; he chose his disciples.
      1. It is not we who choose God, but it is God who calls us and we answer either yes or no.

[[@Bible:matt 4:20]]Matt 4:20

1. God likes it when we follow Him 100%!
2. Many of the disciples left both their jobs and their fathers when they became disciples of Jesus.
   1. The disciples were probably teenagers (apart from Peter) when Jesus called them.
      1. A first argument for the disciples being teenagers is that it is believed that the apostle John wrote his gospel as late as 80-100 AD, which means that he could not have been that old when he became a disciple.
      2. A second argument for believing that the disciples were teenagers was that only Jesus and Peter pay the temple tax in Matthew 17:24-27. According to Exodus 30:14, only men over the age of 20 would pay this tax.
      3. A third argument for the disciples being young was that it seems that only Peter was married (Matt 8:14) and normally people would get married at about 18 years of age.
3. Does everyone who wants to be a disciple of Jesus have to leave everything, quit their job and move away from home?
   1. I believe that God calls some people to just that. I personally have left everything to follow Jesus. I have left my former life, job, etc., to devote myself full time to working for Jesus.
   2. I don't believe that God calls everyone to this. There are many who serve God much better than me through their normal job. However, I am convinced that everyone needs to leave something in order to follow Jesus.

## Matthew 4:23-25 - Jesus Preaches in Galilee

[[@Bible:matt 4:23]]Matt 4:23

1. There is a certain difference between "teaching" and "preaching". They are the same message but delivered in different ways. "Teaching" is usually aimed at those who are already believers, while a "sermon" is more about sharing the gospel with those who have not yet heard.
   1. In Jesus' day, all men could teach in the synagogue, a system used by both Jesus and Paul (Acts 19:8).
   2. The word "preach" comes from the Greek word "keryx" which means "herald". A herald was a person who proclaimed a "message directly from the king".
2. In paradise before the fall, there were no diseases, but because of the fall of mankind, diseases have entered our world. It is not one person's personal sin that creates disease, but disease has afflicted humanity as a whole because of sin.
   1. Not only does Jesus forgive us our sins, he also restores us to the way we were before the fall.
3. Even today, the church is called to do these three:
   1. Preach the kingdom of God in society.
   2. Teaching in the church.
   3. Pray for the sick.

[[@Bible:matt 4:25]]Matt 4:25

1. Jesus did not go only to the Jewish people. Here we see that the Gentiles respond strongly to Jesus' miracles and teachings.
   1. Probably they became curious about Jesus because of all the miracles, which in turn gave Jesus an opportunity to teach the people. But many eventually left Jesus.
      1. Certainly one would wish that more miracles would happen in the Church so that many curious seekers would come. But if you only follow Jesus because he is cool and because you have seen a miracle, you will soon leave him.
      2. Jesus doesn't just want to entertain us, he also wants to teach us, and Jesus' teaching on repentance and the like can be extremely challenging and difficult to digest.

## Matt 5:38-41 - Making Peace

[[@Bible:matt 5:38]]Matt 5:38

1. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus compares the Old Covenant approach with the New Covenant approach when he repeatedly contrasts the Old Testament "you have heard that it is said" with the New Testament "I tell you".
2. Anyone who has been to the place where Jesus preached his Sermon on the Mount is struck by the fact that it is not remotely a "mountain" as Matthew writes (Matthew 5:1), but rather a "plain" as Luke writes (Luke 6:17). This is because Matthew makes a connection between what Jesus says in his Sermon on the Mount with the law given to Moses when Israel made a covenant with God on Mount Sinai. What Moses' law at Mount Sinai is for Israel, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is for the kingdom of God.
   1. It can sometimes be easy for Christians to read about all the wars in the Old Testament and take that as a pledge that we too should fight, but then they miss the fact that according to Hebrews we live in a "new covenant" that is "better" than the old one (Heb 8:6-8). We Christians are not to remain in the old covenant, but rather allow the Holy Spirit to spread the kingdom of God in the world so that it may be on earth as it is in heaven.
3. Since the Old Testament Bible words Jesus contrasts in his Sermon on the Mount come from the Law of Moses, which was part of the Jewish legal system, Jesus' commandments apply in the New Covenant just as the Law of Moses applied in the Old Covenant. Jesus' call to refrain from retaliation and instead turn the other cheek is thus more than just a private religious stance, it is a general principle for all who belong to the Kingdom of God.
4. IF Jesus had wanted us to use violence in self-defense against an unjust attack, he would have shown it in Gethsemane when he was attacked by *"a mob with swords and stakes"* even though he had done no harm. When one of his disciples drew his sword to defend Jesus against the attackers, Jesus told him: *"Put your sword in its sheath! For everyone who draws a sword will be put to death by the sword. Or do you mean that I cannot ask my Father that he now sends to my service more than twelve legions of angels?"* (Matt 26:47-53). So Jesus could well have defended himself, but refrained, partly because his death was part of God's plan, but also to show us an example of how we should respond to those who attack us for our faith in Jesus.
5. Another example of when the disciples wanted to resort to violence is found on the road to Jerusalem. When Jesus is not received by the Samaritans, James and John want to take revenge by destroying them with "fire from heaven" (Luke 9:53-55). Jesus rebukes his angry disciples and then moves on. Revenge and violence are simply not for us Christians who follow in Jesus' footsteps.
6. In the expression *"an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot"* (Exodus 21:24), Jesus refers to the Law of Moses, where there was room for retribution for certain crimes. But this law existed primarily to *limit the* desire for vengeance so as not to retaliate too much.
   1. But the problem with "revenge" is that it destroys both the one who receives the punishment and the one who carries it out. By taking revenge, you ironically become the very thing you want to punish someone else for.

[[@Bible:matt 5:39]]Matt 5:39

1. I find it remarkable that Jesus says: *"if anyone strikes you on the* ***right*** *cheek, turn the other also to him"*. Since the vast majority of people are right-handed, they are normally struck on the left cheek, so why does Jesus specifically mention the right?
   1. In Jesus' time, it was not uncommon to show authority and superiority by hitting someone with the back of the hand. A Roman might strike a Jew in this way, a master his slave, a husband his wife, i.e. a reverse echo of Paul's vision: *'Here is not Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. You are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Gal 3:28).
   2. But if the person being beaten then responds by turning up their left cheek, it shows that they refuse to accept the oppression they are subjected to and want to be treated as an equal. The batterer is then faced with a dilemma; either slap an equal on the left cheek or stop slapping and thus indirectly show that he or she no longer has any authority. By turning the other cheek, we show that violence cannot defeat those who no longer fear *"those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul"* (Matthew 10:28).
   3. By not fighting back, we disarm our opponent and stop the spiral of violence and revenge that has been going on since time immemorial. The only way to stop the violence is for someone to choose not to fight back and instead offer a path to reconciliation. This is exactly what Jesus did on the cross, thus winning a victory over the devil. When we understand that death cannot separate us from Christ and are no longer afraid to die (Rom 8:35-39), then the perpetrators of violence no longer have any power over us (John 14:30).
2. What Jesus teaches in this part of the Sermon on the Mount I call "pacifism".
   1. The word "pacifist" is composed of the two Latin words "pax" and "facere", and means "peacemaker". In the Latin translation of the Bible, the word appears in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount: *"Blessed are the peacemakers [pacifici], who shall be called children of God."* (Matthew 5:9). To be a Christian pacifist is more than just *renouncing violence*, it is also actively *creating peace*.
   2. Christian pacifism was the widely accepted Christian position for the first 300 years and has since been represented among revivalist groups such as Franciscans, Waldenses, Anabaptists, Quakers and the original Pentecostals.
   3. My definition of a Christian pacifist is: a person who follows in the footsteps of Jesus (1Pet 2:21) by refraining from retaliation (Rom 12:18-19) or repaying evil with evil (Rom 12:17) and instead defeats evil with good (Rom 12:21) by loving his enemy (Matt 5:44) and making peace (Matt 5:9) by offering reconciliation, bringing people together and working against unjust living conditions and power structures (Gal 3:26-29).

[[@Bible:matt 5:40]]Matt 5:40

1. By giving your opponent all your clothes, a situation will arise where you are standing naked next to a person who has all your clothes in his hand, which in a Middle Eastern culture would mean great shame for the person who caused you this. By stripping you naked you strip your opponent of his power over you. Anyone who sees this will regard your opponent as an unjust aggressor. So by not just being passive, you have exposed the unjust behaviour of the one who is trying to rape you and offered him an opportunity to realise his stupidity and give you back your clothes.

[[@Bible:matt 5:41]]Matt 5:41

1. A Roman soldier was allowed by Roman law to require a Jewish man to carry his equipment for one mile, but no more. Anyone could be forced to perform tasks for the Romans, as we see, for example, when Simon of Cyrene is forced to carry Jesus' cross (Mark 15:21). By not only accepting the soldier's demands but going a mile further, the Roman soldier's unjust demands are exposed and he is forced to stop his aggression or else commit a Roman law-breaking act. The Roman soldier must now unexpectedly appeal to the Jewish man to carry his own equipment. Thus the pacifist has gained the initiative and offered the soldier a chance for reconciliation.

## Matthew 11:1-6 - John the Baptist in Prison

[[@Bible:matt 11:2]]Matt 11:2

1. Matthew tells us in chapter 14 that John the Baptist was imprisoned because he criticized King Herod Antipas for his sinful behavior. Herod had divorced his wife to marry his brother's wife Herodias, which greatly angered Herod's first wife's father, who attacked and defeated Herod in battle. Herod eventually committed suicide after first being accused of treason by his brother and exiled to the Roman province of Gaul.
   1. We don't know exactly how long John was in prison before he was executed, but scholars speculate anywhere from a few weeks to a full year. Sitting that long in a Middle Eastern prison 2,000 years ago must have undeniably caused John the Baptist enormous suffering.
   2. Like John the Baptist, we Christians today should also criticize the immorality and unrighteousness of political power and governance.
2. If Jesus is really who he says he is and if the kingdom of God has really come, why doesn't Jesus help his cousin John the Baptist who is in prison? These are important existential questions that I am sure we have all asked God at some point in our lives. Why don't we see more of God? Why doesn't Jesus cure all diseases? Why doesn't Jesus help me in my suffering?
3. There is a possibility that John did not really need the answers to the question he sent with his disciples, but that he asked the question for the sake of the disciples. Now that John was in prison and about to die, he wanted his disciples to start joining Jesus instead (John 3:30).

[[@Bible:matt 11:3]]Matt 11:3

1. Although John was the Elijah who would precede the Messiah (Matthew 11:14) and he himself has stated that Jesus is the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29), John suddenly seems to start doubting Jesus.
2. Probably John began to think and ponder very much while in prison; "If I am the forerunner of the Messiah and Jesus is the Messiah, why am I in prison?" Shouldn't the kingdom of God begin to be established now that the Messiah has finally come?
3. There were many Jews in Jesus' day who expected that when the Messiah came, he would forcibly drive out the occupying Romans, re-establish Israel as a kingdom, and take the throne as Israel's new king (John 6:14-15, Acts 1:6). Perhaps John the Baptist also expected something similar from Jesus and was thus disappointed when he was in prison and Jesus still had not either driven out the Romans, begun to restore Israel as a nation again, or even rescued John from prison.
4. Perhaps John the Baptist began to doubt his own role as the Messiah's forerunner as he began to doubt whether Jesus was really the Messiah. If Jesus was not the Messiah, then John the Baptist was a false prophet.
5. Perhaps John was unhappy to hear how much good Jesus was doing in other places while he himself was suffering in prison.
   1. I think many Christians today recognize these sentiments. You hear about how much God is doing in other countries; healings, miracles, huge revivals, etc. But here at home nothing happens!?
   2. Jesus' response to John therefore becomes an assurance that God is indeed doing quite a lot, even if it doesn't look exactly as John wished.

[[@Bible:matt 11:4-5]]Matt 11:4-5

1. Jesus doesn't help John out of prison, but he does help him with the doubts that John had begun to have. Jesus is indeed the Messiah and the kingdom of God has indeed come. The fact that John is still allowed to continue suffering does not mean that John is a false prophet. We may not always get answers to the dilemma of suffering, but we should still continue to believe in Jesus.
   1. In some ways, John the Baptist's situation is very similar to what Daniel's friends experienced when they were thrown into the fiery furnace (Dan 3). They refused to bow to anyone but God, whether God would save them or not. God saved Daniel's friends but not John the Baptist. The important thing is to believe in God whether you are saved or not.
2. Perhaps John the Baptist expected Jesus to start a great political change that would result in a free Israel with Jesus as king. When Jesus didn't do all this, John was probably disappointed, especially since he himself was in prison, and thus began to doubt whether Jesus was really the Messiah. But it wasn't Jesus who was at fault, it was John's expectations that were at fault. Instead of starting a political change, Jesus went around facing the problems of ordinary people. Even though all these miracles were amazing, they were still performed among poor, sick and outcast people. The great social transformation that many wanted to see failed to happen.
   1. But Jesus' response to John shows that the kingdom of God is spread to these very people: the little ones, the sick, the poor, the outcasts (Matt 11:25, Matt 25:31-46).
   2. God's kingdom may look very small and petty at first, but as it grows, it gets bigger and bigger, and soon God's kingdom has spread to the whole world (Matthew 13:31-32).
   3. Jesus could have gone to the finer quarters of Jerusalem and worked miracles among the religious and political leaders. Then he would surely have been accepted as their Messiah and won success and been able to re-establish Israel as a political nation. But Jesus did not spread the kingdom of God in this way, instead he went to the villages and sought out individuals, he healed the poor sick and he criticised the religious and political leadership.
      1. In the same way, today we should also reach out to the poor, the sick and the outcasts of society and preach and practice the gospel to them. Helping a lonely and insignificant person who is struggling is not petty, it is the very essence of the Kingdom of God.
3. When Jesus answers John in this way, John understands that the Messiah and the kingdom of God are indeed here. For John knows his Bible and knows that Isaiah 35:5-6 says: "*5 Then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. 6 The lame will leap like a deer, the tongue of the mute will shout. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, streams in the heath.* "
   1. John the Baptist knew what was in the Bible and when Jesus tells him, he knows immediately what it is all about. In the same way, we today should learn the Bible and know what it says.

[[@Bible:matt 11:6]]Matt 11:6

1. Many of those who heard Jesus wanted him to liberate Israel and drive out the Romans, and many of them found it hard to accept that Jesus had no intention of doing so.
   1. When Jesus rides into Jerusalem, the people shout "Hosanna!" and hail Jesus as a king of the people, but when they eventually realize that he hasn't come to drive out the Romans at all, they instead shout "Crucify him!" (Mark 11:1-11, Mark 15:12-13).
2. Jesus means that those who chose to change their preconceived notions about Jesus and accept what Jesus said would be "blessed".
   1. The longer one lives a life with God, the more the Holy Spirit points out that one needs to change, repent and become more like Jesus. This is a natural part of the Christian life and is usually referred to as "sanctification", i.e. "making oneself holy".
3. Those who could not change their minds would rather see a new Israel than accept Jesus as the Messiah.
   1. Sometimes, unfortunately, you may have grown up with a view that you think is "Christian", but which doesn't really fit with the Bible. In such cases, it is important to humbly take the bull by the horns and consider whether that view needs to be re-evaluated, rather than, like Paul, "kicking at the cape" (Acts 26:14).

## Matt 13:31-35 - The Mustard Seed and the Leaven

[[@Bible:matt 13:31]]Matt 13:31

1. In interpreting this text, we must take a humble and respectful attitude because, unlike many other parables, Jesus never actually explained these two. But in order to make the best interpretation possible, it is important to understand what the original listeners heard when they listened to Jesus. In these parables, Jesus uses a number of terms that had a certain connotation for the Jews, and it is clear in three different places that Matthew is addressing Jews in this text:
   1. In this text, it appears in three places that Matthew's readers were Jews. Among the Jews at the time of Jesus there was great expectation that the Messiah would soon come and establish the kingdom of God on earth. Matthew is trying to show his Jewish readers that the kingdom of God, instead of coming immediately all at once, "grows" like leaven in a dough or like a mustard seed that becomes a tree.
   2. A second indication of Matthew's Jewish audience is that Matthew chooses to write "the kingdom of heaven" instead of "the kingdom of God," because Jews did not pronounce God's name.
   3. A third hint that Matthew was writing for a Jewish audience is the fact that Matthew strangely writes that the "garden plant" mustard seed is planted in a "field". Surely a garden plant should be planted in a garden, not in a field. According to Donald A Hagner, it was a rabbinic teaching that Jews were not allowed to plant mustard seed in their garden and thus had to plant it out in the field if they wanted a mustard tree. Luke's Gospel, which was probably written primarily to Gentiles, uses the word "garden" instead of the word "field" in its text on the same parable, and Mark's Gospel, which was probably written to both Jews and Gentiles, writes neither.
   4. The concept of "field" can also symbolize that God's kingdom will not grow large in God's "garden"; Israel, but instead will grow large among the Gentiles, outside the garden. The symbolism fits well with Matthew's otherwise strong emphasis on the kingdom of God spreading among all peoples, not just among the Jews. It is probably safe to assume that the Jewish audience who heard the parable and those who later read Matthew's Gospel reacted strongly to the fact that the kingdom of God was planted out in the field.

[[@Bible:matt 13:32]]Matt 13:32

1. The mustard seed was the smallest visible seed in Palestine at the time and had also become a proverb for smallness. It is therefore not very far-fetched for Jesus to use the mustard seed to illustrate the small beginnings of the kingdom of heaven. Today, thanks to science, we are well aware that the mustard seed is not the smallest of all seeds, but it was not Jesus' purpose to describe an accurate scientific truth. Jesus wanted to highlight the exaggerated contrast in order to create a reaction in the audience. Similarly, the parable of the birds nesting in the tree is not an entirely accurate scientific description because birds nest in the spring and the mustard seed has not yet grown that large.
2. Jesus' talk about the birds of the air nesting among the branches is astonishingly similar to the vision described by the prophet Daniel in his fourth chapter, where the birds represent pagans. Since Jesus, Matthew and the Jewish audience and readers were all well aware of Daniel's vision and knew that the birds in that vision symbolized Gentiles from all nations, it is not a stretch to think that they all understood that it was Gentiles who will be able to nest in the kingdom of God. Add to that the fact that the mustard seed was planted outside the "garden" and it is hard not to conclude that the kingdom of God will be planted outside of Israel and grow larger there than it was in Israel. It is also consistent with the historical fact that the church/kingdom of God began on a very small scale and later grew enormously outside Israel proper and soon among all the peoples of the earth. My interpretation is that both of these parables symbolize the expansion of the church.

[[@Bible:matt 13:33]]Matt 13:33

1. If "field" was a controversial image for the Jews in verse 31, the word "leaven" was also a loaded and controversial word. Leaven often symbolized evil in the Old Testament and was also not to be used during the celebration of Passover. Even in the New Testament, leaven is used as a symbol of something negative when Jesus warns against the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees.
2. It is not a small amount of dough that Jesus is describing, for it makes 50 kg of bread, which is enough for a feast. So again we see that Jesus starts with something vanishingly small to describe the *small beginnings of* the kingdom of God but takes on large measures to describe the *results of the* kingdom of God. This is one of the "secrets of the kingdom of heaven" that non-Christians do not understand. At first, the kingdom of God may be considered insignificant and not worth noticing, but in time it will grow stronger and bigger than anyone could have imagined.
3. If the parable of the mustard seed describes the great growth of God's kingdom, the parable of the leaven also describes the transforming power of God's kingdom. The dough not only grows larger, it becomes fully infused with leaven. Not only will the kingdom of God grow large, but, like the leaven that permeates the whole dough, it will also permeate the whole of society.
4. Now that 2000 years have passed since Jesus told these parables, one must ask if the passage of time has confirmed Jesus' words? My simple conclusion is that the kingdom of God has grown immensely from a collection of fishermen from the Galilean countryside to the largest religion the world has ever seen with over 2 billion believers from virtually every nation in the world. So in terms of size and numbers, Jesus' parables match up very well with what the world looks like today, although of course there is still much to be done. Missionary organisations around the world are working to bring the gospel to all the peoples of the world once and for all.
   1. Has the kingdom of God permeated society? It is clear that the UN's "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" has been influenced by the Ten Commandments. In most European countries there are political parties with a Christian basis. Churches and missionary organisations are active not only in spreading the message of salvation but also in promoting human rights, agricultural reform and better health care worldwide.
   2. What are the implications of these parables for us today? Well, we too must work for the spread of God's kingdom even if we do not see immediate results and even if we have to suffer for God's kingdom.

# Mark

## Mark 1:1 - Jesus' name and title

[[@Bible:mark 1:1]]Mark 1:1

1. ***The Gospel*** is a Greek word that means "*good news"*. In English, we have become so used to the Greek word that there is a risk that we lose its meaning, namely that Jesus means "good news".
   1. A few hundred years earlier, Isaiah had prophesied of a future when a messenger would call out *"good news"* of *"salvation"* and that *"God is king"* (Isa 52:7).
   2. The good news for the Jewish people who heard Jesus live was that their long-awaited *"Messiah"* was finally here and that he now offers forgiveness for sins.
   3. This offer is open and freely available even today.
2. ***Jesus*** is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name Joshua, Yeshua or Yehoshuah, and is a contraction of the two Hebrew words "yeho", which is a word that comes from "YHWH" / "Yahweh", and "shua" which means "salvation" or "save us!". So all in all, Jesus' name becomes "God saves us" or "God the saviour", which is very consistent with Jesus being God who became man to save us.
   1. In biblical times, a person's name was more than just a nickname; it also represented the person's purpose, character and life.
   2. The fact that Jesus was given the name "Jesus" gives us a signal that he will be a saviour who, like Joshua, will open up the holy land to God's people.
   3. When something significant happened in life, it was not uncommon for a person to get a new name.
      1. When Simon the disciple becomes the leader of the disciples, Jesus gives him a new name: "Peter", which means "rock" (Mk 3:16).
      2. In the context of Jacob becoming the father of a new nation, God gives him a new name: "Israel", which roughly means "God fights" (Genesis 32:28).
3. ***Christ*** is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew "Messiah" and means "the anointed one".
   1. In biblical times, a new king or high priest was anointed with oil when he was installed, similar to the way we crown someone king today (2 Sam 5:3).
      1. Jesus is "the anointed one" both in terms of being king and being high priest.
   2. The Jewish people had long waited for the "anointed one" to come and "save" their people (Dan 9:25).
4. ***The Son of God*** has many different meanings:
   1. "Son of God" was a title applied to kings of David's line (2 Sam 7:14).
   2. In his humanity, Jesus is the "Son of David", but in his divinity he is the "Lord of David" (Mk 12:35-37).
   3. Within the Trinity, Jesus is the person called "the Son".
   4. From our human point of view, Jesus is the "Son of God", but from Jesus' point of view, he is a "Son of Man" because he is the member of the Trinity who was born as a human being.
   5. The demons knew from the beginning that Jesus is the Son of God (Mk 3:11), but for humans it requires the Father to reveal it in the human heart (Mt 16:16-17).
   6. According to Isaiah, the Messiah would be a *"son"* whose name is *"Mighty God"* (Isaiah 9:6).

## Mark 1:2-3 - Isaiah's prophecy

[[@Bible:mark 1:2]]Mark 1:2

1. Only the end of this quote is from the prophet Isaiah, the rest is from the prophet Malachi.
   1. In biblical times, the writings of several prophets could be collected in a single large scroll, usually named after the first prophet in the scroll. Therefore, it is not strange that Mark writes that it is *"written in the prophet Isaiah"*. The same phenomenon is found in Mt 27:9.
2. ***Prophet*** is a Greek word which in Hebrew is "nabi" and in English means "preacher"; i.e. a person who speaks for someone else.
   1. An example of an early "nabi" is Aaron, who was Moses' nabi when he pleaded Moses' case before Pharaoh (Exodus 7:1).
   2. A prophet is a mediator between God and God's people.
      1. A prophet of God speaks for God before his people (Jer 26:16-18).
      2. A prophet can also speak for the people before God (Amos 7:2-3).
   3. According to Paul, hearing God's voice and communicating God's word is a gift from God that we should strive for because it builds up the church (1 Corinthians 14:1-5).
3. ***My messenger*** is an expression that Mark borrows from the prophet Malachi.
   1. Malachi prophesied that a messenger would prepare the Jewish people for the coming of Yahweh (Mal 3:1). The messenger John the Baptist is given the great honor of preparing and paving the way for Yahweh's soon coming to earth.

[[@Bible:mark 1:3]]Mark 1:3

1. ***Path road***
   1. In biblical times, paved highways did not exist as they do today. So when a king came to visit, it was not uncommon for the roads to be prepared, cleaned and made ready so that the king could travel smoothly.
2. ***For the Lord*** is one of the clearest proofs that Jesus is God:
   1. Where it says "the Lord" in English, it says "kyrios" in the basic Greek text.
   2. Kyrios can mainly refer to 4 different things; "yhwh/Yahweh (=God), "an owner", "a boss" and "lord (as in "sir" in English)".
   3. In biblical times, God's name was not usually pronounced "yhwh". When it said yhwh in Scripture, it read "Adonai" instead. Adonaj is Hebrew and means "lord" in the same way that "kyrios" means "lord" in Greek.
   4. To know which "lord" Mark is referring to, we have to look at the text he quotes. Mark quotes Isaiah 40:3 and where it says "Lord" in English and "kyrios" in Greek it says *"yhwh"* in Hebrew. So the "lord" John is supposed to be paving the way for is none other than Yahweh, God himself!

## Mark 1:4-8 - John the Baptist

[[@Bible:mark 1:4]]Mark 1:4

1. ***In the desert*** is another connection to the prophet Isaiah who prophesied that *"a voice cries out in the desert"* (Isa 40:3).
2. The word *"proclaim"* comes from the Greek word "kerysson" and has the meaning "to proclaim a message".
   1. For example, a king of the time might send a herald to "announce" that taxes would be raised.
   2. John is sent by God to "proclaim" that there is forgiveness of sins for those who repent and are baptized.
   3. The word "baptize" comes from the Greek word "baptizo" and means "to lower" or "to enclose".
   4. Baptism by immersion in water was not new to the Jewish people.
      1. At this time there were also "mikveh" (purification baths) where one could dip oneself for various reasons and thus ritually purify oneself before entering the temple, for example.
      2. Immersion in a mikveh was also part of the procedure required for a gentile to become part of the Jewish people.
   5. What is new in John's teaching is that he now wants the *Jewish* people to be baptized and that this should happen in the context of their return to God.
   6. Baptism thus became the means John used to prepare the Jewish people for the coming of the Messiah.
3. What gives forgiveness of sins is Jesus' death on the cross (Mt 26:28).
   1. Anyone who turns to God and demonstrates it by being baptized receives the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38).

[[@Bible:mark 1:5]]Mark 1:5

1. All Judea confessed her sins and was baptized
   1. Those who were baptized openly confessed that they had not been able to keep their part of the covenant with God. Just as it is only the sick who need doctors, it is only sinners who need forgiveness (Mk 2:11).
   2. The open confession of sin is a recurring theme in the New Testament (Acts 19:18, James 5:16).

[[@Bible:mark 1:6]]Mark 1:6

1. By this dress he resembles Elijah (2 Kings 1:8).
2. John's locust diet was not uncommon among the desert population at this time, but only the poorest ate locusts. In this way, John's lifestyle shows that he identifies with the people he lives next door to, on the one hand, and the people who are poor, on the other.

[[@Bible:mark 1:7]Mark 1:7

1. There were certainly people around John who speculated that John might not be the long-awaited Messiah, but John is clear that he is not.
2. Although John became a successful prophet, he was totally humble before the greatness of Jesus and he was not afraid to openly confess that in comparison with Jesus he is only a slave.

[[@Bible:mark 1:8]Mark 1:8

1. This is a promise that goes back to several Old Testament prophets (Isaiah 44:3, Ezekiel 36:26-27, Joel 2:28-29) and is fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4).
2. If baptism in water is a sign of *repentance*, baptism in the Holy Spirit is the *power* given to the believer to bear witness to Jesus (Acts 1:8).
3. Every Christian can be baptized in the Holy Spirit and receive the power of the Spirit.
   1. Today, in some contexts, there may be a rush for intercession to be baptized in the Holy Spirit in order to have an *experience*. This is not the purpose of the power of the Spirit and such intercession risks being a great disappointment. But if one goes out and witnesses to Jesus and at the same time asks for the *power of* the Holy Spirit, he will receive it (Acts 4:8).

## Mark 1:9-11 - Jesus is baptized

[[@Bible:mark 1:9]]Mark 1:9

1. Although Jesus was born in Bethlehem, he had grown up in Nazareth, a despised city in the north (John 1:46). But even though the city was disliked, Jesus chose to be identified with it.
   1. Even today we call Jesus "Jesus of Nazareth", not "Jesus of Bethlehem" or "Jesus of Capernaum".
   2. Even today, many Christians in the Middle East are called "Nazarenes".
2. Jesus was not baptized as a sign of his repentance, but to fulfill all righteousness (Mt 3:15).
   1. Jesus was like the people when he was baptized, like everyone else, but he was unlike the people in that he did not confess his sins, because he had no sins (1 John 3:5).

[[@Bible:mark 1:10]]Mark 1:10

1. Here we see the whole Trinity represented at the same time.
   1. The Father speaks from heaven.
   2. The Son identifies with sinful people.
   3. The Holy Spirit comes upon the Son like a dove.
2. Isaiah had prayed to God a few hundred years earlier that he would tear apart the heavens and come down to earth and set everything right (Isaiah 64:1). Now this is precisely what is happening as God magnificently shows that Isaiah's prayer has been answered in Jesus.
3. In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit came upon the person whom God called to a special mission (Judges 3:10). God's Spirit then empowered the person so that he could complete the assignment. In the same way, Jesus is now empowered to complete his mission as the Messiah.

## Mark 1:12-13 - Jesus is tempted

[[@Bible:mark 1:12]]Mark 1:12

1. When the Son was born a man, he took on the *form of* a *"servant when he became a man"* (Phil 2:6-8), thus making himself voluntarily dependent on his Father for knowledge of what he should do (John 5:19) and dependent on the Holy Spirit to do what the Father commanded (Acts 10:38).
   1. Jesus did this to fully share our human condition and to lead the way. We are Jesus' disciples when we imitate Jesus, listen to the Father and live in the power of the Holy Spirit.

[[@Bible:mark 1:13]]Mark 1:13

1. The parallels to the Old Testament are many:
   1. Moses was on Mount Sinai for 40 days without eating or drinking (Exodus 34:28).
   2. Elijah walked 40 days after a meal (1 Kings 19:8).
   3. Goliath mocked Israel for 40 days (1 Sam 17:16).
2. Satan tempts Jesus with the same temptations that Eve fell to, the difference is that Jesus resists.
   1. Jesus was tempted, which shows that he is a man.
   2. Jesus resisted temptation and did not sin, which shows that he is God.

## Mark 1:14-20 - Jesus' first disciples

[[@Bible:mark 1:14]]Mark 1:14

1. This was the signal Jesus had been waiting for; as soon as John was imprisoned, Jesus knew it was his turn.
   1. Jesus sent a clear signal that you can imprison God's servants but you cannot stop God's message.
2. Jesus preaches the same message as John. The only difference is that John preached *about the* Messiah, while Jesus *is the* Messiah.

[[@Bible:mark 1:15]]Mark 1:15

1. *"Converted"* is the first word of the Gospel, the good news.
   1. John the Baptist preached repentance (Mk 1:4).
   2. Jesus preached repentance (Mk 1:15).
   3. The disciples preached repentance (Acts 2:38).
2. To repent means to stop putting oneself at the centre and to put God at the centre.
3. Just as one cannot travel to a place without first leaving that place, so one cannot enter the kingdom of God without first repenting.
   1. If you choose to enter the kingdom of God, you have automatically repented.
4. Anyone who turns away from a life without God and chooses instead to believe in the good news of Jesus may enter the kingdom of God.

[[@Bible:mark 1:16]]Mark 1:16

1. It was not uncommon for a rabbi to have disciples in Jesus' time. The difference here is that it is Jesus who chooses his disciples instead of the other way around which was the normal procedure.
2. The disciples were fishermen, not scribes.
   1. Jesus could have chosen religious specialists from Jerusalem, but instead he chooses young workers from Galilee.
3. The disciples left their father and their jobs, giving a clear signal of what one might have to be prepared to give up in order to follow Jesus.
   1. Not all disciples followed Jesus in this way, but those who would become Jesus' 12 apostles did.

## Mark 1:21-28 - Jesus in the synagogue of Capernaum

[[@Bible:mark 1:21]]Mark 1:21

1. **Capernaum** is actually called *Kfar Nahum*, which means *the village of Nahum,* and is probably named after the prophet Nahum.
2. Capernaum was a suitable base for Jesus' ministry because it had a mixed population, was a fairly large city and had a synagogue.
3. Today, only the ruins of Capernaum remain and it is a typical destination for Christian pilgrims.
   1. Among the ruins are the remains of a 3rd century synagogue, said to have been built on top of the synagogue that existed in Jesus' time.
   2. The Catholic Church has built a basilica above what is believed to be Peter's house.
4. Like all Jews, Jesus celebrated the Sabbath.
   1. The Sabbath starts at nightfall on Friday evening and lasts for 24 hours.
   2. Remembering to keep the Sabbath is part of God's Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8-11).
      1. Just as God worked to create the earth in six days and rested on the seventh, so man is supposed to work six days and then rest on the seventh.
5. ***The synagogue*** was a natural gathering place for community activities.
   1. On the Shabbat, the Jewish people gathered in their synagogue to hear the Scriptures.
   2. In Jesus' day, it also included the opportunity for just about anyone to teach Scripture, an opportunity that both Jesus and Paul used to teach about the kingdom of God.

[[@Bible:mark 1:23]]Mark 1:23

1. This man was possessed by an unclean spirit, a demon. The demon knew very well who Jesus was; the Holy One of God.
   1. Jesus did not want the demon to confess who Jesus was, but instead commands him to be quiet and get out of the man.
2. In Jesus' day, it was not uncommon to believe that if you knew someone's real name, you had power over that person. So it's very possible that the demon is trying to get power over Jesus.
   1. However, it is not possible to have power over Jesus because the Father has given Jesus "*all authority in heaven and on earth"* (Mt 28:18).

## Mark 1:29-39 - Jesus heals the sick

[[@Bible:mark 1:32]]Mark 1:32

1. This was on Saturday evening, a day later, when the Sabbath was over.
2. Many Jews considered healing to be work, and since work was not allowed on the Shabbat, people waited until after the Shabbat to bring their sick.
3. Since Jesus did not consider it forbidden to heal the sick on the Sabbath, this became a recurring conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees (Mt 12:1-8).

[[@Bible:mark 1:34]]Mark 1:34

1. This is a fulfillment of what Isaiah prophesied the Messiah would do (Is 53:4). The people around Jesus should have understood that Isaiah's prophecy was being fulfilled before their eyes.
2. Since Jesus healed the sick with the power of the Holy Spirit, we Christians today have the same opportunity to heal the sick with the power of the Holy Spirit.

[[@Bible:mark 1:35]]Mark 1:35

1. Jesus was successful and probably very popular after all the miracles he had performed in Capernaum. But instead of taking credit, Jesus chooses to spend time in prayer in solitude. Jesus is focused and doesn't let success take him away from the mission at hand; the cross.
2. Are you a stressed and busy person who finds it hard to make time work? Jesus was incredibly busy but still made time for prayer. Stress and a busy schedule should not cause us to prioritize prayer but instead lead us to more time with our Father.
3. Martin Luther once said: "I have so much to do that I have no time *not* to pray for 3 hours a day."

## Mark 1:40-45 - Jesus heals a leper

[[@Bible:mark 1:40]]Mark 1:40

1. "Leprosy" is a skin disease that can cause severe physical damage.
2. The lepers were considered unclean and therefore one was not allowed to touch a leper (Leviticus 13-14).
   1. Since the man became clean and free from his disease the moment Jesus touched him, technically Jesus did not break this prohibition.

[[@Bible:mark 1:44]]Mark 1:44

1. The reason Jesus did not want people to spread the word that he was the Messiah was because the Jewish people were longing for a Messiah who would free them from Roman occupation and become the new king of Israel. However, word of Jesus spread and eventually the people did indeed try to make him king (John 6:15).
2. True, Jesus came to liberate Israel and become king, but not in the way the Jewish people thought. The kingdom of God is not of this world (John 18:36).
3. Jesus was careful to follow what is written in the Torah (the Pentateuch) and therefore he urges the former leper to do as it is written (Leviticus 14).

## Mark 2:1-12 - Jesus forgives sins

[[@Bible:mark 2:2]]Mark 2:2

1. Jesus had returned from his preaching tour in Galilee. After all the miracles Jesus had done, people were naturally very curious about him and wanted him to perform more miracles. But for Jesus it was important not only to do miracles but also to teach the people.

[[@Bible:mark 2:5]]Mark 2:5

1. The Torah says that if a person has sinned, he must sacrifice an animal in the Temple and then receive God's forgiveness through the priest who mediates the atonement (Leviticus 4:26).
   1. Jesus announces that this lame man is forgiven of his sins simply because he has "faith".
   2. It is obvious that the lame man believed that Jesus could heal him.
2. The scribes are outraged when Jesus gives God's forgiveness before the lame man has sacrificed in the temple or even confessed his sin.
   1. Besides, it is God who forgives sins, so the scribes were upset that they thought Jesus was making himself God and thus blaspheming.
3. Jesus' death on the cross provides forgiveness of sins.
   1. All men have sinned and are sinners (Rom 3:23).
   2. Sin separates people from God (Isa 59:2).
   3. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).
   4. Because God loves us humans in spite of our sin, God sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sins (John 3:16).
   5. Jesus died a substitutionary death for all men (Rom 5:8).
   6. Jesus offered himself for the sins of all people (Heb 9:28).
   7. Everyone who believes in Jesus receives eternal life (John 3:16).

[[@Bible:mark 2:6]]Mark 2:6

1. A "scribe" studied and taught the most important text of Judaism; the Torah (the five books of Moses), and was well versed in Jewish tradition.
2. In spite of the large crowd, these scribes were already "sitting".
   1. Perhaps they had made an appointment with Jesus to discuss with him whether he was the Messiah described in the Scriptures? Now they were waiting for him where Jesus lived, in Peter's home.
   2. Instead of discussing with Jesus, they now had a front-row seat to watch him teach the people. Jesus' focus on the people rather than the scribes shows how he prioritised.
3. The scribes knew the texts about the Messiah, some of the positive texts being these:
   1. The Messiah will be of David's lineage and filled with the Spirit of the Lord (Isaiah 11:1-2).
   2. The Messiah would have been born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).
   3. The Messiah will appear in Galilee (Isaiah 9:1-2).
   4. The Messiah would cure diseases (Isaiah 35:5-6, 53:4).
   5. The Messiah would establish the kingdom and become king (Zech 9:9).
4. But there were also prophetic texts about the Messiah that are more negative:
   1. People will hear the Messiah but not believe (Isaiah 53:1).
   2. People will abandon and despise the Messiah (Isaiah 53:3).
   3. The Messiah will be imprisoned (Isaiah 53:8).
   4. The Messiah will die (Is 53:9).
5. So the people and the scribes focused only on the positive texts about the Messiah and eventually wanted to make Jesus king. Jesus knew this and therefore tried to silence those who were trying to make him king. Jesus also had to teach his own disciples repeatedly that part of the Messiah's mission was to die for the people (Mark 9:30-32).
6. Although it is not explicitly stated that Jesus is God in Mark's gospel, Mark shows this indirectly when he describes Jesus doing things that only God can do (Mark 2:7, 4:41, 10:18).

[[@Bible:mark 2:8]]Mark 2:8

1. The only one in the Bible who is described as being able to see into people's hearts and know what they are thinking is God (Psalm 44:22, 139:23).
   1. Time and again, Mark shows Jesus doing things that only God can do.

[[@Bible:mark 2:10]]Mark 2:10

1. "Son of Man" is one of the Messiah's titles and is a concept Jesus borrows from the prophet Daniel's book.
   1. Daniel writes that he saw a "son of man" come with the clouds of heaven and be brought before God. The Son of Man was given all power and an eternal kingdom with people from all nations (Dan 7:13-14).
   2. When Jesus calls himself "the Son of Man" and preaches that "the kingdom of God" is here, people understood that he was referring to the book of Daniel and was claiming to be the Messiah himself.
2. People called Jesus "the Son of God" because they saw a man who was like God. Jesus himself, on the other hand, calls himself the "son of man" because he saw himself the other way around; he is God who was born as a man.
   1. If Jesus was just an ordinary man, why would he go around calling himself a "son of man"? Everyone could see that Jesus was a man. What was special about Jesus was that he was the one of the Trinity who was born as a "son of man", something neither the Father nor the Spirit did.

[[@Bible:mark 2:11]]Mark 2:11

1. What was greater; the forgiveness of sins or being healed from paralysis?
   1. Jesus gives both, but he starts with the forgiveness of sins, which shows what is more important.
2. It's not uncommon for Jesus to tell the sick to do something they can't really do.
   1. A person's faith + Jesus = the power of God.
   2. It was when the man, at Jesus' urging, did what he could not do, that he was healed.
3. The scribes seem to have been open to the possibility that Jesus was the Messiah and wanted to discuss this with Jesus. The scribes knew that the Messiah would heal the sick but they did not know that the Messiah would also have the authority to forgive sins. Here Jesus demonstrates that he has the power to do both!
   1. The mistake the scribes made was not that they did not understand everything about the Messiah, but that they did not believe in the Messiah once they met him. Their image of the Messiah was more important than the Messiah himself and they could not go beyond their own framework.

[[@Bible:mark 2:12]]Mark 2:12

1. A natural and good reaction to a miracle is to praise God.

## Mark 2:13-14 - Levi

[[@Bible:mark 2:14]]Mark 2:14

1. Levi also goes by another, better known name: *Matthew* (Mt 9:9).
   1. This Levi is the author of the Gospel of Matthew.
2. Levi was a Jewish "tax collector" who collected taxes from the Jewish people for the Roman authorities.
   1. If the customs officer collected more money than the tax demanded by the Romans, he could keep the money for himself. As a result, many customs officers were despised as greedy traitors who had gone over to the Roman side.
3. It is very likely that this Levi has taken treasure from Peter, John and the other disciples who lived in Capernaum.
   1. It must have been a tense moment when they greeted each other for the first time as common disciples of Jesus.
4. Although everyone despised Levi, Jesus did not.
   1. No matter what your background, you can always start over and follow Jesus.
   2. No matter how terrible you have been as a human being, God is always willing to forgive immediately and move on.
   3. As soon as Levi gets the chance to leave his greedy and despised life, he takes it.

## Mark 2:15-17 - Jesus eats with publicans and sinners

[[@Bible:mark 2:15]]Mark 2:15

1. Not only did Levi immediately become a disciple of Jesus, but he also invited Jesus and the disciples to his home for dinner.
2. Mealtime fellowship is central to both the Jewish and Christian communities.
   1. Eating together is a sign of belonging, acceptance and care. It's also fun.

[[@Bible:mark 2:16]]Mark 2:16

1. *The "Pharisees"* were a "revival movement" among the Jewish people who studied the Pentateuch carefully and tried to live their lives accordingly. The word "Pharisee" roughly means "the consecrated".
   1. The Pharisees were very careful not to break any of the commandments of the Pentateuch. They were so careful that they even put a "fence" of extra rules around the rules of the Pentateuch to minimize the risk of accidentally breaking the rules of the Pentateuch.
      1. These rules were also called "the statutes of the elders", "the oral Torah" and later "the Talmud" (Mt 7:3).
   2. Jesus quarreled with the Pharisees when he felt that their extra rules conflicted with the rules of the Pentateuch (Mark 7:8).
2. *The "audience"* was Levi's former tax colleagues.
   1. Levi certainly wanted more of his friends and colleagues to become Jesus' disciples, so he invited them to a meal so they could get acquainted.
3. The Pharisees saw themselves as "righteous" because they considered themselves to be following the rules of the Pentateuch. On the other hand, those who openly disobeyed the rules of the Pentateuch, such as prostitutes, were called "*sinners"* by the Pharisees.
   1. Jesus criticizes this way of thinking because the Pharisees were just as much sinners but in other areas, greed for example, which perhaps did not appear as much outwardly (Luke 16:14-15).
      1. The New Testament is clear that *all* people have sinned and are sinners (Romans 3:23).
   2. Since the Pharisees did not consider themselves sinners, they did not feel the need to repent. But since the kingdom of God requires repentance, the Pharisees are thus automatically excluded from the kingdom of God (Mk 1:15).
   3. When Jesus dined with sinners, thus showing fellowship with them, it was offensive in the eyes of the Pharisees.
      1. Jesus distinguishes between sin and sinners. It is wrong to have fellowship with *sin* but it is not wrong to have fellowship with *sinners*.

[[@Bible:mark 2:17]]Mark 2:17

1. The Pharisees were disturbed that Jesus, who followed the Pentateuch, was eating with those who, according to them, did not follow the Pentateuch.
2. The Pharisees might have hoped that Jesus, who could cure diseases, etc., would join the Pharisees' party, but here they see themselves sidelined in favour of "sinners".
3. Jesus' focus was on the people who did not try to hide the fact that they were sinners.

## Mark 2:18-22 - Jesus about Fasting

[[@Bible:mark 2:18]]Mark 2:18

1. According to the Pentateuch, the Jewish people were to fast once a year, on the *"day of atonement"* (Leviticus 23:27).
   1. The Jewish people also fasted on other occasions for various reasons.
   2. The Pharisees had instituted a number of extra days of fasting and boasted that they fasted two days a week (Luke 18:12).
   3. Fasting is usually associated with repenting of one's sinful life or asking God for guidance (1 Sam 7:6).
2. Jesus expected his disciples to fast when his mission was completed.
   1. As long as Jesus was in the midst of his disciples, he saw no need for further repentance and guidance.
   2. Fasting should be based on the personal relationship with God. One should be careful not to fast just because people think it is important.

[[@Bible:mark 2:19]]Mark 2:19

1. Jesus compares his own presence to a wedding where Jesus is the bridegroom and the disciples are the wedding guests.
   1. A wedding should be fun and involve a lot of food, so it's not appropriate to fast.
2. The wedding theme also appears in other parts of the Bible:
   1. Isaiah calls Israel the bride of God (Isaiah 54:5).
   2. Paul calls the church the bride of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2).
3. In the same way that the couple getting married says "Yes!" to each other, Jesus and man need to say "Yes!" to each other.
   1. Jesus has said his "Yes!" to you, you have said your "Yes!" to him?

[[@Bible:mark 2:21]]Mark 2:21

1. Jesus now addresses the relationship between the old and the new covenant in two parables.
2. David H. Stern writes in his book *"The Jewish New Testament Commentary"* that the *"unshorn cloth"* is the new covenant and the *"old garment"* is the old covenant.
   1. For the *"old mantle" to* be whole, faith in Jesus is needed.
   2. But faith in Jesus must be consistent with the Old Testament or it risks not lasting, and the tears may even be worse than before.
3. The bottom line is that the Old Testament is not without Jesus and that Jesus needs to be understood from the Old Testament.

[[@Bible:mark 2:22]]Mark 2:22

1. According to Stern, the *"new wine"* symbolizes faith in Jesus and the *"old skin sacks"* the old covenant.
   1. If faith in Jesus must conform to the Old Testament in the previous parable, then the Old Covenant must now conform to faith in Jesus.
2. What Jesus is trying to say is that the many rules and laws of the Old Testament are no longer necessary because Jesus has come.
   1. For a Jew who believes in Jesus, for example, it is unnecessary to sacrifice in the temple to receive forgiveness for one's sins because Jesus has forgiven all one's sins on the cross.
   2. But if a Jew adapts his religious traditions to fit the faith in Jesus, it is not wrong to continue living according to Jewish traditions and rules.
3. Another way of looking at this parable is that the *"new wine"* symbolizes the kingdom of God and the *"new sacks of skins"* symbolizes the new environment or culture in which the kingdom of God is preached.
   1. The gospel is successful only when the kingdom of God is preached in a way that the new environment understands. The kingdom of God needs to be explained to young people in a way that young people understand, and the kingdom of God needs to be explained to Norwegians in a way that Norwegians understand.
   2. A missionary who travels to a new environment thus needs to explain the gospel in such a way and in such language that the audience understands. A missionary needs to spend a lot of time learning the culture, customs, language and beliefs of the new environment and to communicate the message of Jesus in a relevant way without watering down or changing the message in the process.
   3. Paul is a prime example of this because his missionary method was to become like those he preached to (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).
      1. When Paul missioned among the Jews, he conducted himself and preached the gospel in such a way that the Jews understood (Acts 13:14, Acts 16:2, Acts 17:1-2, 18:18).
      2. When Paul was missionary to the Greeks, he preached the gospel so that the Greeks would understand (Acts 17:16-34).

## Mark 2:23-28 - Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath

[[@Bible:mark 2:23]]Mark 2:23

1. When God had created the earth in six days, He rested on the seventh (Genesis 2:1-3).
2. The Sabbath is the day that God wants man to keep holy and to rest from work (Exodus 20:8-11).

[[@Bible:mark 2:24]]Mark 2:24

1. Is it "work" to "pick axles"?
   1. It was permissible according to the Pentateuch to pick ears of grain in the fields (Deuteronomy 23:26).
   2. It was forbidden according to the Pentateuch to work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:9-10).
   3. According to the *oral* Torah of the Pharisees, the disciples' ax-picking meant "threshing", which according to the Pharisees was forbidden on the Shabbat.
   4. When two rules clash, it was traditional that the most important rule should prevail.
      1. Priests were allowed to work on the Sabbath if certain feasts happened to occur on the Sabbath.
      2. Boys were to be circumcised on the eighth day after their birth, even if that day happened to fall on the Sabbath.

[[@Bible:mark 2:26]]Mark 2:26

1. *"Showbread"* was bread that was always on display in the temple before the presence of God (Leviticus 24:5-9) and could only be eaten by priests.
2. According to the book of Samuel, David ate of these showbread even though he was not given (1 Sam 21:1-6).
3. Jesus' answer is that under certain circumstances one may break the Sabbath because the Sabbath is for the good of man and not the other way around.

## Mark 3:1-6 - The man with the withered hand

[[@Bible:mark 3:4]]Mark 3:4

1. Jesus asks an ironic question.
   1. Jesus heals the sick on the Sabbath.
   2. The Pharisees plan to murder Jesus on the Sabbath.
2. The Pharisees believed that Jesus could perform *miracles*, but they still didn't want to believe in *him*.
3. The question was not whether it was wrong for Jesus to heal the man, but whether he was allowed to do so on the *"Sabbath"*.
   1. The Sabbath is a day of rest when you are not supposed to work.
      1. When God had created the earth in six days, He rested on the seventh (Genesis 2:1-3).
      2. The Sabbath is the day that God wants man to keep holy and to rest from work (Exodus 20:8-11).
4. The Pharisees took pains not to break any rules or commandments given by God in the Torah (the five books of Moses). In order not to accidentally break God's commandments, they had written a number of additional rules and statutes that would minimize the risks of breaking the Torah. It was over these rules that Jesus and the Pharisees often quarreled (Mat 7:1-13).
   1. According to these rules, it was permissible to save lives on the Sabbath, but not to medicate those who were not in urgent need.
   2. Jesus breaks the Pharisees' rules because the man is not in urgent need of rescue.
5. Even if the Pentateuch prohibited something, there were sometimes exceptions. It was important to keep the Sabbath commandment, but if another, more important commandment happened to appear on the Sabbath, it was more important to keep that commandment. Some examples of this:
   1. Priests were allowed to work even if a feast fell on the Sabbath day.
   2. A boy was circumcised on the Sabbath even though it was a work (John 7:22-23).
   3. Why, then, shouldn't Jesus be healed of a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath?
6. Jesus' main argument in this matter is: *"The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.* "(Mark 2:27).
7. The bottom line is that it is good to keep the Sabbath by abstaining from work and dedicating the day of rest to God. But if something comes up that is more important than personal rest, one should break it and do what is more important instead. So here we have to think for ourselves and use our common sense to decide what to do in different situations.
   1. *"Consider for yourselves whether it is right before God to obey you more than him."* (Acts 4:19b).

[[@Bible:mark 3:5]]Mark 3:5

1. The Pharisees were not in the synagogue to worship God or to help the sick, they were there to frame Jesus.
2. Jesus not only shows by his argumentation that he has God on his side, he also demonstrates it by performing a miracle that only God can do.
   1. When the Pharisees couldn't argue or even answer Jesus, they indirectly show that Jesus is right, but they still don't want to go along with what Jesus did and want to kill him instead.
3. It's not uncommon for Jesus to tell the sick to do something they can't really do.
   1. A person's faith + Jesus = the power of God.
   2. It was when the man, at Jesus' urging, did what he could not do that he was healed.

[[@Bible:mark 3:6]]Mark 3:6

1. Jesus disagreed with the Pharisees about their extra rules and regulations.
   1. Even today, it is a topical question whether it is more important to obey God than to obey one's own traditions. It is important that there is an ongoing conversation about how to obey the Bible in the time and culture in which one happens to find oneself. God's word is eternal, but the world is changing; how do we apply God's word to the world we ourselves live in?
2. ***The Herodians*** were followers of Herod.
   1. Herod Antipas ruled over Galilee and Perea and founded the city of Tiberias.
      1. This Herod was the son of Herod the Great who murdered the boys in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16).
   2. The Pharisees and the Herodians had little in common, but one thing they could apparently agree on: to *"put Jesus out of the way"*.

## Mark 3:7-12 - The crowd on the beach

[[@Bible:mark 3:7]]Mark 3:7

1. Jesus didn't just want to heal the sick and teach in the synagogues. He also wanted to withdraw with his disciples and teach them even more deeply.
2. A disciple of Jesus today also needs to withdraw from time to time to be alone with Jesus.
3. Jesus had certainly made quite an impression on the people of Galilee and beyond.
4. However, these people were more interested in what Jesus could *do* for them than who Jesus *is*.
   1. When Jesus eventually taught them a little more deeply, they left him (John 6:66).

[[@Bible:mark 3:10]]Mark 3:10

1. This is a fulfillment of what Isaiah prophesied the Messiah would do (Is 53:4).
   1. Jesus knew that when people understand that Jesus is the Messiah, they will want to make him king over Israel and then try to drive out the Roman occupiers (John 6:15).
2. What the people did not know was that the Messiah will come to earth twice:
   1. The first time he came to earth, he acted as the *suffering servant* and died on the cross for our sins.
   2. The second time Jesus comes to earth, he will be *king* and fully establish his kingdom.

[[@Bible:mark 3:12]]Mark 3:12

1. The unclean spirits understood Jesus' true identity.
2. Neither the angels nor the demons are allowed to spread the message of Jesus because that mission has been given to the church (Matthew 28:18-20).

## Mark 3:13-19 - The twelve are appointed

[[@Bible:mark 3:13]]Mark 3:13

1. It is always better to be chosen by God for a task than to appoint oneself to that task.

[[@Bible:mark 3:14]]Mark 3:14

1. The number twelve is symbolic and corresponds to the twelve tribes of Israel.
   1. Twelve apostles and twelve tribes symbolize "all".
2. The word *"apostle"* means "sent" and is a title that also indicates mission.
3. A *disciple* should not only *read* and *study* but also *practice*.
4. The same mission and authority that Jesus himself had he passes on to his disciples.
   1. Even today, Jesus' disciples have the power to cast out demons.
5. When Jesus was born a man, he took on the *form of* a *"servant when he became a man"* (Phil 2:6-8), thus making himself voluntarily dependent on his Father to know what he should do (John 5:19) and dependent on the Holy Spirit to do what the Father commanded (Acts 10:38).
   1. Jesus showed his disciples that they too can listen to their Father and they too can do what the Father commands through the power of the Holy Spirit.
   2. Even today we can imitate Jesus by listening to the Father and letting the Holy Spirit perform the miracles the Father wants to do.

## Mark 3:20-30 - Blasphemy

[[@Bible:mark 3:21]]Mark 3:21

1. When Jesus lived in Nazareth, he behaved like any other human being, and when his relatives hear that he performs miracles and does not eat, they think he has gone mad.

[[@Bible:mark 3:22]]Mark 3:22

1. *"Beelzebub"* means "lord of the flies" and is the name of an ancient Canaanite god (2 Kings 1:2), and also another name for Satan.

[[@Bible:mark 3:23]]Mark 3:23

1. The scribes believed that Jesus cast out demons with the help of the prince of demons, *"Satan"*.
2. Jesus responds in parables, saying that it is absurd that Satan would cast out his own demons.
   1. If that were the case, Satan's kingdom would be shattered and his power would soon be at an end.
3. If you compare it to a war, you can't start looting until the enemy is defeated.
   1. Jesus will defeat Satan on the cross.

[[@Bible:mark 3:28]]Mark 3:28

1. All people who come to God and ask for forgiveness will receive it, there are no limits.
   1. The only excuse for God's forgiveness is if you voluntarily renounce it after you have seen the power of God, understand that it is God, but still do not want to believe.
   2. The scribes had seen the power of God, but still would not accept that Jesus was from God.

## Mark 3:31-35 - Jesus' family

[[@Bible:mark 3:32]]Mark 3:32

1. Jesus' earthly adoptive father Joseph had probably been dead for some time, at least he is not mentioned in the New Testament after Jesus has turned twelve.
2. Jesus had brothers and sisters in Nazareth (Mark 6:2-3).

[[@Bible:mark 3:28]]Mark 3:28

1. If Jesus had not said this, there would have been a danger that there might have been a cult around Jesus' earthly relatives, or that someone might have taken it into his head, for example, to exalt Jesus' mother Mary in an improper way.
2. Jesus shows here that he does not belong first and foremost to his own family, but that he is the saviour of the whole world.
3. One is not born to belong to Jesus, but it is a personal decision.

## Mark 4:1- 12 - The Parable of the Sower

[[@Bible:mark 4:2]]Mark 4:2

1. Jesus explains difficult things in a simple way. Today it is common for preachers to do the opposite; they explain simple things in a difficult way.

[[@Bible:mark 4:11]]Mark 4:11

1. *The "secret"* is that the kingdom of God has come to earth through Jesus.
   1. Those who follow Jesus have thus become partakers of the kingdom of God.
   2. Those who do not follow Jesus do not share in the kingdom of God.
2. Of all those who heard Jesus' teaching, some chose to become his followers and some chose not to.
   1. Those who listened to Jesus but still did not want to become his followers, who had seen the kingdom of God, but still chose to leave.
3. You don't have to understand Jesus before you become his follower. When you meet Jesus, understand that he comes from God and choose to become his follower, God reveals more and more about who Jesus is. Those who meet Jesus but still refuse to believe in him, they also voluntarily refuse to know more about Jesus.

[[@Bible:mark 4:12]]Mark 4:12

1. Jesus quotes Isaiah (Isaiah 6:9-10).
2. Anyone who hears Jesus' parables can be content not to understand the meaning of the parable or to ask Jesus for the parable's explanation. There were many who heard Jesus tell parables but it was only the disciples who asked Jesus to explain the meaning of the parables.
3. A person who hears about Jesus but chooses not to become a follower of Jesus risks not only continuing to live as a sinner but also becoming an opponent of Jesus.
   1. The road to repentance then becomes twice as long.

## Mark 4:13-20 - Jesus explains the parable of the sower

[[@Bible:mark 4:14]]Mark 4:14

1. The key to understanding this parable is that the seed is the *"word"*.
   1. If you think that the seed represents "money", "church activities" or "good deeds", then you are misunderstanding the parable.
   2. One is not saved by doing good deeds but by hearing God's *word*, the Bible, explained. When God's word takes root in good soil in a person, it grows and bears fruit.
2. The sower is a person who tells the good news about Jesus and the kingdom of God to someone else.
3. Jesus' use of *grain* as a parable for the *message* shows that it is not the preacher's task to make the message grow in a person's heart. The preacher's task is only to *"sow"*, that is, to "tell". The growth itself is up to God to arrange.
4. A farmer of today would probably not throw the grain into the bad soil if he knew it was bad soil. But in the Middle East 2000 years ago, people ploughed *after* they had sown the seed, not *before,* as they do today. So the sower didn't always know where the good soil was.
5. The sower did not only throw the seed into the good soil, but also into the less good soil so that everyone would have a chance.

[[@Bible:mark 4:15]]Mark 4:15

1. These people hear the message of Jesus, but it never gets to the heart before Satan picks it up.
2. A person's heart can be so hard that they are completely uninterested in hearing about Jesus. In such a situation, it might be better to first try to soften the heart instead.

[[@Bible:mark 4:16]]Mark 4:16

1. These people hear the message of Jesus and immediately want to become followers of Jesus!
   1. But because they don't get the message in depth, they will soon tire of the message of Jesus.
   2. The message of Jesus is a happy one, but it can also lead to difficulties, and if we have only listened to the positive without having anticipated the difficulties, the happy message can quickly turn into a message that is too difficult.
   3. Even for those who have deeply received the message of Jesus, the discipleship of Jesus can become so difficult and burdensome that they think about giving up. Jesus' discipleship is sometimes about staying with Jesus even if you don't understand and even if it is difficult and hard (John 6:66-69).

[[@Bible:mark 4:18]]Mark 4:18

1. These people hear the message of Jesus and want to become Christians.
   1. But as soon as something else interesting comes up; you might have a child, a partner or a new job, it immediately becomes more important than faith in Jesus.

[[@Bible:mark 4:20]]Mark 4:20

1. When the seed ends up where it should, in the good soil, something happens!
   1. If a person has received the word deep in his heart, it will bear fruit.
   2. Jesus says on another occasion that, just as you can tell what kind of tree it is by its *fruit*, you can tell whose disciple you are by looking at a person's *deeds* (Matt 7:20).
   3. Paul lists a number of good spiritual fruits: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control* (Gal 5:22-23).
   4. Good fruit doesn't come by trying to force it on yourself, it grows naturally the more you get to know Jesus.

## Mark 4:21-23 - A Lamp Under a Basket

[[@Bible:mark 4:21]]Mark 4:21

1. Jesus uses a parable to state the obvious:
   1. You don't light a candle in a dark room and then hide it.
   2. You don't receive the message of Jesus and then hide it.
2. Anyone who has heard and received the good news of Jesus has a responsibility to share it with others.
   1. A congregation must never be satisfied with just teaching about Jesus inside the church, but must also preach the good news outside the church.

## Mark 4:24-29 - Listening to the Word of God

[[@Bible:mark 4:24]]Mark 4:24

1. A disciple of Jesus should be careful who he listens to; not all preachers teach the *whole* word of God.
2. Jesus urged his disciples to flee from false teachers in the same way that sheep flee from an alien shepherd (John 10:5).
   1. A false teacher may look and sound like a real preacher, but when you examine what is being preached, it does not line up with God's Word. Therefore, a disciple of Jesus needs to always consider what is being preached so that he does not blindly listen to a false teacher.
3. The one who listens to God's word with disinterest will lose interest even more, but the one who listens to God's word with a hunger for more will also receive more.

[[@Bible:mark 4:26]]Mark 4:26

1. It is the Christian's task to *tell about* the kingdom of God, and it is God's task to make the kingdom *grow* in a person's heart.
   1. Life itself is in the *seed*, not in the soil or in the sowing. It is important for a preacher to trust that God's word is at work in a person's heart, without the preacher trying to create life by, for example, manipulating a "spiritual atmosphere" or something similar.
   2. God told Isaiah that his word is like rain falling from the sky; "*it does not turn back in vain, but does what I want and carries out my mission"* (Isa 55:11).
2. When God's word has been allowed to grow, it is the Christian's task to reap and see the fruit of his work.
   1. If a preacher sees very little harvest, it may be because he simply has to be patient, keep preaching God's word and let God work.
   2. If a preacher sees very little harvest, it may also be because he is not preaching *God's* word, but mostly his own.

## Mark 4:30-34 - The parable of the mustard seed

[[@Bible:mark 4:31]]Mark 4:31

1. The mustard seed is not the smallest seed in the world, but in the world of the time it was considered to be. The mustard seed had also become a proverb to describe something very small.
2. Jesus tries to explain that the kingdom of God will not be big at first, but will start with a few insignificant fishermen from Galilee and then spread to the whole world.
3. The difference between the kingdom of God and a human kingdom in this respect is that when a man tries to create a great kingdom by his own efforts, it will eventually fall. But when a man obeys God and allows God's power to expand the kingdom of God, it will go from something small to something immense.

## Mark 4:35-41 - Jesus calms the storm

[[@Bible:mark 4:35]]Mark 4:35

1. Jesus worked hard and got a lot of attention from a lot of people. Now Jesus wanted to get away from the attention to rest and to be alone with the disciples.

[[@Bible:mark 4:37]]Mark 4:37

1. Lake Gennesaret is known for its rapid weather changes.
   1. Jesus' disciples were experienced fishermen, yet they could not in their own strength "row ashore" this storm.
2. God has never claimed that we should be able to obey him in our own strength. On the contrary, we need the Spirit of God to accomplish our mission (Acts 1:8).

[[@Bible:mark 4:38]]Mark 4:38

1. Although Jesus is God, he was born as a human being to fully share our human condition (Phil 2:6-8).
2. Storm, noise and waves could not wake Jesus, so deep was his sleep. But as soon as his disciples cried out to him in distress, he awoke, so deep is his love.

[[@Bible:mark 4:40]]Mark 4:40

1. Jesus had explicitly told them to cross over to the other side of the lake.
   1. If the disciples had known who Jesus really is, they would have believed Jesus' words even in the storm.
   2. Even today we can receive words from God that we can believe and trust that he will carry out, even in the face of storms.

[[@Bible:mark 4:41]]Mark 4:41

1. Here the disciples not only saw the humanity of Jesus, they also saw the divinity of Jesus.
2. Although it is not explicitly stated that Jesus is God in Mark's gospel, Mark shows this indirectly when he describes Jesus doing things that only God can do (Mark 2:7, 4:41, 10:18).
   1. When Jesus calmed the storm, he did something that only God can do, which probably began to shed light on who Jesus really is to the disciples (Psalm 89:9-10).

## Mark 5:1-20 - Jesus Heals a Man with a Demon

[[@Bible:mark 5:1]]Mark 5:1

1. Jesus goes to a non-Jewish area where most Gentiles live.
2. *The "Gerasenes"* were probably non-Jews because they had a large herd of pigs.
   1. However, if the Gerasenes were Jews, they were breaking the rules of the Pentateuch because pigs are unclean animals for Jews (Leviticus 11:7).

[[@Bible:mark 5:2]]Mark 5:2

1. Since Jesus goes to this area, frees this man from the unclean spirit, and then immediately leaves, it seems that Jesus' only purpose was to meet this man. Perhaps Jesus had heard rumors about him, perhaps he was led by the Spirit of God.
2. The man was possessed by an *"unclean spirit"* or "demon" as it is also sometimes called.
   1. A demon is a "fallen angel". The Book of Revelation says: *"And the great dragon, the old serpent, which is called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world, was cast down to the earth, and his angels were cast down with him."* (Revelation 12:9). The Bible does not describe the origin of the devil and the demons very clearly, but it is usually reasoned that Satan was an archangel named Lucifer who rebelled against God in some way and was therefore cast down to earth with the angels who supported him (Isa 14:12-15 and Ezek 28:12-15).
   2. Ever since the fall of the devil, the devil and his demons have been trying to deceive us humans and prevent us from receiving the gospel (1 Peter 5:8, 2 Corinthians 4:4, 2 Corinthians 11:14-15).
   3. Jesus triumphed over the devil and his demons on the cross: "He stripped the *powers and authorities and presented them in public, triumphing over them on the cross."* (Col 2:15).
   4. It is my understanding that no Christian can be possessed by a demon or unclean spirit, this is because when a person becomes a Christian the Holy Spirit moves into that person and demons cannot possess a body where the Holy Spirit dwells (Rom 8:9). On the other hand, a Christian who is not vigilant can be influenced and deceived by Satan and his demons (Matt 16:21-23). James therefore gives the good advice, *"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."* (James 4:7).

[[@Bible:mark 5:5]]Mark 5:5

1. Presumably this man was part of the local community before he became possessed with the unclean spirit. People around him didn't know how to deal with him or how to cure him so they pushed him away.
2. The unclean spirit affected the man in different ways:
   1. He was alone.
   2. He was among graves.
   3. He became very strong.
   4. He hurt himself.

[[@Bible:mark 5:6]]Mark 5:6

1. How would you react if a possessed, naked and very strong person, who also lives among tombs, runs towards you and screams? Most people would probably run home to mom. But not Jesus, he remains standing and the man eventually falls at Jesus' feet.

[[@Bible:mark 5:7]]Mark 5:7

1. When Jesus came near people possessed by demons, it was common for them to confess his name and title.
   1. In Jesus' day, it was not uncommon to believe that if you knew someone's real name, you had power over that person. So it is very possible that the demon is trying to gain power over Jesus, as we can see from his attempt to use "spells" against Jesus.
      1. However, it is not possible to have power over Jesus because the Father has given Jesus *"all authority in heaven and on earth"* (Mt 28:18).

[[@Bible:mark 5:8]]Mark 5:8

1. Jesus has power and authority over demons, they must obey him.
   1. Jesus has given the same authority to his disciples (Mark 3:14-15).

[[@Bible:mark 5:9]]Mark 5:9

1. Jesus asking for the demon's name does not mean that Jesus had to know the demon's name in order to cast it out. On several other occasions, Jesus casts out demons without knowing their names (Mark 9:14-29).
2. In biblical times, a person's name meant more than just the name of address, it could also say something *about the* person. It seems that Jesus is asking for the demon's name in order to understand the scope of the problem facing the possessed man.
3. When the demon failed to get power over Jesus and is forced to say his own name instead, he seems to be lying; "Legion" is not a name but a military unit of about 6000 soldiers.
   1. The fact that the demon does not say his own name but instead a military unit may mean that he is defying Jesus and showing that he is ready for battle.
   2. The fact that the demon gives such a large number could also mean that the man is possessed by many demons and that he suffers from very big problems.

[[@Bible:mark 5:12]]Mark 5:12

1. The unclean spirits in the possessed man understood that Jesus had power over them and therefore pleaded feverishly that Jesus would not send them away to a place where they could no longer torment anyone.

[[@Bible:mark 5:13]]Mark 5:13

1. Why did Jesus allow the unclean spirits to enter the swine?
   1. Perhaps to challenge the locals' priority?
      1. What was more important; the man's well-being or their own wallet?
      2. The Gerasenes should have been more concerned about the ill health of the possessed man than about their lost herd of pigs.
   2. Perhaps to show in a concrete way how destructive demons are and that we really need to beware of them.
   3. Perhaps these Gerasenes were Jews and thus needed to be rebuked by Jesus for dealing with unclean animals?
   4. Perhaps this was a dramatic lesson for the locals that Satan and his demonic activities lead to uncleanness and eventually to death.

[[@Bible:mark 5:17]]Mark 5:17

1. The miracle that Jesus performed on the possessed man should have led to joy and a great celebration for the man who had finally been freed. Instead, the locals clearly show that they valued their own financial gain more than the possessed man being freed from his demons.
   1. If they had accepted Jesus as a deliverer, it would not have been a big problem for Jesus to fix large quantities of both wine and bread (John 2, John 6).
2. This text in Mark is a great challenge to today's materialistic society that values economic gains above all else.
   1. Anyone who puts his own finances above the well-being of others will be extremely challenged and provoked by Jesus and may even eventually reject Jesus.
3. Following Jesus is a free offer and is always accepted voluntarily. If these people didn't want Jesus in the area, Jesus simply leaves.

[[@Bible:mark 5:18]]Mark 5:18

1. In contrast to the rest of the locals who wanted to drive Jesus *away*, the formerly possessed man wants to *go with* Jesus.
2. Certainly, it is important to study and learn more about Jesus, but preaching the gospel is even more important.

[[@Bible:mark 5:19]]Mark 5:19

1. When Jesus has performed miracles in the past, he has told people to keep *quiet* about what they have seen, but now Jesus wants the man to *tell* (Mark 1:44).
   1. This is because Jesus had previously performed the miracles in Jewish areas where the rumor of the Messiah could quickly lead to the Jewish people resorting to violence to make Jesus king in an effort to drive out the Romans (John 6:15). This was a non-Jewish area where the risk of this happening was much less.
2. Since Jesus was not welcome in this area, he let the formerly possessed man preach the gospel there instead.
   1. The man's presence among the locals became a constant reminder that they had done wrong and should instead listen to the man's encounter with Jesus.
3. Jesus' mission to the man was:
   1. Go to your own people.
   2. Tell me all that God has done for you.
   3. Tell us how God had mercy.

## Mark 5:21-34 - Jesus Heals a Woman and Jairus’s Daughter

[[@Bible:mark 5:23]]Mark 5:23

1. The contrast between the *unbelief* of the Gerasenes and the *faith of* Jairus is like night and day.
   * 1. When the Gerasenes see Jesus' miracle, they ask him to *leave*.
     2. When Jairus sees Jesus, he asks him to *come*.
   1. A miracle performed among people who don't want to believe often leads to greater unbelief.
2. Jesus often healed the sick by laying his hands on them (Mark 6:5).
   1. People knew that Jesus used to heal the sick in this way (Mark 7:32).
   2. Jesus urges his disciples to heal the sick by laying hands on them (Mark 16:18).
   3. Jesus' disciples healed the sick by laying hands on them (Acts 28:8).
3. Jesus blessed people by laying his hands on them (Mark 10:16).
   1. The power of the Holy Spirit is often communicated through the laying on of hands (Acts 8:17-19, 9:17, 19:6).

[[@Bible:mark 5:25]]Mark 5:25

1. In addition to the obvious discomfort of the disease itself, the woman was also ritually unclean and not allowed to be among people (Leviticus 15:25-27).
2. For twelve years she had not been able to interact normally with people or to go to the synagogue or temple to worship God.
   1. For many Christians in Sweden today, having to go to Sunday services is less of a chore, but for this woman it was the opposite; she wanted to but couldn't.

[[@Bible:mark 5:26]]Mark 5:26

1. The woman had tried everything and spent all the money she had, but it had only got worse.
2. It is a well-known phenomenon that a person is prepared to try just about anything to get rid of his illness, of which God is often the last thing a person tries.
   1. One tip is to go to God first, so you don't get ruined.

[[@Bible:mark 5:28]]Mark 5:28

1. There are really two flaws in this woman's faith:
   1. The woman seems to have a strange magical belief in Jesus' clothes.
   2. The woman is violating God's word because she is not allowed to be in this crowd when she is ritually unclean.
2. But in spite of her false faith and the fact that she is breaking God's word, she is healed because *she believes in Jesus*.
   1. What matters is not always *how* we believe, but in *whom* we believe.

[[@Bible:mark 5:29]]Mark 5:29

1. The woman believed in Jesus, touched Jesus and was healed.
   1. A person's faith + Jesus = the power of God.
   2. This woman shows the essence of what it means to believe in Jesus:
      1. She realises her own limitations; it is impossible for her to be free of her torments.
      2. She believes that salvation is with God, if she can get close to Jesus.

[[@Bible:mark 5:30]]Mark 5:30

1. In the large crowd, there were plenty of people touching Jesus without witnessing the same miracle as this woman.
   1. In the same way, today we can go to church Sunday after Sunday without meeting Jesus or witnessing a miracle.
   2. There is a difference between going to church out of habit and going to church because you desperately need to meet Jesus.
   3. This woman touched Jesus with a faith and a hope that she would be healed, God saw her heart and responded to her longing.
2. It may seem a bit harsh for Jesus to call this terrified woman before the crowd, but Jesus certainly didn't want to just give her a *healing*, he wanted to communicate something even greater to her, namely *salvation*.

[[@Bible:mark 5:33]]Mark 5:33

1. When the woman touched Jesus, according to the Pentateuch, it would make him ritually unclean as well, but the moment she touched Jesus, she became healthy instead.
   1. In the same way, today we can give our sins to Jesus and be free and healthy. Jesus does not share our sins when we come to him, but we share in Jesus' holiness.

[[@Bible:mark 5:34]]Mark 5:34

1. The woman was not healed because she touched Jesus' clothes, she was healed because she believed in Jesus.
   1. If Jesus hadn't talked to her, she might have thought she was cured because she touched Jesus' clothes and perhaps remained in a strange magical delusion about Jesus.
2. Normally, Jesus healed the sick by laying his hands on them, but this story shows us that it is not possible to make a pattern or ritual out of God's power.
   1. The important thing is not that the external circumstances are perfect for God to communicate his power. What matters is the faith of the heart.
3. Jesus points out that her faith has *saved* her.
   1. The most important thing that Jesus wants to convey to this woman is that she has been *saved*.

[[@Bible:mark 5:35]]Mark 5:35

1. While Jesus took the time to talk to the woman who had been sick for *twelve years*, Jairus' *twelve-year-old* daughter dies, a clear indication that these two stories are connected.
2. Jairus was a synagogue ruler and Jesus puts him through an extreme lesson in what it means to believe in Jesus.
3. It must have been extremely painful for Jairus to wait for Jesus when his daughter was so close to death. Jairus wanted to hurry while Jesus wanted to wait.
   1. From this we can learn that we must humble ourselves before God and wait for *his* time. If we hurry before God, we risk missing the plan that God has prepared.
   2. From this we can also learn to trust that God knows what he is doing, even if we have to wait for the miracle. God knows best and we do best to wait for *his* time.

[[@Bible:mark 5:36]]Mark 5:36

1. Jesus tells Jairus two things: not to be *afraid*, but to *believe*. Often it is not *unbelief* that is the greatest obstacle to faith, but *the fear* of not knowing how things will turn out.
   1. All the circumstances around him pointed in a different direction, but Jesus wants him to believe anyway.
   2. Faith and fear are rarely a good combination. Before you can believe in Jesus, you need to stop being afraid of all the circumstances around you that point in a different direction.
2. The healing of the woman with hemophilia probably strengthened Jairus' faith and made it easier for him to trust Jesus.
   1. In the same way, today we can strengthen each other's faith by sharing what God has done in our lives.

[[@Bible:mark 5:37]]Mark 5:37

1. These three belonged to the inner circle around Jesus.

[[@Bible:mark 5:39]]Mark 5:39

1. In biblical times, hired "weepers" were not uncommon, adding to the tragedy (Jer 9:17).
2. When a believer dies, his spirit comes to God while the body *"sleeps"* awaiting the resurrection of the body (1 Corinthians 15:50-55).
   1. When Lazarus died, Jesus calls it *"sleeping"* (John 11:11-14).

[[@Bible:mark 5:40]]Mark 5:40

1. All the circumstances pointed to Jesus being wrong. People even laughed at him.
   1. These humiliations are part of the Christian life even today, but this story shows us who will ultimately have the last word.

[[@Bible:mark 5:41]]Mark 5:41

1. Jesus has power over death and asks the girl to get up.
2. That this made a strong impression on Peter and gave him a lesson in how to raise the dead can be seen in Acts where Peter raises the dead Tabitha with the similar words *"Tabitha, arise!"* (Acts 9:40).

[[@Bible:mark 5:42]]Mark 5:42

1. Jairus and the woman with hemophilia contrast each other and give us two different lessons in faith.
   1. Jairus was the head of the synagogue and had a daughter who had been healthy for twelve years. Now he prays publicly and openly for Jesus' healing and she is healed when no one is looking.
   2. The woman, whose name is unknown, was not allowed to go to synagogue because of her impurity and she had been ill for twelve years. The woman hides and touches Jesus when no one is looking but is healed when everyone is watching.

[[@Bible:mark 5:43]]Mark 5:43

1. Jesus gives two commands which clearly show Jesus' exemplary attitude; not to exalt himself but to help the little ones.

## Mark 6:1-6 - Jesus Rejected at Nazareth

[[@Bible:mark 6:2]]Mark 6:2

1. Like all Jews, Jesus celebrated the Sabbath.
   1. The Sabbath starts at nightfall on Friday evening and lasts for 24 hours.
   2. Remembering to keep the Sabbath is part of God's Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8-11).
      1. Just as God worked to create the earth in six days and rested on the seventh, so man is meant to work six days and then rest on the seventh.
2. The synagogue was a natural gathering place for community activities.
   1. On the Shabbat, the Jewish people gathered in their synagogue to hear the Scriptures.
   2. In Jesus' day, it also included the opportunity for just about anyone to teach Scripture, an opportunity that both Jesus and Paul used to teach about the kingdom of God.
3. When Jesus left Nazareth, he did so as a "carpenter", but now when he returns he is a prophet and miracle worker with a wealth of disciples.
   1. The people in the synagogue are "amazed" at what Jesus says and does. Because Jesus taught in his hometown of Nazareth, the synagogue is full of people who have known him all his life. They don't seem to have noticed before that there was anything special about Jesus.
   2. When a new preacher comes along who causes "astonishment", it is not wrong in itself to examine the person and ask where he got it from.
      1. However, the Nazarene seems to suffer from the law of Jannah when they say that what Jesus says and does cannot come from God because he was just an ordinary "carpenter".

[[@Bible:mark 6:3]]Mark 6:3

1. Like Joseph, Mary's husband, Jesus had previously worked as some kind of craftsman, stonecutter or carpenter.
   1. The Nazareths don't want to believe in Jesus because they know his whole family and because Jesus used to be an ordinary "worker", an ordinary person just like them.
2. When Jesus is called "the son of Mary", it is pejorative:
   1. A man was never called his "mother's son" even if his father was dead.
      1. The last time Joseph is mentioned is when Jesus is twelve years old, which probably means that Joseph died shortly afterwards (Luke 2:51).
   2. There may have been rumors that Jesus was an illegitimate child (John 8:41).
   3. But even though the malicious ones tried to knock Jesus, they were right; Jesus was born of Mary, but only adopted by Joseph.
3. Jesus was Mary's firstborn child, these were her others (Luke 2:7).
   1. James became the leader of the church in Jerusalem and wrote the letter of James (Acts 15:13, James 1:1).
   2. Judas wrote the Epistle of Jude (Jude 1).

[[@Bible:mark 6:4]]Mark 6:4

1. Then as now, this is a saying that is all too often true when a preacher preaches in his home environment.
2. Moses called the coming Messiah a *"prophet"* and warned of the consequences of not listening to this prophet (Deuteronomy 18:18-19).

[[@Bible:mark 6:5]]Mark 6:5

1. The power of God is communicated through Jesus when people *believe* in Jesus.
   1. Jesus could perform works of power if a person lacked faith but *wanted to* believe (Mark 9:24). But the Nazarethites neither *believed* in Jesus nor *wanted to believe* in Jesus.

## Mark 6:6-13 - Jesus sends out the twelve

[[@Bible:mark 6:6]]Mark 6:6

1. Even though Jesus worked hard and taught everywhere, he could only be in one place at a time. Now Jesus thinks it's time for the twelve apostles to join in Jesus' ministry and thus extend Jesus' teaching.

[[@Bible:mark 6:7]]Mark 6:7

1. The word "apostle" means "sent out".
2. According to the Pentateuch, every case was to be decided by *"the testimony of two or three witnesses"* (Deuteronomy 19:15). Jesus sends out his twelve apostles two by two, thus confirming the truthfulness of their testimony.
3. As Jesus' special apostles, the apostles represent Jesus himself (Matt 10:40). The same mission and authority that Jesus himself had he passes on to his disciples, which is still true today.

[[@Bible:mark 6:8]]Mark 6:8

1. These instructions are partly different from the other instructions Jesus gives to his disciples (Matt 10:9-10, Luke 9:3).
2. When the apostles were not allowed to take more than the bare essentials, their trust in God was tested. They were challenged to trust God to provide for those who put the kingdom of God first (Matthew 6:31-34). As they preached about the kingdom of God, they learned about the kingdom of God.

[[@Bible:mark 6:11]]Mark 6:11

1. It was not uncommon in Bible times for a Jew to shake off the dust when they left a pagan area. When Jesus tells his disciples to do so when they leave a *Jewish* village, this signaled that the village was behaving like pagans when they did not listen to the message of the kingdom of God.

[[@Bible:mark 6:12-13]]Mark 6:12-13

1. What Jesus has begun, the apostles now continue: they preach *repentance, cast out evil spirits* and *heal the sick*.
   1. This shows that Jesus' power and authority is also with his disciples.
      1. Even today, a disciple of Jesus should preach repentance, cast out evil spirits and heal the sick.
   2. The apostles did not preach a message of their own but preached what they had heard Jesus preach.
      1. Even today, a disciple of Jesus should preach the message written in the Bible, and avoid preaching his own made-up message.
2. Anointing the sick with oil was a common way of caring for the sick in biblical times (Isaiah 1:6, Luke 10:34).
   1. Anointing someone with oil was used to install someone as a priest (Ex 28:41) and king (1 Sam 10:1).
   2. The Hebrew word *"Messiah"* means "the anointed one", so it is not impossible that Jesus' disciples anointed people with oil as a symbolic act signaling that they belonged to the Messiah, the anointed one.
   3. James urges those who are sick in the church to call the elders of the church so that they can *"pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord"* (James 5:14).

## Mark 6:14-29 - The Death of John the Baptist

[[@Bible:mark 6:14]]Mark 6:14

1. Herod was not really a *"king"* but a "tetrarch" or "governor", a lower rank of leader (Matthew 14:1). However, he very much wanted to be king, so this may be an ironic detail that Mark adds.
   1. Herod ruled over Galilee and Perea and founded the city of Tiberias.
   2. This Herod was the son of Herod the Great who murdered the boys in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16).
2. It seems that it was not uncommon for people around Jesus to believe that he was an Old Testament prophet who had been resurrected (Matthew 16:13-14, Luke 9:8).

[[@Bible:mark 6:15]]Mark 6:15

1. Elijah was one of the first and greatest prophets of the Old Testament (1 Kings 17-2, 2 Kings).
2. Malachi prophesied that Elijah would appear just before the Messiah and make way for him (Mal 3:1, 4:5-6).
   1. This "Elijah role" is given to John the Baptist (Matt 11:14).
3. Elijah's disciple Elisha received a *"double inheritance of Elijah's spirit"* when Elijah died, in other words, Elisha was allowed to continue Elijah's prophetic work but received twice as much of God's power in his life (2 Kings 2:9).
   1. It may be a distorted view of this that Herod believes that John the Baptist has been resurrected in Jesus in the same way that Elisha received double power when Elijah died.
4. Another similarity between John the Baptist and Elijah is that the queen who lived in Elijah's time, Jezebel, strongly influenced her husband the king and even tried to assassinate God's prophet Elijah but failed (1 Kings 19:2). Now Herodias influences her husband Herod to murder John and succeeds.
5. Moses had prophesied that a prophet like Moses himself would come (Deuteronomy 18:18-19).
   1. Some believed that Jesus was this prophet (Acts 3:22, 7:37).

[[@Bible:mark 6:20]]Mark 6:20

1. Herod seems to have *appreciated* John the Baptist and considered him a prophet, but he did not let his life be *influenced by* John:
   1. When John the Baptist referred to the word of God and called Herod to change, he did not listen (Leviticus 20:21).
   2. When Herodias wanted to execute John, he finally agreed.
   3. The mistake Herod made was that he was unable to give himself wholeheartedly to God, but instead was torn between his respect for John and his love for his wife. Unable to decide which leg to stand on, his wife Herodias eventually won.

## Mark 6:30-44 - Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

[[@Bible:mark 6:30]]Mark 6:30

1. The word *"apostle"* means "sent" and is a title that also indicates mission.
2. Jesus had previously sent his twelve closest disciples to represent him by preaching repentance, casting out evil spirits and healing the sick. Now that they have returned, they will report back.
3. It is Jesus who is the true shepherd and teacher, but a disciple can have the opportunity to represent Jesus by being a shepherd or teacher.
   1. Then you are to represent Jesus by teaching what Jesus has previously taught, while being aware that you will have to give an account to Jesus and that you will receive a harsher judgment (Jas 3:1).

[[@Bible:mark 6:31]]Mark 6:31

1. Jesus worked hard but also made it a priority to rest. Jesus wants to teach us not only how to work but also how to rest.

[[@Bible:mark 6:34]]Mark 6:34

1. Sheep without a shepherd don't last long; they can't find food and water on their own and they can't protect themselves from attackers.
2. Just as the disciples of the past, we need to go to Jesus today for food, water and protection. In other biblical texts, these are symbols:
   1. Food = the Word of God (Matt 4:4).
   2. Water = the Holy Spirit (John 7:38).
   3. The aggressor = the devil (1 Peter 5:8).

[[@Bible:mark 6:36]]Mark 6:36

1. Jesus and the disciples faced the same problem, but they had completely different solutions to the problem.
   1. The disciples want to send the people away while Jesus wants to perform a miracle.
2. A *"denarius"* is equivalent to a day's wages, so if the disciples were to pay for the food out of their own money, it would be a lot of money.

[[@Bible:mark 6:37]]Mark 6:37

1. Here Jesus teaches us several things:
   1. Jesus cares for the hungry.
   2. Jesus commands his disciples to feed the hungry.
   3. Nothing is too small to be used in God's service, Jesus can multiply what little we have.
2. First Jesus gave the people spiritual food by teaching them, then he gave them real food.
   1. In this we should take Jesus as an example and invest in both without neglecting either.
3. Just as God provided food for the people of Israel during the wilderness wanderings, Jesus provides food for the people of Israel (Exodus 16:4).

[[@Bible:mark 6:39]]Mark 6:39

1. It is no coincidence that Mark first describes Jesus as a *"shepherd"* and then mentions the *"green grass"*, for Psalm 23 says: *"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures."* (Psalm 23:1-2a).

[[@Bible:mark 6:43]]Mark 6:43

1. Even though Jesus had the capacity to miraculously create a huge amount of new food, it was still important not to throw away the food that was left.
   1. In the same way, today we should think about not throwing away food unnecessarily while there are poor and hungry people around us.

## Mark 6:45-52 - Jesus Walks on the Water

[[@Bible:mark 6:46]]Mark 6:46

1. Because Jesus had worked hard, he now wanted to spend time alone with his Father to pray.
2. When Jesus was born a man, he took on the *form of* a *"servant when he became a man"* (Phil 2:6-8), thus making himself voluntarily dependent on his Father to know what he should do (John 5:19) and dependent on the Holy Spirit to do what the Father commanded (Acts 10:38).
   1. Jesus did this to fully share our human condition and to lead the way. We are Jesus' disciples when we imitate Jesus, listen to the Father and live in the power of the Holy Spirit.

[[@Bible:mark 6:48]]Mark 6:48

1. No matter how hard the disciples worked, they got nowhere because the wind was against them.
   1. This may be the case in the various stages of life, but it is important to remember that nothing is impossible for God (Luke 1:37).
2. John writes of Jesus that "through him all things were made, and without him nothing was made that was made." (John 1:3).
   1. The whole earth was created through Jesus and he has every opportunity to do what he wants with his own creation.
3. When God created the heavens and the earth, He determined the order and the laws of nature that would prevail (Gen 1:1, Jer 33:25).
   1. At a later point, Jesus tells his disciples that he has been given "all authority in heaven and on earth." (Matthew 28:18).
      1. That Jesus has been given all power on earth is here amply demonstrated by the fact that even the waters must obey him.

## Mark 6:53-56 - The sick are carried to Jesus

[[@Bible:mark 6:56]]Mark 6:56

1. The horned toad was a Jewish symbol that served as a reminder to obey God's commandments (Numbers 15:37-41).
2. Perhaps these people had heard about the woman with hemophilia who had been healed earlier when she touched Jesus on the back of her head (Matthew 9:20).
3. It was not the fact that they touched Jesus' clothes that made them healed, but it was their *active faith in Jesus in the* context of *Jesus' presence* that made them well (Mark 5:28, 34).
4. In this chapter, Jesus has shown that he has infinite resources:
   1. Jesus can miraculously bring food to 5,000 men.
   2. Jesus can walk on water.
   3. Jesus can heal all who are sick.
   4. Against this background, it is good to recall the following great biblical words: *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."* (Heb 13:8).

## Mark 7:1-13 - God's commandments or the Traditions of men

[[@Bible:mark 7:1]]Mark 7:1

1. *The "Pharisees"* were a "revival movement" among the Jewish people who studied the Pentateuch carefully and tried to live their lives accordingly. The word "Pharisee" roughly means "the consecrated".
2. The Pharisees were very careful not to break any of the commandments of the Pentateuch. They were so careful that they even put a "fence" of extra rules around the rules of the Pentateuch to minimize the risk of accidentally breaking the rules of the Pentateuch.
3. Since some Jewish leaders had already decided to kill Jesus, one can imagine that the Pharisees are examining Jesus to find a reason to execute him (John 5:18).

[[@Bible:mark 7:5]]Mark 7:5

1. When God gave the Torah (the five books of Moses) to the people of Israel, it can be said that these instructions were sometimes very easy to understand and sometimes very difficult. For example, it is written that Israel must not work on the Sabbath, a commandment that is relatively easy to understand (Exodus 31:14). But on the other hand, the Pentateuch does not define exactly what "work" is, which opens the door to a lot of follow-up questions. God also says that *"you shall distinguish between holy and unholy, between unclean and clean."* (Leviticus 10:10). Even this commandment is relatively simple, but on the other hand it does not define exactly what is unclean or clean.
   1. Because the books of Moses do not always define exactly what certain commandments mean, the people used to come to Moses and ask and he had the right to judge what was right and what was wrong. When Moses' workload became too great, this task was delegated to the leaders of the people. When the leaders answered the people's questions about how to follow the Torah and what the rules were, they were said to be *"sitting on Moses' chair"* (Exodus 18:13-27).
      1. These rules for interpreting and understanding the Pentateuch were then passed on orally and were called the "Oral Torah", the "Statutes of the Elders", the "Mishnah", and eventually the "Talmud".
   2. Jesus often criticizes the Pharisees for nullifying God's commandments when they teach the people to follow some of these rules in the *"statutes of the elders"* (Mark 7:8).
   3. Jesus says on another occasion, "The *scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses' chair. Therefore, whatever they teach you, do and keep, but do not act on their deeds. For they speak but do not act."* (Matt 23:2-3).
   4. After Peter has confessed Jesus as the Messiah, Peter is given the right by Jesus to bind and loose, which means that he is given this function that Moses had. Jesus had determined the broad guidelines but Peter is given the right to decide on the details that arise (Matthew 16:19).
2. Jesus' disciples do not break any commandment in the Pentateuch, but they do break the *"statutes of the elders"*, the extra rules that the Pharisees had put up as a fence around the Pentateuch to minimize the risk of "accidentally" breaking the rules of the Torah.
   1. The Pentateuch teaches that priests should ceremonially cleanse themselves before performing sacrificial service in the Temple (Exodus 30:17-21). The "extra rules" of the Pharisees, the *statutes of the elders*, teach that *a man's home is his temple* and that therefore, like the priests before their sacrificial service, he should ceremonially cleanse himself before he eats.
3. In this matter, one could say that Jesus and his disciples followed *Scripture*, but not *Tradition.* Jesus is not automatically against either the Jewish or the Pharisaic tradition, but he criticizes the tradition that stands in the way of Scripture. Scripture is the word of God and authoritative for a believer. The statutes of the elders are not biblical statutes and are therefore not authoritative.

[[@Bible:mark 7:6-8]]Mark 7:6-8

1. Jesus quotes Isaiah 29:13 and calls the Pharisees *hupokrites* (hypocrites in English) which is a Greek word meaning "actors".
   1. The Pharisees are actors in the sense that they played religious but in reality they were far from God.
   2. Similarly, we are religious actors today if, for example, we sing praises to God on Sundays in church but live ungodly lives the rest of the week.
2. Nowhere in Scripture does it say that God gives a command to ceremonially wash one's hands before eating.
   1. Jesus says that when the Pharisees teach that the *"statutes of the elders"* are God's commandments and try to get ordinary people to follow these human statutes, it prevents ordinary people from following God's *true* commandments.

[[@Bible:mark 7:10-13]]Mark 7:10-13

1. After his harsh words against the Pharisees, Jesus now backs up his accusation with a concrete and clear example of how the Pharisees nullify God's commandments when they follow *"the statutes of the elders"*.
   1. One of God's ten commandments says, *"Honor your father and your mother, that you may live long in the land which the Lord your God gives you."* (Genesis 20:12).
   2. There was no pension system in Jesus' time, so people honoured their parents by taking care of them financially when they got old.
   3. The Pharisees, according to their human statutes, could take the money intended to support their parents and give it as an offering to God. In this way, they gave away money that was not even their own in order to appear "pious" and "religious".
   4. It was not wrong to give an offering to God, but it was wrong to do so if it meant that God's commandment to honor one's father and mother was nullified by the offering.
      1. God says in Hosea, *"I delight in love, and not in sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God more than in burnt offerings."* (Hos 6:6).

## Mark 7:14-23 - What Defiles a Person

[[@Bible:mark 7:15]]Mark 7:15

1. The Pharisees believed that food became ceremonially unclean if eaten with unclean hands. Jesus now goes against this view and explains to his audience that food cannot defile a person, whether or not they have washed their hands.
2. Jesus explains to his disciples that uncleanness comes from the *heart* instead.
   1. A person becomes unclean if what Jesus describes emanates from his heart, regardless of whether all the ceremonial purity regulations have been followed.

[[@Bible:mark 7:19]]Mark 7:19

1. There is disagreement as to whether Jesus here ends the (kosher) law that God gave to the people of Israel regarding what food they could eat (Leviticus 11).
   1. From the context, it seems that Jesus is not talking about whether the people of Israel are now allowed to eat all food, but rather is stating that the food that the people of Israel were *allowed to* eat according to the Pentateuch does not become unclean if eaten without the ceremonial rules of the Pharisees.
      1. We also see in Acts that Peter has not understood that Jesus has finished the special dietary rules of the Jews (Acts 10:9-28).
   2. It could also be interpreted as Mark explaining to his Christian readers that Jesus does not require a Christian to enter into Jewish dietary rules.
      1. A Jew who becomes a Christian can thus, according to such an interpretation, continue to live according to the dietary rules of the Bible, while a gentile who becomes a Christian should not fall under the Jewish dietary rules.

[[@Bible:mark 7:21]]Mark 7:21

1. While most of us can beat our chests and claim we've never murdered anyone, we've probably fallen for some of the other evils in this list. Unfortunately, man is full of sin and needs a Savior who can forgive us our sins and create in us a new and pure heart. In dying on the cross, Jesus took all our sins and gave us the opportunity to be forgiven and cleansed.
   1. *"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* (1 John 1:8-9).
   2. *"Create in me, O God, a pure heart, and give me again a spirit of boldness."* (Psalm 51:12).

## Mark 7:24-30 - The Syrophoenician Woman’s Faith

[[@Bible:mark 7:24]]Mark 7:24

1. Tyre was an important port city in Phoenicia (present-day Lebanon).
2. We have seen earlier in Mark that Jesus has tried to withdraw from the crowds in order to rest and teach the disciples a little more undisturbed (Mark 6:32-34).
   1. Having failed to escape in the past, Jesus now goes away from Jewish areas and stays among the Gentiles in the hope that no one will recognise him.
   2. Jesus' focus was normally on *"the lost sheep of the house of Israel"* (Matthew 15:24).
3. Wherever Jesus goes, he becomes known.
   1. In the same way, our faith in Jesus should make people around us immediately recognise Jesus in us.

[[@Bible:mark 7:25]]Mark 7:25

1. The woman shows signs of *desperation* by coming *straight to* Jesus, but at the same time she shows great *respect for* Jesus by *falling down* before him.
2. This woman's neighbors had visited Jesus, but unfortunately she had not been able to find him herself (Mark 3:8).
   1. Now, when Jesus suddenly appears, she wastes no time and hurries to meet him.

[[@Bible:mark 7:26]]Mark 7:26

1. Here Mark makes it abundantly clear that she was a *Gentile, i.e.* a "non-Jew".
   1. The term "Gentile" (goyim in Hebrew) has its background in the fact that the people of Israel were not allowed to have any association with the seven nations living in the land of Canaan when Joshua invaded (Exodus 23:28-33).
   2. Although not stated in the Old Testament, in Jesus' time it was unusual for Jews to have any dealings with Gentiles because according to the above-mentioned *"statutes of the elders"* (and later also written down in the Mishnah) they were considered "unclean".
      1. By visiting this pagan area, Jesus shows that he does not obey this Jewish tradition.
      2. God shows Peter that he and the other Christians should not look upon Gentiles as "unholy" or "unclean" (Acts 10:28).

[[@Bible:mark 7:27]]Mark 7:27

1. Generally speaking, the *"children"* symbolize the Jews, and the *"dogs" the* Gentiles.
   1. Jesus' mission was directed first and foremost to the Jewish people (Matthew 15:24, Acts 13:46, Romans 1:16).
   2. Paul teaches in Ephesians that the wall that separated Jews and Gentiles has been torn down with Jesus' death on the cross. But since Jesus had not yet died on the cross at that time, the Gentiles must wait (Ephesians 2:11-22).
   3. After the wall of partition was torn down, it was time for Jesus to send his disciples to the Gentiles and *"make disciples of all nations"* (Matthew 28:19).
2. Among both Jews and Gentiles, *"dog"* was a very negative slur associated with stray wild dogs.
   1. Jesus, however, does not use the usual word for dog but calls her literally "little puppy", in a much more positive sense.
   2. So Jesus' parable shows that although there is a difference between children and puppies, both fit within one household and both get the food they need.
3. In this specific case, the *"children"* symbolize Jesus' disciples, and *the "dogs"* symbolize the woman and her daughter.
   1. Jesus had probably come to this area to be alone with his disciples and to teach them a little more privately.
      1. The woman insists that although Jesus gives the disciples *"bread"*, the household puppies can actually get some crumbs at the same time.
4. Jesus challenges the woman to see that although the Jews hear about Jesus first, the Gentiles also have access to Jesus. If she believes this, she will also receive what she asks for.

[[@Bible:mark 7:28]]Mark 7:28

1. This woman understands that Jesus is not rejecting her when he answers her with this parable.
2. The woman combines an *unshakeable belief in Jesus' ability to perform miracles* with *a humble acceptance* that she is just a puppy.
   1. The world is full of people with just *one* of these qualities.
      1. You may have an amazing faith that God is good and will give you what you need. Your faith is so strong that when for some reason you don't get what you ask for, you start demanding it from God. You are absolutely right that God is good and that he loves to give, but you could use some humility.
      2. Another person, on the contrary, may be humble, but lack faith that God wants to give. You may think that you are the most insignificant person in the world; why should God hear your prayer? You need to realise how incredibly loved you are by God and that he actually wants to answer your prayers.
   2. She recognizes her own smallness and accepts her position but refuses to abandon her faith in God and insists that He intervene in her situation.
   3. If we approach God with respect and recognise our own smallness, the Bible encourages us to stand up and refer to God's goodness and insist that he give us what we ask for.

[[@Bible:mark 7:30]]Mark 7:30

1. The unnamed woman is a wonderful example of a good *intercessor*.
   1. She actively takes over another person's problem and asks Jesus for help.
   2. She really believed that Jesus could help by asking him for this.
   3. She is desperate in that she immediately comes to Jesus.
   4. She shows great respect for Jesus by falling down before him.
   5. She does not give in when Jesus initially gives a seemingly dismissive response.
   6. She humbly accepts that Jesus calls her a little puppy.

## Mark 7:31-37 - Jesus Heals a Deaf Man

[[@Bible:mark 7:31]]Mark 7:31

1. Decapolis means "the ten cities" and was an area in modern-day Jordan where ten cities had joined together in a confederation.
2. The last time Jesus was here, he drove the Legion out of a man who was badly possessed and who was then asked to tell about Jesus in Decapolis (Mark 5:1-20).

[[@Bible:mark 7:32]]Mark 7:32

1. Jesus often healed the sick by laying his hands on them (Mark 6:5).
   1. People knew that Jesus used to heal the sick in this way (Mark 7:32).
   2. Jesus urges his disciples to heal the sick by laying hands on them (Mark 16:18).
   3. Jesus' disciples healed the sick by laying hands on them (Acts 28:8).
   4. Jesus blessed people by laying his hands on them (Mark 10:16).
   5. The power of the Holy Spirit is communicated through the laying on of hands (Acts 8:17-19, 9:17, 19:6).
2. But even though Jesus often healed the sick in this way, there is no magical automaticity through the laying on of hands. The most important ingredient in someone being healed is that the person actually believes that Jesus can heal and demonstrates this by acting in accordance with their faith.

[[@Bible:mark 7:33]]Mark 7:33

1. It was not uncommon for some kind of "act of faith" to precede the miracles Jesus performed:
   1. Jesus calls the *lame man* to *stand up* (Mark 2:11).
   2. Jesus invites the man with a *withered hand* to *stretch it out* (Mark 3:5).
   3. When the woman with hemophilia *touches Jesus, believing that* she can be healed, she is healed (Mark 5:28-29).
   4. Earlier in this chapter, when the woman *does not leave Jesus* despite a seemingly dismissive response, Jesus heals her daughter (Mark 7:24-30).
   5. Jesus asks two blind men, *"Do you think I can do this?" They answered, "Yes, Lord." Then he touched their eyes and said, "As you believe, so shall it be done to you." And their eyes were opened.* "(Matthew 9:28-30).
2. But in this case, the man can neither speak nor hear, so Jesus cannot ask the man questions, but must use other means to make the man believe in Jesus' power.
   1. Even though the man was deaf and dumb, he could see, so Jesus performs symbolic acts to make the man understand what is going on and to challenge the man to believe in Jesus' power to heal.
      1. Jesus touches the man in the places where he is sick and then looks up at the sky, which symbolised God, to make him understand what Jesus is about to do.
      2. Jesus says *"Effata!"* so that the deaf man can read Jesus' lips and thus be further helped to understand what is going on and make him believe in Jesus' power to heal.

[[@Bible:mark 7:36]]Mark 7:36

1. Jesus did not want to be known as the Messiah as long as the general image of the Messiah held by the people prevailed. The Jewish people longed for a Messiah who would be a new David, a new warrior king who would drive out the Romans and re-establish Israel as a strong nation.
   1. The first time Jesus came to earth, he came as *the suffering servant*, offering peace and reconciliation to all peoples (Acts 10:34-36).
   2. At Jesus' return, he will take his rightful place as king and destroy all his enemies (Rev 19:11-16).
2. The people were happy about what Jesus had done, but they didn't want to obey him. If you want Jesus as your Lord, you need to both praise him and obey him, not just one or the other.

[[@Bible:mark 7:37]]Mark 7:37

1. After God created the earth, he looked at his work and considered *it "very good"* (Genesis 1:31).
   1. Unfortunately, the Fall destroyed God's good creation and sin and sickness became a reality in human existence.
   2. When Jesus goes around healing the sick and casting out demons, he restores the good creation and so Mark can write, alluding to the creation story, that *"all he has done is good."*
   3. Paul writes: *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."* (2 Corinthians 5:17).
2. Mark is probably also connecting to what Isaiah prophesied 700 years earlier (Isaiah 35:3-6).

## Mark 8:1-9 - Jesus Feeds the Four Thousand

[[@Bible:mark 8:1]]Mark 8:1

1. This is the second time that Jesus performs a "food miracle". The first is described in Mark 6:30-44.
   1. The last feast was among Jews, but this time it is on Gentile territory, signaling Jesus' intention to spread the kingdom of God among the Gentiles as well.

[[@Bible:mark 8:2]]Mark 8:2

1. Many people had come from far away and sacrificed a lot to listen to Jesus' teaching.
2. Jesus teaches the people about spiritual matters but is also concerned about their physical well-being. A person cannot do without one or the other.
3. If a person comes to Jesus for spiritual food, Jesus will also give worldly food. Whoever seeks the kingdom of God will also receive all the rest (Matthew 6:33).

[[@Bible:mark 8:4]]Mark 8:4

1. Jesus knows very well how to solve the food shortage, so Jesus' statement becomes a test to see if the disciples have learned anything from Jesus in the past.
   1. In the same way, today we should let our past experiences of answering prayer strengthen our faith for what God can do today.
2. It is very strange that the disciples do not remember that Jesus has previously performed a miracle by turning two loaves of bread and five fish into food for 5,000 men. However, Mark writes in chapter 6: *"they had not understood this about the loaves. Their hearts were hard."* (Mark 6:52).

[[@Bible:mark 8:6]]Mark 8:6

1. Even if the disciples did not have much, Jesus was able to transform their little resources so that there was enough for everyone, and moreover, there was enough left over.
   1. In the same way, today we can give what little we have to God and let him transform it into something great.

## Mark 8:10-13 - The Pharisees Demand a Sign

[[@Bible:mark 8:11]]Mark 8:11

1. *The "Pharisees"* were a "revival movement" among the Jewish people who studied the Pentateuch carefully and tried to live their lives accordingly. The word "Pharisee" roughly means "the consecrated".
2. There is nothing wrong with examining and discussing with Jesus to see if what he says is true, but the Pharisees do this to *"entrap"* him.
3. The Pharisees ask for a sign from heaven, which would be proof that Jesus was authorized by God.
   1. Jesus had done many signs in the past; for example, he had healed the sick and cast out demons.
   2. The problem was not a lack of signs from Jesus, but the Pharisees' lack of a willingness to believe in Jesus when they saw the signs he did.

[[@Bible:mark 8:12]]Mark 8:12

1. No matter how many signs Jesus did, the Pharisees still ask for one more sign to accept Jesus.
   1. Jesus sighs deeply because he is tired and resigned to the unbelief of the Pharisees.
2. Jesus never made signs to convince those who would not believe.
   1. Jesus did signs to heal the sick in love, not to show himself and prove to others who he is.
3. If you have already decided in advance not to believe, then no matter how many signs you see, you still won't believe. That's why Jesus doesn't give the Pharisees a sign.

## Mark 8:14-21 - The Leaven of the Pharisees and Herod

[[@Bible:mark 8:15]]Mark 8:15

1. In biblical times, leaven was often a symbol of sin.
   1. Just as a little leaven in a dough leavens the whole dough and causes it to swell, a little sin poisons the whole life (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).
   2. The Jewish people celebrated Passover by eating unleavened bread because they did not have time to prepare the bread when they had to leave Egypt in a hurry.
      1. The Christian celebrates Easter because that is when Jesus died on the cross and took away sin.
      2. Jesus' admonition to beware of leaven is thus an admonition to beware of sin, because even a little sin can poison a lot.

[[@Bible:mark 8:16]]Mark 8:16

1. The disciples didn't understand what Jesus was talking about.
   1. The difference between the Pharisees and the disciples was that the Pharisees (probably) understood who Jesus was, but did not want to follow him, while the disciples, at least at first, did not understand who Jesus was, but wanted to follow him anyway.
   2. Faith is not always about *understanding*, but about *following*.

[[@Bible:mark 8:17]]Mark 8:17

1. The disciples were too busy thinking about the worldly bread to understand that Jesus was talking about the spiritual bread.
2. Jesus has shown earlier in this chapter that he can arrange as much bread as he wants, it is no problem for him.
3. As a disciple of Jesus, we don't have to worry about worldly things, Jesus takes care of that for us (Matt 6:24-34).
   1. Instead, Jesus' disciples should focus on the kingdom of God, and God will take care of the rest.

## Mark 8:22-26 - Jesus Heals a Blind Man at Bethsaida

[[@Bible:mark 8:23]]Mark 8:23

1. This is the second time that Mark describes how Jesus healed the sick by spitting (Mark 7:33).
2. In biblical times, spittle was considered to have a healing effect.

[[@Bible:mark 8:25]]Mark 8:25

1. This is the only time when Jesus gradually heals someone.
   1. This does not mean that Jesus could not heal him instantly, Jesus has shown many times before that he has the authority to heal the sick.
2. Jesus heals the blind man's sight gradually to illustrate to the disciples that their *spiritual* blindness will be healed gradually.
   1. Jesus had just said to the disciples, *"Do you have eyes and do not see?"* (Mark 8:18).
   2. When the disciples began to walk with Jesus, they knew almost nothing about Jesus, but gradually and as they went along, they came to know Jesus more and more.
   3. In the same way, today we can gradually have our spiritual eyes opened by Jesus so that we understand more and more who Jesus is.
3. When I went to the Bjärka-Säby Bible School, a friend and I used to read a chapter from the Bible every night. When we got to this passage, my friend asked me if I could pray for him, because he had a congenital defect in his foot. I prayed for my friend and then he tried standing on his foot and noticed that it had actually improved a little. Then he asked me to pray again, which I was happy to do because I noticed that it seemed to work. After the second prayer, he tried standing on his foot again and found that he had now been completely healed by God in his foot!
   1. When we witness miracles, our faith grows and we witness even more miracles.

## Mark 8:27-30 - Peter's Confession

[[@Bible:mark 8:27]]Mark 8:27

1. *John the Baptist*, because he preached repentance.
   1. Jesus also preached repentance, but he was much greater than John the Baptist.
2. *Elijah*, because he did many miracles.
   1. Jesus also did many miracles, but he was much greater than Elijah.
3. *Prophet*, because he conveyed the word of God.
   1. Jesus also conveyed the word of God, but he was much greater than just a prophet.
4. If you think that Jesus corresponds only to one of these personalities, then you have only partially understood who Jesus is.

[[@Bible:mark 8:29]]Mark 8:29

1. It is not enough to know what others think of Jesus, one needs to realize and confess who Jesus is.
   1. For example, one is not automatically a Christian because one's parents are Christians.
   2. It is not enough just to confess what one's pastor has taught, one needs to realize this and confess it.
2. *"Messiah"* is Hebrew and means "the anointed one"
   1. In Old Testament times, it was common for God's representatives to be anointed with oil to symbolize that they were chosen by God and sanctified for a specific mission.
      1. David was anointed king (1 Sam 16:1-13).
      2. Aaron was anointed a priest (Leviticus 8:12).
      3. Elisha was anointed a prophet (1 Kings 19:16).
   2. As the Messiah, Jesus is all three:
      1. Jesus is King (Matthew 27:11).
      2. Jesus is a priest (Heb 6:20).
      3. Jesus is a prophet (John 12:49).
   3. Zechariah prophesied of a *"son"* who would be king and priest at the same time and who would build the temple of the Lord (Zech 6:12-13).
3. The Jewish people waited for the Messiah to come and forcibly drive out the Romans and re-establish Israel as a powerful nation.
   1. Jesus is the Messiah, but he has not come to respond to these expectations, so he forbids his disciples to say that he is the Messiah because then there is a risk that the Jewish people will take matters into their own hands and try to make Jesus king by force (John 6:15).
4. Jesus is the Messiah who has established the Kingdom of God, not as a worldly nation, but as a spiritual nation.

## Mark 8:31-33 - Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

[[@Bible:mark 8:31]]Mark 8:31

1. Even the disciples had a wrong preconception and thought that the Messiah would be a powerful king who liberates Israel in a worldly way.
   1. So Jesus now begins to teach them the real story.

[[@Bible:mark 8:32]]Mark 8:32

1. Peter believed and confessed that Jesus is the Messiah, but he had a wrong preconception of what the Messiah would be like and therefore cannot accept the Messiah that Jesus describes.
   1. Jesus has just told the disciples that he will suffer, but Peter does not believe in Jesus.
   2. Isaiah has prophesied that the Messiah will suffer and die for the sake of the people (Is 53), but Peter ignores God's word.

[[@Bible:mark 8:33]]Mark 8:33

1. If our human image of God does not fit, it is we who need to change our perception, not the other way around.
   1. We need to believe what Jesus says and learn God's word even if it doesn't fit our own worldview.
2. Peter is not *possessed* by a demon, but he is *influenced by* Satan, who tries to create a false image of Jesus.
   1. It is my understanding that no Christian can be *possessed* by a demon or unclean spirit, this is because when a person becomes a Christian the Holy Spirit moves into that person and demons cannot possess a body where the Holy Spirit dwells (Rom 8:9). On the other hand, a Christian who is not vigilant can be *influenced* and deceived by Satan and his demons (Matt 16:21-23). James therefore gives the good advice, *"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."* (James 4:7).

## Mark 8:34-38 - Following Jesus

[[@Bible:mark 8:34]]Mark 8:34

1. As followers of Jesus, we are called, in every aspect of our lives, to *deny* ourselves, no matter what our personal goals in life or our attractions. For our identity is in *Christ*, not in our family, in our job, in our sexuality, in our nationality, or even in our hockey team.
   1. To deny something is to renounce something. To deny ourselves is thus to renounce our own selfish desires and live for Christ according to God's will. Our calling as Christians is to live for Christ and to crucify our flesh with all its passions and desires.
   2. For a disciple, nothing must be more important than Jesus, and a disciple must always be ready to leave everything to follow Jesus.
2. The cross was a cruel Roman method of execution.
   1. Taking up one's cross and following Jesus means that one has given one's life to Jesus and that there is no turning back.

## Mark 9:1-13 - The Transfiguration

[[@Bible:mark 9:2]]Mark 9:2

1. These three disciples were part of Jesus' immediate circle (Mark 5:37, Mark 14:33).
   1. Jesus often spoke in parables to large crowds, but when he was alone with his disciples, he explained in more depth (Mark 4:34).
2. A mountain is an ideal place to meet God because it allows you to be alone without being disturbed by people walking by.
   1. Moses met God on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:12-18).
   2. Elijah met God on Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:8-18).
3. For a brief moment, the three disciples saw the glory of Jesus, as it was before he was born and as it will be after his death and resurrection (John 17:5).
   1. In Philippians 2:6-7 we read that *"Though he was in the form of God, he did not count his existence as God as a victory, but gave himself up by taking the form of a servant when he became a man."* 
      1. So Jesus took the *form of* a *"servant"* when he became a man, but now the disciples see Jesus in his *"form of God"*.
   2. When the atonement through death on the cross was completed, Jesus received his glory back (Heb 2:9).
   3. Jesus gives of his glory to his disciples (John 17:22).
   4. Jesus will return to earth in full majesty and glory (Mark 13:26).

[[@Bible:mark 9:3]]Mark 9:3

1. At the end of his life, John saw Jesus again in all his glory, and even then he describes Jesus as white: *"His head and his hair were white as wool, like snow, and his eyes like flames of fire"* (Rev 1:14).

[[@Bible:mark 9:4]]Mark 9:4

1. Moses and Elijah have met God on two mountains, now they will meet Jesus on this mountain.
2. Moses represents the Law and Elijah represents the Prophets.
   1. The Law (i.e. the five books of Moses, was at the beginning of the Old Testament, and the Prophets was at the end of the Old Testament). *"The Law and the Prophets"* is an expression similar to our English "from cover to cover" and stands for "the whole Old Testament".
      1. Jesus showed the Emmaus pilgrims that it is written about the Messiah throughout the Old Testament (Luke 24:27).

[[@Bible:mark 9:5]]Mark 9:5

1. Peter was horrified by what he witnessed, but still considered it good and wanted to make sure that Moses and Elijah stayed as long as possible.
2. Peter didn't like Jesus' talk about his suffering, and now that he sees Jesus' glory, he wants more of it (Mark 8:31-33).
3. Israel celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles by dwelling once a year in tabernacles to commemorate the wilderness wandering (Leviticus 23:42-43).

[[@Bible:mark 9:6]]Mark 9:6

1. Peter was afraid and didn't know what to say, two clear indications that should have made him realize that he really shouldn't say anything.
   1. Peter was often the spokesman for the other disciples (Acts 2:14).
   2. Peter was energetic, brash and thoughtless, yet he was chosen by Jesus to be the leader of the disciples. This shows that God can change a person for the better.
2. Peter had a recurring habit of constantly telling Jesus what Jesus ought to do (Mark 8:32), but as he developed in his discipleship, the more he did what Jesus told him to do instead.

[[@Bible:mark 9:7]]Mark 9:7

1. The glory of God has many times before appeared in the form of a cloud (Exodus 16:10).
2. This is the second time the Father speaks of the Son (Mark 1:11).
3. With Moses and Elijah beside him, Jesus is highlighted as even greater than the Law and the Prophets when the disciples are invited to listen to Jesus.

[[@Bible:mark 9:9]]Mark 9:9

1. That the disciples often misunderstood Jesus' mission is clear, not least from this chapter. That's why Jesus tells his disciples to be quiet about what they have seen until Jesus has risen again.
2. The rest of the Jewish people had also misunderstood Jesus' mission and at times wanted to make Jesus king of Israel by force (John 6:15).
3. Jesus did not seek human glory but was focused on his mission; to reconcile humanity (John 5:41).

[[@Bible:mark 9:11]]Mark 9:11

1. The disciples knew that Malachi had prophesied that Elijah would come and prepare the Jewish people for the Messiah and now they wonder if this has happened with the incident on the mountain (Mal 4:5-6).
   1. Jesus informs his disciples that Elijah has come, but that it was John the Baptist who was this Elijah (Mark 1:2-8).
   2. However, the fact that Elijah has come does not mean that the Messiah will not suffer; on the contrary, Jesus teaches that the Son of Man will suffer much and be despised.

## Mark 9:14-29 - Jesus Heals a Boy with an Unclean Spirit

[[@Bible:mark 9:17]]Mark 9:17

1. When Matthew describes the same event, he adds that this boy suffers from *"falling sickness"*, an older term for epilepsy (Matthew 17:15).
   1. William Menzies Alexander describes the boy's epileptic symptoms in his book *Medical Aspects of Demonic Possession*:
      1. He screams before fainting, he falls suddenly, he has convulsions, he sputters from the mouth, he rolls around on the ground and his total exhaustion makes people around him think he's dead.
      2. But the fact that the boy is described as epileptic does not necessarily mean that he was not possessed by a demon, but rather that the demon *caused* the boy's illness.
      3. You don't have to be possessed by a demon if you are sick, but there is a possibility that the illness is caused by a demon.
   2. If the people of the past were sometimes a little too quick to describe sick people as demon-possessed, the people of today are sometimes a little too quick to describe demon-possessed people as sick.

[[@Bible:mark 9:18]]Mark 9:18

1. While Jesus was on the mountain, the disciples tried to cast out the demon but failed. This upsets Jesus because it shows that the disciples have not come very far in their faith.
2. In New Testament times, it was commonly believed that one had to know the name of the demon in order to cast it out. Since the boy was mute and thus unable to say the demon's name, the disciples probably considered this an impossible case.
   1. Jesus makes it abundantly clear that he does not depend on the name of the demon to cast it out.

[[@Bible:mark 9:23]]Mark 9:23

1. Since Jesus' disciples have failed to cast out the demon, the boy's father has begun to despair that even Jesus can cast out the demon.
   1. For God, all things are possible, so the question is not whether the miracle can happen or not, but whether the father believes that God can perform this miracle (Mark 10:27).
      1. It is a person's faith that makes the miracle of God available. Of course, God can perform miracles independently of man, but often God chooses to perform miracles in the context of a person's faith.
      2. Jesus could not work miracles when people did not believe in him (Mark 6:5).
      3. The woman with hemophilia was healed when she touched Jesus in faith (Mark 5:34).
      4. Jesus often challenged the sick to go a step further in their faith so that they would be healed (Mark 5:36).
      5. Even the disciples of Jesus today have the power to cast out demons (Luke 9:1, Mark 16:17).
   2. If something is according to God's will, it only takes a little faith like a grain of mustard seed to do great things (Luke 17:6).

[[@Bible:mark 9:24]]Mark 9:24

1. Although the boy's father confessed his faith, it was weak and lacking, so he asks Jesus for help.
   1. Without God's help, it is sometimes difficult to believe, so it is not wrong to ask God for help to believe.
   2. James writes*, "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."* (James 4:8).

[[@Bible:mark 9:29]]Mark 9:29

1. Jesus has given his disciples the authority to cast out demons, but the belief that one has received this authority is strengthened by living close to God in prayer.
   1. Believing that you have received God's authority while living close to God in prayer is an excellent combination.
2. If you lack the faith needed to cast out demons, you should do what the boy's father did; turn to Jesus and pray for more faith.
3. Some Bible translations have a longer version of this verse: "with prayer *and fasting".*
   1. This is because some Greek manuscripts contain the addition *"and fasting"*, while the oldest manuscripts lack this.
   2. Which translation is more correct is difficult to answer, although research suggests that *"and fast"* was not in the original text but is a later addition. Either way, it doesn't really matter since prayer and fasting are often connected.

## Mark 9:30-32 - Jesus Again Foretells Death, Resurrection

[[@Bible:mark 9:30-31]]Mark 9:30-31

1. Jesus now begins to finish his ministry in Galilee and enters a new phase that will end with the crucifixion in Jerusalem.
2. When Jesus preached to the public, he did not preach that the Messiah must die.
   1. When Peter found out that the Messiah was going to die, he tried to stop Jesus from doing so (Mark 8:31-33).
      1. If the public also learns that the Messiah will soon die, there is a danger that they too will try to prevent Jesus' death, and then the atonement will fail. That is why Jesus does not want the people to know until the atonement is completed. Only after his death and resurrection were the disciples commissioned to teach the people about this.

[[@Bible:mark 9:32]]Mark 9:32

1. Even the disciples had a hard time with the message of Jesus' death, but Jesus still taught them about it so they would know about it beforehand.
2. The disciples, as well as the rest of the people, had a wrong preconception and thought that the Messiah would be a powerful king who liberates Israel in a worldly way.
   1. However, the disciples and the people should have known that Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah will suffer and die for the sake of the people (Is 53).

## Mark 9:33-37 - Who is the greatest?

[[@Bible:mark 9:34]]Mark 9:34

1. The disciples believed that Jesus, as the Messiah, would become king and re-establish Israel as a mighty nation. Presumably, they are now discussing who will have what role in Jesus' new government.

[[@Bible:mark 9:35]]Mark 9:35

1. When a Jewish rabbi would teach his disciples, he would sit down while the listeners had to stand up.
   1. Now when Jesus sits down and calls his disciples to him, it signals that he has something very important to say.
2. The disciples were arguing about who was closest to Jesus and who would have the finest and most glorious role in the Messiah's kingdom, but they had not understood that being great in the kingdom of God is not the same as being great in the kingdom of the world.
   1. A servant is not a slave who *is forced to* do chores, but someone who *volunteers to* help others.
   2. A disciple should not seek to be the greatest and foremost, but should focus on lifting up other people and serving others instead of himself.
   3. Jesus himself set a good example; he did not pursue success and exaltation, but went around ministering to the people by healing the sick and teaching the word of God.

[[@Bible:mark 9:37]]Mark 9:37

1. A disciple should be as dependent on God as a child is on his parents.
2. Children were considered to be at the bottom of the social ladder, so when a disciple serves a child, he is automatically the last of all and the servant of all.
   1. A disciple of today should think about who is at the bottom of the social scale and then decide to serve them.

## Mark 9:38-41 - Anyone Not Against Us Is for Us

[[@Bible:mark 9:38]]Mark 9:38

1. The disciples had recently failed to drive the evil spirit out of the boy and now they seem annoyed that someone else, who was not in the company of Jesus, has succeeded in doing so.
   1. This anonymous disciple may have been one of John the Baptist's disciples, or one of the 70 Jesus had sent out earlier (Luke 10:1).
   2. Jesus has just taught about welcoming children in *"Jesus' name"*, now the disciples are asking if they did the right thing when they tried to stop a man who was casting out evil spirits in "Jesus' name".

[[@Bible:mark 9:39]]Mark 9:39

1. Being both God and man, Jesus is the mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5).
   1. Whoever prays to God should therefore do so in *"the name of Jesus"* (John 14:13).
      1. However, one does not have to end every prayer with the words "in Jesus' name" as if it were a magic formula. It is the purpose that counts, not the words.
   2. To pray or do something in "Jesus' name" means to act as Jesus' representative and with Jesus' authority. Similarly, an ambassador can represent a country and say or act in the "name of the country".

[[@Bible:mark 9:40]]Mark 9:40

1. Paul heard many preaching about Jesus with wrong motives, but was still glad that they were preaching about Jesus (Phil 1:15-18).
   1. In the same way, disciples should rejoice when demons are cast out in Jesus' name, even if it is not done by the disciples themselves.
   2. In the same way, today we should be careful to discourage people who may not preach perfectly or do everything 100% right, as long as they preach a biblical Jesus.

[[@Bible:mark 9:41]]Mark 9:41

1. A glass of water may be the cheapest gift you can give someone, but even this will be remembered by God.

## Mark 9:42-50 - Temptations to Sin

[[@Bible:mark 9:42]]Mark 9:42

1. This statement is a typical "hyperbole"*,* an *"exaggerated simile intended to create an unexpected reaction in the audience"*. Hyperboles were common in Jesus' time and were very useful when Jesus wanted to shock the audience in order to create a reflection. A hyperbole is not meant to be interpreted literally, but in this case the parable is intended to help Jesus' disciples understand the great seriousness of leading someone else to sin.
2. The little ones mentioned are either *children* or *new to the faith*. They have not matured enough in their faith to be able to stand on their own two feet or be strong enough to resist temptation.
3. Throwing someone into the sea with a millstone around their neck was a Roman and Greek method of execution.

[[@Bible:mark 9:43]]Mark 9:43

1. Jesus is again not literal when he calls on his disciples to cut off their hands, but uses yet another "hyperbole", i.e. shocking language to make his disciples understand the great seriousness.
   1. If, on the off chance, one were to cut off one's hand because one is tempted, then the problem arises that the other hand can also tempt to sin, and how can one cut off that hand if one has only one hand left?
   2. Jesus' point, then, is not that one should literally cut off one's body parts, but that if one is in a situation where one is exposed to temptation, one should do everything possible to get out of it so that one cannot fall into temptation (Genesis 39:11-12, 1 Corinthians 6:18).
2. ***Gehenna*** (the Valley of Hinnom), is a valley in Jerusalem.
   1. According to one theory, the Valley of Hinnom was used as Jerusalem's garbage station where garbage was burned. The fires were constantly burning and therefore acted as an image of hell. However, there is no biblical support for this theory.
   2. The Valley of Hinnom was used in Old Testament times to sacrifice children to the idol Molech (Jer 32:35).
   3. Gehenna is not a pleasant place, so Jesus warns his disciples against committing sins that lead to Gehenna (Matthew 5:22) and urges them to fear the God who has the power to condemn people to Gehenna (Luke 12:5).
   4. Hell is meant for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41), but it is also a place where people who do not belong to God go (Matthew 13:40-42).
      1. Jesus has been given the power to judge people (John 5:27) and He will condemn the wicked to Gehenna (Revelation 21:8).
         1. However, those who believe in Jesus will have eternal life (John 3:36) and go to paradise (Luke 23:43).

[[@Bible:mark 9:49]]Mark 9:49

1. In the Old Testament, all food offerings were to be salted before they were sacrificed (Leviticus 2:13).
   1. In the same way, Jesus' disciples will serve as a living sacrifice to God, *"salted"* through trials (Rom 12:1, 1 Pet 4:12).
2. The fire of trial that Jesus' disciples go through is preferable to the eternal fire that the wicked go through.

[[@Bible:mark 9:50]]Mark 9:50

1. Salt has two main uses: seasoning and preservation.
   1. Salt adds flavour to whatever it is salted on. Food can be transformed from tasteless to delicious with just a little salt, but salt that loses its saltiness becomes as useless as sand.
      1. God's people are the salt of the earth and should add flavour to a lifeless world by spreading the gospel of Jesus.
   2. Salt has a preserving and conserving effect.
      1. God's people are the salt of the earth and should make sure that the world does not rot in sin by, for example, working for a fairer world, getting involved politically and being present in all kinds of workplaces. If a Christian is in a particular place, he/she has a great opportunity to improve that environment by spreading love and thus ensuring that sin does not take over too much.
2. God has instituted a covenant of salt with Israel (Numbers 18:19) and given Israel to the Messiah through a covenant of salt (2 Chron. 13:5).
   1. Israel and the Messiah are supposed to serve as salt for the rest of the world.
3. A disciple should make sure that he has salt in him so that he can serve the rest of the world by spreading the kingdom of God.
   1. If the disciples fight over who is the greatest, they risk losing their saltiness and thus not functioning as salt should function.

## Mark 10:1-12 - Marriage and Divorce

[[@Bible:mark 10:2]]Mark 10:2

1. Shortly before the time of Jesus, there were two influential rabbis who each had a different interpretation of the Torah (the Pentateuch); Rabbi Hillel, who had a more permissive interpretation, and Rabbi Shammai, who usually had a more strict interpretation.
   1. Since Deuteronomy 24:1 states that it is permissible for a man to divorce his wife if he comes upon her *"with anything unseemly,*" these two schools of thought argued about what exactly was meant by "unseemly."
   2. Shammai believed that the husband could only be divorced if there had been a serious transgression such as sexual immorality, while Hillel believed that one could also be divorced for minor offences such as the wife burning the food.
   3. The Pharisees now asking Jesus where *he* stands on this issue suggests that they wanted to entrap Jesus by making him choose one of these rabbis and thus possibly create a division among Jesus' disciples. Jesus, however, does not fall into the trap.

[[@Bible:mark 10:3]]Mark 10:3

1. Instead of taking sides in the debate, Jesus does what every Bible believer should do, he asks the question, "What does Scripture say?"
2. Jesus points out that Moses did not actually "command" divorce, but "permitted" it.
   1. The Pharisees wanted to discuss how to separate while Jesus wanted to discuss how to stay together. Jesus teaches us that instead of putting our energy into figuring out the reasons for divorce, we should put that energy into forming a good marriage.

[[@Bible:mark 10:5]]Mark 10:5

1. The Bible never *requires* divorce, but it does *allow* divorce in certain circumstances.
2. For example, if the husband is hard-hearted and refuses to forgive his wife's transgression, it is better for the wife to go her separate ways because otherwise she risks having to live with the husband's intransigence for the rest of her life.

[[@Bible:mark 10:6]]Mark 10:6

1. Instead of discussing the different rules of divorce, Jesus goes back to what is the basis of marriage (Genesis 1:27, 2:24).
2. When Jesus says that *"God made them male and female"* he is showing that marriage is between a man and a woman and it is not a human invention but a divine institution.
3. The fact that God created man male and female shows that we are created differently from the start, but that we are meant to complement each other.
4. A marriage is not *two different people* living together, but *a couple* staying together.
   1. Two people sitting together can't walk in opposite directions because they'll just stomp around and use up each other's strength. It's only when they work together and move towards a common goal that they get anywhere.
5. Jesus goes against the frivolity of the Pharisees and calls instead for a lifelong marriage of fidelity and unity.
6. If it is God who has joined the marriage together, then a human letter of divorce is not enough to separate the two.

[[@Bible:mark 10:11]]Mark 10:11

1. Since marriage is not a human invention but instituted by God, God counts two people as still married if they have divorced each other for non-legitimate reasons.
   1. Since they are still married in God's eyes, they commit adultery against each other if they marry someone new (see also 1 Corinthians 7:10-11).
   2. Instead of divorce, God wants the married to reconcile and forgive each other (Hos 3:1).
2. However, divorce is permitted if one of the spouses has been unfaithful (Matthew 5:31-32), or if one of the spouses is not a Christian and for that reason wants to separate (1 Corinthians 7:15).
   1. If the divorce is valid in God's eyes, then it is also okay to remarry.

## Mark 10:13-16 - Let the Children Come to Me

[[@Bible:mark 10:13]]Mark 10:13

1. The laying on of hands was a common way of communicating something from God to the person concerned.
2. It is the desire of every believing parent that God will bless their children and it is also the duty of every believing parent to bring their children before God and to teach them to live a Christian life.
   1. *"Train up the young man in the way he should go, and he will not turn aside from it when he is old."* (Proverbs 22:6).
3. The fact that the disciples turned the children away reveals that they had not understood the order of the kingdom of God; the last shall be first and the first shall be last (Mark 10:31).

[[@Bible:mark 10:15]]Mark 10:15

1. Jesus does not urge us to have a "childlike" faith, but to be "like a child".
   1. Children trust their parents completely, are totally dependent on their parents, believe everything about their parents and willingly hand over all their problems to their parents. We should relate to God in the same way.
   2. Children do not believe that they have to earn what their parents give, but assume that their parents give them what they need. In the same way, we should not try to earn the kingdom of God but gratefully receive the good things we get.

## Mark 10:17-31 - Jesus and the Rich Young Man

[[@Bible:mark 10:17]]Mark 10:17

1. The man is eager and respectful and comes to Jesus to find out what he must do to inherit eternal life. In the same way, we should come to Jesus to learn about the kingdom of God.
2. However, the man shows that he believes that eternal life is something that can be earned by "doing" something, which is a clear contrast to what Jesus said about receiving the kingdom of God in Mark 10:15.
   1. If you think that you can have eternal life by your own performance and actions, you miss the opportunity to let Jesus be your personal saviour.
   2. In order to be saved and receive eternal life, there are no good deeds one can "do" to earn eternal life, but one must receive salvation as a free gift from God. The moment you pay something for a free gift, it is no longer a free gift.
   3. Under no circumstances should one do good deeds in order to be saved, but one can do good deeds because one loves one's fellow human beings.

[[@Bible:mark 10:18]]Mark 10:18

1. Jesus does not deny his own divinity here, but affirms it. Since only God is wholly good, and this man calls Jesus good, Jesus challenges the man to think about what his confession really means. Jesus does not deny that he is indeed wholly good but instead asks the man if this is what he means when he calls Jesus good. Since Jesus is sinless (John 8:46) and thoroughly good, this is indirect evidence that Jesus is God.
   1. However, the man later removes the word "good" when addressing Jesus.
2. Although it is not explicitly stated that Jesus is God in Mark's gospel, Mark shows this indirectly when he describes Jesus doing things that only God can do (Mark 2:7, Mark 4:41, Mark 10:18).

[[@Bible:mark 10:19]]Mark 10:19

1. Jesus quotes the commandments about how to treat one's fellow man (Exodus 20:12-16).

[[@Bible:mark 10:20]]Mark 10:20

1. The traditional view of the Law was that one should not break the commandments. However, Jesus turns the tables in his Sermon on the Mount and emphasizes that the very purpose of the Law is not to focus on trying to avoid breaking the commandments but instead to actively do good to one's fellow man (Matt 5-7).
2. No man can succeed in keeping the whole Law because he breaks the Law even when he treats his fellow man badly in his heart.

[[@Bible:mark 10:21]]Mark 10:21

1. True, the man had, at least according to himself, kept all the commandments that Jesus listed, but he was unable to keep the most important one (Matthew 22:36-38).
2. The man was not willing to sell everything he owned to obtain eternal life, which shows that he neither loved God with all his heart nor his fellow human beings (the poor) as himself, thus violating the first of the commandments (Exodus 20:3) and the purpose of the whole Law (Matthew 22:36-40).
3. The man mistakenly believed that he could "do" something to inherit eternal life. Since it is not possible to "do" something or "perform" something to get eternal life, Jesus shows this man how impossible it is to get eternal life by "doing" something. If the man had sold everything he owned, he would have done everything he could "do" to inherit eternal life, hopefully realizing that all that is really required is that he freely accept the grace that Jesus offers.

[[@Bible:mark 10:23]]Mark 10:23

1. Being rich does not necessarily mean being blessed by God, but Jesus shows that it is difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.
   1. Paul writes that those who strive to be rich fall prey to desires that lead to destruction (1 Timothy 6:9-10).
2. The man who is rich wanted to earn his eternal life, but lost it. Instead, Jesus points out that only those who are like children can enter the kingdom of God because they do not believe they deserve God's kingdom but willingly receive it for free.
   1. The man was rich and therefore did not need God. Children have nothing and are therefore dependent on their parents.

[[@Bible:mark 10:27]]Mark 10:27

1. It is impossible for people to save themselves by doing good deeds. We all depend on God himself to save us. This salvation can only be received with open arms without any quid pro quo through faith in Jesus.

[[@Bible:mark 10:28]]Mark 10:28

1. Although the rich man was unable to leave everything to follow Jesus, Peter wants to emphasize that the disciples have indeed done so and wonders what reward they would receive for doing so.
2. The disciples often had a false understanding of who Jesus was and what it meant to follow him. However, this was not a disaster as long as they at least followed Jesus because he could then teach them more gradually and progressively.
   1. In the same way, we should be humble today that we do not always have a fully accurate understanding of who Jesus is and what it means to follow him, but that the most important thing is that we stay with him and try to follow him to the best of our ability.

[[@Bible:mark 10:29]]Mark 10:29

1. Even if you lose your family community when you choose to follow Jesus, the church will be the new community (Mark 3:31-35).

## Mark 10:32-34 - Jesus speaks a third time about his suffering

[[@Bible:mark 10:32]]Mark 10:32

1. Jesus knew that he would die in Jerusalem, yet he courageously and unceasingly continued his mission, even *"going ahead"* (Mark 14:1).
2. Even if the disciples did not understand Jesus' mission 100%, they understood that something big was going on. They also knew that there were many who wanted to kill Jesus and so they were afraid as they approached Jerusalem.
   1. Even though the world around us seems to be falling apart, there is no safer place than near Jesus. The disciples were afraid, but they continued to follow Jesus.
3. So that Jesus' death would not come as a surprise to the disciples, Jesus once again prepares them for what is about to happen.
4. The disciples, as well as the rest of the people, had a wrong preconception and thought that the Messiah would be a powerful king who liberates Israel in a worldly way.
   1. However, the disciples and the people should have known that Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah will suffer and die for the sake of the people (Is 53).

## Mark 10:35-45 - The Request of James and John

[[@Bible:mark 10:37]]Mark 10:37

1. Even though Jesus has repeatedly told his disciples that he will suffer and die in Jerusalem, James and John believe that Jesus will now become the new king in Jerusalem and re-establish Israel as a secular nation, thus asking to be given prominent positions in Jesus' new government.

[[@Bible:mark 10:38]]Mark 10:38

1. The *"cup"* that Jesus would drink was God's wrath for the sins of all people that Jesus voluntarily took upon himself on the cross. To be *"baptized"* means to be immersed and completely surrounded by water. What Jesus means is that the cup he will drink will completely envelop him and immerse him in suffering.
   1. The suffering that Jesus went through was so totally overwhelming that he prayed to his Father, *"Take this cup from me. But not as I will, but as you will."* (Mark 14:36b).

[[@Bible:mark 10:39]]Mark 10:39

1. Both of these apostles were called to honour God with a very special calling:
   1. James was the first apostle to die and thus had to go before the others and show them how to *die* for their faith (Acts 12:1-2).
   2. John was the last apostle to die and thus had to show how to *live* a long and faithful life for Jesus.

[[@Bible:mark 10:42-45]]Mark 10:42-45

1. A Christian's success is not measured by how many servants he has, but by how many he serves.
2. Jesus, who is undeniably the Lord of all Christians, showed by his own life that he was not after worldly success. Jesus built no worldly palace, acquired no worldly wealth and forced no one into submission.

## Mark 10:46-52 - Jesus heals blind Bartimeus

[[@Bible:mark 10:46]]Mark 10:46

1. When Luke describes the same event, he writes that this happened when Jesus *"was on his way out of Jericho"* (Luke 18:35), not *into* Jericho. Which of them is right?
2. It is very possible that both are right, since archaeological excavations show that there were actually *two* Jericho's; an older and a newer Roman one. So Bartimeus may have been in between, in which case both authors are correct.

[[@Bible:mark 10:47]]Mark 10:47

1. King David received a promise from God that the Messiah would come from his family (2 Sam 7:8-16).
   1. When Bartimeus uses this title about Jesus, he shows that he believes that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel.

[[@Bible:mark 10:48]]Mark 10:48

1. Bartimeus is an excellent example of a good *prayer leader* because he didn't give up when people around him told him to be quiet and shouted even louder when people wouldn't lead him to Jesus.

[[@Bible:mark 10:51]]Mark 10:51

1. Although it was obvious to Jesus that Bartimeus was blind and wanted his sight restored, Jesus wanted Bartimeus to ask for it himself. Jesus does not intrude but heals the sick who come to him.

[[@Bible:mark 10:52]]Mark 10:52

1. Bartimeus was blind, yet he could see that Jesus was the Messiah, and so he was both healed and saved.
2. Bartimeus is a very good example of how a disciple of Jesus should be:
   1. When Bartimeus heard about Jesus, he eagerly cried out for Jesus' mercy, ignoring the people around him who tried to stop him.
   2. Bartimeus realized his own inadequacy and asked Jesus for help.
   3. Bartimeus confessed before everyone that Jesus is the Messiah.
   4. When Jesus had received Bartimeus, he immediately began to follow Jesus on the road.

## Mark 11:1-11 - The Triumphal Entry

[[@Bible:mark 11:1]]Mark 11:1

1. Until now, Mark has described Jesus' activities outside Jerusalem.
   1. It's a few days before Easter week and a new phase of Jesus' ministry is beginning that will end with Jesus dying on the cross.
   2. Jerusalem is an ancient city that existed before Israel came to the land of Canaan.
      1. Abraham meets Melchizedek who lives in Salem (Genesis 14:18).
      2. Jerusalem belonged to the Jebusites and was originally called Jebus (Judges 19:10-11).
      3. Joshua captured Jebus, but seems to have lost the city eventually (Judges 1:8).
      4. Jerusalem was conquered by David and made by him the capital of Israel (1 Chron 11:4-9).
      5. God chose Jerusalem as the center of worship and where the temple would be built (1 Kings 11:36).
   3. The word "salem" in Jerusalem comes from the Hebrew word *shalom*, which in English means "peace" or "peace".
      1. Jerusalem is sometimes called "the city of David" or "Zion".
   4. Jerusalem originally consisted of two hills:
      1. Zion, where the fortress and the defense of Jerusalem stood (2 Sam 5:7).
      2. Moriah, where Abraham (not) sacrificed Isaac (Genesis 22:2) and where Solomon built the temple (2 Chron 3:1).
   5. Jerusalem is a holy city in the sense that it is consecrated by God to be a place where he does special things and reveals himself (1 Kings 11:36, Matthew 27:53).
   6. Jerusalem is the city of the king (Matthew 5:35).
2. The Mount of Olives, also known as the Mount of Olives, is a hillside just outside the walls of Jerusalem overlooking Jerusalem and the Temple.
   1. Zechariah prophesied that God himself would stand with his feet on the Mount of Olives and that the Mount of Olives would be split in two on the Day of the Lord (Zech 14:4).
   2. Jesus often withdrew from the noise of Jerusalem to spend time with his disciples on the Mount of Olives (Luke 22:39).
   3. Jesus flew up to heaven from the Mount of Olives and that is where he will return (Acts 1:9-12).

[[@Bible:mark 11:2]]Mark 11:2

1. An animal not yet used as a worker was sometimes used for certain religious purposes (Numbers 19:2, Deuteronomy 21:3, 1 Samuel 6:7).
2. Zechariah prophesied that the king of Jerusalem would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt, eradicate strife, and speak peace to the nations (Zech 9:9-10).

[[@Bible:mark 11:3]]Mark 11:3

1. Given that Jesus will use this donkey to ride into Jerusalem as king, it is safe to say that Jesus is claiming to be lord, king and Messiah.

[[@Bible:mark 11:8]]Mark 11:8

1. On the Feast of Tabernacles, Hosanna from Psalm 118:25 was recited while palm leaves were waved and tabernacles were built from palm leaves and other branches (Leviticus 23:39-44).
   1. The Feast of Tabernacles (also called Sukkot) is celebrated to commemorate Israel's desert wandering.
2. In biblical times, this was often how a king or leader was received:
   1. The people put their cloaks under the feet of Jehu when he became king (2 Kings 9:13).
   2. When Simon Thassi enters Jerusalem and offers peace, the people wave palm leaves and sing hymns (1 Macc 13:51).
   3. In his revelation, John sees people from all nations waving palm leaves before the Lamb (Rev 7:9).
3. On previous occasions Jesus has tried to silence those who wanted to proclaim him as the Messiah, but now he accepts the accolades (Mark 8:29-30).
4. On another occasion, the people tried to make Jesus the new king of Israel by force in order to free the Jewish people from the Romans (John 6:14-15).
   1. When Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey instead of a horse, it shows that Jesus does intend to be king, but not in the way the people had intended. In the Middle East of biblical times, a horse symbolised "war" and a donkey "peace".

[[@Bible:mark 11:9]]Mark 11:9

1. Hosanna is a combination of the two Hebrew words "save" and "I/we pray" and is quoted from Psalm 118:25.
   1. *"25 O Lord, save! O Lord, let all things prosper!"* (Ps 118:25)
   2. On the Feast of Tabernacles, Hosanna from Psalm 118:25 was recited while waving palm leaves and building tabernacles from palm leaves and other twigs (Leviticus 23:39-44).
2. The expression "hosanna" was associated with a prayer and longing for the Messiah to come and save the people of Israel***.***
3. The name of the Lord is YHWH and is translated into English as *"I am who I am"* or the short form *"I am"* (Exodus 3:13-15).
   1. In biblical times, it was very rare to speak God's name because people were afraid to misuse or defame God's name (Leviticus 24:15-16).
      1. When the Scriptures said "YHWH", they wrote or pronounced "Adonaj" in Hebrew, "Kyrios" in Greek or "Lord" in Swedish.
      2. Since Mark is quoting Psalm 118:26 here, we know that it originally says "YHWH".
   2. Now that Jesus is the one who comes in the name of the Lord, and also called himself "the Lord" in the past, he clearly claims to be YHWH.

[[@Bible:mark 11:10]]Mark 11:10

1. The kingdom referred to is the Messianic kingdom that God promised to give to David's descendants (2 Sam 7:11-14).

[[@Bible:mark 11:11]]Mark 11:11

1. In the Middle East of biblical times, a horse symbolised "war" and a donkey "peace" and was used by kings to signal war or peace.
   1. So when Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey accompanied by messianic songs, it symbolizes that he comes as the Messiah to the city of peace and offers peace.
2. After the magnificent entrance into Jerusalem, Jesus goes almost directly from there.
3. Jesus examines the temple area to see if it is being managed as it is stated in the Pentateuch.

## Mark 11:12-14 - Jesus Curses the Fig Tree

[[@Bible:mark 11:13]]Mark 11:13

1. Since this story of the fig tree comes both before and after Jesus' cleansing of the temple, it serves as a framing device that gives us clues as to how to interpret the cleansing of the temple.
2. The fig tree pretended to have figs, but it turned out to be false advertising.
   1. Just as the green leaves of the fig tree appear to have good fruit, so the temple appears to have good fruit, but when Jesus gets there, he finds no good fruit.
   2. Just as the green leaves of the fig tree could be seen from a distance and good fruit could be expected, so the temple in Jerusalem would serve as a place where all the peoples of the world could come to meet the God of Israel.
   3. In the same way, today we should consider whether our lives only give the appearance of being believers, or whether our lives also bear good fruit.

[[@Bible:mark 11:14]]Mark 11:14

1. These words do not make the fig tree barren, it was already barren. These words are a continuation of what already was.
2. Jesus did many miracles, but this is the only time he does a negative "miracle of judgment".

## Mark 11:15-19 - Jesus Cleanses the Temple

[[@Bible:mark 11:15]]Mark 11:15

1. The temple area was divided into different sections:
   1. *The outer court* where everyone could stay, including gentiles, non-Israelites.
   2. *The court of the women* was for all Israelites.
   3. *The men's courtyard* was for men only. Gentiles and women were not allowed to stay there.
   4. *The priests' courtyard* was for priests only.
2. Malachi prophesies that the Lord will come to his temple, but that it will not be a pleasant experience, but rather a judgment on those who *"turn the tables on the stranger"* (Mal 3:1-5).
3. Instead of serving as a house of prayer for all peoples, the temple area had become a marketplace and a thoroughfare.
   1. For pilgrims coming to Jerusalem from afar, there was the possibility of buying sacrificial animals on the spot. But since they were not allowed to trade in Roman coins (they had pagan images on their coins), people were forced to exchange money at high exchange rates.
      1. This created a commercialization of people's desire to meet God that upset Jesus.
      2. In the area where the gentiles (non-Israelites) were supposed to be able to pray to God, there was now a marketplace for sacrificial animals.
   2. To avoid going around the temple area, some people took a shortcut through the courtyard of the pagans. These stop Jesus because it prevents the temple area from being a place of prayer.

[[@Bible:mark 11:17]]Mark 11:17

1. Jesus quotes Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11.
   1. Jesus teaches the people that the temple in Jerusalem is meant to be a "place of prayer" and that *"all nations"* will have access to the temple.
2. In the Old Testament, God chose Israel to show the rest of the world who he is through them. When the other nations heard about God's greatness, they could come to the Temple in Jerusalem to know God.
   1. God made a promise to Abraham that *"all nations"* would be blessed through him (Genesis 12:1-3).
   2. God told Israel that *"all the earth"* belongs to God and that the people of Israel will serve as God's priests (Exodus 19:5-6).
   3. Isaiah prophesied that *"all nations"* would flock to the temple in Jerusalem to learn about God (Isaiah 2:1-3).
   4. When Solomon dedicated the Temple in Jerusalem, he prayed that God would hear *"all strangers"* who come to Jerusalem to pray (1 Kings 8:41-43).
3. Just as the green leaves of the fig tree could be seen from a distance and good fruit could be expected, so the temple in Jerusalem would serve as a place where all the peoples of the world could come to meet the God of Israel.
   1. Interpreting Jesus' temple cleansing in the light of the framing of the fig story, we see that from a distance the temple looked like it was bearing good fruit, but as Jesus got closer he saw a marketplace instead of a place of prayer.
      1. Just as the fig tree had no future fruit, the temple will also cease to bear fruit.
      2. The temple was destroyed by the Romans in 77 AD and has not been rebuilt since.

## Mark 11:20-25 - The Lesson from the Withered Fig Tree

[[@Bible:mark 11:20]]Mark 11:20

1. What Jesus had said the day before had now been fulfilled.
2. The fact that the tree had dried from the root down shows that it will never be able to bear fruit again.

[[@Bible:mark 11:22]]Mark 11:22

1. Jesus urges his disciples to trust that God has the power to do what he wants.
   1. Nothing is impossible for God (Luke 1:37).
2. There is a difference between "believing in *faith*" and "believing in *God*".
   1. A person can have *faith* for great miracles to happen, but Jesus urges his disciples to believe that *God* can do great miracles.
   2. A person can rely and focus so much on his own faith that he forgets the goal of faith; God.

[[@Bible:mark 11:23]]Mark 11:23

1. A mountain is a symbolic image of something that is insurmountable and immovable.
2. Jesus gives many different lessons about how we should believe. Here he shows us not to doubt when we pray, but to expect to receive what we ask for.
   1. In the same way, Jesus knew that the fig tree would dry up the next day even if it did not do so instantly.

[[@Bible:mark 11:24]]Mark 11:24

1. What we ask for must be in accordance with God's word and God's will, otherwise we cannot expect to receive it (John 15:7, 1 John 5:14-15).
   1. Jesus exemplifies this in Gethsemane when he asks not to die on the cross. Jesus receives no answer because the prayer is against God's will (Mark 14:36).
2. If a disciple of Jesus prays in accordance with God's Word and God's will, he can expect to receive what he asks for.
   1. However, the answer to the prayer may be delayed, but the disciple should still trust that God has heard the prayer and that the answer will come when the time is right.
   2. For example, it took a number of weeks for Daniel's prayer to be answered, but it was finally answered (Dan 10:12-14).

[[@Bible:mark 11:25]]Mark 11:25

1. In Mark 5:36, Jesus teaches us that *fear* can be an obstacle to faith. Here we see that even *unforgiveness* can be an obstacle to answering prayer.
   1. In many cases, the biggest "mountain" to move, the biggest obstacle to our faith, may be that we have an unforgiving heart.
2. A person who has received God's forgiveness is also expected to forgive others (Ephesians 4:32).
   1. A person who cannot forgive other people is unlikely to have been forgiven himself.

## Mark 11:27-33 - The question of Jesus' authority

[[@Bible:mark 11:28]]Mark 11:28

1. Israel's top religious leader comes to Jesus and asks these two questions.
   1. Jesus was not out to debate theology with the religious leaders, he was out to tell the people the good news.
2. The religious leaders had seen and heard about the miracle of Jesus, but they accused Jesus of being led by Satan (Matthew 12:24).

[[@Bible:mark 11:30]]Mark 11:30

1. Jesus answers with a question. The religious leaders don't want to answer Jesus' question because then they will have to admit that they didn't receive John the Baptist as God's messenger.
2. By asking this counter-question, Jesus indirectly answers that his authority comes from God, just like John the Baptist.
3. Unfortunately, a recurring theme was that Israel did not receive the prophets that God sent them (Mark 12:1-12).

## Mark 12:1-12 - The Parable of the Tenants

[[@Bible:mark 12:1]]Mark 12:1

1. Jesus speaks specifically to the chief priests, the scribes and the elders (Mark 11:27).
2. With this parable, Jesus shows that he knew what they were up to and thus gives them a chance to repent.
3. The symbolism of this parable:
   1. *The "man"* is God.
   2. *The "vineyard"* is Israel.
   3. *The "vineyard workers"* are Israel's leadership.
   4. *The "servants"* are the prophets.
   5. *The "Son"* is Jesus.
4. The language of this parable is very similar to Isaiah's prophecy (Isa 5:1-2).
5. The Psalms also likens Israel to a vineyard (Ps 80:8-19).

[[@Bible:mark 12:2]]Mark 12:2

1. God repeatedly sent his servants the prophets, but Israel's leadership usually did not receive them (Jer 7:25-26, Jer 25:4-7, Matt 23:33-39).

[[@Bible:mark 12:6]]Mark 12:6

1. Those listening to Jesus' parable were well aware that the vineyard symbolized Israel, that the vineyard workers symbolized Israel's leadership, that the servants symbolized the prophets, but now Jesus presents the shocking news of the parable; that God has now sent his *son* but that the vineyard workers will kill him!
2. That Jesus is the Son of God shows that he is more than just a prophet. Moreover, the Son is also the last one God sends, after him there will be no more.
   1. The relationship one has with the Father is determined by how one relates to the Son. If you receive the Son, you also receive the Father, but if you reject the Son, you also reject the Father (1 John 2:23).

[[@Bible:mark 12:9]]Mark 12:9

1. Jesus asks a rhetorical question and invites the listeners to consider for themselves what the master of the vineyard should do. So far, the vineyard owner has been unreasonably patient.
2. When a word of judgment like this is conveyed, there is always a chance for repentance before the words become reality (Jon 3:10). That the religious leaders did not listen to this judgment and repent is sadly shown in Mark 12:12.
3. Since the leadership of Israel did not receive the Son, their status as God's vineyard workers will be handed over to the Gentiles.
   1. In the Gospel of Matthew's parallel to this parable, Matthew writes: *"Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who bear its fruit."* (Matthew 21:43).
   2. Paul first preached to the Jews, but when they did not accept the gospel, he preached to the Gentiles instead (Acts 13:46-47), saying that they should listen instead (Acts 28:28).
   3. In Romans, Paul writes that *"hardening has come upon a part of Israel, and will continue until the Gentiles have come in in full numbers."* (Romans 11:25b).
   4. Today we can see that these prophetic words of Jesus have been fulfilled. Although Israel is still God's own people, today God is working first and foremost through *the church* to extend his kingdom beyond the world.

[[@Bible:mark 12:10]]Mark 12:10

1. Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22-23.
2. The stone symbolises Jesus and the builders symbolise the leadership of Israel.
3. A cornerstone was the most important stone in a building, and if Israel's leadership had been good builders, they would have quickly realized when they inspected Jesus that he is an excellent cornerstone. Instead, they rejected Jesus.
4. At other times, Jesus is likened to the spiritual rock that followed Israel in the desert (1 Corinthians 10:4) and a stumbling block that brings people down (1 Peter 2:8).

[[@Bible:mark 12:12]]Mark 12:12

1. Israel's religious leaders understood, but still would not repent; they had already decided to murder Jesus (John 11:53, Matthew 12:14).

## Mark 12:13-17 - Paying Taxes to Caesar

[[@Bible:mark 12:13]]Mark 12:13

1. Since they don't dare to arrest Jesus because of the people, they now try to trap Jesus with difficult questions so that the people will turn against Jesus.
   1. This was not the first time that the Pharisees wanted to entrap Jesus (Mark 10:2).
      1. When Jesus eventually stood before the Great Council, an unsuccessful attempt was made to use this to have Jesus condemned to death (Mark 14:55-59).
2. *The "Pharisees"* were a "revival movement" among the Jewish people who studied the Pentateuch carefully and tried to live their lives accordingly. The word "Pharisee" roughly means "the consecrated".
3. *"Herodians"* were followers of Herod Antipas who ruled Galilee and Perea and founded the city of Tiberias.
   1. This Herod was the son of Herod the Great who murdered the boys in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16).
4. The Pharisees and the Herodians had little in common, but one thing they could apparently agree on was to get Jesus out of the way.

[[@Bible:mark 12:14]]Mark 12:14

1. From 6 AD, the Romans forced the Jewish people to pay taxes to the emperor.
2. If Jesus answered yes to this question, it would mean that he accepted that the emperor was Lord of Israel instead of God, and then he would have the religious against him.
3. If Jesus answered no to this question, it would mean that he wanted to rebel against Rome and then he would be classified as a revolutionary and political enemy by the Romans.

[[@Bible:mark 12:17]]Mark 12:17

1. Since the Pharisees and Herodians used the emperor's coins, they had already accepted the Roman rule and thus they should also pay the Roman taxes.
   1. Had Israel given God what belongs to God, they would never have come under Roman rule.
2. Reverence for Caesar was an important part of Roman society, and neither Jesus nor the apostles criticized it as long as Caesar did not go against God (1 Peter 2:11-17).
   1. But there was also another side to the imperial veneration that involved sacrificing to the emperor and thus worshipping the emperor as a god. The Jewish people had an exemption from this aspect of the imperial cult as long as they paid their taxes.
      1. This exception also applied to the first Christians as long as the Romans considered the Christians to be a Jewish sect. But eventually, when Christianity and Judaism parted ways, this no longer applied to Christians, leading to the martyrdom of those who refused to sacrifice to the emperor. This in turn led to internal Christian divisions between those who had refused to sacrifice to the emperor and those who had agreed to do so.
   2. So Jesus agreed that God's people should revere the emperor and pay Roman taxes, but he did not agree to sacrifice to the emperor or to worship the emperor. So Jesus calls for giving money to Caesar but worship to God. In this way, both are satisfied.
3. As long as the state does not go against God's will (Acts 4:18-20), we should obey the state and pay taxes (Romans 13:6-7).

## Mark 12:18-27 - The Resurrection of the Dead

[[@Bible:mark 12:18]]Mark 12:18

1. The Sadducees were a small but influential movement, largely made up of members of the clergy or upper classes, and were often opposed to the more popular Pharisees.
2. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, a future judgment, or the existence of angels and spirits, which led to quarrels with the Pharisees (Acts 23:6-8). They accepted only the Torah, the Pentateuch, as authoritative.

[[@Bible:mark 12:23]]Mark 12:23

1. Moses writes that if a man dies without leaving a male heir, his unmarried brother should marry his widow to give him an heir so that his name can live on (Deuteronomy 25:5-10).
   1. Since the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, they now try to show how absurd the belief in the resurrection is by inventing a story where 7 brothers all die without having succeeded in producing an heir.

[[@Bible:mark 12:24]]Mark 12:24

1. The mistake the Sadducees made was that they assumed that life after death works the same way it does here on earth. Jesus informs the Sadducees that this is not the case and that their question is therefore irrelevant.
2. The reason for the Sadducees' mistaken belief was that they understood neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.
   1. What good is it to a man if he knows all of Scripture by heart but lacks the ability to *understand* Scripture?
   2. What good is it to a person if he understands what Scripture says but does not believe that God has the power to *fulfill* his promises?

[[@Bible:mark 12:25]]Mark 12:25

1. One of the reasons for getting married, as I said, is to have children. If humanity did not continually produce new children, humanity would undoubtedly soon die out. But since the resurrected man will no longer die, there will not be the same need to produce new human beings and therefore we humans will be like the angels who do not need to have children.

[[@Bible:mark 12:26]]Mark 12:26

1. Since the Sadducees only accepted the Pentateuch as their authority, Jesus quotes Exodus 3:6 to show that they are wrong.
2. Since the Pentateuch teaches that God *is the* God of Abraham, there must be an afterlife because Abraham is dead.

## Mark 12:28-34 - The Great Commandment

[[@Bible:mark 12:28]]Mark 12:28

1. The Law of Moses has 613 commandments, and even though they were all to be kept, the Pharisees used to discuss which of these commandments were more important.
2. In the Talmud, Rabbi Simlai writes: *"Moses gave Israel 613 commandments, David reduced them to eleven (Psalm 15), Isaiah to six (Isaiah 33:15-16), Micah to three (Micah 6:8), Isaiah again to two (Isaiah 56:1); but it was Habakkuk who gave the most important commandment: 'The righteous shall live by his faith.'" (Hab 2:4)* (Makkot 23b-24a).

[[@Bible:mark 12:29]]Mark 12:29

1. Jesus quotes the "Shema"; Israel's creed that was recited two or three times a day (Deuteronomy 6:4).
2. The first and greatest commandment is to *"love God"* and if we do that, obedience will automatically follow.
   1. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) is said to have said *"Love God and do what you will."*
3. Jesus is trying to show the scribe what is the very "purpose of the Law". The purpose of the Law is not to punish the transgressor, but for the people of Israel to love God and love their fellow man. But in order to achieve this love of God and fellow man, God instituted rules and laws that prevented the people of Israel from mistreating God and fellow man.
4. When Jesus says in his Sermon on the Mount that he has not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17), he means that he has not come to take away the Law but to emphasize the purpose of the Law. Instead of focusing on punishing those who break the Law, Jesus believes that we should focus on fulfilling the purpose of the Law. Instead of retaliating *"eye for an eye"*, Jesus teaches us to *"turn the other cheek*". In this way we show love to our fellow human beings and fulfil the true purpose of the Law instead of spending our time looking for those who have broken the Law.
5. If a Christian tries to fulfill the Law by following all the rules and laws of the Law, then the Christian will fail to fulfill the Law. Instead, a Christian should focus on fulfilling the purpose of the Law by loving God and his fellow man. Then the Christian automatically fulfills the Law.
6. In other words, instead of punishing those who have violated the Law, we should fulfill the Law by doing good. Instead of retaliating eye for eye, we should turn the other cheek.

## Mark 12:35-37 - Is the Messiah the Son of David?

[[@Bible:mark 12:36]]Mark 12:36

1. Jesus is quoting Psalm 110:1, the most quoted verse from the OT in the NT.
2. Just before his death, Stephen saw Jesus at God's right hand in heaven (Acts 7:54-56).
3. Paul teaches more about Jesus' enemies in 1 Corinthians 15:23-28.

[[@Bible:mark 12:37]]Mark 12:37

1. In his humanity, Jesus is a descendant of David (Matthew 1:1) but in his divinity, Jesus has existed since before time (Micah 5:2, John 8:58) and everything (including David) came into being through him (John 1:3).
   1. According to the Book of Revelation, Jesus is at the same time the root of David and the descendant of David (Rev 22:16).
   2. According to the Gospel of John, Jesus is both God (John 1:1) and man (John 1:14).
   3. According to the book of Romans, Jesus is in his human nature from the lineage of David and by the Spirit of holiness proved to be the Son of God (Rom 1:3-4).
2. The scribes could not answer Jesus' question because their understanding of the Messiah was limited. They knew that the Messiah would be David's *son* but they did not understand this to mean that he was also David's *Lord*.

## Mark 12:38-40 - Jesus Warns the Scribes

[[@Bible:mark 12:38]]Mark 12:38

1. A scribe was more or less a "Bible teacher" and, all things being equal, should have been a good role model for Jesus' disciples. However, these scribes greatly abused their role.
2. The scribes disliked ordinary work but liked people to look up to them, so they took advantage of people's piety to receive gifts.
3. Instead, a disciple of Jesus should *"work and do something useful with his hands, so that he has something to share with those who need it"* (Ephesians 4:28), choose the lowest seat at a feast (Luke 14:7-11), take care of widows in need (James 1:27), and pray in secret (Matthew 6:6).

## Mark 12:41-44 - The Widow’s Offering

[[@Bible:mark 12:42]]Mark 12:42

1. The *"poor widow"* is a sharp contrast to the aforementioned scribes. Perhaps she was poor precisely because a scribe had eaten her out of house and home?
2. The poor widow had *two* coins and could in good conscience have chosen to spend half of what she had, but she gave *all of* what she had.

[[@Bible:mark 12:44]]Mark 12:44

1. It's not *how much* money we give that matters, but *why* we give. From this we can learn that God is not in need of our money but wants our hearts instead. God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7).
2. If you give away your abundance, there is a risk that you won't care much about the money because it is so small in relative terms. For example, David refused to offer to God anything he had received for free (2 Sam 24:24).
3. Jesus has the power to turn the little we give to God into something enormous that is more than enough to last (Mark 6:35-44).

## Mark 13:1-23 - Signs of the End of the Age

[[@Bible:mark 13:1]]Mark 13:1

1. The first temple was built by King Solomon and was grand and magnificent (1 Kings 7-8) but was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC (2 Kings 25:8-9).
2. The second temple was built by Zerubbabel in 516 BC, but it was nowhere near the temple of Solomon (Hag 2:3).
3. In 19 BC, Herod the Great began to renovate and refurbish the Second Temple (John 2:20) so that it would once again be as grand as it had been in Solomon's time. By 64, the restoration was complete and the result was one of the most impressive buildings of antiquity.
4. The temple was built with white marble stones weighing 100 tons and, according to the Jewish historian Josephus, was partially covered with gold plates that reflected the sun, which must have made a "radiant" impression on most people, including Jesus' disciples. From a distance, the temple looked like a snow-covered mountaintop because of the white stone.
5. But however grand the temple may have been, Jesus claimed that he was *"greater than the temple"* (Matthew 12:6).

[[@Bible:mark 13:2]]Mark 13:2

1. 40 years after Jesus prophesied this, the Jews rebelled against Rome, which led to the Romans razing Jerusalem and the Temple to the ground in 70, just 6 years after the renovation was completed.
2. The destruction of the temple by the Romans was so total that it is still not known exactly where the temple stood. All that remains of the temple is part of the western wall, also known as the Wailing Wall.

[[@Bible:mark 13:3-4]]Mark 13:3-4

1. The Mount of Olives is a hill just outside the Jerusalem of the past, overlooking the Temple.
2. Probably the disciples are a bit dismayed by Jesus' prophecy and ask two questions about it.

[[@Bible:mark 13:6-8]]Mark 13:6-8

1. Since Jesus repeatedly warns us to be *"on our guard"* and make sure that no one deceives us, it must be possible to be deceived if we are *not on* our guard.
2. The basic text does not include the word *"Messiah"* so an alternative understanding of this warning is that Jesus is warning that many will come in Jesus' name and use God's name *"I Am"* about themselves (Exodus 3:14), in other words; make divine claims.
3. When wars and earthquakes are raging all around, it is natural to think that the end times have come, but Jesus explicitly says that this *does not* mean that the end has come.
4. Jesus describes these catastrophes as *"the beginning of the birth pangs"*, suggesting that they will increase in force and become more frequent the closer we get to the "redemption", the end.

[[@Bible:mark 13:9-11]]Mark 13:9-11

1. Jesus prepares his disciples that they will have to endure much suffering if they confess him, but that they should not worry about this because the Holy Spirit will assist them.
   1. An example of this is found in Acts 4:1-22 where Peter and John are arrested and made to answer for their faith in Jesus before the Jewish leadership. Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit and delivers a very bold response!
2. Before Jesus returns, "*the gospel must be preached to all nations*.*"* This mission persists even under persecution and suffering, and nevertheless under calmer conditions.

[[@Bible:mark 13:12-13]]Mark 13:12-13

1. Jesus prepares his disciples for the fact that persecution will come not only from the authorities but also from close relatives.
2. It only takes a quick search on the internet to understand that death and persecution have been and still are a constant ingredient in Christian discipleship.
3. It is said that more Christians have died for their faith in the 20th century than in all previous centuries combined.

[[@Bible:mark 13:14]]Mark 13:14

1. So far, Jesus has been teaching about what it will be like for Christians *before* the end times. Now Jesus begins to go into what it will be like *in the* end times.
2. Is it Jesus who says *"the one who reads this"* or is it Mark the evangelist who added this afterwards?
   1. If it is Mark who has written to this, it is a reference to those who live in the last days and read the Gospel of Mark.
   2. If it is Jesus who says this, it is probably a reference to the listeners to read Daniel, a book of the Bible from which Jesus quotes.
3. The expression *"abomination of desolation"* comes from Daniel 11:31 and refers to such a devastating defilement of the temple that it is abandoned***.*** 
   1. In the book of Daniel, this refers first of all to when the Syrian-Greek king Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 BC erected an altar inside the temple of Jerusalem and on it sacrificed a pig to the Greek god Zeus. Not only that, but he also turned God's temple into a brothel.
      1. This event led to a Jewish uprising that ended with the Jews reclaiming their land and cleansing the Temple. This is still celebrated today as Hanukkah or the Feast of Lights.
   2. The *"abomination of desolation"* that Jesus speaks of is the Antichrist who will sit in the temple of God and claim to be God.
      1. Paul writes: *"Let no one deceive you in any way. For first the apostasy must come, and the man of lawlessness, the son of perdition, must appear openly, the adversary who exalts himself above all that is called God or holy, so that he sits in the temple of God, claiming to be God."* (2 Thess 2:3-4).
      2. Since there is currently no temple in Jerusalem, either it must first be built or the temple means the church (1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1, Ephesians 2:21).
   3. According to my simple interpretation, the temple symbolizes the body of Christ, i.e. *the church*. So I don't think that this text necessarily means that the temple of Jerusalem will be physically rebuilt. I also believe that a so-called "Christian" leader will make himself the head of the church and call himself "God" or some kind of new "Messiah" (Jesus is God, after all). I also think he will introduce some kind of "brothel" in the church and hold some kind of fornication in the church.
      1. Some believe that this Antichrist is the Pope because he is the "head" of the Roman Catholic Church and uses the expression "Vicar of Christ" and also "Vicar of God" about himself. In 2012, the title officially became the Pope's number two title, second only to the Pope's first title, which is "Bishop of Rome". The problem with this theory is that the Pope has used this title frequently at least since the 13th century and since according to Jesus the *"abomination of desolation"* would be the beginning of the end times, then the end times should have begun long ago.
4. In 66, when the Roman armies began to fight against Jewish insurgents, many Christians remembered these words of Jesus and fled to the mountains of Jordan, escaping the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70.

[[@Bible:mark 13:22]]Mark 13:22

1. Once Jesus comes back, no one, absolutely no one, will be able to miss that it is Jesus! So if someone else claims to be the Messiah, we shouldn't listen to him, even if he does miracles and signs.
   1. It is quite possible for a Christian to be deceived into believing in a false Messiah if he is not careful, otherwise Jesus would not have warned about it repeatedly.
   2. It is easy to be seduced by a person who does signs and wonders, but one must always be on guard and critically examine what the person is teaching.

## Mark 13:24-37 - The Coming of the Son of Man

[[@Bible:mark 13:24-27]]Mark 13:24-27

1. After the end-time distress has hit the earth, the universe will also be *"shaken"*. No one will be able to miss the return of Jesus (Acts 1:1, Revelation 1:7).
2. When Jesus returns, disciples from all peoples and nations will be gathered together.

[[@Bible:mark 13:28-29]]Mark 13:28-29

1. We cannot say that we are living in the end times just because there may be a lot of war and earthquakes, but when we see the *"abomination of desolation"*, then we can know that Jesus is coming back soon.

[[@Bible:mark 13:30]]Mark 13:30

1. The generation that will experience the *"abomination of desolation"* will also experience the return of Jesus.
2. The generation that will experience the suffering of the end times can also trust and rely on Jesus' words that the suffering will be short and thus be encouraged to persevere and not give up.

[[@Bible:mark 13:31-33]]Mark 13:31-33

1. Heaven and earth as we know it now will perish and there will be a new heaven and a new earth instead (2 Peter 3:7-13).
2. That even the Son does not know when he will return to earth should be a good reminder not to speculate on possible dates for Jesus' return or the end of the world.
3. Since none of us can know when Jesus will return, we should always live as if he will return soon. Always ready!
4. Just as the first Christians watched and were ready when the Roman armies approached Jerusalem and therefore obeyed Jesus' words to flee to the mountains, so today's Christians should watch and be ready when we see *"the abomination of desolation"*.

[[@Bible:mark 13:34-35]]Mark 13:34-35

1. *The "man"* in this parable symbolizes Jesus, the *"house"* symbolizes the church, the "*servants"* symbolize the disciples, and the *"gatekeeper"* symbolizes pastors and those who work in the church.
   1. The church belongs to Jesus, but he entrusts his house to his disciples.
   2. Every disciple has a task to perform.
   3. The pastor or minister has a special responsibility to ensure that the disciples are always ready for the return of Jesus.

## Mark 14:1-2 - The Plot to Kill Jesus

[[@Bible:mark 14:1]]Mark 14:1

1. *"Passover"* means "pass by", "spare" and was an annual festival celebrated in Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 16:5-6) to commemorate Israel's exodus from Egypt (Exodus 12:1-20).

[[@Bible:mark 14:2]]Mark 14:2

1. Jesus knew for a long time that he would die during the week of Passover in Jerusalem (Mark 10:32-34). However, the religious leaders decided *not to* kill Jesus during Easter but eventually did so anyway. This shows us that Jesus had the situation under control and that nothing could prevent him from fulfilling the prophecies and carrying out his mission.

## Mark 14:3-9 - Jesus Anointed at Bethany

[[@Bible:mark 14:3]]Mark 14:3

1. Simon the leper may have been the leper that Jesus healed in Mark 1:40-41.
2. According to John, this anonymous woman was called Mary and was the sister of Martha and Lazarus (John 12:1-8).
3. *The "alabaster bottles"* had a long, narrow neck that broke when the oil was used.
4. It was a Jewish custom to anoint the heads of their guests at feasts (Ps23:5, Luke 7:46).

[[@Bible:mark 14:4-5]]Mark 14:4-5

1. A *"denarius"* was a Roman silver coin that was equivalent to a day's wage for a worker. In other words, Mary spent almost an entire year's wages on Jesus.
2. Mary showed her devotion to Jesus and this causes jealousy and irritation among the other disciples. From this we should learn today not to look down on people who openly show their love for Jesus, even if they do so in a way that we find inappropriate.

[[@Bible:mark 14:6]]Mark 14:6

1. In the kingdom of God the conditions are not the same as in the world. In God's kingdom, *why* you do something is more important than *how much* it costs.
   1. Jesus criticizes the disciples for looking at this situation with worldly eyes and instead praises Mary for showing tremendous affection and love.
2. Mary does not respond to the attacks herself, but instead lets Jesus defend her.

[[@Bible:mark 14:8]]Mark 14:8

1. Jesus' imminent death was not news to the disciples; Jesus had told them several times (Mark 8:31-33, Mark 9:30-32, Mark 10:32-34).
   1. The difference between the disciples and Mary was that the disciples did not believe Jesus when he said he was going to die (Mark 8:31-33) while Mary listened to Jesus, believed in him and now acted on her faith and therefore anointed him before his death.

## Mark 14:10-11 - Judas to Betray Jesus

[[@Bible:mark 14:10]]Mark 14:10

1. According to John 12:4-7, the apostle Judas was one of those who quarreled most with Mary, so it is quite possible that this money dispute with Jesus was the trigger for his betrayal.
2. The religious leadership has long wanted to kill Jesus (Mark 3:6), but only now do they have a real opportunity when one of Jesus' closest associates betrays him.
3. This event is foretold in Zech 11:12-13.

## Mark 14:12-21 - The Passover with the Disciples

[[@Bible:mark 14:12]]Mark 14:12

1. The Passover celebration began with a Passover meal on the 14th day of the month Nisan and continued with a week-long celebration of the "Feast of Unleavened Bread".
   1. The Passover meal contained many symbolic dishes:
      1. Bitter herbs symbolise the bitterness of slavery.
      2. Salt water symbolises the tears of the people.
      3. The lamb symbolizes that God passed by and spared the homes that had the blood of the lamb strewn on their doorposts.
2. Probably this was Thursday evening and began Jesus' Passion Week.
   1. There is some uncertainty about the exact days of the Passion Week, which could be due to the different calendars and time systems of Jesus' time. For example, the Romans' new day started at midnight while the Jews' new day started in the evening.

[[@Bible:mark 14:13]]Mark 14:13

1. Only women carried water in pots, men usually carried it in leather sacks, so it was easy for the disciples to recognize him without having to ask around.
   1. The religious leadership had given orders that whoever knew where Jesus was must reveal it so they could arrest him (John 11:57).
   2. Jesus knew that Judas would betray him, so he did not want to reveal his position until he had the opportunity to eat this meal with the disciples.

[[@Bible:mark 14:18]]Mark 14:18

1. When a word of judgment is conveyed, there is always a chance for repentance before the words become reality (Jon 3:10). Unfortunately, however, Judas chose to follow through on his intention to betray Jesus.
2. By eating with Judas, Jesus shows that he considers Judas a friend and by warning Judas, Jesus gives him an opportunity to repent.

[[@Bible:mark 14:21]]Mark 14:21

1. That Jesus would die is written down in the Scriptures in several places (Ps 22, Isa 53).
2. That a friend would betray Jesus is recorded in Ps 41:10.

## Mark 14:22-26 - Institution of the Lord’s Supper

[[@Bible:mark 14:22]]Mark 14:22

1. Giving thanks to God, breaking the bread and then distributing it to each person was a common way to begin a meal (Matthew 14:9). The Passover meal also had a number of words recited to commemorate Israel's exodus from Egypt.
2. That the bread is "broken" and given to "all" symbolizes that Jesus died for all humanity.
3. The fact that Jesus offers this meal to his disciples shows that Jesus does not force this on anyone, it must be received voluntarily.
4. Jesus calls himself *"the bread of life"* (John 6:48).

[[@Bible:mark 14:23-24]]Mark 14:23-24

1. In the Old Testament, a goat was sacrificed once a year to take away the sins of the people and make atonement for Israel (Leviticus 16).
   1. Jesus is the sacrificial lamb of all humanity who reconciled humanity to God and takes away all sin once and for all (John 1:29, Heb 9:14, 1 Peter 1:18-21).
2. With this meal, Jesus shifts the focus from the exodus of Israel to his own death. Just as God saved Israel from the bondage of Egypt through the blood of the Lamb, so God saves all humanity from the bondage of sin through Jesus' death on the cross.
3. Jeremiah prophesied that God would establish a new covenant: *"No, this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after this time, says the Lord: I will put my law within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people. Then they will no longer have to teach one another, no one their brother, and say: "Know the Lord!" For all will know me from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquities, and their sins I will remember no more."* (Jer 31:33-34).
   1. This new covenant is based on God forgiving our sins, putting his word in our hearts and opening up a close relationship between God and man.
   2. This first communion will be the beginning of this new covenant, and those who partake of it will also partake of the covenant.

[[@Bible:mark 14:25]]Mark 14:25

1. The first time Jesus came to earth, he planted the kingdom of God and sacrificed himself for humanity. The second time Jesus comes to earth, he will fully establish the kingdom of God and reign as king (Rev 20:4-6).

## Mark 14:27-31 - Jesus Foretells Peter’s Denial

[[@Bible:mark 14:27]]Mark 14:27

1. It was important for Jesus to show his disciples that everything that happened was already foretold in the Scriptures, which meant that God was in control.
2. It was important for Mark to show his readers that everything that happened was foretold in the Scriptures, which means that Jesus is indeed the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament.
3. Jesus quotes Zech 13:7 and prepares his disciples to abandon him. But even if the disciples abandoned Jesus, Jesus did not abandon the disciples.

[[@Bible:mark 14:29-30]]Mark 14:29-30

1. Peter contradicts Jesus, claiming that he will be the only one not to abandon Jesus. Jesus responds by saying that, on the contrary, he will be the only one who also *denies* Jesus.
2. Instead of contradicting Jesus, it would be better to accept what Jesus says and ask how to deal with the situation.

[[@Bible:mark 14:31]]Mark 14:31

1. It is important not to base one's confession on "temporary feelings".
   1. Right now, when emotions are strong, Peter is courageous, but in a little while he won't even dare to confess his faith in front of a little girl (Mark 14:66-72).
   2. It is better to be aware of the difficulties of Christian confession and to base one's confession on a well-considered decision.
2. There is a big difference between the two occasions when the disciples were alone without Jesus. At Jesus' death they fled and denied Jesus, but after Jesus' ascension they confessed their faith in Jesus and endured suffering for Jesus' sake. The difference was that the disciples received the Holy Spirit after Jesus returned to heaven and then they received power and boldness (Acts 4:29-31).

## Mark 14:32-42 - Jesus Prays in Gethsemane

[[@Bible:mark 14:32]]Mark 14:32

1. *"Gethsemane"* means "oil press" and was a garden at the foot of the Mount of Olives where Jesus often used to go together with his disciples (John 18:1-2).
   1. It is probably no coincidence that in this particular place Jesus experienced enormous "pressure".
   2. Even today there are olive trees in this place that are said to be over 2000 years old.

[[@Bible:mark 14:33-34]]Mark 14:33-34

1. Just as in the garden of Gethsemane there were olive presses crushing olives, so there was such pressure on Jesus that it was crushing him.
   1. The pressure that Jesus experienced in Gethsemane was not only because he knew that he would soon die, but also because he knew that he would soon carry the sin of all mankind on his shoulders.

[[@Bible:mark 14:36]]Mark 14:36

1. *"Abba"* is an Aramaic word meaning "father" and is normally used by children when addressing their father.
2. *The "chalice"* symbolizes what Jesus had to go through; the cross.
3. Although Jesus is God, he fully shared our human condition when he became a man (Phil 2:6-8) and therefore depended on God the Father to give him everything he needed (John 5:30). When Jesus hung on the cross, he was alone without the Father, a fact that deeply troubled Jesus (Mark 15:34).
4. Jesus sets a good example here when he chooses to do the Father's will instead of his own, even though it means immense suffering (John 6:38).
5. If there had been any other way for a person to come to God than through Jesus' death on the cross, that possibility would now have been offered to Jesus (John 14:6).

[[@Bible:mark 14:37-38]]Mark 14:37-38

1. Jesus is all alone in his hour of need, not even his closest disciples support him.
2. Jesus calls Peter by his old name *"Simon"*, implying that he is far from the "rock" that he is supposed to be (Matt 16:18).
3. If you want to avoid temptation, the solution according to Jesus is to *"watch and pray"*. Those who watch and pray often are less likely to fall into temptation than those who never watch and pray.

## Mark 14:43-52 - Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus

[[@Bible:mark 14:44]]Mark 14:44

1. Those who seized Jesus were both Roman soldiers (John 18:12) and Jewish temple guards (Luke 22:52).
2. Greeting someone with a kiss was a common greeting that showed both respect and affection (Romans 16:16).
3. Since Judas had to point out Jesus with a kiss, Jesus must surely have looked normal enough to be indistinguishable from the other disciples. From this we can learn that Jesus' appearance was typically Jewish and that he did not wear any extravagant clothes.
4. Knowing that Jesus had miraculously escaped an angry mob on a previous occasion, Judas now makes sure that they will take him away *"under safe guard"*.

[[@Bible:mark 14:47]]Mark 14:47

1. According to John, it was Peter who cut off the ear of the servant Malchus (John 18:10) and according to Luke, Jesus healed Malchus (Luke 22:51).
   1. Since many believe that Mark wrote his gospel with the help of Peter, it is strange that he does not name Peter. Perhaps Peter was ashamed of this?
2. When the Christian uses the "Sword of *the World*" and goes on a crusade to defend the Christian faith, it will only result in people not listening because we cut off their *ears*. Instead, when Christians use the "sword of *the Spirit*," i.e., the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17), to preach the good news about Jesus, it will result in people listening because it cuts into their *hearts* (Acts 2:37).

[[@Bible:mark 14:50-52]]Mark 14:50-52

1. Peter and all the other disciples have only moments ago assured Jesus that they would not abandon Jesus and would rather die than deny him (Mark 14:27-31), but now they flee as soon as Jesus is arrested.
2. According to tradition, this young man was the author Mark himself. Since the disciples often met at Mark's home (Acts 12:12), it is quite possible that this was where they celebrated the Passover meal earlier in the evening and that this is where Judas and the guards first looked for Jesus, but when they discovered that Jesus was no longer there, they went to the other place where Jesus used to stay (Luke 22:39). Perhaps Mark had gone to bed in his linen shirt, been awakened by Judas and the guards, and hurried off to the Mount of Olives to warn Jesus that Judas was about to betray Jesus.

## Mark 14:53-65 - Jesus Before the Council

[[@Bible:mark 14:53]]Mark 14:53

1. Jesus was interrogated three times by the religious courts and three times by the political courts. The Jews had no right to carry out the death penalty and therefore had to bring the Romans into line (John 18:31).

[[@Bible:mark 14:55-56]]Mark 14:55-56

1. The Jewish leadership had long since decided to get Jesus out of the way (Mark 3:6) and had tried and failed countless times to entrap Jesus in order to have some valid reason to condemn him to death (Mark 8:11, Mark 10:2, Mark 12:13).
2. *The "Great Council",* also called the Sanhedrin, consisted of 71 members of scribes, elders, etc.
3. In order to sentence someone to death according to the Law of Moses, the Great Council needed at least two consistent testimonies, but undeniably they had a hard time making the stories fit together (Deuteronomy 17:6).

[[@Bible:mark 14:57-58]]Mark 14:57-58

1. Jesus did say that the temple would be broken down and that he would rebuild it in three days, but it was his own body he was referring to when he said *"temple"* (John 2:19-22).
   1. Jesus' accusers falsely add the words *"built with hands" to* make it look like Jesus is a terrorist who plans to destroy the temple of the Jews.

[[@Bible:mark 14:60]]Mark 14:60

1. Jesus could have defended himself by either answering his accusers (Luke 20:26), by calling down angels to his defense (Matthew 26:53) or by showing himself in his radiant glory (Mark 9:2), but he knows that the Jewish leadership has already decided to kill him (Mark 3:6) and he also knows that his mission is to die for humanity (John 15:13). Therefore, should Jesus begin to argue against it, the leadership would not be able to kill him and he would risk his mission.
2. Jesus is silent, thus fulfilling the ancient prophecy of Isaiah: *"He was beaten, but he humbled himself and did not open his mouth. Like a lamb led to the slaughter, like a sheep that is silent before those who shear it, he did not open his mouth."* (Isa 53:7).
3. Peter, with this incident in mind, teaches that Christians should not retaliate on such occasions but instead *"surrender their cause to him who judges justly"* (1 Peter 2:23).

[[@Bible:mark 14:61-62]]Mark 14:61-62

1. *"Messiah"* is Hebrew and means "the anointed one"
   1. In Old Testament times, it was common for God's representatives to be anointed with oil to symbolize that they were chosen by God and sanctified for a specific mission.
      1. David was anointed king (1 Sam 16:1-13).
      2. Aaron was anointed a priest (Leviticus 8:12).
      3. Elisha was anointed a prophet (1 Kings 19:16).
   2. As the Messiah, Jesus is all three:
      1. Jesus is King (Matthew 27:11).
      2. Jesus is a priest (Heb 6:20).
      3. Jesus is a prophet (John 12:49).
   3. Zechariah prophesied of a *"son"* who would be king and priest at the same time and who would build the temple of the Lord (Zech 6:12-13).
   4. The Jewish people waited for the Messiah to come and forcibly drive out the Romans and re-establish Israel as a powerful nation.
   5. Jesus is the Messiah who has established the Kingdom of God, not as a worldly nation, but as a spiritual nation.
2. Jesus' answer *"I am"* means either that Jesus simply answered the high priest's question in the affirmative or that while he openly declared himself to be the Messiah, he also used God's name *"I Am"* (Exodus 3:14) to reveal his true identity.
   1. Judging by the reaction of the High Priest, it certainly seems that he did not just answer in the affirmative. If Jesus had wanted to answer the question in the affirmative, he could have answered "yes".
   2. According to John, Jesus has also pronounced God's name *"I Am",* among other things, at his arrest (John 18:6).
3. That the Son of Man would sit at the right hand of power (Ps 110:1) and come among the clouds of heaven (Dan 7:13-14) shows that although it is Jesus who stands accused, it is really he who has the power and eventually he will judge those who now judge him.
   1. Just before his death, Stephen saw Jesus at God's right hand in heaven (Acts 7:54-56).

[[@Bible:mark 14:63-64]]Mark 14:63-64

1. The high priest's reaction to accusing Jesus of blasphemy may be due to two things (or both at the same time):
   1. Either the high priest believes that Jesus has blasphemed God's name *"I Am"* and therefore, according to the Law of Moses, should be condemned to death (Leviticus 24:16).
      1. This would indeed be blasphemy unless the claim is true; that Jesus is indeed *"I Am"* (John 8:24, John 8:58).
   2. Or the high priest believes that Jesus has taken the role that only God has when he claims that he will sit at the right hand of power and thus blaspheme (Mark 2:7).
2. Jesus identifies himself with God both by using the name of God and by using the role that only God has.

## Mark 14:66-72 - Peter Denies Jesus

[[@Bible:mark 14:70-71]]Mark 14:70-71

1. It was brave of Peter to follow Jesus from a distance, but at the same time it is never a good idea to follow Jesus from a distance, because then one can easily fall when difficulties come.
2. Peter swears that he does not know Jesus, trying to convince his accusers that God will punish him if he does not tell the truth.
3. Peter has probably told himself that it is okay to lie and deny, because he is spying. But the end does not justify the means, as he will soon find out.

[[@Bible:mark 14:72]]Mark 14:72

1. Like Judas, Peter denied Jesus, but the difference between the two apostles was that Peter gave his life to Jesus and was restored (John 21:15-19) while Judas took his life (Matthew 27:3-10, Acts 1:18).
   1. The fact that both Peter and Judas fell means that all people can fall and that it is then a matter of repenting and receiving Jesus' forgiveness and restoration.

## Mark 15:1-15 - Jesus Before Pilate

[[@Bible:mark 15:1]]Mark 15:1

1. Pilate was the Roman governor of the occupied province of Judea from 26-36 AD.
   1. Pilate had his headquarters in Caesarea but stayed in Jerusalem during the feasts of the Jews.
2. The Jewish people were occupied by the Romans and had no right to condemn anyone to death so the Great Council is so badly forced to hand Jesus over to the Romans (John 18:31).
   1. The Jewish leadership murdered Stephen at a later date (Acts 7:57-60), but they dare not do so to Jesus because he was popular among the people (Mark 12:12, Mark 14:2).

[[@Bible:mark 15:2]]Mark 15:2

1. The reason the Jewish leadership wanted to kill Jesus was because he "blasphemed" (Mark 14:64), but this was not a reason for the Romans to condemn anyone to death. So in order to succeed in getting the Romans to condemn Jesus to death, they instead highlight something that they know will make the Romans see red; a rebel and political rival to the Roman emperor.
2. Jesus is indeed *"king of the Jews"*, but not politically or militarily, and is thus not a rival to Caesar (John 18:33-38).

[[@Bible:mark 15:5]]Mark 15:5

1. Just as Isaiah prophesied, Jesus was silent before his accusers (Is 53:7).
2. This surprised Pilate, who seems not to have been used to such dignified behaviour. Pilate did not believe that Jesus was guilty, nor did he want to condemn him to death (John 18:38).

[[@Bible:mark 15:6]]Mark 15:6

1. Since Pilate neither wants to crucify Jesus nor anger the religious leadership, he comes up with the cunning plan to get the people to release Jesus instead. Pilate offers the people a choice between Jesus and a murderer, but is probably surprised when the people suddenly choose to release Barabbas.

[[@Bible:mark 15:7]]Mark 15:7

1. *"Barabbas"* means "son of the father" and when the people receive Barabbas but reject Jesus, they receive the false son and deny the true Son.
2. The contrast between Barabbas and Jesus is great. Barabbas is a murderer, a person who *takes* life. Jesus is the giver of life, a person who *gives* life (Acts 3:14-15).
3. Barabbas serves as a symbolic role model for all people in that he is set free when Jesus takes his place, condemned to death, even though he is guilty of his crimes.

## Mark 15:16-20 - Jesus Is Mocked

[[@Bible:mark 15:17]]Mark 15:17

1. The soldiers mockingly dress Jesus as a king and greet him as they greeted the Roman emperor.
2. Jesus wearing the crown of thorns symbolizes that he bears the curse that mankind had to bear because of Adam's sin (Genesis 3:17-18).

[[@Bible:mark 15:19]]Mark 15:19

1. According to John, the Romans scourged Jesus (John 19:1).
   1. When the Romans scourged those who were to be crucified, they tied the prisoner up and beat him with sticks or lashed him with sharp objects that tore the skin.
   2. That Jesus was severely scourged is shown by the fact that he could not carry his cross all the way himself (Mark 15:21).

## Mark 15:21-32 - The Crucifixion

[[@Bible:mark 15:21]]Mark 15:21

1. Cyrene was a city in North Africa that had a relatively large Jewish population (Acts 2:10).
2. Simon was probably visiting Jerusalem to celebrate Easter with his countrymen.
3. The fact that his two sons are mentioned by name indicates that they belonged to the disciples (Rom 16:13).
4. The Romans used to let the one to be crucified carry his own cross on the way to the execution, but since Jesus was so badly scourged, he couldn't take it.
5. Simon Peter has promised just hours earlier never to abandon Jesus, but now, when Jesus needs help the most, another Simon must help Jesus (Mark 14:27-31).
   1. **The good thing about this** is that even if Jesus' disciples abandon Jesus, God still has the power to carry out his plan even without the disciples.
   2. The negative of this is that Peter missed out on a priceless honor and glory by not being where he had promised he would be!
   3. Although Jesus offers Peter forgiveness and restoration, there is no denying that Simon Peter here lost a great honour in helping his Master on the way to the cross.

[[@Bible:mark 15:22]]Mark 15:22

1. The location of Jesus' crucifixion is unknown today, but there are two suggestions as to where Calvary was located:
   1. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, built in 326 on the site where the Roman Emperor Constantine and his mother Helena believed Calvary was located.
   2. Gordon's Garden Tomb, which General Gordon found in 1883 on a rock that looks like a skull and has a tomb and a garden (John 19:41).

[[@Bible:mark 15:23]]Mark 15:23

1. The spiked wine had a painkilling effect, but Jesus refused to accept it because he was about to undergo the crucifixion in his right mind.

[[@Bible:mark 15:24]]Mark 15:24

1. Crucifixion was a cruel method of execution used to execute people as slowly and painfully as possible in front of an audience.
   1. Crucifixion was so cruel that it was forbidden to execute Roman citizens in this way. Crucifixion was intended for slaves and for the worst criminals.
2. Normally, the crucifixion took place in the following way:
   1. The prisoner was whipped so that his back was sore and torn.
   2. The prisoner was stripped and laid on the ground.
   3. The arms were nailed to the cross, which was then erected.
   4. The feet were nailed to the cross.
   5. The posture of the cross meant that if you didn't lift yourself, you would suffocate, but because you had nails in your feet, lifting yourself was extremely painful, which meant that you eventually couldn't cope and died from the pain or difficulty in breathing.
   6. The crucified could hang on the cross for days. If the Romans wanted to hasten death, they could crush the thigh bones of those crucified so that they could not lift themselves to breathe and thus suffocate to death (John 19:31-32).
3. The Roman soldiers here fulfill Psalm 22:19.

[[@Bible:mark 15:26]]Mark 15:26

1. The Romans used to name the crucified person on a poster and write what he was guilty of.
2. According to John, Pilate wrote *"Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews"* in Hebrew, Latin and Greek (John 19:19).
   1. If you take the initial letters from the poster, it becomes "INRI" in Latin and "YHWH" in Hebrew.
   2. The Jewish leadership vainly wanted Pilate to change the written text and perhaps it was because it looked like they had crucified God (John 19:21-22).

[[@Bible:mark 15:29]]Mark 15:29

1. Although they acknowledge that Jesus has done good, they still mock him.
2. Even those crucified with Jesus mock him, although one of the robbers eventually repents (Luke 23:39-43).

## Mark 15:33-41 - The Death of Jesus

[[@Bible:mark 15:33]]Mark 15:33

1. When Jesus had hung on the cross for three hours, the whole land was covered with darkness, as predicted by several prophets (Amos 8:9-19).
2. The Roman historian Phlegon also mentions a solar eclipse at the time of Jesus' crucifixion.

[[@Bible:mark 15:34]]Mark 15:34

1. Jesus quotes Psalm 22, a psalm that is bursting with references to Jesus and the cross.
2. Jesus, who is one with the Father (John 10:30), now experiences how he is instead made one with sin (2 Corinthians 5:21).
   1. Jesus, who is sinless and righteous, bore our sins in his body when he died on the cross (1 Peter 2:24), which resulted in us sinners being able to get rid of sin and share in Jesus' righteousness instead (2 Corinthians 5:21).
3. *"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law when he became a curse in our place. It is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on wood.'"* (Galatians 3:13, see also Deuteronomy 21:22-23).

[[@Bible:mark 15:37]]Mark 15:37

1. No one had the power to take Jesus' life, but he gave it willingly (John 10:17-18).

[[@Bible:mark 15:38]]Mark 15:38

1. The veil was a thick piece of cloth that hung inside the temple between the holiest and the most holy (Exodus 26:33).
2. Once a year, the high priest went into the holy of holies and offered a sacrifice of atonement for Israel (Exodus 30:10).
   1. With Jesus' death on the cross, this sacrifice is no longer needed and therefore the way into the Holy of Holies was opened so that all people now have free access to the Holy of Holies (Heb 9:3-9, Heb 10:19-22).

[[@Bible:mark 15:39]]Mark 15:39

1. This is the first time in Mark's gospel that anyone, other than God and the demons, confesses that Jesus is the Son of God.
2. Just as the Roman officer saw who Jesus was at the cross, we too can see who Jesus really is when we come to Jesus with our sins and ask for forgiveness.

[[@Bible:mark 15:40]]Mark 15:40

1. While many of the male disciples have abandoned Jesus, the female ones remain.
2. These women, thanks to their courage and devotion to Jesus, witnessed Jesus' death, burial and resurrection.

## Mark 15:42-47 - Jesus Is Buried

[[@Bible:mark 15:42-43]]Mark 15:42-43

1. Joseph was a member of the Great Council, the Sanhedrin, but had not agreed to kill Jesus (Luke 23:51) because he was a disciple of Jesus in secret (John 19:38).
2. Interestingly, the president of the disciples, the outspoken leader Peter, confesses to everyone that he will never abandon Jesus, but when the heat is on, he flees. Instead, it is the silent and withdrawn disciples who remain at Jesus' side.
3. Normally, the Romans used to let the crucified hang on the cross until they rotted or were eaten by animals, but now Pilate allowed Joseph to take Jesus down. Perhaps Pilate felt guilty because he knew that Jesus was really innocent? (John 18:38).
4. Since the Jews were not allowed to work on the Shabbat, Saturday, they had to fix everything on Friday.

## Mark 16:1-8 - The Resurrection

[[@Bible:mark 16:2]]Mark 16:2

1. The women could not take care of Jesus' body on Saturday because it was forbidden to work on the Sabbath. But as soon as they had the chance, they went to the tomb.

[[@Bible:mark 16:3-4]]Mark 16:3-4

1. According to Matthew, there was a guard guarding the tomb (Matthew 27:65-66) and there was an angel who rolled away the stone (Matthew 28:2).
2. The stone was not rolled away so that Jesus could come *out*, for he could walk through walls (John 20:19). The stone was rolled away so that the women could look *into* the tomb.

[[@Bible:mark 16:5]]Mark 16:5

1. The young man the women see is an angel***.***
2. The white robe is reminiscent of Jesus' white robes on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9:3).

[[@Bible:mark 16:6]]Mark 16:6

1. The angel points out that Jesus *was* crucified but that he has *now* risen. Both of these messages are equally important, one does not work without the other.
2. Nazareth was a despised city (John 1:46) and crucifixion was a despised method of execution. Jesus has no problem identifying with that which is despised; on the contrary, he makes it his title.
   1. In the same way, we Christians today are to identify with the despised and the least in society (Matthew 25:35-40).
3. There are several people in the Bible who had their lives restored after they died, but they eventually died again (1 Kings 17:17-24, John 11:38-44).
   1. The resurrection of Jesus is to the new eternal life in which all who believe in him will share (John 3:16)***.***
4. Thanks to the resurrection of Jesus, everyone who believes in Jesus will be resurrected when Jesus returns to earth (1 Thess 4:14-17) and will receive a new resurrection body (1 Cor 15:51-52, Phil 3:21).

[[@Bible:mark 16:7]]Mark 16:7

1. The women are asked to testify to the other disciples about Jesus' resurrection. Unfortunately, the women's testimony is not properly received because women's testimonies were not considered credible. But even if the disciples did not believe the women, Jesus believed in them and entrusted them with this important mission.

## Mark 16:9-20 - The Great Commission

[[@Bible:mark 16:14]]Mark 16:14

1. It was difficult for the disciples to believe that Jesus had risen unless they saw it for themselves. But in doing so, they learned what it's like for everyone else who hasn't seen Jesus with their own eyes.

[[@Bible:mark 16:15]]Mark 16:15

1. Jesus here gives a command that the church must obey. Preaching the gospel is not a leisure activity but a mission in which the whole life and being of the congregation should be engaged.
2. Although Jesus said *"the whole world"*, it was a long time before the disciples began to move outside their own Jewish circles.
3. An example of Peter preaching the gospel to the Jews: Acts 2:14-41.
4. An example of Paul preaching the gospel to Greeks: Acts 17:22-34.

[[@Bible:mark 16:16]]Mark 16:16

1. "Therefore, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." (Rom 10:9-10).
2. Anyone who hears the gospel and believes in Jesus should be baptized as a sign of repentance and obedience to Jesus' commands.
3. If for some reason you have not been baptized, you can rest easy because Jesus shows that it is the lack of faith, not the lack of baptism, that causes you to be condemned. In other words, anyone who is baptized but does not believe is in danger of being condemned.

[[@Bible:mark 16:17]]Mark 16:17

1. All these signs that Jesus lists will follow those who believe. In the book of Acts we find examples of all of them:
   1. Paul drives a fortune teller out of a slave girl (Acts 16:16-18).
   2. The disciples all begin to speak in tongues when they are filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4).
   3. Paul is bitten by a viper without being harmed (Acts 28:3-6).
   4. Paul laid his hands on a sick man who was healed (Acts 28:7-9).
2. In the last verse of this chapter we see that these signs are to follow the *"word"* where it is preached. So Christians are not always saved when they are bitten by vipers, for example, but they can expect similar things when they preach the gospel.

[[@Bible:mark 16:19]]Mark 16:19

1. Had Jesus not left the disciples, there would have been a risk that they would not take their mission seriously and instead rely on Jesus to do so.
   1. When Jesus walked the earth, he acted as a model for all disciples. With the power of the Holy Spirit, we too can do great things (John 14:12).
2. When Jesus sits at the right hand of God, Psalm 110:1 is fulfilled.
3. Stephen saw Jesus sitting at God's right hand just before he was martyred (Acts 7:56).

[[@Bible:mark 16:20]]Mark 16:20

1. Although Mark's Gospel ends with these words, the Gospel continues into our days. The Gospel is preached all over the world and miracles and signs are still an important part of the Christian message.
2. These words teach us that we should not sit and wait for signs before we go out and preach, but we should start preaching the gospel and then expect signs to follow.

# Luke

## Luke 1:1-4 - Introduction

[[@Bible:luke 1:3]]Luke 1:3

1. Luke was a physician and one of Paul's co-workers on his missionary journeys (Colossians 4:14) and authored both the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles (Luke 1:1-4).
   1. In the Gospel of Luke, Luke wrote what Jesus did here on earth; in Acts, Luke writes what Jesus *continues to* do through his disciples.
2. The fact that Luke *carefully researched* underlines the importance of telling the Gospel in an accurate, thoughtful and credible way.
   1. Luke's *careful research* also highlights the fact that the Gospel is not a myth to be believed, but is actually historical fact that can be studied.
3. When Luke writes that he has written this down "*in order"* it does not necessarily mean that he means *chronological* order but that he has chosen to present his gospel in a *logical* order.
   1. The basic text does not include the word "right", as it does in some Bible translations.
4. Theophilus means "friend of God" and theologians dispute whether this Theophilus was a real person or whether the name is symbolic. One possibility is that Theophilus was real and that Luke gratefully used his name to address not only Theophilus personally but all the friends of God.
   1. Since Acts ends with Paul waiting to be tried before the emperor (Acts 28:19), Luke and Acts could be defensive writings to show the emperor that the Christian message was not dangerous for Rome. Theophilus could then be the Roman official who handled the matter.
   2. Theophilus may well have been an early house church leader who had sufficient financial resources to take on the responsibility of copying and distributing the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts.

## Luke 1:5-25 - Birth of John the Baptist Foretold

[[@Bible:luke 1:5]]Luke 1:5

1. This Herod was called Herod the Great and is the same Herod who murdered the boys in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16).

[[@Bible:luke 1:6]]Luke 1:6

1. Zechariah and Elizabeth were both righteous before God, suggesting that, like Abraham, they believed in God (Gen 15:6) because "the righteous shall live by their faith" (Hab 2:4). In addition, they followed the laws and commandments found in the Torah.
   1. Other people who were also called "righteous" in the Old Testament are Noah (Gen 6:9), Abraham (Gen 15:6), Job (Job 34:5) and God (Ps 11:7).
   2. Other people who were also called "righteous" in the New Testament are Joseph (Matthew 1:19), Simeon (Luke 2:25) and Paul (Philippians 3:6).

[[@Bible:luke 1:7]]Luke 1:7

1. It is almost commonplace for men of God to be born miraculously of barren people.
   1. Abraham and Sarah were barren, yet they had Isaac (Genesis 11:30).
   2. Isaac and Rebekah were barren, but still had Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:21).
   3. Elkanah and Hannah were barren, yet they had Samuel (1 Sam 1:5).
   4. Mary was a virgin, yet she had Jesus (Luke 1:26-34).
2. The fact that a child will again be born to barren parents ties in with the biblical story and shows that once again a child will be born whom God has intended to use in a special way.
   1. In this way, God shows that he has all the power, takes the initiative and offers a free miracle.
3. Zacharias and Elizabeth were unable to have children, but did not drown their sorrow in bitterness and alcohol. Instead, they remained faithful to the Lord and tried to live as righteous a life as possible.
   1. How do you react to personal disappointments? Do you pull away from God or closer?

[[@Bible:luke 1:8-9]]Luke 1:8-9

1. In New Testament times, there were about 20,000 priests, each of whom served at the temple for a week twice a year. In addition, they served once in their lives at the sacrificial service that Zechariah is about to do. The priests were divided into 24 divisions based on 1 Chronicles 24:7-18.
2. The sacrificial service that Zechariah now performs is the daily sacrifice described in Exodus 29:38-42.
   1. Every morning and every evening for all eternity, Israel would sacrifice to the Lord at the temple, and the Lord would then reveal Himself to the children of Israel, sanctify them, and make them realize that the Lord is their God.
      1. These daily sacrifices can be likened to prayer in our time. It is a good routine to gather every morning and every evening for a little while to pray and read the Bible. Then God will reveal Himself to us, sanctify us and we will realize that the Lord is our God.
3. It is no coincidence that at the same time that Zechariah is about to perform a sacrificial service to atone for the sins of the people, God is starting a series of events that will culminate in Jesus dying on the cross to atone for the sins of humanity.
4. Considering that priests might only be given this glorious assignment to enter the Lord's temple and light the incense offering once in their entire lifetime, Zechariah was probably very excited and thrilled about this great moment!
   1. If you could be before the face of God once in your life, what would you pray for?

[[@Bible:luke 1:10-13]]Luke 1:10-13

1. Once inside the temple at the altar of incense, Zechariah fixes the incense and prays to the Lord. Presumably he prayed that God would send the promised Messiah to save Israel from Roman occupation. Perhaps he also took the opportunity to pray for his private prayer topic; having a child. Or perhaps Zechariah had given up and stopped praying to God for a child, as he and his wife Elizabeth were getting on in years. But clearly, God had not given up on the idea of giving them an answer to prayer!
   1. How long can you pray faithfully before you give up hope and quit? From Zechariah and Elizabeth we learn that it is never too late for God to answer your prayer, even if it takes a miracle!
2. In the midst of Zechariah's prayer and incense burning, an angel appears to him! We don't know exactly what prayers Zechariah prayed, but we do know what two answers the angel conveyed to him: a promise that the Messiah would soon come and a promise of a child.
3. The name John means "God has shown mercy" and is a fitting name for someone who will point to Jesus and say "There is mercy".

[[@Bible:luke 1:17]]Luke 1:17

1. John's great mission in life was to prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah by urging them to repentance, as the prophet Elijah did (1 Kings 18:20-40).
2. The words "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children" are taken from the very last verse of the Old Testament (Mal 4:6) and are very symbolic because John the Baptist was the last Old Testament prophet.

[[@Bible:luke 1:18-20]]Luke 1:18-20

1. If my boss comes to me and tells me I'm going to get a raise, and I say, "How can I be sure?" then I think my boss will take offense! It shows that I don't trust my boss and that I don't think he has the power to do what he promises.
   1. When Zechariah questions the angel's words to him, it shows that he does not believe that God has the power to bring about his promises.
2. Because of Zechariah's doubts, God made him "dumb". God didn't take back his promise, but he made it so that Zechariah didn't have the joy of telling the good news. In this way, God gave him a real wake-up call and he was able to reflect in silence on what had happened.
   1. From Zechariah we learn that unbelief leads to silence and that we do not have the joy of sharing the gospel, the good news, with those around us.
3. The priest Zechariah and the Virgin Mary become two clear contrasts in how to receive a greeting from God.
   1. Zacharias was a man, a priest, from a fine family, and served in the capital with the finest task one could get. Zechariah questioned whether God's promise was really possible to accomplish.
   2. Maria was a young poor unmarried woman from the countryside. Assuming that God's promise is true and will be fulfilled, Mary asks a logical follow-up question about how it will happen, since she has not yet been with a man.

[[@Bible:luke 1:21-25]]Luke 1:21-25

1. After lighting the incense, it was traditional for the priest to come out of the temple, raise his hands and pronounce the blessing to all the people gathered (Numbers 6:24-26). Then a song of praise was sung together.
   1. The people outside are waiting for Zechariah to come out, but it takes a long time and people are getting worried. When he finally comes out, he can't say the blessing because he's gone mute!
   2. Because of his unbelief, Zechariah loses the chance to bless God's people and is silently dismissed.
      1. In a similar way, we also suffer today when we do not believe in God, we miss the chance to be a blessing to our fellow human beings.
      2. But fortunately for Zechariah, his muteness did not last long. When John is born 9 months later, Zechariah regains his voice (Luke 1:64).
2. After Elizabeth became pregnant, she did not show herself openly for five months, not because she wanted to hide her growing belly, but because she was grateful to the Lord and spent the time in prayer and thanksgiving.

## Luke 1:26-38 - The angel's message to Mary

[[@Bible:luke 1:26-27]]Luke 1:26-27

1. Earlier in the chapter, the angel Gabriel visited Zechariah and also the prophet Daniel 500 years before Christ (Dan 8:16, 9:21). Gabriel's name means "mighty man".
2. Mary was a "virgin", i.e. she was unmarried and therefore had not had sex. Hence Mary's surprise that she will soon become pregnant.
3. Sometimes the biblical testimony of the virgin birth is questioned and (mis)explained as a "mythological term" or similar. But the fact that the virgin birth really happened as described in the Bible is important for seven main reasons:
   1. First of all, if the virgin birth is not true, then the Bible is not true either. Both Luke and Matthew write that Jesus was born of a virgin (Matthew 1:18-25, Luke 1:26-38).
   2. Second, if the virgin birth is not true, who was Jesus' father? Matthew is clear that Joseph was not the father of the child. If you don't believe in the virgin birth, you are indirectly accusing Mary of adultery.
   3. Third, if the virgin birth is not true, is Jesus really God? According to John 1, Jesus is God who was born as a man, but if Jesus was made from two ordinary people, how can Jesus be incarnate?
   4. Fourth, if the virgin birth is not true, how can Jesus be sinless? According to Paul, all men have sinned (Rom 3:23) and how can a sinful man die for the sins of mankind?
   5. Fifth, if the virgin birth is not true, what about other miracles? If one does not believe that God can create life in a woman's womb, does one believe, for example, that Jesus rose from the dead?
   6. Sixthly, if the Virgin Birth is not correct, then you have problems with the creeds, either you have to reinterpret its content or you have to remove or change it.
   7. Seventh, if the virgin birth is not true, then one gets a strange relationship to both church history and the rest of Christianity.
   8. In conclusion, I believe that if one is serious about questioning the virgin birth, one is also indirectly questioning the authority of Scripture, the credibility of Mary, the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection, the Creeds and Church history.
4. Every child that is born is a new creation, but since Jesus has always existed (John 1:1, John 17:5), and is therefore older than his own mother, he could not have been born by a normal "conception" but by a miracle.
   1. Jesus existed in heaven with his Father, but without a mother, and was born into this world through his mother, but without an earthly father.
   2. The Son of God becoming man is therefore a miracle and took place through the work of the Holy Spirit.
5. Mary was from the much despised city of Nazareth in northern Israel. Although Jesus was born in Bethlehem, he was often referred to as "Jesus of Nazareth". This shows us that Jesus had no problem being associated with this town and its bad reputation. In the same way, we Christians today should not be afraid of being associated with despised people, but rather identify with them.
   1. Even today, Christians in the Middle East are called "Nazarenes" (Acts 24:5).
      1. We Westerners were recently given a painful reminder of this when Muslim extremists seized the Iraqi city of Mosul and forced all Christians to convert to Islam or die. The extremists marked all Christian houses with the Arabic letter "N" for "Nazarene". The vast majority of Christians in Mosul fled the city as a result.
6. Very often biblical names have a connection to the mission of the person in question, but in Mary's case this does not seem to be the case. The meaning of Mary's name is uncertain, but a common interpretation is that her name means "defiant" and thus does not at all reflect her response to God's mission. Another possible interpretation of the name Mary is that it means "beloved".
7. The traditions of marriage in Jesus' time are quite different from today's Western views. Normally, parents would arrange the marriage without even asking those who were getting married. The groom's family paid a "bride price" for the marriage and thus the couple was "betrothed". Betrothal was as binding as marriage; to dissolve the betrothal, one had to be divorced and if one was unfaithful during the betrothal, one would be stoned (Deut. 22:23-24). The only difference was that the couple had not yet moved in together and entered into a sexual relationship.
   1. By becoming pregnant while engaged to Joseph, Mary put herself in mortal danger because people might think she had been unfaithful and would be stoned to death.
8. Joseph belonged to the tribe of Judah and was related to King David (Matthew 1:6). He was a carpenter by trade (Matthew 13:55) and came from the city of Nazareth in Galilee (Luke 2:4).
   1. The reason it is so important that Jesus is of David's lineage is because of God's promise to King David (2Sam 7:14-16).

[[@Bible:luke 1:28]]Luke 1:28

1. Mary is called "pardoned" because, on the one hand, she was an ordinary sinful person (Ecclesiastes 7:21, Romans 3:23) in need of a Savior (Luke 1:46-47) just like everyone else, but on the other hand she was given the great joy of bringing God's Son into the world.
   1. The great thing about Mary is not her *excellence*, but her *lowliness* (Luke 1:45). The unique thing about Mary is that although she was just an ordinary teenage girl, she got to be the instrument God used to make her human. God often uses the insignificant as an instrument of his will. In this way, God gets the glory because it was not through the excellence of any human being but instead through the grace of God.
      1. Therefore, it is important not to exalt Mary and praise her for her excellence, because then we both diminish God's mercy towards Mary and fail to give God the glory for the miracle that Mary witnessed.
      2. Instead, we should remember Mary for the amazing blessing she received and her humble approach to the enormous task she was given.
      3. In the same way, we should be careful not to exalt ourselves or other persons whom God uses in a powerful way, because we risk obscuring the fact that it is God who is working through the person in question. When we thank God for doing great works through little people, we give God the glory instead of exalting ourselves.

[[@Bible:luke 1:29-30]]Luke 1:29-30

1. Maria was a simple and pious young woman with no extravagant plans for the future, and it is no wonder that she is terrified of the great task that awaits her.

[[@Bible:luke 1:30]]Luke 1:30

1. These words from the angel Gabriel were prophesied by Isaiah:
   1. *"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: behold, the virgin will conceive and bear a son, and she will call his name Immanuel."* (Isa 7:14).
      1. The name "Immanuel" means "God with us" and implies that Jesus is the person of the Trinity who became human; as one of us.
2. In biblical times, a person's name was more than just a name of address; it represented the person's purpose, character and life. All of Jesus' names and titles teach us something about who he is.
   1. The name "Jesus" is a Greek variant of the Hebrew name Joshua, Yeshua or Yehoshuah, which is a contraction of the two Hebrew words "yeho", which is a word that comes from "YHWH" / "Yahweh", and "shua" which means "salvation" or "save us!". So all in all, Jesus' name becomes "God saves us" or "God the saviour", which is very consistent with Jesus being God who became man to save us.

[[@Bible:luke 1:32-33]]Luke 1:32-33

1. From a secular point of view, it is difficult to find a historical person greater than Jesus. Wherever you go in the world, most people know who Jesus is. Without conquering a single kingdom or killing a single person, Jesus has built a greater kingdom than the world has ever seen. Today alone, there are over 2 billion people who confess Jesus as their King.
2. Jesus would receive the throne of his ancestor King David, that is, he would be the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament to come (2 Sam 7:12-16).

[[@Bible:luke 1:34-35]]Luke 1:34-35

1. Mary does not ask *if* this miracle can happen, but *how* it should happen, since she was a virgin. This shows that she believes in the angel Gabriel's message, but wonders how God will bring this about.
2. In Old Testament times, it was not uncommon for God to reveal himself to people by a "thick cloud" over the person in question, such as Moses or Aaron (Exodus 19:9).
3. The word "holy" means "consecrated for a specific purpose", and in this sense Jesus was indeed "holy", because he was chosen to die for the sins of all people and thus reconcile humanity with God.
4. Since Jesus has always existed (John 1:1, John 17:5), he did not *become* the Son of God on this occasion, but from now on he would be *called* the Son of God.
   1. To be called someone's "son" in biblical times meant that you possessed that person's qualities. With this in mind, it is therefore not surprising that the Jewish religious leadership becomes enraged when Jesus calls God his "Father" (John 5:18) and thus claims to be the "Son of God", which was obviously blasphemous unless, as in Jesus' case, one is God (John 1:1).
   2. The fact that Jesus is the *Son of* God shows us the mutual relationship between the Father and Jesus, but also shows that Jesus is the person in the Trinity who was born as a Son of Man.
   3. Jesus is *"true God of true God, born and not made, of the same essence as the Father"* (see the Council of the Church of Constantinople in 381).

[[@Bible:luke 1:36]]Luke 1:36

1. Mary never asked for proof that what the angel Gabriel told her was true, but gets it anyway.
   1. While God's word should be good enough for the believer, it does not hurt to have some form of confirmation from time to time that what God says will happen.

[[@Bible:luke 1:37]]Luke 1:37

1. Even though every believer knows this, it can be nice to be reminded that God is all-powerful and can do whatever he wants. We can trust what God says, even if it seems humanly impossible.
   1. If it was true for Mary 2000 years ago, it is true for us today, because *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."* (Heb 13:8)

[[@Bible:luke 1:38]]Luke 1:38

1. Mary replies to the angel Gabriel that she is willing to humbly accept the task God has given her and that she believes in what God has said.
   1. In the same way, today we too should humbly accept the task God gives us and trust that God will carry out what he has said.

## Luke 2:1-20 - The Birth of Jesus Christ

[[@Bible:luke 2:1]]Luke 2:1

1. ***Augustus*** (ruled the Roman Empire from 31 BC to 14 AD) was originally named Octavian and was the adopted son of Julius Caesar. After defeating Mark Antony and Cleopatra, Augustus became by far the most powerful man in the Roman Empire, as evidenced by the fact that he was the first Roman to give himself the title "emperor".
2. It is no coincidence that God chooses to send his Son into the world just when Augustus is emperor. God's timing is perfect. There are many similarities and parallels between Emperor Augustus and Jesus.
   1. After all the Roman wars and civil wars, Augustus introduced the "Pax Romana"; the Roman peace. According to the "Inscription of Priene" (9 BC), Augustus was seen as a "god" and "saviour" who had brought "peace" to the whole world. When this peace was proclaimed, it was called "good news" (gospel).
      1. *"It seemed good to the Greeks of Asia, in the opinion of the high priest Apollonius of Menophilus Azanitus: "Since Providence, which has ordered all things and is deeply interested in our life, has set in most perfect order by giving us Augustus, whom she filled with virtue that he might benefit humankind, sending him as a* ***savior****, both for us and for our descendants,* ***that he might end war*** *and arrange all things, and since he, Caesar, by his appearance (excelled even our anticipations), surpassing all previous benefactors, and not even leaving to posterity any hope of surpassing what he has done, and since the birthday of the* ***god*** *Augustus was the beginning of the* ***good tidings*** *for the world that came by reason of him" which Asia resolved in Smyrna."* (Priene Inscripton).
      2. It is against this background that Luke writes his Gospel, which must most likely have been seen as some kind of rebellion by the Roman authorities. Going around proclaiming that someone other than the Roman emperor is God, Saviour and Lord were claims that the Roman emperor could hardly tolerate. In other words, writing as Luke does in his Gospel was a life-threatening proposition.
      3. It is true that the Jewish people at this time enjoyed various religious privileges thanks to their coming to the rescue of Julius Caesar when he was in trouble in Egypt. In return, Julius exempted the Jews from Roman military service and made Judaism a permitted religion in the Roman Empire (read more about this in Josephus Jewish Antiquities 14:225-227). The Jewish people were allowed to follow religious customs, although most Roman citizens viewed Jewish monotheism as atheism. Failure to worship the Greco-Roman gods, who were seen as protecting the Roman Empire, was seen as treason. These religious privileges also applied to the first Christians, as long as the Romans considered the Christians to be only a Jewish sect, but as more and more non-Jews became Christians and Christians and Jews went their separate ways a few decades after Jesus, the Christians had big problems with the Roman imperial cult, which led to the Christians being persecuted and murdered for not wanting to worship the emperor or call anyone other than Jesus Lord. Not only that, but in the early 100s Christians were criminalised, making it illegal to profess to be a Christian.
   2. The little defenseless infant born into a poor Jewish family in a Roman suburb stands as a parallel to the mighty Roman emperor. Augustus came with an imposed peace, called saviour, lord and son of God, but Jesus is the real Saviour who now comes into the world to offer real peace, and who offers this for free, by grace.
   3. It is probably no coincidence that God chose this particular time to send his Son into the world. The conditions for spreading the Gospel were very favourable. There was peace in the Roman Empire, travel was fast because the Romans had built 8,000 miles of paved road and 32,000 miles of other roads, a postal system had been established and there was an international language (Koine Greek).
   4. Although the Roman emperor Augustus was the most powerful man in the world at the time and commanded that "the whole world should be taxed", he was still only a tool in God's plan. The prophet Micah had prophesied that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Mic 5:2), and this command forces the pregnant Mary to travel from Nazareth down to Bethlehem, a journey she probably would not have made otherwise.

[[@Bible:luke 2:2]]Luke 2:2

1. Tax writing was an effective way for the Roman authorities to collect money from ordinary people.
2. The second tax inscription, at least as Luke mentions, is in Acts 5:37.
3. Luke's clear naming of people and places shows us that Luke's gospel claims to have happened in reality, it is anchored in history. This may seem natural to most believing Bible readers, but there are many who believe that the gospel of Jesus is just made-up fairy tales.
   1. There are many different kinds of texts in the Bible and not all of them claim to be historical. The Psalms, for example, are poetry and should not necessarily be taken literally. For example, when we read in Ps 59:10 that God is a "fortress", we understand that God is not really a fortress, but we understand (hopefully) the point of the poetic language; that God protects us from our enemies. Luke, on the other hand, anchors his gospel in history, and we should read Luke's gospel as if what is described actually happened for real.

[[@Bible:luke 2:4-5]]Luke 2:4-5

1. Galilee is north of Judea, but they say "up to Judea" because Judea was on a hill.
2. The distance between Nazareth and Bethlehem is about 13 miles, about the same as between Linköping and Jönköping or between Timrå and Örnsköldsvik. Normally, this distance would take about 4 days to walk, but considering that Mary was pregnant, this journey certainly took at least a week.
3. Mary did not have to go with Joseph to Bethlehem to be taxed, but Joseph probably wanted to remove her from Nazareth to avoid unnecessary gossip among neighbors and acquaintances about why Mary was pregnant even though Joseph and Mary had not yet married.
   1. Luke writes nothing about all the possible troubles Mary faced being pregnant and unmarried, but one can imagine that this must have been a very difficult personal time for Mary, while she was probably very blissful and excited about the miracle that was going on.

[[@Bible:luke 2:7]]Luke 2:7

1. Many houses in Judea at this time had only one room and then a stable for the animals in a cave under the house. It is possible that it is in such a stable that Joseph and Mary spend the night and give birth to Jesus.
2. The fact that Luke writes "she gave birth to her firstborn son" shows us that Mary later gave birth to more children (Matt 13:54-56, John 7:5, Gal 1:18-19).

[[@Bible:luke 2:8-9]]Luke 2:8-9

1. Some argue that the fact that the shepherds were out at night with their flocks shows that Jesus could not have been born in December because Judea was too cold at this time of year. However, it is not entirely impossible that at this time it was a warm winter and that the shepherds were therefore able to be out with their sheep. But normally shepherds were out with their sheep between March and October.
2. The sheep that were sacrificed in the temple in Jerusalem were often herded in Bethlehem, so it is not impossible that the shepherds of the sacrificial lambs will now meet the sacrificial lambs of God (John 1:29, Rev 5:6).
3. Herdsmen were at that time a very despised group of people. Together with the three wise men in Matthew's Gospel, they contrast the scale of society, both high and low came to praise Jesus when he was born!
   1. It is probably no coincidence that God chooses to announce the coming of the Messiah to representatives of the lowest strata of society; Jesus himself says at a later point: "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to the unlearned and lowly. Yes, Father, this was your good will." (Luke 10:21)

[[@Bible:luke 2:10-11]]Luke 2:10-11

1. If I had suddenly seen a UFO, my knees would have been a little shaky to say the least, imagine these shepherds, who, for real, see an angel shining with the glory of the Lord. No wonder they are horrified and terrified. But fortunately for the shepherds, the angel comes with "good news". The message of Jesus is something positive for all people and we have nothing to fear.
2. The angel's message is undeniably very similar to the message that the Roman Empire tried to convey about Emperor Augustus. The difference is, among other things, that Augustus comes with arms in hand and imposes a peace on the people while demanding their money and forcing them to confess the Emperor as God and Lord. Jesus comes as a servant and offers grace and peace to all who desire forgiveness of sins.
3. ***Saviour*** means "saviour" and refers above all to the fact that Jesus is the one who saves us from sin through his death on the cross. All people can be saved from sin and all who believe in Jesus will be (1 John 2:2, John 3:16-17).
   1. The word "savior" is actually in Jesus' name. Jesus is called "Yeshua" in Hebrew, which is a contraction of the two words "yhwh" (God) and "savior". So Jesus' name is "God saves".
4. ***The city of David*** is Bethlehem (1 Sam 17:12) and the prophet Micah prophesied that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem (Mic 5:2).
5. ***Messiah*** is Hebrew and means "the anointed one" in English and "Christ" in Greek.
   1. In biblical times, a new king or high priest was anointed with oil when he was installed, similar to the way we crown someone king today (2 Sam 5:3). Jesus is "the anointed one" both in terms of being king and being high priest.
   2. The Jewish people had long waited for the "anointed one" to come and "save" their people (Dan 9:25).
6. ***The Lord*** is one of the strongest confessions of Jesus there is: "Therefore, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Rom 10:9)
   1. Where it says "the Lord" in English, it says "kyrios" in the basic Greek text. Kyrios can mainly refer to 4 different things; "Yahweh (=God), "an owner", "a boss" and "lord" (as in "sir" in English). In Bible times, the name of God was not usually pronounced "yhwh". When it said yhwh in Scripture, it read "Adonaj" instead. Adonaj is Hebrew and means "lord" in the same way that "kyrios" means "lord" in Greek. Very often "Lord" refers to "God" when used as a title for Jesus. This can be seen by examining quotes from the Old Testament used about Jesus in the New Testament. For example, Mark quotes Isaiah 40:3 when describing Jesus as "Lord" in Mark 1:3. But in Isaiah 40:3, the basic text reads "yhwh" where Mark writes "Lord".

[[@Bible:luke 2:12-14]]Luke 2:12-14

1. The contrast is great when a mighty and pompous choir of angels sings glory to God for the birth of a baby. God often uses something fragile and small to get his way because then all who witness must realize that it was God who did it or as Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:7, "But this treasure we have in earthen vessels, that the mighty power may be of God and not come from us."
   1. In the same way, God can use you to do great things. Even if you are small and weak in comparison to the mission you are given, God can work miracles through you if you enter into his service. But don't forget to always give God the glory.

[[@Bible:luke 2:15-16]]Luke 2:15-16

1. Once again the contrast becomes clear! The shepherds have just heard the angels praise God for the birth of a Savior and now they find this Messiah and Lord in a "manger".
   1. A crib was a wooden stand for feeding all kinds of animals. The manger was slightly raised to protect the feed from the surrounding droppings of the animals.
   2. This mighty Messiah who will save the whole world turns out to be a fragile little baby lying in a feeding trough surrounded by shit!
2. It is honourable of the shepherds that they did not turn at the door when they saw this poor and unglamorous sight.
   1. We humans often want to express our faith with grand and fancy churches, with fantastic creeds or with pompous titles, but God has never asked this of us. What God wants from us is that we love God with all our heart and our fellow man as ourselves, then we will fulfil God's requirements (Luke 10:27).

[[@Bible:luke 2:18]]Luke 2:18

1. There is a difference between "wondering" and "preserving". Mary is a model for all believers in that she did not always understand everything about Jesus, but she kept it in her heart.
2. Just as Mary did, we who are Jesus' disciples today should continue to "keep" and "ponder" all that Jesus does. We read about Jesus in the Gospels and take to heart all that is written about him and ponder, pray and think about what Jesus did and what it means for us today.

## Luke 2:41-52 - The Boy Jesus in the Temple

[[@Bible:luke 2:41]]Luke 2:41

1. Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth, north of Jerusalem, so why does it say that they went "up" to Jerusalem? Well, because Jerusalem is on a hill.
2. According to Exodus 34:22-23, all the men of Israel were to celebrate three feasts each year; Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles.
3. As described in the Book of Genesis, Joseph and Mary celebrated Passover every year (Exodus 23:15) in the place that God himself had chosen; Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 16:2).
   1. The Passover was celebrated for only one day, but was then followed by a seven-day feast called "the feast of unleavened bread" (Luke 22:1).
4. The fact that Jesus' parents went "every year" to the Passover means that they were devout and religious Jews.
5. Joseph, Mary, Jesus, and probably Jesus' half-siblings (Matthew 13:55-56) had gone to Jerusalem as pilgrims to celebrate this feast.
   1. Probably it was a big and expensive project for a carpenter family to leave their house and their job for a whole week.
   2. Yet we see that the family prioritised God's will over their own finances, choosing to care about the spiritual and not just the valuable.
   3. In the same way, today we should also think about how we prioritise our time. Of course, we should work and provide for our families, but we should not forget to take care of our spiritual needs as well. It is important to plan and set aside time to go to worship and be with our Father.

[[@Bible:luke 2:42]]Luke 2:42

1. We know virtually nothing about Jesus' life from the time he was a baby until he became an adult, except for this small text.
   1. The reason for this gap in Jesus' life is because we don't need to know. The Bible is not a historical factual account but tells and highlights what we need to know.
   2. John writes in his Gospel, "Jesus also did many other things. If every event were to be written down, I believe that even the whole world could not contain the books that would then be written." (John 21:25).
2. In the Middle Ages, a Jewish tradition had developed whereby Jewish boys at the age of five begin to learn the Torah, the five books of Moses, and then at the age of thirteen undergo their "bar-mitzvah" and thus become personally responsible to obey the Torah, the Law.
   1. We don't know if this tradition was already in use at the time of Jesus, but perhaps there was something similar.
3. According to Jewish tradition, one should start learning one's father's trade at the age of twelve, and this is exactly what Jesus does when he "*devotes himself to what belongs to his Father."*

[[@Bible:luke 2:43]]Luke 2:43

1. When Jews from Galilee went to Jerusalem to celebrate a feast, they often went in large traveling parties, and it seems that Joseph and Mary assumed that Jesus was somewhere in this traveling party. It is likely that Jesus had some people with whom he associated and whom his parents assumed he was with when they went home.
2. The fact that Joseph and Mary missed the fact that Jesus was not in the travelling party on the way home shows us that they *trusted Jesus*.
   1. Both Joseph and Mary knew beforehand that there was something very special about Jesus (Matt 1:21-23, Luke 1:31-33), but they still had a parental responsibility for Jesus.

[[@Bible:luke 2:46-47]]Luke 2:46-47

1. It is remarkable that Joseph and Mary search in Jerusalem for three days before they start searching in the temple. All in all, Jesus was gone for five days.
   1. Jesus was most likely aware that they were looking for him and therefore we understand that Jesus was trying to show his parents something.
2. Jesus was extremely interested in talking about God and the Bible. Not only did he listen to the teachers, but he also asked questions and had discussions with them.
   1. In the same way, we today should also learn from Jesus' example and be just as inquisitive about the Bible so that we can't get enough of discussing God.
   2. Personally, I have been struck by a love for the Bible and I spend much of my time and thought researching the Scriptures and learning more about Jesus. My Bible commentaries are a result of this curiosity.
3. These Jewish rabbis and teachers were extremely knowledgeable about God's Word, yet they were "amazed" at Jesus' "reasonable answers." This was because Jesus had a unique relationship with God.
   1. From this we can learn the important lesson that one can learn more about God by spending time with him than by reading and studying theology.
   2. As a believer, you can really know God and have a living relationship with him.

[[@Bible:luke 2:49]]Luke 2:49

1. In Jesus' time it was common to have the same profession as his father, and Jesus did indeed work as a carpenter (Mark 6:3), just like Joseph (Matt 13:55), but here Jesus shows that he is also aware of what he will do in the future.
   1. Jesus is the Son of God and does God the Father's will here on earth (Luke 10:22, Luke 22:29, John 1:18, John 3:35, John 5:19-20, John 5:36).
   2. Incidentally, this is the last time Joseph appears in the Bible. It seems that Joseph passed away sometime after this event.
2. Since at the age of twelve Jesus had already grown so much in his spirituality that he already knew what a great mission lay ahead of him, Jesus is surprised that his parents do not go straight to the temple to look for him.
   1. Both Joseph and Mary had met an angel and witnessed the miracle of the virgin birth, so they knew that there was something very special about Jesus and should have understood where he was.
   2. From this we can learn that even if we have had strong spiritual encounters with God, we still need to continue to spend time with our Father. It is not enough to build one's faith on past experiences; it is better to build one's faith on a lasting and living relationship with our Father.

[[@Bible:luke 2:50-51]]Luke 2:50-51

1. Joseph and Mary were simple and pious people, but they did not have the deep spiritual understanding that Jesus had. So by the age of twelve, Jesus had already grown so much in his spirituality that his parents couldn't keep up.
   1. Probably this was very difficult for Joseph and Mary to handle, but as we see in verse 51, Jesus made it easy for them by always being "obedient to them".
   2. Even though Jesus is the Messiah, Lord and Savior and has all power both in heaven and on earth, and was already spiritually more mature than his parents at the age of twelve, he still humbles himself and obeys God's word and God's will by thus "honoring his father and his mother" (Exodus 20:12).
   3. In the same way, we should remember today that even if we are further along in our faith than some others, it is important to respect those who are in some way responsible for us. Perhaps you are a young Christian, but you still need to honor your parents. Maybe you feel you are much more mature in your faith than your pastor/minister, but you still need to respect his/her role as shepherd.
2. Luke himself writes that he wrote down his gospel after he had "carefully researched everything from the beginning" (Luke 1:3). It is likely that Luke met Mary in person and heard her recount this event.
   1. Mary is in many ways a spiritual example. Probably no human being has come as close to Jesus as Mary did. Mary did not always understand everything that Jesus did, but she trusted Jesus and kept what she saw in her heart.
      1. In the same way, today we should also read the Bible about Jesus, reflect on what Jesus does and keep it in our hearts.

[[@Bible:luke 2:52]]Luke 2:52

1. One of the biggest reasons this one little text describing Jesus' youth is in the Bible is to tell us that "Jesus grew up in wisdom".
   1. Even though Jesus is the Son of God, he was not born with the ability to speak, walk or preach.
   2. We see that Jesus was definitely a different boy and that in many ways he had progressed beyond even his parents, yet we see that he was "growing". In other words, he did not have all knowledge from birth.
2. An important lesson from this text is that even we who are disciples of Jesus today need to "grow in wisdom" and mature in our relationship with our Father. If this was true of Jesus, it is certainly true of us.
3. It must have been very strange for Jesus' family, relatives and friends, for example, never to see Jesus sin or do anything against God's will (2 Corinthians 5:21).
   1. Here we see that although Jesus was a strange child, he was liked by people and so certainly had many friends in his youth. It seems that Jesus was a person that people enjoyed being with.

## Luke 4:1-13 - The Temptation of Jesus

[[@Bible:luke 4:1]]Luke 4:1

1. The Holy Spirit is a person and part of the Trinity.
   1. When the Son was born as a man, he renounced his divine attributes, with the result that he could do nothing in himself, in his own divinity (Phil 2:6-8). Thus, he became dependent on his Father to know what to do (John 5:19) and he became dependent on the Holy Spirit to do what the Father commanded (Acts 10:38).
      1. Jesus did this to fully share our human condition and to lead the way. We are Jesus' disciples when we imitate Jesus, listen to the Father and live in the power of the Holy Spirit.
2. God can lead us through periods of desert as well as periods of green and budding. We cannot decide how God chooses to lead us, but we must be faithful and trust that God knows what he is doing and that he never tests us beyond our ability (1 Corinthians 10:13).

[[@Bible:luke 4:2]]Luke 4:2

1. The devil is described in the Bible as an evil fallen angel, who does everything he can to control people, deceive and tempt them (Ezek 35-36, Eph 2:2, 1 Tim 3:7, Acts 10:38, 1 Peter 5:8, John 13:2).
   1. However, everyone who believes in Jesus has the ability to resist the devil's cunning attacks and cause him to flee (Ephesians 6:11, James 4:7).
2. The parallels to the Old Testament are many
   1. Moses was on Mount Sinai for 40 days without eating or drinking (Exodus 34:28).
   2. Elijah walked 40 days after a meal (1 Kings 19:8).
   3. Goliath mocked Israel for 40 days (1 Sam 17:16).
3. Trials is a concept in the Bible (*peirazo* and *peirasmos* in Greek) that is used in a few different ways.
   1. Satan can tempt us and make us fall into our own desires (1 Corinthians 7:5, James 1:13-14).
   2. We can tempt God (Acts 5:9, 1 Corinthians 10:9).
   3. God can test us so that we grow in our faith (James 1:2-3, Hebrews 11:17, 1 Peter 1:6).
4. God allows Satan to tempt Jesus so that we can learn that we too can resist the devil.
5. Satan tempts Jesus with the same temptations that Eve fell to, the difference is that Jesus resists.
6. Jesus is 100% God and 100% man. In his humanity, Jesus was tempted, but in his divinity he did not sin. Even though Jesus is God, he can still have "compassion for our weaknesses" because he was "tempted in all things as we are, but without sin." (Heb 4:15).

[[@Bible:luke 4:3-4]]Luke 4:3-4

1. The author Luke, who is also a physician (Colossians 4:14), mentions that Jesus became hungry when the fasting days were *over.* Obviously, Jesus has felt some form of hunger before, so this hunger probably indicates that Jesus has now reached the physical capacity of his body and is close to dying of starvation.
   1. Some people can survive 70 days without food, while others die after 17 days. However, the average human life span is 40 days.
2. The devil does not question whether Jesus is the Son of God or not, but instead tempts him to break his focus on God and focus selfishly on himself.
   1. Jesus may be hungry, but he is full of the Spirit of God. Worse would be, as it may be for many of us, if Jesus were full and satisfied, but lacking the Spirit of God.
3. The devil tempted Adam and Eve with food and they fell to temptation (Genesis 3:1-7).
   1. Paul writes of Jesus, "The last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (1 Corinthians 15:22, 45).
   2. Adam, as a representative of all men, sinned when tempted by the devil, and thus sin entered the world and destroyed man's relationship with God.
   3. Jesus resists the temptations of the devil and does not sin. In this way, all who believe in Jesus can share in Jesus' freedom from sin and have the opportunity for a restored relationship with God.
4. Jesus answered the devil's temptation with a Bible verse (Deuteronomy 8:3).
   1. Satan's temptation was not in itself wrong. It is not wrong to eat bread. But it is better to put God's word above our own needs.
   2. Paul teaches us that in the battle against the devil, our weapon is "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17).
   3. Since Jesus is the Son of God, he could easily have commanded Satan to leave him alone and Satan would immediately have had to obey. But here Jesus enters under our human condition and shows us a way to fight Satan that all of us believers can do.
   4. Like Jesus, we can resist the devil's temptations by being well versed in God's Word and thus figuring out that the seemingly reasonable suggestion to eat some bread was really a temptation. But if we are not well versed in the Bible, we may not even notice that the devil is deceiving and tempting us.
5. What does this mean for us today?
   1. Jesus teaches us that there is more to life than worldly things. It is important to eat food and worry about such things, but it is even more important to eat our fill of God's word (Matthew 4:4).
      1. Jesus teaches us to prioritise God, the Bible, the church, at least as much as all worldly concerns.

[[@Bible:luke 4:5-8]]Luke 4:5-8

1. According to 1 John 5:19, "the whole world is under the power of the evil one" and according to John 12:31, "the prince of this world will be cast out" and the prophetic account of the future in the Book of Revelation says that *"the dominion of the world now belongs to our Lord and to his Anointed, and he will reign forever and ever."* (Rev 11:15).
   1. Originally, God gave mankind the task of ruling and managing the earth (Genesis 1:28), but somewhere along the way, the devil has increasingly taken over the world by tricking mankind into handing over power.
   2. When Jesus came to earth, the devil had the whole world under his power, but with the coming of Jesus, the kingdom of God is spreading more and more on earth and in the future Jesus will totally rule the whole world.
   3. With Jesus' death on the cross, the devil is defeated (Colossians 2:15), but there is still fighting.
      1. This is often compared to D-Day during World War II. When the Allies landed in Normandy, everyone knew that the Allies had won the war, yet fighting went on for over a year more.
2. The devil knows that Jesus will somehow defeat him and become Lord of the whole world and therefore tries to trick Jesus into taking the quick way and becoming Lord without dying on the cross.
   1. The devil offered his dominion over the earth to Jesus if he would only bow down to the devil and worship him.
   2. Jesus knows that he will be Lord of the whole world, but that the way to get there is through the cross. If Jesus had accepted this offer, we would never have been forgiven of our sins.
3. Jesus again takes his answer from the Bible (Genesis 6:13, Exodus 34:14) and replies that one should only serve and worship God.
   1. In the New Testament, several people worship Jesus, which is one of all the biblical proofs that Jesus is God (Matt 2:11, Matt 14:33, Matt 28:9, Matt 28:17, John 9:38, Heb 1:6).
   2. It is the same Greek word "proskyneo" (worship in English) in all these Bible words. Jesus says that one should only worship God at the same time as he himself receives worship.
4. In a similar way, the devil tempted Eve to gain power and "become like God" if she would only do what the devil said (Genesis 3:5).
5. What does this mean for us today?
   1. The only one we as Christians fully bow to is the Lord God.

[[@Bible:luke 4:9-12]]Luke 4:9-12

1. There was a Jewish tradition that the Messiah would appear to Israel standing on the Temple of Jerusalem.
2. The devil himself could not physically push Jesus off the temple wall and therefore had to try to trick Jesus.
3. Here the devil quotes the Bible (Psalm 91:11-12).
   1. With this in mind, we understand that it is not enough for someone to quote the Bible for what is said to be true. Just because someone knows the Bible by heart does not mean that person has *the right interpretation*.
      1. By getting to know God and reading the Bible with Jesus at the centre, the chances of understanding the Bible correctly increase.
4. Jesus again answers the devil with a Bible word (Deuteronomy 6:16).
   1. It is not enough to simply rattle off a bunch of Bible words to get a proper understanding of "the whole will and plan of God" (Acts 20:27). Jesus knew how to "rightly divide the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15) and therefore is not fooled by the devil's distorted interpretation of the Bible.
5. The devil tried to trick Jesus into forcing God to perform a spectacular miracle.
   1. We can never force God to perform a miracle, because that would be "tempting the Lord your God".
6. In a similar way, the devil tried to trick Eve into not dying (Genesis 3:3). Eve fell for the temptation, but Jesus resisted.
7. What does this mean for us today?
   1. We should believe and trust that God wants to work miracles in our midst. But we must remember who is God and who is man. We must accept what God does with us and we cannot force God to do anything.

[[@Bible:luke 4:13]]Luke 4:13

1. Just as it says in James 4:7*, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."* Jesus stood against the devil which led to his eventual departure from Jesus.
   1. In the same way, today we can resist the devil when he tries to trick us into going against God's will. If you never resist the devil's temptations, he will only continue to tempt.
2. Jesus was "filled with the Holy Spirit", while being well versed in the Word of God.
   1. To be filled with the Holy Spirit alone, without being familiar with the Word of God, makes it easy to drift away in one's spirituality.
   2. Being familiar only with God's Word without being filled with the Holy Spirit can lead to treating the Bible as a book of facts or fairy tales without any grounding in reality.
   3. To be, like Jesus, both filled with the Holy Spirit and well versed in the Word of God is an unbeatable combination that is to be recommended to all who want to be disciples of Jesus.

## Luke 5:1-11 - Jesus Calls the First Disciples

[[@Bible:luke 5:1-3]]Luke 5:1-3

1. Jesus, and several of the first disciples, lived near Lake Gennesaret, or the Sea of Galilee as it is better known.
2. Working as a fisherman was a tough job in Jesus' day. At night, people fished, and during the day they cleaned and rinsed the nets in preparation for the next fishing trip, and then sold or salted the fish. This was the kind of work the fishermen were doing when Jesus came by.
3. Jesus did not depend on a church with a pulpit to teach the Word of God. What matters to Jesus is not the form of the message, but the content. In the same way, we should be careful not to get too caught up in traditions so that they become more important than the gospel itself. Also important to always be prepared to preach the Gospel wherever you are, whether in a church or in a boat.
   1. Today it is more normal for the preacher to stand up and the listeners to sit down. But in Jesus' day it was the other way around, the preacher sat down and the listeners had to stand.
   2. Sometimes when Jesus was teaching, there were so many people pushing that Jesus had to get in a boat to get some distance and speak so that everyone could hear. Probably this boat was barely 30 feet and I can see Jesus sitting on the railing, dangling his legs in the water while he teaches the people standing on the shore.

[[@Bible:luke 5:4-5]]Luke 5:4-5

1. Simon had been generous to Jesus and lent him his boat, and now Jesus is giving back by blessing him with a large amount of fish!
   1. When we give what we have to God, he will first use it to demonstrate the gospel, and then he will bless us abundantly.
   2. Do you have a gift or talent? Are you a good singer? Do you have more money than you need? Are you good at writing? Tell God to be happy to use what you have, and you will be both used and blessed.
2. It seems almost comical that an experienced fisherman would take advice from a carpenter on how to fish. Simon could have replied with a sneer that Jesus was just a carpenter who didn't know anything about fishing. But however skilled and knowledgeable we may be about our possible talents, it is nothing compared to whether God may bless us.
   1. Being a disciple of Jesus sometimes means, like Simon Peter, obeying when Jesus gives instructions that seemingly go against better judgment. Because Jesus sees the bigger picture and is able to perform miracles, obedience will pay off in the long run. But for now, it may mean furrowed brows and questioning comments.
3. Simon could also have replied that they were tired after a whole night's hard work and that it was pointless to go out again, especially during the day when the fish weren't biting anyway. But Simon chooses, against his better judgment, to listen to Jesus anyway. Sometimes God can put something on our heart that surpasses all human understanding. Then it's not wrong to test this and see if God has a blessing to offer if we believe in him and his word.

[[@Bible:luke 5:6-7]]Luke 5:6-7

1. Simon could have said no to Jesus because he had both more knowledge and more experience than Jesus in fishing. But Simon listened to Jesus despite the circumstances, and was richly rewarded for his faith.
   1. If Simon had not believed in Jesus, or blamed his tiredness for not being able to do so, he would not have received this great blessing.
2. It is also worth noting that Simon would not have been able to salvage this great blessing if he had not worked with the other boat.
   1. In the same way, today we should not be envious when another church is blessed with revival, but rather try to help each other.

[[@Bible:luke 5:8-9]]Luke 5:8-9

1. Jesus had previously healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law (Luke 4:38-39), but that miracle did not result in Simon fully giving his life to Jesus. Perhaps Simon had a hard time really understanding the healing miracle because he was ignorant about sickness and healing. But this fishing miracle seems to have touched him to the core because, as an experienced fisherman, he knew how miraculous it was.
   1. It's one thing to be amazed when Jesus does a miracle with someone else, but quite another when Jesus does a miracle with myself.
2. In verse 5, Simon addresses Jesus as "Master", which roughly means "boss". After experiencing this miracle, Simon now addresses Jesus as "Lord" in verse 8. After experiencing a personal miracle, Simon's view of Jesus changes and he begins to understand who Jesus really is. Amidst the splashing of fish and shouts of joy at the miraculous big catch, Simon stills himself and bows his knee to Jesus.
   1. But the problem for Simon is that the clearer he sees who Jesus is, the greater the contrast he feels between Jesus' holiness and his own sinfulness. When Simon truly understands that Jesus is a man of God, he considers himself not worthy enough to be in God's presence and therefore wants Jesus to leave his boat. Peter seems to believe that God is a distant holy and angry God who would rather punish sinners than restore them.
      1. But at the same time there seems to be a longing in Simon to share in the holiness of Jesus, a longing that prevents Simon from walking away from Jesus himself. Instead, he sits and asks Jesus to leave, perhaps hoping that he will not leave at all.
   2. Fortunately for Simon, Jesus looks beyond Peter's sin with loving eyes and offers an opportunity for restoration instead of punishment. God is aware of our sin but has come not to punish us but to forgive us and create something new. When Simon saw only his own sin in his encounter with Jesus, Jesus saw instead an opportunity for restoration.
   3. Simon's reaction in his encounter with the Lord is to ask Jesus to leave because he believes that only worthy men of God can serve God. But there is a difference between being a sinner and denying it and being a sinner and confessing it. This humble approach to Jesus means that Simon now learns that Jesus has not come to earth to judge sinners but to save and forgive sinners. When we give our lives to Jesus, he does not share in our sin, but we share in Jesus' holiness. Acknowledging that we are sinners in need of grace is a prerequisite for ministry rather than an obstacle.
   4. Simon identified himself as an unworthy sinner, but Jesus saw in Simon an opportunity to transform Simon from a sinner into an instrument of the kingdom of God. It is never our own self-image that defines our potential to serve God. In this way, Simon's awareness of his own weakness became the strength that God could use to lead Simon to do God's work.

[[@Bible:luke 5:10-11]]Luke 5:10-11

1. Although God is worthy of our fear and we should be afraid of his mighty power, he does not want to relate to us humans out of fear, but out of forgiving love. While we may "should" be afraid of God, we don't have to be.
2. Simon's mission from now on would be to fish for people, and this event taught Simon a lot. When Jesus gets to lead, it always leads to some kind of blessing.
   1. In the same way, today we too should "fish for people" by listening to Jesus' teaching, putting our gifts and talents at God's disposal, and listening to Jesus as he directs us towards the blessing.
3. It seems that Simon and the other disciples left the miraculous catch of fish on the beach when they followed Jesus. The financial blessing of the fishing miracle was nothing compared to the privilege of following Jesus and becoming his disciple.
   1. Does this mean that everyone who wants to serve God must leave their current job and work full time for God? No. Jesus taught many on the beach, but it was only Simon Peter whom he called, at least on this occasion, into full-time ministry. And even though Simon left his job as a fisherman, Paul, for example, continued his job as a tentmaker. There are many different ways to serve God, and you have to ask God for guidance.
   2. In conclusion, we can see that this little text is about Jesus' call into full-time service for the kingdom of God. But why did Simon Peter receive this call? Well, first of all, he was willing to listen to Jesus' directive; secondly, he was humble and bowed before Jesus; and thirdly, he was ready to leave everything and follow Jesus wholeheartedly.

## Luke 6:17-19 - Jesus' Sermon on the Plain

[[@Bible:luke 6:17]]Luke 6:17

1. After wrestling with the Pharisees and selecting his apostles, Jesus now stops on a plain to preach to the people. This sermon is very similar in content to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7) and one might ask if it is exactly the same sermon described in two slightly different ways? In my opinion, the most likely scenario is that Jesus preached this message more than both once and twice and that it is therefore very possible that Matthew's Sermon on the Mount and Luke's Sermon on the Plain are two different sermons but with the same message.
   1. But since the place where Jesus is believed to have preached the Sermon on the Mount looks like a mountain seen from Lake Gennesaret, but looks like a plain once you stand on the spot, the mountain and the plain may very well have been the same place.
   2. It is also quite possible that Matthew calls the plain a mountain in order to make a symbolic connection to Mount Sinai where Moses proclaimed how Israel was to live in the Old Covenant. On this "mountain" Jesus proclaims how to live in the New Covenant.
2. The message of this sermon is not primarily about how to be saved or have your sins forgiven, but about how you are expected to live as a citizen of the kingdom of God.
3. Many people, including pagans from far away places, crowded around Jesus to listen to his teaching and be healed.
   1. Jesus was careful to both teach God's word and pray for the sick because without the other, one risks being unhealthy. For the kingdom of God does not consist in teaching alone or in miracles alone, but in a healthy combination.

[[@Bible:luke 6:18]]Luke 6:18

1. Luke, who was a physician (Col 4:14), is careful to distinguish between sickness and being possessed by an evil spirit.

## Luke 6:20-26 - The Beatitudes

[[@Bible:luke 6:20]]Luke 6:20

1. The word "blessed" in Greek is "makarios" and means something like "happy", "lucky" or "fortunate". But to be "blessed" does not mean to be happy for a little while and then to be sad when something bad happens, but the happiness of which blessedness is the bearer is a happiness that stands above difficulties and that can rejoice in God regardless of circumstances.
   1. Notice that it says "blessed ***are*** you...". The blessedness promised to a citizen of God's kingdom is not something that lies in the future, but something that we already have access to here and now!
2. We see in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3) that the poverty Jesus refers to is not necessarily a *material* poverty, but a *spiritual* one: *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 5:3).
   1. Even the materially rich can be poor in spirit.
   2. The Greek word for "poor" is "ptochos" and it doesn't just mean that you have little money, but that you are completely destitute like a beggar on the street.
   3. To be destitute is to have nothing of your own and to be totally dependent on the generosity of others. In the same way, spiritual poverty means that one does not possess any spiritual power in oneself, but is totally dependent on God's generosity.
   4. To be poor in spirit, then, is to realize that one is dependent on God and constantly comes to him to ask for his generous gifts.
      1. On the contrary, when we think that we are spiritually rich and do not need God, then we do not have access to the kingdom of God.
3. But even though Jesus is talking about spiritual poverty here, it is worth adding that material wealth can be an obstacle to drawing closer to God. Not because money in itself is an obstacle, but because wealth creates a comfort that makes one not want to draw near to God or feel any need for God.

[[@Bible:luke 6:21]]Luke 6:21

1. He who hungers for God as a ravenous man hungers for food will do anything to be "satisfied". Nor does the person who is not hungry make much effort to satisfy his hunger.
   1. God is not far away from us, the only thing that really prevents us from meeting God is our own comfort.
   2. Jesus' analogy with food is very good because we are de facto dependent on regular food for our own survival and know immediately when we need to eat.
      1. In the same way, we should realize that we depend on meeting God regularly, hearing his Word, receiving intercession, etc. We should also live so close to God that we immediately notice when we have not "eaten" for a long time.
2. Meeting a holy God also means recognizing one's own sin. But those who genuinely weep over their own sin and repent of their mistakes will soon rejoice and laugh when they receive God's forgiveness!

[[@Bible:luke 6:22-23]]Luke 6:22-23

1. It may be hard to understand why anyone would want to hate people who are poor, hungry and crying, but sadly it wasn't long before early Christians suffered persecution for their beliefs.
2. But even if we Christians have to suffer for our faith, we should be happy inside because we know that we will receive our reward in heaven.
3. Jesus puts his disciples in the same ranks as the Old Testament prophets. God has always called people to follow him and proclaim his message, which has almost always led to persecution.

[[@Bible:luke 6:24-26]]Luke 6:24-26

1. Being rich, full and happy is normally a very positive thing, but Jesus turns this reasoning upside down. If you have everything you need but don't belong to the kingdom of God, all your riches are just vain worldly pleasures.
   1. Whoever really wants to be rich, full and hungry should seek this from God, because it is only God who can offer this in depth.
   2. The person who is poor, hungry and weeping is much more blessed than the person who is rich, full and happy, because that person belongs to the kingdom of God.

## Luke 6:27-36 - Love Your Enemies

[[@Bible:luke 6:27-28]]Luke 6:27-28

1. Whether you are a Christian or not, it is easy to miss the teachings of Jesus. It can be perceived as difficult, too radical, strange, etc. There is a risk that Jesus' message will affect your life so much that it will become uncomfortable to follow Jesus because you are already doing so well in the world. But Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God is radical and uncomfortable for anyone who still lives, in whole or in part, in the Kingdom of the World. But for those who are willing to listen, there is teaching here that is "sweeter than honey" (Ps 119:103).
2. Much of Jesus' plain preaching goes against our sinful human nature, such as doing good to someone who treats us badly. But that is exactly how Jesus calls us to live because we are no longer citizens of the Kingdom of the World but of the Kingdom of God. We are no longer to behave like the sinners we once were, but like the children of God we are now born to be.
   1. It is very easy to *become a* Christian, you just have to believe in Jesus, but it is very difficult to *live* as a Christian, and you will have to work all your life to try to learn from Jesus with the help of the Spirit so that we slowly but surely become what we were once created to be; namely the image of God.
3. Jesus informs his disciples that they will have enemies in the world. Perhaps this was not as shocking as Jesus' words about *loving* your enemies! This extremely simple command is as simple as it is difficult, and goes against all worldly thinking. But Jesus wants his disciples to treat all people well, even enemies, and instead to leave our cause to our just and merciful God. In this way, perhaps God will eventually turn these enemies into friends.
   1. The love Jesus wants us to have towards our enemies is not some kind of inner feeling, but rather three clear actions: do good, bless and pray.
      1. "Doing good" to your enemy means giving them what they need, as Paul writes in Romans: *"if your enemy is hungry, give him something to eat; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. If he is thirsty, if he is hungry, if he is thirsty, if he is hungry, you gather coals of fire to his head."* (Romans 12:20).
      2. When God blesses us, it creates multiplication and diversity (Gen 1:22), rebuke (Psalm 1:1-3), blessedness, joy and forgiveness (Romans 4:6-8). Just as God wants to bless us with all of these things, we should try to do what we can to help people succeed in their lives.
      3. On the cross, Jesus gives the ultimate example of how to pray for one's enemies: "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.* " (Luke 23:34a)

[[@Bible:luke 6:29]]Luke 6:29

1. Jesus was a perfect example of turning the other cheek. When people slandered him, called him a glutton and a drunkard, a bastard, a blasphemer, etc., Jesus did not respond by speaking back, but by healing the sick, casting out demons and proclaiming the kingdom of God.
   1. A first interpretation of the principle of turning the other cheek is about breaking the cycle of violence. The slap on the cheek that Jesus is talking about here is not about Christians never defending themselves if someone wants to hit us, but about a more general principle of ending all violence that is everywhere. Violence begets violence and revenge begets revenge, but anyone who does not fight back but instead surrenders revenge to God will see an end to violence (Romans 12:17-21).
      1. Here again, Jesus is the best example of turning the other cheek, when he does not resist being nailed to the cross but instead forgives his perpetrators, thus bringing reconciliation and forgiveness to all.
   2. A second interpretation of the principle of turning the other cheek is about equality. Matthew writes in his Sermon on the Mount that: *"if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also to him"* (Matthew 5:38).
      1. When you hit someone on the jaw, you normally hit them on the *left* cheek, but since Jesus specifically mentions a blow on the *right* cheek, we understand that he probably means a blow with the *back of* the hand. Such a blow was used in Jesus' time by people of higher rank when they hit what they considered to be people of lower rank, such as a slave. But if after such a blow a slave then turns up his left cheek, he is making it abundantly clear that he does not regard himself as a slave and wishes to be regarded on an equal footing with everyone else. The beater then has two options; either stop beating his slave or begin to regard him as a free man. Either option would be better than being beaten as a slave.
   3. A third interpretation of the principle of turning the other cheek concerns exclusion from the Jewish community. A similar kind may have been used to symbolically remove someone from the synagogue and the Jewish religious community (John 18:22, Acts 23:2, 1 Esdras 4:30). The disciples constantly encountered this but responded by spreading the gospel even more. They did not fight back but instead tried to "overcome evil with good" (Rom 12:21).
2. The "mantle" refers to the outer garment worn in Jesus' time and the "habit" was the garment worn closest to the body.
   1. According to the Law of Moses, it was forbidden to take someone's cloak (Deuteronomy 24:10-13), but if someone insisted on taking your cloak, you would also offer your bodily clothing because you would then become naked and thus bring shame even to the one who sees you (Genesis 9:20-23).

[[@Bible:luke 6:30]]Luke 6:30

1. You can only practice these Kingdom of God principles if you fully trust God to provide. For someone who trusts God to provide everything he needs, it is no big deal if someone takes his money or possessions.
2. The only limitation to this principle is love. It is not love to give a child a chainsaw even if the child asks nicely. It is important to live by all the principles of the Sermon on the Plain in love.

[[@Bible:luke 6:31]]Luke 6:31

1. This statement of Jesus has gone down in history as the "golden rule". Before Jesus, a similar principle was known; "don't do to others what you don't want them to do to you", also known as the "silver rule". Among others, the famous Rabbi Hillel the Elder expressed himself in this way (Talmud, Shabbat 31a).
   1. Some have wanted to diminish the significance of Jesus' positive version of the already famous "silver rule", but then it is easy to forget that the silver rule leads to no one doing anything good to anyone else, but only refraining from doing evil. Instead, Jesus' golden rule creates a society where everyone tries to do what is good instead of just trying not to do what is evil.
   2. If you apply the silver rule and the golden rule to the story of the Good Samaritan and then compare, we see that those who walked past the abused man fulfilled the silver rule because they did not harm the man, they just walked by. But the Good Samaritan fulfilled the golden rule because he helped the battered man and did what is good. So the practical difference between the silver rule and the golden rule is enormous, even life-changing for some people.
2. If all people followed the golden rule, we would never have any wars, burglaries, fights, etc.

[[@Bible:luke 6:32-34]]Luke 6:32-34

1. In this sermon on the plain, Jesus teaches how to live in the kingdom of God as opposed to the kingdom of the world. Loving only those who love back is not a principle of the Kingdom of God but a principle of the Kingdom of the World. Of course, it is not wrong to love those who love back, but a citizen of the Kingdom of God needs to go further and also love the one who hates you.
   1. Just because you have certain morals or follow certain rules doesn't mean you are godly. Even criminals may have rules and a code of honour, but that does not mean they are righteous. A person who belongs to the kingdom of God needs to live differently than a person who belongs to the kingdom of the world because they belong to a different kingdom.

[[@Bible:luke 6:35-36]]Luke 6:35-36

1. A child often has a lot of similarities with its parents and a child of God should therefore be like his Father in heaven. Those who live according to the principles of the Kingdom of God show that they are trying to live like Jesus and thus show that they are born again as a child of God in the Kingdom of God.

## Luke 6:37-42 - Judging Others

[[@Bible:luke 6:37]]Luke 6:37

1. What Jesus *does not* say in this famous statement is that we should unreservedly accept sin, error or immoral behavior. We are to show love to all people, no matter what sin they are struggling with, but we are not to accept, approve or bless sin.
2. If someone confesses to a crime and is convicted in court, he is sentenced to an appropriate penalty. That's how it works in the kingdom of the world, but that's not how it works in the kingdom of God. If someone has wronged me and asks for forgiveness, I will forgive without imposing a penalty or requiring due penance.
   1. Jesus wants us to forgive without judging because God is that way with us. What if on the day of judgment God forgives us for our sins but still gives us the punishment for our sins?
   2. When Jesus in John 8:1-11 meets a woman caught in adultery, he says: *"let him who is without sin cast the first stone at her".* The penalty for adultery under the Mosaic Law was death (Leviticus 20:10), but when none of her accusers casts a stone, Jesus says, *"Woman, where are they? Has no one judged you?" She replied, "No, Lord, no one." Then Jesus said, "Neither do I judge you. Go, and sin no more!"* 
      1. The woman had committed a sin and the penalty of the Law was death. Jesus is clear that he does not accept sin itself when he says "sin no more!" but forgives her without condemning her to the appropriate punishment.
3. It's easier to have a judgmental attitude towards others than towards yourself. But anyone who has ever been convicted by the Holy Spirit of his own sin will hate the sin but love the sinner.
   1. The one who has had his own sin forgiven will also want to lead others to the forgiveness of sins, not through coercion or condemnation, but through love, mercy and care.

[[@Bible:luke 6:38]]Luke 6:38

1. Just as we should not judge others because we probably don't want to be judged ourselves, we should give generously because we want to be given generously.
2. When we give of our money, our time, our ears, etc., God will give back. Generous giving is one of the few things that God actually invites us to test him in (Mal 3:10).
3. Instead of putting ourselves first and constantly thinking about how we can enrich ourselves or afford this or that, Jesus wants us to think about others and how we can generously help our fellow human beings in the best possible way.
4. But one should be careful not to *give in order to receive*, because then one is not really *giving*, but trying to *buy* a blessing.

[[@Bible:luke 6:39]]Luke 6:39

1. The Pharisees were very convinced in their belief in God and studied God's Word very zealously, yet Jesus accuses the Pharisees of being blind leaders (Matthew 15:14) because they did not see Jesus in Scripture.
   1. So it is possible to have a tremendous knowledge of God's Word and be zealous for God's Word, and yet be *blind to* what God's Word is all about: the love of God.
   2. He who constantly sees fault in others, but never in himself, is a blind leader. He who constantly judges others, without thinking that one day he himself will be judged by the same measure, is a blind leader.
2. Jesus here gives a great responsibility to each one who follows a leader. One should never follow anyone anyway, but always pay attention to the leader's relationship with God and his Word, and also consider that in the end one has only Jesus as one's supreme leader.

[[@Bible:luke 6:40]]Luke 6:40

1. A disciple is something more than just a student, because a disciple should not only learn from his teacher, but also try to *imitate* his teacher. Thus, a disciple can become like his master, but never *more than* his master, because it is not possible to become more than like anyone.
   1. Man was originally created in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27), something we still are (Jas 3:9), but which has been more or less destroyed and deformed by sin. When God came to earth and became like us (Jn 1:14), the goal was that we should become like him, by *being "formed in the image of his Son"* (Rom 8:29) and eventually, *"when we see him as he is"*, *"become like him"* (1 Jn 3:2). So in this process of discipleship, also known as the "sanctification process," we are slowly but surely restored to what we were once created to be; the image of God.
   2. A disciple of Jesus should thus read the Bible about Jesus and try to imitate him by doing what he did and living the way he lived.

[[@Bible:luke 6:41-42]]Luke 6:41-42

1. This statement is a typical *hyperbole,* i.e. *"an exaggerated simile intended to create an unexpected reaction in the audience"*. Hyperboles were common in Jesus' time and were very useful when Jesus wanted to shock the audience in order to create a reflection. A hyperbole is not meant to be interpreted literally.
   1. One of the most classic and clear hyperboles is: *"I tell you: Anyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye tempts you to sin, pluck it out and cast it away! It is better for you that one of your limbs be lost than that your whole body be cast into Gehenna."* (Matthew 5:28-29)
   2. Even if it is possible to get a splinter in the eye, it is probably not possible to get a beam in the eye. Jesus uses this exaggeration to humorously first shock the audience and then explain an important point.
   3. If you imagine a man with a beam in his eye carefully trying to pick out a small splinter in his brother's eye, you realise quite quickly that perhaps he should take care of his own problems first, partly to save himself, but also because it is impossible for him to pick out a small splinter when he can't see properly because of the beam.
      1. But not only is it impossible to pick out the splinter with a beam in your own eye, it's obvious to everyone around you that you have bigger problems than the person you're trying to help. Often we don't see our own sins when we're too busy looking for fault in others. We get a blind spot that makes us not see our own situation.
   4. The point Jesus is making is that we should not be so quick to point out the sins of others when we ourselves are full of sin. It's not wrong to try to help other people who are struggling with their sin, but we shouldn't constantly point out people's "little sins" when we ourselves are struggling with big sins. Then we should first deal with our own sin before we are ready to help others.
2. A good example of this is David's reaction when the prophet Nathan tells about a man who stole and killed another man's lamb. David believes that the man should be sentenced to death as punishment for his sin, but does not see that he himself is even more sinful because he has done exactly the same thing when he murdered a man and took his wife (2 Sam 12).

## Luke 6:43-49 - A Tree and Its Fruit

[[@Bible:luke 6:43-44]]Luke 6:43-44

1. There are many different types of trees, all of which produce different fruit, but when a fruit tree bears bad fruit, it is of no use.
2. For the sinner it is not strange to bear sinful fruit, but for the forgiven disciple it should be natural to be loving, to speak well of others, to be generous, to bear witness to Jesus, etc.

[[@Bible:luke 6:45]]Luke 6:45

1. It is important not to try to impose change from the outside, as this can easily become a doctrine of action. So you shouldn't try to change your heart by forcing yourself to just talk good, but on the contrary pray to God for a changed heart and it will lead you to talk good.
   1. It is not good deeds that create faith, but on the contrary, faith that creates good deeds.

[[@Bible:luke 6:46]]Luke 6:46

1. A disciple needs to confess his faith both in word and deed.
   1. Just doing good but not confessing Jesus as Lord does not lead to salvation, but just confessing Jesus as Lord without doing good does not make you a disciple, even though you may be saved.

[[@Bible:luke 6:47]]Luke 6:47

1. Anyone who wants to become a disciple of Jesus should 1) come to Jesus, 2) listen to Jesus, and 3) act on Jesus' words.
   1. Those who have only made it to step 1 are those who have been saved but never go to church or even read their Bible.
   2. Those who have reached stage 2 are the church's pew sitters who have been saved and who attend services by tradition, but who never make anything of their faith.
   3. Those who have come to stage 3 are the disciples of Jesus. They have met Jesus, are actively reading their Bible and trying to put Jesus' message into practice.

[[@Bible:luke 6:48-49]]Luke 6:48-49

1. From the outside, the two houses looked the same, but when the river came, the difference became apparent.
2. All human beings suffer from worries and trials, it is rather difficult to avoid. But when we are tested, we also find that faith holds! The one who has built his life on the rock, Jesus, will withstand all the storms, floods and storms that he will face in life.
   1. If you're not sure if you've built your life on the rock, you should check if your house will hold up *before the* inevitable storm hits. Jesus' parable should make us reflect on our lives and evaluate our potential discipleship. Anyone who hears Jesus' words of warning but does not care will not be able to cope once the flood comes.

## Luke 9:18-22 - Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ

[[@Bible:luke 9:18]]Luke 9:18

1. Did Jesus pray with his disciples? Or had Jesus withdrawn to pray quietly when they came to disturb him? Unfortunately, the text does not say.
   1. For a leader in the Kingdom of God, it is important to find time for quiet prayer. Exactly where, when or how you pray is very individual, but praying is very important.
   2. A leader in the kingdom of God draws much of his inspiration from God. When one prays in silence, it is easier to listen to God's voice and address in the situation at hand.
   3. In Jesus' prayer, he seems to feel that now is the time to have a conversation with his disciples about who Jesus really is. Jesus begins this conversation by asking the disciples who people in general think Jesus is.

[[@Bible:luke 9:19]]Luke 9:19

1. We look at different people differently depending on our perception of that person. When an ordinary person sees a policeman, he feels safe, but when a criminal sees a policeman, he gets nervous.
   1. To answer the question, "Who is Jesus?" actually says more about those who answer than about Jesus.
2. John the Baptist was known for preaching repentance, Elijah was known for performing many miracles, and the prophets of old preached the word of God and prophesied.
   1. If you think that Jesus corresponds only to one of these personalities, then you have only partially understood who Jesus is. Jesus is more than just a preacher of repentance, he is also a transmitter of God's word and miracles. But Jesus is not only a miracle worker who offers healing, he also calls us to repentance. And so on.
3. John the Baptist and the prophet Elijah were also strong personalities who dared to go against the corruption in society. Perhaps the people wanted Jesus to challenge the Jewish establishment and start a rebellion against the Roman occupation.

[[@Bible:luke 9:20]]Luke 9:20

1. It is not enough to know what others think about Jesus, one needs to recognize and confess one's own personal faith. This is especially important for second-generation Christians growing up in a Christian family. You are not automatically a Christian just because your parents are Christians. You need to confess your faith in Jesus at some point in your life.
2. "Messiah", or "Christ" in Greek, comes from the Hebrew word *"mashiach"* and means "the anointed one".
   1. In Old Testament times, it was common for God's representatives to be anointed with oil to symbolize that they were chosen by God and sanctified for a specific mission. In our Western society, "anointed" can be compared to "crowned".
      1. David was anointed king (1 Sam 16:1-13).
      2. Aaron was anointed a priest (Leviticus 8:12).
      3. Elisha was anointed a prophet (1 Kings 19:16).
   2. As the Messiah, Jesus is all three:
      1. Jesus is King (Matthew 27:11).
      2. Jesus is a priest (Heb 6:20).
      3. Jesus is a prophet (John 12:49).
   3. Zechariah prophesied of a "son" who would be king and priest at the same time and who would build the temple of the Lord (Zech 6:12-13).
   4. In the Old Testament, it is clear that one must not anoint anyone with oil. The anointing oil is holy and must not be used on anyone "unauthorized" (Exodus 30:30).
   5. Being anointed with oil is a symbolic act that shows that the person is chosen by God and is empowered by the Holy Spirit to do his or her job well. The anointing with oil is on the outside and symbolizes the "anointing of the Spirit" on the inside. In this way, the anointing is similar to baptism, which is an outward symbolic manifestation of an inward rebirth of the Spirit.
   6. The fact that Jesus' disciples are called "Christians" literally means that we are "anointed" (2 Corinthians 1:21, 1 John 2:20). All Christians belong to Christ and share in Christ's anointing. This means that all who belong to Christ, the anointed one, are Christians/anointed into holy service for God. We are chosen by God and called to carry out a holy mission. To accomplish this mission we have been given the Holy Spirit who gives us anointing and power.
3. Peter, who was in the habit of speaking for everyone, confessed that Jesus is "the Messiah of God".
   1. The order of the confession is important. Jesus is not "my" Messiah, whom I can decide what he should be, but Jesus is *"God's"* Messiah. It is God who gives the commission and decides what the Messiah will be like, not us.
      1. This was particularly difficult for many of the Jews who longed for a political Messiah, a new King David, who would rebel against the Romans and re-establish Israel as a nation. But Jesus opposed this and instead walked the path of suffering and the cross (John 6:14-15, 18:36).
      2. Do we today also have a false image of who Jesus is? Do we want Jesus to be like **Santa Claus** and give us what we want at the appointed time? Or is Jesus the one who challenges us sinners to repentance, who works miracles in our lives and who teaches us the word of God?

[[@Bible:luke 9:21-22]]Luke 9:21-22

1. There was a very big difference between the Messiah that Jesus intended to be, and the Messiah that the Jewish people wanted him to be.
   1. Jesus rejoices that the disciples are slowly but surely discovering that Jesus is *God's* Messiah, and may not live up to their expectations in the way they want. But this knowledge has not yet landed with the rest of the Jewish people, and so Jesus does not want the rest of the people to hear that Jesus is indeed the Messiah.
2. That the Messiah would suffer greatly and be rejected by the Jewish leadership was probably a shock to most people. If Jesus is the Messiah and yet would NOT drive out the Romans and re-establish Israel as a nation, then most people would not want Jesus as their Messiah.
   1. Imagine if Gustav Vasa had gathered the dockers and said he was going to Stockholm, but not to drive the Dane out, but to be captured and executed. How many Dalmatians would he have brought with him to Stockholm?
      1. In much the same way, it is offensive to the Jews to hear that their Messiah is going to Jerusalem to be captured by the Romans and executed. Since this is not very easy to accept, Jesus also does not want this knowledge to reach the people until Jesus is ready to complete his mission to save humanity by dying on the cross.

## Luke 9:23-26 - Take Up Your Cross and Follow Jesus

[[@Bible:luke 9:23]]Luke 9:23

1. As if it wasn't hard enough for the disciples to hear that their Messiah would suffer and die, now Jesus says that they will ALSO meet the same fate!
2. When the Romans crucified slaves and criminals, they used to let these condemned people carry their own cross on the way to the place of execution.
   1. To "take up one's cross" every day does not mean to wear a necklace with a cross on it, but to have the intention to serve Jesus 100% every day, despite the possible shame this may bring.
   2. To "deny oneself" every day means to put God first in everything and to live to help other people.
   3. Had Jesus not gone ahead and shown the way by actually carrying his cross and lovingly sacrificing himself and dying on the cross of Calvary, we followers of Jesus would probably have had a hard time doing the same.
      1. The leader in God's kingdom has a great responsibility to lead the way, by becoming not a boss who dominates other people but a servant who serves God's people.

[[@Bible:luke 9:24-25]]Luke 9:24-25

1. In order for a seed to become a fruit-bearing tree, it must first be buried in the soil. It then dies as a seed but is reborn as a tree. In the same way, we humans cannot receive eternal heavenly life unless we first die to ourselves. But whoever believes in Jesus is born again of the Holy Spirit and receives eternal life.
2. In order for a caterpillar to become a butterfly, it must first "die" as a caterpillar, and be reborn as a butterfly. For a "carnal" man to become a "spiritual" man, the carnal must first die and the spiritual be born.
3. Those who live selfishly for themselves at the expense of others become lonely and unhappy, while those who live for other people have a life filled with love for and from other people.

[[@Bible:luke 9:26]]Luke 9:26

1. For example, being ashamed of a person means not wanting to be seen in public with that person. In this context, it means not wanting people to know that you are a Christian. You don't want to tell people about your faith or have it show in your life.
   1. If you are ashamed of Jesus and of being a Christian in this way, you distance yourself from Jesus and the Christian faith and distance yourself from salvation.
   2. On the contrary, one should be proud of Jesus and of being a Christian. A proud person tells how good Jesus is, testifies to his own faith in Jesus and tries to live a Christian life as best he can. A person who is proud of Jesus lives in an "anointed" way that shows that he or she is born again and belongs to the kingdom of God.

## Luke 9:51-62 - Jesus on his way up to Jerusalem

[[@Bible:luke 9:51]]Luke 9:51

1. A more literal translation of the word "departure" is "exaltation", which is a reference to Jesus' exaltation on the tree of the cross, Jesus' victory, Jesus' resurrection, and Jesus' ascension into heaven.
2. Jesus is a role model in every way. In this passage we can learn to be "determined" to fulfill the mission God has given us. Even if we know it means suffering, we are to walk the path God has called us into.
   1. As a pastor and leader of a congregation, I can testify that there are few occasions that make me as happy as when someone undertakes a task and then "resolutely" carries it out, whether it goes well or badly, whether it is fun or boring. Faithfully carrying out one's task is a sign of maturity required of anyone who wants to be a leader in God's church. Anyone who gives up at the slightest setback will not be entrusted with leadership.
3. Jesus was "determined" to carry out his mission despite the fact that almost everyone tried to persuade him to give up:
   1. Jesus' enemy the devil tried to tempt him (Matthew 4:1-11).
   2. Jesus' friend Peter tried to persuade him (Matthew 16:21-23).
   3. Jesus himself doubted before his suffering (Matt 26:37-39, Luke 22:29-44).
   4. Pontius Pilate tried to release Jesus (John 18:28-40).

[[@Bible:luke 9:52-53]]Luke 9:52-53

1. After the fall of the northern kingdom, Israel, to the Assyrians in 721 BC, most of the 10 northern tribes were taken into captivity and assimilated with the rest of the population of Assyria. To further blend the Israelite population, other peoples were brought to Israel and then intermarried with the remaining Israelites. The descendants of these mixed peoples are the Samaritans, named after the Israelite king Omri's capital. Some Israelite priests were allowed to remain to teach the new Samaritan people how to worship the God of Israel (2 Kings 17).
   1. The Samaritans have their own version of the Pentateuch and worship God on their own Mount Gerizim, rather than in Jerusalem (John 4:20).
   2. Because of the historical conflict (Ezr 4) and the fact that the Samaritans were a mixed people, there was hostility and much prejudice between Jews and Samaritans. The Samaritans also used not to offer overnight accommodation to travelling Jews when those living north of Samaria, in Galilee, wanted to go down to Judea to celebrate Jewish festivals in Jerusalem. Therefore, most Galileans often took a detour to avoid entering Samaria.
2. The Samaritans did not receive Jesus and his travelling party on this occasion because they were on their way to Jerusalem. The Samaritans on this occasion let their prejudices and old enmities with the Jews prevent them from hearing the Gospel. On another occasion, when a Samaritan woman is given a chance to talk quietly with Jesus (John 4:1-42), it leads to many Samaritans accepting Jesus as their savior.
   1. What we can learn from Jesus is not to let our prejudices control who we witness to. The person you least expect to be interested in Jesus may turn out to be the first to repent.
   2. Given this, it is probably no coincidence that Jesus mentions Samaria when he urges his disciples to go out into all the world and do missionary work: "*8 But when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be empowered and become my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.*"" (Acts 1:8)

[[@Bible:luke 9:54-56]]Luke 9:54-56

1. When the disciples see that the Samaritans do not accept Jesus, they let their prejudices and old hostile history take over their judgement.
2. The two brothers James and John were called by Jesus "Boanerges", which in English means "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17). In other words, they were very hot-tempered and close to rage.
   1. Against this background, it is a proof of God's ability to change a person that the apostle John later became known as the "apostle of love".
   2. Do you have a lesser character trait? This need not be an obstacle to becoming a disciple, but you should at the same time pray to Jesus to change you for the better.
3. The mistake James and John make can be compared to the "hell preachers" or "prophets of doom" of the 20th century.
   1. Countless times I have read about so-called "prophets" who prophesy of a God's judgment on Sweden because the Swedes have abandoned God. One time it is prophesied that the Russians will come, other times it is natural disasters that will hit us. But from this text we can learn that God does not act in this way.
   2. James and John focus on the Samaritans' sin and God's punishment instead of focusing on Jesus' possibility of salvation and God's love.
4. Jesus rebukes James and John because they don't seem to have understood Jesus' mission. Jesus has not come to earth to judge all wrongdoers or to punish all sinners. Jesus has come to offer salvation to all people and to save all who believe in him.
   1. *"16 For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved."* (John 3:16-17)
   2. What we can learn from this is not to constantly look for faults in other people just for the sake of it. We should be well aware that all people, including ourselves, have faults and commit sins. But instead of constantly pointing out each other's faults, we should instead focus on growing in our faith, studying the Bible together, praying for each other, etc.
   3. But while we should not focus on the negative, we should not pretend that there is no sin. Sometimes you have to rebuke the wrongdoer, just as Jesus does here. But notice that Jesus does not rebuke the Samaritans, only his own disciples. One cannot demand as much of non-Christians as of disciples.
5. A congregation should be aware that the surrounding community may well reject the Christian message. This should not surprise us or make us angry, but rather lead us to pray for the community and show as much love as we can.
   1. Jesus could get angry at religious hypocrites who prevented people from meeting God, but he rarely got angry at ordinary people who didn't know any better. Once Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, he knew he would be rejected, but he didn't get angry, instead he wept (Luke 19:41-44). When Stephen is stoned for his faith in Jesus, he doesn't get angry, but instead prays for his killers (Acts 7:59-60).
      1. So when we face persecution, we should not respond with hatred or a judgmental attitude, but with prayer and love, leaving the judgment to God when the time comes.
6. The Christian who is afflicted by the sins of sinners should do as Jesus did, i.e. walk away without taking revenge and instead leave vengeance to God (Rom 12:19).

[[@Bible:luke 9:57-58]]Luke 9:57-58

1. Jesus lived a relatively simple life with few resources, no house of his own, and constantly dependent on God to provide for him. Such a life is hardly attractive to a person with worldly ambitions who wants to be rich or successful. But given all the miracles and good teaching Jesus preached, at times very many people wanted to follow Jesus.
   1. Perhaps many were drawn to Jesus because he was "popular" at the time or stood for something "modern".
   2. So as not to create false expectations or hasty decisions, Jesus is clear from the start that discipleship in his discipleship is not an easy thing that will lead to worldly or human success and wealth. On the contrary, there is a risk that it will lead to great sacrifice.
      1. Jesus exemplifies these sacrifices by saying that even he, the leader of this movement, has no fancy house or worldly wealth.
   3. What we can learn from Jesus is that when people are interested in the Christian faith, we should not try to entice them with false hopes of a humanly successful life, but instead tell them the truth about spiritual growth but worldly suffering.
   4. We can also learn that discipleship may well mean not being able to buy as nice a house as all the other average Swedes. As a disciple of Jesus, you may have to choose between a successful career and a sacrificial life.

[[@Bible:luke 9:59-60]]Luke 9:59-60

1. In the previous example, a man asked to follow Jesus. In this example, it is Jesus asking a man to follow him. For the evangelist, it is important to be able to see and decide when it is appropriate to ask someone if they want to become a Christian or when to wait for the person to come to that decision for themselves.
2. The man in this example wants to follow Jesus, but not quite yet. If the man in the previous example was too quick to follow Jesus, this man is too slow to follow Jesus.
3. A Jewish funeral ritual could take 12 months for a loved one to perform. In other words, waiting to follow Jesus until the entire ritual is performed could result in missing the opportunity to become a disciple altogether.
   1. From this we can learn that we should not let human traditions stand in the way of following Jesus.
4. In Nepal, a country I spent a lot of time in, according to Hindu tradition, the eldest son has to perform a Hindu funeral ritual when his parents die. This ritual allows the parents to go to Hindu heaven. When a Nepali becomes a Christian, he does not want to perform this Hindu ritual for obvious reasons, which often leads to the parents distancing themselves from their son, throwing him out of the home and disinheriting him. In a poor society where children stay at home even after they marry in order to care for their parents when they grow old and to help each other with their livelihoods, such divisions can be disastrous. That's why many young Nepalis wait to become Christians until after their parents have died so they can perform the Hindu funeral ritual. In other words, this Bible verse becomes very topical in Nepal when compared to Sweden.

[[@Bible:luke 9:61-62]]Luke 9:61-62

1. When the time comes to become a Christian, one should not waver or make a half-hearted decision.
2. Sometimes I have come across people who want to become Christians, but who first want to live out in the world for a while. They want to follow Jesus, but first they want to find a girlfriend or do all the fun things their friends do. Then when you get a bit older you can calm down and start going to church. But with that kind of attitude, you've already shown that you think the kingdom of the world is a better place to be than the kingdom of God.
   1. When farmers in Jesus' day would plow the field, he had to look at something ahead, like a tree, so that the rows would be straight. If the farmer lost focus and started looking back, he ploughed crookedly.
   2. If we want to follow Jesus, we should fix our eyes on Jesus and not look back at our old life.
   3. Jesus exemplifies this when in verse 51 he "*turned his face toward Jerusalem, determined to go up there".* 
      1. As disciples of Jesus, we are right to follow Jesus with determination by leaving our old sinful life behind us immediately when Jesus calls and fixing our eyes on Jesus and the mission he gives us. ­­­­

## Luke 10:38-42 - Martha and Mary

[[@Bible:luke 10:38]]Luke 10:38

1. Jesus was good friends with the sisters Martha and Mary and their brother Lazarus, whom Jesus also raised from the dead on another occasion (John 11). They lived just outside Jerusalem in the village of Bethany.
2. The passage just before this text, "The Good Samaritan", begins with a lawyer asking Jesus what one should do to have eternal life, to which Jesus replies, *"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 neighbour as yourself."* (Luke 10:27). Then Jesus tells us first about the Good Samaritan to show us how to treat our neighbour as ourselves, and then we read about Martha and Mary to show us how to love the Lord God with all our heart, namely by "sitting at the Lord's feet".
3. This text shows two representatives of two different ways of practising their faith. Martha represents the practical active Christian and Mary the more pious praying and reading Christian. Neither of these two ways of practicing their faith is wrong, but Jesus wants to emphasize that Mary has chosen the better of the two.
   1. What Mary learned at Jesus' feet she will carry with her forever and ever, while all of Martha's practical tasks will eventually come to an end.
   2. However, it should be remembered never to despise one or the other way of practicing one's faith because both are needed. A Marior-only congregation would be just as strange as a Martor-only congregation.

[[@Bible:luke 10:39]]Luke 10:39

1. Sitting at the "feet of the Lord" was the place of Jesus' disciples. This was how Jewish students sat when they listened to their rabbi's teaching (Acts 22:3). Now Mary, a woman, sits there.
   1. You can imagine that many people turned up their noses when Mary sat down to listen to Jesus as if she were one of his closest disciples. Perhaps even some thought that the kitchen, where Martha was, is the place for women.
2. When you sit down at Jesus' feet, that is, start reading your Bible as if it were God's word to me today, then discipleship begins in earnest. You show Jesus that you believe in him, bow to him and are ready to do what he says. But perhaps most of all, you show that you love Jesus and his word.
3. This is how Jesus wants us to approach him, by listening to his word, the word of God, the Bible.
   1. Constantly going to church to meet friends and have some social fellowship is not wrong, but if that is your only focus, then you have missed *the most necessary thing*.
   2. In Jesus' time, you could get to know Jesus by meeting him in person, but today we meet Jesus through his word, the Bible. For those who discover this, it is like finding treasure in a field (Matthew 13:44).
   3. When we take time for God's word, the Bible becomes for us like a light on our path: '*Your word is the lamp of my feet and a light on my path.* " (Ps 119:105)
      1. Many times I have had problems in my life and not really known how to solve them, but when I have prayed to God, he has shown me some kind of solution from the Bible. God's word is living and active and it does not return to the Lord until it has worked out what God wants (Isa 55:10-11, 1Thess 2:13, Heb 4:12).

[[@Bible:luke 10:40]]Luke 10:40

1. Not only was Jesus a celebrity, he was also the promised Messiah, something the siblings had probably begun to realise.
   1. So it was not surprising that Martha wanted to prepare her home for Jesus' coming. Martha is not wrong to make practical preparations for Jesus' visit. When you have such a nice visit, you naturally want to make the house nice and offer something good.
   2. The mistake that Marta makes is that she is so busy fixing everything practical that she forgets the most important, *the only necessary.*
2. Sometimes we humans are so busy fixing our homes, shoveling snow, cleaning the church, raising the kids, etc, etc, that we forget the most important thing, sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to his word.
   1. There is absolutely nothing wrong with shovelling snow or taking care of your children, on the contrary, this is what we should do. But it must not be at the expense of our relationship with Jesus.
3. Martha was even so distracted with all the practical things that she actually interrupted Jesus when he was teaching to complain about her sister.
   1. When one wrongly criticizes other Christians, there is a risk that one prevents Jesus from doing what he intended to do.
4. When I once visited the mountain where Jesus preached his Sermon on the Mount, there was a nun sitting guard at the entrance to the church. She would snap and scold anyone she thought was dressed unchristianly and would not let them in. She was so busy with her task that she had forgotten that Jesus was the friend of sinners (Luke 7:34).

[[@Bible:luke 10:41-42]]Luke 10:41-42

1. It's not often that a name in the Bible is repeated in this way, but you can almost hear the love in Jesus' words to Martha.
   1. When we humans make mistakes or even sin, Jesus lovingly calls us to turn around and come back to him.
2. No matter how much you serve Jesus, it is in vain if you lack that "one thing necessary".
   1. In a similar way, Jesus responded to the rich man who asked Jesus what he would do to have eternal life. He had done everything right, but one thing was missing: to sell everything he owned and come follow Jesus (Luke 18:22).
   2. If we fill our lives with good works, perhaps even in church, but have not given our lives to Jesus, then we have done all in vain.
3. No matter how many troubles you have in your life, you can hand them all over to Jesus and receive "the peace of God" in return (Phil 4:4-7).
4. As I said, in this biblical text Martha and Mary show two different ways of exercising their faith, one practical and one contemplative. Neither is wrong, but one is better. The challenge for those who want to grow in their discipleship is to start from the perspective of "the feet of Jesus", while allowing both sides to develop. If you feel more like Martha, you may need to make more time for the Bible. If you feel more like Mary, you may need to try to put into practice what you have learned from reading the Bible.
   1. What Mary learned at Jesus' feet she will carry with her forever and ever, while all of Martha's practical tasks will eventually come to an end.
   2. However, it should be remembered never to despise one or the other way of practicing one's faith because both are needed. A Marior-only congregation would be just as strange as a Martor-only congregation.
   3. Whoever begins like Mary, at the feet of Jesus, will hopefully eventually also begin to do like Martha, to serve God practically.

## Luke 14:1-14 - Jesus as a Guest of a Pharisee

[[@Bible:luke 14:1]]Luke 14:1

1. When God had created the earth in six days, He rested on the seventh day, the "Sabbath" (Genesis 2:1-3).
   1. The Sabbath is the day of rest that God wants man to keep holy and to rest from work (Exodus 20:8-11).
   2. Originally, Saturday is the Sabbath day, a tradition that is important to the Jewish people. When Judaism and Christianity parted ways, Christians for various reasons began to use Sunday as a day of rest instead.
   3. Celebrating and keeping the Sabbath is one of the main identity markers of the Jewish people, and it is therefore not surprising that many of the quarrels between Jesus and the Pharisees are often about the Sabbath itself.
      1. When you hold on to something very tightly for various reasons, it can be very hard to realise that you have been wrong. In this chapter, Jesus challenges the Pharisees to reprioritise what is more important; God's will or human traditions.
      2. In the same way, of course, today we can also have human traditions that may be contrary to God's will and God's word. It is therefore important to constantly examine oneself and see if there is anything from which one needs to repent.
2. The Pharisees were a movement among the Jewish people who focused their energy on studying the Law (Torah or the Pentateuch) and how to live by it.
   1. The Pharisees were very careful not to break any of the commandments of the Law. They were so careful that they even put a "fence" of extra rules around the rules of the Law to minimize the risk of accidentally breaking the Law.
      1. These rules were also called "the statutes of the elders", "the Oral Law/Torah" and later "the Talmud" (Matt 7:3).
   2. Jesus quarreled with the Pharisees when he felt that their extra rules clashed with the rules of the Law (Mk 7:8).
3. It was not uncommon in Jewish culture to gather for a large and festive Shabbat meal with invited guests. It also seems to have been possible to attend such a feast even as an uninvited guest (Luke 7:37).
   1. Although Jesus often quarreled with the Pharisees, he had no problem going to their homes and eating with them. Jesus sets a good example and shows us concretely how to "love your enemies" as he taught in Matthew 5:43-48.
      1. This is a very good illustration of how much God loves us humans. Even if we are sinners and perhaps even enemies of God, he still wants to visit us, fellowship with us and eat with us (Romans 5:7-8).
4. Wherever Jesus went and whatever Jesus did, people watched him. When I was in Nepal, a born-again Christian told me that "we are the fifth gospel". By this he meant that people look at us Christians and form an opinion of the Christian faith based on how we live. People don't just read the Bible to learn about God, they also look at his disciples. It is therefore important for a Christian, based on the knowledge he has, to think about how he lives and to do the best he can to live a Christian life (2 Corinthians 3:2-3).

[[@Bible:luke 14:2]]Luke 14:2

1. The disease the man suffered from meant that a lot of water accumulated in his body, causing his body to become bloated.
2. Since the verse before says that the Pharisees "watched him", one might suspect that the Pharisees had invited this sick man in order to "trick" Jesus into healing him on the Sabbath, something the Pharisees considered forbidden.

[[@Bible:luke 14:3]]Luke 14:3

1. The Pharisees were not against Jesus healing the sick, but against him healing the sick on *the Sabbath*. According to the Law, it was forbidden to work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:9-10) and the Pharisees seem to have considered that "healing the sick" was equivalent to "work" and thus could not be done on the Sabbath.
2. To understand this better, we can go to a similar discussion in Mark 2:23-28, where Jesus is arguing with the Pharisees about whether or not it is work to "pluck the ears of corn". Since one was not allowed to work on the Sabbath, it was important to define what constitutes work.
   1. It was permissible according to Moses to pick ears of grain in the fields (Deuteronomy 23:26), but it was forbidden to work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:9-10).
   2. According to the *oral* Torah of the Pharisees, the disciples' ax-picking meant "threshing", which according to the Pharisees was forbidden on the Shabbat.
   3. When two rules clash, the most important rule must prevail.
      1. Priests were allowed to work on the Sabbath if certain feasts happened to occur on the Sabbath.
      2. Boys were to be circumcised on the eighth day after their birth, even if that day happened to fall on the Sabbath.
   4. In short, Jesus' answer in Mark 2 is that under certain circumstances, one may do on the Sabbath what is normally defined as "work" because the Sabbath is for the good of man and not the other way around.
3. According to the Oral Law, it was permitted to cure the life-threatening sick on the Sabbath, but it was not permitted to cure the "lesser" sick because that would mean doing some kind of work, such as making medicine. Since this man was not suffering from a life-threatening illness, according to the oral tradition he was not allowed to be cured on the Sabbath. Jesus, however, disagrees with this oral tradition and in this and similar arguments with the Pharisees, makes a number of arguments:
   1. It is more important to "do good on the Sabbath" than to argue about the details of the oral tradition (Matthew 12:12).
   2. Who would not help his son or his ox that was in trouble, even though it was the Sabbath? Why shouldn't God help one of his children? (Luke 14:5).
   3. The Sabbath was made for man, not the other way around. God's idea of the Sabbath was not to enslave man for a day, but to do good to man. If someone is feeling bad, of course that person should be helped because the Sabbath is about rest and well-being (Mark 2:27).
   4. Since healing comes from God, God confirms that it is permissible to heal the sick on the Sabbath because it is God who performs the healing (John 5:17-18).
4. One can summarize these arguments between Jesus and the Pharisees as being about the *word of God* vs. *human traditions*.
   1. It is not wrong to have human traditions, but when they clash with the Word of God, one must break with one's traditions.
   2. Since God is a merciful and loving God, our human traditions must not stand in the way of our loving and merciful actions.
   3. It was not necessarily wrong for the Pharisees to discuss the "oral Law" in order to try to live by the "written Law" (the Pentateuch), but if the oral Law, i.e. human tradition, clashes with the written Law, i.e. the Word of God, then the tradition must be broken so that the Word of God can be obeyed instead.
   4. Even we in Sweden today have human traditions that violate God's Word and that we need to locate and break. In some Free Church traditions a "verbal catalogue of sins" was developed, it was considered sinful to dance, go to the cinema or go to the pub. Dancing, going to the cinema or the like is not necessarily wrong in itself, and therefore we should not be too quick to judge or look down on people who do any of these things for a good reason.

[[@Bible:luke 14:4]]Luke 14:4

1. Before Jesus heals the man, he asks the Pharisees if it is allowed or not. If the Pharisees answered yes, they could not accuse him afterwards; if they answered no, they would be perceived as harsh and merciless. In other words, the Pharisees can answer neither yes nor no and remain silent instead.
   1. The Pharisees had intended to trap Jesus, but since they are now silent before Jesus heals the man, they show that they can't really answer whether or not it is allowed to heal the sick on the Sabbath, and thus they can't accuse Jesus if he heals the man. Thus Jesus does not fall into the trap.
2. God's power is often communicated by touching the one you pray for through the laying on of hands. However, Jesus was able to heal the sick in all sorts of ways, because the most important thing is not *how* you pray for the sick but to *whom* you pray.

[[@Bible:luke 14:5]]Luke 14:5

1. This is the answer that Jesus himself gives to the question he asked earlier. If the Pharisees can think of helping their ox or their son who is in trouble, shouldn't God be able to help his children if they are in trouble?
   1. Although God has commanded us to rest on the day of rest, this rule must not be taken to such an extreme that we stop helping people in need just because it is the day of rest.

[[@Bible:luke 14:7]]Luke 14:7

1. The closer you were to the host, the more honourable you were.
2. It must have been very interesting to see Jesus criticizing the host and the guests at the feast in this way.

[[@Bible:luke 14:8]]Luke 14:8

1. The person who takes the worst place never runs the risk of shamefully having to move. On the other hand, the person who takes the worst place in the first place may have to move to a better place and thus be recognised as humble.

[[@Bible:luke 14:10]]Luke 14:10

1. One should not take the lowest place just to hope, in false humility, to be recognised for one's humility and thus get a better place. Living a simple and humble life is part of the Christian life and not something one does just to get something out of it (Phil 2).
   1. It is part of the Christian life to help one's fellow men selflessly and to the best of one's ability, "bearing one another's burdens" (Gal 6:2), not in order to eventually gain something for oneself, but simply because one loves one's fellow men as oneself.
   2. On another occasion, a teacher of the law asks Jesus which is the greatest commandment:"*36 "Master, which is the greatest commandment in the law?" 37 He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the greatest and foremost commandment. 39 Then comes one similar to it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments hang the whole law and the prophets."* "(Matthew 22:36-40).
      1. This is precisely Jesus' message to the Pharisees; love your neighbour not by enslaving them with human traditions, rules and prohibitions, but by freeing them from poverty and disease.

[[@Bible:luke 14:11]]Luke 14:11

1. Although Jesus often quarreled with and criticized the Pharisees, here he tries to help them. The Pharisees wanted to obey God and live according to his will, but they did it the wrong way. They were more interested in being considered "honorable" because of their good works when they obeyed God's law so well, but when they obeyed God's law in this way, they missed the very purpose of God's law, namely to love God and love their fellow man (Matt 22:36-40).
   1. Anyone who truly wants to obey God's law should love God with all his heart and his fellow man as himself, instead of trying to show off his knowledge of the Bible and God's law (Gal 6:2).
2. There is always a risk, even in Christian contexts, that pastors and leaders try to elbow their way up the hierarchy and try to get nice leadership positions. It is important for Christian leaders to understand that the most important thing is not to get a nice title, but to humbly serve the people around you.

[[@Bible:luke 14:12-14]]Luke 14:12-14

1. A very nice part of the Christian life is to invite people to food and fellowship. Of course, it is not wrong to invite your friends and relatives, but this cannot be counted as some kind of "righteous deed" that earns you heavenly plus points. Instead, if you want to do something righteous, you should invite the poor and outcast, those who have no friends, those who cannot afford to eat well and those who may be perceived as "uncomfortable".
   1. A good time for this is Christmas Eve. Many people sit alone with no one to celebrate with, and inviting them to your own Christmas celebrations would be a perfect example of what Jesus wants us to do here.
2. This selfless life can cost us a great deal on earth. We may not end up at the top of the success scale, we ourselves may eventually not be considered "nice" enough to be invited to other people's parties, etc. But if we live in this unselfish way, we will get our reward in the afterlife.

## Luke 15:11-32 - The Parable of the Prodigal Son

[[@Bible:luke 15:11-16]]Luke 15:11-16

1. This amazing symbolic story is an educational illustration of God's relationship with a rebellious man who leaves God for sin. In the story, the "father" symbolizes God, the "son" the rebellious sinner, and the "brother" the faithful parishioner.
2. Asking his father for his share of the inheritance while he was still alive was like saying: *"Father, I wish you were dead!"* Such a rebellious approach to one's father was very serious in biblical times, and could even result in stoning (Deut 21:18-21).
   1. According to custom, the eldest son would receive two-thirds (a double lot) of the inheritance, and the younger son would receive one-third (Deut 21:17).
   2. According to Jewish law and tradition, a father could decide while he was still alive which of his sons would receive which part of the inheritance, for example which piece of land would belong to whom. But the father still retained ownership of the land and income until his death.
3. Since the younger son is unmarried, he was probably 18 years old or younger.
4. The father in this story shows God's love for man. The father allows the son to rebel against his father, he allows the son to go his own way even though the father knows that this means a life of sin. God respects human free will.
5. The prodigal son goes to a foreign land far away and lives a debauched life, wasting all his money on anything that gives him temporary pleasure. Most likely he bought alcohol and prostitutes with the money until it ran out.
   1. The fact that the son "packed up his things" shows that he had no intention of returning.
   2. "A strange land far away" symbolizes that the prodigal son's life is far away from God.
6. The son was himself guilty of his profligate and sinful life, but he could not help a severe famine coming. Perhaps he could have lived decently if it had not been for the famine, but now he had both spent all his money while society suffered an economic disaster.
   1. It's not uncommon for non-religious people to suddenly start praying to God when you're in a life crisis. If you had made a habit of praying to God and living a righteous life, you might never have gotten into that life crisis.
   2. Driven by hunger, the son accepts work that no self-respecting Jew could have imagined. According to the Mosaic Law, pigs are unclean animals (Leviticus 11:7).
   3. Although the famine was not a positive and welcome thing, it cannot be denied that it was the famine that finally made the son rethink. Had it not been for the famine, he might have continued to live his sinful life far away from his father.
      1. Even if personal disasters are not sent by God, they can sometimes make us think, turn to God and find our way back to our Father.

[[@Bible:luke 15:17-19]]Luke 15:17-19

1. In his great distress, the prodigal son comes to his senses and realizes that what he has become is not his true self. The son is not really a rebellious sinner guarding pigs, he is his father's son.
2. When the prodigal son comes to his senses, he wants to return to his father. He is not thinking primarily of returning to his home or his friends, he is thinking of his father.
   1. In the same way, every person needs to turn first and foremost to God our Father, and not to the church, friends, business, or anything else.
3. The prodigal son realizes and confesses his sin. He is ready to accept a life as his father's servant, as long as he is allowed to come back.
   1. But the son not only "thought" his confession, he also acted on it. It is important not only to let his confession exist in our heart or brain, but also to turn it into concrete action.
   2. From this we also learn that we humans are not just passive recipients of God's salvation, we need to make a choice and actively receive salvation.

[[@Bible:luke 15:20-24]]Luke 15:20-24

1. The father of the prodigal son had not forgotten his son. But he was not preoccupied with bitterness, revenge or anything negative. The father's love was constant throughout this story, and the longing for the son consisted only of love.
2. The normal reaction would have been for the father to wait for his son in the house, demand a respectful confession of sin and then consider whether to take his son back.
   1. But the father running to meet his son in joy must have shocked the audience! An older man in biblical times did not normally run, as it was considered undignified.
   2. The prodigal son begins to confess his sins by saying what he had previously decided, but the son doesn't have time to finish all three sentences before his father interrupts him and begins preparing a feast for his returning son!
3. The Father's reaction shows the tremendous love God our Father has for all people, and how God longs for sinners to repent and come back to Him!
   1. When a sinner repents, God is not slow to forgive, but quick and cheerful! God is so quick to forgive that the sinner barely has time to finish confessing his sin before God has begun His work of restoration.

[[@Bible:luke 15:25-32]]Luke 15:25-32

1. At first you might think that this parable is only about the prodigal son, but it is really just as much about the prodigal son's brother.
   1. The brother of the prodigal son represents those members of the church who have not lived a debauched and sinful life, but have tried to live right and proper all their lives.
   2. At first, the brother of the prodigal son felt that the father's instantaneous welcome of his returning son was an insult to his own obedience and faithfulness.
   3. The brother does not want to call his brother "brother", but instead says "that one" and "*your* son".
   4. The prodigal's brother lived close to his father, but far from his father's heart. He was more worried and bitter about his brother's sinful life and his father's possible punishment, than grateful for all the good things he had.
   5. When the brother refuses to come to the party, the father goes out to meet him and appeals to him to come in and join the festivities. But whether or not the brother listened to his father is not clear from the story and is thus an open question to the Pharisees who listened to Jesus. God wants the Pharisees too, but like the prodigal son, they too must choose God for themselves.
2. In these parables, Jesus' message can be summarized as follows:
   1. To sinners: repent and come home to your Father!
   2. To the religious leaders: be happy when the lost repent and come home to their Father.

## Luke 19:1-10 - Jesus and Zacchaeus

[[@Bible:luke 19:1]]Luke 19:1

1. Why did Jesus pass through Jericho on his way to Jerusalem? The only thing that happened in Jericho during this visit was Jesus' meeting with Zacchaeus, so most likely Jesus entered Jericho just to meet Zacchaeus.

[[@Bible:luke 19:2]]Luke 19:2

1. At the time of Jesus, the Jewish people were occupied by the Roman Empire, and the Romans demanded taxes from the Jews. This tax provided a revenue for Rome and thus paid for the Roman occupation, while at the same time weakening the Jewish people.
   1. The Romans liked to hire Jews to collect these taxes, and these Jewish tax collectors, also called "publicans", often charged a higher tax than the Romans demanded, so that they themselves would make a profit from the Roman tax. As a result, the tax collectors were despised by the rest of the Jewish people and considered greedy traitors who had gone over to the Roman side.
   2. Not only was Sackeus a customs officer, but he was also a *foreman of* the customs, and could thus make even more money from the Roman tax.
   3. In Mark 2:15-17, Jesus eats at the home of some publicans, which upsets the scribes and Pharisees, but Jesus justifies his fellowship with these people with these words, *"It is not the healthy who need doctors, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners."*

[[@Bible:luke 19:3]]Luke 19:3

1. Sackeus was small in stature, and even though the Bible text itself says nothing more about this, one can assume that Sackeus has been bullied because of this. Perhaps it was even what caused him to go over to the Roman side and take advantage of the Jewish people out of some sort of vindictiveness or revenge?
   1. One can also imagine that Sackeus felt he had to be extra hard on people to get anyone to take him seriously at all and not look down on him.

[[@Bible:luke 19:4]]Luke 19:4

1. Neither running nor climbing trees was something that a respectable adult male engaged in. Climbing trees was something that children did, and it must have looked hilarious when the rich businessman climbs a tree.
   1. Here Sackeus does exactly what Jesus said to do in the previous chapter, *"Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a child will never enter it."* (Luke 18:17).
      1. It may seem silly for a grown man to climb a tree to get a little closer to Jesus, but who was being silly? Zacchaeus, acting like a child to get closer to the Lord, or those who stand by and mutter angrily when a sinner wants to be saved?
   2. It is a constant challenge for established Christians to dare to be open to new people who long to meet Jesus, but who may not fit into the Christian mould.
      1. If Jesus is ready to receive these people with open arms, shouldn't we be too?
   3. It can undoubtedly be very hard for someone who longs for Jesus, but has no Christian friends or acquaintances. It takes a lot of courage to tell your non-Christian colleagues that you are thinking of going to church on Sunday.
      1. It can also be very uncomfortable for an established Christian to come forward for intercession during a service because they may be worried about what others will think.
      2. But all those who ignore what others mutter behind their backs, and instead do everything they can to meet Jesus, will receive a reward worth more than anything else, namely, they will meet the Lord Jesus Christ!

[[@Bible:luke 19:5]]Luke 19:5

1. Jesus' stopping at Sackeus' house to eat with him is not a coincidence, it is the very essence of Jesus' ministry; to seek out those whom other people despise, to urge them to repent of their sins and offer them fellowship with the Lord.
2. The first thing Jesus does is *mention Sackeus by name*. Knowing someone's name means that you are interested in that person and want a relationship.
   1. Jesus knows all those who belong to him and knows their names (John 10:3).
   2. Personally, I have heard God's voice many times, but the first time I heard him clearly, he spoke just one word, a word that meant everything to me: "Christian". He didn't have to say any more, because I knew that that one little word meant so much; he knows who I am, he knows me, he has accepted me and he will be with me.
3. Jesus wants Sackeus to *hurry up*. If you are thinking about becoming a Christian and feel Jesus calling you, do as Jesus told Sackeus, *hurry up* and don't let it wait.
4. Eating with someone in Jesus' time was a sign of community, acceptance and belonging. Jesus' desire to eat with Sackeus does not mean that he was acutely hungry, but he is showing us what it means to be a Christian, namely *communion with Jesus*.
5. In the context of Sackeus being saved, who was it that sought whom? Sackeus did what he could to get closer to Jesus, but it was Jesus who was calling him. So both were involved in Sackeus being saved. When we take a step towards Jesus, he takes a step towards us. When Jesus takes a step towards us, we should hurriedly take a step towards him.

[[@Bible:luke 19:7]]Luke 19:7

1. "Grumbling in anger" is something God's people have always done in all times when God has worked in ways they did not expect, such as when the people of Israel "grumbled" about having to wander in the wilderness when God rescued them from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 16:7).
2. Living morally right and staying away from sin is undoubtedly part of the Christian vocation, but there is a danger that this pursuit can go awry and lead to a reluctance to engage with immoral people who live in sin.
   1. We must remember that the fact that a sinner is saved is a result of God's grace, not of our own effort to be as "perfect" as possible. One does not have to be perfect before becoming a Christian, but one will undoubtedly be transformed after becoming a Christian, perhaps not all at once, but certainly as one goes along.
   2. In his encounter with Sackeus, Jesus shows us how he managed to combine his own sinless life with spending time with sinners in a very exemplary way. Jesus voluntarily chose to associate with the most despised in society, and Jesus' example is our model.
      1. We Christians are the body of Christ and should, like Jesus, seek out the most despised in society and invite them into fellowship. Exactly who these groups are varies between times, societies and cultures, but the principle is the same.
      2. We Christians should beware of becoming a club of inward admiration. It is important that we dare to extend a hand to those who need our help without fear of getting a little dirt under our fingernails. Jesus came not to heal the healthy but to heal the sick, and so if we want to follow in his footsteps we should seek out the places where sinners are and look there for those who long for Jesus.

[[@Bible:luke 19:8]]Luke 19:8

1. Zacchaeus' response to Jesus' invitation is apt: he recognizes his sins, confesses them publicly, and tries to right all wrongs.
2. It was only after Sackeus met Jesus that he was ready to stop his sin and get his life in order. You don't have to be perfect to meet Jesus, but meeting Jesus will affect your life so that you want to do the right thing.
3. Too often we think that salvation is just something that happens on the inside, but here we see that Sackaeus' encounter with Jesus affected his whole life.
4. Sackeus stands in contrast to the rich man in the previous chapter (Luke 18:18-30), who is urged by Jesus to sell everything he owns and give to the poor, but who is unable to do so because he was "very rich". Zacchaeus becomes a "cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9:7) in his encounter with Jesus.
   1. The fact that Jesus does not urge Zacchaeus, like the rich young man in Luke 18, to give everything he owns to the poor, shows that this was not an invitation Jesus gave to everyone, but rather was based on the specific situation of the rich young man. The important thing is to be generous and to put all one's possessions at the service of God.
   2. It is not the giving of money that is Sackaeus' reaction to salvation, but the joy, which in turn leads Sackaeus to be generous, probably because this is what was his sin.

[[@Bible:luke 19:9]]Luke 19:9

1. It is quite possible that the vast majority of Jews saw Sackeus as a traitor who had gone over to the Roman side. Perhaps they no longer even regarded Sackeus as one of "Abraham's children", i.e. a Jew. But here Jesus shows with all the clarity he desires that everyone who believes in Jesus becomes a child of Abraham.
   1. One is not saved by being born a Jew or by being baptized. You are saved by receiving Jesus.

[[@Bible:luke 19:10]]Luke 19:10

1. The first time Jesus came to earth, he came to reach out his hand and offer reconciliation and salvation to all (John 3:16-17).
2. The second time Jesus comes to earth, he comes to judge the world with righteousness (Acts 10:31).
3. Until Jesus' return, it is our task as Jesus' disciples to reach out like Jesus to all those whom society despises, to all those who long for Jesus, and to all those who long to meet Jesus.

## Luke 19:28-40 - The Triumphal Entry

[[@Bible:luke 19:28]]Luke 19:28

1. Jerusalem is an ancient city that existed before Israel came to the land of Canaan.
   1. Abraham meets Melchizedek who lives in Salem (Genesis 14:18).
   2. Jerusalem belonged to the Jebusites and was called Jebus (Judges 19:10-11). Joshua captured Jebus, but seems to have lost the city eventually (Judges 1:8).
   3. Jerusalem was conquered by David and made the capital of Israel (1 Chron 11:4-9).
   4. God chose Jerusalem as the center of worship and where the temple would be built (1 Kings 11:36).
2. The word "Salem" in Jerusalem comes from the Hebrew word *shalom*, which in English means "peace" or "peace". Jerusalem is also sometimes called the "City of David" or "Zion".
3. Jerusalem originally consisted of two hills: Zion, where the castle and the defenses of Jerusalem stood (2 Sam 5:7), and Moriah, where Abraham (not) sacrificed Isaac (Gen 22:2) and where Solomon built the temple (2 Chron 3:1).
4. Jerusalem is a holy city in the sense that it is consecrated by God to be a place where he does special things and reveals himself (1 Kings 11:36, Matthew 27:53).

[[@Bible:luke 19:29]]Luke 19:29

1. The Mount of Olives, also known as the Mount of Olives, is a hillside just outside the walls of Jerusalem, overlooking Jerusalem and the Temple. Zechariah prophesied that God himself would stand with his feet on the Mount of Olives and that the Mount of Olives would be split in two on the Day of the Lord (Zech 14:4).
2. Jesus often withdrew from the noise of Jerusalem to spend time in peace with his disciples on the Mount of Olives (Luke 22:39).
3. Jesus flew up to heaven from the Mount of Olives and that is where he will return (Acts 1:9-12).

[[@Bible:luke 19:30]]Luke 19:30

1. In Jesus' time there was a law called "Angaria" which meant that a lord, king, rabbi or similar, had the right to use the property of others. This right is now being used by Jesus on the grounds that he is "the Lord".
   1. If we try to live as disciples of Jesus, there will be times in our lives when Jesus will ask us to do things. If we put ourselves at God's disposal, he will also want to use us to spread his kingdom.
2. An animal not yet used as a worker was sometimes used for certain religious purposes (Numbers 19:2, Deuteronomy 21:3, 1 Samuel 6:7).
3. Zechariah prophesied that the king of Jerusalem would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt, eradicate strife, and speak peace to the nations (Zech 9:9-10).

[[@Bible:luke 19:31]]Luke 19:31

1. Given that Jesus will use this donkey to ride into Jerusalem as king, it is safe to say that Jesus is claiming to be lord, king and Messiah.

[[@Bible:luke 19:36]]Luke 19:36

1. On the Feast of Tabernacles, Hosanna from Psalm 118:25 was recited while palm leaves were waved and tabernacles were built from palm leaves and other branches (Leviticus 23:39-44). The Feast of Tabernacles (also called Sukkot) is celebrated to commemorate Israel's wilderness wandering.
2. In biblical times, this was often how a king or leader was received:
   1. The people put their cloaks under the feet of Jehu when he became king (2 Kings 9:13).
   2. When Simon Thassi enters Jerusalem and offers peace, the people wave palm leaves and sing hymns (1 Macc 13:51).
   3. In his revelation, John sees people from all nations waving palm leaves before the Lamb (Rev 7:9).
3. There are similarities between Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and a "Roman triumphal procession". The Romans would sometimes honour a victorious commander by staging a large procession in Rome. The triumphal procession included politicians, priests, sacrificial animals. They carried stretchers with treasures he had taken in the war. Prisoners were brought out and executed. Generals rode their war horses. It all ended with a sacrificial feast.
   1. One of the most famous triumphs is the triumph of Titus after he defeated the Jews and destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. In the procession they carried the seven-armed candlestick of Jerusalem, the menorah, which is still depicted on the Great Arch of Titus in Rome.
4. On previous occasions Jesus has tried to silence those who wanted to proclaim him as the Messiah, but now he accepts the accolades (Mark 8:29-30). On another occasion, the people tried to make Jesus the new king of Israel by force in order to free the Jewish people from the Romans (John 6:14-15).
5. When Jesus now rides into Jerusalem like a Roman triumphal procession, but on a donkey instead of a war horse, it shows that Jesus does intend to be king, but not in the way the people had intended. In the Middle East of biblical times, a horse symbolised "war" and a donkey "peace".

[[@Bible:luke 19:37]]Luke 19:37

1. In the other Gospels, the crowd praises Jesus by shouting "Hosanna!"
   1. Hosanna is a combination of the two Hebrew words "save" and "I/we pray" and is quoted from Psalm 118:25.
   2. On the Feast of Tabernacles, Hosanna from Psalm 118:25 was recited while palm leaves were waved and tabernacles were built from palm leaves and other branches (Leviticus 23:39-44).
   3. The expression "hosanna" was associated with a prayer and longing for the Messiah to come and save the people of Israel***.***
2. The crowd praises Jesus "for all the works of power which they had seen". In the same way, we should also praise Jesus for all the answers to prayer and blessings we have received.

[[@Bible:luke 19:38]]Luke 19:38

1. The name of the Lord is YHWH and is translated into English as "I am who I am" or the short form "I am" (Exodus 3:13-15).
   1. In biblical times, it was very rare to speak God's name because people were afraid to misuse or defame God's name (Leviticus 24:15-16).
   2. When the Scriptures said "YHWH", they wrote or pronounced "Adonaj" in Hebrew, "Kyrios" in Greek or "Lord" in Swedish.
   3. Since Mark is quoting Psalm 118:26 here, we know that it originally says "YHWH".
2. Now that Jesus is the one who comes in the name of the Lord, and also called himself "the Lord" in the past, he clearly claims to be YHWH.

# John

## John 2:1-12 - The Wedding at Cana

[[@Bible:john 2:1-2]]John 2:1-2

1. The author of the Gospel of John mentions neither himself nor Mary by name. But most likely the author is the apostle John who, at the cross, was given this mission by Jesus: "*26 When Jesus saw his mother and beside her the disciple whom he loved, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold your son." 27Then he said to the disciple, "See your mother." And from that moment the disciple took her home to him.* " (John 19:26-27)
2. It is not impossible that Jesus and the apostle John were cousins and that this was John's wedding feast. In the Gospel of Matthew we read that John was the son of Zebedee (Matthew 4:21). In Matthew we also read that John's mother, Zebedee's wife, was with Mary at the cross (Matthew 27:56). In the Gospel of Mark we read that John's mother was named Salome (Mark 15:40), and in the Gospel of John we read that Salome is the sister of Jesus' mother Mary (John 19:25). According to the exclusion method Jesus and John's mothers should be sisters and thus Jesus and John become cousins. If Mary's nephew got married, it is only natural that she helped with the practicalities of the wedding, which in turn explains why she is concerned that the wedding wine has run out. John's failure to mention who got married by name is consistent with John never naming himself in his own gospel. It is not possible to establish with certainty that this is John's wedding, but it is also not possible to rule it out.

[[@Bible:john 2:3]]John 2:3

1. In biblical times, there were basically only two beverages to choose from: water and wine. Water was for everyday use and wine for parties. However, drinking water was often so bad that, if you could afford it, it was often better for your health to drink wine with your food instead of water. However, wine in biblical times did not have the same amount of alcohol as today. So when we read about Jesus' water-to-wine miracle, we shouldn't think of this as a modern-day Swedish drunken feast, but one where wine symbolises solemnity and joy.
2. Wedding feasts in biblical times could last a whole week (Gen 29:27), and it was not uncommon to have open houses and guests coming and going. Perhaps more people came to this wedding feast than the hosts had planned, resulting in the wine eventually running out.
   1. Running out of wine before the party was over was a very embarrassing and big failure. Since "wine" symbolizes "joy", running out of wine is equivalent to running out of joy. In this case, it would mean an unhappy bride and groom and a failed party with unhappy guests.
3. Why did Mary say this to Jesus? Maybe the bride and groom were relatives of hers and she was at the party to help. We don't know what that was all about, but we understand that Mary mentions this to Jesus because she knows that Jesus can solve the problem.
   1. For 30 years, Mary has lived with the certainty that there is something special about Jesus (Luke 1:35). Although Mary does not yet know exactly how, she knows that God will use her son in a great, significant and miraculous way. She has been waiting for Jesus to begin this for a long time. Perhaps Mary is eager and trying to hurry Jesus along a bit? Perhaps Mary and Jesus have prayed together on previous occasions and received answers to their prayers?
   2. Maria has also lived with people's eyes for 30 years. Because Mary became pregnant before marrying Joseph, rumors spread. We know, of course, that Jesus was conceived in Mary by the Holy Spirit, but this was difficult for Mary to tell others about for obvious reasons. But perhaps Mary thought that people would understand her situation better if Jesus finally appeared as the man of God she knew him to be?

[[@Bible:john 2:4]]John 2:4

1. Jesus' response to Mary is very special. First, Jesus calls Mary "woman" instead of "mother". With this Jesus wants to signal in a respectful way (John 19:26) that from now on there is a new relationship between mother and son, where Mary is no longer above Jesus as a parent. Until now, Jesus has obeyed his mother in everything (Luke 2:51), but now it is time to start walking on the path that God has ordained, and he must act independently in relation to his mother.
2. Secondly, Jesus says that he has nothing to do with the wine problem. With this expression, Jesus is showing his mother Mary that he is no longer acting on his mother's word based on the worldly concerns Mary had, but instead is acting on his Father's word based on the spiritual mission Jesus is now entering into. Jesus now leaves the role of "Mary's son" who helps his mother with whatever she needs, and instead enters the role of "God's son" who fully acts on what God says.
3. Thirdly, Jesus says that his hour has not yet come. This expression appears five times in the Gospel of John (John 2:4, 7:6, 7:8, 7:30, 8:20). The "hour" Jesus is talking about is the hour of his "glorification", i.e. his death on the cross. In the later part of John's Gospel, Jesus declares that his hour has now come (John 12:23, 13:1, 17:1).

[[@Bible:john 2:5]]John 2:5

1. Mary's response to Jesus shows, first of all, an extremely humble submission. Although Jesus is Mary's child, Mary knows that Jesus is the Son of God and her Lord (Luke 1:43). Mary understands that the implication of Jesus' words is that Mary is no longer in charge of Jesus as a mother is of her child, but that Mary now needs to submit to Jesus as a believer submits to her Lord. Mary, who is probably the person who has known Jesus most closely, gives very good advice to all people who read the Bible: *"Do whatever he tells you"*. Imagine if all people had heeded Mary's call!
2. Secondly, Mary's response shows that she wants to shift the focus from herself to Jesus. What Mary is teaching us is not to exalt her because she is Jesus' mother, but to exalt Jesus because he is the Son of God. Exalting Mary at the expense of Jesus is an unbiblical practice that both Jesus and Mary were opposed to (Luke 11:27-28). Better than exalting Mary is to listen to what she has to say about Jesus.
3. Thirdly, Mary's answer shows that she knew that Jesus could do miracles. Even though this was Jesus' first miracle, she knew what Jesus could do and longed for him to begin his service to God.
   1. In the same way we should relate to God's miracles. We believe and know that God can answer our prayer even if we have not yet seen it with our own eyes. And until our prayer is answered, we humbly accept that God will answer when the time is right, and until then, we continue to do in all things what Jesus tells us to do.

[[@Bible:john 2:6]]John 2:6

1. These water pots were used by the Jews to ritually wash their hands before and after meals (Matthew 15:1-2). These pots were thus a symbol of the Old Testament Law.

[[@Bible:john 2:7-8]]John 2:7-8

1. Jesus could have done this miracle any way he wanted, but he chose to do it this way. Jesus used the resources and people available and it is interesting to see the part of the servants in the miracle.
   1. Jesus could have filled the jars with water all by himself, but by involving the servants, they got to share in both the miracle and the joy.
   2. It wasn't the servants who did the miracle, they just did what Jesus told them to do without question, and then Jesus did the rest.
   3. The servants filled the pots "to the brim". If they had only filled them halfway, they would have received only half as much blessing.
   4. It required faith on the part of the servants to scoop up "water" and go with it to the host, trusting Jesus that it was now wine.

[[@Bible:john 2:9-10]]John 2:9-10

1. The wine that Jesus miraculously created was a very good and fine wine. This does not mean that the wine had a high alcohol content, but that it was a high quality wine.
2. The transformation of water into wine that Jesus did serves as a symbolic image of the transformation that Jesus makes with every person who comes to believe in him. The Christian life is not mundane, boring and merely for survival, but is celebration, joy and miracles!

[[@Bible:john 2:11-12]]John 2:11-12

1. Jesus' miracle of turning water into wine contrasts with the miracle of Moses turning the waters of the Nile into blood (Exodus 7:14-24). Moses, representing the Law, the old covenant, witnesses a miracle symbolizing death, while Jesus, representing the Gospel, the new covenant, performs a miracle symbolizing joy.
   1. This miracle shows the Jewish people that a new covenant is at hand with Jesus. This new covenant will not be a legal covenant that leads to death for the sinner, but a new covenant with God that leads to forgiveness and joy for the sinner.
2. The disciples certainly believed in Jesus even before this miracle, but their faith was strengthened and renewed when they saw it with their own eyes. In the same way, it is good for every person's faith to be reminded from time to time of the greatness of Jesus and to witness a miracle. Then our faith in Jesus is renewed and strengthened.

## John 7:53-8:11 - The Woman Caught in Adultery

[[@Bible:john 7:53-8:1]]John 7:53-8:1

1. Jesus is in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles and takes the opportunity to teach the people. However, the atmosphere is hostile as the Pharisees and scribes try to find reasons to kill him, which is where this passage unfolds.
   1. According to Exodus 34:22-23, all the men of Israel were to celebrate three feasts each year; Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles (also called Sukkot). Israel celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles by dwelling once a year in tabernacles to commemorate the wilderness wanderings (Leviticus 23:42-43). They also recited Hosanna from Psalm 118:25 while waving palm leaves (Leviticus 23:39-44).
2. Most Bible scholars agree that John 7:53-8:11 was not in the original Gospel of John. This text simply does not appear in the earliest manuscripts that have been found.
   1. The researchers also believe that the style and vocabulary of the text is not consistent with the rest of the Gospel of John and that it interrupts verse 7:52 and verse 8:12.
      1. In verses 7:45-52 we get the impression that the temple guards, the chief priests and the Pharisees are talking internally, but in verse 7:53 it suddenly says that everyone goes home and Jesus goes to the Mount of Olives. It seems that the story of the adulteress is pasted in the wrong place in the Gospel of John. That said, it still fits quite well into the context of the Pharisees' enmity towards Jesus.
      2. Some manuscripts have instead placed this text after Luke 21:38, after John 21:24 or after John 7:36.
   2. But even if biblical scholars agree that this text does not fit into the Gospel of John, there is still a strong consensus that the content of the text is authentic. One possible explanation for why this text was not included in the original text but was added later is that it was originally part of the oral tradition of storytelling.
   3. Personally, I think the story fits quite well with the hostile atmosphere towards Jesus that prevailed in Jerusalem. Jesus has taught the people and many are impressed (John 7:46) and come to believe in him (John 7:31). As a result, the Pharisees and scribes, wanting to find reasons to arrest and kill Jesus (John 7:1), in a desperate attempt to put Jesus in a situation where he is forced to choose between killing a poor woman or obeying the Law of Moses, cunningly defeat Jesus and force him to confess his guilt.
      1. So my guess is that this event happened at the time of Jesus' celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, but for some reason John did not record it in his gospel. Instead, the event was passed on orally and then brought into its proper textual context at a later date.
3. After Jesus teaches, everyone goes home to their house to sleep, but Jesus went out to the Mount of Olives. Perhaps Jesus spent the night in prayer (Luke 6:12)? Maybe he slept under a tree (Luke 9:58)? Maybe he went home to his friends; Lazarus, Martha and Mary, who lived in Bethany on the other side of the Mount of Olives (John 11:1-2)?

[[@Bible:john 8:2]]John 8:2

1. Jesus lingered in Galilee because of the hostile atmosphere in Jerusalem, but eventually went up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. Here we see clearly that it was not for fear of death that Jesus lingered in Galilee. Despite the Jewish leadership looking for reasons to kill him, he enters the temple site and teaches the people openly.
2. In Jesus' time, it was common for the preacher to sit down and the audience to stand up, contrary to how we do it today. That way, if the preacher gets boring, you don't fall asleep.

[[@Bible:john 8:3]]John 8:3

1. This is hardly a spontaneous invention of the Pharisees. It's morning and a lot of people have gathered in the temple square to listen to Jesus. The Jewish leadership has probably known about this adulteress for some time but now takes the opportunity to arrest her in order to shame Jesus in front of so many people.
   1. The Pharisees and the scribes want to force Jesus to choose between obeying the Law of Moses and thus killing the woman, or disobeying the Law of Moses and letting the woman go free.
      1. If Jesus obeyed the Law of Moses and commanded her to be stoned, he would have the Romans against him because the Romans had taken away the Jews' ability to impose the death penalty (John 18:31). In the worst case, Jesus could be considered a revolutionary and thus be sentenced to death by the Romans himself.
      2. If Jesus disobeyed the Law of Moses and let the woman go free, then he would instead have the Jews against him because he disqualified himself as Messiah and teacher.
      3. So if Jesus chooses option 1, he will have the Romans against him and if he chooses option 2, he will have the Jews against him. Fortunately, Jesus does not choose either of these two options, but instead presents his own third option.
         1. This is pacifism at its core; that is, neither being passive in the face of sin nor using violence to punish, but instead offering a third option that both exposes injustice and creates an opportunity for reconciliation and forgiveness.
2. If the Pharisees and scribes had only wanted to hear Jesus' position on adultery, they could have asked him, but since they are out to embarrass Jesus in front of the people, they bring the woman along in an attempt to force Jesus to take a stand directly.

[[@Bible:john 8:4-5]]John 8:4-5

1. The law referred to by the Pharisees is found in Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22-24.
2. The Pharisees mention that she was caught "in the act" because the rules around this were so strict that several witnesses had to actually see the actual adultery and then give completely consistent information in order to convict someone of this crime. Because of this, it was very rare for someone to actually be sentenced to death for adultery.
3. Since the woman was arrested in the act, the Pharisees should also have arrested the *man* with whom the woman committed adultery. After all, the law of Moses is clear that he should also be punished. But since the man was not arrested, it shows that the Pharisees were out to shame Jesus rather than obey the Law of Moses.
4. It is only in the case when a "*betrothed virgin"* commits adultery that the Law of Moses explicitly says that those who have committed this adultery shall be "stoned". This shows us that God considers it just as wrong to have sex before marriage as to be unfaithful outside of marriage.
5. Since it was so difficult to convict someone of adultery, which is also to be carried out by stoning, it is a reasonable conclusion that the Pharisees have lured a young girl into a deliberate trap. They spied on her, followed her and then, in order to get more witnesses, watched her having sex with the man in question. All this they have done in order to lure Jesus into a trap.
   1. Perhaps the man who committed the adultery belonged to the Pharisees, given that he was never arrested?
6. Since the Pharisees undeniably already knew what the Law of Moses said about adultery (they have just told Jesus), it is not a humble question that the Pharisees want answered, but a trap to frame Jesus.

[[@Bible:john 8:6]]John 8:6

1. By the fact that the Pharisees did not arrest the man with whom the woman committed adultery, the Pharisees are also violating the Law of Moses.
   1. The Pharisees in this case are not the least bit interested in obeying the law of Moses, but only in luring Jesus into a trap that will lead to the people abandoning him and the Romans executing him.
2. It is difficult to know exactly why Jesus bowed down and what he wrote on the ground, but if I may make a personal interpretation, I think it may be due to the following:
   1. Jesus has no desire whatsoever to answer the Pharisees' question because they are embarrassing themselves, the woman and Jesus.
   2. Jesus doesn't respond directly because he doesn't play the Pharisees' game and doesn't get angry at their attempts to entrap him. Instead, Jesus refrains from responding directly because the Pharisees would have to stand for a while and be ashamed of their sinful behavior.
   3. According to Roman law, the crime and punishment would be written down before the sentence was pronounced orally. Perhaps Jesus wrote down the crime the woman had committed according to the law of Moses and the punishment she should receive?

[[@Bible:john 8:7]]John 8:7

1. From a Jewish perspective, Jesus reveals that the Pharisees violate the Law of Moses at least as much as the woman. For according to the Law of Moses, those who witnessed the crime should throw the first stones (Deut 17:7), so when Jesus calls on them to come forward and throw the first stones, he reveals that they themselves have broken the Law of Moses because they did not also arrest the *man* with whom the woman committed adultery. If, on closer examination, it turns out that all is not well with this arrest, as there is much evidence to suggest, then these Pharisees themselves risk arrest for giving "false testimony", i.e. lying about what really happened. This means that, according to the Law of Moses, they would then receive the same punishment that they had intended for the person they accused; i.e. in this case, stoning to death! (Deuteronomy 19:16-19)
2. From a general human perspective, Jesus reveals the great problem of humanity: sin and judgment! Since we have all sinned, we should also all be judged! By wanting to condemn the adulteress for breaking the Law of Moses, the Pharisees indirectly admit that they themselves should also be condemned according to the Law of Moses. Faced with such a fact, most people would rather forgive than punish the one who has sinned because they are fully aware that they have sinned and should be punished.
   1. From this we can learn that we are all sinners in need of a Saviour. Before we condemn someone for a sin, we should consider that we ourselves are sinners too and would probably rather be forgiven than condemned. So if we want to be forgiven for the sin we have committed, we should reasonably also forgive those who have committed a sin against us. (Matt 6:12-15, Matt 7:12)
3. From a divine perspective, Jesus shows us that we should not judge one another because we have all sinned. If we judge someone else for a sin, we are indirectly judging ourselves because we are sinners too. The only one who is completely without sin is Jesus, and therefore the only one who could really have cast. But Jesus did not come to earth to condemn the world, but to save the world (John 3:17).

[[@Bible:john 8:8]]John 8:8

1. If Jesus had previously written the crime and punishment of the adulteress, he now writes the crime and punishment of her accuser. Thus they could see that they too are sinners and should receive the death penalty. By stoning this woman, they would confirm that they believe they themselves should receive the same punishment accordingly.

[[@Bible:john 8:9]]John 8:9

1. Since Jesus didn't say they couldn't stone the adulteress, he didn't go against the Law of Moses, but since they didn't throw a stone, he didn't offend the Romans either. The Pharisees wanted to lure Jesus into a trap and get either the Jews or the Romans to go against Jesus, but instead Jesus manages to make the Pharisees walk away in shame, unrepentant.
2. The oldest go away first, because they are the greatest sinners. They should know better and guide the younger ones.
   1. This teaches us that there is always hope, even for the most hardened Pharisees. They understood that they too were sinners, and then there is the possibility of forgiveness.

[[@Bible:john 8:10-11]]John 8:10-11

1. After all her accusers have left, there is no one left to judge her. Since the witnesses were required to throw the first stone, Jesus could not throw a stone either.
2. Jesus is full of both "grace and truth" (John 1:14). Jesus knew that she had sinned and therefore told her *the truth*, but he also gave her *grace* from the sin she had committed.
   1. Merely giving grace without revealing the truth is counterproductive because it does not give anyone the opportunity to receive forgiveness for their sin and thus does not lead to a reverse life of sanctification. Simply revealing the truth without giving grace is also counterproductive because it only makes people feel condemned and bad and does not lead to a life of Christ's freedom and forgiveness.
3. Jesus forgives the adulteress's sins, but he also sends her away with the admonition not to continue sinning. Being forgiven does not mean that one can continue with the same sin, because then one shows that the forgiveness was not really that valuable.
4. As the adulteress is left alone with Jesus, she now experiences what Paul writes to the Christians in Rome, *"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* (Romans 8:1)
   1. Without Jesus, the woman would have been stoned to death for her sin, but with Jesus she is forgiven.

## John 21:1-14 - Jesus appears at the lake of Tiberias

[[@Bible:john 21:1]]John 21:1

1. This is the third time after Jesus' resurrection that Jesus appears to his disciples. Earlier, an angel had promised the disciples that they would meet Jesus in Galilee (Matthew 28:7).
2. Lake Tiberias is also known as Lake Gennesaret or the Sea of Galilee.

[[@Bible:john 21:2]]John 21:2

1. Seven of the disciples, two of whom are not mentioned by name, gather in Galilee to fish together.
   1. Peter was seen as the leader of the disciples and his name is mentioned first. But it is interesting that even those who are not mentioned by name get to meet Jesus.
      1. Similarly, there are many Christians who are never mentioned by name or become "famous". But they too get to meet Jesus just as much as the great famous leaders.

[[@Bible:john 21:3]]John 21:3

1. There seems to have been great uncertainty about the future among the disciples. The death and resurrection of Jesus must have made a very strong impression on the disciples, but now weeks had passed and they had not met Jesus for a long time. What about the future?
2. As Peter walked with Jesus, he and the other disciples were part of a community that seems to have been sustained by means other than work. For example, we know that there were many "who served them with what they had" (Luke 8:3).
   1. This sustaining community seems to have been greatly affected by the death of Jesus, and perhaps even dissolved. Now Peter does not seem to know how to support himself and his family, so he returns to his former occupation as a fisherman.
   2. It is understandable if Peter was uncertain about his future after Jesus' death and therefore returns to what he was doing before he met Jesus.
3. Anyone who has ever been out fishing knows that sometimes you go home empty-handed. No matter how good your fishing skills are, the fish don't always bite and it's not always possible to know exactly why. Anyone who wants to work as a fisherman needs to be aware of this. But at the same time, a fisherman must constantly try new methods until he finally gets his fish.
   1. In the same way, those who work to "fish people out" need to be aware that no matter how good an evangelist you are, and no matter how good the conditions, it doesn't always work.
   2. Anyone who wants to see long-term results must continue working faithfully and not become discouraged when things don't go as well as planned.
   3. If you want to become a good fisherman, you have to learn to try many new methods until you finally find the right one and get a big catch.
4. Anyone who has begun to serve God and work in the Lord's service knows that it is very difficult to go back to a normal job. Certainly, one is often tempted to give up when one does not get any "fish", but at the same time it is very difficult because one is experiencing the Lord's call.

[[@Bible:john 21:4-6]]John 21:4-6

1. In the midst of uncertainty, discouragement and frustration, they hear a voice calling from the shore.
2. Almost every time Jesus appears to the disciples after his resurrection, it is sudden and unexpected. This time they don't even understand that it's Jesus.
   1. It is also interesting to note that this time Jesus did not appear when the disciples were in prayer meeting or in the temple or synagogue. This time Jesus appeared when they were at work. From this we can learn that Jesus is interested in our whole life. Jesus wants to meet us not only on Sundays, but also on weekdays, at work, at the kitchen table, etc., etc.
3. It must have been very hard for experienced fishermen to have to admit that they hadn't caught any fish when Jesus asks if they have anything to eat.
   1. Jesus, of course, already knows the answer to his question, but wants the disciples to realize that it is frustrating and difficult to get "fish" without Jesus' clear instructions.
4. The advice that Jesus gives the disciples did not exactly follow any kind of "fishing logic". After all, you hardly get more fish if you cast the net on one side of the boat or the other.
   1. The tip that Jesus gives his disciples can only be given by someone who can supernaturally see where there are fish. Since this tip does not follow any kind of logic, it must be received with faith and trust that Jesus knows best.
5. When we work to reach new people with the gospel, we must always be prepared to change the way we work if we receive instructions from Jesus. We must always be prepared to reassess our vision if we find the Lord leading us in a different direction. We must always be prepared to try new methods if we are not reaching people in the usual way.
6. When Peter "went fishing" he went back to his old life before he met Jesus. Peter did not necessarily commit a "sin" when he did this, but this story shows us that he, who had a missionary calling on his life, did not do what was right either.
   1. When the disciples went their own way, they got no fish at all, but when they did as Jesus said, they got more fish than they could pull up! The difference between getting no fish at all and getting more fish than you can pull up is Jesus' guidance.
   2. Because of the connection between success and Jesus' instructions, it is imperative to seek God and ask for guidance when trying to reach new people with the gospel.
7. The great capture probably caused Peter to recall a similar event earlier in his walk with Jesus (Luke 5:1-11).

[[@Bible:john 21:7-8]]John 21:7-8

1. "The disciple whom Jesus loved" is most likely the apostle and evangelist John (John 13:23).
2. John is often careful to point out that he was ahead of Peter in understanding who Jesus is. When Jesus had risen, John writes that they both ran to the tomb, but that John "ran faster than Peter and came to the tomb first", although he stopped outside and let Peter go in first (John 20:4). John also wants to point out that he was the first to believe in Jesus' resurrection (John 20:8), and now he is ahead of Peter in understanding that it is Jesus who is standing on the shore and crying out.
   1. But just as at the tomb, John is the one who first sees and realizes, but Peter is the one who reacts. Peter seems more decisive and straightforward, while John is more insightful and thoughtful. Two people who undeniably complement each other quite well.
3. Peter's reaction when he realizes that it is Jesus waiting on the shore is to immediately drop everything he has at hand and throw himself into the water to be with Jesus as quickly as possible!
   1. Peter had previously fallen into sin and denied Jesus. Yet Peter did not want to stay away from the Lord.
   2. Whatever sin we may have fallen into, we should not let this prevent us from turning back to Jesus in haste when we come to our senses.

[[@Bible:john 21:9-11]]John 21:9-11

1. Sharing a meal was in biblical times, and still is, a sign of community. Cooking for others is a sign of service. All in all, Jesus shows Peter and the other disciples that he cares for them, wants to fellowship with them and is not afraid to serve his disciples.
2. 153 large fish plus a wet net probably weighed about 150 kg. To haul in such a heavy catch alone shows that Peter was powerful and strong as a quarryman.
3. The fact that John is careful to point out exactly how many fish there were and that the net did not break shows that he was an eyewitness, and that he was an experienced fisherman (Matthew 4:18-22).
4. Why does Johannes note that there were just 153 fish? Some ancient writers believed that there were only 153 different kinds of fish. The number of fish then becomes a symbolic figure that means that people from "all nations" throughout the world will believe the gospel and be saved.

[[@Bible:john 21:12-14]]John 21:12-14

1. Jesus shows his care and friendship for his disciples by offering them food. However, the disciples seem to have been caught up in the moment and remained silent. After all, it's not every day that you sit and eat food with the risen Jesus!
   1. The silent reaction of the disciples is not really so strange. Many of us would like to meet the risen Jesus and eat with him, but if that were to happen, we would probably be so impressed by Jesus' holiness that we would be unable to say anything sensible.
   2. Perhaps the disciples sat silently contemplating the fact that they had gone back to their old lives even though Jesus wanted them to go out and tell all the people about him. Maybe they sat silent because they were ashamed of the way Peter, for example, denied Jesus, or Thomas, who demanded proof of his resurrection. Whatever their reason for being silent, Jesus was still kind, inviting and ministering.
      1. No matter what sins we have committed in the past, it is never too late to turn back to Jesus!

# Acts

## Acts 1:1-5 - The Promise of the Holy Spirit

[[@Bible:acts 1:1]]Acts 1:1

1. Luke was a physician and one of Paul's co-workers on his missionary journeys (Colossians 4:14) and authored both the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles (Luke 1:1-4).
   1. In the Gospel of Luke, Luke wrote what Jesus did here on earth; in Acts, Luke writes what Jesus *continues to* do through his disciples.
   2. What Luke describes Jesus doing is found in Luke 24.
2. Theophilus means "friend of God" and theologians dispute whether this Theophilus was a real person or whether the name is symbolic. One possibility is that Theophilus was real and that Luke gratefully used his name to address not only Theophilus personally but all the friends of God.
   1. Since Acts ends with Paul waiting to be tried before the emperor (Acts 28:19), Luke and Acts could be defensive writings to show the emperor that the Christian message was not dangerous for Rome. Theophilus could then be the Roman official who handled the matter.
   2. Theophilus may well have been an early house church leader who had sufficient financial resources to take on the responsibility of copying and distributing the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts.
3. Most English translations say "all that Jesus *began* to do and teach".
   1. In Luke's first writing, the Gospel of Luke, we can read about what Jesus *began to* do, and Acts is the continuation of what Jesus is doing today.
   2. This scripture is normally called "the works of the apostles", but it could just as well be called "the works of the Holy Spirit", because it is really He who does a lot of things through the apostles.
   3. As we, the disciples of Jesus today, obey the Great Commission, we continue to write chapters in the book of Acts. The Holy Spirit is at least as active today as He was 2000 years ago and it is up to us to seek His will.
      1. At first glance, it may seem that Acts is full of miracles and signs, and it is easy to despair and think that God never does miracles today. However, it should be remembered that the book of Acts depicts a period of 30 years and that all these miracles are scattered over time.

[[@Bible:acts 1:4-5]]Acts 1:4-5

1. One could say that the first word in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) is "wait", not "go".
   1. To be a witness of Jesus without the power of the Holy Spirit is like trying to *sail without wind*. Being a *witness of* Jesus is not something we can do in our own strength, so we need to receive this power from the Holy Spirit before we go out into the world.
   2. If you feel unmotivated to testify about your faith, or if you back off because you don't know what to say, it may be because you need to be filled with the Holy Spirit.
   3. The Christian life is so structured that it is not possible to manage a holy life or to obey the missionary command without being filled with the Holy Spirit.
2. In the same way that one is completely enveloped and immersed in water when one is baptized, one is completely filled and enveloped in the Holy Spirit when one is baptized in the Spirit.
3. In Old Testament times, only certain chosen people were filled with the Holy Spirit, but here Joel's ancient prophecy is fulfilled that there will come a time when everyone can be filled with God's Spirit (Joel 2:28-32), something Moses prayed for (Numbers 11:29) and Jesus promised (Luke 24:49).
   1. No distinction is made between apostles, disciples, women or men. ALL were filled with the Holy Spirit. Or as Paul wrote: *"Here is not Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. You are all one in Christ Jesus."* (Gal 3:28).
4. All who believe in Jesus are born again of the Spirit of God (John 3:1-8), and receive the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 12:13). In addition to this, all believers can also be filled anew with the Spirit of God over and over again (Acts 4:8, Acts 4:31, Acts 6:3, Acts 6:5, Acts 7:55, Acts 9:17, Acts 13:9, Acts 13:52).
   1. The difference between the two is that the one who is born again by the Spirit of God is saved and the one who is filled with the Spirit of God is given power and courage to testify about Jesus.

## Acts 1:6-11 - The Ascension of Jesus

[[@Bible:acts 1:6]]Acts 1:6

1. The Jewish people, and thus Jesus' disciples, expected that when the Messiah came, he would deliver Israel from the Romans and become king over Israel (Luke 19:11, Luke 24:21, John 6:15).
   1. The first time Jesus came to earth, he came to suffer and die for humanity (Mark 10:45).
   2. When Jesus comes back a second time, he will reign as king over the whole world (Rev 20).

[[@Bible:acts 1:7-8]]Acts 1:7-8

1. In the Old Testament, there is a close connection between the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the restoration of Israel, so it is not surprising that the disciples ask this question after Jesus has spoken about the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-3:1).
2. Jesus does not say that the disciples are wrong in their question, but emphasizes that they should stop thinking about when Israel will be restored and focus on the mission; to bear witness to Jesus everywhere on earth.
3. Jesus wants the disciples to lift their eyes and stop thinking only about Israel and go out into the whole world to preach the message of Jesus (Matt 28:19, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:47, John 17:18).
4. The "power" that the disciples ask for is a political and worldly power, but the power that Jesus refers to is a "spiritual" power with a special purpose: to be Jesus' witnesses and to spread the gospel throughout the earth.
   1. Being a witness of Jesus is not an order from Jesus but rather an effect of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Thus, if one wants to be a witness of Jesus, one should ask to be filled with the Holy Spirit.
   2. Historically, when the Church has become rich and large, there has always been a temptation to use that power politically.
5. Where it says "witness" in English, it says "martys" in Greek.
   1. To be a martyr is to be a witness of Jesus, whether you are executed for your faith or not.
6. The Acts of the Apostles in general follows the same geographical pattern that Jesus is telling us about here; Acts 1-7 is about the gospel in Jerusalem, Acts 8-12 is about the gospel in Judea and Samaria, Acts 13-28 is about the gospel in the rest of the world.
   1. One can imagine that the disciples had many objections to the places Jesus mentioned: in Jerusalem Jesus was crucified (Mark 10:33), in Samaria lived the Samaritans, the Jews' enemies (John 4:9), and at the ends of the earth lived Gentiles with whom the Jews did not want to have fellowship (Galatians 1:12). Jesus challenges his disciples to forgive and turn the other cheek.

[[@Bible:acts 1:9]]Acts 1:9

1. Just as Jesus took off from the Mount of Olives and disappeared among the clouds to take his rightful place at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56, Hebrews 12:2), so he will return to the Mount of Olives (Zech 14:4) among the clouds (Dan 7:13, Mark 14:62, Revelation 1:7) to reign on earth as well (Revelation 20:4).
2. The disciples had had the luxury of getting to know Jesus personally, but now no longer have that opportunity (2 Corinthians 5:16). From now on, the disciples can begin to know the Holy Spirit.
3. It was better for the disciples that Jesus went away among the clouds because then he could send the Holy Spirit to them (John 16:7). The Holy Spirit will teach and remind the disciples of all that Jesus has taught (John 14:26).

## Acts 1:12-26 - Matthias Chosen to Replace Judas

[[@Bible:acts 1:12]]Acts 1:12

1. In the Gospels, we see the disciples quarrelling with each other (Luke 22:24) and fighting against Jesus (Mark 8:32). Now, instead, the disciples are *obedient, united and praying together,* three very good qualities for a Christian congregation.

[[@Bible:acts 1:16]]Acts 1:16

1. Peter has long been the president of the disciples (Matthew 19:27) and Jesus had even appointed him as shepherd of Jesus' sheep (John 21:16).
2. Peter refers to Ps 69:26 and Ps 109:8.

[[@Bible:acts 1:18]]Acts 1:18

1. Matthew writes that Judas hanged himself (Matt 27:5) while Luke writes that he fell forward, who is right? If Judas hanged himself but the tree branch broke and he fell forward, both versions are correct.

[[@Bible:acts 1:21-22]]Acts 1:21-22

1. The twelve apostles had a very important role in the beginning of Jesus' mission and therefore these demands were made on the new apostle.
   1. Some believe that Paul should have been the twelfth apostle, but that would not be possible because he did not meet the requirements.
2. The twelve apostles will sit on twelve thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28).
3. The apostle's primary role was to bear witness to the "resurrection". In the same way, we Christians today can bear witness to the fact that Jesus is alive and show how he has a living role in our lives today.

[[@Bible:acts 1:26]]Acts 1:26

1. Casting lots and then assuming that God leads was a common Jewish practice (Proverbs 16:33).
2. This is the first and last time we hear about Matthias in the Bible.

## Acts 2:1-13 - The Coming of the Holy Spirit

[[@Bible:acts 2:1]]Acts 2:1

1. Pentecost was one of the three great pilgrimage festivals when all Jewish men went up to Jerusalem. Pentecost is also known as the "Feast of Weeks" because the feast took place 7 weeks (50 days) after Passover. The name "Pentecost" comes from the Greek word "pentekoste" which means "50".
2. Pentecost was also called the "harvest festival". Because the first harvest was celebrated (Leviticus 23:15-22).
   1. On the Day of Pentecost, "about 3,000" were the first to be saved and thus became "the first harvest".
   2. According to Paul, we have received the Spirit as the "firstfruits" and just as the first harvest was a foretaste for the farmer of what is to come, so the Spirit is a foretaste of what we will eventually receive in full (Rom 8:23).
3. Pentecost, according to Jewish tradition, was also called the "Birthday of the Law" and was celebrated to commemorate Moses receiving the Law from God on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19-20). The English translation "Law" comes from the Hebrew word "torah" which actually means "teaching" or "instruction".
4. There are many parables and parallels between the giving of the Law and the giving of the Spirit:
   1. At the Old Testament Pentecost, God's people received the Law at Sinai; at the New Testament Pentecost, God's people received the Spirit in Jerusalem. According to Isaiah, God's torah/teaching is to proceed from Jerusalem and God Himself will teach us His ways (Isa 2:3). God teaches both through his Word, but also through the Spirit.
   2. At Sinai, God appeared in smoke and flames of fire (Exodus 20:18); on the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit appeared through storms and tongues of fire.
   3. At Sinai, "about 3,000 men" died (Ex 32:28); on the Day of Pentecost, "about 3,000" were saved (Acts 2:41).
   4. At Sinai, the Law was written with God's finger on tablets of stone (Exodus 31:18). God told the prophet Jeremiah that *"I will put my law within them and write it on their hearts"* (Jer 31:31-34) and to the prophet Ezekiel *"I will give you a new heart and a new spirit will enter into you. I will remove the heart of stone from your body and give you a heart of flesh. "*At Sinai, then, the Law was written on tablets of stone, while at Pentecost the Law was written on the heart by the Spirit coming to each one (2 Corinthians 3:3).
   5. At Sinai, the Law was given to the people as a whole and communicated to the people through priests. On the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit was given to all and opened up the possibility for each and every person to have their own personal relationship with God and God's Word/Law/instructions/will without a "priest" or "mediator" standing in between. The Holy Spirit teaches us and reminds us of all that Jesus has said (John 14:26).

[[@Bible:acts 2:2-3]]Acts 2:2-3

1. When Moses received the Law on Mount Sinai, "the Lord descended on the mountain in fire" and Sinai was surrounded by clouds, lightning and thunder (Exodus 19:16-18), on the Day of Pentecost the Spirit comes in a violent storm and with tongues of fire. At Sinai the people were not allowed to come too close to God (Ex 19:21), but on the Day of Pentecost God comes close to man.
2. Many times in the Old Testament, fire symbolizes the presence of God (Exodus 3:2, Exodus 13:32, Exodus 19:18, Deuteronomy 4:24).
3. According to Malachi, God is like a goldsmith who purifies his people in "fire" (Mal 3:3). According to John the Baptist, Jesus would baptize in the Holy Spirit and in fire, in other words, purify his people so that they can enter the kingdom of God. For those who belong to the Lord, the fire of God is purifying, but for those who do not belong to the Lord, the fire is consuming.
4. It is probably no coincidence that the Spirit came in the context of a "storm" because "spirit" in both Hebrew and Greek is the same word as "wind".

[[@Bible:acts 2:4]]Acts 2:4

1. In Old Testament times, only certain chosen people were filled with the Holy Spirit, but here Joel's ancient prophecy is fulfilled that there will come a time when everyone can be filled with God's Spirit (Joel 2:28-32), something Moses prayed for (Numbers 11:29) and Jesus promised (Luke 24:49).
   1. No distinction is made between apostles, disciples, women or men. ALL were filled with the Holy Spirit. Or as Paul wrote: *"Here is not Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. You are all one in Christ Jesus."* (Gal 3:28).
2. All who believe in Jesus are born again of the Spirit of God (John 3:1-8), and receive the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 12:13). In addition to this, all believers can also be filled anew with the Spirit of God over and over again (Acts 4:8, Acts 4:31, Acts 6:3, Acts 6:5, Acts 7:55, Acts 9:17, Acts 13:9, Acts 13:52).
   1. The difference between the two is that the one who is born again by the Spirit of God is saved and the one who is filled with the Spirit of God is given power and courage to testify about Jesus.
3. All the disciples, not just the apostles, miraculously begin to speak languages they do not know. Here Jesus' promise is fulfilled (Mark 16:17).
   1. In the beginning, when all people spoke the same language, God forbade their language, so that they could not understand one another (Genesis 11:1-9). Now this is happening again, but in reverse.
   2. The fact that the disciples begin to speak foreign languages indicates that the gospel is for all peoples, not just the Jewish people.
   3. Even today, Jesus' disciples can receive this gift of speaking in a foreign language (1 Corinthians 12:10, 1 Corinthians 12:28).
   4. Speaking in tongues can mean, on the one hand, receiving the gift of being able to miraculously speak a foreign language, but it can also mean receiving a language that only God understands (1 Corinthians 14:2) that you pray in your spirit (1 Corinthians 14:14) in order to build yourself up (1 Corinthians 14:4).

[[@Bible:acts 2:6]]Acts 2:6

1. During the Feast of Pentecost, many of the Jews living in other countries gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the feast; they now hear the disciples speaking in their own language.
2. The people's response to the disciples' tongues is either to ask the curious question "What could this mean?" or to mock. Still today, people react the same way to the tongues.

## Acts 2:14-41 - Peter’s Sermon at Pentecost

[[@Bible:acts 2:14]]Acts 2:14

1. Peter was often the spokesman for the disciples (Matthew 19:27).
2. There is a big difference between Peter before and after he was filled with the Holy Spirit. Before he didn't even dare to confess his faith in front of a little girl, now he confesses publicly in front of all Jerusalem (Mark 14:66-68).
   1. In the same way, we too can have the courage today to share our faith in Jesus when we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

[[@Bible:acts 2:16]]Acts 2:16

1. Being filled with the Spirit often leads to opening your Bible and starting to teach.
2. Peter quotes Joel 2:28-32 and declares that this prophecy has now been fulfilled.

[[@Bible:acts 2:17]]Acts 2:17

1. With Jesus, the last days have begun (1 Peter 1:20). When Jesus came the first time, he came as the suffering servant who died for humanity. When Jesus comes the second time, he will come in power and glory. The disciples found it hard to believe that Jesus would come twice, believing that the glory of Jesus would appear at his first coming (Acts 1:6).

[[@Bible:acts 2:21]]Acts 2:21

1. The "name of the Lord" is "YHWH" or "I am who I am" or "I Am" (Exodus 3:11-15).
2. Where in English it says "the Lord", in Hebrew it says "YHWH" in Joel 2:32, from which Peter quotes.
   1. When Paul quotes the same verse from Joel, he emphasizes that "if you therefore confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:9) Paul is saying that if you confess that Jesus is Lord/YHWH, you will be saved.
3. When the audience eventually asks Peter what they should do, he answers: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, that your sins may be forgiven you."
   1. Instead of saying "in the name of the Lord", Peter says "in the name of Jesus", which again links Jesus and the Lord/YHWH.

[[@Bible:acts 2:23]]Acts 2:23

1. After first explaining to his audience that Joel's prophecy has now been fulfilled, Peter shifts his focus to tell them about something even more important: the death and resurrection of Jesus.
2. The death of Jesus on the cross was not a failure or a coincidence, but a fixed plan.
3. Even though the people of Israel were involved in the crucifixion, there is now a chance for repentance, even those who killed Jesus are offered forgiveness! No matter what sins we carry, we can always turn around, go to Jesus and ask for forgiveness.

[[@Bible:acts 2:25]]Acts 2:25

1. Peter quotes Psalm 16:8-11 but says that this psalm cannot be about David because David is dead.
2. God promised David that he would have a descendant on the throne, now Peter tells us that this descendant is Jesus (2 Sam 7:11-16).

[[@Bible:acts 2:34]]Acts 2:34

1. Here Peter quotes Psalm 110:1, the most quoted verse from the OT in the NT.
2. Just before his death, Stephen saw Jesus at God's right hand in heaven (Acts 7:54-56).
3. For more on this topic, see my commentary on Mark 12:35-37.

[[@Bible:acts 2:37]]Acts 2:37

1. When the people see the disciples speaking in tongues, they react either by not understanding or by mocking. It is only when Peter begins to preach about the crucified Jesus that the people want to repent.
2. Peter has not exactly tried to flatter his audience and then, at the end of his sermon, to have a show of hands and an invitation to salvation. Instead, Peter has explained to his audience that they are guilty of killing God's Messiah. Despite this harsh message, the people still respond in this way. It certainly seems that it is the Holy Spirit who proves to them that they have done wrong and urges them to repent (John 16:7-8).
   1. In the same way, we should be aware today that if we try to flatter people into becoming Christians, they will build their house on sand (Matthew 7:24-27). It is better to leave everything and radically follow Jesus instead of believing from a distance (Luke 14:26-27).
3. When Peter tried to save Jesus in Gethsemane with a sword, he only managed to cut off the ear of a servant (Mark 14:47). When Peter uses the sword of the Spirit instead (Ephesians 6:17), people want to be saved. When we Christians use the power of the world to spread Christianity, it will only result in people not wanting to listen with their ears, but when we use the sword of the Spirit and preach about Jesus, then the Holy Spirit will bring people to repentance.

[[@Bible:acts 2:38]]Acts 2:38

1. Since man has turned away from God, it is not possible to come to God unless one first turns back. To repent means to realize that one has gone wrong, to change the direction of one's life and to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.
   1. John the Baptist, Jesus and Peter all preached that repentance is the first step into the kingdom of God (Matthew 3:2, 4:17).
2. Being baptized is the visible sign of repentance and the beginning of the new repentant life.
3. Being baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ" involves believing that Jesus is the crucified and risen "Lord and Messiah" just described by Peter (Acts 2:36) and entering into the authority of Jesus.
4. Once one is saved, all one's sins are forgiven, they are no more (Jer 1:18, Jer 31:34).
5. Everyone who chooses to believe in Jesus is born again of the Holy Spirit (John 3:1-8), and receives the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 12:13).

[[@Bible:acts 2:41]]Acts 2:41

1. The congregation grew from 120 members to about 3000 in one fell swoop! Another 5,000 men came to faith a little later (Acts 4:4), and still a little later there were tens of thousands of Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 21:20) and many priests also joined the faith in Jesus (Acts 6:7).
2. The Roman historian Tacitus estimated that Jerusalem had a population of about 600,000 around 66 AD, so the Jesus movement must have been a significant part of the city's population.
3. Many of those who came to faith were in Jerusalem as pilgrims and eventually returned to their hometowns, where they could share their new faith in Jesus and thus prepare the ground for the missionary journeys of Paul and the other apostles.

## Acts 2:42-47 - The Fellowship of the Believers

[[@Bible:acts 2:42]]Acts 2:42

1. Pentecost began with the disciples praying to God, continued with them being filled with the Spirit, which in turn led to Peter preaching about the crucified Jesus, which in turn led to 3000 being saved, which in turn led to this. What an amazing day!
2. The apostles were commissioned by Jesus to teach what Jesus has commanded (Matthew 28:20). The apostles' teachings are preserved today as the New Testament.
3. The fellowship that exists between Christians is more than just "having a good time" together, it is a fellowship formed by the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:13).
4. It was common in the Jewish community to eat together as a sign of fellowship and friendship. It was in such a communal meal that Jesus instituted the Eucharist. Christians continued to eat together as a sign of fellowship and celebrated the Eucharist in this meal as well. (See 1 Corinthians 11:17-34).
5. The disciples followed the appointed Jewish prayer times (Acts 3:1) but also prayed spontaneously together (Acts 4:24).

[[@Bible:acts 2:43]]Acts 2:43

1. Although God is love and the Christian community is wonderful, there is also a seriousness to the Christian faith. God is fearsome and his presence can make the mightiest man tremble like an aspen leaf (2 Chronicles 20:29).

[[@Bible:acts 2:44-45]]Acts 2:44-45

1. This different way of being a church was unique to the Jerusalem church and was probably due to the fact that they were convinced that Jesus would return shortly (2 Peter 3:9) and that many of the new disciples were from other countries and were in need of financial support if they were to remain in Jerusalem.
2. This community of property was voluntary (Acts 5:4) and shows how extremely self-sacrificing the first Christians were. The well-being of other people became more important than their own well-being.

[[@Bible:acts 2:46-47]]Acts 2:46-47

1. The first Christians had a wonderful daily community that included prayer, joy and food. As a result, they praised God, were loved by the people around them and people were saved every day.
2. It was God Himself who saw to the growth of the church.
3. The fact that the Christians were in the temple every day and that they were loved by the people shows that they were still regarded by others and themselves as an intra-Jewish movement.

## Acts 3:1-10 - The Lame Beggar Healed

[[@Bible:acts 3:1]]Acts 3:1

1. Today's division between Judaism and Christianity did not exist in the same way this early in history. The first Christians were Jews and continued with their Jewish culture and religiosity as long as it did not clash with the new covenant (Gal 2:11-14). For example, the first Christians often gathered in the temple (Acts 2:46).
2. Normally, many Jews gathered for prayer in the Temple three times a day: in the morning, at the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.), and at dusk (Exodus 29:38-39). The reason that 3:00 p.m. is referred to as the "ninth hour" is because the Romans began counting the day from sunrise.
   1. The first and the last prayer meeting in the temple included a sacrifice and it is interesting that Peter and John choose to go to the prayer meeting when there is *no* sacrifice. Jesus has presented himself as a sin offering and therefore no more sin offerings are needed (Heb 10:11-18).
   2. This is a good example of how the first Christians lived in their Jewish culture and religiosity as long as it did not clash with the new covenant; they attended the common Jewish prayer but refrained from participating in the unnecessary sin offering because they had already had all their sins forgiven.
   3. In the same way, we should also reflect today on what it is in our culture that clashes with the New Covenant and our Christian faith. This should always be an ongoing topic of conversation in the Christian community. One does not have to stop being Swedish just because one has become a Christian, one can well continue with one's Swedish customs and traditions, but one needs to critically examine one's culture and consider whether there is anything that is ungodly and cannot be reconciled with the Christian faith.

[[@Bible:acts 3:2]]Acts 3:2

1. There were several gates into the temple of Jerusalem and this was probably the eastern gate of the temple leading from the court of the women to that of the Gentiles.
2. The lame man's situation was hopeless. He was over 40 years old (Acts 4:22), had been paralyzed from birth and was totally dependent on other people. However, the paralytic man has resigned himself to his situation and did not expect a miracle.
3. The man asks Peter and John for some money to live on with his disability. However, God doesn't just want to *ease* our situation, he wants to *restore* our situation. It is not God's will that we humans should merely receive a little help so that we can survive another day in our miserable situation, no God wants to restore, heal and completely free us from our troubles!

[[@Bible:acts 3:5]]Acts 3:5

1. The lame man expected to get some money, but God wanted to give him something much bigger and better; a healing!
   1. God is so much more good and loving than we can understand and often we expect far too little from him. God *wants to* bless and heal us, but often we settle for something much less than what God really wants to give us.
   2. According to Ephesians, God has blessed us Christians with "all the blessings of the heavenly world" (Eph 1:3) and we need to lift our eyes and pray to receive what God wants to give us.
   3. Sometimes I think that we Christians sometimes put ourselves in the hopeless position of the lame man and do not expect the miracles that God really wants to give us. It would be a great pity if we missed out on a lot of God's blessings just because we didn't believe enough about God.
   4. Even though the lame man didn't really expect healing, God gave him healing anyway! Even if our faith is not always enough, God can still bless us. Sometimes it's easy to feel pressure and force yourself to "believe you'll be healed" so that you end up feeling bad, and that's not God's intention.

[[@Bible:acts 3:6]]Acts 3:6

* 1. Unfortunately, there is a misconception among some Christians that wealth means being blessed by God. Fortunately, however, God's blessing is not about getting rich, but about receiving restoration and healing of spirit, body and soul.
     1. According to Jesus, the believer never has to worry about money; God cares for those who belong to him and will give us everything we need (Matthew 6:24-34).
  2. Peter could, if he had money, have given the lame man a few crowns and thus eased the man's predicament a little, but then the man would have been back as a beggar the next day and the situation would have remained the same.
     1. Peter is not content to simply ease the man's situation, but instead wants to free him completely from his disability so that he has a chance at a new life!
  3. Of course, it is not wrong to give money to beggars or in any other way to ease a difficult situation, it is always good to help. But we as Christians must remember that God wants something much bigger and better than just for the day to *ease* a miserable situation, God wants to completely remove the problem and instead *restore* each person and offer a new life!
     1. We Christians need to ask God for more faith in our lives and more of the power of the Holy Spirit in our prayers so that we can participate even more in God's restoration of all humanity.
  4. If you had to choose between being rich in *money* or rich in *heavenly blessings*, which would you choose?
     1. Today there are many churches and many Christians who might well say "we have silver and gold", but who are far from saying "in the name of Jesus Christ, the Nazarene, arise and walk!". Perhaps it is time to re-evaluate what is most important?
  5. Even today, Christians are called "Nazarene" in Israel.
  6. Peter himself had received the power of Jesus and was therefore able to pass it on (Acts 1:8, Acts 2:1-4).
     1. Anyone can't go around ripping disabled people out of their wheelchairs and assume that God will heal them. Imparting God's power means that you have also in some way shared in God's power.
     2. Paul urges all Christians to *seek the spiritual gifts* (1 Corinthians 14:1), and if you want to do what Peter did, you should ask God for one of these spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4-11).
     3. If one were to necessarily speculate about what spiritual gift Peter had received and used on this occasion, I would personally believe that he had received the *gift of healing the sick,* but also the *gift of faith.* Surely the lame man was healed and cured of his disability so that gift was somehow in use. But the astonishing way that Peter *knew* by faith that this particular man would be healed suggests that Peter also received the gift of faith.
        1. However, it must not be forgotten that the Holy Spirit dwells in every Christian and it is the Holy Spirit who possesses all the gifts and he can of course impart them as he wishes (1 Cor 12:11). So even if one has not been given the gift of healing the sick, every Christian can still pray for the sick and allow the Holy Spirit to heal. Receiving the *gift of* healing the sick is about God using that particular gift in a clearer way.
  7. In our Western culture, names are mostly just a figure of speech, but in the Middle East of biblical times, a name was much more than just a figure of speech. When a biblical person was involved in something big and significant, God sometimes gave them a new name to mark the new life that was beginning.
     1. Jacob (=he who holds the heel) is given the new name Israel (=he struggles with God) after he has wrestled with God (Genesis 32:28).
     2. Simon (=hearing of prayer) receives the new name Peter (=clip) after he has confessed that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God (Matt 16:17-18).
  8. Jesus means "*God saves"* and Christ means *"the Anointed One".* When we believe that Jesus is the Christ, we share in God's salvation and thus share in Jesus' name.
     1. No wonder the first Christians were delighted when people began to call Jesus' disciples "Christians" (Acts 11:26, 1 Peter 4:16), because that meant that they also shared in God's salvation. Calling oneself a "Christian" means identifying oneself with Jesus Christ and belonging to him.
  9. Using the name of Jesus Christ in the way Peter does here can be likened to a *signature.* If I, as a police officer, come to a house with a search warrant signed by a police chief, then by law I may conduct a search. But if the document is not signed, I cannot enter the house. The police officer who is going to carry out the search uses the authority of the chief of police and is therefore authorised to carry out the search. In the same way, Peter can heal the lame man in the name of Jesus because Peter uses the authority of Jesus. No man can miraculously heal someone who is sick by himself, but Jesus can, and if Jesus gives us his authority, we can heal the sick in the name of Jesus (Luke 9:1-2, Mark 16:17, John 14:13).
     1. However, it is important to remember that the name of Jesus is not some magic spell with which you end your prayer to ensure that you really get an answer.

[[@Bible:acts 3:7]]Acts 3:7

1. Often a healing comes in connection with some kind of "act of faith", i.e. doing something in faith that one cannot really do. On this occasion, the lame man's legs are strengthened as Peter raises him up. Some other examples of this are:
   1. Jesus calls the *lame man* to *stand up* (Mark 2:11).
   2. Jesus invites the man with a *withered hand* to *stretch it out* (Mark 3:5).
   3. When the woman with hemophilia *touches Jesus, believing that* she can be healed, she is healed (Mark 5:28-29).
   4. When the woman with a possessed daughter *does not leave Jesus* despite a seemingly dismissive response, Jesus heals her daughter (Mark 7:24-30).
   5. Jesus asks two blind men, *"Do you think I can do this?" They answered, "Yes, Lord." Then he touched their eyes and said, "As you believe, so shall it be done to you." And their eyes were opened. "*(Matthew 9:28-30).

[[@Bible:acts 3:8]]Acts 3:8

1. Before, the lame man's situation was *hopeless,* but now that he is healed, he *jumps* up and praises God. The man's situation is no longer hopeless ;)
2. We can learn many good things from the lame man's response to his healing: (1), the man *follows the apostles,* (2), the man *uses what God has given him*, and (3), the man *praises God.*
3. Isaiah prophesied many hundreds of years before this event that God himself will come to earth and save us humans and that "the lame man" will then "leap like a deer" (Isaiah 35:6). This prophecy is now being fulfilled concretely before the eyes of the people of Jerusalem.

[[@Bible:acts 3:9-10]]Acts 3:9-10

1. The lame man had been lame for 40 years and was well known to all those who used to go to the temple. No one could deny that there had obviously been a fantastic miracle!
   1. The people who recognized the man and realized that God had performed a miracle were *horrified* and *amazed*. A better response would have been for them to do as the lame man did; *praise God*!
   2. When you and I see God perform miracles, how do we react? Do we respond with skepticism, fear, disbelief or joy?
2. The man used to sit and beg at the Beautiful Gate, which most likely means that Jesus must have passed by the man when he entered the temple. Why didn't Jesus heal this man? Sometimes Jesus doesn't heal the sick when they don't believe in him (Mark 6:5-6), but it could also be that for some reason Jesus knew that the right time for the man's healing was when he got to see Peter. God knows when the right time for healing is, and sometimes we may need to wait for God's right time.

## Acts 6:1-7 - Seven Chosen to Serve

[[@Bible:acts 6:1]]Acts 6:1

1. Until Acts 5 and 6, the first church has held together. They have been persecuted, brought before the Great Council and scourged, but they have held together as "one heart and one soul" (Acts 4:32). But now the honeymoon is over and the first internal divisions are beginning within the Church.
   1. If the devil fails to stop the church from spreading the gospel, he will try to stop the church from within.
2. Both of these groups in the congregation were ethnically "Jews", but the native Jews were from Judea and Galilee while the Greek-speakers were from the Diaspora. At first, congregational life certainly worked well, but as time goes on, the differences become apparent.
   1. Paul's vision that in the church it should not matter whether one is a "Jew or a Greek" is shown here in practice (Gal 3:28).
   2. If you transfer the text to today, you can compare Swedes and immigrants. In theory, we all agree that it shouldn't matter if you're Swedish or an immigrant, but the more you live together, the clearer the differences become. To overcome this, we need to listen to the complaints and work on integration.
3. The first church had quickly grown to several thousand members (Acts 4:4) and they shared all their possessions in common (Acts 4:32). Many of the Greek-speaking Jews from the diaspora who had now become Christians were in Jerusalem primarily to celebrate Passover, but after they were saved and baptized, it seems that many of them stayed behind. To make sure that all parishioners had food for the day, they distributed food to all who needed it.
   1. Distributing food to widows and orphans was normally done by the priests in the temple, but for some reason Christians seem to think they need to do it too.
      1. In the same way, we as a church today should help socially vulnerable people. Even if it is the responsibility of the municipality, we need to help if the municipality is not enough or if someone falls through the cracks.
   2. In 1 Timothy 5:3-16 we see that the first Christians took care of their widows. But at the same time they were careful not to give help to just anyone. First of all, the family should help the one in need, but if there is no family left, the church needs to help.
4. For some reason, the Greek-speaking Jews felt that their widows did not receive the same treatment as the native Jews. Exactly what happened is not clear, but with such a rapidly growing congregation of several thousand members, it's not surprising if there's an organizational glitch somewhere.
   1. It was good of the Greek-speaking Jews to bring the problem to the attention of the leaders of the congregation. However, one should of course avoid "complaining" and instead go to the leaders directly and point out the problem and find a solution.
   2. In the same way, it is quite natural today that from time to time unintentional organizational mistakes occur in the work of the church.
      1. By pointing out the problem to the leaders, solutions can be found. Complaining risks creating division and resentment.

[[@Bible:acts 6:2-4]]Acts 6:2-4

1. The problem was unintentional and not the result of misconduct. But now that the apostles and disciples see the problem, they realize that they need to reorganize the food distribution.
   1. As a church leader, it is impossible to foresee every possible problem or change, but once a problem arises, it must be dealt with and the necessary changes made. You don't always get to choose which problems and situations you face, but once you do, you have to deal with them.
2. The apostles could have dealt with the complaints by ignoring the Greek-speaking Jews. Or they could have split into two congregations, one Hebrew-speaking and one Greek-speaking. But they didn't. Instead, the apostles' solution was to include more leaders in the ministry. If they had committed themselves to distributing food to the widows, they would have neglected the specific calling they themselves had received from Jesus. But by recognizing the problem and appointing new leaders to work on it, they resolved the situation in the best possible way.
   1. In a congregation, the pastor is not supposed to do everything. Rather, church leaders are supposed to "equip the saints to carry out their ministry of building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12). That is, church leaders are to help church members find and grow into a role in the church that suits them, so that they too can participate in building up the kingdom of God from the gifts and skills they have.
   2. It is my experience that those who see a need do so because God has placed that task on their heart and is calling them to enter into that ministry. So when someone complains about something in the church, a good leader should turn a person's complaint into trying to help that person into ministry and become part of the solution themselves.
3. It is clear that the apostles devoted a great deal of their time to the Bible and prayer. Pastors and church leaders today should be inspired by this and realize its importance. To be a church leader is not first and foremost to be a leader, manager or administrator, it is to be a worshipper and a preacher.
4. It is not stated in the text, but the ministry of these seven is described in other parts of the Bible as "deacons" or "ministers of the church" (1 Timothy 3:8-13).
5. The seven church servants were to be filled with "Spirit and wisdom", that is, they were to be both spiritual and good at their work. Having only one or the other will not be good, but the combination makes a good church leader!
   1. Although church work is practical, it is important to have a good spiritual character when entering into service for God.
   2. Perhaps the apostles thought that the servants of the church should work one day a week and that is why they chose seven?

[[@Bible:acts 6:5-6]]Acts 6:5-6

1. The whole assembly had to participate in the apostles' decision by confirming that their proposal was "good". Even if the whole assembly cannot decide, they can be involved in confirming.
2. The church itself had a part in appointing these seven church servants, but it was the apostles who separated them into service by praying and laying hands on them.
   1. A church leader does not need to do everything or have knowledge of everything, but he or she does need to take responsibility for everything.
3. All seven congregation servants have Greek names, so they were probably part of the Greek-speaking Jews who felt they had been overlooked by the Hebrew-speaking Jews. It was very wise of the apostles to appoint Greek-speaking Jews to this particular leadership.
4. This text shows us that such a practical and seemingly simple and unglamorous task as distributing food to widows was a spiritual task that needed intercession and separation from the apostles.
   1. In a similar way, Jesus set a good example by washing the feet of his disciples (John 13:1-5). Doing practical chores to help a fellow human being may well be a spiritual service and should not be belittled.
   2. Making coffee and spreading sandwiches for addicts or homeless people who visit the church is a corresponding spiritual service today that also needs intercession and spiritual wisdom. For what should the homeless face when they come to church? Well, not just coffee and sandwiches but also warmth, compassion, a Bible word, an encouragement, intercession and social help.

[[@Bible:acts 6:7]]Acts 6:7

1. If the devil's strategy was to divide the church and distract the apostles from the Word and the ministry of prayer, he failed miserably.
   1. Instead of distracted apostles and a fragmented congregation, the result was a better organised church, wise leaders, new church servants and continued successful growth. And what's more, a large number of ministers were saved!
2. There were probably about 8,000 priests and 10,000 Levites who took turns to serve at the temple.

## Acts 8:1-3 - The Church is Persecuted and Scattered

[[@Bible:acts 8:1]]Acts 8:1

1. Stephen's death was only the beginning of the persecution. This was the first persecution of Christians as a whole. Suffering and persecution is something that Christians throughout the ages have suffered and something we must learn to handle with love and forgiveness.
   1. In 1956, in the reality-based film *End of the Spear,* five missionaries go to the Waodani tribe in Ecuador, a tribe marked by blood vengeance. 60% of all deaths were due to murder. When the missionaries arrive, they are almost immediately murdered with spears. At a later date, the children and wives return to the dead missionaries to witness Jesus to the tribe. The new missionaries became good friends with the murderers and the gospel spread through the tribe. Today there are Bible schools, the tribe has stopped killing each other and many have become Christians.
   2. In Communist China there were thousands of Christians. The Communists knew that the Christians used to gather for services etc., so they decided to spread them out over the country. This created a missionary wave.
2. When Jesus left earth and returned to heaven, he commissioned the disciples to "*be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth.* " (Acts 1:8b)
   1. The disciples had not yet fulfilled this mission, apart from a great success in Jerusalem. For the time being, all the Christians on earth were in Jerusalem, and almost all of them were Jews.
   2. Without this persecution, might the Christians have been content with the comfortable life of the congregation in Jerusalem? Sometimes God needs to shake us up to get us out of our comfort zone and do what God has commissioned us to do (Romans 8:28).
3. The disciples were "scattered" in the same way that seeds are cast over the fertile soil to eventually grow up and produce a harvest.
   1. Around the year 200, the Church Father Tertullian wrote: "The *blood of the martyrs is the best seed of the Church".*

[[@Bible:acts 8:2]]Acts 8:2

1. Although there were hardened persecutors among the Jews, not all Jews wanted to participate in the persecution. Here we see that there were God-fearing Jews who obviously strongly disapproved of the persecution of Christians.

[[@Bible:acts 8:3]]Acts 8:3

1. This was a very difficult time for the early Christians. Paul was not content to persecute men, he also put women in prison.
   1. When he later became a Christian, he deeply regretted this terrible persecution of Christians. In Corinthians, Paul writes: *"For I am the least of the apostles. I am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I have persecuted the church of God."* (1 Corinthians 15:9)
   2. The sins we happily commit today, we will probably deeply regret in a few years.

## Acts 8:4-13 - Philip in Samaria

[[@Bible:acts 8:4]]Acts 8:4

1. Those who fled Jerusalem were not well-trained theologians, pastors, apostles or missionaries. Those who spread the message of Jesus were ordinary Christians fleeing for their lives.
   1. You don't have to be a trained and consecrated pastor to preach. The vast majority of people who become Christians don't become Christians because they heard a great sermon by a trained pastor. Most people become Christians because they hear about Jesus from a friend.

[[@Bible:acts 8:5]]Acts 8:5

1. Philip, like Stephen, was one of the deacons who served in the church in Jerusalem (Acts 6:5).
2. The Samaritans were a mixed people who emerged after the Assyrians defeated the northern tribes of Israel in the 6th century BC. The Assyrians displaced the wealthy Israelites to other parts of the Middle East and moved other peoples into Israel instead. These new peoples mingled with the poor Israelites who remained and eventually became *the Samaritans*.
   1. The Jews and the Samaritans hated each other. The Jews considered the Samaritans to be a half-Hebrew mixed race who worshipped God in the wrong way.
   2. The apostles James and John seem to have had little sympathy for the Samaritans and wanted to call down fire and God's judgment on them (Luke 9:51-56). Jesus, on the other hand, showed great love for the Samaritans when, for example, he talked to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) and when he told the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).
3. Despite the hatred and racism that existed between Jews and Samaritans, Philip preached Christ to the Samaritans. Because of the Holy Spirit's loving transformation, there was no longer any place for racism in Philip's heart.
4. Although Philip had not experienced a direct call to Samaria, God worked miracles there. Jesus had given all Christians a general call to go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the end of the world. When Philip does so, he and his work are blessed. You don't always have to wait to hear God's voice.
5. What did Philip preach about? Did he preach about the Virgin Mary? Did he preach about homosexuality? Did he preach about Israel? Did he preach about being kind to one another?
   1. No, Philip was preaching about *Jesus Christ*. It's very easy to wander off and talk about everything but Jesus. But Jesus must be our starting point and the center of our preaching. Everything else can be taught as we go along.
   2. If someone asks if you are a believer, it is often easier to say that you believe in "God" than to say that you believe in "Jesus". But we should not and need not be ashamed of the name Jesus (Romans 1:16).

[[@Bible:acts 8:6-7]]Acts 8:6-7

1. The success of Philip in Samaria may be due to the fact that Jesus had been in Samaria before, sowing. Now Philip gets to reap.
   1. You shouldn't get discouraged just because you don't see results immediately.
   2. You should also not be too happy if you see great results quickly.
2. What happens in Samaria follows a classic revival pattern where the gospel is preached first:
   1. Philip preached and prayed for the sick and possessed.
   2. God confirmed his word through healings and miracles.
   3. The church had unity and kept to the word of God.
   4. The demons fled.
   5. The city rejoiced.
3. In 1904, miner Evan Roberts preached to a small group of people in Wales. He challenged them to deepen their relationship with the Lord. Two months later, 70,000 people had been saved, and more than 100,000 six months later. The whole community was transformed because of it. Alcoholism was halved, judges were made idle.
   1. In the mid-19th century, Sweden was drinking itself to death on spirits. But thanks to the temperance movement and the Free Church revival, 100,000 people were saved and sobered up.

## Acts 8:26-40 - Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

[[@Bible:acts 8:26]]Acts 8:26

1. Philip was one of the seven deacons chosen in Acts 6:1-7.
2. It may seem strange that an angel of the Lord asks Philip to leave a very successful and fruitful missionary activity (Acts 8:4-13) to go out into a desolate wilderness.
   1. God always looks beyond us and always has a long-term plan. We need to trust that God knows what he is doing when he commands us to do things that may seem foolish from a purely human perspective.
      1. Humanly speaking, Philip should have stayed in Samaria and taken care of his successful missionary work, but God had other plans.
      2. In the same way, we Christians today need to learn to follow God's will when he calls us into something new. Perhaps he is asking us to leave a fruitful work to enter a desert where nothing seems likely to grow. Perhaps this seems humanly foolish, but if we are sure that it is God who is speaking, then we should obey, for God knows what he is doing.
   2. Sometimes we complicate the Christian life so much that we stop doing what God tells us to do.
3. God has saved large crowds by the thousands before in Acts (Acts 2:41, Acts 4:4), but now he directs Philip to save a single individual.
   1. There are few places where you can feel as alone as in a large congregation. But in this text we see that God cares very much about you as an individual. Although God also works with large contexts, he works just as much with individuals.
   2. If you were the pastor of a large church and God suddenly called you to move to a far away country to disciple just one person, would you move?

[[@Bible:acts 8:27-28]]Acts 8:27-28

1. Then "Ethiopia" is not quite the same as today's Ethiopia, but was a country also known as "Nubia" and lay between southern Egypt and Khartoum in Sudan.
2. "Kandace" was a title for the Ethiopian queen much as "Pharaoh" was a title for the Egyptian king.
3. The Ethiopian courtier was probably a cross between a "stranger who feared God" and a "Jewish proselyte". He had visited Jerusalem and was now sitting in his chariot on his way home, reading the Bible.
   1. It was when the courtier read the word of God that the way to God was opened to him.
4. The Ethiopian courtier was a successful man with great responsibility over the treasury of the Ethiopian queen.
   1. Even though the courtier was worthily successful, he still sought the answers to life's questions. Money and success can never fill the need for God that all people need.
5. The Ethiopian courtier was a *eunuch*, i.e. castrated. It was not uncommon for kings in biblical times to prefer servants who were eunuchs because they were more loyal to the king since they had no family. However, the title eunuch was sometimes applied even to court servants who were not castrated.
   1. Similarly, in some cases it may be easier to serve God if one is unmarried, because then one can devote all one's time and energy to serving God (1 Corinthians 7:25-40).
   2. Actually, eunuchs were forbidden to enter the "congregation of the Lord" (Deut 23:1), but according to Isaiah, eunuchs in the Messianic era will enjoy great blessings (Isa 56:3-5).

[[@Bible:acts 8:29]]Acts 8:29

1. In verse 26 it was an angel speaking to Philip and now it is the Spirit of God in verse 29. God can speak to us believers in many different ways:
   1. God speaks through the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16).
   2. God speaks through Christ (Heb 1:1-2).
   3. God speaks through nature and creation (Rom 1:20).
   4. God speaks through other believers (1 Corinthians 14:29).
   5. God speaks through his Spirit (John 14:26).
   6. God speaks through angels (Luke 1:26).
   7. God speaks in dreams (1 Kings 3:5).
2. Again, Philip is very responsive and obedient. He listens to the Spirit of God and does exactly as he says.
   1. Listening to the Spirit of God is not always easy and requires a certain amount of training. The biggest obstacle to hearing the Spirit of God is not listening. But once you start listening, it can be difficult to distinguish between your own thoughts and the voice of God. This requires training, practice and the help of Christians who are further along than you in this area. The best place to learn to listen to the Spirit of God is in the midst of the church, for example in a small prayer group. This gives you the opportunity to decide together whether the message you hear from God is consistent with the Bible and whether it is addressed to a particular person or is a message from God to yourself.

[[@Bible:acts 8:30-31]]Acts 8:30-31

1. In Bible times, reading aloud was common, and when Philip hears the courtier reading from the prophet Isaiah, he understands that God has sent him for this particular meeting.
   1. Sometimes, in our zeal, we can preach and witness to all sorts of people who come our way without seeing any results. But when God has prepared and opened up an opportunity for us to witness, all it takes is one little conversation and that person is ready to give their life to Jesus.
      1. For those who are passionate about evangelism, it is important not only to evangelize but also to ask God for open doors to people whom God has prepared.
2. Although it was obviously good that the courtier read the Bible, it did not help much because he did not understand the meaning of the text. The Bible is not always easy to understand and sometimes it is not enough to just tell people to read the Bible, you also need to be on hand to help explain what the texts mean.
   1. Similarly, it can sometimes be difficult to understand a sermon. Even if you try to listen, it is difficult to understand because the words and the way of preaching are unfamiliar and difficult to understand. As a preacher, it is important to speak so that the listeners you have understand what you are saying, otherwise preaching is pointless.
   2. As a Christian, you should not be afraid to ask for help in understanding the Bible. No one has a complete understanding of all the texts in the whole Bible, but it is together and with the help of each other that we can best understand the Bible.

[[@Bible:acts 8:32-33]]Acts 8:32-33

1. God had not only guided Philip to the Ethiopian courtier, he had also guided the courtier to read Isaiah 53, which speaks of the Messiah sacrificing himself for our sins.
   1. It's almost hard to find a more timely text from the Old Testament on which to base a conversation about Jesus and the cross!

[[@Bible:acts 8:34]]Acts 8:34

1. The centurion, like the twelve-year-old Jesus (Luke 2:46), had certainly talked to the teachers at the temple in Jerusalem and asked them who this text was really about. The teachers of the law had three different interpretations of this text:
   1. The suffering servant was the nation of Israel.
   2. The suffering servant was Isaiah himself.
   3. The suffering servant was the Messiah.

[[@Bible:acts 8:35]]Acts 8:35

1. An old well-known expression is *Christ is the star and the core of Scripture*, i.e. the whole Bible is about and points to Jesus Christ (Luke 24:27). Philip started from Isaiah 53:7-8, the text that the courtier read, and then explained more about who Jesus is.

[[@Bible:acts 8:36-38]]Acts 8:36-38

1. Before meeting Philip, the centurion was interested in God and wanted to understand more, but it is only after he hears about Jesus that he is ready to be baptised.
   1. It doesn't matter how many religious traditions you know or how much you read the Bible or how talented and successful you are, the only thing that matters to be saved is to hear about Jesus and give your life to him.
2. We don't know much about what Philip told the eunuch, but certainly he should have told him about baptism and its importance for the Christian faith.
3. Verse 37 is missing in most of the older manuscripts and has therefore been removed from the Swedish People's Bible and Bible 2000, but reads as follows freely translated from the KJV: *"And Philip said, If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."* 
   1. Although verse 37 does not belong to the original version of Acts but is a later addition, the message of the verse is important, i.e. that in order to be baptized it is important to truly believe in Jesus with all one's heart and confess one's faith (John 9:35-38, Matthew 14:33).
   2. There is a difference between believing in Jesus with your brain and with your heart. Even the devil knows who Jesus is, but he does not believe in Jesus with his heart (Matt 4:1-11, Jas 2:19, Matt 22:34-37).

[[@Bible:acts 8:39-40]]Acts 8:39-40

1. Philip and the eunuch "went down" into the water and "came up" out of the water. As far as possible, it is important that the whole body is immersed in the water when one is baptized because it symbolically shows the total surrender to Jesus.
   1. Baptism is sometimes likened to a funeral, i.e. burying one's old life and rising together with Jesus to a new life. It is important not to leave behind a little bit of the old life, but to give oneself completely to God (Col 2:12-13).
   2. One of the earliest Christian writings, Didache, writes this about baptism (chapter 7):
      1. *"Concerning baptism, baptize in this way: having first recited all these things, baptize in running water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. But if you have no running water, baptize in other water, and if you cannot baptize in cold water, baptize in hot water. And if you have neither, pour water on your head three times, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."*
         1. By "*running* water" is probably meant a river or similar. If there is no possibility to baptize in a river, e.g. because you happen to be in a desert or in prison, then you can baptize by pouring water on your head. The point is that, as far as possible, one should baptize by immersion, but if that is not possible, one must find other ways. The important thing is *that* you are baptised, not exactly *how it is* done.
2. The Holy Spirit "snatched away" Philip, i.e. suddenly and supernaturally moved him to another place.
   1. Although this sounds very strange to the average Christian, it did occur in the Bible.
      1. The disciples' boat suddenly arrived where they were going (John 6:21).
      2. Jesus suddenly stood in the midst of the disciples even though they had locked the door (John 20:19).
      3. All believers who are alive when Jesus returns will be "caught up among the clouds" (1 Thess 4:16-17).

## Acts 9:1-19 - The Conversion of Saul

[[@Bible:acts 9:2]]Acts 9:2

1. Paul, who had previously persecuted Christians in Jerusalem, now goes to the city of Damascus to persecute Christians there as well. Paul is backed by the religious Jewish elite in Jerusalem.
   1. The extreme religious zeal that Paul experiences can be extremely dangerous. Anyone who believes he is doing God's will can be prepared to do just about anything. There is nothing wrong with being religiously zealous, but one must consider what fruit one's zeal will bear. In this case, Paul's zeal leads to murder, persecution and violence. A more righteous religious zeal would lead to evangelism, helping the poor, building hospitals, leading people to salvation, etc.
2. The first Christians did not call their faith "Christianity" but "the Way" (Acts 16:17, 18:25-26, 19:9, 19:23, 22:4, 24:14, 24:22, 2 Peter 2:2). Jesus also called himself "The Way" (John 14:6), which shows the clear affinity between Jesus and his disciples.
   1. The Greek word for "way" is "hodos" and has its counterpart in the Hebrew expression "halakha". Both of these words can also mean "walk", "conduct" or "way of life".
   2. God does not want man to go "his own way" but "God's way" by obeying God's commands. In the Old Testament, going God's way means that the people of Israel were to live in covenant with God and obey the law that God gave Israel through Moses. Going God's way in the New Testament means that all people should obey God's commands by believing in Jesus. Israel obeys God's commands to Moses by listening to Jesus' teaching because Jesus is the one who proclaims the law of Moses correctly.
   3. The one who goes "astray" is the one who perverts the "straight paths of the Lord" and risks being struck blind (Acts 13:10-11). The one who wants to walk in God's straight path should instead "prepare the way for the Lord" and make "the paths straight before him" (Luke 3:4).

[[@Bible:acts 9:3-6]]Acts 9:3-6

1. The road between Jerusalem and Damascus is about 24 miles and takes about four to six days. In the middle of the day, when the sun is at its brightest, Paul experiences an even brighter light from heaven (Acts 26:13).
2. Paul falls to the ground, a behavior that is perfectly reasonable when one comes near God. A person who encounters the holiness of God can react in different ways; one can be terrified, humbled, puffed up, etc.
   1. I myself have experienced something similar on one occasion. I was attending the Bible school in Bjärka-Säby and would eventually become a youth pastor in Filadelfia Bankeryd. I had just turned off the lamp and gone to bed, and suddenly, to my great surprise, I saw Jesus standing beside the bed! I couldn't see any exact details, it was like a mix between a "real" sight and a spiritual sight. I didn't see any details of Jesus' appearance, but he radiated a white glow, and I could clearly understand that it was Jesus who was standing beside me, because he said to me: "*This is my church"*. These words made me immediately think of Jesus' words to Peter in Matthew 16:18: *"I tell you: You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it".* With these words I understood that Jesus was in control of the situation. If Jesus wants me to be the youth pastor in Bankeryd, I will be because the church belongs to Jesus and not to the Bankeryd Elders. With these words I understood that I will be the youth pastor in Bankeryd because Jesus wanted it. I could safely relax and trust in God's care. Now I see this experience as my personal calling to become a pastor.
   2. According to Acts 1:21-22, one of the criteria for being an "apostle" is that one has personally met the risen Jesus. This encounter with Jesus that Paul has on the road to Damascus is later used by Paul as an argument for being an apostle (1 Corinthians 9:1-2).
3. When God repeats a person's name, it signals that the message is of the utmost importance! The other people in the Bible who have received such addresses are only Abraham (Gen 22:11), Jacob (Gen 46:2), Moses (Ex 3:4), Samuel (1 Sam 3:10), Martha (Luke 10:41) and Simon Peter (Luke 22:31).
4. Jesus asks Paul, *"Why do you persecute me?"* shows the clear identification that Jesus makes with his persecuted church. Jesus takes it personally when someone persecutes Christians, because all believers are members of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12) and Jesus continues his work on earth through his church (Luke 1:1).
5. One of the most important lessons of Jesus' call by Paul is that Jesus can use and convert anyone he wants. No person is too far removed from the Lord that they cannot turn around and begin to serve him. Therefore, never give up on anyone and always testify about Jesus to everyone and everything.

[[@Bible:acts 9:7]]Acts 9:7

1. An encounter with God is always personal. Even if there are many people around, our experience of the Lord is always individual. Personally, in church services I have felt God's presence strongly, while people around me have yawned and wanted to leave bored. I have also experienced the opposite, that people around me strongly felt God's presence while I felt nothing. The experience of God is always personal and individual.

[[@Bible:acts 9:8-9]]Acts 9:8-9

1. Paul thought he had a light on the situation when he persecuted the Christians, but now Jesus shows him that he was actually blind to the truth.
2. Paul was so taken, so puffed and so humbled by his encounter with Jesus that he can do nothing but sit still blindly for three days without eating or drinking. Paul's whole world collapses and he is forced to totally re-evaluate his life, his faith and his actions.
3. Just as Jesus was dead in the tomb for three days, so the old Paul dies for three days, only to be resurrected with Jesus to new life.

[[@Bible:acts 9:10-12]]Acts 9:10-12

1. Ananias is described in Acts 22:12 as a *"pious and devout man, well spoken of by all the Jews of the city"*. He seems to have been an ordinary simple Christian living in Damascus. This shows us that God does not only have tasks for apostles, prophets, pastors and evangelists, but that God wants to use everyone who is willing to serve him.
2. For Paul to listen, Jesus needed to confront him forcefully, knock him to the ground and speak to him in no uncertain terms. But for Ananias to listen to the Lord, Jesus needed to speak in a simple way through a vision.
   1. Compare, for example, how God speaks to the Babylonian king Belshazzar through a hand writing on the wall (Dan 5), and how God speaks to the prophet Elijah through a still whisper (1 Kings 19). For those who live in sin far from the Lord, God needs to speak overtly, but for those who live close to God and are responsive, it is enough for God to whisper his words quietly.
3. It is no coincidence that Paul is saved and becomes part of the "Way" precisely on the "Straight Street". In the past, he has perverted the "Straight Paths of the Lord" and been blindsided (see parallel in Acts 13:10-11). Anyone who wants to walk in God's straight way should "make straight the way of the Lord" and make "the paths straight for him" (Luke 3:4).

[[@Bible:acts 9:13-14]]Acts 9:13-14

1. Humanly speaking, it is perfectly understandable that Ananias should hesitate to go to Paul, having heard of him and probably begun to prepare himself for the persecution that was about to begin in Damascus.
2. When you experience a call or a task from God, it is very important to test it. There is a possibility that you have misheard or misunderstood. So it is not wrong to ask God follow-up questions and open your heart to any concerns. If it is a big, important or even dangerous task, it is good to wait until you have confirmation that you have heard God's voice correctly.

[[@Bible:acts 9:15-16]]Acts 9:15-16

1. God repeats the task he gives to Ananias. Sometimes it's good to have your calling confirmed.
2. God knew how he wanted to use Paul even before Paul was saved. God saw something in Paul that he could use while Paul was persecuting the Christians. This shows us that we should never give up hope on any human being. Even the worst kind of criminal can have a personal encounter with Jesus and begin a new life with the Lord.
3. What Ananias saw when he met Paul was a broken and blind man, but what God saw in Paul was a mission to reach Gentiles, kings and Israel with the gospel.
4. With a great calling comes great stress and challenge. Paul would become one of the most important Christians in the history of the world, but he would also suffer more than most. In this way, he follows in Jesus' footsteps because Jesus also suffered a lot. But whoever suffers for Christ will also be blessed and glorified with Christ (Matt. 5:11 & Rom. 8:17).

[[@Bible:acts 9:17-19]]Acts 9:17-19

1. It took great courage for Ananias to actively seek out his persecutor and pray for him. Since Paul could not see, Ananias says "brother" and lays his hands on him to show that he comes as a friend and not as an enemy.
2. Until this moment, Paul has been blind, broken, despairing and forced to re-evaluate his whole life. But from now on, Paul begins a new life.
   1. For some people, it takes getting to the bottom of their lives before they are ready to accept Jesus as their Savior. When a person is that far down in the tragic doldrums, it is important to meet a friend like Ananias, who is not frightened away but instead seeks him out.
3. Paul's new life began with a brother's intercession, the filling of the Holy Spirit, a miracle and baptism. It testifies to what the rest of his life would be about.

## Acts 11:19-30 - The Church of Antioch

[[@Bible:acts 11:19]]Acts 11:19

1. The city of Antioch was founded in 301 BC by Selevko Nikator, who had a penchant for naming cities after his father, Antiochus, which he did 15 times. At the time of the New Testament, Antioch, also known as the "Queen of the East", was the capital of the Roman province of Syria, and had about half a million inhabitants, making Antioch the third largest city in the entire Roman Empire, only smaller than Rome itself and the Egyptian city of Alexandria. Antioch was known in New Testament times as a commercial and cultural centre, but also for its prostitution and notorious immorality. Today Antioch is a small Turkish town of about 6000 inhabitants.
2. Antioch had a large Jewish minority, and it was natural for believers fleeing the persecution in Jerusalem to seek out their fellow countrymen. It was also natural for these Messiah-believing Jews to tell the Jews who did not yet believe in Jesus about Jesus.
   1. Initially, it is natural to share your faith with those with whom you have contact and fellowship. But eventually it is important not to get stuck there, but also to try to reach out beyond your comfort zone and your natural communion with the message of Jesus.

[[@Bible:acts 11:20-21]]Acts 11:20-21

1. When these anonymous believing Jews go from spreading the gospel only among their Jewish compatriots to spreading the gospel among the Greeks as well, they go from merely "evangelizing" to now also "proselytizing".
2. Successful mission requires that Christians take the mission seriously and begin to witness to new people about Jesus, but it also requires the "hand of the Lord" to be present. Jesus has given the mission to all Christians, but he has also promised to be concretely involved (Matthew 28:18-20).
   1. So if we complain that we see too little of the "hand of the Lord", perhaps we should start taking Jesus' missionary command seriously.

[[@Bible:acts 11:22-25]]Acts 11:22-25

1. Word of the revival in Antioch reaches the church in Jerusalem and they send Barnabas to investigate.
   1. Barnabas was a trustworthy man known for his generosity (Acts 4:36-37) and for taking on the newly saved Paul when no one else dared (Acts 9:26-28).
      1. The church in Jerusalem knew they could trust Barnabas because he had proven himself trustworthy and reliable in the past. Anyone who wants to serve the Lord in a big way also needs to learn to serve the Lord in a small way first.
   2. When a spiritual event or revival begins somewhere, it is important not to throw the baby out with the bathwater or swallow everything whole. Instead, one should examine the revival, retain the good and correct the unhealthy.
2. When Barnabas examines the revival in Antioch, he sees that it is good and judges that they should continue on the path they have embarked on, but that they need more Bible teaching. He therefore decides to bring Paul from Tarsus and then, together with Paul, teach the church for a year.
   1. The revival in Antioch led to the growth of the church both in quantity and quality. It is important not to focus only on one or the other, because then you run the risk of having either a large congregation with a superficial faith or a small, stagnant congregation that does not reach out. The church needs to reach outwards to always reach new people while deepening its faith through sound Bible teaching.
3. A similar "investigation" took place in Skövde at the beginning of the 20th century when the Pentecostal revival came to Sweden. When Andrew Johnson returns to his hometown of Skövde after witnessing the start of the Pentecostal revival on Azusa Street in Los Angeles, he begins preaching about it in the town's Baptist church. But since the leadership of the church was a bit skeptical about Andrew Johnson, they called John Ongman from Örebro to help them assess this with tongues, spirit baptism, etc. Ongman was the pastor of the Filadelfia congregation in Örebro and also founded the Örebro Mission School. When Ongman came to Skövde to investigate what was happening, he saw "the Holy Spirit of God falling and the speaking in tongues, singing and rejoicing" and realized that the church leadership need not be in doubt about what was happening in the church; it was a Pentecostal revival! Ongman then hastened to invite Andrew Johnson to his congregation in Örebro. Many in Örebro were also baptised and the Pentecostal revival, or "the new movement" as it came to be called, spread further in Sweden. Ongman continued to organize revival campaigns with baptisms and tongues, and the Pentecostal revival spread throughout Sweden.

[[@Bible:acts 11:26]]Acts 11:26

1. In Antioch, believers begin to be called "Christians" for the first time. Previously, in Acts, they have been called "brethren" (Acts 1:15), "believers" (Acts 2:44), "witnesses" (Acts 5:32), "disciples" (Acts 6:1), "the way" (Acts 9:2), "saints" (Acts 9:13) and "Nazarenes" (Acts 24:5).
2. To be called "Christian" is to be associated with Jesus' Greek title "Christ" in much the same way that "Jesuit" is associated with the name "Jesus" or "Messianic" is associated with Jesus' Hebrew title "Messiah".
   1. One of the goals of the Christian life is to let Jesus shine through so that people who meet us see Jesus. In Antioch, believers seem undeniably to have become so associated with Christ that they were simply called "Christ-saints".
      1. Many people are associated with one thing or another, such as a football team or a job or whatever. What do those around you associate you with? Are you known as someone who always talks about Arsenal or as someone who always talks about Jesus?
      2. When I was in the army, my fellow soldiers started calling me "Jesus" instead of "Christian" or "Mölk", because they thought I had such a habit (according to them) of always talking about Jesus all the time.

[[@Bible:acts 11:27-30]]Acts 11:27-30

1. The Christians of Antioch invested in evangelism, missions and Bible teaching, but do not yet seem to have had many prophets among them. Now some with a prophetic gift are coming from Jerusalem to visit Antioch.
   1. It can sometimes be difficult for a congregation to be complete, but then it is important to be humble and open to Christians from other congregations visiting and helping with the gifts they have received.
2. Although the Christians of Antioch did not have prophets themselves at this time, they were open to this gift and believed in the prophets from Jerusalem. The disciples in Antioch act on the prophetic word and collect as much money as they can.
3. The Christians in Antioch gave "as much as they could". This is a good principle for how generous one should be with one's money. You don't necessarily have to give exactly 10%, but you can make a considered judgement about how much money you can give.
4. In Acts 13:1 we read that *"in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers"*. This means that either Agabus and the other prophets stayed in Antioch and were these "prophets", or some of the members of the church received this gift after Agabus went home. Either way, it shows that the church in Antioch continued to grow and be completed.

## Acts 12:1-19 - James Killed and Peter Imprisoned

[[@Bible:acts 12:1]]Acts 12:1

1. This Herod Agrippa I was the grandson of Herod the Great who tried to murder Jesus when he was born and the nephew of Herod Antipas who executed John the Baptist and who was involved in the crucifixion of Jesus.
2. Herod was raised in Rome, but tried to prove his Jewishness by following the Jewish laws in every way. He does not seem to have cared much about people, but rather about strengthening his own power. If there was any rebellion, he killed the rebels. Now he noticed that many Jews disliked the Christians, so he executed one of the Christian leaders.
   1. However, this behaviour resulted in his becoming the last king of the Jews.

[[@Bible:acts 12:2]]Acts 12:2

1. There is not much about Jacob in the Bible. Almost all it says is that James, along with Peter and John, was one of Jesus' three closest disciples and that he tells Jesus that he would *"drink the same cup as Jesus and be baptized with the same baptism"* as Jesus (Mark 10:35-40).
   1. Since Jesus responds in the affirmative to the request of the two brothers James and John to drink the same cup as Jesus, perhaps that is what James was martyred to do.
      1. If James was the first apostle to die, John was the last. Both of these lives have their difficulties. James had to come to Jesus while John had to work for Jesus. An apostle must be prepared to both live and die for Jesus, and one may not be easier than the other.
2. The English word "martyr" comes from the Greek word "martyron" which means "witness" (Heb 12:1). A martyr is a person who tells and testifies about something he has seen and for which he is willing to die.
   1. A Nepalese friend of mine became a "living martyr" when he was arrested by the Nepalese police for breaking the law by preaching Jesus to Hindus. When he had the chance to escape, he chose instead to go to jail even though he knew he would not survive a prison term. We prayed very hard for him and eventually he was released.
3. When someone was imprisoned in the time of the apostles, they were chained with a guard. According to Clement of Alexandria (150-215), James took the opportunity to testify to his faith in Jesus to his soldier guard. According to Clement, that soldier was saved and later executed along with James.

[[@Bible:acts 12:3]]Acts 12:3

1. When King Herod saw that the Jews liked the execution of James, he now intends to do the same with Peter. A classic way to try to stop a successful movement is to execute the leader. This is what the Jewish leadership tried to do with Jesus, but it only led to more Christians.
2. King Herod knows that Peter has mysteriously escaped from prison before (Acts 5), so now he has four guards guarding Peter at the same time. These four guards change with four other guards after three hours, so Peter was very well guarded.

[[@Bible:acts 12:6]]Acts 12:6

1. King Herod had a prison and soldiers as his weapons, but the church's only weapon was prayer. They prayed fervently night and day. When all the doors are closed, the door to heaven is always open.
2. Peter is sleeping the night before he is to be executed. If I had been in a dark dungeon chained to guards, knowing that I would be executed the next day, I would NOT have been able to sleep...
   1. Peter must certainly have been very relaxed, calmly trusting that God is with him, whether he lives or dies.

[[@Bible:acts 12:7-10]]Acts 12:7-10

1. While Peter sleeps, an angel makes a grand entrance, candlelight and all! But apparently Peter is so deeply asleep that the angel has to try to wake him up by hitting him in the side. Peter is so dizzy that the angel has to tell Peter what to do.

[[@Bible:acts 12:11]]Acts 12:11

1. Why did God save Peter and not James? Why did James die? Didn't God have great use for an apostle like James? These are difficult questions to which there are not always answers. Similar questions are asked by many of us today; "Why did God heal that person, but not me?"
   1. Perhaps God wanted to show us Christians today that we must all be prepared for suffering and persecution. God is not a respecter of persons and it can happen to anyone, even an apostle or pastor.
   2. When you become a Christian, it is important to think about whether you are prepared to live and die for Jesus. Both of these decisions are important and I'm not sure which is more difficult.
   3. Sometimes God lets bad things happen. This does not necessarily mean that we have problems with God, but rather that God leads us through trials that will eventually make us stronger.
      1. A weightlifter doesn't get stronger by sitting on the couch all day, but by lifting weights. In the same way, we get stronger when we go through difficulties and have to carry heavy loads.
      2. My personal experience is that I have never felt God to be closer than when I have gone through difficulties. On one occasion, I was so happy by God's presence during a difficult event that I accidentally exclaimed, "If this is suffering, I always want to suffer!"
   4. We humans have a tendency to always want to find *meaning* in everything. But is there always a meaning? Or is there a meaning, but one that we will only understand when we get to heaven? Whether there is a meaning to our suffering or not, the important thing is that God is glorified.
   5. We may not always know how things will turn out, but we can learn from Peter that we should always trust in the Lord and be secure in him.

[[@Bible:acts 12:12-16]]Acts 12:12-16

1. For the first Christians, the church was extremely important. The first thing Peter does after he is released is to go to his Christian brothers and sisters.
   1. The first Christians had no church buildings, but gathered in their homes. Mary probably had the largest house, so her home was a natural gathering place.
      1. Often we make the mistake of exalting only the apostles and pastors who preach or are seen on the platform, but if Mary had not served God with the gifts she had, then the church would not have been able to gather. It is important to thank God for those people who serve God wholeheartedly with the gifts they have received, but who are not as visible.
      2. The earliest church building that archaeology has found is a house from around 232 AD in Dura-Europos in present-day Syria. The building is a simple house where a wall between two rooms has been knocked out to make room for about 70 people. In other words, the first church building was also really an ordinary home.
2. An ordinary house in New Testament times had a gate, a courtyard and then the house itself. The congregation is busy in prayer and does not hear Peter banging on the gate.
   1. When the maid, Rode, hears Peter, she is so upset that she forgets to open the door and runs in to join the others in the house.
3. It seems to have been easier for Peter to get out of prison than into the church.
   1. A similar pattern can sometimes be seen in our congregations today. We pray for new people to come to church, but we don't let them in when they do!
      1. A person may have met Jesus, been gloriously saved and freed from drugs, crime and addiction, but fail to enter the church community.
      2. A person who longs for God, but has tattoos or strange clothes, and thus finds it difficult to be fully accepted in the church because the other Christians look askance and talk behind their backs.
      3. Sometimes it can be easier for a person to leave their old life in "prison", thanks to Jesus, than to enter the Christian community. We Christians need to think about this! We Christians must make it easy to enter our community! It is never the responsibility of the new believer to find Christian friends, it is our responsibility to help.
4. While Peter stands outside knocking and wanting to come in, the congregation is praying to God to set Peter free. When Rode comes in and tells the congregation that Peter has been set free, they yell at poor Rode that she is crazy! When Rode continues to insist that Peter is here, they still don't believe her and try to come up with all sorts of strange explanations. So the congregation was too busy praying that they didn't see when the answer to prayer came.
   1. We Swedish Christians have also been praying for revival for a long time now. We pray that our churches will be filled with people longing for Jesus. This prayer has now begun to be answered by God, but perhaps not in the way we think.
   2. If we look around the world, we can see that there are an unimaginable 60 million people living as refugees. Many of these come from countries that are often considered "closed" from a mission perspective, namely Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia. We do not have the opportunity to go to them and proselytise, but instead these people are now pouring into us. They have escaped from a "prison" and are now knocking on our church door asking to come in. Will we continue to pray for them or will we open the door and let them in? Today we have an unprecedented opportunity to witness to Jesus in word and deed to people we would otherwise never have been able to reach.
   3. Some time ago, when I had just finished a funeral service and was on my way to kindergarten to pick up my son, there was a knock on the door of my office in the church. It was an Afghan who, with the help of an interpreter, told me that he wanted to "change his religion from Muslim to Christian"! I was delighted and surprised and thought his suggestion was very good! I asked him to come back at 7pm because by then my Afghan co-worker would be in the church so he could be there to interpret. My co-worker is a skilled evangelist and being an Afghan himself and a former Muslim, he knows the Afghan culture and the Muslim religion. When the clock struck 7pm, the Afghan came back, and what's more, he had brought another Afghan with him who also wanted to become a Christian! After a number of conversations, these two Afghans are now saved, baptised and active members of our church.
   4. Just like the first Christians, there are people outside our church "banging on the door". We have been praying for revival and now it is here! At this very moment, people from other countries and religions are knocking on our church door asking to come in. We need to embrace these people with God's love and witness our faith in Jesus to them. We should treat them as we want to be treated ourselves. Sure, we will face difficulties, culture clashes, crime, etc., etc., but we will get through this. The more serious the situation, the greater our trust in God will be. This is where our faith is tested. It is now that we Swedes must leave our apathetic comfort and rise up and obey our Master!
   5. If your parish has not yet opened its doors to refugees, get started as soon as possible! Start a language café, invite them to a baptism school, open the church to unaccompanied minors, etc, etc! The time has come! It is time! The harvest is big, the only thing missing is workers! The harvest is even so great that the one who sows and the one who reaps will rejoice at the same time! Look up and see how the fields have turned white for harvest! (John 4:35-38)

## Acts 16:6-15 - Under the Guidance of the Spirit

[[@Bible:acts 16:6-8]]Acts 16:6-8

1. Paul intends to continue his missionary journey and "preach the word in Asia", but is stopped by the Holy Spirit.
   1. Of course, there was nothing wrong with wanting to preach in Asia, but the Holy Spirit prevented Paul from doing what we normally think of as something positive, because God had other plans.
      1. Sometimes our plan may be good and godly, but not timely and we may be the wrong person to carry out the plan.
2. How did the Spirit of God speak to Paul? Through prophetic words? Through a sense of fear? Through practical aggravating circumstances? We don't know, but we do know that Paul was aware that the Spirit of God wanted to lead him and he followed God's guidance.
   1. Today, we too can be led by God's Spirit both in our daily lives and in our service to God. The Holy Spirit wants to help you witness to your fellow man about Jesus and he will try to lead you to the right person at the right time. Like Paul, learning to discern the guidance of God's Spirit is an important lesson in life as a disciple of Jesus.
   2. My tips for learning to listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit are as follows:
      1. Live a life of daily prayer and Bible reading.
      2. Pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit.
      3. Listen for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
      4. Try boldly when you experience something! The worst thing that can happen is that you happen to share the gospel with one person too many.
      5. Repeat.

[[@Bible:acts 16:9-10]]Acts 16:9-10

1. Now if it was God's will that Paul preach the gospel in Macedonia, why didn't God's Spirit put Macedonia on Paul's heart before he began to prevent him from traveling to Asia and Bithynia? It is obvious that God can speak to us in many different ways:
   1. Awakens thoughts in our heart that we can't let go of
   2. We hear a clear voice
   3. We feel strongly in our spirit
   4. Doors close or open
2. It is interesting to note that it is only when Paul arrives at Troas that he receives further instructions. It is rare that God allows us to see his whole plan for us, but we are allowed to see a bit at a time, one step at a time.
   1. If God had let us see his whole plan for our lives, we probably wouldn't have believed it or perhaps wouldn't have dared to follow it. Sometimes it's better to just know the next step and then trust God.
3. When Paul understood that God wanted him to preach the gospel in Macedonia, he *immediately went* there. Paul's eagerness to serve God is a model for us.
4. In verse 8 it says that "they" went through Mysia, and in verse 10 it says that "we" went to Macedonia. This probably means that it was in Troas that Luke, the author of Acts, joined Paul. Perhaps this was even one of the reasons why Paul was not told that he was going to Macedonia until he arrived in Troas.
5. Perhaps the most important lesson from this biblical text is that the Holy Spirit has an interest in directing the mission. Of course we should plan according to our human circumstances, but we need above all to be sensitive to the Spirit's leading.

[[@Bible:acts 16:11-12]]Acts 16:11-12

1. Thanks to Paul's responsiveness to God's Spirit, the Gospel came to Europe and we received the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts.
   1. God always knows what he is doing when he says no to our plans. While it is of course more fun when God opens doors than when he closes them, in the end it is always for our good and the good of the Gospel.

[[@Bible:acts 16:13]]Acts 16:13

1. When Paul came to a new city, he would normally start by going to the Jewish synagogue to preach the gospel there, but there were probably not enough Jews in that city to enable them to build their own synagogue. Instead, the Jews met for prayer down by the river.

[[@Bible:acts 16:14]]Acts 16:14

1. The Macedonian man whom Paul saw in his vision turned out to be a woman!
   1. Lydia becomes the first Christian in Europe, thanks to "the Lord opening her heart".

[[@Bible:acts 16:15]]Acts 16:15

1. Since Lydia dealt in "purpurtyger" she was probably rich and well off. Because of this, she was able to open her home to Paul and his entourage, thus starting the first church in Europe in her house.

## Acts 16:16-40 - Paul and Silas in Prison

[[@Bible:acts 16:16]]Acts 16:16

1. When Paul and his associates go to the place of prayer, they meet a girl with a spirit that is believed to be able to predict the future. Where the Bible says "divining", it translates directly from the original Greek text as "python-ing".
   1. In Greek mythology, the Greek god Apollo killed a large snake called Pyton. In Delphi, the site of this event, the Greeks built a temple where people could come to consult the gods by lying on the floor and letting snakes coil over them. A python thus became a symbol of the oracle at Delphi, and anyone who was thought to be able to predict the future was then often described as "led by the python".
   2. In the Greco-Roman world, great importance was attached to oracles and to trying to predict the future. Emperors and generals always consulted soothsayers before making major decisions or going to war.
      1. In such an environment, owning a slave girl who was thought to be able to foresee the future was undeniably a good deal for the owner.

[[@Bible:acts 16:17]]Acts 16:17

1. In New Testament times, there was a notion that if you knew the true name or title of a spirit, you could gain power over it and control it. So it may be that this spirit of divination is trying to gain power and control over Paul's teachings by titling him as "the servant of the Most High God".
   1. Jesus encountered several demon-possessed people who rightly titled him, but he did not accept such a confession but instead freed the possessed from their demons (Luke 8:28, Mark 1:24, Mark 3:11, Matthew 8:29).
2. In James 2:19 we see that even demons believe in God in a sense, but that does not automatically mean that they belong to God and are saved.
   1. Even if the spirit of divination tells the truth about God, it does not mean that the spirit comes from God and leads people on the right path to salvation.

[[@Bible:acts 16:18]]Acts 16:18

1. Why is Paul upset that this spirit of divination is telling the truth about God and salvation? Because the more people who listen to Paul and believe what he says, the more it confirms that the soothsayer is right, which risks reinforcing the belief in the Greek god Apollo and the oracle of Delphi. The demon did not confess that God is the Most High in order to honour God, but to associate the gospel with the demonic.
2. Notice that the Spirit of Prophecy says "ONE way to salvation" and not "THE WAY to salvation". Jesus is clear that he "IS the way" and that "no one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).
   1. If Paul had not reacted in this way, there would have been an obvious risk that the Greeks who believed in Paul's teachings would have continued to believe in Apollo as well, and thus would have remained polytheists. But for anyone who wants to confess Jesus as Lord, there is no room for more than one God on the throne.
3. Paul is not upset with the slave girl but with the demonic spirit. He addresses the spirit and commands it to come out of her in Jesus' name.
   1. In the same way, we should relate to people who have experienced similar problems. We should not blame the person who has suffered, but rather lead them to deliverance from their troubles in Jesus' name.

[[@Bible:acts 16:19]]Acts 16:19

1. The moment the spirit disappeared, so did the owners' income opportunities. The masters of the slave girl did not care that a person had been freed from an evil spirit, but that they risked losing money.
   1. Greed often risks becoming an obstacle to salvation (Mark 5:16-17, Acts 8:19, Acts 19:24-28), while generosity is often a result of salvation (Luke 19:8-9, Acts 16:15).

[[@Bible:acts 16:20-22]]Acts 16:20-22

1. As long as the Greeks perceived that Paul's teachings were compatible with their ancient religion, they saw no reason to stop him. But when they found that they had to leave their religion and source of income in order to be saved, it suddenly became a different matter.
2. In the Roman Empire, Roman citizens had clear rights and could not be treated in any way, while non-citizens were often subject to the whims of the crowd. The company consisted of Paul, Silas, Luke and Timothy. Of these, Paul and Silas are singled out, presumably because they looked like Jews and so were assumed not to have Roman citizenship. Luke was Greek and Timothy was half Greek and half Jewish.
3. The accusations against Paul are neither true nor were they illegal. Jews were allowed to proselytize until the second century. But regardless, the false accusations had an effect and led to Paul and Silas being imprisoned.

[[@Bible:acts 16:23-24]]Acts 16:23-24

1. To be beaten in this way was a punishment meant to humiliate a man in public. You were beaten as if you were a disobedient animal, and you might well die from the punishment, even if the purpose was rather to humiliate. Because it was so degrading, it was illegal to give this punishment to Roman citizens and was only considered appropriate for the lower classes of society; slaves and non-citizens.
   1. The person to be punished was stripped naked, tied to a pole and whipped on the back. In the worst cases, the whip or stick could be fitted with small sharp pieces of iron or glass, so that the skin on the back would stick to the whip and tear off when the whip was withdrawn. Such a terrible whipping could result in the back being completely destroyed so that the intestines could be seen inside the body.
   2. After the whipping, Paul and Silas were put with their feet in a log. This was done to further make it as painful and uncomfortable as possible.

[[@Bible:acts 16:25]]Acts 16:25

1. Paul and Silas did not let the fact that they were falsely accused or brutally beaten stop their praise to God. Though their backs were in agony, their hearts were in heaven.
   1. All people can be happy when something positive happens, but a Christian can experience inner peace and heavenly joy even in dark and negative moments. Instead of getting angry and bitter at their accusers, Paul and Silas sang praises to God.
      1. Paul writes to the church in Philippi: *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything let God know your desires through supplication and prayer with thanksgiving. Then the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."* (Phil 4:6-7)
      2. If we are in a dark situation overwhelmed with problems and worries, we need to pray and sing praises, because then we will be filled with God's peace.
2. The other prisoners in the jail listened to Paul and Silas singing praises. They had probably only heard swearing, negative talk and curses before, and were amazed that anyone could sing praise in such a dark situation.
   1. It is very special to hear the gospel from someone who is in the same situation as you, or at least has been in the past. When an addict hears about Jesus from a former addict, he is more receptive than if he hears it from someone who has never even smoked a cigarette or had a beer.
      1. The negative experiences we have in life can be a great blessing for people in the same situation. The dark experiences you are going through right now can lead to liberation and salvation for people around you at a later time.
3. We can also be innocently accused and unfairly hit by life's hard knocks. But that doesn't have to automatically lead us to walk away from God or lose our faith. On the contrary, it can lead us to share God's joy and peace with people who are in the same dark situation as us.

[[@Bible:acts 16:26]]Acts 16:26

1. Paul and Silas were in an area where earthquakes were not uncommon, so the earthquake may well have been entirely natural, but the timing and the loosening of everyone's chains was a supernatural miracle of God.
2. An interesting curiosity is that the word "saved" comes from the old word "frehalsad", which means that a person who had a shackle around his neck had it removed. The person who was freed, saved, was thus freed from his shackles and thus saved from his former life as a slave.

[[@Bible:acts 16:27-28]]Acts 16:27-28

1. Were Paul's fellow prisoners saved? Yes, probably because they stayed with Paul even though they had a chance to escape.
   1. It is a remarkable fact that people are often saved in large numbers in the midst of times of darkness. We are in the midst of a pandemic and cannot worship as usual. But at the same time, there are more baptisms than ever and more newcomers to our services than normal. As the darkness grows darker, the light also becomes more visible.
2. Jailers were personally responsible for their prisoners (Acts 12:19), and the jailer, probably from personal experience, knew very well the brutal Roman methods of execution. Rather than being flogged and tortured to death, he chooses to die by his own hand.
3. Would it have been wrong for Paul and Silas to escape from prison? No, in a way it wasn't. God freed Peter from prison by having an angel open the doors so he could go out (Acts 12).
   1. But on this occasion, God's purpose was not to free the prisoners, but to save the jailer.
   2. Paul trusted that God, who had now shown that he has the capacity to deliver Paul, would be able to save Paul again if he wanted to. But if Paul escapes, he misses the chance to save the jailer's body and soul.
      1. Perhaps it was this jailer who had whipped Paul. Perhaps this led Paul to have a special heart for the jailer and to turn the other cheek and show him the forgiving love of Jesus.

[[@Bible:acts 16:29-32]]Acts 16:29-32

1. The jailer understands that Paul, by not escaping, has saved his life. Now he also asks Paul to save his eternal life.
   1. Perhaps he has heard the slave girl preach about Paul's way to salvation, and now he feels so shaken inside that he prays for salvation.
      1. Often it is when we are at the bottom of life that we long for salvation. If we had asked for salvation at the peak of life, we might never have hit rock bottom.
2. If you could only say one last sentence to a dying person asking how to get to heaven, what would you say? Paul's words *"Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved"* are at the heart of the Christian faith and are sufficient for a person to be saved.
3. The jailer asks what he should "do" to be saved, and Paul replies that he should "believe" in the Lord Jesus. It is human to think that one must do something active, to earn God's grace. But the truth is that it is enough to believe in and put one's trust in Jesus to be saved. Jesus has already done everything on the cross and all we have to do is receive.
4. As if it wasn't enough that only the jailer was saved, his family and household were also saved. But the household was not automatically saved just because the jailer believed in Jesus, Paul had to preach the "word of the Lord" to them as well.

[[@Bible:acts 16:33-34]]Acts 16:33-34

1. The jailer washes Paul's wounds clean, and Paul washes the jailer's soul clean. The consequence of the jailer's repentance and salvation was that he was baptized, offered food and experienced jubilant joy. From being jailer and prisoner, they are now brothers in Christ.

[[@Bible:acts 16:35-36]]Acts 16:35-36

1. Why Paul and Silas are released is not clear. Perhaps the judges thought the punishment was enough. Perhaps the jailer had persuaded the judges to release them.

[[@Bible:acts 16:37]]Acts 16:37

1. As if it were not enough that Paul had been falsely accused and undeservedly punished, he was also a Roman citizen, which meant that the judges had overstepped their authority because of this.
2. There was certainly a desire on Paul's part to be vindicated, but the primary reason he does not agree to sweep this under the carpet is because if he is not publicly vindicated, he will continue to be regarded as a troublemaker by the townspeople and the church in Philippi will have difficulty reaching out with the gospel.

[[@Bible:acts 16:38-40]]Acts 16:38-40

1. The judges had to crawl to the cross and admit that they had treated Paul and Silas wrongly, and appeal to them to leave the city. But now that Paul and Silas are cleared, they don't just want to slip away, they want to leave the city on their own terms. Only after they have visited the church are they ready to leave the city.
   1. The church at Philippi was undeniably a special group of people: Lydia, the jailer, the slave girl and a bunch of prisoners.
      1. Lydia's heart was opened by the Holy Spirit when Paul preached. The jailer's heart was converted after an earthquake. Both heard the gospel, believed in Jesus and saw their families saved.
      2. Most likely, Paul left Luke behind in Philippi so that he could stay with the church for a while and guide them further in the gospel. In verse 12 Luke writes that "in that city *we* stayed a few days", but in verse 40 he writes "then *they* went on".

## Acts 17:1-14 - Paul in Thessalonica and Berea

[[@Bible:acts 17:1-4]]Acts 17:1-4

1. Thessalonica was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia and had about 200,000 inhabitants at the time. It is interesting to note that Paul passed through the cities of Amphipolis and Apollonia on his journey from Philippi to Thessalonica. All of these cities were within a day's walk of each other on the main Roman road called the "Via Egnatia", which stretched from the western coast of Greece all the way to modern-day Istanbul. It seems that Paul deliberately chooses Thessalonica over Amphipolis and Apollonia, perhaps because Thessalonica is an important strategic key city in that it is the capital of the region.
2. Paul's basic message was to show *who* Jesus is and *what* he has done. Jesus is the Messiah and has risen from the dead.
3. When Paul came to a new city where the gospel had not been preached before, he would use the same method to preach the gospel. I have reviewed the Greek words used and tried to explain Paul's method:
   1. Paul went to the "Jews". It was important for both Jesus and Paul to preach the gospel first to the Jews, and only then to the Gentiles (Matthew 10:6, Acts 13:46, Romans 1:16). When Paul preaches to Jews, he also has an opportunity to speak in his own language, to his own people, and to assume that they already have a pretty good grasp of the Bible and what it says about the Messiah.
   2. Paul had a "dialogue" with the audience. He conversed, discussed, argued and reasoned. There was an opportunity for the audience to ask questions and make their own contributions.
   3. Paul started from the "Scriptures". The basis of Paul's dialogue with his audience was the Bible, not the latest news or modern philosophy.
   4. Paul "opened" the Scriptures. Like someone who opens a door and shows what is inside, or someone who goes house-sitting.
   5. Paul "presented evidence" for his teaching. Like a lawyer defending his client in various ways, Paul proved from the Old Testament that Jesus is the Messiah who suffered, died and rose again.
   6. Paul "proclaimed" Christ. The Romans used to proclaim "good news" in the town squares when, for example, a new emperor had taken office or a military victory had been achieved. Paul proclaims to the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah and has won victory over death.
4. Paul's message was that *Jesus* is the Messiah and that it was necessary for him to suffer and rise from death. This was important because many Jews expected that when the Messiah came, he would be a mighty king like David, who would forcibly liberate Israel from Roman occupation. While it is true that the Old Testament describes the Messiah as a mighty king who restores Israel, the Old Testament also describes that the Messiah will suffer and die for the sake of the people (Ps 22, Isa 53, Zech 12:10). The Old Testament thus contains both of these images of the Messiah in parallel: the "victorious" and the "suffering". But what the Jews did not understand was that the Messiah would come twice: at his first coming Jesus came to "suffer" and die on the cross, and at his return he will come as the "victorious" king who fully establishes the kingdom of God.
   1. Many Jews thus believed that the Messiah would establish Israel at his first coming, and therefore found it difficult to believe that Jesus could be the Messiah, since he died and the Romans were still there. But Paul methodically tries to show from the Scriptures that the Messiah at his first coming had to suffer and die in order to win victory.
5. Both Jews and godly Greeks began to believe in Jesus as the Messiah based on Paul's teaching.
   1. Even Macedonian "upper-class women" came to faith. It was not uncommon for Paul and the early Christians to be cared for by women who acted as financial benefactors. They were wealthy, had a large house and were able to make their resources available to the church, for example like Lydia who opened her home to Paul and his associates (Acts 16:14-15) or like Mary who allowed the church to gather in her home (Acts 12:12).
   2. It is interesting to note that Paul's gospel was received by people from different ethnic groups and different social status. The gospel is transnational in nature.

[[@Bible:acts 17:5-9]]Acts 17:5-9

1. Some Jews believed Paul's message about Jesus, but other Jews became "jealous." In the original Greek text, the word "zeloo" is used, which is the same word as "selot" (Luke 6:15, Acts 1:13). The Zealots were one of four Jewish factions (the others being the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes) who wanted to forcibly drive the Romans out of Israel and seize political power. The Zealots are followers of "Judas of Galilee", who led a violent resistance against the Romans in 6-7 AD and is mentioned in Acts 5:37. The Selots were also sometimes called Sicarii, because they sometimes carried out political assassinations using a "sica", a Roman dagger.
   1. It is obvious that Paul's teaching about the suffering Messiah did not fit in with the Zealots' conception of the Messiah as a warrior. They were not prepared to re-evaluate their understanding of the Messiah, their longing for a restored and powerful Israel was greater than their faith in the Scriptures.
   2. For the selfish Jews, Paul's teaching about the suffering Messiah becomes as wrong as the Roman occupation, and they seem to want to solve both "problems" in the same way; namely, by violence.
   3. The response of the selotic Jews to Paul's teaching when it did not correspond to their erroneous preconception of the Messiah is sobering. How do we respond when the gospel demonstrably clashes with our delusions?
      1. How do we do this if all our lives we have been selfishly living for ourselves and our own ambitions and career, and then we are told to be generous and love our fellow man? Will we repent?
      2. How do we do this if we have lived our whole lives with racist notions about other peoples? Will we accept the gospel and repent?
      3. What if we have believed all our lives that God doesn't exist and suddenly we have proof to the contrary? Will we bow before the Lord and accept Jesus as our Lord?
      4. Or do we decide to rebel against the gospel and persecute its followers?
2. It was not uncommon for Paul's mission to meet with violent opposition (Acts 13:45, 50, Acts 14:2,5, Acts 14:19).
   1. Paul tells us in his first letter to Corinth that he has been imprisoned, stabbed and beaten in abundance, scourged five times, whipped three times, and stoned once (1 Corinthians 11:23-25).
3. This Jason was one of the Christians in Thessalonica. Probably Paul and the Christians gathered in his house, which led to his capture and beating.
4. The self-righteous Jews accuse the Christians of "turning the whole world upside down". In a way, this is a positive accusation that Paul should be happy about. In just a few years, the gospel has spread so far and made such an impact among people that it is turning society upside down. What if we Christians today could have that much impact on the world around us?
   1. Has Jesus turned your world upside down? A life of following Jesus turns all worldly thinking upside down. Jesus won victory by dying. Jesus showed love in the face of hate. Jesus lifted up the weak instead of the strong. To be a leader in the kingdom of God, you must be a servant of others. etc.

[[@Bible:acts 17:10]]Acts 17:10

1. Paul leaves Thessalonica quickly because he does not want to expose the church to unnecessary persecution. Had he been able to, he might have stayed longer and continued his Bible teaching. But instead of continuing to teach on the spot, he eventually sends more teaching in the form of 1 Thessalonians, which turned out to be a blessing for us today as well. This shows us that God can turn perceived adversity into success.

[[@Bible:acts 17:11-12]]Acts 17:11-12

1. Paul repeated his earlier strategy and went first to the Jews in the synagogue and began to teach from Scripture.
   1. In both Thessalonica and Berea, both Jews and Greeks accept Paul's message, but with the difference that in Thessalonica a group of (supposedly) selotic Jews resisted Paul, while in Berea this does not happen at all.
2. Instead of selfish resistance in Thessalonica, the people of Berea did four very exemplary things: they "received" Paul's teaching "with all readiness", and "searched" the Scriptures "daily". The Bereans combined an open heart with a thinking mind in a very exemplary way.
   1. When the Bereans "received" God's word, it can be compared to accepting something, welcoming someone, receiving a guest, or receiving a gift.
   2. The expression "willingly" is about "being ready to do good". It can be compared to inviting a party to a restaurant and starting the dinner by saying "It's on me!". Or telling your boss or manager that you are ready and willing to do whatever it takes to bring a project to fruition. Being "willing" means that the person in question is ready to go all out on this as long as they receive further instructions.
   3. To "research" the Scriptures in this context means to examine, question the text, assess, gain insight into, discern, search, test and examine. One can compare the Bereans' approach to Scripture to a car inspection. The inspector examines the car, tests that everything works as it should, checks that everything is approved, ticks off his list and finally (hopefully) gives a pass.
   4. The Bereans were not content to just listen to Paul's teaching and receive the message, they also wanted to gather "daily" and investigate further. In this way, they are a model for us in our own personal Bible reading. The Bible is not just a book to be read once and accepted, but a sacred scripture to be interacted with every day.
3. The Bereans were ready to accept Paul's teaching, but they also wanted to examine it at the same time so that it was in agreement with Scripture. It is interesting to note that the Bereans were allowed to listen to a well-known and prominent apostle, but still considered it important to make sure that his teaching was consistent with the Bible. Scripture is above the preacher.

[[@Bible:acts 17:13-14]]Acts 17:13-14

1. When word spreads that Paul is also preaching in Berea, the self-righteous Jews in Thessalonica want to drive Paul away. Similar riots occurred in several places (Acts 13:45, 50, Acts 14:2, 5, Acts 14:19, Acts 17:5-8).
   1. While it is of course tragic that the gospel is disputed and that Paul was repeatedly beaten and persecuted, these recurring riots resulted in the gospel spreading even further as Paul was continually forced to move. God can turn everything negative into something positive.
2. While it was important for Paul to continue missionary work and spread the gospel everywhere, it was also important that some stayed behind and began to build the local church. Simply leading people to salvation is not enough; you also have to build the Christian community.

## Acts 19:1-20 - Paul in Ephesus

[[@Bible:acts 19:1]]Acts 19:1

1. Ephesus, also known as the "Light of Asia", is today a ruined city in Turkey, but in New Testament times it was the fourth largest city in the world, located on the west coast of Asia Minor. Ephesus attracted many people, partly because its geographical location made it a hub of trade, but also because many religious pilgrims made the pilgrimage to Ephesus to see one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, the Temple of Artemis.

[[@Bible:acts 19:2]]Acts 19:2

1. When Paul comes to Ephesus, he meets some disciples whom he feels compelled to ask whether they received the Holy Spirit when they came to faith. These disciples have previously been disciples of John the Baptist and have most likely heard about the Messiah, but at the same time they have a very limited knowledge of Jesus and all that he has done.
2. Joel prophesied that in the last days God would pour out the Holy Spirit "on all flesh" (Joel 2:28), which also happened when the Holy Spirit fell on the disciples on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).
3. Although a number of years have passed since the day of Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is still relatively new and it is therefore not very surprising that these disciples have not heard about it.

[[@Bible:acts 19:3]]Acts 19:3

1. When John the Baptist compares himself to Jesus, he says: "I baptize you in water unto repentance, but he that cometh after me is stronger than I. I am not even worthy to take off his sandals. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in fire." (Matt 3:11)
   1. There is thus a clear link between baptism in the name of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, a link that is not found in the context of John's baptism. Although the disciples in Ephesus were saved by their faith in Jesus, they had not yet received the Holy Spirit, an experience and help in the Christian life that is extremely important.
2. A similar situation is found in Acts 18, where Apollos preaches eagerly about Jesus, while he has only heard about John's baptism. He is taught more thoroughly by Priscilla and Aquila.
3. All these "disciples of John" are a result of the transitional phase between the Old and New Testaments that occurred because of the ministry of John the Baptist. This is not as relevant today, but can possibly be compared to people from other religions who begin to believe in Jesus without actually having read the Bible or taken part in Christian teaching.

[[@Bible:acts 19:4-5]]Acts 19:4-5

1. When you were baptized by John, you did so primarily because you repented of your sin, but not necessarily because you confessed your faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior of the world.
2. One should only be baptized in the name of Jesus once in one's life, but if one has been baptized on insufficient grounds, it is not wrong to be baptized a second time, since this is actually the first correct baptism.
   1. If someone who was baptized as an infant but then under no circumstances believes in Jesus or lives a Christian life, but then in adulthood repents and comes to believe in Jesus, it is my personal opinion that that person, like those disciples of John in Ephesus, should be baptized "again". However, this will not be a "re-baptism", since the first one was not after one's own confession of faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior of the world, which is a necessary basis for being baptized in Jesus' name.

[[@Bible:acts 19:6]]Acts 19:6

1. There is a close connection between baptism in the name of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:37-38, Acts 8:14-17, Acts 10:44-48).
2. Everyone who believes in Jesus and is saved is born again of the Holy Spirit and receives new eternal life (John 3:5, Romans 8:9, 1 Corinthians 12:3). But in addition to this, as a Christian you can also be filled with the Spirit of God so that you have supernatural power to be a witness of Jesus (Acts 1:8).
   1. Thus, as a Christian, one is born again of the Spirit, but does not necessarily automatically partake of the power of the Holy Spirit by being baptized in the Holy Spirit or being filled with the Holy Spirit. This "baptism of the Spirit" is something I believe all Christians should long for and pray for. While the Holy Spirit is clearly at work in and through all Christians, it is extremely valuable to also partake of this tremendous power.
      1. An example of this can be found in the introduction to the book of Acts. When Jesus leaves the earth, he says to his disciples, *"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for what the Father has promised, what you have heard from me. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit."* (Acts 1:4-5) and a little later, *"When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be empowered and become my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."* (Acts 1:8)
      2. The disciples belonged to Jesus and were saved, but had not yet received the power of the Holy Spirit. Before they received this power, we read in the text that the disciples were confined to a room (Acts 1:13), but after the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4), they dare to testify boldly to all who want to hear that Jesus is the Messiah and that Joel's prophecy about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit has now been fulfilled (Acts 2).
   2. The strange thing about these disciples in Ephesus is that they seem neither to have been born again of the Holy Spirit nor to have partaken of his power. Probably this was because they fell a little in between John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. Now, however, this is amply compensated for when they receive the power of the Holy Spirit in a wonderful way!
3. It is very important for all Christians to allow the Holy Spirit to transform our inner being so that we become as much like Jesus as possible. You don't become perfect just because you have been saved, there is a lot to work on and deal with. Putting away sin and living a life of love is a lifelong process that the Holy Spirit wants to lead us through.

[[@Bible:acts 19:8]]Acts 19:8

1. Paul's mission follows the same pattern as before; he travels to a central city that serves as a hub and first begins preaching to the Jews. What is slightly different about Ephesus is that he gets to preach for an unusually long time, a full three months! After that, some people don't want to hear any more and he is forced to continue preaching in Tyrannus' lecture hall instead.
2. The Son of God was born as a man into the Jewish people, and they were also the ones who had received the Bible and the covenant, so it is very natural that they heard the gospel first. But when the gospel was not received, the offer was passed on to the Gentiles (Rom 1:16, Acts 13:46, Matt 21:43).

[[@Bible:acts 19:9]]Acts 19:9

1. The Christian faith has not always been called "Christianity"; instead, it came to be called "The Way" early on. In Acts, for example, we see that Paul at first persecutes those who belonged to "that Way" (Acts 9:2) but later repents and begins to walk on "that Way" himself (Acts 24:14).
2. In the Old Testament, the term "way" is often used synonymously with "a way of life" and is used to contrast "God's way" and "the way of the wicked". In the OT, God wants the people of Israel to walk in God's way by doing what God has commanded Moses (Ex 18:20). In the Old Testament, "God's way" is synonymous with "God's will" or "God's commands," and God wants people to walk not "their own way" but "God's way" by obeying God's commands that God gave Israel through Moses.
3. Jesus continues on the Old Testament track of two roads when he informs us that the "way of destruction" is broad and the "way of life" is narrow (Matthew 7:13-14). But even though Jesus continues on the path laid out in the OT, there is a difference in how one walks on God's path. Instead of emphasizing that, as in the Old Testament, one should walk in God's way by obeying the Law of Moses, Jesus instead emphasizes that the "way to the Father" is through himself. The only way to come to the Father is through faith in Jesus, and thus Jesus *is the* way (John 14:6).

[[@Bible:acts 19:10]]Acts 19:10

1. Gathering around the Word of God is at the heart of Christian discipleship, and it is no coincidence that we devote so much of our worship to this.
   1. However, it is interesting to note that Paul taught by holding *conversations*. So it seems that he did not preach a regular Sunday sermon as we do today.
2. Paul would never have been able to reach all those living in Asia, i.e. the west coast of today's Turkey, if all believers did not help each other. Paul writes about this in his letter to Ephesus (Ephesians 4:11-12).
3. It was probably during this time that Paul's associates founded the churches in Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis (Colossians 1:7, 4:12-17).
4. During these two years (52-54 AD), Paul wrote First Corinthians (1 Corinthians 16:8) and possibly Galatians as well.

[[@Bible:acts 19:11-12]]Acts 19:11-12

1. In the hot climate of Ephesus, cloth was often used to wipe the sweat or something similar. Probably these cloths were put on the sick.
2. That these miracles were *unusual* teaches us first of all that there are miracles and wonders that should be *common*. It also teaches us that there are some more normal ways of curing the sick, such as laying hands on the sick person and saying a simple prayer.
   1. You don't have to strive for the extraordinary just because it's a little extra cool, but at the same time you should be happy and grateful when God does extraordinary miracles.
3. In Acts 5:15, people are healed when Peter's shadow falls on them, and in Mark 5:27, the woman with hemophilia is healed when she touches Jesus' clothes. However, there is no magic in the garments themselves, but it says that *God* made these miracles. If God does not work miracles, it does not help how many garments of Paul, or even Jesus, we put on the sick.
4. It is not surprising to me that these unusual miracles occurred in a *mission situation*. I believe missions is very close to God's heart and he is often very quick to confirm his Word with miracles and signs when it is preached to unrepentant people.

[[@Bible:acts 19:13]]Acts 19:13

1. In New Testament times, there were many professional "magicians" or "exorcists" or the like (Acts 8:9-24, 13:6-12, 16:16-19).
2. These Jewish exorcists do not seem to have had their own faith in Jesus as their Lord and Saviour but, probably inspired by the aforementioned unusual miracles, tried to use Paul's God to cast out evil spirits.
   1. The problem with this is that the Christian faith is not *magic*, it is not possible to "learn" a spiritual technique as if it were some kind of magic formula. No, the Christian faith is based on having a *relationship* with Jesus, and without it it doesn't matter how good you are at the Bible, how eloquent you are or what fancy title you have (Matt 11:25-26).
3. It is important that all who call themselves Christians have *their own* relationship with Jesus. It is not enough to simply "believe in the Jesus that the pastor preaches" or to live by the faith of one's parents. It is very important that everyone at some point in their life makes a conscious decision whether or not to believe in Jesus.

[[@Bible:acts 19:15-16]]Acts 19:15-16

1. Here we see the incredible power of the name Jesus; the evil spirits must back down for those who believe in Jesus, but at the same time we also see the danger of getting into a battle with evil spirits if you *don't* have a relationship with Jesus.

[[@Bible:acts 19:17]]Acts 19:17

1. Although the miracles were performed through Paul, it is Jesus who is praised, and this is a lesson we must never forget. When God blesses in different ways, we must never take credit for it ourselves. We must also always be on our guard so that we do not exalt preachers or leaders so much that Jesus is no longer seen.

[[@Bible:acts 19:18-19]]Acts 19:18-19

1. A natural reaction to coming to faith in Jesus is to want to do away with your old sinful life. Someone might empty their cupboard into the sink, someone else might give back money they have stolen (Luke 19:1-10) or something similar, depending on what sin they had in their life before they were saved.
   1. Maybe there is something in your life that you need to leave?
2. A silver drachma was worth about a quarter of a day's wages, which tells us that the value of this bonfire was enormous!
3. It is important to remember that the books they burned *were their own.* So as a Christian, you cannot burn all the books you think are wrong or pour out someone else's alcohol. Each person must come to terms with his or her own sin.

[[@Bible:acts 19:20]]Acts 19:20

1. Acts 19 is a good example of what we today call "revival", and there are four summary lessons:
   1. People gathered around the Word of God.
   2. There were unusual miracles.
   3. There was spiritual warfare.
   4. People repented of their old sinful lives.

## Acts 19:21-40 - Trouble in Ephesus

[[@Bible:acts 19:23-28]]Acts 19:23-28

1. In Ephesus there was a large temple dedicated to the goddess Artemis, or Diana as she is also known, which was considered to be one of the seven wonders of antiquity.
2. Many travellers visited the temple, worshipped Artemis and bought a statue or something similar. This, of course, brought considerable income to the city's craftsmen, an income that was now in danger of being lost because of Paul's preaching.
3. It is important to remember that Paul was not preaching *against* Artemis, but *for* Jesus. That those who started believing in Jesus and stopped believing in Artemis then stopped buying statues was a natural reaction. But Paul's main purpose was not to go against another religion but rather to preach about Jesus, something that is clearly confirmed in verse 37, where the city secretary declares that Paul has not blasphemed Artemis at all.

[[@Bible:acts 19:29-32]]Acts 19:29-32

1. Many in the city were extremely upset, while many others didn't really know why they had even gathered.
2. The theatre in Ephesus could hold 25,000 people and the city had a maximum of about 50,000 inhabitants. The text doesn't say how many people were in the theatre, but you can imagine that there were a lot of people and the screams must have been deafening!

[[@Bible:acts 19:35-40]]Acts 19:35-40

1. It has happened many times that different kinds of people have been very upset by the Christian message, but here we see that even high political leaders in the city's elite could see that there was nothing really to fear.

## Acts 20:1-12 - Paul in Troas

[[@Bible:acts 20:1]]Acts 20:1

1. When the unrest in Ephesus (Acts 19) had calmed down, Paul decides to travel on to Macedonia. Paul had spent 3 successful years in Ephesus and now it was time to move on (Acts 20:31).

[[@Bible:acts 20:3]]Acts 20:3

1. It was not that the Jews as a people were against Paul and the Christian faith. Jesus, Paul and all the early Christians were themselves Jews. The Jews referred to here are the Jews who did not accept Jesus as the Messiah and who actively opposed Paul's missionary work.
2. In the last chapter we saw how the Greeks were upset by the gospel, and in this chapter it is the Jews who are upset. So it wasn't just one specific group that opposed Paul, but within all people groups, some accepted the message of Jesus while others opposed.
3. Today, Christianity and Judaism exist as two separate religions, but if we go back 2000 years, we see that the Christian faith exists within Judaism. Jesus is a Jew and all his disciples are Jews. In the New Testament we can see two different kinds of Judaism crystallising: the "rabbinic Judaism" of the Pharisees and the "messianic Judaism" of Jesus. The clear distinction that exists today between these two was not nearly as clear in biblical times, but one can clearly see the origins of Messianic Judaism, i.e. Christianity, in biblical texts such as this one.
   1. Because the Jews had helped Julius Caesar in a war, the Jews had a religious exemption from the otherwise generally prevailing Roman imperial cult. All peoples occupied by the Romans would sacrifice to the emperor and thus worship the emperor as a god. This exemption also applied to the early Christians as long as the Romans considered Christians to be part of Judaism. But eventually, when Christianity and Judaism parted ways, this no longer applied to Christians, and those who refused to sacrifice to the emperor became martyrs. This in turn led to internal Christian divisions between those who had refused to sacrifice to the emperor and those who had agreed to do so.

[[@Bible:acts 20:4]]Acts 20:4

1. The name "Aristarchus" roughly means "the best ruler" and our Swedish word "aristocracy" is closely related.
2. The Romans sometimes gave their slaves "numbers" as names: primus (first), secundus (second), tertius (third), quartus (fourth). The most important slave was named Primus and the second most important slave was named Sekundus, etc.
   1. We find several such names in the New Testament: Sekundus (Acts 20:4), Tertius (Romans 16:22) and Quartus (Romans 16:23).
   2. It is interesting to note that we do not find the name "Primus" (=first) in the Bible. Perhaps that name is reserved for Jesus Christ, who took "the form of a servant" (Phil 2:7) and who is in all things "the first" (Col 1:19)?
3. It is certainly interesting that the noble name "Aristarkus" and the slave name "Sekundus" are mentioned together!
   1. A recurring teaching of Paul is: *"Here is not Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. You are all one in Christ Jesus."* (Gal 3:28)
   2. Perhaps these two were master and slave before they became Christians, but now they travel together as if they were brothers!

[[@Bible:acts 20:7]]Acts 20:7

1. It is not easy to determine exactly which day is meant here because the Jews and Romans counted the beginning of the day differently. The Jews believed that a new day began at sunset, i.e. at 18:00, while the Romans and Greeks counted from 00:00. What both agree on is at least that "the first day of the week" is Sunday.
   1. According to the Old Testament, the Jewish people celebrated the Sabbath on Saturday, the seventh day.
      1. It was only in 1972 that it was decided internationally that Monday would be the first day of the week.
   2. So we know that the Jews, according to the Old Testament, celebrated the Sabbath on Saturday and that the Christians, according to church history, eventually began to worship on Sunday, but has this change already taken place here in Acts?
      1. If Luke is using the Jewish time count, then this should reasonably be Saturday sometime after 6:00 pm, i.e. early Sunday according to Jewish time counting.
      2. If Luke is using the Roman-Greek era, this should be Sunday morning or evening, since common people worked on Sunday day.
         1. The evidence for this theory is that the "next day" (verse 7) was at "dawn" (verse 11). If Luke had counted according to the Jewish calendar, dawn would have been the same day.
         2. Moreover, it seems to be normal for Christians to gather on "the first day of the week" (1 Corinthians 16:2).
   3. The New Testament does not specify the exact day of worship and there is no requirement to worship on either Saturday or Sunday. It makes sense that the Christian Jews worshipped on Saturday because they were accustomed to it and still kept the Sabbath on that day. It is also not unreasonable that Christian Romans and Greeks celebrated worship on Sunday because it was more natural for them.
      1. The main reason for celebrating worship on Sunday is that it was the day Jesus rose from the dead (Matthew 28:1).
      2. The important thing is not exactly what day you worship, but *that* you worship.
2. From this text it is clear that the first Christians gathered and celebrated communion together, but there is also an interesting outside note about what else the Christians did when they gathered. Here's what the Roman senator Pliny the Younger wrote about the first Christians around 110: *"They met on a certain day before it was light, and addressed a form of prayer to Christ, as to a deity."*
   1. Pliny was a Roman senator who mentions and describes the Christians in a letter to Emperor Trajan in order to ask his advice on how to deal with them. Since Pliny died in 113, this letter was written only 20 years after the Apostle John wrote his Gospel. Even so early in the history of Christianity, outside Roman government officials describe Christians as praying to Christ as a deity.
3. From 1 Corinthians 11, it is clear that the "breaking of bread" of the early Christians was something more than the traditional celebration of the Lord's Supper that most Christians do today. They gathered for a "meal of love" (2 Pet 2:13), eating together while also lifting up the bread and wine in remembrance of Jesus.
4. Here we see another interpretation of "preaching biblically", namely, preaching long sermons! ;-)
   1. Paul had a lot to impart to the Christians in Troas, so he taught as much as he could.
      1. From this we can learn that there is indeed much that we Christians need to learn. When we gather for worship, it is important that we gather around God's word and try to understand what God wants to communicate to us.
      2. The message of the Bible is important, it is not just a programme item that needs to be covered at some point during the service. God wants to teach us how to live through the study of his Word.
   2. So it seems that even in biblical times, Christians gathered on Sunday, celebrated communion together, listened to God's word, prayed, sang praises together (Matt 26:30) and collected a collection (1 Cor 16:2).
      1. Even today, 2000 years later, we gather in this way.

[[@Bible:acts 20:9-10]]Acts 20:9-10

1. Again, we see that names often also have some kind of message in the text. The name Eutykus means "fortunate", and it is fair to say that he was!
2. The author of Acts, Luke, was a physician by profession (Col 4:14), and here we see how he observes this event through the eyes of a physician. Luke notes that Eutychus fell from the "third floor" and that he was "dead". What happened next was undoubtedly a miracle of God!
   1. Like Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-24) and Elisha (2 Kings 4:32-37), Paul bowed over Eutychus and was thus brought back from death.
   2. Similarly, Jesus observed that a little girl who had just died was not dead at all (Mark 5:39).
3. Probably Paul's preaching came off a bit when Eutychus died, but must have become quite exciting when Eutychus miraculously came back to life!
4. Even today, people fall asleep when someone is preaching, even though today's preachers often preach for only 20 to 40 minutes, compared to Paul's all-night sermon.
   1. Often a lack of interest starts even before the sermon and is reinforced the longer the sermon takes. But anyone who listens to a sermon with a hunger for God's Word will be satisfied!
5. Although this incident is quite innocent because it was probably due to the fumes from "the many lamps" in the room (verse 8), there is a worse kind of sleep that Christians can fall into and that both Jesus and Paul warn against (Mark 13:33-37, 1Thess 5:6-11).
   1. Jesus' parable of a man who goes away is matched today by a manager who goes on a business trip. How do we behave at work when the boss is away? Do we do our job dutifully or do we go to bed and sleep because the boss won't see us anyway?
   2. The same applies to us today, how do we Christians do our job; i.e. the Great Commission? Are we fulfilling our duty to the poor and sick? Are we witnessing to our faith? Do we immerse ourselves in our personal discipleship?
6. A Christian needs to be "awake" so that he or she is always living the Christian life as an active disciple of Jesus. A sleeping Christian forgets the church and loses interest in his own discipleship.
   1. Christians who are "asleep" need to be "awakened" so that they begin to care more about God's Word, prayer, worship, evangelism, mission and service.
   2. From this imagery we have the word "revival", which is about Christians waking up and starting to take God's word seriously.
   3. A revival always starts among Christians who wake up in their Christian life and begin to take the Great Commission seriously, leading to many being saved.
   4. Often we Christians gather together and ask God for a revival in the hope that people will flock to the church and be saved. Instead, perhaps we should simply obey the Great Commission and see how people are saved once we begin to witness to Jesus.

# 1 Corinthians

## 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 - Women In The Church

[[@Bible:1 Cor 11:1-16]]1 Cor 11:1-16

1. This text is often used to state that man is above woman in authority in the same way that Jesus is above man in authority. But my assessment is that this text is not about authority at all. The only time the word "authority" is mentioned is in verse 10 where it talks about the authority of *the woman*.
2. The reason this text is thought to be about authority is because the Greek word for "head" ("kephale") is misinterpreted. Using "kephale" as a description of who has the highest authority was, according to Gordon Fee's Bible commentary "The First Epistle to the Corinthians", very unusual in ancient Greek. It was so unusual that when Hebrew texts were translated into Greek, the Hebrew word for "head" ("rosh") was almost never translated as "kephale" when the Hebrew reference was to "authority".
   1. What the Greeks meant by "head" was rather "origin" or "source". That both Paul and the Corinthians understood the expression in this way is confirmed by verses 8-9 where Paul writes that the woman comes from the man, i.e. the man is the "origin" or "head" of the woman. Paul is referring to the fact that God created the man Adam before the woman Eve.
      1. Christ is the origin of every man in the sense that Christ is "the firstborn before all creation" and that everything in heaven and on earth was created "in him" (Colossians 1:15-16).
      2. Man is the origin of woman in the sense that God created woman "from the rib that he took from man" (Gen 2:22).
      3. God is the origin of Christ in the sense that Jesus came to earth as a man through the agency of the Holy Spirit.
   2. A further argument that Paul means "origin" when he uses the word "head" is how he uses the word in his letter to the church in Colosse: *"He is the head of his body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he might be first."* (Colossians 1:18)
      1. Here we see that Jesus is the "head" of the church in the sense that he is its "beginning" and that he is the "firstborn".
      2. In Paul's second letter to Corinth, we can also see that everyone who is "in Christ" is born again and becomes "a new creation": "So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." (2 Corinthians 5:17)
      3. For the Christian, Christ is the "head" in the sense that Jesus is the beginning of the Christian life, the source of the new life and the origin of the new creation.
3. To make his point clear, Paul first begins by presenting a hypothetical counterpart to what he says women do. Hypothetically, Paul is saying that it would be dishonoring to Christ if a man prayed with something on his head. Exactly what this men had on their heads is not revealed and we can only guess.
   1. Perhaps Paul was referring to the "prayer shawl" that Jews often wore on their heads when they prayed. While there is nothing wrong with such a shawl per se, there was an obvious danger that if Jewish Christians prayed with such a shawl on their heads, they could exclude Gentile Christians and thus divide the church, something Paul often taught against (1 Cor 7:19, Gal 3:28).
   2. Perhaps Paul was referring to the fact that Romans used to pull their toga up over their heads like a shawl when they prayed to their pagan gods. If even Christians pray that way, it dishonors Christ because you are praying in a pagan way.
   3. But whatever Paul meant in his hypothetical example, both he and the Corinthians seem to agree that it would be as dishonourable to the head of men, i.e. Christ, if Christian men prayed with a shawl on their head as it is dishonourable to the "head" of women, i.e. man, if the woman prays or prophesies without anything on her head. What then was it that the women of Corinth had taken off their heads that would bring dishonor to men in general and husbands in particular?
   4. One possible explanation is that Paul is referring to "loose hair". The word Paul uses is also used in the Greek translation of Numbers 5:18 where it says that if a woman has been unfaithful to her husband, the priest shall "loosen her hair". Perhaps Paul is referring to the fact that Christian women, because of their newfound freedom in Christ, began to dress and look like loose women and thus brought shame on their husbands. In our culture, where loose hair is in no way associated with either unfaithfulness or looseness, the parable cannot be directly transposed, but one must understand the underlying symbolic point that Paul is trying to make to the Corinthians.
4. Since we don't know exactly what kind of cultural hairstyle Paul is referring to, we can conclude that this is not Paul's point either. If you start arguing about what kind of head dress or hairstyle men or women should wear in church, you have completely missed the point of this text.
   1. One also misses Paul's point if one thinks that Paul is writing to establish men's authority over women.
   2. Rather, Paul's point is that it is just as bad for men to pray in a way that dishonors Christ as it is for women to pray in a way that dishonors their husbands. It is just as bad for men if the Corinthian women signal unfaithfulness by praying in public with their hair down as it is for Christ if men signal paganism by praying in public with a shawl on their head. Neither men nor women should engage in either.

## 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 - The Lord's Supper

[[@Bible:1 Cor 11:17-22]]1 Cor 11:17-22

1. The original Eucharist was not a ceremony inside a church building where people queued up to see a priest who handed out a wafer to be dipped in a cup of wine. No, the original communion was a ceremony in the context of a meal (Matt 26:26-30, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:19-20, Acts 2:42-47), as is evident from the very word "communion" (supper). The original Greek reads "kyriakos deipnon", which simply means "the Lord's supper".
   1. Celebrating a ceremony of bread and wine in anticipation of the coming of the Messiah was practiced by the Jews of Qumran 100 years before Jesus.
   2. When Abram meets Melchizedek, the king of Salem, he brings bread and wine to Abram and blesses him (Gen 14:17-20).
   3. In the Jewish culture of Jesus' time, a communal meal was a way of showing togetherness and community, and was often associated with various ceremonies and commemorations. Compare, for example, the Israelites' celebration of Passover to commemorate the Exodus from Egypt (Ex 12); the people of Israel would sprinkle the blood of the lamb on their doorposts to avoid death, and then eat unleavened bread to commemorate God's salvation. Jews still celebrate the Passover meal in this way today:
      1. The Passover lamb reminds us of the angel of death who, thanks to the blood of the lamb, passed by the Israelites' homes and saved them from death.
      2. The unleavened bread reminds us of the speed of God's salvation. The Israelites did not have time to prepare the bread as usual, but had to hurry.
      3. The salt water is reminiscent of the tears that the Israelites wept in their captivity, as well as the fact that they passed through the Red Sea.
      4. The bitter herbs are reminiscent of the bitterness of slavery.
      5. A special fruit puree is reminiscent of the clay they used to make bricks from in their captivity in Egypt.
      6. The four cups of wine, with three parts water and one part wine, recall God's four promises to Israel in Exodus 6:6-7: 1) bring you out, 2) rescue you, 3) redeem you, and 4) take you to be my people.
   4. It is no coincidence that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper in connection with the Jewish Passover meal (Matt 26:17-29). On the other hand, the Eucharist is not dependent on the Passover meal, which is celebrated only once a year, but can be celebrated at any time believers gather in Jesus' name.
      1. The Passover meal includes a reminder to God's people that God remembers his covenant, that God saved Israel from Egyptian slavery, the blood of the lamb that gave salvation from death, and a call to continually celebrate the Passover meal.
      2. The Eucharist includes a reminder to God's people that God has instituted a new covenant, that God saved his people from the bondage of sin, the blood of the Lamb that provides forgiveness of sins, and a call to continually celebrate the Eucharist.
   5. An interesting curiosity is that the city of Philadelphia, which is addressed in Rev 3:7-13, was located in a fertile valley where they grew wheat and grapes. In the city translated "brotherly love" the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper grew.
2. Since there were no church buildings in Bible times, the congregation gathered in homes. It was therefore natural that those who had a large house, and were therefore reasonably well off, opened up their homes for worship.
   1. In a wealthy Greco-Roman home, the fine dining room was relatively small, while the courtyard was much larger. Perhaps it was natural for the host of the house to invite the finer guests up to the fine dining room, while the other members of the congregation had to be content with eating the communion meal in the courtyard.
      1. Such a class division of the congregation when celebrating communion signaled the very opposite of the meaning of communion; that Christ by his death made Jew and Greek, slave and free, rich and poor, male and female, one in Christ (Gal 3:26-28).
      2. If the Greek upper classes want to eat their fine dinners with each other, they can do so on some other occasion than the celebration of Holy Communion.

[[@Bible:1 Cor 11:23-26]]1 Cor 11:23-26

1. Communion is a ceremony associated with a meal. In its most basic form, the communion ceremony has four parts:
   1. "This is my body"
      1. Jesus physically gave his "body" as a sacrifice to save humanity from death, by carrying our sins in his body up on the tree of the cross (1 Peter 2:24).
         1. In the same way, we too are to offer *"our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God"*, our *"spiritual worship"* (Rom 12:1).
      2. A second symbolic meaning of the bread is that it is "one" loaf, but when divided into smaller pieces at the same time contains "many" pieces of bread. Thanks to Jesus' death on the cross, we believers become part of the body of Christ, the church.
   2. "Do this in memory of me"
      1. Communion, like the Jewish Passover meal, is meant to be celebrated continuously in conjunction with a meal. In this way, people are repeatedly reminded of the significance of Jesus' death and offered an opportunity to ask Jesus for forgiveness for the sins they have committed.
   3. "This cup is the new covenant in my blood"
      1. Just as Moses sprinkled the blood of the covenant on the Israelites (Exodus 24:8), so we drink the *"blood of* Jesus*, the blood of the covenant, shed for many for the forgiveness of sins"* (Matthew 26:28).
         1. The big difference between the blood of the Old Testament covenant and that of the New Testament is that the blood of Moses was sprinkled on the outside and covered the sins, while the blood of Jesus fills our body and transforms us from the inside out.
            1. This difference between the old and the new covenant is echoed by God in Jer 31:31-34. The new covenant will be written on the hearts of God's people, bringing them to know God and to have their sins forgiven.
   4. "Until he comes"
      1. Communion is not only about remembering what Jesus did on the cross, but also longing for Jesus' return when he will once again *"drink of the fruit of the vine"* (Matt 26:29) in the context of the great "messianic banquet" (Isa 25:6-9, Matt 8:11).
         1. The Eucharist, then, is not only a sad memory of Jesus' death, but also a foretaste of the great heavenly feast that awaits all believers when Jesus returns.
         2. The Eucharist looks back and remembers the death of Jesus who became life for us, while the Eucharist also looks forward in longing for the return of Jesus. As we partake of the bread and wine, we also partake of the death and resurrection of Jesus, while already here and now in faith we are given a taste of the heavenly banquet to come.

[[@Bible:1 Cor 11:27-32]]1 Cor 11:27-34

1. Paul reacts strongly to the Corinthian church's *"unworthy* handling*"* of the Lord's Supper, which in Corinth seems to have involved 1) fighting, 2) some people grabbing all the food, and 3) not discerning the Lord's body in the Lord's Supper.
   1. What Paul is critical of, then, is not whether the church handled the bread and wine ceremonially incorrectly, whether they used a wafer or a loaf of bread, whether they used wine or grape juice. It was not the handling of the external forms of the Eucharist that was the problem, but that the way in which the congregation celebrated the Eucharist showed division rather than unity, which contradicts the meaning of the Eucharist. The rich separated themselves from the poor, ate all the food and left the poor hungry, making the body of Christ divided in a ceremony that is supposed to show unity and togetherness.
2. Can we too today risk handling the Eucharist in an unworthy way? Yes, if we make the Eucharist a marker to divide Christians rather than to unite Christians, if we focus on the forms of the Eucharist at the expense of its meaning, or if we let the poor go hungry from the meal while we ourselves are eating our fill.
   1. A proper communion celebration is when we lift up bread and wine to remember the death and resurrection of Jesus and all that it meant for our salvation, a meal where all are fed whether we are poor or rich, where we show spiritual unity across worldly boundaries, where we long for the return of Jesus and in faith get a taste of the heavenly banquet to come.

## 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 - The Spiritual Gifts

[[@Bible:1 cor 12:1]]1 Cor 12:1

1. There are three topics that Paul believes it is important for us Christians not to be ignorant of: 1) the spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1), 2) God's plan for Israel (Romans 11:25), and 3) the return of Jesus (1 Thessalonians 4:13).
   1. It is important to remind yourself of these three topics from time to time, otherwise they can easily be forgotten.
2. In this chapter, Paul teaches the Corinthians that the spiritual gifts are meant to function as a "body", where all the different parts of the body are equally important. Emphasizing or focusing only on one spiritual gift is wrong and shapes a deformed body.
   1. By emphasizing so strongly that we Christians are one body belonging together, we understand that the spiritual gifts are meant to function first and foremost in a congregational setting. It is when we Christians come together that the gifts come into their own because we are then in a safe congregational environment where we can support and encourage each other while helping each other not to stray into the spiritual gifts.
   2. It is important to understand that spiritual gifts should always be used in love with the aim of exalting God and helping others. Misuse of the gifts often leads to selfishness, self-aggrandizement, division, etc.

[[@Bible:1 cor 12:2]]1 Cor 12:2

1. When you study Paul's letters in the New Testament, it's like listening to a person talking on the phone; you only hear one person in the conversation and have to try to figure out what the other person is saying. Paul's letters are written in a situation that he touches on in various ways, either by trying to solve a specific problem, answer a question, or encourage someone who is in a difficult situation. However, Paul does not give us much information about the situation he is writing to, because those he is writing to obviously already know their own situation. So we who read Paul's letters must try to find out what situation Paul is writing to in order to fully understand his message. This can be done partly by studying Paul's letters in depth, but also by researching the city in question and its situation at the time of Paul's writing.
   1. As an example, we see in this verse that Paul writes that the Corinthians were "drawn to dumb idols". Exactly what this means is hard to say, but since Paul brings this up in the context of writing about spiritual gifts, it probably has something to do with some form of idolatry that was somewhat similar to "Christian" spirituality. There are many non-Christian religious contexts where practitioners go into ecstasy and certainly experience this as "spiritual", but this is a spirituality that Paul does not want us Christians to engage in.
2. If you come from a non-Christian background, it is not impossible that you may have brought with you a faulty understanding of spiritual things, you may even have been influenced by demonic spirituality in the past. It is important to put aside all that is pagan and try to learn sound biblical spirituality.

[[@Bible:1 cor 12:3]]1 Cor 12:3

1. In biblical times, it was not at all uncommon for a person to claim to have a message from God and to be able to perform miracles. For Paul, it is important that we Christians should firstly not listen to any "prophet" who is not a Christian and professes at least the most basic confession: "Jesus is Lord", and secondly that we should always "test" whether what a prophet says agrees with the word of God (1 Cor 14:29, 1 Thess 5:20-22, 1 John 4:21).
   1. Too often we Christians make the mistake of thinking that just because a person has been endowed with a spiritual gift, everything he or she says is a message directly from God. When this mistake is made, one of the most important messages of this chapter is completely missed: that we are one body with different parts and that we need each other. If one person has received a gift, we should rejoice in it, but we must not forget that God has given other gifts to other people, and that they are just as important for the well-being of the body, even if they are not as "cool".

[[@Bible:1 cor 12:4]]1 Cor 12:4

1. When studying spiritual gifts, it may be useful for pedagogical purposes to distinguish between *natural* and *supernatural* gifts. Since God is the creator of us humans, he gives us all the natural gifts that we are born with, such as the gift of singing or having a mind for mathematics, but he can also give supernatural gifts that go beyond our human understanding and sometimes even defy the laws of nature. The supernatural gifts are of course not "better" than the natural ones, but in order to understand the gifts of grace and not to confuse them with other gifts God gives, it may be helpful to clarify that the 9 gifts of grace Paul goes through in this chapter are *supernatural* in nature.
2. Where in English it says "gifts of grace", in the original text it says "charisma", which is a Greek word that comes from the word "charis" meaning "grace". A gift of grace is an undeserved gift that God has given in order that we may serve God in the best way possible.
   1. Grace means that God has lovingly saved us from sin and given us the promise of a new eternal life, a life that he has already begun to transform with his Holy Spirit. There are no "good works" we can do to earn God's grace, we can only gratefully receive grace by believing in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Grace then manifests itself in our lives through the Holy Spirit's transformation of us in various ways, including through the miraculous gifts we Christians are given to one another.
3. All Christians have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) and can thus generally pray for the sick, prophesy, receive a word of knowledge, etc. But God's Spirit also gives a more specific gift to each person so that they can function more focused on the specific task they have been given.
4. By pointing out that there are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit, Paul shows that there is a great diversity in the kingdom of God, but that at the same time there is also a unity in God.
5. By describing God in three different ways; the Spirit, the Lord and God, Paul makes a connection to the contemporary diversity and unity of the Trinity.

[[@Bible:1 cor 12:5]]1 Cor 12:5

1. While not necessarily a miraculous gift in the "ordinary" sense, God may well choose to endow a particular person with a ministry as a pastor or preacher or something else. One should not be blind to the fact that there are only exactly 9 gifts of grace or the like, but rather be glad and thankful that God allows his Spirit to be expressed in us in a variety of ways, and the important thing is that it glorifies our Lord.
   1. Some of the "ministries" mentioned in the Bible are apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd and teacher (Ephesians 4:11). However, one should not look too blindly at these particular ministries; God can, if He wishes, give you a combination of these ministries or some other kind of ministry. The important thing is not exactly *how* you serve God, but *that* you serve God.
      1. For example, if God wants to give you a ministry as a singer, don't be unhappy that God didn't make you an apostle, but instead serve God wholeheartedly as a singer and let God's Spirit touch people through your singing.

[[@Bible:1 cor 12:6]]1 Cor 12:6

1. God works in different ways through different people, in different congregations and in different places. You do yourself a disservice if you pigeonhole yourself or your congregation and think that God can only work in a certain predetermined way. Instead of focusing too much on a specific gift, focus on God and let him work through the church in the way he wants.

[[@Bible:1 cor 12:7]]1 Cor 12:7

1. Every Christian, without exception, has received the Holy Spirit as a gift in connection with his or her salvation. Because the Holy Spirit is in every believer, every Christian can pray for the sick, prophesy, etc. Not only that, but every Christian can be endowed with a specific gift of grace to perform a specific service for God.
2. The idea of spiritual gifts is that we should help each other, not exalt ourselves. Spiritual gifts should be used so that they are "useful", a blessing to others, and glorify God.
   1. When a gift of grace is abused in such a way that it puts too much focus on the person who has *received* the gift rather than on the person who has *given* the gift, then one should react.
3. There is a danger of believing that the Spirit is not present just because we do not see his "manifestations". But just because the Spirit does not choose to manifest himself in a very visible way does not mean that he is not present. Jesus himself says that the Holy Spirit *"will always be with you"* (John 14:16).
   1. Those who seek the Spirit of God only in miraculous manifestations risk missing the joyful peace of the Spirit's constant presence.

[[@Bible:1 cor 12:8]]1 Cor 12:8

1. ***Wisdom***
   1. According to Paul, God is "the only wise one" (Rom 16:27) and wisdom is, at its deepest level, about knowing God and his ways. Receiving the gift of wisdom from the Spirit can therefore be about both knowing who God is, but also understanding what God wants to do in a time like this.
      1. An example might be that someone who has been endowed with the gift of wisdom comes to the realization that God wants your local church to begin a ministry among addicts because God loves these people and wants to help them out of addiction. Sometimes it can take great wisdom to know what your particular church should be focusing on in your local situation.
      2. Another example might be that God is sending a message through you to a particular person in your congregation that God wants him or her to attend a Bible school and eventually go into missionary service.
      3. A third example might be when you or your congregation is in trouble and can't think of a good solution, but God gives a "word of wisdom" that helps you come up with a solution that makes everything work out for the best (Acts 23:6-9).
   2. Jesus was known to have a lot of "wisdom" (Matthew 13:54), which was evident in his teaching and in the way he dealt with people. Jesus' wisdom was due to the fact that he spent much of his time in prayer and conversation with his Father (Luke 5:16) and his tremendous knowledge of God's Word (Matthew 4:4).
   3. The person in the Bible who is perhaps most associated with the gift of wisdom is King Solomon. God comes to Solomon in a dream and tells Solomon to: "ask me for what you want me to give you" whereupon Solomon asks for "an obedient heart, so that he can be a judge for your people and distinguish between good and evil". God answers the prayer by giving Solomon both wisdom and riches (1 Kings 3:5-15).
      1. Solomon's wisdom appears immediately after he has received this gift from God. Two women come to King Solomon and ask him to judge between them because they both claim that a certain child is theirs. Solomon then commands that the child be cut in half with a sword so that they can each have half, whereupon the real mother blurts out that the other woman can have the child as long as the child survives, while the other woman thinks it was a good solution to cut the child in half. Solomon then understands that it was the woman who cared about the child's life who was the real mother and therefore gave the child to her (1 Kings 3:16-28).
2. ***Knowledge***
   1. The gift of grace "the word of knowledge" means to have knowledge of something that is impossible to know but that God supernaturally reveals.
   2. An example of the word of knowledge is found when Jesus asks Peter to go down to the lake and catch a fish. In the fish, Jesus tells him that there will be a silver coin with which he and Jesus can pay their temple tax (Matthew 17:24-27).
   3. Another example of the word of knowledge is when Jesus says of Nathanael that he is *"a true Israelite, in him there is no deceit"* whereupon Nathanael asks Jesus, *"how can you know me?"* (John 1:47-48).
      1. The word of knowledge often involves the recipient supernaturally describing things in a person's life that are impossible to know. This knowledge often leads to the person in question being encouraged or called into service in some way.
   4. When I was a youth pastor in Bankeryd, I personally experienced this with the Word of Knowledge. Before my last semester as a youth pastor, I prayed to God and asked if he wanted me to do something special during my last time. In response, I was told that I would preach at the youth gatherings based on the book of Acts and then when I was finished I would stand on the stage and listen to the Spirit of God and He would speak through me to the young people. When the time came and I had preached the first chapter of Acts, I did exactly as God had said, I stood on the stage and listened, but I didn't know if God would really say anything. But after a little while I got a message and I told the young people. After the youth gathering, one of the young people came up and said that the message was for that person and that she really needed to hear it at that time. Friday after Friday this continued and the Spirit of God spoke every Friday throughout that semester and pretty much every Friday one of the young people came forward and told me that the message was for them.
      1. As a matter of fact, the first few times I listened to the Spirit of God, I saw an inner spiritual vision of a garden. At first I thought this was a message to one of the young people, but as the image recurred every Friday, I finally understood that this image was a message from God to me! The meaning of the picture was that God was letting me into his own private garden, i.e. the church, and when I received these words of Knowledge to the young people, it was as if I had to go into his garden and tend the fruit trees and flowers so that they could grow to their full potential and produce good fruit. Sometimes we Christians need to be made aware of, for example, our own sin or something in our lives that we need to come to terms with, i.e. to be "corrected" or “tended” by the Spirit of God.

[[@Bible:1 cor 12:9]]1 Cor 12:9

1. ***Faith***
   1. Of course, as the name implies, all believers have *"faith",* but the gift of faith is about having a supernatural certainty in certain critical situations that God will act in a certain way.
      1. A very good example of the gift of faith is when a lame man at the Beautiful Gate asks Peter for some money, to which Peter replies, "*Silver and gold I have not, but what I have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ, the Nazarene, arise and walk." And he took him by the right hand and raised him up. Immediately the man received strength in his feet and ankles."* (Acts 3:6-7)
         1. Somehow Peter had such assurance that the lame man would be healed that he could tell the man in advance what was going to happen and then pull him up from the ground!
      2. Another example of the gift of faith is when Jesus stands outside the tomb of his friend Lazarus and cries out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!", whereupon the dead Lazarus comes back to life and comes out of the tomb (John 11).
   2. It may be important to clarify that the gift of faith is *not* about trying to *convince* yourself that something will happen, or that you may even *force* yourself to believe a certain way because you think it will automatically happen. The gift of faith is not something you can produce in yourself but a supernatural gift from God.
2. ***Healing***
   1. All Christians can pray for the sick and many who do so regularly can testify that miracles sometimes happen! But those who receive the gift of healing are especially used by the Spirit of God to pray for the sick and see many people healed.
   2. God often performs miracles and healings in order to *"confirm his gracious word"* as it says in Acts 14:3. Supernatural miracles go hand in hand with sound Bible teaching.
   3. Notice that the gift of grace to heal the sick is plural, which means that God's Spirit can heal the sick in many different ways.
      1. Some have interpreted this to mean that the gift of healing can also mean that God heals the sick through doctors and nurses. Personally, I am of the opinion that God is happy to use health care to help anyone who is sick, but I don't think one should confuse that with the gift of healing, which is a gift that leads to supernatural miracles, something that the art of healing de facto is not.

[[@Bible:1 cor 12:10]]1 Cor 12:10

1. ***Miracles***
   1. The gift of miracle is about God performing remarkable miracles at well-chosen times that defy all natural laws.
      1. Some examples of this gift is when Jesus and Peter walked on water (Matthew 14:22-33), when Jesus commands the storm to calm down (Matthew 8:23-27) or when the Spirit of God hastily "snatches" Philip from the desert and miraculously moves him to the city of Ashdod (Acts 8:39).
2. ***Prophecy***
   1. In its most original form, the word "prophet" means a "mouthpiece" who simply conveys a message from God to some human being. But the gift of prophecy is also a very multifaceted gift, and can mean, for example, receiving a word of encouragement from God to someone who needed to hear it at that moment, but it can also mean that God reveals something about the future.
   2. It is extremely important that prophesying never become profiteering, i.e. that prophecy is used to make money, but that the gift leads to "encouragement, edification and comfort" (1 Corinthians 14:3), that the prophesied word is always in "accord with the faith" (Romans 12:6) and that care is taken to "test everything" prophesied (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21).
   3. In my personal experience, it is not at all uncommon that if you are a group of believers who gather to pray for each other, that someone gets a prophetic message to the one you are praying for. This may be that God is calling that person to a life of missionary service or that God simply wants to give guidance in a difficult choice that the person is facing.
      1. When you find that you are getting these prophetic messages to someone, it is very important that you always "test" the message. The first thing to test is whether it agrees with God's word, and the second thing to test is whether it was really a message from God and not your own personal thoughts.
         1. How do you know if a prophetic message is from God or if it is your own thoughts? The best way to find out is to wait and see! If the message is from God, it will eventually come to pass. If the message was delivered in a healthy and stable church environment, it's not the end of the world if it happens to go wrong at some point because it can be corrected fairly quickly and easily through humble trial. If one is unsure, it is better to tell the message one believes comes from God and invite trial than to remain silent.
   4. An example of the gift of prophecy from the Bible is when "some prophets" from Jerusalem came down to Antioch and prophesied that there would be a famine all over the world (Acts 11:27-30), which led the church to take up a collection to help those in need.
3. ***Distinguishing between spirits.*** 
   1. The gift of discerning between spirits is about being able to supernaturally distinguish between the work of the Holy Spirit and the work of evil spirits.
      1. An example of this gift is found in Acts 16, where Paul meets a slave girl with a "fortune teller" who brought her masters good income by divining. Although this girl received "spiritual messages," they were not from the Spirit of God, but from an evil spirit. Although the girl's message was actually a most biblical and correct one: "These men are servants of the Most High God, and they proclaim to you a way of salvation," Paul was not at all pleased that she shouted this message for days, and finally commanded the evil spirit to leave her.
         1. For a person without the gift of discerning between spirits, it may be virtually impossible to know with certainty whether a "prophet" or someone with a "spiritual message" has received these words from the Spirit of God or an evil spirit. But with this gift of grace, God can supernaturally distinguish between spirits.
      2. We should not be surprised that it can sometimes be difficult to distinguish between spirits because the devil sometimes makes himself look like an "angel of light" and sends out false apostles and false prophets to try to deceive the church of God (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).
4. ***Speaking in tongues***
   1. The word "tongues" actually means "language" and in general, tongues means that God supernaturally gives you a "prayer language" that you can use to pray to God in your spirit in words that you do not understand but that God understands (1 Corinthians 14:2, 14). Normally, this language of prayer is not an existing language but a "spiritual language" that only God understands, but on certain special occasions, the person who speaks in tongues in a supernatural way may be given the opportunity to speak in an existing language, but one that he or she has never learned.
      1. Paul wants all Christians to share in the gift of tongues (1 Corinthians 14:5), but at the same time notes that not everyone receives it (1 Corinthians 12:30).
   2. As with all other gifts of grace, all Christians in general can benefit from all that the Holy Spirit does, such as speaking in tongues in this case, while God's Spirit sometimes chooses a particular person to use especially with a special gift.
      1. In this case, it may be that someone is given the supernatural ability to convey a message from God in a language that they themselves do not know. Examples of this are found in Acts 2:1-12.
      2. Many years ago, when I was given the gift of speaking in tongues, it began with just one word that I repeated over and over again. I didn't know what the word meant but I understood in a supernatural way that God understood. As time went on, more and more words came and today my tongues are like a language I use in my personal prayer.
         1. So I have generally received the gift of tongues, but I have also sometimes been used by God in a more specific way. On one occasion, we were praying a few paragraphs for a particular person and she happened to hear my tongues and asked when the prayer was over, "Christian, do you know French?" I replied in surprise, "No," whereupon she told me that I had prayed in French and that she understood what I had prayed because she knew French. Apparently, God had supernaturally led me to pray a prayer in French that she needed to hear.
   3. Paul is careful to point out that speaking in tongues should generally be used for personal edification (1 Corinthians 14:4) and that one should therefore not pray in tongues uncontrollably, for example, at a church service. It is permissible to speak in tongues at a service, but Paul wants it to be no more than two or three and to be interpreted, because the whole congregation is then edified instead of just the person praying (1 Cor 14:13-33). If one does not have an interpretation of the number of tongues, it is better to pray to God silently for oneself (1 Cor 14:28).
5. ***Interpretation of tongues***
   1. The gift of tongue interpretation means that you supernaturally understand the meaning of your own or someone else's tongue.
      1. When someone prophesies, it builds up the church, but when someone speaks in tongues, it only builds up the one who speaks in tongues, because the rest of the church does not understand what the one who speaks in tongues is saying. But if someone can explain what the one speaking in tongues was really asking for, then it can be edifying for the rest of the church as well (1 Corinthians 14:13-33).
         1. On one occasion, when I and some others had gathered for prayer, I prayed in tongues silently to myself, but the person sitting next to me happened to hear what I was praying, and also understood what I was praying! Even though my tongues were not a real language, the person in question was able to explain to me in a supernatural way what I had prayed.

[[@Bible:1 cor 12:11]]1 Cor 12:11

1. All these different spiritual gifts are gifts from God for the purpose of building up the church. The gifts of grace must never be used for self-aggrandizement, gaining advantage or causing division in the church.
2. We can never ask God for a particular gift, but we must gratefully receive the gift that God's Spirit gives us.
3. In this verse we can see that the Spirit of God distributes his gifts *"to each one"*. So every Christian can receive at least one gift, and if you are reading this and have not received a gift, I would encourage you to start praying to God to receive one. Because if you do, you will soon see that God's word is true!

## 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 - The Body of Christ

[[@Bible:1 Cor 12:12-14]]1 Cor 12:12-14

1. Paul compares the church to a body. At the same time as we all belong together, we are also different.
2. What brings believers together and unites them into a "body" is the "baptism" of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who removes the enmity between Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, and makes them "brothers and sisters" in Christ.
   1. The word "baptism" ("baptizo" in Greek) means to "lower", "dip", or "completely envelop".
      1. For example, if you immerse a piece of fabric in paint, it is enveloped by the paint and becomes completely filled with it.
      2. If a believer is baptized in water, he is completely surrounded by water and rises as a new man. An outward manifestation of inward salvation.
      3. If you are baptized in the Holy Spirit, you are completely enveloped and filled with the Spirit of God and empowered to live a Christian life boldly and bear witness to Jesus to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

[[@Bible:1 Cor 12:15-20]]1 Cor 12:15-16

1. It is as wrong for a foot to say that it does not belong to the body because it is not a hand, as for a Greek to say that he does not belong to the people of God because he is not a Jew, or for a person who does not have the gift of tongues to say that he cannot be a Pentecostal. What binds the body together is not any ethnicity, wealth or spiritual gift, but faith in Jesus.

[[@Bible:1 Cor 12:15-20]]1 Cor 12:17-20

1. Not only does Paul want to stress that we should accept each other's differences in the church, he goes so far as to say that differences are even *necessary* for the whole to work. A body must have different kinds of body parts in order to function as a body is meant to.
2. Why did the hand become a hand, and the foot a foot? Well, because God wanted to create that way and he has the right to choose.
   1. Why was I given the gift of prophesying, and you the gift of healing the sick? Well, because God wanted it that way and he has the right to decide.
   2. In this way, none of us can take credit for what God has given us, but instead use our gifts together to glorify God. In this way, we realize that we need each other to fully function as the body of Christ together.

[[@Bible:1 Cor 12:21-26]]1 Cor 12:21-26

1. While we hide some of our body parts so as not to show them off to all and sundry, we give them greater honour by dressing them.
   1. The heart and lungs may be considered more sensitive parts of the body than the arms and legs, but they are still vital and are protected more than the other parts of the body.
2. If we each understand our place in God's kingdom and seek to serve God according to the gifts and abilities we have, then we don't need to quarrel with each other. It is only when we want to take someone else's place that divisions arise.
3. Although the foot is a relatively tough and resilient part of the body, nothing hurts like stepping on a Lego bit. In such a tragic and shocking event, the whole body suffers, not just the foot. To avoid a recurrence, the eyes need to help the feet see the floor properly. The eyes help the feet even if it was not the eyes that suffered, but because the body is connected.
   1. No part of the body lives only for its own sake. The hands make sure the whole body is fed. The hands do this not just for the hands, but for the whole body. The heart does not just pump blood around the heart, but around the whole body.

[[@Bible:1 Cor 12:27-28]]1 Cor 12:27-28

1. Paul now mentions eight different functions and gifts, "body parts", of the church. All believers can generally function in all of these gifts, but some are equipped by the Holy Spirit in a more specific way.
   1. Apostles
      1. The word "apostle" ("apostolos" in Greek) means "sent", and can have several different meanings:
         1. In a sense, all Christians are apostles, i.e. "sent" by Jesus into the world to preach the gospel in word and deed.
         2. A second meaning of the word is the twelve apostles of Jesus, his closest circle who wrote the New Testament and were the first leaders of the early church. One criterion for being such an apostle was to have been with Jesus from the beginning, and to have been sent by Jesus (John 20:21) as a "witness to Jesus' resurrection" (Acts 1:21-22). Apostles of this kind do not exist today but are reserved for the time of the early church in order to lay the foundations of Christianity (Eph 2:20, Acts 2:42).
         3. A third meaning of the word "apostle", and the kind of apostle I think Paul means in this verse, is "a pioneer church leader", "church planter" or "missionary". For example, we see that the pioneer church leaders Paul (1 Cor 9:1-2), Barnabas (Acts 14:14), James (Gal 1:19), Andronicus, and Junias (Rom 16:7) are all called "apostles," even though they were not among the original twelve apostles.
            1. An apostle of this kind works with the gospel, lays the foundations of churches or church activities, builds up and takes new initiatives in new places. When the work is self-sustaining, the apostle moves on to new unreached areas to build up the kingdom of God there as well.

Because an apostle is often a pioneer who breaks new ground and builds a church from the ground up, apostles are often gifted with more or less all five of these ministry gifts. An apostle must be an evangelist to reach new people, and a shepherd to care for those who are saved. An apostle must also be able to prophesy in order to supernaturally touch people's insides, and must also be able to preach Scripture in a way that people understand.

* 1. Prophet
     1. In the Old Testament, a prophet was a "mouthpiece" for God and conveyed God's word to God's people.
        1. In Joel 2:28-29, the prophet Joel prophesies that in the end times God will pour out his Spirit on both men and women so that they will prophesy. This was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21).
     2. In the New Testament, to "prophesy" or to be a "prophet" ("prophetes" in Greek) usually means to communicate in one's own words what God has revealed to the prophet.
        1. Prophetic words give people *"edification, encouragement and comfort"* (1 Corinthians 14:3) to the whole church (1 Corinthians 14:4-5) and, for evangelistic purposes, can reveal a person's inner *"secrets"* so that they are led to salvation and worship (1 Corinthians 14:24-25).
        2. Since the prophetic message is from God but delivered through a human being, prophetic greetings can sometimes contain errors, or be "colored" by the person who has experienced the message. Therefore, it is important that all prophetic words be *"tested"* by those who hear the message, so that they are consistent with God's word and will (1 Cor 14:29, 1 Thess 5:20-21).
        3. Some examples of New Testament prophets are Agabus, who predicted a severe famine (Acts 11:28), Judas and Silas, who encouraged and strengthened the brothers (Acts 15:32), and the evangelist Philip's four unmarried daughters who all had prophetic gifts (Acts 21:8-9).
  2. Teachers
     1. A "teacher" ("didaskalos" in Greek) teaches the Word of God (Romans 12:7). So do evangelists and shepherds, of course, but teachers have a special gift for opening up the Scriptures (Luke 24:25-32), sharing the "word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15), teaching the "sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1), passing on the apostles' teaching (2 Timothy 2:2) so that people understand and embrace the message at a deeper level.
  3. Acts of Power
     1. The gift of power ("dynamis" in Greek) is about God performing remarkable miracles at well-chosen times that defy all natural laws.
        1. Some examples of acts of power are when Jesus and Peter walked on water (Matthew 14:22-33), when Jesus commands the storm to calm down (Matthew 8:23-27) or when the Spirit of God hastily "snatches" Philip from the desert and miraculously moves him to the city of Ashdod (Acts 8:39).
  4. Cure the sick
     1. All Christians can pray for the sick and many who do so regularly can testify that miracles sometimes happen! But those who receive the gift of healing ("charismata iama" in Greek) are especially used by the Spirit of God to pray for the sick and see many people healed.
     2. God often performs miracles and healings in order to *"confirm his gracious word"* as it says in Acts 14:3. Supernatural miracles go hand in hand with sound Bible teaching.
  5. Help
     1. To be set by God "to help" ("antilempsis" in Greek) means to help and assist others to serve God in their gifts.
        1. In the Old Testament, there is a great story about King Saul's son Jonathan and his "armour-bearer" (1 Sam 14). In the story, Jonathan is the hero, but he wouldn't have made it if it weren't for his anonymous armour-bearer. Not only did the armour-bearer, of course, carry Jonathan's weapon for him, he was also a support that gave Jonathan the courage to carry out his task. When Jonathan hesitates about his task, the weapon bearer says: "*Do whatever you have in mind. You go! I will follow you wherever you want to go."* (1 Sam 14:7) Without the support of the armour-bearer, Jonathan would never have succeeded in his own task. When the battle does come, it is Jonathan who must fight, but the armour-bearer goes behind and delivers the deathblow to those whom Jonathan defeats. Together they defeat the Philistines, leading to Israel eventually winning the war against all odds. However, only Jonathan gets the credit for the victory while the weapon bearer remains anonymous. But for a person with the gift of "helping," the reward is not the limelight, but seeing other people grow in their faith and function in their gifts to the glory of God.
     2. The gift of helping can also mean helping other people socially and diaconally in various ways.
  6. Steer
     1. The word "steer" ("kybernesis" in Greek) is associated with being, for example, a "helmsman" on a boat, or a "pilot". A person with this gift is simply skilled at using the Holy Spirit to steer the church in the right direction, making sure that things are not going too fast, too slow or in the wrong direction, and that everyone is in the right place and knows what they are supposed to be doing. For example, an administrative leader or a president.
  7. Speaking different kinds of tongues
     1. The word "tongues" ("glossa" in Greek) actually means "language" and in general tongues means that God supernaturally gives you a "prayer language" that you can use to pray to God in your spirit with words that you do not understand but that God understands (1 Corinthians 14:2, 14). Normally, this language of prayer is not an existing language but a "spiritual language" that only God understands, but on certain special occasions, the person who speaks in tongues in a supernatural way may be given the opportunity to speak in an existing language, but one that he or she has never learned.
        1. Paul wants all Christians to share in the gift of tongues (1 Corinthians 14:5), but at the same time notes that not everyone receives it (1 Corinthians 12:30).

[[@Bible:1 Cor 12:28-31]]1 Cor 12:28-31

1. Paul now concludes his argument with a rhetorical question, "Are not all...?" Paul's point is that we should allow all the gifts of the Holy Spirit to flow into the body of the church rather than focusing too much on one particular gift or one specific charismatic leader. It is not when all the parts of the body try to become one mouth that the body works best, but when all the different limbs work together and function as a whole.

# 2 Corinthians

## 2 Corinthians 8:1-9 - Encouragement to Give Generously

[[@Bible:2 cor 8:1-2]]2 Cor 8:1-2

1. In the eighth and ninth chapters of Second Corinthians, Paul writes about "giving", partly because he is trying to raise money for the poor Christians in Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1-4).
   1. In 1 Corinthians 16, Paul writes that he wants the churches to take up a collection "on the first day of the week", i.e. on the Sunday when the Christians gathered for worship.
2. Generally speaking, in Paul's time, northern Greece was called "Macedonia" and southern Greece was called "Achaia". In the north were cities such as Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea, while in the south were Corinth and Athens.
   1. In this letter to the church in Corinth, Paul wants the Christians of Achaia to learn from the example of generous giving of their northern neighbours.
   2. The Macedonians themselves lived in "deep poverty", but gave relatively much because of "sincere devotion".

[[@Bible:2 cor 8:3-4]]2 Cor 8:3-4

1. Since the Macedonians were poor, they did not give much overall, but they did give "according to their ability".
   1. It is impossible not to recall how the poor widow in Luke 21:1-4, according to Jesus, gave more than everyone else, even though she gave only 2 measly copper coins. Everyone else gave of their abundance while the widow "gave of her poverty all that she had to live on".
   2. A poor person can therefore sacrifice relatively more of his money than a rich person can, even if the rich person actually gives more.
2. Paul did not have to give a long collection speech to convince the Macedonians to share their money with the Christians in Jerusalem; on the contrary, it was the Macedonians themselves who "earnestly" asked to "share in the help of the saints".
   1. Perhaps it was even the case that Paul, because of the poverty of the Macedonians, was initially unwilling to accept the Macedonians' money.
   2. Christian giving is not measured by how much money we *give*, but by how much money we *sacrifice*.

[[@Bible:2 cor 8:5]]2 Cor 8:5

1. The Macedonians were able to give so much money because they had first given themselves "to the Lord". This is the key to learning how to share generously.
   1. The Macedonians had already given themselves and everything they owned to God, so it was not difficult to share their money with the poor in Jerusalem.
   2. For those who have not given themselves completely to the Lord, every penny they sacrifice must be carefully considered. Thus, anyone who wants to learn the blessings of generous giving must first give himself completely to the Lord.
   3. It's also important to remember that God doesn't really want our money, he wants US. What good does it do you if you give away all your money, but keep your heart to yourself? Make sure to give your whole life to the Lord first and foremost and generous giving will eventually most likely follow.
   4. One who has given his whole life to the Lord does not go around thinking about what percentage of his salary he should sacrifice, but sees all his assets as tools in the hands of the Lord.

[[@Bible:2 cor 8:6]]2 Cor 8:6

1. Titus was one of Paul's most faithful co-workers and probably the one who brought this letter to the church in Corinth and also the one who would later bring the money collected to Paul.
2. It seems that after Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, the Christians in Corinth began a collection that he now wants them to "complete" (2 Corinthians 9:2).
   1. It's easy to get inspired and dedicated to doing something good, but then when you get back to everyday life, it just doesn't happen. It's important to finish what you've started.
   2. It is possible that some of the "false apostles" in Corinth were able to persuade the Corinthians to give their collected money to them instead of to the poor in Jerusalem (2 Cor 2:17, 2 Cor 11:20).
      1. It is not impossible that it is because of this situation that Paul wants to distance himself from the false apostles by not accepting money from the church in Corinth himself (2 Corinthians 11:7-12, 2 Corinthians 12:13-18).
   3. Fortunately, the Corinthians eventually completed their collection (Romans 15:25-26, Acts 24:17).

[[@Bible:2 cor 8:7]]2 Cor 8:7

1. Where in the Swedish Bible it says "act of love", in the Greek basic text it says "charis", which is normally translated as "grace". Being able to give generously is part of the grace that God gives us. That God has given us grace means that he has lovingly saved us from sin and given us the promise of a new eternal life, a life that he has already begun to transform with his Holy Spirit. There are no "good works" we can do to merit God's grace, we can only gratefully receive grace by believing in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Grace then manifests itself in our lives as the Holy Spirit transforms us in various ways. If we freely and genuinely *want to* share our resources, then it means that we are seeing signs of this transformation.
   1. If God had not blessed you with wealth, you would not have *been able to* give money at all.
   2. If God had not saved and transformed your heart, you would never have *wanted to* give your money to someone else. You would have remained in your former sinful and selfish life.
   3. The fact that the Macedonians "earnestly asked" to participate in this collection means that God's grace had worked in their hearts and made them generous.

[[@Bible:2 cor 8:8]]2 Cor 8:8

1. You can't force someone to be loving, it kind of falls on its own reasonableness. Paul is careful to point out that this generous giving is not a "command". One who is compelled to give, does not "give", but instead "pays", something that is and always will be alien to the Christian Church. Giving and offering of one's money to church activities is and always will be voluntary.
   1. If you are in a Christian context where tithing is "forced" or something similar, I recommend you ask your leaders to read Second Corinthians at least once more.
2. Paul believed that the Corinthians' giving was a test to see if their "love is genuine". The Apostle John makes a similar point in his first letter:
   1. *"17 If a man has the goods of this world and sees his brother in need, but closes his heart to him, how can the love of God abide in him? 18Dear children, let us love, not in words or phrases, but in deeds and in truth."* (1 John 3:17-18)
   2. The Christian faith constantly returns to this "love", it is something extremely central throughout the Bible. You can't claim to be living a loving life if you keep your money all to yourself, even though you see all the needs that exist.

[[@Bible:2 cor 8:9]]2 Cor 8:9

1. Paul began by giving the example of generous giving from Macedonia, now Paul continues with the second example; Jesus.
2. Again Paul returns to this with "grace". God gives us "grace" in that Jesus willingly and lovingly "gave" himself to die for our sins so that we might receive forgiveness and atonement.
   1. It is no coincidence that Paul so frequently uses the word "grace" when he teaches about "giving"; the two are undeniably linked. God's grace means that God has given us forgiveness of sins even though we do not deserve it. God's grace also means that he has begun a work in our hearts, a work of slowly but surely transforming us from the sinners we were before we were saved, to becoming more and more like Jesus, the image of God.
3. Paul writes that Jesus was "rich but became poor". Jesus was born into a simple family who fled to Egypt in his early years, surely Jesus could not have been described as "rich" during his earthly life? No, what Paul is referring to is Jesus' "preexistence".
   1. Since Jesus is the Son of God, he has always existed as part of the Trinity. When Jesus was born human, he gave up his existence in heaven with all its riches, glory and majesty to share fully in our human condition. After Jesus rose from the dead, he returned to heaven and now sits on his rightful throne.
   2. Some Bible passages about Jesus' pre-existence: Phil 2:6-11, John 8:58, John 17:5.

## 2 Corinthians 8:10-24 - Practical Advice on Christian Giving

[[@Bible:2 cor 8:10-11]]2 Cor 8:10-11

1. If earlier in the chapter Paul gave exemplary examples of giving and explained the spiritual background to Christian giving, he now presents some practical advice on how a Christian should give of his money.
   1. The first practical advice for generous Christian giving is to "finish what you start". The Corinthians had previously decided to give money to the poor in Jerusalem; now they need to complete that decision as well.
      1. All decisions that a Christian makes should be well thought out. It is important to "count the cost", as Jesus put it (Luke 14:28), of all the important decisions you make so that you do not later realise that you have made a mistake.
      2. That is why it is so important that as a preacher you do not stir up a lawsuit or manipulate someone's decision, a decision that the latter may not be able to live up to.
   2. The second practical advice for generous Christian giving is "willingness". Christian giving is based on "wanting" to give. If you give because you feel compelled or something like that, then it is not really "giving", because giving is based on willingness.
   3. The third practical advice for generous Christian giving is the principle of "giving according to the means you have". Christian giving is not measured by how much money one gives, and neither Paul nor God expects us to give something we do not have.
      1. Someone who gives only 100 crowns may generously share all the money they have, while someone who gives 1000 crowns may only give dutifully of their abundance.
   4. An often debated question is whether Christians should tithe or not. There is a lot to be said on this subject, but in short it can be said that tithing as a *law* obviously does not apply to us Christians because we belong to the New Covenant. However, tithing as a *principle* can be said to be a good benchmark for how much of one's money one should give in normal circumstances.
      1. If it is more important to give exactly 10% than to give generously depending on the situation, then you have missed the point of Christian giving. If the Old Covenant was based on the Law of Moses, the New Covenant is based on the love of Jesus. Christian giving is based on *wanting to* give, not *having to* give.
         1. The person who gives because he has to, he only gives exactly as much as you have to, for example 10%, but the person who gives because he wants to, he can sometimes give 100%, depending on the situation.

[[@Bible:2 cor 8:13]]2 Cor 8:13

1. The idea was not that the Corinthians would give of their money so that the Christians in Jerusalem would become rich at their expense, no, they would give to help those who were less fortunate than themselves.
   1. So you should not give away your money so that a pastor or preacher can become rich and live a luxurious life.
   2. The fourth practical advice is that giving is based on the needs of the other. There is no point in a poor person giving of his money to a rich person just for the sake of it.

[[@Bible:2 cor 8:14]]2 Cor 8:14

1. At the moment, the needs were greater in Jerusalem than in Corinth, but who knows, in the future it might be the other way around? One should not give in order to get back, but it may still be good to know that the principle of giving applies in all directions and in the future it may be ourselves who are in great need of a fundraiser.
   1. The fifth piece of practical advice is to "treat others as you would like to be treated yourself" (Matthew 7:12). If we think it is good when other Christians give generously to us, then we should also strive to give generously ourselves when money is available to us.

[[@Bible:2 cor 8:16]]2 Cor 8:16

1. Since Titus was to take with him the money collected by the Corinthians, Paul here writes a recommendation for Titus so that the Corinthians would feel secure in handing over their money to him.
   1. The sixth piece of practical advice Paul gives us about Christian giving is to put trustworthy people in charge of the money. Since the money is collected to help poor people, it is very important that it is handled in the best possible way so that no money is lost in the process.

[[@Bible:2 cor 8:21]]2 Cor 8:21

1. The seventh piece of practical advice is to manage all money raised *transparently*. Let everyone who wants to know how much money has been raised, who is in charge of it and how it is distributed.
   1. Gossip and suspicion about corruption would be devastating for the Church and must be avoided in every possible way.

[[@Bible:2 cor 8:24]]2 Cor 8:24

1. As I have written before, generous giving is the result of God's grace working in one's life. The practical and the spiritual go together. Having become a Christian eventually affects all areas of life, including money, sex and power (1 John 4:20-21).

## 2 Corinthians 9:1-15 - The Cheerful Giver

[[@Bible:2 cor 9:1-2]]2 Cor 9:1-2

1. In Paul's time, Macedonia was the northern part of Greece, while Achaia was the southern. Corinth was the capital of Achaia, while Macedonia contained cities such as Philippi, Berea and Thessalonica.
2. The "help" Paul writes about is the collection of money that he has previously wanted the Corinthians to collect for the Christians in Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1-4).
3. Paul writes that he doesn't really need to write to the Corinthians about this Christian giving, so why does he?
   1. Actually, the Corinthians knew that they should collect money for the poor, but they had gotten out of the way.
   2. In the same way, one might wonder why one should preach a sermon on giving, when everyone knows that one should give? Well, because most of us sometimes don't live up to what we set out to do, and need to be reminded to continue what we started.
4. In the last chapter, Paul wrote about how eager the northern neighbors of the Corinthians, the Macedonians, were to participate in the collection, and now he writes that he knows "how willing" the Corinthians are to collect the money. But in fact, unlike the exemplary devotion of the Macedonians, the Corinthians' fundraising had come off. After all, if the Corinthians had been so willing to give money, Paul would not reasonably have needed to write this letter to urge them to start collecting again!
   1. Paul is trying to make the Corinthians realize that if they do not complete the collection well, both Paul and the Corinthians will be ashamed of their failure. And surely the Corinthians don't want to be financially outdone by their poor neighbours to the north, the Macedonians?
   2. Fortunately, the Corinthians eventually completed their collection (Romans 15:25-26, Acts 24:17).
   3. For a Christian, it is easy to decide in a moment of devotion to "give it all" for Jesus Christ, but when everyday life returns, it is more difficult to live up to what was previously promised.
      1. To avoid this, it is important to make "well thought-out decisions" and to "discipline oneself".

[[@Bible:2 cor 9:5]]2 Cor 9:5

1. The fact that Paul wants the collection to be finished *before* he gets to Corinth shows how far removed manipulative collect speech was from Paul's reality. Paul wants the Corinthians to fulfill what they have pledged, but he does not want to coerce them or manipulate them into giving more in the heat of the moment than they really want.

[[@Bible:2 cor 9:6]]2 Cor 9:6

1. Paul compares the giving of money to farmers sowing seed. A farmer is not frugal with his seed, but sows as much as he can because he knows that he will also reap more than if he had sown little. The farmer will have less grain but a bigger harvest.
   1. In the same way, he who does not sow his money will keep his money, but will miss out on the bountiful harvest.
2. If you sow "money" by giving generously to the poor who need help, do you also reap money? No, not necessarily. In the New Testament we see repeatedly that God promises that the sower will not lose his wages, he will reap, but it rarely says exactly *what* you will reap, rather "you will get what you need" (Phil 4:19, Matt 10:42).
   1. Thanks to this collection, the Christians in Jerusalem received what they needed at that particular moment, namely money. But the great need of the Corinthians was not money, and therefore it is not at all certain that God blesses them financially just because they "sowed" money.
   2. Those who give of their money only to reap money for themselves are not really "giving", but trying to "buy" God's blessings, which God sees through because he sees our hearts. We should give because we want to *give,* not because we want to *receive.* You give of your money because you love your fellow man, not because you love yourself.

[[@Bible:2 cor 9:7]]2 Cor 9:7

1. Here we see that giving is for "everyone". Whether rich or poor, everyone can give something. The important thing is not necessarily how much you give, but that you give according to your ability (2 Corinthians 8:3).
2. It is important to make a considered "decision" to give so that you are not manipulated into giving more than you want or into giving for selfish reasons so that you can reap the rewards.
   1. How much should a Christian decide to give?
   2. In the Old Testament, the Law of Moses states that the people of Israel are to give tithes of their "grain, fruit and livestock" (Leviticus 27:30-32) to the Levites, the priests, "as a reward for their service at the Tent of Meeting" (Numbers 18:21-28) and to "the stranger, the orphan and the widow" (Deuteronomy 26:12).
   3. Since we Christians are not under the Law of Moses (Rom 6:14-15, 1 Cor 9:20, Gal 5:18), there is no requirement to tithe. On the other hand, "10%" may well be seen as a good biblical principle to "decide" to give, but not because we *have to*, but because we *want to*. The very principle of 10% is found both before and after the Law of Moses (Gen 14:18-20, Heb 7:2-9).
   4. It is not wrong for a congregation to think and talk together from time to time about how much money they want to give in order to have a common church building and an employed pastor. What is then agreed upon and "decided" should then be done as much as possible to live up to, but not out of compulsion but because you have decided to do so and because you want to.
   5. For God, it is not the size of the gift that matters, but the attitude of the heart. What matters is not how much you give, but that you give generously to those in need (Matthew 25:31-46).
   6. Although Paul strongly emphasizes "voluntariness" and "joy", there is also a serious side to this giving. For example, if you live in a society with many poor people, but turn a blind eye to this and keep all your money for yourself even though you could afford to give, then you are committing a serious sin (Matthew 5:42, 1 John 3:17).
   7. So if anyone wonders how much a Christian should give, I think the best biblical answer is just verse 7 of this chapter: "*Let each one give what he has decided in his heart."*
3. Whether you give your money or not indirectly reveals what you have "in your heart". If you say you love God more than anything but spend all your money on technology gadgets, then confession and practice don't match, or as Jesus himself said: "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:21).
4. Under no circumstances should you give your money out of "compulsion", for example by someone giving a long manipulative collective speech. Instead of giving out of "desire or compulsion", Christian giving is about giving in "joy and voluntariness".
5. God wants us to give in joy because that's how He gives us everything we need! God doesn't grumble when he gives us of his riches, no he is happy to give us all we need. God doesn't withhold his blessings or give us as little as possible, no he gives us everything we need in abundance!

[[@Bible:2 cor 9:8]]2 Cor 9:8

1. Being able to give generously is part of the grace that God gives us. That God has given us grace means that he has lovingly saved us from sin and given us the promise of a new eternal life, a life that he has already begun to transform with his Holy Spirit. There are no "good works" we can do to merit God's grace, we can only gratefully receive grace by believing in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Grace then manifests itself in our lives as the Holy Spirit transforms us in various ways. If we freely and genuinely *want to* share our resources, then it means that we are seeing signs of this transformation.
   1. If God had not saved and transformed your heart, you would never have *wanted to* give your money to someone else. You would have remained in your former sinful and selfish life.
   2. Hopefully, God's grace has overflowed in our lives so that we have been "sanctified" and become more like Jesus in every possible area of our lives.
      1. When we were sinners, we may have looked for a life partner in the pub, but when God's grace transforms us on the inside, we find other more holy ways to find a life partner.
      2. When we were sinners, our lives may have been about getting rich at the expense of others, but after God's grace has been allowed to work in our lives, we suddenly have other motives in our lives.
      3. God's grace transforms us from the inside out so that we wholeheartedly want to live a Christian life with Jesus as our model.
2. Feeling that you "have enough of everything" means that you have peace and don't need to chase after worldly goods.
   1. It is said that when Alexander the Great had conquered the whole world, he wept because there was nothing more to conquer.
   2. Jesus conveys a similar thought when he says, "*What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his soul?"* (Mark 8:36).
   3. The author of Ecclesiastes "set his heart on pondering and exploring everything" but realised that everything is only "perishable" and that the only thing that really matters is that: "fear God and keep his commandments" (Ecclesiastes 12:13).
3. God blesses us not to keep it for ourselves but to "give abundantly to every good work". If God has blessed you with a beautiful singing voice; sing! If God has blessed you with a large wallet; give generously! If God has blessed you with manual dexterity; carve!

[[@Bible:2 cor 9:11]]2 Cor 9:11

1. God's purpose in making us "rich in everything" is so that we can then be "bountiful in everything". Again, God does not give us abundance so that we can keep it for ourselves, but so that we can cheerfully give it to others.
2. Something that in the kingdom of God is worth much more than worldly money is "thanksgiving". The money collected by the Corinthians will bring about "thanksgiving to God", something that is much more valuable than money itself.

[[@Bible:2 cor 9:12-15]]2 Cor 9:12-15

1. As I mentioned earlier, when you sow "money" it does not necessarily mean that you will reap "money", but rather what is needed. However, here we see examples of some of the blessings that the money raised will bring.
2. Christian giving leads first of all to "meeting the needs of the saints", but also to "thanksgiving" before God, a gain that is certainly not to be underestimated, and that the Christians in Jerusalem will "pray for" and "long for" the Corinthians. Christian giving thus leads to Christians being fed, thankful to God and praying for other Christians.
   1. The "saints" are all Christians, not just those who work as pastors or who for some reason are considered more holy than others. All who have been saved have also been made holy, that is, "consecrated" to God.
3. Paul concludes his teaching on Christian giving by thanking God for *his* gift to us: salvation in Jesus Christ. God has given us everything, even himself! Not only that, but he gave himself as a *gift,* meaning there is nothing we can do to earn salvation, we can only *receive* the gift by *believing in Jesus* (John 3:16).
   1. Thanks to God's gift to us, our "needs" have been met, which should lead to "thanksgiving" and to "praying for" and "longing" for other Christians.
4. It feels like Paul has first taught two chapters on why and how a Christian should give of his money, and then concluded with an argument that really makes all other arguments redundant!
   1. If you have previously pondered whether or how much to give, Paul's conclusion should lead you to realize that you want to give your whole life to God! If God has been so generous as to give me salvation and eternal life, shouldn't I generously share all I can?

# Ephesians

## Ephesians 4:11-16 - The Five Ministries

[[@Bible:eph 4:11]]Eph 4:11

1. In 1 Corinthians 12:4, Paul writes that "there are different kinds of grace". So there is a great variety in how the Spirit equips us with spiritual gifts and spiritual services.
   1. As with all spiritual gifts, all Christians can be used by God in all gifts in general, while God also wants to use some people more specifically. For example, all Christians can pray for the sick and see healings, but some are chosen by God to function more specifically in the gift of healing the sick.
2. Now Paul goes on to mention five (or four, depending on how you look at shepherd/teacher) "gifts of service":
   1. Apostles
      1. The word "apostle" ("apostolos" in Greek) means "sent", and can have several different meanings:
         1. In a sense, all Christians are apostles, i.e. "sent" by Jesus into the world to preach the gospel in word and deed.
         2. A second meaning of the word is the twelve apostles of Jesus, his closest circle who wrote the New Testament and were the first leaders of the early church. One criterion for being such an apostle was to have been with Jesus from the beginning, and to have been sent by Jesus (John 20:21) as a "witness to Jesus' resurrection" (Acts 1:21-22). Apostles of this kind do not exist today but are reserved for the time of the early church in order to lay the foundations of Christianity (Eph 2:20, Acts 2:42).
         3. A third meaning of the word "apostle", and the kind of apostle I think Paul means in this verse, is "a pioneer church leader", "church planter" or "missionary". For example, we see that the pioneer church leaders Paul (1 Cor 9:1-2), Barnabas (Acts 14:14), James (Gal 1:19), Andronicus, and Junias (Rom 16:7) are all called "apostles," even though they were not among the original twelve apostles.
            1. An apostle of this kind works with the gospel, lays the foundations for churches or church activities, builds up and takes new initiatives in new places. When the work is self-sustaining, the apostle moves on to new unreached areas to build up the kingdom of God there as well.

Because an apostle is often a pioneer who breaks new ground and builds a church from the ground up, apostles are often gifted with more or less all five of these ministry gifts. An apostle must be an evangelist to reach new people, and a shepherd to care for those who are saved. An apostle must also be able to prophesy in order to supernaturally touch people's insides, and must also be able to preach Scripture in a way that people understand.

* 1. Prophet
     1. In the Old Testament, a prophet was a "mouthpiece" for God and conveyed God's word to God's people.
        1. In Joel 2:28-29, the prophet Joel prophesies that in the end times God will pour out his Spirit on both men and women so that they will prophesy. This was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21).
     2. In the New Testament, to "prophesy" or to be a "prophet" ("prophetes" in Greek) usually means to communicate in one's own words what God has revealed to the prophet.
        1. Prophetic words give people *"edification, encouragement and comfort"* (1 Corinthians 14:3) to the whole church (1 Corinthians 14:4-5) and, for evangelistic purposes, can reveal a person's inner *"secrets"* so that they are led to salvation and worship (1 Corinthians 14:24-25).
        2. Since the prophetic message is from God but delivered through a human being, prophetic greetings can sometimes contain errors, or be "colored" by the person who has experienced the message. Therefore, it is important that all prophetic words be *"tested"* by those who hear the message, so that they are consistent with God's word and will (1 Cor 14:29, 1 Thess 5:20-21).
        3. Some examples of New Testament prophets are Agabus, who predicted a severe famine (Acts 11:28), Judas and Silas, who encouraged and strengthened the brothers (Acts 15:32), and the evangelist Philip's four unmarried daughters who all had prophetic gifts (Acts 21:8-9).
  2. Evangelists
     1. A New Testament "evangelist" ("euangelistes" in Greek) is a person who proclaims the "gospel" (=good news) of Jesus.
        1. The Greek word "evangelion" is a combination of the two words "eu" (= good) and "angelos" (= messenger).
        2. Roman heralds used to stand in city squares and proclaim "good news" when, for example, a military victory or the accession of a new emperor.
     2. Examples of evangelists in the New Testament are Timothy (2 Timothy 4:5) and Philip (Acts 21:8), who preached Christ to the people of Samaria (Acts 8:4-5), and who preached the gospel of Jesus to the Ethiopian courtier (Acts 8:26-40), based on Scripture.
     3. If a shepherd reaches out to his own congregation and cares for those who are already Christians, the evangelist reaches out to new people who have not yet heard the good news of salvation in Jesus.
        1. While all Christians are generally commissioned to spread the gospel (Matthew 28:18-20), God equips some more specifically. Evangelists have a special ability to reach new people and lead them to salvation.
  3. Herdar
     1. The word "shepherd" ("poimen" in Greek and "pastor" in Latin) is taken from "sheepherder" and simply means to be a shepherd over a "flock" of believers.
        1. In the Old Testament, God is described as "the shepherd of Israel" (Psalm 80:1) and in the New Testament, Jesus is described as "the good shepherd" (John 10:11). In a conversation with Peter, Jesus urges Peter to be a shepherd of Jesus' sheep and lead them in the pasture (John 21:15-17).
        2. Just as a shepherd leads his sheep to grass and water and protects them from wolves, so a shepherd leads his members to the Bible and prayer and protects them from stray teachers.
     2. Theologians disagree about whether shepherds and teachers are two different ministries or whether they belong together. In the original Greek text, it seems that Paul is lumping them together. However, in my experience, they are two different ministries that do not necessarily always go together. Certainly a shepherd must be able to teach the word of God, but that is not necessarily his or her primary gift. Nor is it always certain that a good Bible teacher is also a gifted shepherd and pastor.
        1. In Acts, Paul calls the elders of the church in Ephesus to be "shepherds" of the flock over which the Holy Spirit has placed them (Acts 20:28). But while all elders are to be shepherds, Paul does not seem to think that all elders should be engaged in *"preaching and teaching"* (1 Tim 5:17).
  4. Teachers
     1. A "teacher" ("didaskalos" in Greek) teaches the Word of God (Romans 12:7). So do evangelists and shepherds, of course, but teachers have a special gift for opening up the Scriptures (Luke 24:25-32), sharing the "word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15), teaching the "sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1), passing on the apostles' teaching (2 Timothy 2:2) so that people understand and embrace the message at a deeper level.

1. An interesting "detail" to ponder is the fact that when Paul describes the five ministries, he mentions neither bishop, priest nor deacon. These three ministries have been established in the historical churches in post-biblical times. My understanding is that the hierarchical way these three ministries function in today's historic churches is not consistent with the way they are described in the Bible, where they are rather described almost synonymously (1 Peter 5:1-2), and that we find a more biblically accurate governance in these five ministries.
   1. In fact, it was not until the 100th century AD that apostles and prophets became bishops and priests. Instead of the five ministries being a collegial leadership with different gifts complementing each other, ecclesiastical leadership became hierarchical. Perhaps this development was due to a loss of contact with the Holy Spirit and compensated for this with hierarchical structures.

[[@Bible:eph 4:12-13]]Eph 4:12-13

1. It is not God's intention that a pastor or church leader alone should do all the work of the church while the members of the congregation silently watch. Part of the church leader's responsibility is to help church members participate in the work of the church. This is done as a church leader by "equipping the saints" to do two things in particular: 1) "to carry out their ministry" and 2) "to build up the body of Christ".
   1. The Greek word translated as "equip" is "katartismos" and was sometimes used to describe the "mending" of fish nets or broken bones.
      1. The work of a church leader in equipping the church can be as painstaking and long-term as sitting down to mend a fishing net or someone's broken bones. It takes time and requires patience and hard work.
      2. The goal of discipleship is to grow in faith and become like Jesus (Luke 6:40), *"well equipped for every good work"* (2 Timothy 3:17).
   2. The body of Christ, the church, is compared two chapters earlier to a *"holy temple"* that is joined together and grows (Ephesians 2:21). The church is being "built up" in the same way that, stone by stone, all the parts are put in their proper place. Peter makes a similar comparison, saying that we are *"living stones"* in a *"spiritual house"* (1 Pet 2:5).
      1. A church leader is thus a good builder who helps church members to find their place and purpose in the spiritual building of the church.
2. One result of building the spiritual church is 1) unity in faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, 2) male maturity and 3) being fully filled with Christ.
   1. Through the care of a Bible teacher, the church can grow in its knowledge of Jesus and gain a unified understanding of who he is.
   2. By growing in your faith, you will eventually reach a maturity of faith that will prevent you from being tossed about like a ship on a stormy sea.
      1. The word "male" maturity is not used as a contrast to "female" maturity, but as a contrast to a "childlike" maturity in verse 14.
         1. In the Bible, we see that the term "man" often includes both men and women as a kind of collective term. In Hebrew, the word for "man" is the same as the first man's name: "adam" (Gen 1:27). Just as the word "man" can mean "humanity", the word "brothers" can also mean "siblings" and include both "brothers and sisters".
   3. By finding one's place in the spiritual building of the church and serving God according to the gifts and calling one has, one grows in faith, matures and becomes more and more like Jesus. This is true both individually for the individual disciple, but also collectively for the whole congregation together.

[[@Bible:eph 4:14-16]]Eph 4:14-16

1. A mature faith, a faith built on the New Testament with Jesus as its cornerstone (Eph 2:20), is not tossed back and forth between different doctrines like a ship on a stormy sea. The mature in faith builds his faith on what is written about Jesus in the New Testament and is not deceived by unbiblical teachings here and there.
   1. Paul compares the deceptions of the false teachers to "false gambling", i.e. cheating at cards, for example. Just as a cheating card player uses cheating and lying to cheat his fellow players out of money, so a false teacher uses his unbiblical teachings to deceive church members for personal gain.
   2. To discourage false teaching and resist false teachers, Paul urges the church to *"hold fast to the truth"*.
      1. It is said that the old preacher Charles Spurgeon used to say "Chapter and Verse, please!" when someone was presenting some new doctrine or teaching. For the mature Christian, it is important to always ask the person teaching something new to ground it in the Bible and ask for "Chapter and verse, please!"
2. Is the church a "pyramid" with an archbishop at the top? Or a bus where the pastor drives and the members sit quietly and safely in their pews? No, the church is a "body" where all parts have their place and help each other in the way they were made to do.

## Ephesians 6:10-20 – The Spiritual Armor

[[@Bible:eph 6:10]]Eph 6:10

1. Before describing the armor, Paul writes that we need to *“be strong in the Lord.”* A soldier’s equipment on a weak and untrained body does not help very much. One does not give an untrained recruit all the soldier’s equipment right away and send him into a battle without first having taught him how to shoot. But a strong and well-trained soldier with the right equipment is ready to face any danger.
   1. As good as the armor King Saul had, it was too big and unwieldy for little David in his fight against Goliath ([1Sa 17:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Sam%2017.38-39)).
2. If you intend to climb Kebnekaise, the highest mountain in Sweden, it is not enough to just have the right equipment, shoes and bag, you also need to be reasonably fit. Otherwise, you give up halfway, no matter how good equipment you have.
3. Before you are ready to deal with danger, you need to get to know Jesus and grow in your personal faith through the Bible and prayer. A strong faith combined with the right spiritual equipment is a great combination to face any opposition.

[[@Bible:eph 6:11]]Eph 6:11

1. Reading Ephesians, one can easily get the impression that the Christian life is amazing, glorious, and completely without difficulty. We are chosen in Christ, we have gone from death to life, Jesus has torn down the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile and given us a new life in Christ! But then, perhaps to your great surprise, you meet resistance. Not to be surprised, and above all not to give up, by all the resistance one encounters, Paul wants to prepare us for the fight.
2. In the work of fulfilling Jesus’ missionary command, preaching the gospel, spreading the kingdom of God, and loving our Lord and fellowmen, we will inevitably be attacked by the Devil. He wants to prevent, complicate, and destroy for us so that we cannot fulfill what God has planned for our lives. In that situation, Paul encourages us Christians to become strong in the faith and put on God’s armor and compare this to a Roman soldier’s gear. The armor is primarily *defensive* and aims to help us *stand firm*, not to go out and attack unprovoked. But if we actively work to spread the gospel, we must expect that the Devil will try to stop us, and in order not to give up on these attacks, we need God’s armor.
3. Paul wrote the letter to Ephesus while in captivity in Rome.
   1. Isaiah prophesies of the Messiah that *“righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins”* ([Is 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2011.5)), and that God clothes himself in *“righteousness as a breastplate*,*and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing*, *and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak.”* ([Is 59:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2059.17))
   2. Paul encourages us to *“put on the armor of light”* ([Ro 13:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%2013.12)), to present our members *“as instruments for righteousness”* ([Ro 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%206.13)), to take *“the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left”* ([2Cor. 6:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor.%206.7)), and *“having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation”* ([1Thess 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Thess%205.8)).

[[@Bible:eph 6:12]]Eph 6:12

1. The Christian struggle is not against people, even if they see us as their enemies, but against the Devil and his demons. Our weapons are not swords, rifles, and cannons, but Bible, prayer, and love ([2Co 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor%2010.4), [Ro 12:17-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%2012.17-21)).

[[@Bible:eph 6:13]]Eph 6:13

1. Spiritual warfare is not first and foremost about offensively *attacking* the enemy, but about defensively *resisting* the attacks one is subjected to from the Devil. The offensive mission is to go out into the whole world and preach about Jesus and spread the kingdom of God. When we meet resistance, we should resist the attacks so that we can continue to fulfill the mission.

[[@Bible:eph 6:14]]Eph 6:14

***The Belt of Truth***

1. In Biblical times the ordinary clothes was a long piece of cloth. When you sat down or relaxed, you took off your belt. If you were preparing to work or do something, you had to put on your belt and tighten up your clothes. *Therefore, “fasten your belt”* became an expression that urges readiness and to get to work or fight ([Ex 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod%2012.11), [Luke 12:35](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%2012.35), [1Pet 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Pet%201.13)).
2. The Greek word “alēthĕia” means “truth”, something that has really happened in the way that is told. The woman with hemophilia told Jesus the “whole truth” when she was saved ([Mark 5:33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark%205.33)). Jesus is described in the New Testament as the Truth with a capital T ([John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2014.6)), a truth that we will receive and that will set us free ([John 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%208.32)).
3. The first meaning of belting truth around life is that the foundation of Christian work must always be Jesus as Lord and Savior. Missionary and working for the kingdom of God without believing in Jesus creates a skewed focus and a skewed outcome.
4. The second meaning is that a Christian who wants to fight the good fight must stick to the truth, be honest, and not have a hidden agenda. A Christian worker may have amazing swords and weapons in his spiritual equipment, be an accomplished evangelist and prophet, but if the work is not built on truth and honesty, it will eventually fall and collapse like a house of cards. But he who is genuine and honest and does the best he can to share the gospel with his fellow man will see good fruit from his work for Jesus.
5. The belt of truth is taken on when *preparing*for battle. A Christian worker prepares for the spiritual battle by always sticking to the truth and building his entire business on a genuine honesty.

***The Breastplate of Righteousness***

1. The Roman soldiers wore a bronze armor on their chest and back to protect the most important organs in battle. Of course, it was possible to die in battle even while carrying an armor, but if you *didn’t*,  you could die far too quickly and easily from the first best stab.
2. The Greek word “dikaiŏsunē,” which translates to “righteousness,” means simply doing what is right, whether one is persecuted for it or not ([Matt. 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt.%205.10)).
3. Taking on the armor of righteousness means deciding to do what is right, whether you are being opposed, criticized, or suffering for it. To continue to help refugees regardless of whether society considers it politically correct or not. To continue preaching the truth of God’s Word regardless of whether society changes its mind.
4. The breastplate of righteousness is put on as the battle *approaches*, when one sees that the clouds of concern are piling up and criticism begins to increase. Then you should continue to do what is right and not become a weathervane that changes your mind according to the politically correct opinion of the day.

[[@Bible:eph 6:15]]Eph 6:15

***The Shoes of Readiness***

1. The Roman soldiers wore special sandals called “caligae”. These shoes were often equipped with sharp little spikes underneath, much like studded tires on ice, which allowed them to stand firmly and firm, as well as being able to march very far at a fast pace in difficult terrain.
2. The Greek word “hĕtŏimasia” means to be “prepared”, “ready” and “willing”. The word is also used to describe something that is “finished” and “ready.” For example, the room that Jesus told his disciples to prepare for Easter celebrations, it was prepared and “finished” and stood “ready” for the disciples ([Mark 14:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark%2014.15)).
3. The first meaning of being “ready” is being able to stand steadfastly stuck in a battle. In order to be able to “stand firm” in a battle, these “stud-shoes” were invaluable to the Roman soldiers. For a Christian to stand firm in his faith in the midst of a spiritual struggle, the “inner peace” of the gospel is priceless. This inner peace we get because we know that the gospel is “finished”, it is already prepared and fixed by Jesus. We don’t have to do anything more than receive. If you have the inner peace you get from the gospel, you can stand as unwavering in the midst of the heat of battle as a Roman soldier with studded shoes.
4. The second meaning of being “ready” is being able to go further and faster than anyone else even if the terrain is difficult. The fact that we have received the gospel and received peace in our hearts makes us want to spread this gospel to more people who have not yet heard of Jesus. We are “prepared” to go further than we can see, to “cross the mountains” to “proclaim peace and salvation” and “bring forth good news,” as Isaiah prophesies ([Isa. 52:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa.%2052.7)).
   1. *“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.””* ([Is 52:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2052.7))
5. The shoes of readiness are put on when it’s time to head to the battle. When you understand that it’s going to be tough, you need to pray to the Lord for the inner peace that only Jesus can bring.

[[@Bible:eph 6:16]]Eph 6:16

***The Shield of Faith***

1. At the beginning of the battle before the man-to-man battle, the enemy could send a rain of arrows over the opponent. The Roman soldiers then each had a shield to hold up for protection. The protection became extra effective when the soldiers formed the so-called “turtle formation” by putting the shields together and helping to protect each other. The front ranks hold the shield in front of them and the rear ranks hold their shields above the heads.
   1. Since the shields were often made of wood, the enemy sometimes shot burning arrows to set fire to the shields. The Roman soldiers had therefore often wrapped their wooden shields in wet leather so that the fire would quickly go out.
2. The Greek word “pistis” we usually translate to “faith” in English. When we come to believe in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we are saved and have our names written in the Book of Life. We have been born again and live in faith to go to heaven the day we die. We remain in this world waiting for the day of resurrection. We know that Jesus has forgiven us our sins and that the Holy Spirit has begun a work of sanctification within us.
   1. But all of this is done in faith. It is easy for someone to remind us of our past sins, question our salvation and make us start to doubt. Mean words can create confusion, make us lose heart and give up. The words are shot at us like burning arrows and should they take hold in our lives they could get us completely off balance so that we give up. But we should not listen to the enemy’s slander about us, but instead stand firm in our faith in Jesus. When the Devil reminds us of our background, we will remind Him of His future. When people call us bad things, we are to remember who we are in Christ.
3. Just like the Roman soldiers, we too need to help each other hold up the shield of faith above each other. We need to remind each other of what Jesus has done in our lives, that we have had our sins forgiven, that the Holy Spirit has transformed us, that we have begun to live the saved life already here and now, and that we will see it fully when Jesus returns.
4. The shield of faith is brought out when you see the enemy from *a distance*, when the evil words begin to hail and the criticism begins to sting.

[[@Bible:eph 6:17]]Eph 6:17

***The Helmet of Salvation***

1. The Roman helmets were often made of bronze and leather. They protected one of the most important parts of the body, the head, but were normally only taken on during the battle.
2. The Greek word “sōtēriŏn” in this context means the “salvation” Jesus gives us with his death and resurrection.
3. Paul writes to the congregation in Thessaloniki about *“the hope of salvation as a helmet”* ([1Th 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Thess%205.8)). When the enemy attacks us with jeers, when the Devil tries to get us off balance, then we can still stand firm and be confident that Jesus has not only saved us in theory, but will also win victory and give us salvation in practice.
   1. “*O Lord, my Lord, the strength of my salvation, you have covered my head in the day of battle.*” ([Ps 140:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%20140.7))
4. The helmet of salvation is put on when the battle is *near*, when the enemy wants to get us out of the battle with one big stab. But because of the helmet of salvation, we know that nothing can *“separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”* ([Ro 8:39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%208.39)).

***The Sword of the Spirit***

1. The Roman swords were mainly used in melee combat and were relatively short, only 60 cm, in order to be extra agile and manageable when used in group formation.
2. Once the battle rages, then there is no longer time to prepare, but to actively fight the fight. The only offensive weapon we have been given in this context is the “Word of God.” Just as when the Devil tempted Jesus out in the wilderness and tried to get him to give up and he responded by quoting the Bible, so too should we answer the Devil with Scriptures ([Matt. 4:1-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt.%204.1-11), [Mark 1:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark%201.12-13), [Luke 4:1-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%204.1-13)).
   1. If the Devil says that our sin is too great for God to forgive, then we can quote, “*Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.*” ([Is 1:18b](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%201.18b))
   2. If our enemy tries to forbid us to testify, then we can read, “*Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge,*” ([Acts 4:19b](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%204.19b))
   3. If we are told that we are too inept to serve the Lord, then we should answer, “*With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.*” ([Matt. 19:26b](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt.%2019.26b))
   4. If the enemy means that we are ugly and useless, then we should answer: “*I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.*” ([Ps 139:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%20139.14))
   5. If the Devil claims that we should not evangelize and missionary, then we should quote Jesus who, after his temptation, quoted Isaiah: “*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*” ([Lk 4:18–19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%204.18%E2%80%9319))
3. The sword of the *spirit is used* in the heat of battle when one is showered with hard thoughts and corrosive jeers. When the spiritual attacks are massive, you need to sit down with your Bible and remind yourself who you are in Christ and clearly explain it to the enemy.

# 1 Thessalonians

En bild som visar karta

Automatiskt genererad beskrivning

## 1 Thessalonians 1:1 - Greeting

[[@Bible:1 Thess 1:1]]1 Thess 1:1

1. Paul (c. 5 AD - c. 67 AD) was a Benjamite (Rom. 11:1) from the Greek city of Tarsus (Acts 21:39).
   1. The Roman name *"Paul"* means "the little one" and his former Hebrew name *"Saul"* means "in demand".
   2. Initially called *"Saul"*, Paul was a strict Pharisee who persecuted Christians in their zeal for God (Acts 22:4).
   3. On the road to Damascus, Saul met Jesus (Acts 9) and then became an apostle missionary to the Gentiles (Gal 2:8).
   4. Paul made three missionary journeys, wrote (at least) 13 letters and was martyred in Rome.
2. Paul wrote this letter to the Thessalonians on his second missionary journey, around the year 52, making it probably the first in the New Testament.
3. Although Paul was a *hard* worker, he was not a *lone* worker. Paul always wanted a team around him.
   1. Jesus sent out the disciples two by two (Mark 6:7).
   2. In the same way, Christian workers today should work together with others.
4. *Silvanus* is the Roman variant of the name *"Silas"*.
   1. Silvanus was one of Paul's closest associates on Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 15:40) and accompanied Paul to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9).
   2. Silvanus is also mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament (1 Peter 5:12, 2 Corinthians 1:19).
5. *Timothy* was a young man whom Paul had led to faith in Jesus during his first missionary journey (1 Tim 1:2).
   1. The name *"Timothy"* means "honour God" or "honoured by God", a name he probably got because his mother and grandmother were believers (2 Tim 1:5).
   2. Timothy's father was Greek (Acts 16:3) and his mother was Jewish.
   3. Timothy was probably Paul's closest and most trusted associate. Paul wrote six letters together with Timothy and sent two to him.
6. In short, *the church* is the collection of people who believe in Jesus. God has called believers out of the world, born them anew, and then sent them back into the world to bear witness to Jesus.
   1. Thessalonica was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia.
   2. It was Paul himself who had founded the church in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1-9) but had to leave in a hurry because of unrest (Acts 17:10).
7. Here Paul links the two words commonly used to refer to God: *"God"* and *"Lord"*, thus showing the unity of the Father and the Son (John 10:30).
8. It was common in New Testament times to begin letters with similar greetings.
   1. It is no coincidence that Paul writes *"grace"* before *"peace"*. For it is God's grace that gives man peace. If man has received grace and forgiveness from his old sins, he can look forward to a life of peace.

## 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10 - The Thessalonians’ Faith and Example

[[@Bible:1 Thess 1:2-3]]1 Thess 1:2-3

1. Paul did not necessarily pray long prayers for the church in Thessalonica but *"mentioned"* the church before God. The important thing is not the length of the prayer but the content and the heart behind it.
2. Here we see Paul's famous *"faith, hope and love" for the* first time (1 Corinthians 13:13).
   1. The Thessalonians had "previously" come to believe in Jesus, were "now" laboring in love and "waiting" for Jesus.
   2. For those who believe in Jesus, loving deeds naturally follow (Jas 2:14-17) or as James wrote*, "be doers of the word, not hearers only"* (Jas 1:22).

[[@Bible:1 Thess 1:4]]1 Thess 1:4

1. Paul calls the Thessalonians *"brothers"*, indicating that he did not see himself as their superior, even though he had more knowledge than them and had founded the church. God is our Father and we are all equal brothers (Matthew 23:9).
2. Since Paul has seen so many signs that the Thessalonians really belong to God, he understands that they are chosen by God.
   1. The Thessalonians received the word with joy, they became followers of Jesus, they suffered for Jesus and they spread the word.

[[@Bible:1 Thess 1:5]]1 Thess 1:5

1. The Gospel is not only teaching and preaching, but also miracles, healings and power.
2. If a sermon consisted only of fine rhetoric, not many would be convinced, but if the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of the listeners, then many will want to turn to Jesus (John 16:8, 1 Corinthians 2:1-5).
3. The Holy Spirit can create such a supernaturally strong faith that it will not give in to anything.

[[@Bible:1 Thess 1:6]]1 Thess 1:6

1. Paul was not ashamed that the Thessalonians followed him because he knew that he himself followed Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:1).
2. A believer is often more eager to live fully for Jesus if he is forced to do so in the midst of severe suffering. A believer who lives in peaceful conditions risks becoming comfortable, apathetic and forgetting the importance of spreading the Gospel.
3. The severe sufferings Paul describes are first of all the riots that occurred in Thessalonica when Paul preached the gospel there (Acts 17:4-10).

[[@Bible:1 Thess 1:7]]1 Thess 1:7

1. First Paul was an example to the Thessalonians, now the Thessalonians are in turn examples to the Macedonians. In the same way, we should have Christian examples and also lead people to faith who in turn can become examples for others.
2. The Romans divided Greece into the northern province of *Macedonia*, with Thessalonica as its capital, and the southern province of *Achaia*, with Corinth as its capital.
   1. After the Thessalonians themselves had come to faith, they spread the gospel throughout the rest of Greece.

[[@Bible:1 thess 1:9-10]]1 Thess 1:9-10

1. All men will perish because all men have sinned. But God sent Jesus to save all those who believe in Jesus so that they will not perish (John 3:16).
2. It is equally important today that Christians spread the gospel, the good news, throughout the world that there is salvation from wrath by turning from idols and to God through faith in Jesus.
3. Just as Jesus has ascended among the clouds, he will one day return among the clouds (Acts 1:9-11). The Thessalonians were eagerly awaiting this.
   1. Since Jesus may return at any time, we Christians today should also wait eagerly for Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:2).

## 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16 - The Apostle's Ministry in Thessalonica

[[@Bible:1 Thess 2:1]]1 Thess 2:1

1. Paul had enemies in Thessalonica and it certainly seems that in Paul's absence they accuse him of various things (Acts 17:5-6, Acts 17:13).
   1. Paul responds by pointing out that he trusts the Thessalonians' own judgment, since they themselves saw how Paul behaved when he was with them.
   2. Despite the opposition Paul faced in Thessalonica, he managed to start a vibrant and exemplary church. The church in Thessalonica thus becomes its own testimony that Paul's enemies are wrong.

[[@Bible:1 Thess 2:2]]1 Thess 2:2

1. In Philippi, Paul and Silas were flogged and imprisoned but escaped thanks to an earthquake (Acts 16:22-40).
2. By this Paul wants to show that he does not preach the gospel for his own well-being, but on the contrary, he often had to suffer for the gospel.

[[@Bible:1 Thess 2:3]]1 Thess 2:3

1. In Paul's time there were many different religions and many opportunists who tried to make money or power by promoting their religion. Paul's enemies seem to have accused him of being one of these, preaching the gospel only to flatter, please and rob people.

[[@Bible:1 Thess 2:4]]1 Thess 2:4

1. On the road to Damascus, Paul was entrusted with two missions from Jesus; to bring the name of Jesus before Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel, and to suffer for the sake of Jesus' name (Acts 9:15-16). He had succeeded in both of these missions in Thessalonica.
2. It is very easy for a Christian to try to adapt the gospel so that it fits better into society and is easier to receive. But this pleases people instead of God and misses the fundamental point that all people must first repent before they can have their sins forgiven (Luke 13:3, Acts 2:38).
   1. Paul changed the *way* he preached depending on the audience, but he never changed the *message* of the gospel. In the same way, today we should preach the gospel in a way that ordinary people understand while never compromising the message of the gospel.

[[@Bible:1 Thess 2:5]]1 Thess 2:5

1. If you turn around what Paul says he is not, you get a checklist to see if someone is a false apostle:
   1. Trying to please people instead of God by adapting or watering down the gospel message.
   2. Flatter the audience with fine rhetorical speeches.
   3. Taking the audience's money.
   4. Striving to be honored by men instead of God.
   5. Acts unlovingly and unjustly.
   6. A burden on people.
2. Although Paul's enemies accuse Paul of behaving in this way, Paul reminds the Thessalonians that they themselves know from their own experience that this is not the case.

[[@Bible:1 thess 2:6-7]]1 Thess 2:6-7

1. The one who has his eyes fixed on Jesus does not worry about being honoured by people, getting high positions or becoming famous. Instead, one who follows in the footsteps of Jesus will be concerned with carrying out the mission that Jesus entrusts to one. Then you will probably suffer as Jesus did, but you will also be filled with the joy and peace that only God can give.

[[@Bible:1 thess 2:8-9]]1 Thess 2:8-9

1. Just as a mother does not demand money from her child, so Paul did not accept any money from the Thessalonians. Just as a mother gives everything for her child, Paul gave everything he had for the Thessalonians.
2. Paul writes elsewhere that he and other gospel workers need not be ashamed to receive wages for their work because *"the laborer is worthy of his wages"* (1 Corinthians 9:14, 1 Timothy 5:18). But Paul still did not want to accept the wages to which he was entitled because his enemies might then accuse him of being an opportunist.
3. Paul was a tentmaker by trade (Acts 18:3) and was able to support himself and others by it (Acts 20:34).

[[@Bible:1 thess 2:11-12]]1 Thess 2:11-12

1. Paul was not afraid to *"admonish"* the Christian Thessalonians if they were living ungodly, which becomes proof that he was not trying to please men but was concerned with what God thought.
2. Paul was also careful to *"encourage"* those who did the right thing so that they would get a boost in the right direction.
3. Sometimes it's easy to get stuck in one or the other, which quickly becomes wrong. It is better to *both* admonish and encourage.
4. Paul exhorted and encouraged *"everyone"*, not just those he was fond of or particularly fond of. In the same way, a pastor today should not forget to admonish and encourage everyone in the congregation.
   1. Missing this, it is easy to "forget" to admonish certain people because they are on the board, for example, or to "forget" to encourage those who faithfully serve God year after year but are not seen on the platform.

[[@Bible:1 thess 2:13]]1 Thess 2:13

1. Here the ancient prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, that the word of the Lord does not return in vain without having done what God wants (Isa 55:10-11).
2. The preacher of the gospel does not need to try to force anyone to convert or try to embellish the gospel message, but can calmly relax and let the Word work in the hearts of the hearers (Acts 2:37-41, Rom 10:4).
3. Although Paul's enemies tried to stop the Christians by smearing Paul, it did not work on the Thessalonians because they knew Paul and had already received God's word.
   1. In the same way, today we should also make sure that we are well grounded in God's Word so that we do not waver in our faith whenever someone says something wrong.

[[@Bible:1 thess 2:14]]1 Thess 2:14

1. Paul comforts the Thessalonians that they are not the first to suffer for the gospel; Jesus sacrificed his life and the first Christians in Jerusalem were persecuted.
2. Paul does not pit Christians against Jews, for he himself was a Christian Jew (Acts 21:39).
   1. We are all guilty of Jesus' death; a *Christian* betrayed Jesus (Mark 14:45), *the Jews* handed Jesus over (Mark 15:1), and *the Gentiles* killed Jesus (Mark 15:15).

[[@Bible:1 thess 2:16]]1 Thess 2:16

1. It is important not to take matters into your own hands and try to stop any persecution in the wrong way. It is better to endure and let God deal with the punishment instead (Rom 12:19).

## 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5 - The Apostle longs to visit the Thessalonians

[[@Bible:1 thess 2:18]]1 Thess 2:18

1. The Thessalonians probably wondered why Paul did not come to visit them. Perhaps Paul's enemies used this as an argument that Paul didn't care about them anymore. But Paul assures the Thessalonians that he has repeatedly tried to come.
2. Paul was wise enough to understand that the obstacles that blocked him from visiting the Thessalonians were from Satan, but he was also wise enough to understand that Satan could only hinder him *for a short time*. Paul later returned to Thessalonica (Acts 20:1-5).
   1. Since Satan prevented Paul from visiting the Thessalonians, he wrote a letter to them instead. This has ultimately led to greater blessing for all of us because we can still read Paul's teaching today. God has the power to turn every situation around for the better (Romans 8:28).

[[@Bible:1 Thess 3:1-2]]1 Thess 3:1-2

1. The church in Thessalonica had experienced persecution from the very beginning and had been forced to get rid of its founder Paul after only a few weeks (Acts 17:1-9). Not surprisingly, Paul is concerned about the well-being of the church and is eager to meet with them.
2. Timothy was Paul's closest and most trusted associate and was the obvious person to send if Paul himself could not go.

[[@Bible:1 Thess 3:3]]1 Thess 3:3

1. The church needed a strong faith, so that they would stand firm and not waver when suffering comes.
2. The church needed to be encouraged so that they would continue to believe and not give up when the suffering comes.
3. A disciple should follow in the footsteps of his master, and since Jesus went through much suffering, we too will go through much suffering. However, suffering does not always have to be a negative thing because God teaches us obedience through suffering (Heb 5:8).
   1. Whenever we despair and wonder whether suffering is really necessary, we should remind ourselves of what is the very symbol of our Christian faith: the cross, a brutal instrument of execution (Mark 8:34).
4. Jesus had predicted that suffering would befall believers (John 16:33) and Paul writes in a later letter to Timothy that all Christians who want to live godly lives will be persecuted (2 Tim 3:12).
5. Those who are not aware that the Christian life may well involve suffering will quickly begin to waver in their faith when the suffering comes. Therefore, it is important to be strong in one's faith from the very beginning so that one is well prepared.

## 1 Thessalonians 3:6-13 - The apostle's Joy at the Thessalonians' Faith

[[@Bible:1 Thess 3:6]]1 Thess 3:6

1. Paul's concerns are allayed when Timothy returns with good news that the gospel, the good news, has taken root in the Thessalonians' faith.
2. *"Believing"* in Jesus and having *"love"* for your fellow man pretty much sums up what the Good News is all about.
3. The fact that the Thessalonians long to meet Paul shows that they have not bought into the false rumors spread by Paul's enemies.

[[@Bible:1 Thess 3:7]]1 Thess 3:7

1. Paul was in Corinth when he wrote this letter to the Thessalonians (Acts 18:1). Even in Corinth, Paul had to endure much suffering, but it was made easier when he learned that the faith of the Thessalonians was in good shape.

[[@Bible:1 Thess 3:10]]1 Thess 3:10

1. Although Paul was very pleased with the stability and strength of the Thessalonians' faith, he still wanted to correct any shortcomings. From this we can learn that no matter how far we have come in our faith, there is always something to work on and we should always strive to get closer to God.
2. It is quite possible that Paul was so worried about the church in Thessalonica that he stayed awake at night. If so, he took the opportunity to pray for the Thessalonians.

[[@Bible:1 Thess 3:11]]1 Thess 3:11

1. Here Paul opens up a little insight into how he used to formulate his prayers.
2. Paul prays to the Father and to Jesus as if they were one and the same person. In fact, the Father and the Son have such a unity that they are one (John 10:30), and what you ask the Son to do, the Father will do (John 15:16).

[[@Bible:1 Thess 3:12]]1 Thess 3:12

1. The second thing that Paul asks is that Jesus will make the Thessalonians' love for their fellow men grow.
2. Love for God and for one's fellow man is fundamental for a Christian (Matthew 22:37-40).
   1. Jesus even said that if we Christians have love for one another, everyone will know that we are Jesus' disciples (John 13:35).

[[@Bible:1 thess 3:13]]1 Thess 3:13

1. To be *"holy"* means to be "consecrated" to something. In this context, it means that the Thessalonians separate their behavior from the rest of the city of Thessalonica and all its sin, and instead devote their lives to loving God and loving all their fellow human beings.
2. It is easier to focus on living holy if you are aware that Jesus can come back at any time (1 Thessalonians 5:2).
3. *The "saints"* who will come with Jesus are probably the believers who arise when Jesus returns (1 Thess 4:16), but it could also refer to angels.

## 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 - A life of Sanctification

[[@Bible:1 Thess 4:1]]1 Thess 4:1

1. Paul was not displeased with the Thessalonians, on the contrary, he was very happy about them. But as strong as the Thessalonians were in their faith, they could still be better.
   1. From this we can learn that we should always strive to draw closer to God. The Christian should never stop and be content, but always move forward. If one has stood still too long, there is a danger of falling asleep and becoming apathetic.
2. To *"please God"* should be the desire of every Christian, here Paul writes instructions on how to achieve this.
3. Paul is referring to what he had previously said orally to them when he started the church in Thessalonica.

[[@Bible:1 Thess 4:3-4]]1 Thess 4:3-4

1. To be *"sanctified"* means on the one hand to *separate* oneself from the desires of the world and of sin, and instead to keep oneself to God, but it also means to *develop* and come closer and closer to God. The further away from the sins of the world you are and the closer to God you are, the holier your life becomes.
   1. The Christian life does not stand still but is a constant movement away from the world and closer to God.
   2. Man was created in the image of God but chose to walk away from God with the fall. Jesus, who *is the* image of God, made it possible for us humans to repent and come back to God. By leaving the sin of the world and trying to imitate Jesus, we become again what we are created to be: the image of God.
2. *"Fornication"* ("porneia" in Greek) means all sexual activity outside marriage (before, during and after).
   1. One of the reasons why Paul often warns against fornication is because (as in the West today) it was not considered a sin in the Roman and Greek world. Among the Greeks in the city of Thessalonica, prostitution could even be a religious act.
   2. For the Christian, fornication is an obstacle to being sanctified and drawing closer to God, and so Paul urges us to abstain from fornication. Paul underscores this exhortation by emphasizing that it is even a commandment of the Lord Jesus.

[[@Bible:1 thess 4:5-6]]1 Thess 4:5-6

1. Paul is not against sex, but he wants it to take place within marriage and for the Thessalonians to learn to take a wife in a *"holy and honorable way"*.
   1. Paul does not deny that even the Christian can feel passion and desire, but urges the Christian to learn to deal with it instead of falling into temptation. The Christian can do this because he *"knows God"*.
2. Unfortunately, Paul does not give any concrete advice on how the Christian should get a wife, but instead urges the Christian not to get a wife as the pagans do; through passion and lust. So a Christian today should not look for a wife in the pub or any other such place. As long as this is avoided, Paul seems to trust in the good judgment of the Thessalonians.
3. If the Thessalonians, on the other hand, do not heed Paul's exhortations, he informs them that God is also concerned that the Christian abstain from fornication.
   1. Paul does not write how or when God punishes, but emphasizes *that* God does punish, thus giving the Thessalonians a very good reason to stay away from fornication.
   2. For those who are concerned about God's punishment, there is always the possibility to repent of their sin and ask God for forgiveness (Matthew 6:9-15).

[[@Bible:1 thess 4:7]]1 Thess 4:7

1. The very reason we are Christians is because God first *"called"* us to leave the sins of the world and the purpose of the Christian life is for us to live a holy life for God. But if the Christian lives in fornication, he does not live a holy life and therefore misses the very purpose for which God first called and thus finds it difficult to develop in his faith and come closer to God.

[[@Bible:1 thess 4:8]]1 Thess 4:8

1. Paul emphasizes that what he writes is not only his own words, but also the words of God.
2. Constant development in faith, sanctification and drawing closer to God are closely linked to God's giving of his Holy Spirit to the Christian. Those who find it difficult to avoid fornication should therefore ask God to give them more of God's Spirit (Luke 11:13).

[[@Bible:1 thess 4:9]]1 Thess 4:9

1. *"Brotherly love"* in Greek is "filadelfia" and stands for the love that Christians have for each other. Undoubtedly, Paul did not feel as anxious to instruct the Thessalonians on this subject as he did earlier with "holiness", since it was widely known that the Thessalonians showed great love for all the brethren in Macedonia.
   1. It also seems that it is not Paul who has previously taught the Thessalonians about "brotherly love" but that it is something that God himself has taught the Thessalonians.

[[@Bible:1 thess 4:10-12]]1 Thess 4:10-12

1. Although the Thessalonians were excellent models of "brotherly love", Paul nevertheless urges them to *"overflow even more in it"*, which again shows us how important it is for the Christian not to stand still in his sanctification but to move ever closer to God.
2. Since the Thessalonians lived with the expectation that Jesus would return very soon, there was an obvious risk that they would give up their jobs and just go and wait. Paul thinks this looks bad in the eyes of outsiders and wants the Thessalonians to do their work instead. If the Thessalonians did not work, they would quickly become dependent on people outside the church to provide for them and that would look very bad according to Paul.

## 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 - The Coming of the Lord

[[@Bible:1 thess 4:13]]1 Thess 4:13

1. Paul had only been with the Thessalonians for a short time before he had to flee in a hurry. Paul had begun teaching about the imminent return of Jesus but does not seem to have had the opportunity to finish and tell the story of the Christians who die before Jesus returns. Since Jesus has not yet returned, the Thessalonians are therefore concerned that the Christians who had died had lost everything.
2. When a believer dies, his spirit comes to God while the body "sleeps" awaiting the resurrection of the body (1 Corinthians 15:50-55, 2 Corinthians 5:8).
   1. When Lazarus died, Jesus calls it "sleeping" (John 11:11-14).
   2. The early Christians called their cemeteries "sleeping places" (the English word "cemetery" comes from the Greek word for "sleeping place").
3. A Christian may of course grieve for those who have died, but at the same time can be confident that the dead are with God and will eventually be resurrected; hope is not lost.
   1. Paul expresses several times that he would rather die so that he can come to God, but at the same time he wants to stay on earth so that more people can become Christians (2 Corinthians 5:8, Philippians 1:23).

[[@Bible:1 thess 4:14]]1 Thess 4:14

1. The fact that we Christians will be resurrected is as certain as the fact that Jesus has died and risen. So anyone who believes in Jesus can be sure of being resurrected eventually.

[[@Bible:1 thess 4:15]]1 Thess 4:15

1. When Jesus returns, he will bring with him all Christians who have died and resurrect them with a new heavenly body (1 Corinthians 15:35-53).
2. Paul says that he received this message from Jesus, but he does not quote any known passage in the New Testament, so it is quite possible that Jesus said this to Paul personally (John 21:25, Galatians 1:11-12).
3. Paul and the Thessalonians believed that Jesus would return in their lifetime (1 Corinthians 7:29). It is good to live constantly as if Jesus could return at any second because then you are always striving to live a holy life.

[[@Bible:1 thess 4:16]]1 Thess 4:16

1. Jesus will return in the same way he left (Acts 1:11).
   1. Jesus will return to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem (Zech 14:1-4, Acts 1:11-12).
   2. Jesus will be surrounded by clouds at his return (Luke 21:27).
   3. Everyone will be able to see Jesus' return (Luke 17:24).
   4. A trumpet of God will sound at Jesus' return (1 Thessalonians 4:16).
2. The only person in the Bible described as an archangel is Michael (Jude 1:9).

[[@Bible:1 thess 4:17]]1 Thess 4:17

1. After Jesus returns to earth and the dead are raised, other Christians will be taken up to heaven by Jesus.
2. Paul repeatedly wrote that he longed to be with the Lord (Phil 1:23, Col 3:4, 2 Cor 5:8).

[[@Bible:1 thess 4:18]]1 Thess 4:18

1. Probably the Thessalonians were worried about the Christians who had died before Jesus had returned and feared that they had missed everything when they died. But Paul encourages the Thessalonians that both the dead and the living will go to heaven and urges them to comfort each other with this.

## 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 - The Day of the Lord

[[@Bible:1 Thess 5:2]]1 Thess 5:2

1. *"The day of the Lord"* is a familiar expression from the Old Testament that means, in short, that God intervenes in history to judge the sin of Israel and the world through various actions (Joel 1:15, Mal 4:1-2). In other words, *"the day of the Lord"* can refer to different days in history.
   1. The *"day of the Lord"* that Paul refers to on this occasion is the day when Jesus returns.
2. Paul had previously taught the Thessalonians about the return of Jesus, so they were well aware that no one can know on what day Jesus will return, and therefore one must always be prepared.
   1. Jesus did not want us to know *when* the Day of the Lord is (Matt 24:36), but he did want us to be *alert* and prepared for the Day of the Lord to come at any moment (Matt 24:42).

[[@Bible:1 Thess 5:3]]1 Thess 5:3

1. It seems unreasonable to shout *"peace and safety"* on the day of Jesus' return, since Matthew 24:15-35 describes the last days as a time of terrible suffering. Therefore, it is quite possible that the *"day of the Lord"* is longer than just one day and in other words describes the whole of the last days ending with the return of Jesus.
2. The last period will contain suffering that, like the pains of a pregnant woman, will recur more often and more painfully until something new is finally born.

[[@Bible:1 Thess 5:4]]1 Thess 5:4

1. For those who believe in Jesus, Jesus' return will be like a deliverance, but for those who do not believe in Jesus, his return will be like a thief in the night.
2. Even if we don't know exactly what day Jesus will return, we can guess that it will be soon. The disciples asked Jesus what the end times will be like (Matthew 24:3-14) and received an answer that can be summarized in a nutshell as follows:
   1. Many will claim that they are the Messiah, but we should not believe them. When Jesus comes back, it will definitely be felt all over the earth.
   2. There will be many wars here and there.
   3. There will be famine.
   4. There will be earthquakes in one place after another.
   5. Christians will renounce their faith and start hating each other.
   6. Many Christians will be hated, tormented and killed.
   7. Many false prophets will appear and unfortunately many will listen to them.
   8. Lawlessness will increase.

[[@Bible:1 Thess 5:6]]1 Thess 5:6

1. "Spiritually sleeping" is related to not being prepared for Jesus to come back soon. If a Christian does not care that Jesus is coming back, there is a risk that he or she will not care to be sanctified in his or her spiritual life, and then there is a risk that one's Christian life will languish and eventually be forgotten.

[[@Bible:1 thess 5:8]]1 Thess 5:8

1. Paul uses a military illustration because a soldier must always be "awake and sober" because otherwise the soldier runs the risk of being overtaken by the enemy and getting into real trouble.
   1. An *"armour"* was placed on the chest and protected the most important organs. *Believing* in God and showing *love* for one's fellow man is perhaps the most fundamental and important part of the Christian faith (Matthew 22:37-40).
   2. The head is also a vital organ that a soldier must protect. For the Christian, it is vital to trust that God will intervene and save in the future. If this hope is lost, the rest of the Christian life becomes meaningless.
2. Paul compares the Christian to a soldier at war, but he uses only defensive cover. A Christian, while engaged in spiritual warfare, does not need to run off offensively and chase demons, but if attacked, he can stand firm in his faith because of the protections available (Eph 6:13).

[[@Bible:1 thess 5:9]]1 Thess 5:9

1. When Jesus returns, he will *"judge the living and the dead"* (2 Timothy 4:1).
   1. Wrath is for the wicked who *"will be judged and condemned"* (2 Peter 3:7) and who will go away *"into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels"* (Matthew 25:41).
   2. Because Jesus sacrificed himself by dying on the cross, at his return he will not condemn believers to damnation, but will instead save *"those who wait for him"* (Heb 9:28).
      1. However, according to the letter to the Corinthians, Christians will also stand before the judgment seat of Christ and "*receive recompense for what he has done in this life, whether good or bad"* (2 Corinthians 5:10).

## 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28 - Final Instructions

[[@Bible:1 thess 5:12-13]]1 Thess 5:12-13

1. The author of Hebrews adds, "Obey your leaders and follow them, for they watch over your souls and will give you an account" (Heb 13:17).
   1. A Christian leader is therefore accountable to God for how he leads other Christians.
   2. James adds that "not many should become teachers. For you know that we shall receive a more severe judgment" (James 3:1).
2. According to this Bible verse, a Christian leader is characterized by three aspects:
   1. A leader should be appreciated because he "works", not because he may have a nice title.
   2. A leader should be appreciated for being a "leader", a person who shows where to find spiritual food and who is good at resolving disputes between other Christians.
   3. A leader is to be appreciated for "exhorting", a difficult task for which a Christian leader must not back down.
3. Since a Christian leader is a leader for the sake of the congregation, not for his or her own sake, it means a lot to the leader if the congregation shows "love for the work they do".
   1. Paul probably writes in this way to avoid Christian leadership developing into a hypocrisy where the leaders just laze around and take up the slack. Paul wants Christians to show love to their leaders, but only for "the work they do".
4. If all Christians would obey this and keep peace with each other, Christian leaders could spend their time teaching God's Word instead of settling disputes.

[[@Bible:1 thess 5:14]]1 Thess 5:14

1. Paul calls not only the leaders to do this, but all members of the church.
2. The *"disorderly"* are those who go their own way; they need to be rebuked so that they realize that the church is a cohesive body, not a collection of loose body parts (1 Corinthians 12:12-27).
3. The *"discouraged"* are those who are worried and who don't dare to do much. They are not to be despised but encouraged.
4. The *"weak"* are to be taken care of whether it is due to spiritual weakness or physical weakness. For those who are new in faith or old in body, it is easy to be weak, and therefore the church needs to take extra care of them.

[[@Bible:1 thess 5:15-18]]1 Thess 5:15-18

1. For anyone who has ever wondered what God's will is, Paul gives us a nice little list of it:
   1. A Christian should *"keep peace with all men"*, *"strive for what is good in the sight of all men",* but must never take revenge, but rather leave the anger to God. If a Christian so commits himself against his enemy, he is *"*gathering *coals of fire to his head"* (Romans 12:17-21).
   2. If a Christian has his joy in God, then the Christian can always be happy, even in miserable circumstances, because God is always with the believer.
   3. To *"pray"* is to communicate with God and this can be done by praying aloud, praying silently, listening to God's voice, speaking in tongues, etc., etc. The Christian should be in uninterrupted communication with God.
   4. A Christian should not thank God *for* all circumstances, but *in* all circumstances. Even though life can sometimes be one big misery, the Christian can trust that God will have the last word and that he will save all who wait for him.
2. *"In Christ Jesus"* is one of Paul's most common expressions. Paul is trying to show that whoever believes in Jesus is *"in Christ"* and thus shares in Jesus' death and resurrection. Whoever is *"in Christ"* no longer carries any sin and will live forever.
   1. Although Jesus has not returned to fully establish the kingdom of God, the Spirit has been given to all who are *"in Christ"*, resulting in the kingdom of God slowly but surely breaking new ground on earth (Ephesians 1:14).
   2. A contrast to living in Christ is living in Adam: *"as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive"* (1 Corinthians 15:22).

[[@Bible:1 thess 5:23]]1 Thess 5:23

1. To be *"sanctified"* means on the one hand to *separate* oneself from the desires of the world and of sin, and instead to keep oneself to God, but it also means to *develop* and come closer and closer to God. The further away from the sins of the world you are and the closer to God you are, the holier your life becomes.
   1. Here Paul shows us that it is *God* who sanctifies us, not we ourselves. We can strive to be sanctified and draw closer to God, but in the end this depends on God, not ourselves.
2. On the one hand, it can be argued from this biblical passage that man is made up of three distinct components; *"spirit, soul and body"*. On the other hand, it can be argued that man is not so easily divided, since Jesus, for example, divides man into four components; heart, soul, mind and body (Mark 12:30), while Paul in another context divides man into two components; body and soul (1 Corinthians 7:34).
   1. If this is an accurate description of how humans are made up, then one can suggest that these three components be distinguished in this way:
      1. The spirit in us needs a relationship with God to feel good.
      2. The soul in us needs relationships with other people to feel good.
      3. The body needs exercise, health and food to feel good.
   2. Personally, I have made it a habit to daily ask God to bless me and my loved ones spiritually, mentally and physically.

[[@Bible:1 thess 5:24]]1 Thess 5:24

1. Since much of this letter has been about sanctification and drawing closer to God, Paul now emphasizes that this is not primarily something we can do ourselves. It is God who *starts* the sanctification in us, it is God who *leads the* sanctification forward and it is God who *completes* the sanctification. All this because God is *"faithful"*.

[[@Bible:1 thess 5:25]]1 Thess 5:25

1. Although Paul prayed more than most, he still wanted others to pray for him. If the great man of God Paul was in need of intercession, I think we all are!

[[@Bible:1 Thess 5:26]]1 Thess 5:26

1. In New Testament times, it was not uncommon for relatives and close friends of the same sex to greet each other with a kiss on the cheek (Mark 14:45). By greeting each other in this way, we show that we Christians belong together as a family and that we are close friends.
2. Since this is not very normal in Sweden today, there are certainly equivalent greetings that Christians can give each other, such as a hug or a handshake. What is important not to forget, however, is that Paul writes *"holy"* kiss and thus emphasizes that it is not a question of a romantic kiss or something similar.

[[@Bible:1 Thess 5:27]]1 Thess 5:27

1. Since 1 Thessalonians was probably the first of Paul's letters, he emphasizes at once that the purpose of his letters is to make them known.
2. The first Christians did not have a Bible to take to church services, but depended on the Scriptures being read to them as they gathered.
3. Paul's letters are not just for the leaders of the church or for those who could read, but are to be read to all.

# Titus

## Titus 1:1-4 - Greeting from Paul to Titus

[[@Bible:titus 1:1]]Titus 1:1

1. Paul and his companion Titus had previously been together on the island of Crete to start a church, but for some reason Paul had had to leave and so sends these instructions to Titus so that he can continue the work on the island.
2. Paul probably wrote this letter around the years 62-66 at about the same time as he wrote a similar letter to Timothy.
3. In ancient times, it was not uncommon for a superior to send his subordinate so-called "mandate letters" to give instructions and to confirm his position before the local people.
4. Paul writes this letter to Titus in part to confirm to the church in Crete that Paul stands behind Titus. But above all, he writes this letter to give instructions to Titus on how to structure and lead the newly started church on the island of Crete.
5. Where it says *"servant"* in English, it says "doulos" in Greek and actually means "slave". Paul sees himself as a servant and/or slave of God.
   1. In our Swedish context, it may be difficult to relate to the word "slave", but in Paul's time, Roman and Greek society consisted of up to a third of slaves.
   2. It may be easier to relate to words like "child of God", "friend of God" or something similar, but here Paul calls himself "slave of God". Different words may have different significance in the course of our lives. Sometimes it may be necessary to just rest in faith and trust that one is a child of God, but sometimes it may be right and proper to think of oneself as a slave of God, diligently and disciplinedly carrying out God's will.
6. Where it says *"apostle"* in English, it says "apostolos" in Greek and actually means "sent" or "envoy".
   1. Paul is "sent" by Jesus to testify about Jesus to the Gentiles (Acts 22:21).
7. God has a people whom he has saved and given eternal life. This people consists of all who believe in Jesus and have confessed him as their Lord. Paul is chosen by Jesus to teach this people how to live this new life.
   1. Paul struggled to lead people into this salvation, but he also worked hard to teach these people to live godly lives.
   2. Once we are saved, a life of "sanctification" awaits us, a life in which we constantly grow in our faith and learn more and more about this new life.
8. In general, this letter is about how Paul intends this new people to be led into a life of godliness. Paul instructs Titus on how the church should be structured and how to behave toward one another.
   1. By extension, this is of course instructions for us today as well. For the church to function and grow in godliness, it is important that there is exemplary leadership, sound doctrine and good relationships among us Christians.

[[@Bible:titus 1:2]]Titus 1:2

1. Everyone who believes in Jesus receives *"eternal life"* from God (John 3:16). Even if we humans die and are buried in the earth, we know that one day we will be resurrected and have new eternal life (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). There are several images in nature that help us understand this:
   1. When you bury a seed in the ground, it takes on new life and grows up.
   2. A caterpillar may be ugly and caterpillar-like, but when it becomes a pupa after a while, we know that it will soon have a new life and become a butterfly.
   3. In the same way, we live in the hope that one day we will become a "butterfly". When we die and are buried in the earth, we know that we will be resurrected to eternal life with Jesus.
2. The fact that God does not lie is probably self-evident to most people and is written down long ago in Num 23:19.
   1. The reason Paul writes something as obvious as that God cannot lie is because in Paul's day there was a proverb that read*, "Cretans are always lying, beasts, ravenous and lazy"* (see verse 12 for a more detailed commentary on this).
   2. The fact that God does not lie further confirms that we can trust in our hope for eternal life. Even if we sometimes feel like worms and caterpillars, we know that one day we will have new eternal life and become like butterflies.

[[@Bible:titus 1:3]]Titus 1:3

1. When you read the whole of Titus, you notice that Paul uses the word "*savior"* very often, and you also notice that he alternately refers to God as savior and Jesus as savior. Paul uses the word "*savior"* twelve times in all his letters, and half of them are in Titus.
   1. The prophet Isaiah is clear that there is only *one* saviour (Is 43:11), and that saviour is YHWH, our God. How is it then that Paul describes both God and Jesus as our saviour? Well, because Jesus is God! In Titus 2:13 Paul writes: *"our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ"*.
      1. *"of God our Savior"* (Titus 1:3)
      2. *"Christ Jesus our Savior."* (Titus 1:4)
      3. *"of God our Savior"* (Titus 2:10)"
      4. *"our great God and Savior Jesus Christ"* (Titus 2:13)
      5. *"of God our Savior"* (Titus 3:4).
      6. *"Jesus Christ our Savior"* (Titus 3:6).
   2. The Apostle John writes in his Gospel that *"the Word was God"* (John 1:1) and *"became flesh and dwelt among us"* (John 1:14a) and further declares that *"no one has ever seen God. The only-begotten, who is God himself, and is with the Father, has made him known"* (John 1:18). God thus became man and "took up his dwelling among us". The sad thing is, however, that John also writes that *"he came to his own, and his own did not receive him"* (John 1:11). Not until the end of John's Gospel does one of the disciples confess who Jesus is: *"Thomas answered him: "My Lord and God!"* (John 20:28).
      1. Jesus is the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus has always existed but was born as a human being and is therefore 100% God and 100% human at the same time.
      2. Jesus does not force us to confess who he is, but rather he demonstrates this in word and deed (Mark 2:5-7) and then waits for the Father to reveal this in our hearts (Matthew 16:16-17).
   3. The Roman senator and writer Pliny the Younger wrote about the first Christians in about 110: *"They met on a certain day before daylight, and addressed a form of prayer to Christ, as to a deity."* 
      1. From the very beginning, Christians have both confessed and worshipped Jesus as Lord and God.
2. The timing of Jesus' birth was perfect!
   1. There was an international language, Greek, which a lot of people knew.
   2. There was a well-developed postal system, so that Paul could send letters to the churches all over the Roman Empire.
   3. Because of the Roman peace, the Pax Romana, people could move freely throughout the Roman Empire.
   4. There was a well-established network for travelling, both by sea and by land. The Romans were good at building roads so it was easy to get from one place to another.
   5. God always has a "timing" when he wants to do things. Maybe you are praying to God for healing or some other answer to prayer, but God is not answering. There are many different answers to the question of why you don't get an answer to prayer, but one of them may be that God is not answering because the timing is not right yet. Then it is a matter of being humble, realising that God is God, we are human beings, keep praying and wait for God's right time.
3. Do we really need preachers and leaders in the Church? Can't everyone read the Bible for themselves? Of course everyone can read the Bible and the more people who do, the better. But it is also important that the message of Jesus is "passed on". Those who have lived a long Christian life need to pass on their knowledge and experience. Those who have studied the Bible in depth need to pass on their understanding.
   1. The Christian life is not an isolated individualistic phenomenon, but a community with structure and leadership. This is one of the things that Paul is trying to convey through this letter to Titus.
   2. God presents his word through *"proclamation"*. Although God's will is written in the Bible, language and culture change over time. God's word needs to be proclaimed and explained so that ordinary people understand in their own language and culture.
      1. Sometimes a story is told from the South Sea mission field. When the missionaries had to translate the Bible into the local language, they had difficulties when they came to the word "lamb". The islanders had never seen a lamb and did not know what it was. In order for the islanders to understand God's word in their own language, the missionaries translated "lamb" into "pig" and it became easier to understand.
      2. Similarly, the Bible must be constantly preached and explained in a language that ordinary people understand. Each new generation has more or less a new way of speaking and preachers need to constantly develop their way of preaching so that ordinary people understand.
      3. When you look at a parish, it is often very easy to think that "it was better in the past", the parishioners don't pray as much as they used to, not as many people want to go to the pulpit as they used to, etc, etc... But personally, I don't think the problem is that it was better in the past, but that times have changed and we haven't kept up with them. You should never adapt the message, but you should definitely adapt the way you deliver the message. The Gospel always has to be translated into a new time, into a new language and into a new culture. We can't expect young people to always want to sing old hymns and victory tunes and then be disappointed and complain that they are so unspiritual and don't want to go to church.
      4. In different times, revivals have looked different. When the Spirit of God breathes life into us Christians, it shows up in a few different ways.
         1. The end of the 2nd century saw the start of what might be called a "desert revival". Many young men became interested in God and longed to spend more time with him in peace and quiet, so they went out into the desert and lived alone in caves. Imagine how absurd it would be if we Christians today still complained that there was so little revival because so few young men today go out into the desert and live in caves. Exactly how a revival manifests itself is often culturally conditioned and it is therefore foolish to try to mimic these expressions in an attempt to recreate a revival, but its inherent longing to draw closer to God, that is something to strive for and long for.
      5. But while the Bible and God's message need to be proclaimed and explained into each new age and language, it is important to note that it is not just any "proclamation". The message is fixed and cannot be changed or adapted just because there is a new time. Times come and go but God's word stands firm. If our lives and values are not in line with God's message, it is we humans who need to change, not God.

[[@Bible:titus 1:4]]Titus 1:4

1. Titus is mentioned a number of times in 2 Corinthians (e.g. chapters 7 and 8) and was, according to Galatians 2:1-3, a companion of Paul and of Greek descent.
2. Since Paul calls Titus *"my true child in the faith"*, it is very likely that Titus, like Timothy, would have been saved through Paul's teaching and missionary work.
   1. An important lesson from this is that when Paul had led someone to salvation, he welcomed him as a companion. Paul took care of those who had been saved and gave them a task.
   2. Before Paul gave Titus the responsible task of leading the church in Crete, Titus had to follow Paul and see and learn. In doing so, Paul knew that Titus was a person to be trusted.
3. Although we don't know much about Titus as a person, we do know from the Bible that he was:
   1. A true child of faith (Titus 1:4).
   2. A "brother" of Paul (2 Corinthians 2:13).
   3. Paul's friend and co-worker (2 Corinthians 8:23).
   4. Followed in the footsteps and worked in the same spirit as Paul (2 Corinthians 12:18).
   5. Titus had learned from Paul how to be a good Christian leader (Phil 3:17) and could therefore be an example to other Christians (Titus 2:7).
   6. Titus was a reliable person. When Paul needed to control a situation in Corinth but could not go himself, he sent Titus (2 Corinthians 12:18).
4. The Christian faith is not an isolated phenomenon. While it is of course up to each person to decide whether or not to accept Jesus as their Lord, the Christian life and Christian doctrine are not a private matter.
   1. The English expression "each one will be saved by his own faith" is not correct according to the Bible. You cannot decide for yourself what Christian doctrine should look like or who you think Jesus is. If you want to be a Christian, you should accept basic aspects such as the Bible being the Word of God and Jesus being Lord.
      1. If you want to be "godly", you can't pick and choose from the Bible's messages. You can't paint a picture of God as a kind old man with a beard handing out Christmas presents just by asking for it. God is who he is and we have to bow to that. Nor can you pick and choose in Christian doctrine. You cannot opt out of the teaching of Paul, for example, just because you don't "like" it.
         1. However, it may be that one does not "understand" Christian doctrine or has not yet come to know God and therefore does not really know what he is like. Of course, this is not as serious as understanding but not accepting.
5. The greeting *"grace and peace"* is very common in Paul's letters. Personally, I think it is very nice because it shows that we have received *grace* and forgiveness for our old life and instead receive *peace* for our new life.

## Titus 1:5-16 - Qualifications for Elders

[[@Bible:titus 1:5]]Titus 1:5

1. According to Acts 27:7, Paul was passing through Crete when he was taken as a prisoner to Rome. It does not appear that Paul was doing any missionary work in Crete at that time, so it is likely that Paul visited Crete at some other time not mentioned in Acts. In that case, this means that Paul made more missionary journeys than the three known from Acts.
2. Paul was a missionary apostle who saw it as his task to "break new ground" (Rom 15:20). After preaching the gospel in Crete with Titus, Paul leaves Crete for an unknown reason, wanting Titus to stay behind and provide leadership and organize the church, and when he is finished, to meet up again with Paul in Nicopolis (Titus 3:12). Paul therefore writes this letter to give instructions to Titus on how to do this. Although the letter is addressed to Titus, this knowledge of how to appoint leaders is general and for the whole church (Acts 14:23).
   1. Paul gave a similar commission to Timothy in Ephesus (1 and 2 Tim).
3. In verse 5 Paul writes *"elders"* (presbyteros in Greek) and here in verse 7 Paul writes *"church leaders"* (episkopos in Greek). It certainly seems that he is using these different terms synonymously to describe one and the same church ministry.
   1. The Swedish word "priest" comes from the Greek word "presbyteros" which is translated as "elder" and the Swedish word "bishop" comes from the Greek word "episkopos" which is translated as "leader of the congregation".
   2. In some churches, presbyteros and episkopos have been separated, and responsibility for the church is divided hierarchically between "priests" and "bishops". In other churches, these two words are considered synonymous and simply describe a "church leader" in general. The purpose of not dividing these two words is largely to avoid the church ultimately being ruled by, for example, a pope or something similar, and instead to emphasize that all Christians are "priests" (Isa 61:6, 1 Pet 2:5).
4. Titus was commissioned to *"insert"* the elders. Being a leader in a congregation is not a task one takes on alone but should be carefully chosen by the spiritual leadership. Of course, one may volunteer, but it is important that the leadership examine the character of the person who wants to be a leader in the church.
5. The fact that there is such a list of qualifications for a church leader at all (a similar list is found in 1 Tim 3:2-7) means that *God has opinions about what a leader in a church should be like*. In other words, not just anyone can become a church leader, nor should one necessarily become a leader in a church just because one is a good leader in the secular world. It should be obvious to everyone that a good and successful business leader is not automatically a good church leader.
   1. Unfortunately, there is a tendency in many churches to elevate the typical traits of a successful business leader and consider this something desirable in a church leader as well. I believe that this is a disservice to the church and that the letter to Titus should be read at least seven more times. It is not necessarily a bad thing to embrace the good of profane leadership, but if one begins to think along the lines of making a career, working more than double full time, neglecting one's children, etc., then one should promptly repent.
6. This list of qualifications is aimed primarily at Christian leaders, but of course any Christian can take it on board. After all, leaders often serve as role models for other Christians, and even those who are not leaders can practice these instructions.
7. Paul almost always writes his letters in the context of an existing situation in a local church. Reading these letters is like just listening to one of the people in a phone conversation, sort of figuring out what the local situation looks like.
   1. For example, if Paul writes that a leader *must not abuse wine*, it is probably because there have been Christian leaders who *have* unfortunately abused wine.
   2. Common Christian sense must be used as a basis for considering what is right and wrong in a local situation. So you cannot allow someone to become a Christian leader just because he meets all these requirements but lives in manifest sin in some other area. For example, if someone does not abuse *wine,* but instead abuses *beer,* then one should use common Christian sense and realize that it is obviously equivalent.

[[@Bible:titus 1:6]]Titus 1:6

1. It is very important that a leader in a congregation is *"blameless"* or "blameless" as the NKJV writes. The reason for this is so that a congregational leader will be an example and a role model within the congregation and outside the congregation.
   1. If one lives a blatantly sinful life, the believers in the church will have difficulty trusting their leader and accepting the teaching.
   2. The church leader also has the task of reaching new people outside the church, but if they see that the church leader is a hypocrite who preaches one thing but practices another, then they will definitely not want to repent and become disciples of Jesus.
   3. Since there were many false prophets circulating in New Testament times, as there unfortunately still are today, it is also of the utmost importance that the church leader is *"invincible"* so that people can clearly distinguish between the church leader and any false teachers.
   4. Of course, being *"blameless"* does not mean that one must be 100% sinless, for then no man could be a church leader. Rather, it is about not overtly living a sinful life, dealing with the sins one knows about and living in holiness.
2. It's a bit unclear exactly what Paul means by *"a woman's husband"*, but it's clear that it definitely means not being a *polygamist* (which was not uncommon in biblical times) or *promiscuous*, which is definitely not appropriate for a church leader.
   1. The expression does not mean, of course, that one cannot be a church leader if one is unmarried, for then Paul would have excluded both himself and Jesus from church service! Presumably it does not mean that one cannot remarry if one's spouse dies (1 Corinthians 7:39).
   2. The phrase can also be interpreted to mean that if you are divorced, you have failed to manage your marriage and should not manage a congregation. But since this is a matter of interpretation, I personally believe it is up to each individual congregation to judge whether the person in question can be a suitable leader with the responsibility of "stewarding" the congregation.
3. In the similar letter to Timothy, Paul writes that *"if a man does not know how to take care of his own family, how can he take care of the church of God?"* (1 Tim 3:5). In other words, it is important for a church leader to be faithful in small ways and to care for his or her family at home as well. If one is careless with his family, what is to say that he is not also careless with the church?
   1. When a pastor looks too much up to successful business leaders and adopts a worldly leadership mindset, there is a risk that, for example, working from morning to night will be seen as a positive thing, neglecting time with one's family. It is important not only to preach God's word in church, but also to demonstrate the Christian faith through one's life and pass on the message of Jesus to children in the safety of the home.
      1. However, it should not be forgotten that it is of course up to the children themselves to decide whether they want to believe in Jesus or not. The message of Jesus is and will always be a voluntary offer.

[[@Bible:titus 1:7]]Titus 1:7

1. It may seem obvious that a church leader should not possess these negative traits, but unfortunately it has been shown throughout the history of the church, and not least in our own time, that it is unfortunately not uncommon for pastors, evangelists and other church leaders to behave in just this way.

[[@Bible:titus 1:8]]Titus 1:8

1. These positive character traits show that church leaders need to behave in a good way towards their fellow human beings, God and themselves.
2. If you are a leader in a congregation but feel that you are not quite living up to these qualifications, then you should see it as a challenge to try to improve yourself and work on becoming a better leader.

[[@Bible:titus 1:9]]Titus 1:9

1. Jesus gave the apostles the right to write down and lay the foundations of the Christian faith, and the result is what we today call the "New Testament" (Luke 10:16, John 17:20, Acts 2:42, 1 Corinthians 14:37, Galatians 1:11-12).
2. The Christian *"doctrine"* is and will always remain the New Testament (Eph 2:20) and one cannot as a Christian preacher preach a gospel that is not consistent with the works of Jesus and the writings of the apostles. Of course, the New Testament must always be interpreted in a new context, but one cannot add to or subtract from it, but must stick to the foundation that is there.
3. It is important for every individual Christian, but especially for those in leadership positions, to keep their eyes open and make sure that no one starts preaching something that is not in line with the New Testament.
   1. A classic question to ask anyone suspected of preaching unhealthy teaching is, "Where is it written?" If you can't base your teaching on the Bible, you'd better keep your mouth shut.
4. The word "*sound"* appears in the New Testament only in the similar letters to Timothy and Titus. The word roughly means to be "in good health", "well" and to be "unspoiled".
   1. Paul wants Titus' teaching to be sound and unadulterated, leading to people's well-being and good health.
5. It is always an important balancing act between *"refuting the adversaries"* as Paul urges here in 2:9, and *"avoiding foolish disputes"* as Paul writes in 3:9.
   1. The first priority for a Christian preacher is to make sure that he himself teaches "sound doctrine". But it is also part of the mission to counter the unhealthy teaching and show why it is unhealthy. Perhaps there is hope that the one who teaches wrongly may come to his senses. But if one feels that the unhealthy teacher is an obvious "false teacher" who has no intention of teaching according to the apostles' teaching, then one should heed Paul's advice in chapter 3: *"You shall put away a false teacher, after you have warned him once and again"*.

[[@Bible:titus 1:12-14]]Titus 1:12-14

1. Apparently there was a lot of unhealthy teaching in Crete because Paul here gives instructions on how to deal with it.
2. This is one of three quotes from extra-biblical writers found in the Bible, and comes from Epimenides, a philosopher from Crete.
   1. The fact that Epimenides was from Crete and at the same time wrote the proverb *"All from Crete are liars"* gave rise to the "Epimenidean paradox":
      1. If it is true that everyone from Crete is a liar, then Epimenides from Crete is telling the truth and therefore not everyone from Crete is a liar, which makes Epimenides a liar. But if Epimenides is a liar, then Epimenides' proverb is true, which means that Epimenides is telling the truth, but then not everyone from Crete is a liar, which means that the proverb is not true...
3. It was well known in ancient times that the people of Crete had problems with character, so it is not really surprising that Paul writes this letter with instructions on how a Christian leader should be.
   1. Because of the Cretans' propensity to lie, the Greeks coined the new word "chretenize", which means "to lie".
4. Even though the Cretans obviously had major character problems, Paul did not consider them hopeless, but urged Titus to work with them and let God transform their character. No man is so bad that God cannot transform and make all things new.
   1. When we see people with big problems today, we need to see God's possibilities instead of giving up hope. It is often those who are furthest from God, humanly speaking, who are the first to turn to Jesus for salvation. The people who are rich, comfortable and generally well off are usually the ones who have the hardest time repenting.

[[@Bible:titus 1:15]]Titus 1:15

1. There are, of course, things that are sinful and unclean even for the Christian, so what Paul is objecting to are those who teach that certain things are unclean even though God considers them to be pure. In Crete and many other places there were many Gnostic and Jewish heresies that taught, for example, that the whole body was unclean, etc.
   1. In Swedish Christianity there used to be a problem with the so-called "catalogue of sins". It was proclaimed that one was not allowed to go to the cinema, play cards, play football, etc. Of course one cannot say as a Christian preacher that it is sinful to "play cards", nowhere in the apostles' teaching does one find this. The reason for these foolish statements was that there was so much drunkenness associated with playing cards, and then one should rather emphasize that as a Christian one should not get drunk on alcohol, a statement that is also in good agreement with the apostles' writings (Eph 5:18).
2. For more on this topic, read these Scriptures: 1 Timothy 4:4; Mark 7:15-23; Luke 11:41; Romans 14:14, 20; 1 Corinthians 10:23-33.

## Titus 2:1-10 - Teach Sound Doctrine

[[@Bible:titus 2:1]]Titus 2:1

1. In contrast to the deceivers who both teach wrongly and live wrongly, Paul now wants Titus to preach sound doctrine and live the sound life instead.
   1. The fact that sound *doctrine* is also followed by instructions on how to *live* means that the Christian faith is not just an opinion to be believed but a whole life to be lived. As we strive to understand the Christian faith and increase our knowledge, we also need to strive to live the life that the Bible shows us.
2. The word "*sound"* appears in the New Testament only in the similar letters to Timothy and Titus. The word roughly means to be "in good health", "well" and to be "unspoiled".
   1. Paul wants Titus' teaching to be sound and unadulterated, leading to people's well-being and good health.
3. The fact that there is a "sound doctrine" means that a preacher cannot make up his own statements, teachings or messages and then claim that they are the word of God. A preacher must adhere to the message and doctrine found in the Bible, as summarized in 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, among other places. Paul warns against preaching a different gospel (2 Corinthians 11:4, Galatians 1:8).

[[@Bible:titus 2:2]]Titus 2:2

1. It is important to remember that Paul is writing his instructions to a *local situation* with *specific problems.* One cannot unquestioningly and thoughtlessly embrace all the instructions Paul gives, one must understand the *underlying principles* and embrace them, otherwise the theology can become very strange. Very many of Paul's instructions in his letters are based on his response to a concrete problem that existed in the place in question. When we read Paul's letters, it is helpful to try to figure out what the problem was in the particular locality to which Paul is writing. For example, if Paul writes that "the church leader should not be violent," then this is likely because there were indeed church members in Crete who were prone to violence. If Paul writes that "Jewish myths" are not to be dealt with, it is probably because there were church members who did just that.
   1. It is also important to understand the underlying principles. For example, Paul writes that one should not abuse wine, and if one reads this carelessly, then one can get the idea that it is fine to abuse *beer,* since Paul only mentions wine. But if one understands the underlying principles, then one understands that Paul is addressing "the abuse of alcohol in all its forms" and the reason why Paul mentions wine is because there was a specific problem with the local abuse of wine in Crete at that time. If one understands the *local situation* with the *specific problems*, then it is easier to transfer the *underlying principles* into today's time and thus respond to today's problems.
   2. Another example of how foolish it can be to read Paul's instructions carelessly, is that one can get the impression that Paul thought it was okay to have slavery, because he instructs the Christian slaves that they are to submit to their masters in everything. More on this in the explanation of verse 9.
2. *"Older men"* in this context in Mediterranean culture are men from the age of 60.
3. Older men should not withdraw from the work of the church and let the younger ones take over, but they should set an example of how to live and demonstrate a healthy faith.
4. Older men should behave in a *"healthy", "dignified"* and *"restrained" manner* and should thus act as a guarantor that unhealthy misconceptions do not creep into the congregation. Elders, after a long life with the Lord, know what is healthy and what is not. When some new "spiritual fly" comes along, the older men should be restrained and not rashly jump at it if it is unhealthy.
5. Older men should be healthy *"in love"*, i.e. they should show other members of the congregation the care they need. Sometimes love requires that we also rebuke or guide someone right who may have gone wrong.
6. Older men should be sound *"in patience"*, i.e. the elderly should show the other members of the congregation that "faith endures". Those who are younger need to see in their elders that there is something good to strive for. The older men should also be persistent in prayer, because they know from experience that God answers prayer, even if it sometimes takes a long time.

[[@Bible:titus 2:3]]Titus 2:3

1. Celsus, a famous critic of Christianity in the 100s, argued that the Christian faith *"only appealed to gullible women, slaves, children and the stupid"* (Origen: Contra Celsus, Book 3, Chapter 44).
   1. The message that Paul preached rightly appealed to those whom society considered less worthy, namely women, children and slaves.
2. Unfortunately, alcohol and gossip often go hand in hand. It seems that the church in Crete had some problems with women drinking wine and gossiping. This is by no means a problem that only women can have, men also tend to get together, drink beer and gossip, but Paul is specifically addressing this appeal to the older women because there was probably a problem in Crete that the older women were drinking too much wine and gossiping. Anyone who wants to live the Christian life should avoid abusing alcohol and talking badly about other people.
3. Instead of getting together and "talking bad" about other people, the older women should instead be *"teachers of what is good"* and in other words get together to "talk good". Older women have a responsibility to pass on the Gospel message to the younger generations.

[[@Bible:titus 2:4-5]]Titus 2:4-5

1. Paul did not instruct Titus to personally teach and instruct the young women, but instead Paul wanted the older women to teach the younger women. Perhaps Paul had Titus' best interests in mind and did not want him to fall prey to any temptation.
2. In the culture of Crete, most women were occupied with taking care of the home and children, so Paul instructs them to do this well. Although the Christian life offers great freedoms in comparison to the prevailing Roman culture, Paul does not urge either the women or the slaves to rebel and take advantage of their freedom in Christ, but rather wants them to remain submissive.
3. Does this mean that all women in all times and in all cultures must submit to their husbands? In my personal judgment based on Bible words such as *"Here is not Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female. You are all one in Christ Jesus."* (Gal 3:28) and 1 Cor 8:1-13, it is my understanding that all Christians are equal, but that in certain situations and contexts one should not use one's Christian freedom but instead submit to one another in order not to lead other people down the path.
   1. For example, Christians may eat meat sacrificed to idols, because all food is pure, but if someone with a weak conscience has a problem with us eating meat sacrificed to idols, then we should refrain for their sake and thus not take advantage of the Christian freedom we have (1 Corinthians 8:1-13).
   2. The purpose of submission in this case is so that *"the word of God will not be blasphemed"*. Long before anyone encounters the Christian *message*, they have probably already seen how Christians *live,* and it is therefore very important that there is nothing in the Christian's life to complain about, because then they will not listen to the Christian message either. If those who did not belong to the congregation saw that as soon as a woman became a Christian, they took advantage of their newfound Christian freedom to stop submitting and instead rebel against their husbands, then there would probably be great calabash on the island and the husbands would force their wives not to become Christians.

[[@Bible:titus 2:6]]Titus 2:6

1. Paul gives the same instructions to the younger men that he gave to the younger women. The only difference is that Paul did not want Titus himself to teach the younger women, but to leave this to the older women.
2. The only further instruction Paul gives specifically to the younger men is that they *"in everything exercise good judgment"*. The younger men are not to be rash and impulsive, flying here and there between projects, but should be thoughtful, restrained and show good judgment.

[[@Bible:titus 2:7-8]]Titus 2:7-8

1. Again, Paul shows that sound *doctrine* and sound *living* go together. You can't just preach correctly and then live a profligate life. If a Christian leader lives an unhealthy life, it will firstly lead to the members of the congregation not trusting the leader and therefore finding it difficult to grow in their faith, and secondly to people outside the congregation not wanting to become Christians because they see that it leads to hypocrisy because the leader preaches one way but lives in a completely different way.

[[@Bible:titus 2:9-10]]Titus 2:9-10

1. In the Roman Empire of the time, slavery was a brutal reality.
   1. The population of the Roman Empire consisted of up to one third slaves.
   2. Most became slaves because they had committed a crime or been taken as prisoners of war in one of Rome's successful wars.
   3. A Roman slave owner had the right to whip, kill or sell his slave.
   4. Some slaves suffered in miserable conditions without even having their own name, while others were able to have a reasonably good life.
   5. Most slaves were ordinary labourers, working in agriculture, while some lucky slaves were trained as physicists, architects, cooks, shop workers, hairdressers, artists, prophets, teachers, poets, philosophers, etc. As a result, some slaves were able to earn quite a bit of money from their work and were able to obtain administrative positions. Some slaves even gained power over other slaves and, to some extent, over free ones.
2. Neither the Old nor the New Testament opposes slavery as an institution, but there are clear restrictions on how slaves may be treated (Exodus 21:1-32).
   1. According to Leviticus 25:39-43, an Israelite may not own another Israelite as a slave for more than 6 years because all the children of Israel are "slaves of *God*".
   2. Paul uses a similar reasoning when he writes in his letter to Rome that all Christians are slaves of God (Rom 6:22) and further in his letter to the Galatians: "*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. If you have been baptized into Christ, you have also put on Christ. Now no one is Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. You are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Gal 3:26-28)*.*
      1. In the letter to Philemon, Paul shows how this was done in practice.
   3. So, according to Paul, a Christian cannot really own another Christian as a slave because all Christians are slaves of *God.* However, if a Christian does own slaves, he does not have to release his slaves automatically, because it is better for everyone to remain in the situation they are in (1 Corinthians 7:20-24).
3. In Colossians 3:22-4:1, Paul gives exhortations to slaves and to slave owners: slaves must obey their masters in everything with a sincere heart, because it is really the Lord they serve. Slave owners are to treat their slaves *"justly and reasonably*," arguing that *"you know that you also have a master in heaven*.*"* 
   1. So Paul does not explicitly oppose slavery as such, but in the letter to Philemon he emphasizes that slave and master are *"beloved brothers"* in Christ, thus making it virtually impossible for a Christian slave owner to own other Christians.
      1. In an empire built on slavery, this message is radical and totally transformative! It is difficult to underestimate the enormous impact of the Gospel message on all the slaves of the Roman Empire. For these oppressed people, the message of Jesus was indeed good news!
4. Paul taught in Galatians, among other places, that *"Here is not Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. You are all one in Christ Jesus."* (Gal 3:28) A fundamental aspect of the Christian faith is that all the walls that exist between different social groups and genders are torn down when one becomes a Christian. In the church there is equality because we are all brothers and sisters. However, Paul urges everyone to remain in *"the position"* they were in when they became a Christian because *"the time is short"* (1 Cor 7:17-24). The first Christians lived in the belief that Jesus would soon return and the important thing was not to revolutionise society but to spread the gospel message so that as many as possible could be saved. Paul did not *directly* address social injustice, but social injustice was *indirectly* addressed as more and more people became Christians and began to behave lovingly towards each other.

## Titus 2:11-15 - God's Grace has been Revealed

[[@Bible:titus 2:11]]Titus 2:11

1. Salvation is not something that can be demanded or snatched away, it is something that is offered by the grace of God.

[[@Bible:titus 2:12]]Titus 2:12

1. God's grace gives us Christians total forgiveness and enormous freedom in the way we live, but we must not allow this freedom to lead us to live ungodly lives. Although God gives us forgiveness for both our past and future sins, we should not abuse this grace and think that it is okay to sin (Romans 6:1-2). The forgiveness of our sins should encourage us to say no to a continued life of sin and ungodliness and instead to live godly lives in gratitude.

[[@Bible:titus 2:13]]Titus 2:13

1. When I worked as a security guard in Stockholm, I once guarded the tax collection outside the Tax Agency. As the final minutes approached, I realised that there were many people who saw it as a sport to file as late as possible, preferably when the big collection boxes were about to be rolled back in. A few people arrived a minute late and appealed to me to make an exception, but unfortunately I had to tell them it was too late and that the only thing they could do was to appeal to the Treasury's mercy.
   1. In the same way, I believe that many of us Christians wait until the very end to give up our "worldly desires". We take care to live in sin as long as there is forgiveness and we think there will be plenty of time for church when we get older and no longer have much else to think about.
   2. But the point is that we don't know when Jesus will come back, he could come back at any time, and so the Bible urges us to live constantly in a kind of "expectation" that Jesus will return soon (Matthew 25:1-13). If this were our last day before we could go to heaven, wouldn't we be doing everything we could to spread the gospel, stop sinning, and restore our broken relationships?
2. Paul's phrase "*our great God and Savior Jesus Christ*" is, along with John 1:1-18 and Philippians 2:6-11, one of the Bible's clearest statements of Jesus' divinity.
   1. The prophet Isaiah is clear that there is only *one* saviour (Is 43:11), and that saviour is YHWH, our God. In the letter to Titus, Paul refers to *God* as *"Saviour"* three times and to *Jesus Christ* as *"Saviour"* twice and then conflates God, Jesus and the Saviour when he refers to Jesus Christ as *"our great God and Saviour*":
      1. *"of God our Savior"* (Titus 1:3)
      2. *"Christ Jesus our Savior."* (Titus 1:4)
      3. *"of God our Savior"* (Titus 2:10)"
      4. *"our great God and Savior Jesus Christ"* (Titus 2:13)
      5. *"of God our Savior"* (Titus 3:4).
      6. *"Jesus Christ our Savior"* (Titus 3:6).
   2. Jesus is the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus has always existed but was born as a human being and is therefore 100% God and 100% human at the same time.
   3. The Roman senator and writer Pliny the Younger wrote about the first Christians in about 110: *"They met on a certain day before daylight, and addressed a form of prayer to Christ, as to a deity."* 
      1. From the very beginning, Christians have both confessed and worshipped Jesus as Lord and God.

[[@Bible:titus 2:15]]Titus 2:15

1. If God has called you to be a preacher, then you must preach. You cannot keep silent about the Truth but have a responsibility to proclaim sound biblical teaching and to carry the message of Jesus.
2. When you as a pastor or preacher have to instruct people who are perhaps twice your age, it is easy to become insecure and thus back away from parts of your mission. But Paul encourages Titus to dare to stand up for himself and not let anyone look down on him. If God has called you and blessed you, why should you be afraid of what people will think?

## Titus 3:1-11 - Be Ready for Every Good Work

[[@Bible:titus 3:1]]Titus 3:1

1. We Christians need to constantly *remind* ourselves and each other to live the Christian life. Because of our sinful nature, it is very easy for us to forget to do what is good and fall away from the will of God.
   1. In my personal opinion, communion is a great opportunity to remind ourselves of the important things in life, ask God for forgiveness for the stupid things we have done and move on clean, free and forgiven. From time to time it can be good to have some kind of "fresh start" in the Christian life and the Eucharist is a good starting point.
   2. It is important not to get stuck in the past, but rather to confess our sins, receive God's forgiveness and move on to a blessed life.
2. In the similar letter to Timothy, Paul urges the church in Ephesus to pray for *"kings and all in authority"* (1 Timothy 2:1-3), but in this letter Paul feels compelled to remind the Christians in Crete to *"submit to and obey the authorities and rulers"*. The church at Ephesus was probably far more pious than the Cretans, whom Paul describes as *"ravenous beasts"* (Titus 1:12), and Paul must therefore address some more basic instructions to them.
   1. Again we see how Paul addresses different instructions to different churches depending on the *specific problems* the *local church* had. This must always be kept in mind when reading Paul's letters. It is not possible to simply read Paul's instructions and thoughtlessly transpose this literally into our local situation. The important thing is to understand the *underlying principles* and try to transpose them into our time.
3. Christians should not only passively follow the law and obey authorities, but should also be prepared to *"do all that is good"*. Christians should not just live quietly and keep to themselves, but should get involved in society and help where needed. For example, if there are many addicts in a community, Christians should get involved and help as best they can. If there are a lot of asylum seekers, they should help with that, etc, etc.

[[@Bible:titus 3:3]]Titus 3:3

1. Paul reminds the church in Crete that there was a time before they were saved when they lived in ungodliness. Even though we have been forgiven of all our sins, we all still struggle with continuing sin of various kinds. On the one hand, we need to be vigilant so that we do not fall back into the way we lived before we became Christians, but we also need to watch out for the day when we no longer consider that we have any sin. That is why it is so important to regularly confess our sin to the Lord and receive the forgiveness that Jesus gives.
2. When we remind ourselves that we too were once sinners, then it is easier to show mercy to those who live in sin today. We too have been in that situation in the past and therefore we know that it is not so easy to stop sinning.
3. When we remind ourselves that we have been sinners in the past, our gratitude to Jesus increases. Without him, we would still be living in sin, with no possibility of forgiveness or transformation.

[[@Bible:titus 3:4-5]]Titus 3:4-5

1. Again, Paul equates Jesus with God when he first describes God as our Savior and then Jesus Christ as our Savior, here also in the same sentence. See also Titus 1:3, Titus 1:4, Titus 2:10 and Titus 2:13.
   1. Jesus is the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus has always existed but was born as a human being and is therefore 100% God and 100% human at the same time.
2. God is not a cruel dictator who punishes us with eternal suffering for disobeying him; on the contrary, God loves us so much that when we sinned, he sent his own Son to die on the cross to save us from eternal death.
3. Jesus' name means "God saves" and is a clear indication of both who Jesus is, but also his mission.
4. We humans are hopelessly lost unless God intervenes and saves us. Nothing we can do in ourselves can free us from our sins or our ungodliness. The only one who can save us is God himself, and he has done so when Jesus died on the cross, taking all our sins upon himself and offering us his own righteousness.
5. God saves all those who believe in him, not because of any righteous deeds, but because of his mercy (Rom 3:21-24, Eph 2:8-9, 2 Tim 1:9).
   1. So there is nothing we humans can "do" to be saved. Salvation is a free gift from God to us humans and the only thing we can "do" is to gratefully *accept* salvation by starting to believe in Jesus.
6. There is a clear contrast between what *God* has done and what we humans have *not* done.
   1. We humans were hateful and evil, and could do no *"righteous deeds"* to be saved.
   2. God is good and loving and saved us humans because of his mercy.
   3. Because of God's grace, we humans can receive salvation from our sins and begin to live in God's goodness.

[[@Bible:titus 3:6]]Titus 3:6

1. Before God saved us humans, we were "dirty", but through the Holy Spirit we are washed clean.
2. Jesus says in the Gospel of John: *"Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God"* (John 3:5).
   1. When you are saved, you get "new life" and are born into the kingdom of God. It is the Holy Spirit who performs this inner "rebirth", which is symbolically demonstrated when we are baptized in water. In baptism, we "bury" our old man in the water and rise to the new eternal life when we come up out of the water.
   2. Baptism in water is an outward symbolic demonstration of what happens within when the Holy Spirit washes us clean from all sin.
   3. Does this mean that one *must be* baptized in order to participate in this new birth and thus be saved? No, baptism in water is an outward demonstration of something that has taken place on the inside in that one has confessed faith in Jesus and been saved. If, for some reason, you miss out on baptism because, for example, you died hastily and unhappily before you could be baptised, you are of course still saved because the Holy Spirit gives us eternal life when we believe in Jesus. But if you have the opportunity, which most people do, then you should be baptized at the time of salvation and rebirth to demonstrate outwardly what has happened inwardly. See also Acts 10:47, Mark 16:16, Luke 23:39-43.
3. Even if we cannot physically see this new birth, we can hopefully see its consequences in our lives. The Holy Spirit "renews" us and allows us to grow in our faith.
   1. If we spend time in prayer and Bible study, it affects us by giving us knowledge and insight into all kinds of sins in our lives. When we realize our sin and confess it before the Lord, He forgives us and gives us strength and renewal so that we can put our sins behind us and instead fill our lives with the love and power that God wants to give us.
   2. Anyone struggling with sin or lacking "power" in their Christian life should turn to the Lord and pray for spiritual renewal. Notice that the text says *"abundantly poured out"*. So there is plenty of power and renewal to last and be given to all. The only thing that prevents us from being filled with the power of the Holy Spirit is that we are too lazy to ask God to pour out his power on us (Luke 11:13).

[[@Bible:titus 3:8]]Titus 3:8

1. There is a big difference between "salvation by works" and "works by salvation" (Jas 2:14-26).
   1. In verse 5, Paul writes that we were not saved by our own righteous deeds, but in verse 8, Paul writes that he wants us to strive to do good deeds.
      1. We are not saved because of all our possible good deeds. We are saved because of God's grace and as a result of this, good works will eventually come.
   2. Since the church in Crete had problems with false teachers (Titus 1:10, 1:14), we can assume that they taught wrongly about this very thing, which we also see in verse 9. Perhaps they taught from a wrong understanding of the Pentateuch that one must be circumcised or obey all the commandments of the Law of Moses in order to be saved, a false doctrine that flourished in other contexts as well (Acts 15:1).
2. It is very important, perhaps even vital for the salvation of many people, that today we also consider this false doctrine. We cannot and must not place greater demands on anyone who wants to be saved than Jesus himself explained to us.
   1. The "smallest" confession to be found in the Bible is the one uttered by the thief on the cross to Jesus just before he dies: *"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus replied, "Amen I say to you: Today you will be with me in paradise."* (Luke 23:42-43)
      1. So it was enough for the robber on the cross to ask Jesus to "think" about him, for him to be saved. He did not have time to be baptized or welcomed as a member of a church, but he was saved anyway.
3. Obviously, having eternal life and going to heaven is a big part of salvation, but we must not forget that God also wants us to do *"good deeds"* to one another. God wants us to be kind to each other and to help all our fellow human beings, and we should not wait until we get to heaven to do this, but start now.

[[@Bible:titus 3:9-11]]Titus 3:9-11

1. As a Christian, one should not avoid *all* disputes but *"foolish disputes*", a small but oh so important distinction. The history of the Christian Church is full of disputes left and right, and these "debates" are often important to have because they can lead to a greater and better understanding of the Word of God.
   1. But when you notice that the debate is degenerating and going nowhere, then you have to realise that it is harmful and completely pointless, and then you should stop giving the false teacher space and room in the assembly.
2. Examples of contemporary *"foolish disputes"* are the blog debates that have revolved around the divinity of Jesus and the Christian relationship to the Law of Moses. If someone wants to talk about these topics, then of course they should have a conversation, but if you find that the person in question has hardened their heart and denies the deity of Jesus and insists that we Christians must keep the Law of Moses, then you should kindly but firmly end the debate.
   1. In this letter, Paul clearly shows that Jesus *is* our great God and Savior (Titus 2:13) and that we *do not* have to keep the Law of Moses because we are saved by God's grace (Titus 3:4-5).
3. In a congregation, there are always one or two people who exaggerate the theological discussion and forget that as a Christian one should also do *"good deeds"*. It might be a good idea to remind them to step away from the computer, at least for a second, and think about whether there isn't something good they could do to actually help a fellow human being.

## Titus 3:12-15 - Final Instructions and Greetings

[[@Bible:titus 3:12]]Titus 3:12

1. Although the Bible is a "religious scripture", it is still very personal and the personal greetings and thoughts of the various Bible individuals shine through.
2. Titus was never intended to stay in Crete forever, but had an *apostolic* function; to found and organize the church and then move on to the next place (Titus 1:5). It is quite possible that it is Artemas and Tychicus who will succeed Titus as the leader of the church.
   1. Artemas is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible, but Tychicus is mentioned in 2 Tim 4:12, Eph 6:21 and Col 4:7, where we see, among other things, that Paul sent him to various churches to do some kind of church work.

[[@Bible:titus 3:13]]Titus 3:13

1. It was important for Paul that the church learn to care for its leaders and workers (1 Tim 5:18).
2. Apollos was probably one of John the Baptist's disciples who became a passionate preacher who taught about Jesus (Acts 18:24-28).

[[@Bible:titus 3:14]]Titus 3:14

1. God wants all Christians to "bear fruit", i.e. that the faith in Jesus in one's heart does not stay in the heart but shows itself in good deeds that become a blessing for other people.
2. Doing *"good deeds"* and helping those in need is something that Paul says needs to be *"learned"*. For some it comes naturally, but for most of us it requires effort and learning to do what is good.
3. There seems to have been a danger that Titus might have thought that he himself would see to it that these workers were fed and housed etc., but Paul instructs Titus that this is the responsibility of the whole church. Paul wants more people than just Titus to have the opportunity to share in the blessing of helping a fellow human being.

# Filemon

## Philemon 1-3 - Greeting

[[@Bible:philem 1]]Phm 1

1. Normally Paul presents himself as an *"apostle"*, but now he presents himself as a *"prisoner"*.
   1. Paul is imprisoned in Rome when he writes this letter (Acts 28:30-31). Although Paul is a "Roman prisoner", he chooses to think of himself as a *"prisoner of Christ Jesus"* because he is imprisoned for bearing witness to Jesus Christ (Philemon 13).
   2. This letter is about Paul wanting Philemon to release his slave Onesimus from *"captivity"* because Onesimus has now become a Christian. Paul therefore uses a rhetorical device when he titles himself *"the prisoner of Christ Jesus"*.
2. Philemon is a Christian who has probably been saved thanks to Paul (Philemon 19).
   1. Philemon is rich and has a large house in the city of Colossae, where the local congregation gathers (Philemon 2).
   2. Philemon is a slave owner and owns the slave Onesimus. For some reason, Onesimus has escaped from Philemon and run into Paul.
      1. One theory is that Onesimus stole money from Philemon, ran away and then for some reason ran into Paul and became a Christian. Paul then sent Onesimus back to Philemon with this letter to try to persuade Philemon to forgive Onesimus and with an assurance that Paul will pay back whatever Onesimus owes Philemon.
      2. Another theory is that Onesimus for some reason did something that upset Filemon and cost Filemon money. Onesimus has therefore run away to escape severe punishment and sought out Philemon's friend Paul to mediate. This is because Roman law at the time distinguished between a slave who ran away from his master to gain freedom and a slave who ran away to seek some form of asylum.
3. In the Roman Empire of the time, slavery was a brutal reality.
   1. The population of the Roman Empire consisted of up to one third slaves.
   2. Most became slaves because they had committed a crime or been taken as prisoners of war in one of Rome's successful wars.
   3. A Roman slave owner had the right to whip, kill or sell his slave.
   4. Some slaves suffered in miserable conditions without even having their own name, while others were able to have a reasonably good life.
   5. Most slaves were common labourers and worked in agriculture, while some lucky slaves were trained as physicists, architects, cooks, shop workers, hairdressers, artists, prophets, teachers, poets, philosophers, etc. As a result, some slaves were able to earn quite a bit of money from their work and were able to obtain administrative positions. Some slaves even gained power over other slaves and, to some extent, over free ones.
   6. Neither the Old nor the New Testament opposes slavery as an institution, but there are clear restrictions on how slaves may be treated (Exodus 21:1-32).
      1. According to Leviticus 25:39-43, an Israelite may not own another Israelite as a slave for more than 6 years because all the children of Israel are "slaves of *God*".
      2. Paul uses a similar reasoning when he writes in his letter to Rome that all Christians are slaves of God (Rom 6:22) and further in his letter to the Galatians: "*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. If you have been baptized into Christ, you have also put on Christ. Now no one is Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. You are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Gal 3:26-28)*.*
         1. In the letter to Philemon, Paul shows how this was done in practice.
   7. So, according to Paul, a Christian cannot really own another Christian as a slave because all Christians are slaves of *God.* However, if a Christian does own slaves, he does not have to release his slaves automatically, because it is better for everyone to remain in the situation they are in (1 Corinthians 7:20-24).
   8. In Colossians 3:22-4:1, Paul gives exhortations to slaves and to slave owners: slaves must obey their masters in everything from the heart, because it is really the Lord they serve. Slave owners are to treat their slaves *"justly and reasonably*," arguing that *"you know that you also have a master in heaven*.*"* 
      1. So Paul does not explicitly oppose slavery as such, but in this letter to Philemon he emphasizes that slave and master are *"beloved brothers"* in Christ, thus making it virtually impossible for a Christian slave owner to own other Christians.
         1. In an empire built on slavery, this message is radical and totally transformative! It is difficult to underestimate the enormous impact of the Gospel message on all the slaves of the Roman Empire. For these oppressed people, the message of Jesus was indeed good news!

[[@Bible:philem 2]]Phm 2

1. The first Christians had no church buildings, but gathered in each other's homes to worship (Acts 12:12, Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 16:19).
2. It is important to remember that it is not the church building that is the church, it is the congregation, the Christians, that are the church.
3. The earliest church building that archaeology has found is a house from around 232 AD in Dura-Europos in present-day Syria. The building is a simple house where a wall between two rooms has been knocked out to make room for about 70 people. In other words, the first church building was also really an ordinary home.

## Philemon 4-7 - Philemon’s Love and Faith

[[@Bible:philem 4]]Phm 4

1. Paul *"mentioned"* Philemon in his prayers. This shows us that Paul did not necessarily pray very long, but he did pray often.
2. Jesus warns us not to pray long prayers (Matt 6:7), but encourages us to pray always without getting tired (Luke 18:1-8).

[[@Bible:philem 5]]Phm 5

1. One of the foundations of the Christian faith is to *"love your neighbour as yourself"* (Matthew 22:34-40).
2. Paul points out that Philemon has treated other Christians with love in the past and then uses this argument to persuade Philemon to show love to Onesimus because he too has now become a Christian.

## Philemon 8-20 - Paul's Plea for Onesimus

[[@Bible:philem 8-9]]Phm 8-9

1. Paul could have commanded Philemon to forgive Onesimus, but then Philemon would not have had the opportunity to *voluntarily* forgive Onesimus. Instead of commanding, Paul sends Onesimus back and appeals to him to make the right decision himself.
   1. Paul was not afraid to give orders if necessary (1 Cor 5).
   2. Paul knows that true forgiveness can only be voluntary and that the relationship between Philemon and Onesimus can only be established if they both voluntarily agree to it.

[[@Bible:philem 10-12]]Phm 10-12

1. Paul often referred to those he had converted to Christ as his *"children"* (Titus 1:4, 1 Corinthians 4:14, 1 Corinthians 4:17, Galatians 4:19, Colossians 4:15).
   1. Since Paul has led both Philemon and Onesimus to Christ, he assumes the role of their parent and believes that they are both brothers.
   2. Like a real parent, Paul is willing to pay one brother's debts while, like a parent, he urges Philemon to forgive his brother.
2. Paul writes here a play on words that does not appear in English. *"Onesimus"* means "useful" and Paul means that Onesimus was not "useful" to Philemon before but now that he has become a Christian he is "useful" to both Paul and Philemon. Later in verse 20, Paul appeals to Philemon to be "useful" by releasing Onesimus.
3. Given the brutal reality of most slaves at the time, it was very brave of Onesimus to return to Philemon. Had the same thing happened to another slave owner, Onesimus would probably have been crucified.
   1. Presumably Onesimus was the bearer of this letter from Paul, so one can imagine that Onesimus was cold-sweated a bit before Philemon had had time to read Paul's letter.
4. Onesimus is mentioned in Colossians 4:9 as *"our faithful and beloved brother"*.

[[@Bible:philem 13-14]]Phm 13-14

1. Paul could have used his apostolic authority to command Philemon to do what Paul wanted, but then Philemon would have missed the chance to show love to his fellow man and release Onesimus voluntarily.
2. Instead of forcing Philemon to do what is right, Paul trusts that there is an inherent morality in every Christian that allows him to decide for himself what is right or wrong. This is so important to Paul that he risks Onesimus' well-being in order to give Philemon the chance to voluntarily forgive Onesimus.
   1. The new covenant is not based on being forced to obey laws and rules here and there, but on having a new heart that voluntarily *wants to* do what is right (Jer 31:31-34, 2 Cor 3:6).
   2. Every Christian has been given the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), who teaches us and reminds us of everything Jesus said (John 14:26).
   3. Since Philemon has received the Holy Spirit, Paul trusts that Philemon will be able to make the right decision and forgive Onesimus.
      1. In the same way, every Christian today also has the Holy Spirit in his heart and can freely listen to the Holy Spirit and thus make the right decisions for himself.
      2. A Christian does not have to blindly obey laws and rules but can, thanks to the Holy Spirit, make his own decisions to love his fellow human beings. The difficult thing, however, may be for a Christian leader to trust, as Paul did, that other Christians also have the Holy Spirit and can decide for themselves what is right or wrong. If a Christian leader commands his or her parishioners to obey, the parishioners miss the opportunity to voluntarily love their fellow human beings and miss out on one of the most important aspects of the Christian faith.

[[@Bible:philem 15-16]]Phm 15-16

1. There has been a big change in Philemon and Onesimus' relationship. Previously they were master and slave, but now they have suddenly become brothers in Christ. This turns their relationship upside down and everything that had previously happened between Philemon and Onesimus.
2. Although Paul does not explicitly oppose slavery as such in theory, he does oppose it in practice because it becomes increasingly difficult to own other people as more and more people become Christians.
   1. Paul did not challenge slavery from above by instituting new laws and rules that forbade Christians to have slaves. Instead, Paul challenged slavery from within by appealing to the inherent morality and voluntary will of Christians to love their fellow human beings. Slavery was defeated through love, not coercion.
3. To make sure that Philemon does not just become a brother to Onesimus in theory, Paul adds that they are now brothers both as *"men"* and *"in the Lord"*.
   1. The Christian faith is not just a theoretical belief that one holds in one's heart; the Christian faith also has consequences in real life. Philemon and Onesimus are not only brothers in theory but also in practice.
   2. As a Christian, you pray not only on Sundays in church, but also on Mondays at work.

[[@Bible:philem 17-19]]Phm 17-19

1. Even though Onesimus has been saved and forgiven, it was still important that he did the right thing.
2. Paul knows that Onesimus has done wrong, but still chooses to send him back to Philemon with a message that he himself is ready to take Onesimus' punishment.
   1. Here Paul becomes "*Christ-like*" when he does not turn a blind eye to what is wrong, while at the same time he is ready to take the punishment himself, thus creating a reconciliation between master and slave. This is what Jesus has done for us human beings.
   2. We have all been "runaway slaves" who have done wrong. But when we flee to Jesus, Jesus "mediates" between us and our Father. Jesus asks our Father to forgive us and take the punishment for our sins upon himself so that we can live in our Father's house as "sons" instead of "slaves" (1 Tim 2:5-6).
3. Here we see that Philemon has most likely been saved thanks to Paul. Philemon has thus received eternal life thanks to Paul's telling him about Christ. Had it not been for Paul, Philemon would most likely not have been saved and thus Philemon owes an incalculable debt of gratitude to Paul.
   1. Since Philemon owes Paul so much, releasing a Christian brother is the least he can do.

[[@Bible:philem 20]]Phm 20

1. Here Paul again alludes to Onesimus' name, which means "useful".
2. So what Paul is really saying is, "Let me have Onesimus from you."

## Philemon 21-25 - Final Greetings

[[@Bible:philem 21-22]]Phm 21-22

1. Even though Paul emphasizes that he wants Philemon to forgive Onesimus voluntarily, one can still ask how much freedom Philemon really had in practice. After all, this letter was to be read to the congregation gathered in Philemon's house, and besides, Paul is coming soon to visit Philemon. Philemon must certainly have felt a bit pressured and almost forced to do as Paul wanted.
2. The point of this letter, then, is that Paul wants Philemon to *"****obey willingly in love****"*.
   1. Can slavery, alcoholism or abortion, for example, be stopped by banning it? Paul takes a different approach, appealing to Philemon's voluntary love.
3. So how did Onesimus do? Tradition has it that this Onesimus eventually succeeded Timothy as pastor of Ephesus, that he collected Paul's letters which later became part of the New Testament, and that he was martyred when he was stoned to death.
4. Paul was an apostle and one of the greatest missionary heroes in the history of the world, yet he needed intercessors to succeed in his plans. So how important is it for us today to pray constantly for one another?

# James

## James 2:1-13 - The Sin of Partiality

[[@Bible:james 2:1]]Jas 2:1

1. The word "glory" ("doxa" in Greek and "kabod" in Hebrew) was often used in the Old Testament to describe God's presence (e.g. on Mount Sinai in Ex 24:16-17, the ark in 1 Sam 4:22, and when God's glory passed by Moses in Ex 33:22).
   1. In light of the Jewish connection between the word "glory" and "the presence of God", the description of Jesus as "Lord of glory" is a clear indication that Jesus is God's presence on earth.
   2. The glory of God, of which Jesus is the bearer, will also be ours (Rom 8:18, 2 Thess 2:14).
2. Being "biased" in this respect means judging people based on external aspects, whether it is clothing, skin colour or some other external difference.
   1. In the Old Testament, this is a recurring theme. In Deuteronomy 10:17-18, God is clear that he *"is not partial"* and *"does right by the fatherless and the widow; he loves the stranger and gives him food and clothing"*. In Lev 19:15, Israel is urged not to be partial.

[[@Bible:james 2:2-4]]Jas 2:2-4

1. In verses 2-4, James gives a hypothetical example of such "partiality" that he condemns in verse 1 by contrasting a rich man with fine clothes and a poor man with dirty clothes.
   1. When the Christians in the congregation welcome the rich man, he gets to sit in the good seat, and when they welcome the poor man, he gets to sit in the bad seat. They judge people by their appearance and are thus biased.
   2. By having a divided view of their fellow human beings, the Christians James is addressing reveal that they also have a divided relationship with God.
   3. It's not up to us humans to judge people based on their appearance. Only God has that role as judge.
2. Where the Bible says "gathering", the basic Greek text says "synagogue". A Jewish synagogue was a building intended primarily for worship and spiritual life.
   1. Since it is believed that James' letter was written very early, it may well be that the split between Christians and Jews that eventually occurred had not yet happened. Virtually all the first Christians were Jews and it was quite natural that they continued to gather in their synagogues even after they confessed that Jesus was Lord and Messiah.
      1. The terms "church" and "congregation" ("ekklesia" in Greek) were used to describe the Christian community. It was only several hundred years later that the building in which Christians gathered began to be called a "church".

[[@Bible:james 2:5-7]]Jas 2:5-7

1. Now Jakob explains why it is wrong to be biased and discriminate. First, one should not be biased because God is not biased. After all, God has given his salvation to all who believe, whether they are rich or poor. We Christians should not judge each other based on worldly wealth because our wealth is measured in faith, not money. If God has not given advantages to the rich, neither should we.
   1. Very many people who become Christians do so in a situation of poverty, need and great need. After a period of salvation, with God's help, they get their lives in order and in good shape. To discriminate against new Christians because they are poor is a mockery of God and the help he has given.
   2. An interesting question arises for the astute. Does James condemn one kind of discrimination but approve of another? After all, James is saying that we should not discriminate against the poor by being biased against the rich, but isn't God biased against the rich when he specifically chooses the poor at the expense of the rich?
      1. Probably there is a spiritual nuance in the term "the poor" (Matt 5:3, Luke 6:20). Those who are spiritually poor often have a greater desire for God than those who think they already have everything. Therefore, those who humble themselves and long for more of God also have their longings answered to a greater extent than those who think they already have everything and do not seek God to the same extent. So God gives to all who seek him, but the poor are more likely to seek him and therefore receive more from God. Besides, the fact that a rich man comes to church in James' illustration in the verses before shows that even the rich can come to God and receive salvation. See also Luke 1:51-53 and 1 Corinthians 1:26-29.
2. Secondly, James argues that it is quite unnecessary for Christians to try to flatter and be sympathetic to rich people in the belief that it might create advantages for us. James reminds Christians that it is the rich who tend to make trouble for Christians and that will not change just because Christians fawn over the rich.
   1. In biblical times, it was not at all uncommon for rich landowners to accumulate more and more land and wealth at the expense of the poor. In this way, ordinary people became poorer and poorer. The oppression of the poor by the rich is condemned in the Bible (Amos 4:1).
   2. Secondly, the rich also use their power to influence courts and legal decisions to the detriment of the poor.
   3. Third, the rich defame the name of the Christian. Presumably the name "Jesus" is meant. Perhaps it was common for the rich to mock Jesus, either by their speech or by their manner.

[[@Bible:james 2:8]]Jas 2:8

1. The description of the law as "royal" indicates that the law belongs to God and comes from God, just as God's "kingdom" belongs to God and comes from God.
   1. The entire Old Testament Law of Moses can be summarized in the commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." This "royal law" is the practical consequence of the saving confession that "Jesus is Lord". Belonging to the kingdom of God means both confessing Jesus as Lord and loving one's fellow man (Matthew 22:37-40).
   2. We Christians belong to the royal kingdom of God, obey the royal law and confess that Jesus is king. Thus, we are to follow the biblical law as our King Jesus preached and explained it to us.
2. Who is my "neighbor" to love as myself? In the Old Testament, it usually refers to a "fellow Israelite". But Jesus expands its meaning to include "strangers" (Luke 10:25-27) and "enemies" (Matthew 5:44).
3. In summary, James has three arguments for why it is wrong to favour the rich at the expense of the poor: first, because it is not consistent with God's love for the poor, second, because it is completely senseless, but above all, because it is a sin that goes against Scripture.

[[@Bible:james 2:10-13]]Jas 2:10-13

1. It is not exactly which commandment one breaks that is the big problem, but *that* one breaks the law at all, which shows that one does not love God with all one's heart.
2. For a Jew, salvation in Jesus can be perceived as a liberation from the strict Law of Moses and mistakenly lead to a life without "law". But we Christians are also to follow the biblical law, i.e. the "law of royal liberty", founded in the law of Moses but declared and fulfilled through Jesus Christ.
3. The one who obeys the royal law by loving his fellow man as himself shows that he is living out the inner faith in Jesus as Lord. One who does not love his fellow man does not show by his life that he has Jesus as his King.

## James 2:14-26 - Faith Without Works Is Dead

[[@Bible:james 2:14]]Jas 2:14

1. The Greek word "ergon" can be translated as "work", "action", "deed" or "achievement". In the New Testament, this relatively neutral word is often used in connection with the Law of Moses. Paul often goes against the Pharisaic idea that as a Jew one becomes righteous before God by performing "works of the law", and stresses the importance of believing that one is saved not by keeping the Law of Moses but by believing in Jesus (Gal 2:16, 3:2, 3:5, 3:10, Rom 3:20, 3:28).
   1. But if Paul often stressed the importance of not believing that it is the works themselves that lead to righteousness, James stresses the other side of the coin, that righteous works are a result of believing in Jesus.
   2. Since faith leads to righteous deeds, James questions the notion that one can confess Jesus as Lord while living a life completely devoid of any righteous deeds.

[[@Bible:james 2:15-17]]Jas 2:15-17

1. To illustrate his point in verse 14, James gives an example in verses 15 and 16. If a church member becomes like a homeless person, with neither clothes nor food, and the rest of the church only says nice words but does not help in practice, then they have an empty confession and the nice words mean nothing in practice.
   1. The empty words to a homeless parishioner become as meaningless to the homeless person as a loud confession becomes to one who believes that it is possible to be saved by faith without works. A living faith produces righteous deeds because it is genuine and authentic, but a faith that produces no righteous deeds reveals that it is dead.
2. James' reasoning is reminiscent of Jesus' teaching about the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46.

[[@Bible:james 2:18-24]]Jas 2:18-24

1. James continues his argument that faith and works are connected, by bringing in an imaginary person who argues against James and says that it is possible to have faith without any good works.
   1. James replies to his imaginary opponent that in that case he should show James a faith without works. Mere rabbiting of empty words and lofty confessions is not saving in itself, unless it flows from a living faith in the heart.
      1. To prove his point, James explains that even the evil spirits "believe" that "God is one", but they are not saved because of it.
2. As an example, Jacob uses the patriarch Abraham. Anyone with a Jewish background would probably agree that Abraham was a righteous man who was saved. But Jacob's point is that he became righteous by not only having a high confession, but by acting in accordance with his confession. Abraham's deeds "interacted" with his faith, and in this way his deeds proved that he actually had faith.
3. Both James and Paul teach righteousness from Genesis 15:6 in a seemingly contradictory way:
   1. *"And Abram believed in the LORD, and he reckoned it to him for righteousness."* (Genesis 15:6)
   2. "*We maintain that man is declared righteous by faith, without works of the law.* " (Romans 3:28)
   3. "*You see, then, that a man is recognized as righteous by works and not by faith alone.* " (James 2:24)
4. First, I believe that the apparent contradiction between James and Paul is not really a contradiction, but rather two sides of the same coin. The righteousness that Abraham received by faith was demonstrated by his works. It was not the works that led to righteousness, but they were a result of faith.
   1. Paul argues that Abraham was justified by faith, not by works of the law.
   2. James argues that Abraham's righteousness was demonstrated by the manifestation of his inner faith through outward deeds.
5. Secondly, it should be noted that Paul writes "works of the law", and James writes only "works".
   1. What Paul goes against is the idea that one must keep the law of Moses in order to be righteous. What James opposes is the idea that one can have faith without works. So they are talking about two completely different things.
6. Thirdly, James is not arguing against the "faith" that Paul describes, but a "dead faith without works". After all, even Paul said that *"we have a faith that works in love"* (Gal 5:6). So both Paul and James seem to agree that genuine faith leads to good works of love, the very thing James is trying to argue for in this chapter.

# Revelation

## Rev 1:1-3 - Prologue

[[@Bible:rev 1:1]]Rev 1:1

1. The word *"revelation"* is "apŏkalupsis" in Greek and can be translated as "revelation", "manifestation" or "revelation".
   1. From the Greek word "apŏkalupsis" we get the word "apocalyptic", which is a literary genre that aims to reveal and reveal future prophetic events, especially in the last days. Examples of apocalyptic texts in the Bible are: the book of Daniel chapters 7-12, Matthew 24, Mark 13, 2 Thess 2 and the book of Revelation.
   2. It is important to understand that this *"revelation"* is the *"revelation of Jesus Christ"*. It is Jesus who owns this revelation and who chooses to show (reveal) it to the apostle John who then writes it down so that all of us can share it.
2. What does Jesus reveal in this scripture?
   1. First, the book of Revelation is a revelation of Jesus Christ. In this scripture we learn more about Jesus and who sits on the throne in heaven.
      1. Secondly, Jesus reveals a lot of knowledge about the end times, the Antichrist and God's judgment.
   2. If we only read Revelation to find out more about the Antichrist or the end times, then we have missed perhaps the main purpose of Scripture, to reveal Jesus Christ to us.
3. In contrast to an "apocrypha", which means "to hide" or "to keep secret", the book of Revelation is an "apocalypse", i.e. a "revelation" or a "disclosure".
   1. The message of Revelation, then, is something that God wants his servants to know. Discussing and trying to understand this scripture is therefore in line with God's will.
      1. What is meant by *"soon"*? Time is relative and what one person perceives as fast, another perceives as slow. It is now 2000 years since this revelation, so by human standards we can probably say that this prophecy has not been fulfilled *"soon"*, but from God's perspective *"a day* is *like a thousand years and a thousand years like a day"* (2 Peter 3:8).
   2. The word *"soon"* is "en tachei" in Greek and does not necessarily mean that it "will happen *soon*" but rather that once the end time begins, it will "happen *quickly*".
      1. This interpretation fits well with Jesus' words in Matthew 24:22, where we read that the last days will *be shortened* for *"the sake of the elect"*.
4. In verse 1 we see that the book of Revelation was written by "John", but we don't know exactly *which* John is meant, since it was a common name in New Testament times. But the best guess is the apostle John, a fact on which Christian tradition is relatively unanimous (see, for example, Justinus Martyr's Dialogue with Tryphon the Jew, chapter 81).
   1. According to Eusebius' Church History, the Book of Revelation was written during Emperor Domitian's severe persecution of the early Christians in the mid-90s (Eusebius *Church History*, book III, chapter 18).
   2. John received this revelation about Jesus Christ from an angel, who also guided and helped John to understand the revelation (Rev 5:2, 10:8-9, 17:7).

[[@Bible:rev 1:3]]Rev 1:3

1. Today, it is common to have your own Bible, but in New Testament times, people read aloud from the biblical scriptures when they gathered for worship (2 Corinthians 3:14). In other words, the first Christians *listened* to the Bible rather than *read* it.
2. Not only should one *read* and *listen to* the book of Revelation, but one should also *heed* the message of the book of Revelation.
   1. We do not know exactly when Jesus will return, so we must always be prepared for his return. A good way to take advantage of the message of Revelation is therefore to live your life as if Jesus is coming back soon. We should not postpone our sanctification until retirement age, but instead continually develop our faith right here and now.
      1. Since Jesus will come as *"a thief in the night"*, those who are not "spiritually awake" and preparing themselves here and now, risk missing Jesus' return (1 Thess 5:1-11, Matt 25:1-13).
3. Reading, listening to and heeding the message of Revelation is the first of seven "beatitudes" in the book of Revelation (Rev 1:3, 14:13, 16:15, 19:9, 20:6, 22:7, 22:14).
   1. Some Christians do not believe that the book of Revelation should be read or preached, or even included in the Bible. But if God considers this revelation so important that he sends an angel to reveal it to us, surely we should at least consider it important enough to read it and make an effort to try to understand it?

## Rev 1:4-8 - Greeting to the Seven Churches

[[@Bible:rev 1:4]]Rev 1:4

1. Revelation was addressed primarily to seven churches in Asia Minor (modern-day western Turkey), all of which were located so that they could make a tour and carry the message.
2. The *"grace and peace"* that God gives comes from the Father, the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ, i.e. all three persons of the Trinity.
3. *"He who is and who was and who is to come"* is a description of God's name YHWH (I am who I am), which God revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Ex 3).
   1. *"I am who I am"* is "ehyeh asher ehyeh" in Hebrew and is shortened to "I am" in English and "ehyeh" in Hebrew. Of course, when Moses had to say God's name to the people of Israel, he could not say "*I* am" but was told by God to say "*He* is" instead, which becomes "yhwh" and is usually pronounced "Yahweh". Although God had said that this was the name that Israel could use, they felt that the name was too holy to be pronounced, except on certain occasions in the Temple, so they pronounced "adonaj" ("lord" in English) instead of "yhwh". In the New Testament we also find that instead of pronouncing God's name, they choose to say *"heaven"* (Luke 15:21). Hence the expression *"kingdom of heaven"* instead of the more common *"kingdom of God"* and therefore we often say we are going to "heaven" when we really mean we are going to "God".
      1. Where the Swedish Bible says *"LORD"* in capital letters, the Hebrew text says "yhwh".
      2. When the Old Testament was translated into Greek, they continued to avoid writing "yhwh" and instead wrote "kyrios" ("lord" in English).
   2. Some linguists argue that the verb in God's name "I am" cannot be determined; the name could just as easily be "I was", "I am" or "I will be". From this we can learn that God is the one who *has* done wonders in the past and whom we should remember and tell about. God is also the one who *is* with us today and with whom we can have a relationship. God is also the one who *will* intervene in the future and we can trust that what he says he will do, he will do.
   3. Since a name in the Bible is often more than just an address name, it also says something about the character and personality of the person, I want to give a suggestion on how to relate to God's name:
      1. Believe that God created you and saved you on the cross. Remember what God has done in your life in the past, read about what God has done in the Bible and celebrate God for all the good he has done.
      2. Believe that God *is* with you today. Ask God for help in small and big situations and let the Holy Spirit lead you, fill you with power and work miracles in your life and the lives of others.
      3. Believe that God *will* come back. Live with the hope that God will punish evil and make things right. There is something more and greater than what we can see with our eyes.
4. The number seven in the Bible symbolizes "perfection", "completion", "total", "perfection", "all", etc. When John writes about God's *"seven spirits"*, it is a description of God's holy, perfect and perfect Spirit.

[[@Bible:rev 1:5-6]]Rev 1:5-6

1. Jesus is not only God's witness, but also the *"credible witness"*, i.e. we can trust that what Jesus said and did is God's truth. Jesus was really born of a virgin for real, Jesus really died on the cross for real, Jesus will really come back, for real, etc, etc.
   1. The Bible describes a number of people who came back to life after they died, but who eventually died again. Jesus is the first to die and be resurrected into the new and eternal resurrection life that all who believe in Jesus will share (Romans 8:29).
   2. Although Jesus Christ is Lord of heaven and earth, not all men, kings and kingdoms have yet accepted this and bowed before their King. But in due time, Jesus will take his rightful place (Phil 2:9-11, Rev 5:13).
2. Jesus' death on the cross is the ultimate proof that Jesus truly loves us and is willing even to die for us (Rom 5:8).
   1. Jesus showed his love for us by taking away our sins. God's love does not mean that God condones our sins and lets us live as we please, but means that God wants to save us from our sins and make us clean and holy.
3. All who believe in Jesus are God's *"priests"*, i.e. God's servants. In the Old Testament, the priesthood conveyed God's word to the people and was the people's representative before God. In New Testament times, i.e. today, everyone who believes in Jesus has a task to convey God's word and pray for the people around them.
   1. Not only does Jesus love us, save us and make us priests of God, but the glory and power belong to Jesus for all eternity! When we exalt and confess Jesus in this way, we freely acknowledge what is the real truth, no matter what the world around us looks like, a truth that the world will in due time realize, either willingly or unwillingly.

[[@Bible:rev 1:7]]Rev 1:7

1. According to Acts 1:9-11, Jesus will come back the same way he went up to heaven, that is, he will come among the clouds.
   1. Clouds are often symbolic of God's presence (Exodus 13:21, 1 Kings 8:10-11).
2. When Jesus first came to earth, *he "took the form of a servant when he became a man"* (Phil 2:7) and was born as an incorruptible little newborn baby in a small village on the outskirts of the Roman Empire. When Jesus comes to earth the second time, he will come as King and Lord and NO man, dead or alive, will be able to miss Jesus' return!
3. In Zech 12:10 we read that God will *"pour out the Spirit of grace and prayer"* on Israel, *"so that they will look up to me whom they have pierced"*. We can also see in Matthew 23:39 and Romans 11:25-26 that in the last days Israel will confess Jesus as their Lord. So when Jesus returns, Israel will gladly receive Jesus, but at the same time will be painfully reminded that they did not receive him when he came the first time.
4. When Jesus returns, there will be saved among all the *"peoples and tribes and nations and languages"* of the earth (Rev 7:9).

[[@Bible:rev 1:8]]Rev 1:8

1. Alpha (A) is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and Omega (O) is the last. The meaning of this title is that God is both the beginning and the end. God is both the one who started everything and the one who will finish everything. God directs and rules over both creation and the end times.
   1. A more correct Swedish translation would be "I am A and Ö".
   2. Is it the Lord God or is it Jesus Christ who now titles himself as the *"Alpha and Omega"* and the *"Almighty"*? The answer is yes!
      1. In Revelation 1:8 it is the Lord God who is the *"Alpha and Omega"* and in Revelation 21:6 it is Jesus Christ who is the *"Alpha and Omega"*. The truth is that since the Father, Son and Spirit are one (John 10:30, 2 Corinthians 3:17), both the Lord God and Jesus Christ are *"A and O"*.
2. The Book of Revelation repeatedly emphasizes that God is the one who has *all power,* i.e. that God is the *Almighty*. Nothing escapes God, and even if the world seems to be falling apart around us, we can trust that God is the one who will have the last word.

## Rev 1:9-20 - Vision of the Son of Man

[[@Bible:rev 1:9]]Rev 1:9

1. Patmos was a prison island just outside the city of Ephesus in present-day western Turkey. Many of the prisoners placed there were political prisoners who were forced to work in the island's quarries.
2. John states that he was on the island of Patmos for *"the word of God and the testimony of Jesus"*. Either John had been imprisoned by the Roman authorities because they felt that John was preaching the word of God in a way that caused political unrest, or John was there to proselytize and preach the word of God to the imprisoned.
   1. According to Eusebius Church History, the apostle John was pastor of the church in Ephesus when he was arrested by the Roman authorities in connection with Emperor Domitian's severe persecution of the Christians. John was first thrown into boiling oil but survived without injury and was then sent to Patmos to work as a slave in the island's quarries. After Domitian's death in 96, John was allowed to leave the island and returned to Ephesus. (Eusebius *Church History*, book III, chapters 18, 20).
3. The fact that John wrote Revelation on the prison island of Patmos shows us that we should not be discouraged by every seeming setback. Perhaps God can use our time of loneliness or suffering for something we wouldn't be able to do if we were busy with a lot of other things?

[[@Bible:rev 1:10]]Rev 1:10

1. *"The day of the Lord" is* a recurring biblical expression that means "the day when the Lord comes and sets everything right, judges the wicked and saves his people" and is also sometimes called "the day of judgment" or "the return of Jesus" (Joel 2:18-32, Mal 4:1-2, 1 Thess 5:2).
   1. The inner-biblical interpretation of this verse is that John saw in the Spirit into the *"day of the Lord"* of the end times, i.e. the day when Jesus comes back, sets everything right, judges the world and saves his people.
      1. The strongest argument for this interpretation is that this is precisely what Revelation is about and what the concept has meant throughout the Bible. If the meaning of the term has suddenly changed, it should be explained somewhere in the Bible text.
   2. The church-historical interpretation of this verse is that the term *"day of the Lord"* in Revelation means the day of Jesus' resurrection, i.e. *Sunday*.
   3. This is the most common interpretation, but to me it seems far-fetched that a concept that has consistently throughout the Bible been about *the Day of Judgment* without explanation changes its meaning and suddenly becomes about *Sunday*. There is no argument in the Bible text itself that this would be the case.
   4. The Jews worshipped on the Sabbath, i.e. on Saturday, as did the first Christians, since most of them were Jews. However, as Judaism and Christianity became increasingly separated, Christians began to worship on Sunday (Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2). Sunday was the first day of the week and the day of Jesus' resurrection, and they wanted to start the new week by celebrating Jesus' resurrection.
2. John not only heard the voice of God or saw a vision, he also came *"in the Spirit"*. This means that in a very special way, God allowed John to see and experience the revelation that was written down. Peter (Acts 10:10) and Paul (Acts 22:17) also experienced something similar.
3. The voice John hears belongs to Jesus Christ and is clear, strong and clear as a trumpet. In the same way, the word of God is clear, strong and distinct and should be proclaimed as such.

[[@Bible:rev 1:11]]Rev 1:11

1. If John had not been so clearly instructed to write down what he saw, he might have kept this revelation to himself. Probably John was so taken by what he saw that he did not think to write it down and pass it on.
2. Since the number seven in the Bible symbolizes "completeness", "totality", "all", etc., we understand that the messages given to these seven churches are not only addressed to them specifically, but also generally to all churches of all times. Therefore, if we recognize our own local congregation in any of these descriptions, then we would do well to also take note of the text's exhortation, instruction and/or promise.

[[@Bible:rev 1:12]]Rev 1:12

1. The apostle John had walked with Jesus for three and a half years, knew him well, and had also seen the glory of Jesus (Mark 9:1-8). Perhaps John recognized Jesus' voice and turned around to see his beloved friend again?
2. The seven candlesticks that John sees are reminiscent of the seven-armed candlestick (also known as the *menorah*) that was in the Jerusalem temple (Exodus 25:31-37).
   1. Some argue that Israel's seven-armed candlestick symbolizes Israel and its mission to be *"a light to the nations"* (Isaiah 42:6).
   2. In verse 20 we see that the seven candlesticks symbolize the seven churches (i.e. all the churches of all time). Unlike Israel's single candlestick, here we see *seven* candlesticks, which shows us that God is now building his church from all the peoples of the earth, not just one people.
3. Just as a candlestick is meaningless without fire, but with fire can spread light and warmth, so the church is meaningless without God, but with the fire of the Holy Spirit can spread the joyful and warm message of Jesus Christ to the world.

[[@Bible:rev 1:13]]Rev 1:13

1. Amidst the candlesticks, John sees Jesus, described by the same title, *"Son of Man",* that the prophet Daniel used for the Messiah (Dan 7:13-14).
   1. From our human perspective, it is natural to describe Jesus as the Son of *God*, since he is the one of the Trinity who came from heaven to us. But from God's perspective, it is natural to describe Jesus as the *Son of Man*, since he is the one of the Trinity who was born as a human being.
   2. That Jesus is in the midst of the *"candlesticks"* means that Jesus is in the midst of the churches. Jesus is not distant or far away from any of us, but is close to all his congregations, always ready to exhort, help and guide.
2. In the verses that follow, we find the only description of Jesus' appearance found in the Bible. It is safe to say that it differs markedly from the image of Jesus that we are used to seeing in paintings and pictures. This is because when Jesus was on earth the first time, he was here as the suffering servant (Isa 52:13-53:12), but when he comes back the second time, he comes as the eternal King (Matt 24:30)!
3. In biblical times, only those who could afford not to work wore a foot-long garment. Jesus thus appears as a person of power and wealth.
   1. The golden belt is reminiscent of the garment worn by the high priests of Israel (Ex 28:6-8, Ex 29:5, Ex 39:1-5). In Heb 9:11 we can see that Jesus is our high priest.
      1. One of the tasks of the priests of Israel was to take care of the seven-branched lampstand in the temple. They were to make sure that the flame was always burning, replenish it with oil when necessary, etc. (Numbers 4:16). In the same way, Jesus, our High Priest, takes care of the seven candlesticks (the congregations). By listening to and heeding the messages Jesus conveys to the seven assemblies, we can become more fervent, be filled with the Holy Spirit, etc.

[[@Bible:rev 1:14]]Rev 1:14

1. White hair was a sign of age and wisdom in biblical times, just as it is today (Leviticus 19:32, Proverbs 16:31). Jesus is the one who has always existed and who possesses all wisdom.
2. That Jesus is white as snow and white as wool is a reminder to us of God's words to Isaiah: *"Though your sins be red as blood, they shall be white as snow; though they be red as scarlet, they shall be white as wool."* (Isa 1:18)
3. Fire in the Bible is often symbolic of judgment, testing and purification because fire removes what is undesirable while retaining what is pure (1 Corinthians 3:10-15, 1 Peter 1:7). The expression *"eyes like flames of fire"* implies that Jesus both sees what is going on in all the churches and is also the one who judges and evaluates the congregations.

[[@Bible:rev 1:15]]Rev 1:15

1. By melting various minerals and rocks at a sufficiently high temperature, valuable metals can be obtained while removing unnecessary slag products.
   1. By exhorting and guiding his congregations, Jesus purifies and refines us. When we obey Jesus' words, we are sanctified and purified so that we become more like Jesus (Rom 8:29).
      1. But those who are not prepared to go through the fire of purification will find it difficult to be sanctified and to develop in their discipleship.
2. Anyone who has ever stood by a mighty waterfall knows how deafening the sound is. As the water rushes down, it's impossible to hear anything but the waterfall.
   1. In the same way, God's word is deafening when it speaks to us directly into our hearts. In Heb 4:12 we read that: *"The word of God is living and active. It is sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and is a judge of the thoughts and intents of the heart."*

[[@Bible:rev 1:16]]Rev 1:16

1. In verse 20 we see that the seven stars are the *"angels"* of the seven churches.
   1. The Greek word "angelos" means "messenger" or "emissary" and normally refers to an angel, but it can also refer to a local church pastor, since he is a "messenger" who preaches the word of God to the congregation.
2. The sharp two-edged sword that goes out of Jesus' mouth is the Word of God, the Bible (Ephesians 6:17).
   1. Anyone who reads the Bible with an open heart will occasionally discover that he has sin in his life. When you compare your life to Jesus, it is impossible not to realize that you are a sinner. But when this knowledge strikes, it is not because God wants to push us down and make us feel bad, but to use God's word, the two-edged sword, to remove sin from our lives.
3. It is as impossible to look straight into the sun as it is to see Jesus in all his glory (Matthew 17:2, Exodus 33:20).

[[@Bible:rev 1:17-18]]Rev 1:17-18

1. Even though John had walked with Jesus for three and a half years, the sight of the risen Jesus was more than John could bear, and he fell dead at Jesus' feet.
   1. There is a big difference between the frail body we are all born with, and the resurrection body we will receive at Jesus' return (1 Corinthians 15:35-58)!
2. Anyone can get nervous about meeting a celebrity or an important person, but meeting Jesus is not like meeting just anyone. Jesus is God's Holy One and the only possible reaction to standing before God is to fall to one's knees.
   1. Jesus lays his hand on the terrified John and comforts him. Although the encounter with Jesus is grand and powerful, we need not be afraid of Jesus.
3. Jesus is *"the first and the last"*, i.e. Jesus is eternal, has always existed and will always exist.
4. Jesus is *"the living one"*, that is, even though he died on the cross, he rose from the dead and will never die again.
5. Jesus has *the "keys of death and hell"* and no one who believes in Jesus need ever fear going there. Despite how it is often portrayed, the devil has no power whatsoever over hell or who will or will not go there. It is Jesus who holds the keys and he is the righteous judge (John 5:22, John 8:16).

[[@Bible:rev 1:19]]Rev 1:19

1. Jesus tells John to write down the past, present and future. The book of Revelation addresses both the local situation of the seven churches at that time, 2000 years ago, but is also a message to all Christians of all times.
2. The book of Revelation is not a collection of fluffy symbolic events with no basis in reality, but a prophetic account of what will actually happen. Even if we don't always fully understand Revelation, we can still trust that what it says will happen, because Jesus is the *trustworthy* witness (Rev 1:5).

[[@Bible:rev 1:20]]Rev 1:20

1. You almost get the feeling that Jesus is helping John a little when he explains what the seven stars and the seven candlesticks symbolize.
   1. Thanks to this interpretive aid, we understand that we should not necessarily interpret the rest of Revelation literally, but rather try to understand what the different images symbolize.
2. The Greek word "angelos" means "messenger" or "emissary" and normally refers to an angel, but it can also refer to a local church pastor, since he is a "messenger" who preaches the word of God to the congregation.
   1. Most likely, in my opinion, it is the pastor of the congregation who is being referred to. He is the leader of the congregation and also the one who receives the letter from John and also the one who reads the letter to his congregation.
3. The seven candlesticks symbolize the seven assemblies, that is, all the assemblies of all time (see commentary on verse 12).

## Rev 2:1-7 - To the Church in Ephesus

[[@Bible:rev 2:1]]Rev 2:1

1. Ephesus, also known as the "Light of Asia", is today a ruined city in Turkey, but in New Testament times it was the fourth largest city in the world, located on the west coast of Asia Minor. Ephesus attracted many people, partly because its geographical location made it a hub of trade, but also because many religious pilgrims made the pilgrimage to Ephesus to see one of the seven wonders of antiquity: the Temple of Artemis.
   1. Paul lived three years in Ephesus and taught in the schoolroom of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8-12).
   2. According to Eusebius' Church History, Timothy was the first bishop of Ephesus (Eusebius *Church History*, book III, chapter 4). However, there is nothing in the Bible to confirm this, except that Paul urges Timothy to *"remain in Ephesus, exhorting some there not to preach false doctrines"* (1 Tim 1:3).
   3. There are many who believe that the Apostle John lived and worked in the city of Ephesus. The Bible does not tell us this, but what we do know is that he wrote the book of Revelation from the island of Patmos, which is just outside of Ephesus (Rev 1:9).
2. The Greek word "angelos" means "messenger" or "emissary" and normally refers to an angel, but it can also refer to a local church pastor, as he is a "messenger" who preaches the word of God to the congregation.
   1. Most likely, in my opinion, it is the pastor of the congregation who is being referred to. He is the leader of the congregation and also the one who receives the letter from John and also the one who reads the letter to his congregation.
3. In Exodus 25:31-40 we read about the seven-armed candlestick, also called *menorah* (= Hebrew for "lamp"), which is the oldest symbol of the Jewish faith. The seven-branched candlestick was placed in the Temple of Jerusalem and symbolized that Israel would be a light for other peoples who wanted to know God (Isaiah 42:6). The difference between the menorah and this candlestick is that the temple menorah consisted of *a* candlestick with seven candles, whereas here we see *seven* candlesticks.
   1. A candlestick does not shine by itself, but depends on oil and fire. In the same way, the church and we Christians are not the light of God, but we are called to *shine* God's light through our lives.
4. The seven candlesticks are the local churches and the seven stars are the pastors of the churches (Rev 1:20). So Jesus holds the pastors of the local churches in his right hand, and he walks in the midst of his churches.
   1. Just as it says in Matthew 16:20, *"For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them*," Jesus again testifies that if we gather in his name, *he "walks among"* us.
      1. Many local churches may be far from perfect, but they are so precious and valuable to Jesus that he considers it important to be right there. We can complain and think that it would be better if Jesus were somewhere else, but the fact remains; it is in the local churches that Jesus reveals himself, *"walks around"* and spreads his light.
   2. But not only is Jesus at the centre of the life of the church, he also *"holds"* the pastors in his hand. The congregations do not belong to the pastor or the leadership of the congregation, but to Jesus.
      1. When I was a simple student at the Bible School of Bjärka-Säby, I saw Jesus on one occasion. It was like a cross between seeing clearly and dreaming, I saw him as a figure but not in detail. I had just been in contact with Bankeryd Pentecostal Church to possibly become their new youth pastor, but I felt unsure if I could really become a pastor. Then Jesus appears to me and says: *"This is my church"*. I immediately connect these words to Matthew 16:18 where Jesus says to Peter, *"You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* I immediately understood that Jesus' message to me was that he is the one in charge of the Pentecostal church in Bankeryd, and all other churches for that matter, and that no Eldership in the world can prevent Jesus' decision if he wants me to become a youth pastor there. From that moment on, I felt sure that Jesus was calling me to a pastorate and that I would also get the job in Bankeryd. There followed six very blessed years just outside Småland's Jerusalem.
   3. We can be sure and secure that Jesus is in control of his church and that he leads its pastors. If a pastor or a congregation strays from the will of Jesus, then, just as we see here in Revelation, he will speak to the pastor and the congregation in order to lead them right again.

[[@Bible:rev 2:2-3]]Rev 2:2-3

1. Jesus sees his church and knows what is going on. When we behave, Jesus sees it and praises and encourages us. When we misbehave, Jesus sees that too and warns us that we have gone down the wrong path.
2. The first thing the Ephesians get credit for is their *hard work*. The church in Ephesus did much good and worked hard and perseveringly. They seem to have been a church that was committed and active.
   1. For a local congregation with often limited resources, it is important that each member of the congregation takes the responsibility he or she can and tries to help as best he or she can and according to the conditions he or she has. A congregation should not be run by a few people who are allowed to do everything, but everyone should help.
3. The other thing the ephemera is praised for is its *educational clarity*. In the book of Acts we read how Paul warned the church in Ephesus with these words: *"29 I know that when I have left you, predatory wolves will come in among you, and they will not spare the flock. 30Yes, men from your own circle will come forward and distort the truth to win over the disciples. 31Therefore, keep yourselves awake and remember that for three years I have been warning each of you night and day with tears."* (Acts 20:29-31)
   1. Undeniably, the church in Ephesus seems to have taken Paul at his word and has certainly stayed away from those who *"distort the truth"*.
   2. In the same way, local churches today also need to be on guard against those who distort the Word of God and preach outright falsehoods. Don't look up to a pastor just because he is famous or rhetorically skilled; what matters is that he or she preaches God's word correctly.
   3. It is especially important to watch out for those who not only preach falsely, but also elevate themselves to the status of "apostles" and claim to be in closer contact with God than the rest of us.
      1. It is quite possible that God will call someone an apostle even today, but then we should all be as careful as the church in Ephesus and *"test those who call themselves apostles"*. If what they proclaim does not agree with God's Word or if there are other doubts, then we should beware.

[[@Bible:rev 2:4-5]]Rev 2:4-5

1. Jesus is pleased with many things in the church, but despite all the positives, there are still some negatives that he wants to address, and that is that the Ephesians have abandoned *love.* One of the most important and central messages in the Bible is that we should *"love God with all our heart"* and *"love our neighbour as ourselves"* (Matthew 22:37-40). Moreover, Paul writes that *"if we do not have love"*, we are only *"a clanging cymbal"* (1 Cor 13).
2. If one had visited the church in Ephesus as an outsider, one would probably have had a very positive first impression! You would have met a hard-working church where many positive things were happening while they strongly defended the truth of the Gospel and Christian doctrine. But in spite of this nice appearance, they seem to have left *love.* 
   1. Firstly, when you are as active and committed a congregation as Ephesus was, there is always a danger of focusing too much on "showing up" and getting involved, so that you forget *why* you are involved in the congregation: i.e. because you love God and your fellow human being.
   2. Secondly, if, like the Ephesians, one is so meticulous about Christian theology, there is also a risk that one concentrates so much on "believing right" that one becomes cold and hard and loses love for one's fellow men and becomes suspicious and critical of all others who do not believe exactly the same or who have not made quite as much progress in their understanding.
3. It is not that the love of the Ephesians has been "diminished" or "neglected", but that they have *"abandoned"* love. So it seems to be a conscious choice.
   1. The Ephesians are criticized for abandoning their *"first love"*. Compared to a lifelong marriage, it is quite natural that the first feelings between the two new lovers are often very special and one behaves like a silly little fool. The hope is that this new love will turn into a love that may not be as "exciting", but that is stronger and deeper. It seems that the new love of the Ephesians never went into the deeper love, but was abandoned when the excitement was over.
   2. The *"first love"* can also be compared to the first time Adam and Eve lived in paradise before the Fall. Everything was new and wonderful, it was a time when God walked in the midst of his people: *"In the evening breeze they heard the Lord God walking in the garden."* (Gen 3:8), and it was a time before all the problems and worries of man became part of everyday life.
4. In order for the Ephesians to return to where they were before they abandoned their first love, they need to return to their *"first deeds"* which were an expression of the love they had before. They need to remember how they were when they were newly saved and loved God with all their heart and loved their neighbour as themselves. These *"first works"* are about returning to what was so important when they were newly saved:
   1. *Reading the Bible* because you love God's Word.
   2. To *pray* because you love God's voice.
   3. *Witnessing to Jesus* because you love your neighbour.
   4. To *help those in need* because you love your fellow man.
5. Jesus gives the Ephesians a clear warning; if they do not repent, the *"lampstand"* will be moved from its place, i.e., the church in Ephesus will no longer be a church. Even if they remain as an organization, they will no longer be a place where Jesus is in their midst.
   1. Evidently the Ephesians repented, for the church at Ephesus lived on for several hundred years.

[[@Bible:rev 2:6]]Rev 2:6

1. Here Jesus inserts another praise, he emphasizes that he is glad that the Ephesians hate *"the deeds of the Nicolaitans"*.
   1. It is not described exactly what the *"deeds of the Nicolaitans"* are, but in the letter to Pergamum (Rev 2:12-17) the *teachings* of the Nicolaitans are connected with idol sacrifice and fornication, so it is easy to believe that the *deeds of* the Nicolaitans were also about idol sacrifice and fornication.
   2. This interpretation is also confirmed by Irenaeus, who in the 180s wrote: *"The Nicolaitans are the successors of the Nicholas who was one of the first seven ordained deacons by the apostles (Acts 6:5). They live a life of unbridled pleasure. The character of these men is clearly pointed out in the Book of Revelation, such as teaching that it does not matter if one practices fornication and to eat that which is sacrificed to idols."* (Irenaeus *Against the Heresies*, Book I, Chapter 26).

[[@Bible:rev 2:7]]Rev 2:7

1. Since it says *"to the churches"*, and not "to the assembly", all these messages are really addressed to all Christians of all times. But not everyone who listens, listens. In order to hear and understand what Jesus is saying, one must also be prepared to actually listen and accept any criticism that one feels.
   1. If you are willing to listen with an honest heart, the Holy Spirit will convict your heart if you have sinned and need to repent (Acts 16:8-9).
2. The tree of life is first mentioned in Genesis 3:22 as one of the trees in God's paradise that people must not eat from because then they will have eternal life. In the Book of Revelation, besides this verse, it is also mentioned in Revelation 22:2, where it is in the New Jerusalem and bears abundant fruit and its leaves bring healing.
   1. The concept of *"paradise" is a* bit difficult to interpret in the New Testament and can either be interpreted as synonymous with heaven, or as a kind of resting place for the dead believers before the resurrection (Luke 23:43).
   2. The promise of reward is often coupled with the warning the local church received.
      1. For those who repent and return to their *"first love"* and renounce the fornication of the Nicolaitans, God will allow a return to the innocent paradise of the beginning of creation, a time of love and new love between God and man.
      2. For those who repent and refrain from eating the Nicolaitan idol sacrifice, God will reward them with fruit from the *"tree of life"*.

## Rev 2:8-11 - To the Church in Smyrna

[[@Bible:rev 2:8]]Rev 2:8

1. Smyrna was a large and rich trading city just north of Ephesus. Smyrna means "myrrh", a sweet perfume that was used to anoint the dead, but was also an ingredient in Israel's holy anointing oil (Exodus 30:22-25), which was used to anoint and sanctify priests, among other things.
   1. When David was anointed king by the prophet Samuel, it did not mean a trouble-free life of total success. David was persecuted by Saul and had to suffer a lot through his life, but despite that, God was with him and blessed him in everything he did.
      1. In the same way, we believers today must remember that God has not promised us a problem-free life of blessing and success alone. But God has promised to be with us always and has given us of his Spirit to strengthen us and help us.
      2. No matter how hard the world persecutes us, we must never forget that *"he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world"* (1 John 4:4).
   2. Strange as it may sound, the death and sufferings of the Smyrna congregation were like holy anointing oil before God. When the Christians of Smyrna died and suffered for their faith, it was a holy act before God.
2. The people of the city of Smyrna were very involved in the Roman imperial cult and worshipped the Roman emperors. In 196 BC a special temple was built to *Dea Roma,* the Roman goddess, and in 23 AD a temple was built to Emperor Tiberius.
   1. The Roman emperor Domitian (reigned from 81 to 96 AD), was the first Roman emperor to require all Roman citizens to worship the emperor as "Lord", a religious and political test of loyalty. Every year, incense had to be lit at the altar of the imperial cult, after which a certificate was issued to certify that the ritual had been performed.
      1. To worship the emperor and confess him as "Lord" was completely unthinkable for the vast majority of Christians, they confessed only Jesus as Lord. This refusal, however, caused many Christians to suffer and some ended up as martyrs.
      2. It was probably under this emperor that the apostle John was imprisoned on the island of Patmos.
3. The title *"the first and the last"* is, according to Isaiah 41:4, 44:6 and 48:12, a title that belongs to YHWH, the Lord God. When Jesus uses this title about himself (see also Rev 1:11 and 1:17), it is to show that he is the Lord God.
   1. *"I am who I am"* is "ehyeh asher ehyeh" in Hebrew and is shortened to "I am" in English and "ehyeh" in Hebrew. Of course, when Moses had to say God's name to the people of Israel, he could not say "I am" but was told by God to say "He is" instead, which becomes "YHWH" and is usually pronounced "Yahweh".
   2. Although God had said that this was the name Israel could use, they considered the name too holy to be pronounced, except on certain occasions in the Temple, so they pronounced "adonaj" ("kyrios" in Greek and "lord" in English) instead of "YHWH".
   3. By using a title for himself that belongs to YHWH, the Lord, Jesus shows that the Christians in Smyrna are right not to worship the emperor as Lord because only Jesus is Lord!
4. The church in Smyrna suffered a lot, and certainly some had been martyred, so Jesus presents himself as the one who has power over both death and life. Even if the Christians of Smyrna die for their faith, they will, like Jesus, have new life again.

[[@Bible:rev 2:9]]Rev 2:9

1. When you suffer for your faith, you may sometimes think that God has forgotten you and no longer hears your prayers for help. But Jesus testifies that he really knows how they feel, he *"feels"* their suffering.
2. Although Smyrna as a city was rich, the Christians of Smyrna were poor. This was part of the persecution suffered by Smyrna's Christians. Perhaps they lost business contacts and opportunities when they refused to worship the Emperor as Lord.
   1. Probably it was this that had made their faith so strong, because those who were not prepared to sacrifice everything for Jesus, they probably left quite quickly.
3. In worldly terms, the Christians of Smyrna were poor, but according to Jesus, they were rich!
   1. We Christians can be compared to the children of kings. When we are not in our palace, it is quite possible that we may get into trouble, be persecuted or be considered poor, but the truth is that we are the richest in the whole kingdom and have an inheritance waiting for us.
4. In contrast to Smyrna is the church of Laodicea, which thought of itself as rich, but according to Jesus was poor (Rev 3:17).
   1. It is not necessarily wrong to have a lot of money as a Christian; there is no automatic blessing in being poor. But the fact is that spiritual wealth is not measured by the number of crowns in the bank account, so the person who has a lot of money can, according to Jesus, be poor, while the person who is poor is actually rich.
   2. According to Jesus, it is difficult *"for the rich to enter the kingdom of God"* (Mark 10:23-25), but just because you are rich doesn't mean that you, as a Christian, have to give up all your money to enter the kingdom of God. However, you do need to be careful not to let money rule your life (Matthew 6:24).
5. According to history, there was a relatively large Jewish population in Smyrna and they don't seem to have accepted Jesus as Lord, rather they made a mess of the Jews who believed in Jesus.
   1. For the sake of simplicity, it may be useful to distinguish between the terms "ethnic Jew" and "religious Jew". The absolute majority of the first Christians were ethnically Jews, so when Jesus says that the Jews who mock the Christians only *"call themselves Jews"*, he is not talking about ethnicity, but means that a true Jew religiously is a Jew who believes in Jesus. The Jews who did not believe in Jesus were, of course, ethnically still Jews, but religiously they were not Jews because *"he who is a Jew is one inwardly"* (Rom 2:29a).
   2. Jesus' calling these Jews who persecute Christians *"Satan's synagogue"* does not mean that all Jews belong to Satan, as the vast majority of Christians were ethnically Jews, but it does mean that this persecution was influenced by Satan himself.

[[@Bible:rev 2:10]]Rev 2:10

1. The Christians of Smyrna had already suffered and would suffer even more. Of course they were afraid, but Jesus encourages them and shows them that he is in control of the situation and that they can be safe no matter what happens.
2. To show concretely that he is in control of the situation, Jesus tells them exactly what kind of persecution will come next: they will be thrown into prison for ten days. When the Christians were then rightly thrown into prison, they could be sure that liberation would also come 10 days later.
3. This persecution came from the devil, but just as with the sufferings Job suffered, God allows and limits the suffering and decides when it will end.
4. Since this persecution came from the devil, why didn't God stop it? Because God had a purpose for this persecution. God is not the one who gives us suffering, but sometimes he allows the suffering that the devil causes in order to teach us something, make us grow in our faith or something like that (1 Peter 1:6-7).
5. The church in Smyrna was put to the test, but it certainly seems that they passed the test. Of all the churches and cities mentioned in Revelation, only Smyrna remains today.
6. In New Testament times, there were two different kinds of crowns, one worn by kings and one that served as a prize at athletic competitions. If the Christians of Smyrna are faithful unto death, they will receive a crown as a prize for winning. The prize they would win if they were faithful unto death is *life*, *eternal* life.
   1. It is interesting to note that the Greek word for *"crown"* is "stephanos", the name of the first Christian martyr (Acts 7:59).
   2. Athletes win crowns of leaves that eventually wither and die*,* but Jesus' disciples win crowns of life that never withers and dies.
   3. It is remarkable that Jesus gives this kind of crown to those who are faithful in spite of suffering. Otherwise, one sometimes hears from success theologians that God gives success and riches to those who follow him. Here, on the contrary, it is those who are poor and suffering who win the prize.
7. One of those martyred in Smyrna was Polycarp (69-155), a disciple of the Apostle John. According to tradition, Polycarp was ordered to confess that the Emperor is Lord and to burn incense at the altar of the Emperor's cult, to which he is said to have replied: *'For 86 years I have served him, and he has not wronged me. How shall I reproach my King, who hath saved me?"* After this answer, he was burned at the stake along with twelve other Christians, but was stabbed with a knife when the fire did not take hold. (Polycarp's Martyrdom, chapter 18.)

[[@Bible:rev 2:11]]Rev 2:11

1. The messages given to the various churches in Revelation are, of course, primarily addressed to the local churches, but they may well have great significance for individual Christians and churches around the world even today.
   1. The churches going through persecution today can be greatly blessed by reading texts like these and encouraged by Jesus' message to the church in Smyrna.
   2. Although we in the West are spared, countless Christians are currently being persecuted, particularly in the Middle East and Asia. Some even claim that more Christians have died for their faith in the 20th century than in all previous centuries combined.
2. Dying here on earth is not the worst thing that can happen. The worst thing that can happen is to die *the* "*second death"*. According to Revelation 20:14, the *"lake of fire"*, where death and hell are cast, is the *"second death"* and there all those are cast who do not have their names written in the book of life (Rev 20:15).

## Rev 2:12-17 - To the Church in Pergamum

[[@Bible:rev 2:12]]Rev 2:12

1. Pergamum was one of the most important cities in Asia Minor, today's western Turkey, and was also the official centre of the Roman Empire. Pergamus was also famous for its large library, which contained 200,000 books, and for inventing parchment when the Egyptians stopped exporting papyrus.
   1. "Pergamus" means "fortress" and the city was a very strong "stronghold" for paganism.
      1. When the city of Pergamus built a temple to "the divine Augustus and the goddess Thomas" in 29 BC, Pergamus became the first city to officially dedicate worship to a Roman emperor.
      2. Not only was the city devoted to the worship of the emperor, but it also worshipped many other gods, such as the goddess Athena and the god Zeus. But above all, they worshipped the god Asclepius, the god of healing, whose symbol "the rod of Asclepius", a snake coiling up a staff, is still used as a symbol of healing.
         1. Sick people could go to Pergamus and spend the night in the temple of Asclepius together with a bunch of tame snakes. When a snake slithered past and touched the sick person, it was considered that they had been touched by the god Asclepius and would be healed.
2. The city of Pergamus was one of the few cities in the Roman Empire where the governor had the so-called "power of the sword", which meant that the governor himself could decide, for example, on capital punishment without needing Rome's permission.
   1. Perhaps it was precisely in this way that Antipas was murdered, and that Jesus therefore emphasizes that he is the one who has the sword and that he has the ultimate power over life and death.
   2. Jesus showing his sword to the church in Pergamum is a clear signal that they should give more importance to God's word than the governor's word in how they should live and whom they should worship.
3. In Revelation 1:16, John sees a sharp two-edged sword coming out of Jesus' mouth, and now Jesus clarifies to the church in Pergamum that it is *his* sword. That Jesus holds this sword means that it is Jesus who is Lord, King and Judge of all living things. What Jesus says goes.
   1. In Hebrews it says: *"For the word of God is living and active. It is sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and is a judge of the thoughts and intents of the heart."* (Heb 4:12)
   2. That the sword came out of Jesus' mouth is not a coincidence because Jesus' two-edged sword is *the Word*, that is, the Word of God, the Bible.
   3. A person may sometimes find it difficult to distinguish between spiritual experiences from God and their own human feelings. But thanks to God's Word, the Bible, we can distinguish between what really comes from God and what is just a fantasy or our own feelings.
      1. Of course, there is nothing wrong with experiencing emotions, but if you let them control you as if they were the word of God, or even control other people, then it is wrong.
4. One possible interpretation of why it is explicitly mentioned as a *double-edged* sword may be to highlight the capacity of God's Word to both *save* believers and *condemn* unbelievers. As Lord, Jesus is both Saviour and Judge.

[[@Bible:rev 2:13]]Rev 2:13

1. An ancient symbol of Satan is a serpent (Gen 3:1, Rev 12:9, Rev 20:2), and in Pergamum they worshipped Asclepius, the god of medicine, whose symbol was a serpent coiled up on a staff. In addition, Pergamum was the site of the huge 'pergamon altar' built by King Eumenes II for the god Zeus to celebrate his victory over the Galatians. The altar looks like a throne and can be seen today in Berlin's museum. So all in all, we see that there is a clear link between the expression *"the throne of Satan"* and all the idolatry that existed in Pergamus.
2. Satan thrives where idolatry flourishes, even taking up residence there. The Christians of Pergamum were extremely vulnerable and one of them, Antipas, had been murdered.
3. The church in Pergamum is praised by Jesus for holding fast to their faith even in the face of bloody tragedy. Antipas, whose name means "against all", lived in the same city as Satan, and stood "against all" by holding fast to his faith even when everyone was against him and even eventually killed him.
4. The Greek word for *"witness"* is "martys", so it does not necessarily mean dying for one's faith.
   1. A Nepalese friend of mine became a "living martyr" when he was arrested by the Nepalese police for breaking the law by preaching Jesus to Hindus. When he had the chance to escape, he chose instead to go to jail even though he knew he would not survive. We prayed very hard for him and eventually he was released.
5. It is interesting to note that Antipas is accorded the same prestigious title; *"faithful witness"*, as Jesus himself has in Rev 1:5.

[[@Bible:rev 2:14]]Rev 2:14

1. Even though the church in Pergamum did many good things, Jesus still has some critical points to make.
   1. In the same way, today we should also be aware that a congregation or a pastor can do a lot of good, while there are still some things to be critical of.
      1. The church I attended as a new disciple, Stockholm Karisma Center, did a lot of good for Stockholm's homeless and people were saved every Sunday. But as time went on, the disastrous handling of money came to light, leading to the church's bankruptcy. It would no doubt have been appropriate to praise the church for some parts of its activities, while strongly criticising others. So even if a parish is successful in many ways, it should always be humbled by the fact that it can constantly develop and improve.
2. Balaam's teaching was a combination of the two sins of *idolatry* and *sexual immorality* (Num 22-24, 31). Apparently there were Christians in Pergamum who were engaged in some form of idolatry while also committing fornication.
   1. Today, as in Roman times, it is considered odd to live a life of sexual purity by, for example, abstaining from sex before, outside and after marriage.
   2. The same doctrine of error is mentioned in 2 Peter 2:15 and Jude 11.

[[@Bible:rev 2:15]]Rev 2:15

1. The doctrine of the Nicolaitans is not described, but it is not far-fetched to connect it with the doctrine of Balaam, which was about idol sacrifice and sexual immorality.
   1. This interpretation is also confirmed by Irenaeus, who in the 180s wrote: *"The Nicolaitans are the successors of the Nicholas who was one of the first seven ordained deacons by the apostles (Acts 6:5). They live a life of unbridled pleasure. The character of these men is clearly pointed out in the Book of Revelation, such as teaching that it does not matter if one practices fornication and to eat that which is sacrificed to idols."* (Irenaeus *Against the Heresies*, Book I, Chapter 26).
2. The church in Ephesus is praised by Jesus for *"hating the works of the Nicolaitans"* (Rev 2:6), but in Pergamum it seems that this doctrine had taken hold in the church.

[[@Bible:rev 2:16]]Rev 2:16

1. Since there were undeniably a number of believers in the church at Pergamum who are commended for their strong adherence to the faith, it may seem remarkable that at the same time there were those who engaged in idolatry and sexual immorality. The problem of the church in Pergamum seems to have been that they were *too tolerant.* Although many of them lived rightly according to the Christian faith, they also tolerated idolatry and sexual immorality going on in the congregation. This compromise Jesus criticizes and urges the church to repent of.
2. Since Satan obviously failed to bring down the church through murder and persecution, he is instead trying to destroy the church from within by making the church tolerate and accept blatant sin.
3. Repentance is undeniably not only something that non-Christians should do, but also believers who have gone wrong need to repent.
4. If the church does not repent, Jesus will fight against them with his sword, the word of God, the Bible (Isaiah 11:4, Ephesians 6:17, Hebrews 4:12, Revelation 19:15, 21).
   1. For a Christian who does not care much about the Bible, this warning may be difficult to understand, but for someone who wants to live rightly according to God's Word in everything, it is very serious to be convinced that he is living wrongly according to the Bible.
   2. It is probably no coincidence that Balaam was also stopped by an angel with *a sword* (Num 22:23).

[[@Bible:rev 2:17]]Rev 2:17

1. You can read the Bible over and over again without experiencing anything special, but suddenly you feel the Spirit of God speaking through the Word and you feel met.
   1. It is important to be open to God's Spirit when we read God's Word. We may not always hear God speak through the Word, but it is good to be open to the fact that God sometimes speaks through his Word.
2. Even today, a congregation risks becoming too tolerant and permissive of sin. Therefore, it is important to be constantly open to the Spirit of God speaking through the Bible text and to pay attention if there is something that needs to be corrected.
3. Whoever believes in Jesus and lives as a disciple will never have to worry about worldly food or spiritual food (Matthew 6:25-34, John 6:32, 41).
4. Perhaps the Christians of Pergamum were concerned about what they would eat because all meat was sacrificed to idols. But Jesus urges the church not to worry about this, but only to do what is right, and then Jesus will give them everything they need, including food.
5. In biblical times, a white stone could symbolise a number of things, such as being invited to a fancy party, a sign of friendship or proof of being acquitted in court. Whichever of these symbolic meanings Jesus means, they are all very positive and biblical!
6. Being given a new name on special occasions is not new in biblical contexts. For example, the patriarch Jacob was given the new name *Israel* (Gen 35:10) and Simon was given the new name *Peter* (John 1:42). Being given a new name by God can symbolize a transition to something new or being given a specific mission.
7. In Old Testament times, the high priests had a breastplate with a number of stones, each with a name engraved on it (Exodus 28:15-21). It is probably not a far-fetched idea that Jesus is linking to this garment and thus showing the Christians in Pergamum that they are priests in the kingdom of God.

## Rev 2:18-29 - To the Church in Thyatira

[[@Bible:rev 2:18]]Rev 2:18

1. Thyatira was the smallest of the cities in Revelation, but received the longest greeting from Jesus. Thyatira was a relatively small but prosperous trading town in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). Thyatira had a great deal of trading of various kinds, including purple tea, which Lydia of Thyatira, the first person to be saved in Europe, traded (Acts 16:14).
2. Jesus' presentation to the church in Thyatira is very similar to his presentation in Revelation 1:13-15, except that in chapter 1 he presents himself as the "Son of Man" instead of the "Son of God". Both of these aspects of Jesus are equally true, since he is 100% God and 100% man.
   1. The resurrected Jesus presents himself to the church at Thyatira as "the Son of God", a description for which he was also known during his three active years on earth (Matthew 14:33). So even after his resurrection and ascension, Jesus is the Son of God, not just something he was for a brief period on earth. Since Hebrews 13:8 describes Jesus as *"the same yesterday and today and forever"*, we see that Jesus was also the Son of God before he came to earth (John 17:5) and that he will always and forever be the Son of God.
   2. When Jesus presents himself as "Son of God", it is a divine title he uses. In biblical times, being someone's son meant having the same nature as your father. For example, the expression *"child of an adulterer"* (Isa 57:3) meant that one was considered an adulterer. So when Jesus presents himself as the "Son of God" it implies nothing less than that he himself has the same nature as his Father, i.e. that he is God.
3. The expression *"eyes like flames of fire"* means that Jesus sees what is going on in the church and is also the one who judges the church.
   1. Judgment, trial and fire often go together because fire removes what is undesirable and keeps what is pure. Compare, for example, the production of pure gold (1 Corinthians 3:10-15, 1 Peter 1:7).
4. *"Shining ore"* was the strongest metal known in New Testament times, and it had been made by refining and refining it by fire.
5. In sum, then, we see that Jesus is the one who stands firm and strong because he has been tested in fire, and he is the one who judges and tests the church because he is the divine Son of God.

[[@Bible:rev 2:19]]Rev 2:19

1. Even though the church and the city of Thyatira were small, Jesus says he *"knows your works"*. This is a message that small churches should take to heart! Even if you think you are small and cannot do anything special compared to large congregations, Jesus sees your situation and is ready to bless, support, help and test.
2. Jesus praises the church for showing love to one another, for having a strong faith, for not being late to help with what needs to be done, and for being persistent in what they do. Each of these four aspects is important and if the church were to be without one of them it would dramatically affect the church negatively.
   1. What if the church had a lot of work and mission, but no love, what would it look like?
   2. What if the church showed a lot of love to each other, but did not believe in God's word, what would it look like?
   3. What if the congregation was pure in everything, but no one in the congregation wanted to help with the common practical work?
   4. What if the church had a strong belief in God's miracles, but gave up as soon as something didn't turn out the way it was supposed to?
3. Not only does the church receive praise for these four aspects, but Jesus praises them for *growing* in love, faith, service and perseverance.
   1. Both as a congregation and as an individual believer, it is important to continually develop in faith and discipleship. If one stands still in one's development, there is a risk of taking things for granted or becoming apathetic.

[[@Bible:rev 2:20]]Rev 2:20

1. Although there was much to praise in the church, there were some negative things that Jesus needs to address.
   1. The problems of the congregation are summed up in a woman called *"Jezebel"*. It is not certain that she calls herself by this name, but Jesus describes her that way to indicate that she is a false prophetess in the style of Jezebel of Kings (1 Kings 16:31-33, 2 Kings 9:30-37).
      1. Just as the name "Judas" is synonymous with "traitor" today, the name "Jezebel" in biblical times was synonymous with "wicked sinner".
      2. Jezebel the King tried to persuade Israel to combine worship of God with worship of Baal and got the prophets Elijah and Elisha against her.
      3. There is always a risk that someone who is not a prophet at all will start calling himself a prophet and deceive believing disciples with his false message and drag people down to destruction. The problem in Thyatira was that the church leadership had tolerated her teaching and allowed her to be kept. This sin is first and foremost the responsibility of the church leadership and they should never have allowed her to continue teaching the church when they heard what she was teaching. It is the responsibility of a congregational leadership to respond when a congregant teaches unhealthily while gaining more and more power in the congregation.
         1. To avoid this, it is important that everyone knows their Bible and dares to oppose what is unbiblical or an abuse of spiritual power.
2. Jesus does not specify exactly how Jezebel has led the believers to commit fornication and eat the flesh of idol sacrifices, but possibly it was linked to the professional life. Perhaps one could not pursue one's profession without participating in meals where idol sacrifices were going on. Perhaps Jezebel falsely "prophesied" that this was okay, even though God's word says it is not.
   1. Probably there were behaviors in the city of Thyatira that the locals considered "normal", but that are impossible for a Christian to deal with. Perhaps this led the Christians to believe that they too must do this or they would be excluded from society and lose jobs and income. Standing up for one's faith is especially difficult when one is financially strapped and has to support one's family. But Jesus' message to the church is not to engage in fornication and idolatry under any circumstances.
      1. We Christians can always trust that God will give us what we need (Matthew 6:24-34).

[[@Bible:rev 2:21]]Rev 2:21

1. When God gives a judgment, it always means that there is time for repentance before the judgment is carried out. We see an example of this in the book of the prophet Jonah. Jonah is commissioned by God to preach God's judgment on the city of Nineveh (Jon 1:1), but because Nineveh listens to God's word and repents (Jon 3:5), God does not execute the judgment that Nineveh should have received (Jon 3:10).
2. Somehow Jesus has warned Jezebel and urged her to repent, but apparently she hasn't listened to God because she doesn't want to.
   1. In the same way, we should also deal with people who treat us wrongly in some way; we should give them time to repent rather than rejecting them outright. God is merciful to all people and so we should be too.

[[@Bible:rev 2:22]]Rev 2:22

1. Both of the sins into which Jezebel lured the church, fornication and idol sacrifice, are essentially "unfaithfulness", either sexual unfaithfulness or spiritual unfaithfulness to God. Sexual unfaithfulness is usually committed in a bed, and so it is not entirely illogical that Jesus uses a *bed* to condemn Jezebel's sin. Consequently, those who want to continue to share a bed with Jezebel, i.e. to engage in sexual or spiritual unfaithfulness, will also share in her judgment.
2. The goal of this punishment was that those who sinned would repent. Because they have not heeded Jesus' call to repentance in the past, Jesus is now forced to take such drastic measures.

[[@Bible:rev 2:23]]Rev 2:23

1. In the basic text it says "I will kill her child with "death"". My interpretation is that Jesus will simply consider these Christian sinners as "unsaved". For the gift they have received with salvation is *"eternal life"* (John 3:16) and being saved from *"the second death"* (Revelation 2:11), but if these individuals continue in this way, they will no longer have their names written in the *"book of life"* (Philippians 4:3).
2. The expression *"hearts and kidneys"* is synonymous with "hearts and minds" or "the interior". The point is that Jesus is the one who sees our innermost thoughts and intentions.
   1. Even if on the surface you appear to be a pious and loving disciple of Jesus, there can be a lot of falsehood under the surface and you should be aware that Jesus sees this.
   2. In the same way, we should be aware that Jesus sees all the positive things we think, our prayers and our desire to draw closer to God.

[[@Bible:rev 2:24-25]]Rev 2:24-25

1. It seems that the doctrine taught by Jezebel was called *"the depths of Satan"*. It was not uncommon in some Gnostic contexts to explore the depths of Satan and strive to experience the spirit powers of darkness. That this had crept into the church at Thyatira was abominable and it is no wonder that Jesus reacts to it as strongly as he does.
   1. Compared to the other churches in Revelation, Thyatira is the "tolerant church". The church had tolerated the preaching and teaching of *"the depths of Satan".*
2. Fortunately, there were some in the congregation who had not taken to heart what Jezebel taught and prophesied. Sometimes there can be an unnecessary resignation to sin in a congregation, among Christian leaders or the like. In spite of the fact that there was so much sin in the church at Thyatira, Jesus urges faithful Christians to simply *"hold on to what you have"*. God continues to bless and work with the faithful even when sin is all around.

[[@Bible:rev 2:26-28]]Rev 2:26-28

1. Those who hold fast to the works of Jesus, as opposed to the works of Jezebel, are on the winning side, and Jesus promises that they will reign with him in his kingdom.
   1. Even if a devout believer may be perceived as a sissy loser here on earth today, one can safely trust that the "sacrifices" one may make in renouncing sexual impurity or idolatry will pay off in the future. Jesus sees how we live and will reward us accordingly.
2. When Jesus returns, his disciples will reign with him (Matthew 19:28, 1 Corinthians 6:2, Revelation 19:15).
3. The morning star is normally the planet Venus, the brightest source of light after the Sun and the Moon. The morning star is particularly visible in the morning and heralds the start of a new day. In Revelation 22:16, Jesus says that he is the morning star. With Jesus, a new time has begun.

[[@Bible:rev 2:29]]Rev 2:29

1. This greeting is addressed by Jesus to all the seven churches, but in the first three letters this greeting is placed before the promise, while in the last four letters the greeting is placed last.
2. This call is addressed to all believers of all times. If you read this text and feel the Spirit of God speaking, you should listen.

## Rev 3:1-6 - To the Church in Sardis

[[@Bible:rev 3:1]]Rev 3:1

1. The Greek word "angelos" means "messenger" or "emissary" and normally refers to an angel, but it can also refer to a local church pastor, as he is a "messenger" who preaches the word of God to the congregation.
   1. Most likely, in my opinion, it is the pastor of the congregation who is being referred to. He is the leader of the congregation and also the one who receives the letter from John and also the one who reads the letter to his congregation.
2. The city of Sardis was located along important trade routes in Lydia, modern-day Turkey, and was a relatively wealthy and prosperous city with a temple dedicated to Artemis. Previously, Sardis had been the capital of Lydia and also one of the most important cities in the ancient world, but by the time of Revelation its importance had declined considerably.
   1. The city of Sardis is today associated with the invention of *money*. It was during the reign of King Croesus that metallurgists in the city invented how to separate gold and silver. Previously, it had not been possible to know exactly how much silver or gold was in a gold nugget, and so the value of the nugget could never be known exactly, but with the invention in Sardis, *coins* could be made with an exact value, which led to King Croesus becoming enormously rich and today his name is associated with wealth.
   2. In the centre of Sardis stands an altar dedicated to the mother goddess Cybele, who was worshipped through various sexual rites.
   3. The combination of wealth and sexual immorality led to the population of Sardis becoming notorious for laziness and decadence.
      1. It is impossible not to see the resemblance between Sardis and the modern Western world with all its wealth, fixation on money, luxury living, sexual immorality and decadence.
      2. Anyone who is a Christian and lives in an environment like Sardis and the West should therefore take note of the message Jesus is bringing to the church in Sardis and consider whether they feel met. If you do, you should also listen to Jesus' call to repentance and revival.
   4. When the Persian king Cyrus came to Sardis in 549 BC to take the city, he realised that it was virtually impossible because the city was protected by impregnable natural rocks. So Cyrus offered a reward to the soldier who could find a way to take the city. When one of the soldiers accidentally saw a Sardinian sentry drop his helmet down one of the rocks and climb down a secret route to retrieve it, he took a group of soldiers with him under cover of darkness and climbed up the same route. Once on top, he found that Sardis' guards were so sure that the city could not be taken that they had not bothered to keep watch, which meant that Cyrus could take the city with ease. This embarrassing incident was repeated when Antiochus the Great captured the city in 216 BC.
      1. From this we can learn that when a congregation lives in a world of wealth, luxury living and sexual immorality, it must continue to "guard" against sin, false teachings, etc. Otherwise it risks being caught off guard and soon facing the fait accompli; the congregation is taken over by false teachers or has died spiritually.
      2. It is often in the area where we think we are strongest that we fail to defend ourselves and end up sinning in that very area. One should not be surprised, for example, if a pastor who often preaches against sexual immorality has problems in that particular area himself.
3. The number seven in the Bible symbolizes "completeness", "perfection", "totality", "perfection", "all", etc. So when Jesus describes himself as having "the seven spirits of God" and "the seven stars" it shows that he has the Spirit of God in full and is in control of all the pastors of the churches (Rev 1:20). So Jesus does not have the Spirit of God only in part or when needed, but always, constantly and totally. In the same way, he does not only control the churches when he feels like it or when the pastors of the churches think it is appropriate, but Jesus is Lord of the churches regardless.
4. Just as Hillsong is known today for its *worship* and Timrå Pentecost is known for its *mission*, so Sardis was known as a *living* church.
   1. To a person who looked at the church in Sardis in a superficial way, one could get the impression that everything was going well, that the church was alive and thriving. But to Jesus, who *knows* the church and has a complete and total insight into the church, it looks quite different. Jesus sees that the church is *dead* even though it is known to be so alive.
5. To many of the other churches in Revelation, Jesus addresses an exhortation to resist a false doctrine or a sin or something similar, but the church in Sardis seems to have had no problem with either this or any form of persecution. Sardis' problem seems to be that they have slowly but surely died in a comfortable existence. The devil has had no reason to attack and persecute the church in Sardis because they have died to themselves like a frog that jumps into a pot of warm, comfortable water but slowly but surely gets hotter and hotter until it is too late and the water boils the frog to death.
6. There is an obvious risk for Western congregations to slowly but surely adapt to Western luxury living, sexual immorality and decadence. To the outsider observing the congregation, you might be fooled into thinking that all is right because the pastor is so charismatic, the worship is so good, everyone seems to have a smile on their face, but beneath the surface, members have begun to cohabit without thinking it's wrong, people have stopped caring about being generous with their money because they need to buy a new iPhone, and the church's mission is becoming less and less important. By the time you realize that everything is not right, it has already gone so far that you are unable to do anything about it; you have killed yourself by slowly but surely getting used to the hot water like a frog until the water finally starts to boil.

[[@Bible:rev 3:2]]Rev 3:2

1. The first thing Jesus tells the church in Sardis to do is to *"wake up"*. If the church wakes up, it will be, in the true sense of the word, a "revival".
   1. A Christian who is "asleep" cares little for God's Word, prayer, worship, evangelism, mission, service, etc., and needs to be "awakened."
   2. In different times, revivals have looked different. When the Spirit of God breathes life into us Christians, it shows up in a few different ways.
      1. The end of the 2nd century saw the start of what might be called a "desert revival". Many young men were moved by God and longed to spend more time with him in peace and quiet, so they went out into the desert and lived alone in caves. Imagine how absurd it would be if we Christians today still complained that there was so little revival because so few young men today go out into the desert and live in caves. Exactly how a revival manifests itself is often culturally conditioned and it is therefore foolish to try to mimic these expressions in an attempt to recreate a revival, but its inherent longing to draw closer to God, that is something to strive for and long for.
2. Jesus was dissatisfied with the *"works" of* the church in Sardis. Probably it was not the deeds themselves that were at fault, but the fact that they did not do these deeds based on love.
   1. No matter how much activity a church has, it can go wrong if it does all these things for the wrong reason.

[[@Bible:rev 3:3]]Rev 3:3

1. Jesus wants the church to go back to the original message they had previously received. Jesus gave a similar message to the church in Ephesus: *"Repent and do your first works"* (Rev 2:5).
   1. These *"first works"* are about returning to what was so important when you were a new believer: *reading the Bible* because you love God's Word, *praying* because you love God's voice, *witnessing to Jesus because you* love your neighbour, *helping those in need* because you love your fellow man.
2. If the church does not stay awake, it will, like the city of Sardis, be quickly conquered. When Sardis' guardsmen failed to take their mission seriously due to negligence, they were caught off guard by the enemy and quickly lost the impregnable city. When a congregation does not take its mission seriously because of laziness and neglect, there is a great risk of being overtaken by the enemy and losing so quickly that there is no time to react.

[[@Bible:rev 3:4-5]]Rev 3:4-5

1. The color white symbolizes purity and is a recurring color in the Book of Revelation (Rev. 4:4, 6:11, 7:9, 7:13, 19:8).
   1. One does not become pure, holy and righteous by being good or by doing good deeds, but by believing in Jesus. Those who had soiled their former white garments have thus fallen so far from faith in Jesus that Jesus now declares them *"dead"*. But by repenting and going back to the original faith in Jesus, their clothes will become white again. In other words, it is never too late to repent.
2. Although Jesus says that the church as a whole is dead, he also notes that there are a few left in Sardis who are still alive. One can imagine how difficult it must have been for these faithful Christians when the rest of the church indulged in sin and immorality. In the same way, it is difficult even today for a Christian who wants to live purely and be faithful to Jesus when all his Christian friends become sambos. But if the church in Sardis understands its own good, they should repent and listen to them and learn from them how to live their Christian life.
   1. If you recognize yourself in the situation of these few believers, you should take heart and remember that Jesus knows your situation too. Continue to be faithful and pray to Jesus to show the rest of your congregation that they need to repent.
3. Ancient cities often kept records of their citizens. When someone died or committed a criminal act, they were struck from the city's books and were no longer a citizen.
   1. The book of life is mentioned in several places in the Bible, and to be struck out of that book means that one is no longer a citizen of the kingdom of God (Exodus 32:32-33, Psalm 69:29, Luke 10:20, Revelation 20:12-15, Revelation 22:19).
   2. Imagine the joy of standing before the Lord God and hearing Jesus call your name!

[[@Bible:rev 3:6]]Rev 3:6

1. We in the West really need to be on our guard so that we don't let our laziness slowly but surely lead to apathy, decadence and eventually spiritual death. If we recognize ourselves in Sardis' situation, we should also heed Jesus' call to repentance.
   1. Even for the spiritually dead there is hope, since Jesus has a habit of raising the dead to life again (Mark 5, John 11)!

## Rev 3:7-13 - To the Church in Philadelphia

[[@Bible:rev 3:7]]Rev 3:7

1. Filadelfia is a small town in present-day western Turkey, now called "Alaşehir".
2. The city's name *"Filadelfia"* is Greek and means "brotherly love". The name comes from the fact that King Eumenes II of Pergamon founded the city in 189 BC and called it "Philadelphia" because of his love for his brother Attalus II, who was called "Philadelphus" and who later succeeded Eumenes on the throne.
   1. The city was relatively rich and prosperous because, due to its geographical location and strong defensive fortifications, it controlled one of the main trade routes linking Europe and the East, and was located in a valley with good cultivation opportunities, especially grapes. However, the town had to be evacuated from time to time due to earthquakes that occasionally destroyed the town.
      1. It is interesting to note that in the city called "brotherly love" the *bread* and *wine* of the Eucharist grew.
   2. Because of the city's location at the edge of Europe, King Attalus originally used Philadelphia as a "mission station" for Greek civilization and the Greek language. So many Greek temples were built in Philadelphia that the city became known as "little Athens".
3. Jesus presents himself as both the *Holy One* and the *True* One.
   1. Jesus is not only *"holy"*, he is "THE Holy One". Jesus is not just a holy man who walked the earth 2,000 years ago and nagged us to be nice to each other, Jesus is something much holier than that, he is our Holy God himself (Isaiah 43:15).
   2. Jesus is *"the True One"*, in the sense of being *genuine.* Just as most popular goods are copied, many false prophets and demons try to imitate Jesus and pretend to be like Him. But only Jesus is genuine and true and all other religions and idols are copies.
4. Jesus refers to Isaiah 22:20-23 where the key to the house of David was given to Eliakim who then had access and authority over all of David's house and all of his possessions.
   1. It is Jesus who holds the key to the kingdom of heaven and it is only through Jesus that one can enter heaven (John 14:6). The Father has handed over judgment to Jesus (John 5:22).
   2. Just as the city of Philadelphia, with its strong defensive fortress, controlled who could enter or leave Europe via the great trade route, so Jesus controls who may or may not enter heaven.

[[@Bible:rev 3:8]]Rev 3:8

1. Just as Jesus says to all the churches, *"I know your deeds", so* he says it now to the church in Philadelphia. Although the church may have been small and weak, he knew the church's situation and commended them for holding fast to God's word and not denying the name of Jesus.
   1. Today, too, we need to remind ourselves that Jesus knows our situation, even though we ourselves may think we are small and insignificant. The church belongs to Jesus and he has a vested interest in making sure that your particular church is doing well.
2. The city of Philadelphia was used to control who could enter or leave Europe and to spread Greek civilisation.
   1. Against this backdrop, Jesus presents himself as the one who controls who gets to enter heaven and tells the church in Philadelphia that the door to heaven is open to them because they have kept Jesus' word and not denied his name.
   2. But not only is the door *to* heaven open for those who believe in Jesus, Jesus has also opened the door for the church to go *out* and spread the message of Jesus to the world. Normally, "an open door" means evangelistic and missionary opportunities (Acts 14:27, 1 Corinthians 16:9, 2 Corinthians 2:12, Colossians 4:3).
3. Even if the power of the church was *"little"*, it does not mean that the church was powerless, rather the opposite! When a church recognizes its own weakness, God's power can fill the void (John 3:30, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10).
   1. God can do more through a small and weak congregation than through a large and proud congregation.
4. Philadelphia held fast to God's word and did not adapt the Christian faith to worldly philosophies or the prevailing zeitgeist, but rather allowed its own thoughts and life to be influenced by God's word.
   1. Such an approach is always met with resistance as the times change. But for those who want to hold fast to God's word, you can be sure that there will always be something that is not politically correct or suitable for society. So it is important to do as the church in Philadelphia did and hold fast to God's word even when faced with opposition.
5. Philadelphia did not deny the name of Jesus. We do not know exactly what happened to the Christians of Philadelphia, but we understand that they encountered resistance in some form, but stood up for their faith and refused to deny the name of Jesus.
   1. Not denying the name of Jesus is not only about daring to say you are a Christian when someone asks, but also about daring to live your life according to the faith you profess.
   2. Every society and every new age has something that goes against God's word. This changes over time and in different societies and cultures, but there is always something. As a Christian, it is important to be so familiar with God's word that you let the Bible influence your view of all the different areas of life so that you are not prejudiced without even noticing it.
      1. Theologians have a special task to constantly develop and work out a Christian approach in the face of every new cultural invention or zeitgeist. God does not change, but as society changes, we must constantly think through how to relate to various social changes.
6. All the other churches in Revelation hear some kind of criticism, but to the church of Philadelphia Jesus has no criticism at all! This is largely because of this:
   1. Philadelphia had an open door into heaven and out to mission.
   2. Philadelphia trusted in God's power instead of her own.
   3. Philadelphia held fast to the word of God and refused to deny the name of Jesus.

[[@Bible:rev 3:9]]Rev 3:9

1. One can be Jewish partly by origin, but also by religion. Jesus and virtually all of the first Christians were Jews by origin, and at first (at least the Roman authorities) considered Pharisaic (Rabbinic Judaism) and Messianic (Christianity) Judaism to be both part of the Jewish religion. But gradually the gap between the "rabbinic" and the "messianic" Jews became wider and wider and Judaism was divided into Judaism and Christianity.
   1. For Jesus, it was important that a Jew not only assume that he was a child of God just because he was related to Abraham, but that he also shared Abraham's faith (Matthew 3:9, Romans 2:28).
   2. Probably in the city of Philadelphia there was a Jewish synagogue where some of the Jews came to believe in Jesus as the Messiah while others did not want to believe. Perhaps there was a quarrel between these two Jewish groups where the Pharisee Jews tried to persuade the Messianic Jews to deny their belief in Jesus (something similar happened in Acts 17:1-10). When the Messianic Jews refused to do so, they were expelled from the city synagogue and not allowed to join the Jewish community.
      1. The answer Jesus gives these Messianic Jews is that even if the door to the synagogue is closed, the door to heaven is open through their faith in Jesus. Even though these Pharisaic Jews exclude the Messianic Jews from the Jewish community, it is themselves they have actually excluded from God's community and now belong to Satan instead because they have denied Jesus. The Pharisaic Jews call themselves true Jews, but by not believing in Jesus as their Messiah, they show that they do not have Abraham, the father of faith, as their father.
   3. Jesus comforts the church in Philadelphia and promises them that they will be the ones who will ultimately be on the winning side. All other people will eventually, whether willingly or not, bow to Jesus and realize that he is Lord (Phil 2:9-11).

[[@Bible:rev 3:10]]Rev 3:10

1. Since Jesus speaks here of a trial *"that will come upon the whole world"*, he is probably talking about the *"tribulation"* that will come in the last days before Jesus' return (Matt 24).
   1. Some Christians believe that all believers will be *"caught up"* (1 Thess 4:17) before the great tribulation, and see this verse as proof of their position.
   2. Other Christians believe that all believers will remain on earth during the tribulation, but that Jesus will preserve us from the worst torments.

[[@Bible:rev 3:11]]Rev 3:11

1. That Jesus is coming *"soon"* does not mean "soon" but "quickly".
   1. Although we Christians do well to live as if Jesus is coming soon, we still cannot know exactly when Jesus is coming. Moreover, Jesus has said that he will not return until the gospel has been preached in the whole world and to all nations (Matthew 24:14), something that has not yet happened, and which was certainly not within the reach of the first Christians in Philadelphia.
   2. So we cannot know if Jesus is coming "soon" or not, but we can know that when he does come, he will come "quickly" and "suddenly", and therefore we must always be prepared. We should therefore be careful not to postpone our salvation or wait to live as Christians until we are retired (Matt 24:36-44).
2. The crown that the church has is the crown of *"life"*, as Jesus calls it in his letter to the church in Smyrna (Rev 2:10). Receiving this crown means receiving eternal life and entering the kingdom of heaven.
   1. The church in Smyrna would receive this crown if they were faithful until death, but the church in Philadelphia has already received this crown because they held fast to God's word and did not deny the name of Jesus. Jesus has already opened the door to the kingdom of heaven for the Christians of Philadelphia.
   2. It is interesting to note that the Greek word for *"crown"* is "stephanos", the name of the first Christian martyr (Acts 7:59).

[[@Bible:rev 3:12]]Rev 3:12

1. A pillar symbolises strength and durability. Because of the city's many earthquakes, Jesus compares the believer to a *"pillar"* that stands firm even when everything around it is crumbling.
   1. When a city has been completely destroyed by an earthquake, you can often see various pillars standing firmly amidst the rubble. In the same way, those who keep their faith will stand firm in the midst of a world that is falling apart.
2. In the ancient world, it was not uncommon for the person who financed the building of a temple, for example, or gave political permission to build, to have his or her name engraved on one of the pillars. When those who entered the temple saw all these names, they were reminded of who had financed and built the temple.
   1. On the one hand, God himself is the temple of God, and will be in the new city (Rev 21:22), but the temple of God is also the body of Christ (John 2:21), the believers (1 Cor 6:19). God writes his name on us to show the rest of the world that we belong to him and that it is he who has "built" us through regeneration and "financed" us through Jesus' death on the cross (Matt 10:32).

[[@Bible:rev 3:13]]Rev 3:13

1. This message is primarily addressed to the local church in the city of Philadelphia 2000 years ago, but it is also addressed to all Christians of all times. Anyone who wants to be like the church of Philadelphia should do more than just call their church "the church of Philadelphia", and also do as the church of Philadelphia did, i.e. hold fast to the word of God and not deny the name of Jesus!

## Rev 3:14-22 - To the Church in Laodicea

[[@Bible:rev 3:14]]Rev 3:14

1. The name *"Laodicea"* is composed of two Greek words meaning "people" and "govern" or "judge". The name Laodicea can therefore be translated into English as "people's rule".
   1. Laodicea, today's Pamukkale in western Turkey, was a very rich city on the road to Colosse. The city was destroyed in an earthquake in 60 AD, about 35 years before the Book of Revelation, but its inhabitants refused to accept help from Rome, because they were so rich that they didn't want help from outsiders and instead rebuilt the city themselves.
   2. Laodicea was known for its banks and economic success, its textile production (especially black wool fabrics) and its special eye ointment. Products from Laodicea were exported all over the then known world. The city also had a school for training doctors and a temple dedicated to the god of medicine, Asclepius.
   3. The city's weak point was its poor access to water. The water came from the hot springs of the city of Hierapolis via a 10 km long aqueduct. Once in Laodicea, the hot water had become lukewarm and unappetizing.
      1. Because of Laodicea's lack of water, the city's leadership was inclined to compromise with potential enemies because they could easily demolish the aqueduct in the event of a siege of the city, which would quickly cause the city to run out of water. This willingness to compromise meant that the city could be easily defeated if the enemy so wished.
   4. Paul mentions the church in Laodicea in Colossians (Col 2:1), and wrote a letter of his own to them, but it has been lost (Col 4:16).
2. The word *"amen"* means "true", "reliable", "trustworthy", "let it be" and is often used in an affirmative way after someone has said something, similar to someone agreeing with "so be it" after a sentence.
   1. When, after someone has prayed a prayer or preached a sermon, one agrees to say "amen", it means that one agrees with the content of the prayer or sermon, affirms its truth and wishes it to be so.
   2. That Jesus *is "Amen"* means that all the promises God has made about Jesus are true and trustworthy, and will come to pass (2 Corinthians 1:20).
3. The fact that Jesus calls himself trustworthy and truthful contrasts with the city of Laodicea, which had a tendency to compromise with the enemy.

[[@Bible:rev 3:15-16]]Rev 3:15-16

1. Due to the difficult access to water in the city of Laodicea, a 10 km long aqueduct was used to transport water from the hot springs of Hierapolis. Once in Laodicea, the hot water had cooled slightly, but not enough to be cold water. The people of Laodicea were thus well aware of how disgusting lukewarm water is to drink, a knowledge that Jesus uses to explain to the church in Laodicea that *they* too are spiritually lukewarm.
   1. Cold water is good to drink on a hot sunny day, and hot tea is good to drink on a cool evening. But lukewarm water is never good to drink, and anyone who assumed that cold water or hot tea would be served would be so surprised by the lukewarm water that they would spontaneously spit it out.
2. Either this parable can be seen as saying that it would be positive if the church in Laodicea were either hot or cold, or it can be seen as saying that if they are hot they belong to the kingdom of God and if they are cold they belong to the kingdom of the World. Since the city had a tendency to be compromising with the enemy, the latter interpretation of the parable is quite apt.
   1. The church gave the appearance of being rich and successful, but was judged by Jesus to be poor and naked. Another way of understanding the parable is that it is perfectly okay for a Christian to be rich because then they can be generous with their resources, and it is also okay for a Christian to be poor because then they become more dependent on God. Just as both hot and cold water have a purpose, God can use both the poor and the rich for his purposes. But it is difficult for God to use the one who pretends to be rich but never wants to share his wealth or the one who is poor but never asks God for help. It is better to be either hot or cold, than to be lukewarm.
3. Some examples of how to become a lukewarm Christian:
   1. You don't really have a true faith in your heart, but you go to church or perform certain religious ceremonies for show. Then you are cold, but warmed up to a lukewarm unappetizing level.
   2. You have a burning faith in your heart, but only complain about others without faith being expressed in loving actions. Then you are warm, but cool down and end up using the fire only to warm the pews in the church hall.
   3. They call themselves Pentecostal, Spirit-baptised and revivalist, but they never read their Bible, never pray private prayers and never testify to their faith. Then you give the appearance of being passionate about Jesus, but when it comes down to it, you are lukewarm.
4. To avoid getting lukewarm, you have to stop trying to please both Jesus and the world at the same time. Following Jesus sometimes means sacrifice, suffering and persecution, and anyone who constantly tries to avoid sacrifice will eventually compromise his faith, and thus become lukewarm.
5. A good example of a lukewarm person is Judas. He followed Jesus closely while keeping his distance in his heart.
6. He who is lukewarm is in danger of becoming useless to Jesus. As in the image of cold and hot water, both serve their purpose, but lukewarm water is undrinkable and a lukewarm Christian is useless.
7. In today's free church world, it is impossible not to reflect on the Swedish name of the city of Laodicea, "folkstyre", and its connection to lukewarmness. Is there a danger that our association-led parishes lead to lukewarmness? Is there a risk, when all members are democratically allowed to decide the welfare of the congregation, that we are tempted to listen to current social opinion rather than the word of God, thereby taking the edge off the gospel and trying to please both Jesus and the world at the same time?

[[@Bible:rev 3:17]]Rev 3:17

1. When the Christians of Laodicea looked at themselves, they saw only success and prosperity, just as the city in general was rich and prosperous. They did not realize that the more they focused on their own excellence, the less they saw of the glory of Jesus.
   1. The church in Laodicea stands in stark contrast to the church in Smyrna, which saw itself as poor, but according to Jesus was rich (Rev 2:9).
      1. It is not always how we see ourselves that is most correct, but how God sees us.
      2. Those who pray receive answers, but those who already have everything they need rarely pray and thus do not receive many answers. So the one who is worldly rich prays less and thus sees less of God's blessings in his life. In this way, the worldly rich are often spiritually poor.
   2. Today's theology of success has some similarities with the church of Laodicea, where financial wealth is seen as a divine blessing and wealth thus becomes a sign of being close to God. This kind of Christianity easily becomes person- and celebrity-centred and exalts people more than God. It is also easy to become lukewarm as one compromises between precious wealth and pious spirituality.
      1. If, when reading Jesus' criticism of the church in Laodicea, you recognize yourself and realize that you are influenced by success theology, you should listen to Jesus' words and repent.
   3. It would have been better if the Christians of Laodicea had realized, like John the Baptist, that they themselves must become smaller and Jesus greater (John 3:30). The Christian life is not about glorifying oneself and promoting oneself as a superstar or successful super-Christian. The Christian life is about humbling oneself and instead glorifying and exalting Jesus with one's life. As a Christian, when you put the spotlight on yourself and your own excellence, you only expose your own aggrandizement.
   4. In contrast to the Christians of Laodicea who saw themselves as *"rich"*, Jesus says: *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* (Matthew 5:3).
      1. It is not necessarily wrong to be rich or to have what you need, but it is wrong to put so much faith in valuable things that you feel you don't need Jesus.
      2. We humans are not always self-sufficient, as the people of Laodicea should have understood, given all the earthquakes in the area. Even if the people of Laodicea had built the city with their own resources without outside help, they should understand that it will not always be possible. As it happens, the city is collapsing so completely that all the rich assets are destroyed.
      3. For the Christian, it is important not to base his life on worldly perishable things, but on the Rock, Jesus.
         1. So if you are a Christian and rich, thank God and be generous with your resources, but put your trust only in Jesus because precious wealth can quickly perish.
         2. Whoever seeks the kingdom of God first will receive all the rest as well (Matthew 6:33).
2. Not only was the church in Laodicea spiritually poor, but they were *"blind"* to their own spiritual poverty.
   1. In boasting of their own wealth, the church of Laodicea trumpeted their own sin. It is not a sin to be rich, but it is a sin to claim that you no longer need anything.
   2. As a Christian leader with a successful ministry, it can certainly be easy to be tempted to interpret your own success as a blessing from God. But one's success, if any, must always be compared to God's Word, not to what one humanly and worldly believes to be success.
3. There is a strong similarity between the church in Laodicea and the majority population in Sweden. Both say of themselves that they are rich and therefore do not need God but are self-sufficient.
   1. Such thinking can change at any second if disaster strikes. Only when people no longer have their wealth or good health is it common to seek God. Therefore, it is better to start seeking God here and now, then you may even avoid ending up in a possible disaster.

[[@Bible:rev 3:18]]Rev 3:18

1. Laodicea, as mentioned earlier, was famous for its economic success, its textile production and its special eye ointment. Jesus now uses all three of these things, of which the people of Laodicea were so proud, to show that they should put their trust in Jesus instead of their worldly successes.
   1. The economic success of banking in Laodicea did not lead to spiritual wealth, rather the opposite. But for those who want to be *"rich"* in the real sense, seen through God's eyes, they can turn to Jesus at any time and receive God's gifts.
   2. Laodicea was known for its black woollen cloths, but Jesus offers instead *"white clothes"*, symbolising purity and God's forgiveness.
   3. In order to receive Jesus' *"eye salve"*, the church in Laodicea must first realize that they cannot see. Only those who humble themselves can receive what Jesus offers.

[[@Bible:rev 3:19]]Rev 3:19

1. Jesus totally dissents from the church in Laodicea, and it could easily be that many in the church probably felt completely rejected, so Jesus adds that he rebukes them because he actually loves them. The worst thing for the church would have been if Jesus had remained silent and left them to their own devices.
2. Jesus invites the church to turn away from its self-sufficiency and turn towards Jesus.

[[@Bible:rev 3:20]]Rev 3:20

1. Jesus made the great and wonderful offer of salvation to the church at Laodicea. Jesus stands outside the door and knocks. And Jesus makes this offer to all people when he says *"if anyone hears my voice"*, if anyone opens the door, he or she will be saved.
2. In the Middle East, eating together was a strong sign of community and togetherness.
3. Jesus does not address this offer specifically to the church, but to individuals. It is important to understand that as an *individual* you need to open the door to Jesus. Jesus does not force his way in, but waits patiently for us to accept his offer and open the door.
   1. But it is not very likely that you will open the door if you have not first heard Jesus knock or call. In the same way, it is not very likely that you will accept Jesus as your Saviour if you have not first heard the word of God proclaimed.

[[@Bible:rev 3:21]]Rev 3:21

1. The one who repents, puts his trust in Jesus, and thus *"wins"* over a weak and compromising faith that puts its trust in itself instead of Jesus, will sit with Jesus on his throne.

[[@Bible:rev 3:22]]Rev 3:22

1. The message of this letter was primarily addressed to the church in Laodicea, but at the same time it was a general message to all Christians who are in similar situations.
2. Few Christians want to identify themselves with the church of Laodicea, but if you who read this feel in your heart that the Spirit is speaking to you, then you should listen to the words of Jesus and take heed of the criticism and repent. There are great blessings in store for those who do so.