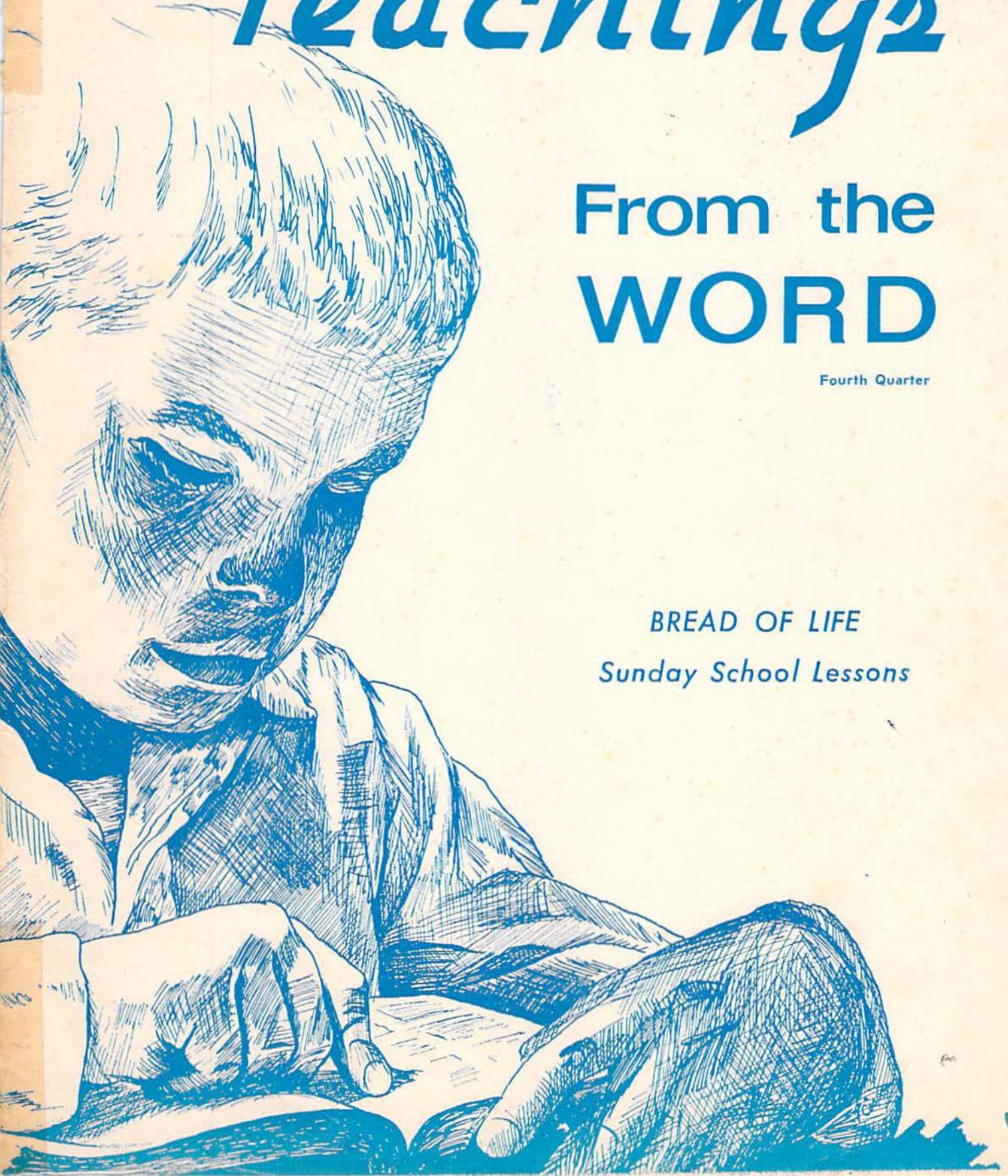


Teachings

From the
WORD

Fourth Quarter

BREAD OF LIFE
Sunday School Lessons



BREAD OF LIFE

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

TEACHINGS FROM THE WORD

THIS is the final quarterly in the Bible study called "Teachings From The Word." Emphasizing the doctrinal truths found in God's Word this study has covered the Bible in one year. As much as possible this study has followed the historical narrative of the Bible.

With the exception of the last lesson in this quarterly all of the enclosed lessons are taken from the New Testament. The first lesson in the quarterly is entitled "The Feast of Dedication." Since the origin of this feast is not mentioned in the Bible although the feast itself is, the notes on the first lesson cover much of the history of the origin of this event. An outgrowth of what was called the "Maccabean Revolt" this feast is celebrated to this day as the "festival of lights" or Hanukkah.

Three lessons are then devoted to three groups of people the Lord and His disciples had a great deal to do with. They are the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Publicans. Each group presents interesting and beneficial lessons for us all.

The next lessons have to do with the Kingdom of God. Beginning with a study of the life and ministry of John the Baptist, this subject is further covered by using three of the parables the Lord taught regarding the Kingdom.

Although it is mentioned frequently in the prophecy of the Bible and while it is a major event in the history of the Jewish nation, the "Destruction of Jerusalem" is rarely covered in Sunday school curriculums. This subject is treated here because of its significance in the fulfillment of prophecy.

Four lessons from the book of Revelation conclude this series of Bible studies. This book is one of the most important which God has given to His people for this age. The attempts of Satan to surround this book with confusion and misunderstanding should give us an indication of how strenuously he is seeking to keep God's people from knowing those truths the Lord has prepared for them. This alone should make us redouble our efforts to know this book.

Many fanciful ideas have sprung from Revelation. Carefulness and much prayer are absolute prerequisites for knowing this book. Let the Holy Spirit illuminate these words and let simplicity be a watchword. Avoid trying to force a meaning or a timetable for these words other than those the Bible itself provides.

Three of the lessons from Revelation are named "The Lion Of Judah", "The Lamb", and "The Conquering Word", three designations of the Lord Jesus Christ. Concluding the series is the final lesson taken from both Revelation and Genesis, "The End and the Beginning". This lesson covers the same ground as the first lesson of the series but shows the final restoration of those things brought to ruin in the beginning. This is the lesson teaching the final victory of the Lord.

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FEAST OF DEDICATION

DAILY READINGS:

Monday:	John 10:22-42
Tuesday:	Daniel 11:1-35
Wednesday:	Psalm 113
Thursday:	Psalm 114
Friday:	Psalm 115
Saturday:	Psalm 116, 117
Sunday:	Psalm 118

MEMORY VERSE:

From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the Lord's name is to be praised (Psalm 113:3).

INTRODUCTION:

Even though the four hundred years which elapsed between the last book of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New are called "silent years," they were years filled with events of great historical importance. It was during this era that both the Greek and Roman empires rose to their magnificent heights. The Greek empire rose first as Alexander the Great, in only eleven short years (c. 323 - 312 B.C.), extended the Greek government over most of the then-known world. At his death his kingdom was divided among his four leading generals. From these there emerged two dominant dynasties, the Ptolemies who ruled Egypt and the Seleucids who ruled over Syria.

LESSON NOTES:

The Maccabees: Strife and warfare became a way of life between these two powers for several hundred years as both sought supremacy in the Middle East. In approximately 168 B.C., the Seleucid ruler of Syria, Antiochus Epiphanes, invaded Egypt. To his great surprise, he was confronted by a general of the Roman army. Rome was just then rising to world power and beginning to make its influence felt in the world. Forced to cease and desist in his invasion of Egypt by the Roman general, Antiochus returned to Syria in anger.

Situated as it was between Egypt and Syria, Israel had long been the political football of these two constantly warring factions. Smarting over his rebuff, Antiochus spent his fury on the hapless Jews. Seizing Jerusalem, he robbed it of its wealth, stripped the temple and confiscated its treasures. He then committed the great sacrilege of desecrating the temple, devoting it to heathen worship and offering a sow upon the altar as a sacrifice.

Throughout the entire land this desecration of holy places went on. People were further forced to renounce all they held dear and made to accept a heathen Greek culture. A priest of the order of Joiarib (see Neh. 12:6,7), by the name of Mattathias, revolted against these practices. Along with his sons, he tore down the altar at Modin, killed a Syrian general and several of his men, and urged his countrymen to defy the Syrians. Of his many sons, Judas, called Maccabaeus, became

the leader of a strong force of guerrillas who for many years waged war with the Syrians in what is known as the "Maccabean Revolt." During a lull in this guerrilla warfare, after three years of success, Judas was able to rebuild the temple and restore divine worship. A joyous celebration of feasting and singing marked the event. Since that time, this event has been observed yearly as the festival of "lights" (Hanukkah), also called the "feast of dedication."

Feast of Dedication: It was during the observance of this feast several hundred years later that Jesus was approached in Jerusalem by some Jews wanting to know more of His origin (see John 10:22-24). It is obvious that the Jews' idea of a Messiah was someone like Judas Maccabaeus, one who would lead a revolt and restore again the sovereignty of Israel. The observance of the feast, no doubt, stirred such patriotic fervor anew. In response to their demand that He tell them "plainly" if He be the Christ, He spoke of His followers as sheep (hardly the type to incite revolution) and spoke of His mission as giving "eternal life," not freedom from Rome. Then when He asserted that He and the Father were one, they considered Him to have committed the ultimate blasphemy and prepared to stone Him (v. 31).

To Jesus the works that He did were the overriding proof that He was the Anointed (Christ) of the Father and one with Him. While the Jews were willing to accept His good works, they were not willing, as was Nicodemus, to accept these good works as a sign of the true identity of Jesus and the essence of the kingdom of God. They never saw the kingdom as freedom from personal bondage and as a deliverance from sin and its effect. Thus these supposed "builders" of the kingdom were rejecting the very Stone on which the kingdom would be built (Psa. 118:22).

The Lessons: It is generally agreed that Daniel's prophecies deal with the coming of the kingdom of God. The amazing accuracy with which his prophecies of the events leading up to the inauguration of the kingdom have been fulfilled is evident by comparing world history from his day onward with his prophecies. For example, the great conflict between the Greeks and Persians in which the last of the Persian rulers (Xerxes) set out to destroy the emerging Greek nation and was himself thoroughly defeated is a historic fact and accurately foretold in Daniel 11:1,2. Alexander the Great's rise and conquests thereafter are described in verses 3 and 4. The subsequent intrigues between the prince of the north (Syria) and the prince of the south (Egypt) are also minutely detailed in this chapter. The pollution of the sanctuary and the "strong" exploits of those who "knew their God" (an acknowledged reference to the Maccabees) are discussed in verses 31 and 32. This entire period of history was foretold several hundred years earlier, and its accurate fulfillment down to the minutest detail has occurred. The kingdom also which Daniel foretold is a present reality.

The conflict between the ideas of the Jews in Jesus' day and Jesus' ministry was in the works which constituted the kingdom. Outward works of great political significance were what the leaders expected of the Messiah. The works of personal deliverance from the effects of sin were what Jesus pointed to as His cre-

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PHARISEES

DAILY READINGS:

Monday:	Matthew 23:1-33
Tuesday:	Matthew 12:1-21
Wednesday:	Matthew 12:22-45
Thursday:	Matthew 15:1-20
Friday:	Luke 5:16-26
Saturday:	Luke 16:1-18
Sunday:	John 12:12-43

MEMORY VERSE:

For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20).

INTRODUCTION:

When the Maccabees rose up in revolt against the practices of Antiochus Epiphanes, much of their support came from a group of "pious ones" who for years had maintained the purity of their worship and had resisted all foreign attempts to destroy their religion. Having their origin around the time of the captivity, it was this group of "pious ones" who rigidly maintained separation from all Babylonian influences. From them came the scribes who preserved the Scriptures and organized the synagogues as places of worship. They were the ones who were willing to turn their backs on Babylon when the opportunity was given to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. Shortly after the time of the Maccabees, the successors to these "pious ones" became the nucleus of the party which eventually became known as the Pharisees.

LESSON NOTES:

Moses' Seat: Originally a "holiness" movement preaching purity and separation from all defilement, the party of the Pharisees in Jesus' day had come a long way from their original purpose. Although they had no official status in either the government or priesthood of Israel according to the organizations set forth by Moses, they had become respected as the guardians of the religious life and the teachers and interpreters of the law. Special schools existed for the young man who wanted to become a "rabbi" and join the party of the Pharisees (see Acts 22:3).

Anyone who desired to observe in the strictest manner all ordinances of Levitical purity and who was willing to become punctilious in tithing and paying dues could become a Pharisee. The Pharisees' zeal in securing proselytes was well known (Matt. 23:15). Candidates were formally admitted into the party in the presence of three members. The common people deferred to these "teachers" of the law, regarding them, because of their education and devotion, as the ultimate authority on faith and practice. Occasionally, the Pharisees took advantage of this authority, especially with the ignorant or unprotected. They were full of extortion, and widows were a special prey for their covetousness (Matt. 23:14, 25; Luke 16:14).

Sitting as they did in "Moses' seat," Jesus respected them for their position and encouraged the general public as well as His disciples to do as the Pharisees taught (Matt. 23:3). On several occasions He held them up as examples of the standard of righteousness required of His followers (Matt. 5:20). The Lord had little quarrel with their teaching. It was their actions He condemned.

Hypocrites: Some of the Lord's strongest words were directed at these religious leaders. "Serpents," "vipers," "hypocrites," are just some of the words He used to denounce their practices. They, of course, smarted from these rebukes and saw Jesus as a threat to their position in the land. Therefore, they constantly sought to trip Him up before the people and find fault with Him.

Much of the motivation for becoming a Pharisee was in the position they held among the people. To be sure, there were those as Nicodemus and Saul (Paul) whose motives may have been deeper. But it was the respect, the high esteem, and the deference to their position which they loved and which drove many to become Pharisees. Being recognized and greeted in the marketplace as "Rabbi," having the chief seats and upper rooms at feasts, being seen engaged in religious observance and highly regarded for it was their supreme joy. As a result, their religion was entirely external and superficial. This was the essence of the Lord's condemnation of them. Inwardly they were more corrupt than the practices they piously decried.

Their religion was entirely an outward show. Their prayers were a pretense, not a desire to meet God and serve Him. They sought an appearance of righteousness while inwardly they were full of iniquity. Outward observance to a strict and unbending code was more important than the "weightier" matters of mercy, truth and justice. Traditions of the elders were more important than the laws they contradicted. Their open covetousness was in direct violation of the law they claimed to uphold. Murderous intentions were not beyond their wicked hearts, despite the sixth commandment. They condoned in their own lives what they condemned in others.

The Lessons: There is no guarantee that any "holiness" movement will not get sidetracked as did that of the Pharisees. The original "puritans" and "separatists," these people were once genuinely concerned with personal holiness before God. Church history gives ample evidence of how time and again, movements which began with sincere desires to please God in the inner thoughts and life degenerated into sects of people who proudly maintained a name but lacked the substance which made the name. Pentecost as a movement is no less vulnerable than its predecessors. Unless doctrines go deeper into shaping our behaviour, we will become as shallow and empty of reality as were the Pharisees.

The spirit of the Pharisee is not peculiar to that party. Pharisee-ism might be defined as human nature in its fullest expression. Proud, egotistical, and self-centered, the spirit of the Pharisee is present in us all. Who does not like to be well spoken of, to have others remark about how devout and holy we are? This nature is a part of us, and the danger is that our whole life will consist of works done only to be seen of men,

(Continued on last page)

SADDUCEES

DAILY READINGS:

Monday:	Acts 23:1-10
Tuesday:	Matthew 3:1-12
Wednesday:	Matthew 16:1-12
Thursday:	Matthew 22:23-33
Friday:	Luke 20:27-38
Saturday:	Acts 4:1-21
Sunday:	Acts 5:12-33

MEMORY VERSE:

Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God (Matt. 22:29).

INTRODUCTION:

While the Pharisees were the most dominant religious party in the days of Jesus, there were other groups in existence. Among these was the party of the Sadducees. Much smaller in numbers than the Pharisees and less influential doctrinally among the common people, the Sadducees were nevertheless a powerful factor in the government of Judah. Aristocratic and proud they dominated the ruling council of the land. Their power was derived through consistent cooperation with the heathen powers which occupied Israel. This aroused the hatred of most of the land, particularly the Pharisees. Whereas the Pharisees were strict separatists, the Sadducees were compromisers. They did anything to maintain the status quo.

LESSON NOTES:

Origin and Doctrine: Little is known of the origin of the Sadducees. As a party under that name, they appear to have originated around the time of the Maccabees as a counter movement to them and the Pharisees. The Sadducees were those who willingly accepted heathen culture as a means of maintaining their life and position, while the Pharisees fought the foreigners to the death. Some claim the Sadducees were descendants of Zadok, the high priest of Solomon's day (1 Kings 1:32,34,38,45), and derived their name from him. Essentially the Sadducees were from the priestly tribe. As such they represented a corrupt priesthood. This is not to say that all priests were Sadducees. By the same token, the Pharisees were generally speaking from the common people of Israel.

The root meaning of Sadducee is "the righteous one"; however, they were not known for their righteousness. What they were known for was their teaching which denied the resurrection and the existence of spirits and angels (Acts 23:8). A life beyond death with rewards for the righteous and punishment for the unrighteous was not recognized by them even though they acknowledged the existence of an everlasting God. Denying a spirit world, they were completely materialistic in outlook. Strange that a priesthood which at one time was so intimately acquainted with the supernatural should develop such a doctrine!

Practise: While the Pharisees and Sadducees had

bitter doctrinal and political differences (which Paul at one time skillful exploited—see Acts 23:1-10), they co-existed in the ruling council of elders which was known as the Sanhedrin. They were very much united in their opposition to Jesus, though from the Sadducees' view, it was more from a desire to suppress a movement which would upset the governmental structure than from differences in teaching. Sadducees had little support from the common people in their doctrine as it was, so had little to lose from Jesus' teachings. They would, however, live in constant dread of an uprising which would bring the heavy hand of Rome down stronger on the land and jeopardize their power and position.

Together with the Pharisees they received the denunciation of both John the Baptist and Jesus (Matt. 3:7; 16:1-6). Arrogant and overbearing because of their position and heritage, they were blind to their true spiritual condition (Matt. 3:7-9). As the supposed shepherds of God's people, they came under double condemnation for their failure to lead them aright.

Attempting to discredit and ridicule the teachings of the resurrection, they once presented Jesus with a hypothetical case based on the Mosaic Law (Matt. 22:23-33). It must have been embarrassing to them to have their hypocrisy exposed and to be told publicly they knew neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. Emphasizing both the resurrection and angels, the Lord's answer astonished the multitudes who heard it for its authority (vv. 30-33).

Almost all of the persecution which the early church endured came from the Sadducees (Acts 4:1; 5:17). This is natural since the preaching and power of the disciples hit at the very foundation of the Sadducees' doctrine (Acts 4:2). A resurrected Christ completely destroyed their teaching, and the presence of a Holy Spirit who empowered and miraculously healed people was intolerable. The spontaneous growth of this movement frightened them. Imagine how they grimaced when possibly it was suggested that only an angel could have opened the secure prison and allowed the disciples to escape (Acts 5:19, 22-24). Also, it may have been with just a bit of a smile that the learned Pharisee, Gamaliel, counselled the harried Sadducees to desist from their plans to slay the disciples, saying, "If it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it" (Acts 5:33-40). Gamaliel's prophecy proved correct. The Sadducees failed to overthrow the work of God, and, it might be added, were themselves completely destroyed as a party within a short time. After the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., they were never heard from again.

The Lessons: Compromise always destroys. Something worth compromising is worth nothing. Each compromise must be supported by additional accommodations. The only solution to compromise is hard and fast separation. While the Pharisees had other faults to be avoided, there is a lot to be said for their original narrow-minded goal of purity and separation. Compromising our standards with the standards of this world will destroy our testimony completely. It may seem small and insignificant at first, but each compromise brings us to the threshold of the next until there is nothing left to compromise. In the same regard, it should be understood that an ecumenical movement

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PUBLICANS

DAILY READINGS:

Monday:	Luke 3:1-17
Tuesday:	Luke 5:27-39
Wednesday:	Luke 7:24-35
Thursday:	Luke 15-1-10
Friday:	Luke 15:11-32
Saturday:	Luke 18:8-14
Sunday:	Luke 19:1-10

MEMORY VERSE:

Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you (Matt. 21:31).

INTRODUCTION:

Even though Israel had its own king, there was no doubt in anyone's mind who had ultimate power and authority in Palestine. Herod was, at best, a nominal ruler whose reign was entirely at the pleasure of the Caesars. Roman soldiers were garrisoned throughout the land within a short march of any possible disturbance. Furthermore, as a subjected nation, every Israelite was forced to pay taxes to Caesar. These were collected by Jewish men who, along no doubt with other choice names reserved for men of their profession, were called "publicans." This term came from the word used for the public treasury, "in publicum," into which these taxes went. As if being a traitor to Israel was not enough, these publicans used their taxing ability to extort as much as possible from their Jewish brethren. Whatever they were able to collect over and above that due to Rome was their personal profit. Many did quite well enriching themselves this way.

LESSON NOTES:

Sinners and Publicans: In the eyes of every Israelite there was no lower level of existence than the publican. They were without exception the rankest of sinners.

Even in this despicable society they retained a separate stigma. When the Israelites spoke of the off-scouring of society, they always used the term, "sinners and publicans" (Luke 5:30). Picture the utter contempt with which those strict separatists, the Pharisees, looked upon these crooked traitors.

We can well imagine the horror with which the Lord's friendship with these publicans was greeted. After all, a man is known by the company he keeps. And what self-respecting man would be caught dead in their company, no less a prophet who claims to be the Messiah. What juicy morsels of gossip must have winged their way through Galilee when this self-styled "king" was caught consorting with harlots, sinners and publicans, even sitting down to eat with them (Luke 15:1,2). More condemning was that one of them, Levi by name, was part of that official group known as His disciples (Luke 5:27,28).

To their credit we find the publicans themselves quite receptive to the gospel. They were well aware

that they were indeed sinners. Many of them came to be baptized of John (Lu. 3:12,13). Others were eager to have this teacher, whose doctrines convicted them, come to their homes for lengthy discussions. Many there were who brought fruits "worthy of repentance" and found friendship and the acceptance which society had denied them.

Parables: As a response to the murmurings of the Pharisees and scribes, Jesus told three parables including that well-known and beautiful one called "The Prodigal Son" (Luke 15). Keep in mind that Jesus was taking aim at the attitude of the Pharisees and scribes over His association with the publicans. While all three parables very graphically portray the Lord's intense desire to seek and save the lost, the primary lesson of each of them is the joy which accompanies the finding of the lost. The lost sheep is brought home rejoicing (vv. 5-7). Similarly the woman finding the lost coin rejoices when it is found and invites all of her friends in to share her joy (vv. 9,10). And without exception the major point in the parable of the prodigal son is the joy of the father at the wayward boy's return. Contrasted with this is the grumbling of the elder son over this rejoicing, to which the father replied, "It is meet that we should make merry and be glad: for this thy brother was dead and is alive again; and was lost and is found" (v. 32).

Clearly the Pharisees should have rejoiced that their brothers (the publicans) were finding salvation. That is, this would be true if they were sincerely interested in their spiritual condition. After all, this would have removed the greater part of the complaint they had against the publicans by making them honest and responsible citizens. But in their own self-righteousness they had no feeling for these who went astray. They were angry that as righteous "elder brothers" they never received the approbation they felt they had earned.

The Lessons: Never do we read that the Lord ever condoned the sin of the publican or of any other sinner, for that matter. He was always forthright in making them to see their sin and their need for repentance. As a general rule, however, the publicans were responsive to this message, seeing their need and repenting of their sin (Lu. 7:29). For example, note the fruits worthy of repentance which Zacchaeus brought (Lu. 19:1-8). Half of his wealth he gave to the poor, and fourfold restitution was made for that which was dishonestly gained. This is the kind of repentance which brings salvation no matter how deep the sin.

Unfortunately it is the "good" people who find it hardest to accept the teaching that *all* have sinned and all need to repent and turn to God. Those who consider themselves religious are often the most self-satisfied. Religion, no matter by what name (and the Pharisees had the very best), cannot make a man righteous. Neither do good works earn salvation. In another parable the Lord hit at the righteousness of the Pharisees and the blindness it produced. Contrasting the Pharisee with the publican, Jesus illustrated the necessary attitudes for salvation. Coming in honest humility and confession brings justification whereas self-righteous exaltation only leads to destruction (Luke 5:31,32; 18:14).

It is a simple, yet overwhelming, statement that the

(Continued on last page)

JOHN THE BAPTIST

DAILY READINGS:

Monday:	Luke 1:5-25
Tuesday:	Luke 1:57-80
Wednesday:	Mark 1:1-11
Thursday:	John 1:15-36
Friday:	John 3:23-36
Saturday:	Matthew 11:2-19
Sunday:	Matthew 14:1-12

MEMORY VERSE:

This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee (Luke 7:27).

INTRODUCTION:

"Among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist." With these words the Lord assessed the ministry of John (Matt. 11:11). Considering all the great men who preceded him in both secular and Biblical history, this statement takes on immense proportions. Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Daniel, Isaiah, etc., were all great men in their day and respective fields, but none of them achieved the greatness of John the Baptist. Yet judging from the emphasis on his life and ministry today, one would get the impression that few share the opinion of the Lord Jesus on this matter. What was there about his work which made Jesus speak so highly of John?

LESSON NOTES:

What Manner of Child: From the very moment his birth was prophesied by an angel, the unusual surrounded the life of John the Baptist. Born of deeply spiritual parents, who have the remarkable testimony that they were both righteous and "walked in all the commandments of the Lord blameless" (Luke 1:6), the very circumstances attending his birth caused people to wonder at what manner of child this was (1:66).

In addition to specifically instructing Zacharias to name the child "John," the angel prophesied that this child would be *great* in the sight of the Lord, that many would *rejoice* at his birth, that he would *turn* people to God for the express purpose of making ready a people *prepared for the Lord* (vv. 13-17). To Zacharias this meant but one thing: the day of the Lord was at hand, and the Messiah was about to be revealed to His people. John was to make the way ready for this event.

All of this is borne out by the magnificent prophecy which Zacharias gave at the child's naming (vv. 68-79). There are two parts to this prophecy. In the first (vv. 68-75), Zacharias gives praise to God for raising "an horn of salvation" in fulfillment of prophecies which had been given "since the world began." In the second part, Zacharias prophesied the part which John was to play in this event (vv. 76-79). John was to be a prophet of the Highest; he was to prepare His way, by giving knowledge of salvation. Throughout the days

of his growing up in the deserts until his shewing unto Israel, the hand of the Lord was with him (vv. 66,80).

Beginning of the Gospel: Despite the brevity of his gospel, Mark begins with the ministry of John the Baptist (Mark 1:2). All four Gospels include the work of John as an integral part of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Central to the ministry of John was the message of preparation, getting ready for the Lord. The very keynote of his ministry was the cry, "Repent." Baptism was an outward sign reflecting the inner commitment and change of those who heeded the cry (Mk. 1:3,4).

Arriving on the scene as he did and preaching the message that he did, John created "no small stir" in Judah. Many came to be baptized, and many others came out of curiosity. Excited discussions took place as to who he was. Emphatically John denied he was the Christ or "that" prophet and either did not know or in humility would not claim to be Elijah (John 1:21). He was simply "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord" in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.

John always pointed to the greater ministry of the Man whose way he was preparing (Mk. 1:7,8). John's baptism was not the ultimate baptism; the baptism of the Holy Ghost was, which only Jesus could give. Later, as Jesus' ministry increased in popularity, the people tried to bait John and make him jealous (John 3:26). Knowing his place, with tremendous character and humility, John gave place to Jesus (v. 30). An indication of the popularity of John as well as his strength of conviction is seen in his encounter with Herod. He had the ear of the ruler of the land and was fearless even in condemning his sin. For this he gave his life.

The Lessons: A further investigation of the Lord's assessment of the work of John reveals additional interesting comments. He was "more than a prophet." The last of the Old Testament prophets, John was the fulfillment of the prophecy regarding a "messenger" who was to precede the Messiah (Mal. 3:1). Zacharias, Jesus, and John himself all refer to this prophecy. The Old Testament era ended with John, for "all the law and the prophets were until John." Finally Jesus definitely stated that John was the "Elias (Elijah) which was for to come" (Matt. 11:9-14).

The time was "at hand." God was fulfilling all His prophecies. These were not for a natural kingdom but for visiting and redeeming His people, for raising a horn of *salvation*, to save people from their enemy (Satan), and to perform the promised mercy that people might serve Him (Luke 1:68-75). All this was fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus for whom John prepared the way. This ministry had to do with man's inner conditions, not his outward circumstances.

Jesus could not be manifested without John's ministry (John 1:31). Neither is it possible today to experience the blessings of the kingdom of God without beginning where John began, with repentance. This is the door to the kingdom. From John's repeated reference to the fact that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Ghost indicates that this baptism was to be *central* to the work of Jesus in establishing His kingdom. This is supported by other Scriptures. It is a disservice to the purpose of God to separate John from Jesus and to ignore the unity of their respective ministries.

A CERTAIN MAN

DAILY READINGS:

Monday:	Matthew 21:23-32
Tuesday:	Psalm 80
Wednesday:	Isaiah 5:1-7
Thursday:	Matthew 3:1-12
Friday:	Luke 3:1-18
Saturday:	Luke 7:18-35
Sunday:	Luke 15:1, 2, 11-32

MEMORY VERSE:

Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham (Luke 3:8).

INTRODUCTION:

Parables were a favorite method used by the Lord to teach those who desired to "learn of Him." Used extensively, the parables were "stories" which He told to illustrate and to make memorable specific points in His teachings. As someone has said, "Parables are earthly stories with heavenly meanings." Careful attention to the circumstances which prompted a particular parable is often a key to its meaning. All of the Lord's parables are interesting, pointed, and highly instructive.

LESSON NOTES:

A Certain Man: At least two parables begin with "a certain man." One is familiar to us as the parable of "The Prodigal Son." The other is simply that of the "two sons" who, when asked to work in their father's vineyard (Matt. 21:28-32), gave two different answers. The varying responses form the basis of understanding this latter parable.

It was to illustrate the failure of the Jewish rulers to accept the authority of John the Baptist and His own ministry as well, that Jesus told this parable. The rulers considered themselves as those who above all were "about their Father's business," while in reality they remained deaf to the Father's call.

Two classes of people are shown: those who at first absolutely refuse to heed the Father's call but who later turn around and obey the Father's wishes, and those who *claim* to serve God but then fail to do His will. The moral of the story is contained in the question, "Whether of them twain did the will of his father?" (Matt. 21:31). The obvious answer was given by the rulers. Then Jesus pointed out how the parable fitted them. Note that throughout the Bible the "vineyard" is always understood to mean the object of God's attention and love. Specifically, in the Old Testament it refers to natural Israel (see Isa. 5:1-7). In the New Testament it refers, of course, to the "spiritual" Israel (see John 15:1,2).

Repentance: The essential difference between the two sons in this parable is that one eventually went to work in his father's vineyard, whereas the other never

did. The key to the one son's service was the recognition that he was doing wrong and his "turning back" to obey the father. Note that both had need of repenting, for at one point neither was doing the father's will. This turning back is the meaning of the term "repent." Contrary to this was the other son's refusal to see his error in claiming to do his father's work but not doing it. He went ahead, following his own will.

Throughout the history of Israel, godly prophets and leaders often recognized that the people had gotten away from serving God. This always led to loss and failure on their part. In Psalm 80 we have such a righteous man's prayer in which he cries out three times, "Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved" (vv. 3,7,19). It was this "turning" which John the Baptist preached when he called on people to "repent."

Repentance is an absolute necessity for the remission of sins (Lu. 3:8). As the meaning of the word implies, it is more than just feeling bad about a certain act or our conduct as a whole; it means turning away from that way of living and changing our actions completely. Repentance is measured by the "fruits" thereof (v. 9). The fruit of the one son's repentance was his abandonment of his stubborn refusal and his change of heart in going to work in the father's vineyard. Corresponding to this was the general acceptance by the harlots and publicans of the message which John preached. Their "fruits" of repentance was the abandonment of their sinful lives and the turning to God to obey His Word. This they openly signified by being publicly baptized by John.

The Lessons: Perhaps the greatest sin of the rulers and Pharisees was their "lip service" to God. This was exactly the fault of the one son who *said*, "I will go," but who didn't. Lip service may have eased their own consciences and may have given them a good reputation, but it did not please the Father, for His will was not done. Examination ought to be made of our service to God. Is it only the honoring of God with our lips, or does it go deeper and affect our lives? Do we *say*, "Thy will be done," and then go ahead and do our own will? It was this type of lip service which forced God to bring judgment on His people (Isa. 29:13). The deeds of the heart, not the statements of our mouths, count with God.

The "fruits" or "grapes" which God expects from His vineyard are righteousness and judgment. These relate to our standing before God and our relationships with man. It was to secure these "grapes" that God took His plant out of Egypt and tenderly planted it and cared for it so lovingly and patiently (see Psa. 80:8-15; Isa. 5:1-7). Instead they brought forth "wild grapes" of oppression and injustice.

Only as we turn to God with the desire to serve Him can we bear the fruit He desires. A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit. Turning to God requires a turning away from sin, for no man can serve two masters. Note that in the parable of the prodigal son, it wasn't until the young man *abandoned completely* his sinful life and returned to the father's house that he enjoyed the privilege of sonship. His repentance was genuine. His "fruits," worthy of repentance, were his recognition of the fact that he wasn't pleasing his father, followed by his resolution to do what was expected of him. It was this counsel of God which John preached and which the Pharisees and lawyers rejected.

A CERTAIN HOUSEHOLDER

DAILY READINGS:

Monday:	Matthew 21:33-46
Tuesday:	Hebrews 1:1-14
Wednesday:	Mark 12:1-12
Thursday:	Hebrews 11:36-12:2
Friday:	Luke 20:9-18
Saturday:	Mark 6:14-29
Sunday:	Psalms 118

MEMORY VERSE:

Therefore I say unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof (Matt. 21:43).

INTRODUCTION:

Having concluded one parable in which He unmasked the blindness and hypocrisy of the rulers and Pharisees in their failure to respond to the authority of John's preaching, Jesus immediately went on with another which was even more pointed. Again, He used the illustration of the vineyard. The striking correspondence between Matthew 21:33 and Isaiah 5:2 makes the meaning of this parable unmistakable. So clear was the message that the people were prompted to say, "God forbid," at the judgment which the parable promised (see Matt. 21:45 and Luke 20:16). This could have been an exclamation of horror, or it might have expressed their feeling that such a sentence could never happen. In any case, the meaning of the parable was not beyond their comprehension.

LESSON NOTES:

The Vineyard: While much of the correspondence between the parable and reality is obvious, other parts are more subtle and require thoughtful study. At the same time, there is a danger of forcing a meaning for every person, place, or thing within the parable. Many times, the Lord included things in His description simply to complete a picture, and each detail does not necessarily have some hidden meaning. Prayerful study and comparing Scripture with Scripture are necessary for the proper illumination of each parable. Parables are intended to reveal, not to conceal the truth.

The vineyard is a picture of the kingdom; it represents the nation Israel (see Psa. 80:8-16; Isa. 5:1-5; 27:1-7). Note that to the Israelite there was no property so valuable nor esteemed to yield such large returns as a vineyard. It required, however, increasing diligence and effort on the part of the vinedresser in order for it to yield its fruit. Thus this example from everyday life was the perfect illustration of a spiritual truth.

This parable describes the sweep of history of God's dealings with His people. If the vineyard represents the nation of Israel, then the husbandmen correspond to the spiritual chiefs and leaders of the land. Furthermore, the servants sent to receive the fruit are the prophets and other more eminent messengers of God raised up at critical periods, having distinct missions.

Many of these prophets were not only mistreated but some were put to death as, for example, John the Baptist (see Mark 6:19-27). Tradition says that Jeremiah was stoned to death and that Isaiah was sawn asunder. Abundant examples of the mistreatment of God's servants are found in the Bible (see Jer. 37:15; I Kings 18:13; 22:24-27; 2 Kings 6:31; 2 Chron. 36:15,16; Acts 7:52; Heb. 11:37,38).

The Son: The householder is, of course, the person who has planted and cared for the vineyard and the one to whom the fruit of the vineyard rightfully belongs. Jesus also called him the "lord of the vineyard" in this parable (Matt. 21:40). Where Matthew states that he "went into a far country," Luke adds "for a long while" (Matt. 21:33; Lu. 20:9). One thing is exceedingly evident, the householder was a man of great patience. He had just cause to take severe action against the wicked husbandmen right from the very beginning but did not. Could there be a better picture of the mercy and longsuffering of God? (See Jer. 44:4 and Neh. 9:26.)

In a final attempt, the "lord of the vineyard" sent his own son to the vineyard. Mark and Luke, respectively, call him his "one son, his wellbeloved" (Mark 12:6) and "my beloved son" (Luke 20:13). It was this son whom they slew in their greed for full and uncontested control of the vineyard. That this referred to Jesus is evident from the Jews' reaction to the parable, from the events which took place, and from other Scriptures. Jesus was the "only begotten" and "beloved Son" of the Father and the "heir" of all things (see John 3:16; Matt. 3:17, Heb. 1:2).

Having exhausted this illustration and having made His point clear to His hearers, Jesus switched allegories while continuing His thought. The rulers' own sense of fair play and justice caused them to pronounce their own judgment (Matt. 21:41) in much the same way as David unwittingly convicted himself when confronted by Nathan's parable. Referring to a well-known statement in Psalm 118, which the Jews acknowledged to be Messianic, Jesus showed how the desire of the householder would be fulfilled in spite of the wicked husbandmen. He would use their own evil deeds to accomplish His purposes. The builders obviously correspond to the husbandmen. Though they perceived that He spoke of them, they went ahead with their desire to slay Him.

The Lessons: It is evident from the parable that possession of the vineyard was not permanent and irrevocable. The Jews themselves recognized the foolishness of allowing the vineyard to be possessed by those who consistently refused to bring forth the fruits thereof. It was not taken from them to be returned to them at a later date. Rather it was given to a "nation" which would bring forth fruit. That nation is the "holy nation," called from among all people.

As a nation, the Jews were indeed a fortunate people. It was to them that God had revealed His will for mankind. His holy law was in their possession. Through many prophets they had the blueprint to God's plan for the ages. All these privileges were given to prepare them for the fullness of God's blessing. It is only natural, therefore, that God should expect them to receive His Son. When they would not have "this man reign" over them, God gave this kingdom to the "holy

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A CERTAIN KING

DAILY READINGS:

Monday:	Matthew 22:1-14
Tuesday:	Matthew 10:1-15
Wednesday:	Acts 3:12-4:3; 5:40,41
Thursday:	Acts 13:26-48
Friday:	Acts 18:1-17
Saturday:	Acts 28:16-31
Sunday:	Luke 21:5-24

MEMORY VERSE:

Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it (Acts 28:28).

INTRODUCTION:

Different teachings regarding the kingdom of God are given in different parables. Where one parable describes the historical setting of the kingdom, another concerns itself with teaching on its inner nature. Still another parable may be given to describe the characteristics of the kingdom and a separate parable may be used to show the various reactions of people to its preaching. Each parable has its own message. It is an error to try and force correspondence between parables as to structure, detail, or message. Each must be studied for the particular lesson or truth it reveals regarding the kingdom.

LESSON NOTES:

The Call: In the parable of the wedding of the king's son, Jesus was describing the reception given the preaching of the kingdom among those to whom it was first preached and then goes on to prophesy God's response to this reception. Three major sections are evident in the parable (see Matt. 22:1-14). In the first section, the Lord showed how the message of the kingdom was received. Next, He described the reaction of the "king" to this response. In the third section, lest there be any wrong impressions, the Lord shows how the eligibility for the kingdom does not change despite the change in guests. Remember that this parable was taught during the last week of the Lord's life when the rulers of Israel had already made firm their decision to execute Jesus.

Much of the parable is clothed in customs familiar to that particular day and culture. Wedding invitations, we are told, were sent out in advance, and a guest list compiled. This is no different from today. What is different is that on the day of the wedding, messengers or "servants" were sent out to "call them that were (previously) bidden to the wedding." It was as inconceivable to the Lord's hearers, as it is to us today, that these honored guests would have reacted as they did to these messengers. Certainly the one event for which all schedules should have been rearranged would have been the wedding of the king's son. Having had an invitation so much in advance, it was nothing short of contempt to turn one's back so casually on this highly privileged social honor. Try to imagine a person refusing to attend a wedding of a child of the

President at the White House or of the son of Queen Elizabeth at Buckingham Palace! It was this point which Jesus wanted to make in this parable.

The contrast of activities they regarded as being more important emphasizes the contempt they had for this "once-in-a-lifetime" opportunity. Farms and business, that is, their day-to-day activities, were more important than this great event. Some went so far as to show their hatred for the king by slaying his messengers. Prophetically, the Lord then told what the king would do to the citizens of such a city.

The Guests: The lack of interest among the honored guests did not cause the wedding to be cancelled or postponed. The wedding was "ready," and nothing was going to prevent it (v. 8). Other guests were sought and invited to join in this grand event. Note that in this second scene of the parable (vv. 8-10), the servants are directed not to any particular people but to any and all, as many as would come, both good and bad, and told to invite them "to the marriage." Many responded, and the wedding was furnished with guests.

Now comes an interesting scene in the parable (vv. 11-14). It is said by some that it is customary in certain oriental countries for the host to provide "wedding garments" for the guests. Whether this is so or not cannot be proven conclusively. However, the action of the "king" did not surprise the hearers of the parable, nor did it seem to strike them as arbitrary and unjust. Whatever the custom, one of the guests was found without a wedding garment upon the inspection of the king himself (vv. 11,12). The guest's speechlessness indicates that he had no excuse to offer in his behalf. To show that the *standards* for admittance did not change despite the "whosoever will," Jesus ended His parable by having the king instruct a servant to bind the unprepared guest and cast him from the occasion. Note that the place without the kingdom is called "outer darkness" (v. 13).

The Lessons: This parable describes the period of history from the preaching of John the Baptist to the destruction of Jerusalem. In addition, it has an application, certainly, to our own day, for the invitation still goes out to enter the kingdom. All of the original preaching of the kingdom was to the Jews only, the original "guest list." Specific instructions were given to the disciples when they were sent out to preach the arrival of the kingdom, that they were not to go to the Samaritans or Gentiles but only to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:5,6). Later, the apostles followed the same pattern until it became evident that the Jews had turned their back on "everlasting life." Then the invitation went to the Gentiles (see Acts 13:46; 18:6; 28:28). The Lord in His instructions gave dire warning to those "cities" which would not receive the words of the disciples (Matt. 10:14,15). All of this was fulfilled in history.

Two ways are seen in the parable of missing the kingdom. The first is to be so preoccupied with earthly things that no time is available for it. Nothing is more important to a man than his soul. The kingdom is eternal; things of this world pass away. "What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" (See also Matt. 6:33.) The second way of missing the kingdom is to deceive ourselves into thinking that we are fit for the kingdom in our own righteousness. There is but one worthy standard, the righteousness of Christ, which is given us by faith in Him.

DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

DAILY READINGS:

Monday:	Matthew 23:13-39
Tuesday:	Matthew 24:1-25
Wednesday:	Mark 13:1-23
Thursday:	Luke 21:5-24
Friday:	1 Thessalonians 2:1-16
Saturday:	Deuteronomy 28:15-44
Sunday:	Deuteronomy 28:45-68

MEMORY VERSE:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate (Matthew 23:37,38).

INTRODUCTION:

On more than one occasion, either directly or indirectly, the Lord, addressing the Jews, especially their rulers, the Pharisees in particular, spoke of the destruction which would come upon them for their rejection of Him. This occurred with increasing frequency towards the end of the Lord's life as the plan of the rulers of the Jews became more and more evident. All of these prophecies culminated in the one given during the final week of the Lord's life. Never were more dreadful words spoken to any nation than those which the Lord publicly addressed to the Pharisees just days before the crucifixion (Matt. 23:29-39). On the same day in which He publicly declared, "Behold, your house is left desolate," He privately instructed a chosen few disciples of the signs relating to the destruction of Jerusalem.

LESSON NOTES:

The Teaching: At the time of the Lord's teaching to Peter, James, John, and Andrew (Mark 13:3), there was absolutely no sign of any potential danger to Jerusalem. The land was relatively peaceful, and there were no disturbances which would threaten the safety of Jerusalem. The temple itself, we are told, was constructed of single stones which were over thirty feet long and eight feet square. No wonder the disciples wondered how such an edifice could be completely leveled to the ground. Further, it is safe to assume that in their minds such a thing could only occur at the "end of the world" (Matt. 24:1-3).

Two questions were asked by the disciples and both were answered by the Lord in what is known to us as the "Olivet Discourse" (Matt. 24:4-25). Occasionally it is difficult to sort out which of the two questions his statement answered. Also, it is possible that an event to occur in answer to the first question was also symbolic of that which would occur in the greater event of the "end of the world." The two questions were, "When shall these things be?" (i.e., the destruction of

the temple) and, "What shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (v. 3).

In answer to these questions, the Lord, generally speaking, confined his answer to the first question first and the second question last. This explanation was given to the disciples to warn them (v. 16). Conclusive proof exists to state that because the disciples were so forewarned not one of the "elect," i.e. the Christians, died in Jerusalem although over one million Jews perished in the destruction of Jerusalem.

The Fulfillment: Two sources provide the historical proof that what the Lord said would happen, did happen. The first is the Bible, and the second is a historian named Josephus, who actually participated in the rebellion which forced Rome to destroy the city.

Almost point for point the Lord's prophecy can be proved to have been fulfilled using these two sources. Only a few can be given here. All of the fulfillment of the first question occurred in the period from 30 A.D. to 70 A.D. when the destruction of Jerusalem was complete. This period proved to be one of the most troublesome in the Roman empire, with nation rising against nation and fearful wars and rumors of war filling the atmosphere (vv. 6,7). It was during this period that the disciples preached the gospel of the kingdom in all the world (v. 14), and when they were delivered up to be afflicted of the authorities and hated of all nations for the sake of the Lord's name (vv. 9,10). It was during this period that the great persecution of Nero's reign occurred.

The "abomination of desolation" mentioned in Matthew 24:15 is described as seeing "Jerusalem compassed with armies" in Luke 21:20. To the Jews, it was the Roman army, particularly with their graven images, which was "the abomination." This occurred in 66 A.D. when the Jews revolted against the yoke of Rome. The Roman army immediately surrounded the city to quell the disturbance. During the next four years there was great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world (Matt. 24:21). Literally thousands were slain every day as the Roman siege brought famine to the city and made barbarians of its inhabitants. In the city of Caesarea we are told that over 20,000 Jews were killed in one hour. At one point the siege was momentarily and miraculously lifted, allowing those who had been forewarned to "flee into the mountains." Later the Roman armies returned in increased fury until the entire city was laid flat in 70 A.D. The final siege was made by Titus. It began at the feast of Passover when the city was filled with inhabitants. Josephus assures us that there were 1,100,000 who perished in this siege and 97,000 captured, many of whom were sold in Egypt as slaves (see Deut. 28:49-68). The temple itself was set on fire and completely destroyed as the Lord's prophecy was literally fulfilled. Josephus further adds that the "multitude of those that perished exceeded all the destructions that either men or God ever fought upon the world." These words correspond almost directly with the Lord's description of that "great tribulation" which would come on His people.

The Lessons: What an example we have here of the thoroughness of God's judgments. It was not the Lord's desire to punish His chosen ones in this way. Often, He would have gathered them as a hen her chicks,

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THE LION OF JUDAH

DAILY READINGS:

Monday:	Revelation 1
Tuesday:	Revelation 2
Wednesday:	Revelation 3
Thursday:	Revelation 4
Friday:	Revelation 5
Saturday:	Revelation 6
Sunday:	Revelation 7

MEMORY VERSE:

And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof (Revelation 5:5).

INTRODUCTION:

After an attempt to execute the Apostle John was supernaturally thwarted, the Roman emperor banished him to the isle of Patmos "for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." It was during this time of exile that God gave to John *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* and commanded him to record it. The book draws back the curtain from the spiritual world and shows the inseparable relationship of that world to the events that take place on the earth. Christ is revealed as the Ruler of all the earth, the "Lion of the tribe of Judah." Right at the start, a blessing is promised to those who will read and keep the sayings of this book. If, instead of trying to figure out the mysterious passages, we will first read the book for its simple instructions, we will be better able to understand the deeper things.

LESSON NOTES:

The Churches: The Apostle John used his exile to good advantage. He obviously spent time waiting on the Lord. He "was in the Spirit on the Lord's day" when he heard the voice of Jesus directing him to write the vision he was about to see, and send it to the seven assemblies in Asia. When John turned to see the Speaker, he was stunned and fell at the feet of the glorified Christ. He saw the Lord walking in the midst of seven golden candlesticks and holding seven stars in His right hand. As in His parables, Christ's own interpretation at the very beginning gives us the key of interpretation, making it obvious that many things in it are in symbolic form.

The messages given to John were to be sent to the seven assemblies named. Each of the messages is introduced by a description of some characteristic of Jesus. Each is followed by a promise, conditioned by an admonition to overcome. With two of the churches the Lord finds no fault. Smyrna is commended for its faithfulness and perseverance in the midst of adverse circumstances and persecution. The Philadelphian assembly is approved for "keeping the word of My patience."

Of the five churches rebuked by the Lord, Pergamos

and Thyatira are admonished to repent of uncleanness, and it is at least implied that many in Sardis were "defiled." The Ephesians are warned that although their works continue unabated for the Lord, their love for Jesus has lost the wonder of its first awakening. Sardis is reproved for not living up to its profession, while the Laodicean church has grown so lukewarm that the Lord threatens to spue it out of His mouth. Each letter concludes with an injunction to hear what the Spirit has said to them.

The Lion of Judah: This title is probably inspired by the prophetic blessing given by Jacob to his son Judah (see Gen. 49:9,10). It illustrates the authority with which the Lord governs the earth and the church and describes one of His primary characteristics. We have already seen Him in this capacity walking in the midst of the seven churches, discerning, reproving, commending, and warning them. Now His authority is manifested in the *heavenlies*. When none in heaven or earth was able to open or even to look on the book in the hand of Him that sat on the throne, "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David. . . prevailed to open the book and to loose the seven seals thereof." All heaven rejoices. The four living creatures and the four and twenty elders fall down before the Lord, having incense, representing the prayers of the saints. They lift their voices with ten thousand times ten thousand angels, and thousands of thousands saying: "Worthy is the Lamb. . ." (see Rev. 5:12).

The Lord is now in absolute control. He looses each successive seal. He is not working aimlessly. The goal is to seal (separate) the true church, judge the apostate church, destroy the wicked out of the earth by a series of judgments, and, finally, to cast Satan and his hordes into the lake of fire. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13:43). Then, the prophetic song of the four living creatures and the four and twenty elders will be fulfilled, "And we shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:10).

The Lessons: The Lord's first concern is for His church. His warnings to the seven assemblies of Asia are as up-to-date as tomorrow morning's newspaper. Many churches which were born in Holy Ghost fire have lost their first love, fail to live up to their profession, indeed, have become so lukewarm that they are content to live in the deceptive smoke of religious activity, never realizing that the Lord is outside their door. We must be vigilant that involvement in church activities and even the work of the Lord never displaces our fervent first love for Himself.

In this permissive era of "the pill," theologians of many church groups are rewriting their moral standards to conform to the prevalent moral and social standards. What could be more timely than the Lord's stern warning against fornication and uncleanness to the churches of Pergamos and Thyatira? Christ's standard is unchanged. It is absolute purity (see Matt. 5:27-32). If we "keep the word of His patience, He will keep us from the hour of temptation (trial) which shall come upon all the world."

As the seals are loosed, the trumpets sounded, and the vials of wrath poured out, it is important that we hide in Him and remember that "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" holds the sceptre. We need not fear, for all these events are under His control.

THE LAMB

DAILY READINGS:

Monday:	Revelation 8
Tuesday:	Revelation 9
Wednesday:	Revelation 10
Thursday:	Revelation 11
Friday:	Revelation 12
Saturday:	Revelation 13
Sunday:	Revelation 14

MEMORY VERSE:

These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb (Revelation 14:4).

INTRODUCTION:

The first acceptable sacrifice mentioned in the Bible was the lamb which Abel offered from his flock. For the Passover the children of Israel killed a lamb. Its blood was sprinkled upon the doorposts and lintel to protect them for the death angel, and it was by feeding on the passover lamb that they obtained strength for the flight from Egypt. These all were types of "the Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world." Little wonder then that John the Baptist introduces Jesus by crying, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" (See John 1:29.) No doubt it was the Apostle John, the author of Revelation, who was Andrew's companion when two of the disciples of John the Baptist became the first followers of the Lamb (see John 1:35-42).

LESSON NOTES:

The Sacrificial Lamb: Over and over again throughout the Book of Revelation heaven resounds with praises to the Lamb. Salvation and redemption are the themes of these outbursts of glory. A great multitude which no man could number of every tribe and tongue and nation, clothed in white robes and waving palms, stands before the throne and the Lamb crying with a loud voice, "Salvation unto our God who sitteth on the throne and unto the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9-10). It was revealed to John that this multitude which had come out of great tribulation had "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Now it was the Lamb, acting as a Shepherd, who was to feed them and to "lead them unto living fountains of water."

Redemption is the theme of the new song of the four living creatures and the four and twenty elders when the Lamb takes the book and prepares to open its seals. "Thou art worthy. . . for Thou wast slain, and has redeemed us to God by Thy blood. . ." (5:9). Another version uses the word "purchased" in place of "redeemed." The hundred and forty-four thousand, which stood with the Lamb on Mount Zion, sang a new song which none could learn but those who were "redeemed from the earth" (14:3).

The primary characteristic of the Lamb is sacrificial. He took our sins and sicknesses upon Himself, bore

them to Calvary, and there took our punishment, redeeming us from the world and its Prince, and reconciling us to God.

The Wrath of the Lamb: To the ungodly the Lamb appears in another character. The kings and great men of the world cry for the rocks and the mountains to fall on them to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb (6:15-17). Those also who worshipped the beast and received his mark are tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the Lamb (14:10). The ten kings who give their power to the beast are overcome as the Lamb leads the "called and chosen and faithful" in war against them (17:14).

Marriage of the Lamb: The Lamb is also portrayed as a bridegroom (19:7). The bride is shown to John in the form of the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God (21:9-10). We are told that the bride has made herself ready and that she is dressed in fine white linen representing the righteousness of saints (see 19:7-8).

Lessons: We are called to be followers of the Lamb. Just as the primary characteristic of the Lamb of God was to humble Himself and become "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross," so we are called upon to obey His commandments which will lead to the crucifixion of the self-life. We are told that the hundred and forty-four thousand which stood with the Lamb on Mount Zion "are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth" (14:4). These followers were pure, redeemed from among men, in their mouth was found no guile, and they were without fault before the throne of God.

It was a long journey from the banks of Jordan to the marriage supper of the Lamb. The squabbling band of disciples that began to follow Jesus from the beginning were not a very promising group. But they *continued* with Him.

Many others began to follow the Lamb but fell by the wayside for one reason or another. The rich young ruler loved his possessions too much. The crowds who followed Christ for the loaves and fishes melted away when He spoke of self-denial. But when all others forsook Him, the twelve disciples remained faithful. When the Lord asked if they would go away also, Peter responded, "To whom shall we go? Thou hast words of eternal life." Although Judas failed and the others wavered at the crucifixion, the eleven remaining disciples followed the resurrected Lamb for forty days. When the Holy Spirit fell on them, they were mightily changed. Their lives became living sacrifices. One by one they fulfilled their courses, received their crowns, and took their places as foundation stones in the New Jerusalem which is described as "the Lamb's wife."

The pattern is clear. We hear the good news: "Behold, the Lamb of God!" and begin to follow Jesus. He manifests His glory to us and step by step leads us to the cross where we are crucified with Him. As we obey His commandments we are loosed from Satan's shackles and sealed with His Holy Spirit.

The enemy of self or flesh may rage, but we may overcome by "the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony." It means our own life also. But following the Lamb does not end with death. There follows the power of His resurrection and finally the great marriage where we are made one with the Lamb, our heavenly Bridegroom. The way is not hard. He said,

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THE CONQUERING WORD

DAILY READINGS:

Monday:	Revelation 15
Tuesday:	Revelation 16
Wednesday:	Revelation 17
Thursday:	Revelation 18
Friday:	Revelation 19
Saturday:	Revelation 20
Sunday:	Revelation 21

MEMORY VERSE:

And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth (Rev. 19:6).

INTRODUCTION:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ is a description of the triumph of the forces of righteousness over the forces of evil. It shows in detail the final victory of the Word of God over the lie of the devil. Jesus Christ was manifested to destroy the works of the devil. His triumph will be complete only when all the hosts of Satan are permanently and completely put out of the way. This is the conquest we read about in Revelation.

LESSON NOTES:

Seven Last Plagues: Several chapters describe what John called "a sign in heaven" which consisted of seven angels (or messengers) having the seven last plagues. These were to be used to execute the final wrath of God upon sin (Rev. 15:1). Evil is completely smitten through the judgment coming from these seven vials. Following the first four plagues, all of which produce terrible physical suffering, we find sinful man still unrepentant and continuing to blaspheme the name of God (16:9). The fifth plague wraps the kingdom of the beast in complete darkness causing its citizens to gnaw their tongues for pain. Despite this awful terror, they continue to blaspheme God.

Preparations for the final battle between the hosts of evil and the forces of righteousness are made following the pouring out of the sixth vial. The seventh vial produces the overthrow of Babylon with a voice from the throne crying, "It is done" (v. 17).

Chapters 17 and 18 are detailed descriptions of the nature of this city called Babylon and its final overthrow. Babylon stands for the complete godlessness of human nature. The "great whore" with whom the inhabitants of the world commit fornication is another representation of the city of Babylon (17:5).

Note that this "city" is clothed in material splendour (17:4; 18:11-16). Material finery has always blinded mankind as to its true condition. Such splendour is not symbolic of God's blessing. In one hour all the riches of Babylon come to nought (18:17). The great city of Babylon is thrown down to be found no more (v. 21).

The Word of God: Several names are given to the

Conqueror in the book of Revelation—the Lamb, the Bridegroom, the King of kings, etc. Among the names given Him is "The Word of God" (19:13). This is not a new name given to the Lord. John in his gospel introduces Him as the Word who was from the beginning, by whom the world was created (John 1:1-5). It was this Word which John in his epistle later called the Word of Life. This Word which was from the beginning, came into the world to be heard, seen, and handled by sinful man, and to bring life to those who received it (1 John 1:1,2).

In the final triumph, the rider of the white horse bears the name, The Word of God. Following Him on white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, are the armies of heaven. Proceeding from His mouth is a sharp sword with which the nations are smitten and the world ruled. This sharp sword can be none other than the Word of God which is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12). In Ephesians the sword of the Spirit is plainly called the Word of God (6:17).

War is made against this Rider and His armies (19:19). From the very beginning in the Garden of Eden, Satan has been warring against God's Word. He attempts to bring it into disrepute and to cast doubt upon it. All of the present day attempts to discredit God's Word are extensions of this warfare. The battle will continue until such time as the Word slays all who war against it.

The Lessons: Throughout the descriptions of the seven last plagues, on at least three occasions, there are words descriptive of and directed to a group of people other than those on whom the judgment will fall. Even as the plagues are about to be poured out we see a host of those who have gotten the victory over the beast singing and praising God (Rev. 15:2,3). This suggests at least a victory over sin which can be enjoyed before its complete elimination. The people of God are privileged to live *now* in the blessings of that final victory.

Just prior to the pouring out of the seventh vial, the Lord speaks to His own people words of admonition, "Behold, I come as a thief" (Rev. 16:15). This is followed with the word, "Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame." These words echo the Lord's repeated final warnings to His disciples (Matt. 24:42-44; 25:13). There is a readiness and watchfulness required of God's people that they might be prepared and without shame in that day of wrath.

Finally, in the midst of the destruction of Babylon, a voice from heaven is again heard warning a certain people, "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues (Rev. 18:4). God's punishment of sin does not distinguish between individuals. He will not execute judgment upon the sinner and allow the same sin to go unnoticed in one who claims to be His. This would make a travesty of God's righteousness and justice. The call is clear. God wants His people to come out from among sinners and be separate. He wants us to avoid touching the unclean thing (2 Cor. 6:17). The temptation to partake of the glamor and splendor of the world is constantly with us. We must remember that her riches will come to nought. The final victory will be shared by those who follow the Lamb wholly, those who "hear the Word of God and keep it" (Luke 11:28).

THE END AND THE BEGINNING

DAILY READINGS:

Monday:	Revelation 19
Tuesday:	Revelation 20
Wednesday:	Revelation 21
Thursday:	Revelation 22
Friday:	Genesis 1
Saturday:	Genesis 2
Sunday:	Genesis 3

MEMORY VERSE:

I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city (Rev. 22:13,14).

INTRODUCTION:

The unity of purpose and inspiration of the Bible is nowhere more clearly illustrated than in a comparison of its first and last three chapters. The plan of God for His creation is totally fulfilled in the book of Revelation in spite of the work of the devil to destroy that purpose. All that was lost in Eden as a result of the subtlety of the serpent is restored in the end as a result of the sacrifice and obedience of the Lamb. The renewed creation, under the dominion of the Lamb and His bride, the church, totally fulfil the plan and promise of God. Little wonder, then, that our Lord is so often characterized in this last book of the Bible as "the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last."

LESSON NOTES:

Satan's Works Destroyed: Death was the wage Satan paid mankind for hearkening to his lies. When Satan deceived man into turning from the path of obedience, he started man careening on a downward course filled with pain, suffering, sickness, condemnation and, finally, death. God had warned that disobedience would bring death. When man failed to heed God's warning, death in all its varying forms came upon humanity. Sickness and suffering, violence and murder became man's portion.

Christ came with a promise of eternal life. He was manifested to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). His power to accomplish this purpose was revealed through His healings and the resurrection of three individuals from the dead. Through His own sacrificial death Jesus destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil (see Heb. 2:14). Paul names death as the last enemy to be destroyed (see 1 Cor. 15:26). Finally in the book of Revelation we see death destroyed forever: "And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

Deception is the very nature of Satan. Despite six thousand years of frustration the world is still following Satan's original deception: the attempt to gain exaltation through knowledge. This deception has led our educational institutions into chaos and all of humanity to the brink of self-extermination. Today the knowledge of good and evil in the world is more clouded than ever before.

Realizing the inherent tendency in man to worship, Satan deceived man into worshipping the works of his own hands. Dumb idols have been superseded by the more sophisticated idols of status and affluence. The master stroke of Satan was to develop an apostate church which would deceive millions into trusting in its sacerdotal rituals rather than in the Saviour Himself.

Jesus Christ called Satan the father of lies (see John 8:44). He proclaimed Himself as the truth. He sent His apostles, not to the schools of higher learning, but to Jerusalem to tarry for the Holy Spirit who would guide them into truth. In the book of Revelation we see the deception destroyed, and finally, the deceiver of the nations cast into the lake of fire (see Rev. 20:10). Into the Holy City no lie may enter (21:27).

God's Purpose Fulfilled: The purpose of creation was that there might be, for the glory of God, a realm where God's Word would by free choice reign over man and thereby destroy Satan and all his hordes. All was supplied in the Garden of Eden to make obedience easy. There was abundance of fruit and herbs to satisfy all man's hunger. God Himself communed with man in the cool of the evening. Only one commandment was given. Yet man failed in his very first test.

Immediately God set into operation His plan of redemption and regeneration whereby man might escape Satan's dominion and receive supernatural power to obey His commandments. The law was given to convince God's people of the impossibility of righteousness through self-effort. The new and eternal covenant was first promised and then sealed with the blood of Christ to endue man with inward power to obey God's commands.

On the Day of Pentecost the Father gave to those who had continued with Christ the gift of the Holy Ghost. Now the Word was within them. They spoke the word with boldness. We read repeatedly, "So mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed."

Finally in the Revelation we see those who have "kept the Word of His patience" and overcome through the Word, wedded to the Lamb. Now all of God's purposes are fulfilled.

A new heaven and earth displace the old. The sun is no longer needed, for the Lamb is the light, and there is no more night. The way to the Tree of Life is no longer barred by flaming swords but is in the midst of the street of the City. The River of Life from the throne replaces the river proceeding from Eden. The curse is abolished. All things are made new. Instead of communion in the cool of the evening, God now dwells with His people continually. Sorrow and death are done away with. He who began the good work of creation has completely fulfilled His purpose.

The Lessons: Since God has begun the work of the new creation we must understand that He intends to finish that work. We were originally created in the image of God. When He returns we are to be like

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dentials. Eternal life is of much greater importance to the soul of man than to whom he pays his taxes. The Jews had lost sight completely of the nature of the Father and the works which would truly characterize His kingdom (John 10:37,38).

History has proven the instability of world empires and governments. The kingdom of God differs from these other kingdoms in that it can never be destroyed. Those who through faith in Jesus Christ become citizens of this kingdom and *continually* heed the voice of the King as sheep following a shepherd will find that they have become heirs to a kingdom which is eternal (vv. 27-29). This kingdom is one which does not come with outward observation (Luke 17:20,21). It is not "meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17). Despite the many who refused to accept this teaching even in Jesus' day, there were many others who believed in Him and entered the kingdom (John 10:42). They didn't let somebody else's theory of the kingdom prevent them from entering in when it came.

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that we develop a good image (Matt. 23:5). Positions of leadership are coveted because we enjoy the honor and respect which goes with them, not because we desire to lead people to serve God better. When these motives become uppermost and the desire to please and serve God take second place or are not considered at all, then our lives are as hypocritical as the lives of the Pharisees.

Over and over again, Jesus struck at the importance of getting the heart right with God (Matt. 12:35; 15:18,19). What good does it do if everybody commends us and God condemns us? On the other hand, if God honors us, it doesn't matter what man thinks. It is by the thoughts of the heart that God judges us. The danger of the Pharisee is not so much that we fool others, it is that we fool ourselves. No blindness is as dark as that which lives for outward appearances and allows the soul to harbor all sorts of iniquity.

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based on compromise will produce an empty form. Beware of the doctrine of the Sadducees.

Materialism is the inevitable outgrowth of any teaching which denies the existence of spirits or life after death. Conversely, as our minds get more and more filled with the things of this earth, our appreciation and desire for the things of God grow weaker and weaker. It is tragic that today many who call themselves Christians deny the very basis on which Christianity began. The virgin birth is denied. Miracles are explained in a natural way. Even the cornerstone of the gospel, the resurrection of Jesus, is rejected and we are told that "God is dead." Is there any wonder that the church is in confusion and materialism abounds? What hope does Christianity offer if not in the resurrection? (See 1 Cor. 15:12-19). On the other hand, if the resurrection is a real fact, then how earnest we ought to be to seek those things which have everlasting value and not be taken up with those things which will pass away. God wants His people to know

both the Scriptures and the power of God and to experience their reality in their lives. Furthermore, He wants His power to be manifested so richly among us that the world will be able to "say nothing against it" (Acts 4:14), but will be forced to acknowledge that there is a God in heaven who cares for His children. If our eyes are fully on Him, this experience can be ours.

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entire mission of the Lord was to seek and save that which is lost. His entire life was given to this purpose. The soul of man is highly valued by God. All of heaven is joined in purpose with the Son and the Father in seeing lost souls found. Should it not then be the prime goal and desire of all who name the name of Jesus to be united with Him also in this purpose? The Christian today appears as though he cares little about the souls of others. It ought to be the prayer of every one who has experienced the joy of salvation that he be given the grace to share this joy with others and to have a continual passion for that which causes all of heaven to rejoice. The salvation of souls should fulfill our joy. If it doesn't, then we ought to search our own souls for the cause of this lack.

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nation," composed of believing Jews and Gentiles, who would have His Son as their king and thereby bring forth the fruits thereof. Bringing forth fruit is really the only condition for having the kingdom. Church membership, family heritage, tribe or race of people are no grounds for entrance into or possession of the kingdom. All these give an added opportunity and privilege, but unless we act upon them the kingdom will be taken from us.

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but they would not. They turned their back on God and their existence literally ceased to exist after 70 A.D. We might well ask, "What shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17) It is truly a fearful thing to fall in the hands of the living God. This need not be so if we yield to Him.

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"I am the way." Following the Lamb will lead us to the great marriage via the way of the cross.

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Him (see 1 John 3:2). It is our duty as followers of the Lamb to overcome all the works of Satan in us personally. Then the Lord will be able to set us to conquer and hasten His return. We must keep the goal in view and run the race through to the end. He has begun the good work, and He will complete it if we will be faithful to the end. "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly." Let us respond, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."