

Under The Fig Tree



WEEK 24

Day 1

1 Kings 11 and 2 Chronicles 9:29-31. We read Proverbs, Song of Song and Job in the context of our study of Solomon. God blessed Solomon with wisdom and understanding, building up the Kingdom of Israel and leaving us a legacy through his writings. Despite all this, like every human being he was imperfect. His main sin was the accumulation of many wives, which compromised his faith, turning him towards foreign gods.

We begin this week by completing our study of Solomon's life in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles. After Solomon's reign the Kingdom was divided. Despite the glorious reign of Solomon, the account ends on a low note. Let this be a preparation for reading about a greater King than Solomon or David. Before reading about the other kings of Israel and Judah we will turn once more to the Gospels, so that we can contrast two of the greatest kings of Israel with the King of Kings, Yeshua HaMashiach.

Matthew Chapter 1. David and Solomon, together, prepare the way for Yeshua. They are types and shadows of the Messiah but with tendency to sin. God used them to establish Israel as a nation which, through the reign of Solomon, had a glorious Temple and great prosperity. It was a nation at peace in the world. Yet it could not be the final Kingdom of God on earth, because it was ruled by men who were imperfect. Israel had asked for a king. God showed human limitations through Saul and greater possibilities through David and Solomon, but it was not God's plan that they should have a king like the other nations: God was to be their King. Ultimately, therefore, the Kingdom was to be fully restored to Him. At the right time God sent His Son to earth. In Hebrew, His Name is *Yeshua*, meaning *Salvation*. He has other titles or names, including *Immanuel, God with us*. He is the fulfillment of Isaiah 9: *Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace*. He is the fulfillment of every type and shadow that prepared the way for Him. He is to be found in all of Scripture and every purpose of God, greater than any king before Him. Through Him all Covenant promises are fulfilled. What a glorious day it was when the Angel was sent to

announce His birth to Mary and Joseph. Matthew understood how this fulfilled the Messianic promise. He recorded his genealogy from a human standpoint. Read it carefully: here are familiar men and women of biblical history. The Messiah was to come from the kingly line of David and from the Tribe of Judah.

Matthew's Gospel is understandable by both Jew and Gentile. For the Jew there is sensitivity to tradition, history and the Hebraic mindset. The Tanakh contains Scriptures that may be interpreted in various ways. There is the plain reading of the text and immediate application. There is also relationship with other Scriptures that are to be found by careful searching, and mysteries that might be unraveled through prayerful reflection. Matthew understood how the Jewish reader needed to perceive Yeshua in these Scriptures. For example, he quoted Isaiah 7:14 as a Messianic prophecy. There was a young girl at the time of Isaiah who fulfilled this verse in part, but Matthew realized that she was a prophetic figure pointing to the Virgin Mary. Yeshua was born a human being, but was unique in that He was born to a virgin, so that He became the perfect sinless Son of God. He was God in human flesh. Solomon and David were types of Yeshua but not without sin. The King of the Jews, if He were to restore the Kingdom to the Father, must be sinless. Yeshua, Immanuel, is God among men, fulfilling the types and shadows of the Tabernacle, the Temple and the Kings of Israel. All of God's Covenant purposes were fulfilled in Him, Prophet, Priest and King. Israel's sojourn, over many years, was a preparation for this great day!

Matthew gives a brief account of Yeshua's birth. Luke gives additional details. Matthew is concerned to illustrate how Yeshua fulfilled Messianic promise.

In Chapter One we see the power of God at work in the context of frail humanity. If Joseph had rejected Mary, thinking her to be disloyal to him, the testimony of Yeshua's birth would have been spoiled at His very conception. God chose well when He appointed both Mary and Joseph. Joseph believed what the angel told him in a dream. The Son of God was born on earth in the care of human parents.

Chapter 2. This Chapter covers a number of years. By the time the wise men came to Yeshua, He was already a young child, possibly as much as two years old. The birth of Moses had similarities with the birth of Yeshua. Moses was born in Egypt to be deliverer of Israel: Yeshua was born as redeemer at the time when Israel was under Roman occupation. Herod was in submission to the Romans. He was, from a human standpoint, a powerful king. He built an ornate Temple, great palaces and other grand constructions. The remains of these edifices are among the ruins found in Israel today. Among them is the palace at Masada, a great aqueduct at Caesarea and a palace at Herodion, not far from Bethlehem. They are monuments to a failed kingdom. The Temple was completely destroyed, because it is replaced by the Living Temple of Yeshua's disciples, of which He is the Cornerstone! Yeshua was born as a baby at the time of the mighty Roman Empire, but God appointed Him to be King of Kings. Herod's plans were thwarted when he tried to deceive the wise men. It is likely

that these men came from Babylon, knowing the prophecies of Daniel. In a way, the entire world had been prepared for His coming. These wise men were used by God to proclaim Yeshua as King bringing appropriate gifts: kingly gold, frankincense for His priestly ministry and myrrh, which spoke prophetically of His sacrificial death.

Matthew recognized that Yeshua was to fulfill the prophecy of Israel coming out of Egypt. This prophecy had first applied to Israel as a nation: now it was fulfilled in Yeshua, in whom God centred all His prophetic purposes. Just as the innocent babies were slaughtered by Pharaoh at the time of Moses, so the innocent children of Bethlehem were slaughtered by Herod. The young Child's arrival on earth disturbed the powers of darkness and the battle began in the spiritual world, with consequences on earth. The birth of this child in Bethlehem would shake both Heaven and earth.

Matthew was inspired to understand how Yeshua fulfilled prophecy. According to biblical principles he highlighted a number of witnesses to this fulfillment, including Micah 5 and Jeremiah 31. It is not clear to which prophet Matthew referred when he said that Yeshua would be a Nazarene. It is possible that Nazareth was a centre of a devout religious Jewish sect. There may be a link between the words *Nazareth* and *nazirite*. Samson, who was a nazirite from birth, was a prophetic type of Yeshua (Judges 13:5).

Chapter 3. There was a stirring across all Israel - an expectation for the dawn of the Messianic age. Rome had occupied Israel for many years, following oppression from the Greek Empire. Cries went up to God for a deliverer just as when Israel was enslaved in Egypt. Recent discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Qumran, near the Dead Sea, reveal details of a religious sect who lived there. They sought to be righteous before God in obedience to Torah. Men baptized themselves in a baths called *Mikveh* several times each day. Remnants of these baptismal pools have been found in Qumran and in other parts of Israel. Baptism was known in Israel from ancient times. Water which cleansed the body was symbolic of inner cleansing. Full immersion baptism was a ceremony indicating a desire for complete holiness before God. There may have been a number of baptizers in the Land of Israel and Judah around the time of the Gospels. Clear running water was used - *Ma'im Ha'im* (living water). This was in baths or flowing rivers. They completely immersed themselves, kneeling in the water and self-immersing before the baptizer, who was the witness to their act. Among these baptizers, one, John, was specially appointed by God to prepare the way for Yeshua in fulfillment of prophecy.

The Holy Spirit stirred men and women to go to him in growing numbers, at the edge of the River Jordan. Many years before, Joshua had led Israel over the Jordan. Now Yeshua, beginning at the Jordan, would lead God's people to eternal life. Luke gives more details of the birth of John than Matthew. Matthew's briefer account focuses on fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3. John, a mighty Prophet, confronted the sins of the Israelites, standing against even the religious authorities and against the evil of Herod and the Romans. He did not compromise

on his call to repentance He announced the coming of Yeshua, who would baptize repentant sinners even more deeply - with the Holy Spirit and fire. Sin was going to be burned up and the life of the Holy Spirit was going to break forth. John prepared the way, so that those who truly desired to be at one with God could make their confession through the waters of baptism.

Yeshua, in complete identification with the needs of these repentant sinners, came into their midst and immersed Himself in their presence before John. This was Yeshua's commitment to us, which would take Him to the Cross. God confirmed His appointment of His Son by speaking from Heaven – what a baptism day that was!

Chapter 4. Everything must be tested, even Yeshua's commitment. He is both God and man. As a man, therefore, satan was allowed to test him with clever deceiving words. Satan knows the Scriptures better than most of us, but not better than the Son of God. Look up the Scriptures that satan used and the Scriptures that Yeshua used to counter Him. Spiritual warfare is a battle of words. Words have power to deceive or reveal truth. Yeshua, the Living Word, used Scriptures to counteract satan's distortions of the written Word. We should learn to use the Scriptures like this, so that we are not deceived. Yeshua demonstrated deeper understanding of Torah than satan and was victorious. Yeshua fasted for forty days and nights, reminding us of the time when Moses went onto Mount Horeb to receive the Ten Commandments from God. This also reminds us of the forty years that Israel was in the wilderness.

Matthew now describes the beginning of Yeshua's ministry in Galilee in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. He announced the coming Kingdom of God and called sinners to repentance. He demonstrated both His authority and God's compassion, through miracles of deliverance and healing. He ministered among the poor, oppressed and needy. His healing miracles were great deliverances for these people and also signs of the greater healing that no-one else could give – forgiveness of sins, and restored relationship with the Father.

In the tradition of the rabbis He called a group of disciples together. This wonderful move of God began in the region of Galilee. The light of God began to shine into the darkness of the earth.

Day 2

Chapters 5 to 7. It is a good idea to read these three Chapters in one sitting, allowing time to read slowly with prayerful reflection. This is called *The Sermon on the Mount*. Multitudes of people were gathering to Yeshua. They heard of His miracles and His teaching. Some came many miles to learn from Him and to be healed. The Kingdom of Heaven was breaking forth into the world!

Let us reflect a little on the background. This day was much too important for us to skim over the account of it. We must come back to these Chapters time and again to find more and more from Yeshua's teaching: it is too much to accomplish in one day. Nevertheless, let us give time for adequate reflection today on what happened that day on a mountain in Israel near the Sea of Galilee. Be patient with me, therefore, if I take you right back to where all this began. Like all great truths from the Bible, we need to begin in the Book of Genesis.

The Bible gives accurate details by which we can trace the history of the world centred on God's Covenant purposes. Let us consider this in round numbers to establish the general picture. Pretend we are among the people drawn to Yeshua, in Matthew Chapters 5 to 7. Around 4000 years before this, God created the universe, and the human race began. It was not long before Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden. Men and women multiplied on the earth. From the early Chapters of the Bible we learn that a great problem arose because of this. Separation from God increased in magnitude on account of men and women not even desiring to live lives that were pure in God's sight. The problem of sin had entered the world. The consequence of sin is death – eternal separation from God and banishment not only from the Garden of Eden but into the hands of Satan and his demonic followers – forever. The Bible describes this eternal separation from God as fire that is never quenched. God did not create mankind for this purpose and so, despite the Fall, He prepared a way back. First He showed the consequences of sin by sending a great Flood to the world at the time of Noah. If we were among the people on the mountain with Yeshua, this would have been about 3000 years ago. Mankind was not completely destroyed, however, because Noah and his family were saved by God through faith and obedience. God's plan of salvation was through the principle of Covenant, which was in His heart from the start and now confirmed in stages. The shadow of the truth that sin leads to death hung over all history of this world, but within the darkness was a ray of hope. The Covenant was made firm about 2000 years before these people gathered to Yeshua in Galilee, when Abraham was called by God. From Abraham came his physical descendants who remembered the promises that were made over all generations. Israel grew as a nation in Egypt. Jacob and his family went down to Egypt because of the famine. They were brought out by the power of God around 400 years after this. The people gathering to Yeshua in Galilee also remembered the times of the kings of Israel, among whom were Solomon and David, around 1000 years before. Israel had tasted the goodness of God, but they had also been exiled to Babylon, dominated by the Kingdoms of Persia, Greece and Rome, and lived for the last 400 years without a strong prophetic word. Sickness and disease had come upon many people and even demons from

satan had entered into many of them. God had given Moses the Torah. Religious teachers abounded who sought to interpret Torah, whilst themselves being sinful, like all mankind. Our reading of the Bible covers much of this and there is more to come. We have yet to read about the fall of Israel and Judah, which led to the exile. All of this is relevant to the day when needy people gathered to Yeshua in eager anticipation of God's Messiah. The history of the world was short and full of trouble, but each day is long without God in our lives. Imagine being among the people gathered to Yeshua on the mountain that day: all this history was behind them, dashed hopes, impossible circumstances, but now the promise of God breaking forth among men in a new and unexpected way. Was all that the Prophets had spoken coming to pass through this Man Yeshua?

The Sermon on the Mount has been called *Yeshua's Midrash on Torah*. Out of context it seems that He is doing a completely new thing: as if Moses and all the Prophets failed so much that God was making a completely fresh start. It *was* a fresh start, but not detached from all that went before. The word *Midrash* is a Hebraic term related to expounding Scripture. The word *Drash* is associated with searching out a truth from Scripture. This is what we must all do, looking at what God has revealed from all sides, moving back and forth through the Bible to link the ideas together and prayerfully seek out the meaning of what we are reading. *Midrash* is a term used when someone, out of his Scriptural meditations, teaches what he has discovered. Thus when it is said that *the Sermon on the Mount* is *Yeshua's Midrash on Torah*, it means that Yeshua is bringing the true meaning of Torah. This is appropriate provided we do not classify Him as a mere rabbi of the time, and so miss who He really is. He grew up as a child in Nazareth among the religious leaders of the day, but He was not representing any particular rabbinical school. He would give credit where it was due because not all that the rabbis taught was wrong. He criticized them as people because they did not live out what they preached – how could they, being sinners like all mankind? Some scholars think that he endorsed some of rabbi Hillel's teaching more than rabbi Shammai's, the two most prominent rabbis of the day. Some also think that He endorsed the teaching of the Pharisees more than that of the Saducees, but this is not the main point. The main point is that with all Covenant history behind Him up to that day, and with all the circumstances of Israel prepared, the Son of God came to earth to correctly interpret the teaching of God. Yeshua said this Himself: He said that He came not to destroy the Torah and the Prophets but to fulfill them. To *destroy* was to *wrongly interpret* and to *fulfill* was to *rightly interpret*.

The Sermon on the Mount seems revolutionary teaching if we have not understood Torah. As you read these Chapters today, have this in mind and begin to link to its foundations what Yeshua said. He brought nothing that was completely new, but brought fulfillment to what was already promised. If you study the Sermon on the Mount carefully line by line, you will find links back to what we have already read in the Tanakh (Old Testament). Some links are not as easy as others, so it will take time – your own midrashic studies under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Torah comes to life through Yeshua and through the ministry of His Spirit. We find life that is not given through the rabbinical schools. One of the easier links to the Tanakh, which illustrates the point, is from Chapter 5 Verse 5, *Blessed are the meek for they*

shall inherit the earth. This is directly from Psalm 37:11. All Torah, Prophets and Writings from the Bible pointed to this day when Yeshua expounded Torah before the people. He fulfilled Torah in His very being and from the life that issued forth from Him. Imagine the comfort that this brought to those who sat before Him. He did not take Torah to a new legalistic and ritual level but drew people who desired to be at one with God into His life and fellowship. They had gathered to John the Baptist because they wanted to demonstrate a repentant heart to God. Now they gathered to Yeshua, through whom Kingdom life was breaking forth. No wonder it was said of Him that His teaching was not like the teachers of the law (Chapter 7, Verse 29), but as one with authority. No such spiritual power and authority was given to any other man through all history, and now the real intent of God was breaking forth through His Son in a way that no-one had fully expected.

Today's visitors to Israel can go to this region of the Sea of Galilee and climb up the hills nearby. Somewhere in this region we will walk on the actual ground where Yeshua stood and the people gathered, but He is no longer there. He is now with the Father in Heaven. One day He will return, but for now we do not see Him nor can we find Him on the hillside, where His first disciples gathered to receive the miracles of healing and deliverance and the deeply penetrating and uplifting spiritual truths that He revealed. Yet, wherever we are in this world, if we ask in faith, He will send His Spirit to fill us and teach us these very same truths. The Holy Spirit confirms what Yeshua taught, causing us to continue to search out the true meaning of His Word throughout all Scripture. We are thus empowered for the lives we live in His Name. We receive the Sermon on the Mount afresh today as if we were there on that great day when the Son of God came to earth and the Kingdom began to break forth.

Day 3

Chapter 8. Like the other three Gospel writers, Matthew made a brief record of the 33 years of Yeshua's life on earth. He selected episodes in Yeshua's life to achieve purposes he had in mind. Matthew's first readers were the Jews of his day. Behind them were the history of their nation and the prophetic expectation of a coming Messiah, One who was anointed by God to bring deliverance to the nation. They had come to expect someone like Joseph, who brought relief from the famine, or like King David, through whom God defeated their enemies and established a Kingdom on earth. Judah was occupied by Rome and times were hard, so this was an ideal moment to look for such a deliverer. It was into this situation that God sent His Son. Matthew was among the twelve chosen disciples of Yeshua and had first-hand experience of what Yeshua did in fulfillment of Messianic prophecy. He set out to show how this came about by describing a number of incidents. He knew that Yeshua did not fulfill the precise expectations of the religious leaders. He had this in mind in recording the events and how they related to a number of key Messianic prophecies. Yeshua emerged from the Torah-based society of Judah, and from the prophetic and historical background of Israel. He let the events speak for themselves, just as they do for us today as we read the Gospel account.

We do not know everything about Yeshua's life on earth, but we know enough so that, through our prayerful meditations, the Holy Spirit will use the Gospel message to draw us into relationship with God. The Kingdom of Heaven broke forth through Yeshua and touched the lives of the poor and needy people of His day. Through the Holy Spirit, the Kingdom breaks forth into our lives too, preparing us for the day when the Kingdom of Heaven will come in all its fullness at Yeshua's return.

We do not know who wrote down the first accounts of Yeshua's ministry. There may have been a number of written records that were used by Matthew, Mark and Luke for their individual Gospel accounts. Mark's Gospel account may have been the basis for Matthew, as some think from the approximate dates that the accounts were written (Matthew is thought to have been written around 70 AD) or there may have been other records which both used. From what Luke tells us in his Gospel account, he seems to have done further research leading to his ordered account. Because of something that Jerome wrote, it is thought that the original document of Matthew's Gospel may have been in Hebrew. Jerome translated the Bible into Latin (the Vulgate) around 400 AD and spent some time in Bethlehem to do his work. He refers, in his records, to a Hebrew version of Matthew. Much research has been done and there are multitudes of manuscripts of the Books of the New Testament to verify its authenticity, but we do not know all that happened in Israel when Yeshua came to earth or every detail of how the Gospels were compiled. What we do know is that God inspired Yeshua's disciples to set down the record of what Yeshua did and taught, so that, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we might become His disciples.

Just as with all of Scripture, the Gospel account was not, at first, divided into chapters and verses. It was one continuous record. The chapters and verses simply make useful divisions for reading and for reference.

In Chapter 8 we have Matthew's account of occasions when Yeshua healed the sick and delivered those who were possessed by demons. Recall that our reading of this Gospel account follows our study of King Solomon. Neither Solomon nor any other king, despite all that God did through them, had such power and authority. The breaking forth of the Kingdom of Heaven was like no other kingdom. Many of the poor were relieved of their physical burdens. This was through the compassion of God. Yeshua showed that this was a sign of His authority to forgive sins and restore people to relationship with God.

Yeshua also taught about the cost of being His disciple when He called others to follow Him for the purposes of the coming Kingdom. Abraham and the other Patriarchs learned that God required faith from his people. Yeshua demanded no less. He demonstrated the potential of such faith when He calmed the raging sea. Everything He did brought fulfillment to what the Scriptures foretold of Him through types, shadows and prophecies. Jonah 1:11-12 comes to mind concerning the calming of a raging sea, and later Yeshua identified Himself more fully with Jonah when He went to the Cross and descended to Hell for us.

The more we study the Bible in its entirety, from Genesis to Revelation, the more we will be able to link together all that God has said and done. The Scriptures are written so that the Holy Spirit can use them to strengthen our faith. See what He says to you today.

Psalm 107. This Psalm was fulfilled through Yeshua's ministry. The disciples may have brought verses 25 to 32 to mind when Yeshua calmed the storm.

Matthew Chapter 9. Matthew recorded the incident of the healing of the paralytic to lift our understanding of Yeshua's miracles beyond our physical need. Yeshua came to save us from our sins. Physical healing is a ministry to the needy on this earth, but our greater need is for spiritual healing. Yeshua can bring both, but the greater need is met when we are saved from the consequences of our sins. This life is short and our physical bodies are temporary. Restoration with the Father is for all eternity. Up to this time there was forgiveness for sins through Temple sacrifices. Faith in God was expressed through sacrifice but it did not change the character of sinful men and women. After Yeshua's sacrificial death there is no other way to the Father than through faith in Him. Yeshua drew attention to His power to restore sinners through the sign of physical healing. Matthew noted the prophecy of Isaiah 53:4 in Chapter 8, Verse 17 of his Gospel account. Here in Chapter 9, through the healing of the paralytic, he takes Yeshua's teaching to the spiritual level, so that both physical and spiritual lessons are learned about Yeshua's ministry, in fulfillment of prophecy. In Verses 15 to 19 we read Yeshua's illustration about the coming Kingdom being likened to new wine. He was

preparing His disciples to receive the Holy Spirit as the fulfillment of Torah, replacing the rabbinical systems of interpretation that lacked life and authority. He continued to heal the sick and deliver the demon possessed out of compassion for the needy and as a demonstration of the Kingdom.

Chapter 10. Yeshua called His disciples to work closely with Him. He included Judas Iscariot, who would betray Him. This shows us that it is possible to follow Yeshua and still be disloyal. In this Chapter we read about the characteristics of true disciples. Yeshua gave His disciples a measure of the same spiritual authority that He had. What we read is valid for His disciples over all ages. We minister according to His calling on our lives. We must learn to minister in His Name, doing only what He is doing and according to His authority. Notice the strong words of Verse 15. They are repeated in the next Chapter.

Chapter 11. We do not have enough information to know exactly what John the Baptist thought of Yeshua up to this point. We know from Luke's account that he was a relative of Yeshua. We also know that Yeshua came to be baptized by him and that he recognized Yeshua as more righteous than he was. He must have observed Yeshua as a boy growing up in Nazareth and this contributed to his perceptions when Yeshua came to the Jordan River for baptism. He heard God speak from Heaven announcing Yeshua to be His Son, but he still wondered at precisely what was happening. John had announced the coming of the Messiah in obedience to God and fulfillment of prophecy, but may not have fully understood the nature of His coming. Now, in prison for his harsh criticism of Herod, and shortly to die, he wanted to confirm who Yeshua was, so he sent messengers to enquire. As a prophet he would have been concerned to have fulfilled his ministry accurately. His question was useful and timely, because many people would have been wondering if Yeshua was a wonderful teacher and worker of miracles or if He had a greater ministry. There were certain signs of the Messiah that the rabbis had interpreted from the Scriptures and so Yeshua did not answer John directly, but reminded him of the signs. In effect He was confirming that He was the Messiah, but not through process of logic. Those who seek will find. Those who desire to learn will discover that He is the One of whom all the Scriptures speak, but the answer to our question, "who are you?", comes by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as confirming the written Word, more than it does through a philosophical dialogue.

Yeshua makes it easy for those who truly seek Him to know Him, but those who do not want to understand His signs shut themselves out of the Kingdom. When we read the Book of Revelation we will discover prophecy of a worldwide denial of Yeshua. He came healing the sick and preaching the Kingdom, playing the flute, as it were, and many rejected Him. During the end times there will be great trials on this earth, a time of mourning, as it were, and still many will reject Him. Yeshua invites all people, through joyful expectation or through mournful times of need - all the circumstances of life - to come to Him and be sealed for the

eternal Kingdom. The time will come for judgement on those who reject Him. Even the cities where His miracles were performed will be judged like Sodom and Gomorrah. Modern-day visitors to Israel might go to the region of Galilee. They can visit the ancient cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. These cities lie in ruins as a sign that Yeshua spoke words of truth. They were wonderful days when the Son of God walked on this earth. It must have been deeply refreshing to hear His words of comfort and promise and also be relieved of physical sickness and oppression – for those truly seeking. Yet, we must also heed the dire warnings to those who reject Him. He did not compromise the truth in any way to win supporters! If you are a true believer let the words of Verse 25 to 30 minister to you today.

Day 4

Chapter 12. The Kingdom of Heaven broke forth when God sent His Son to the earth. Up to this point in time God gave men and women time to discover their need of Him and the limits of human kingdoms. Even though He gave His Torah to the Children of Israel, the kingdoms were, at best, only shadows of the Kingdom to come. Through Yeshua, the Kingdom of Heaven began to break forth in the lives of ordinary people. He also confronted the religious leaders of the day to demonstrate the limits of their understanding of Torah. He confronted them, Man to man, without compromise. Yeshua is the perfect Word of God made flesh, who came to seek and save. In His voice, despite stern uncompromising words, would always be the love of the Father. Through Him the Spirit of God was holding out an invitation, even those whom He criticized with uncompromising words - they could receive it or reject it.

The Sabbath Day was a wonderful gift from God. God reserved this day for building special relationship between Himself and His people. He ordered the universe so that, even though He sent Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden to experience hard labour, there is enough provision for one day of rest each week. He taught the principle through the provision of Manna in the wilderness and gave strict instructions so that we would not forget to honour the Sabbath. This was for our own good. The Jewish religious leaders turned the Sabbath into ritual and misinterpreted God's purposes. Yeshua chose a number of occasions to raise this issue with them. One of these was when He walked through the grain fields with His disciples. It was no coincidence that the disciples were accused of work when they plucked grain and ate it. By this time the Jews had codified Torah to define work in minute detail. They defined a number of processes in the harvesting of grain. On a minute scale the disciples were harvesting grain on that Sabbath day when they separated the grain from the chaff to eat it. Yeshua used this opportunity to demonstrate that the teachers of the law had sought to define the letter of the law but lost the spirit of the law. He used the example of David eating the showbread to trap them in their own thinking and quoted from Hosea 6:6 to show them they had not understood the heart of Torah. More than that, Yeshua claimed to be Lord of the Sabbath, the one who *gave* the Sabbath in the first place! Yeshua then demonstrated who He was through the power of healing on the Sabbath Day. This provoked His enemies even more. Either He was the Son of God or He was demonized. They preferred to consider Him demonized because they were unrepentant. They preferred to keep their status as rulers of the people than give ground to Him.

Matthew continued to show how Yeshua was fulfilling prophecy, quoting from Isaiah 42, known to be a Messianic prophecy. Yeshua's teaching was now dividing Israel. Either we are with Him or against Him. The time for decision arrived on the day when He came to earth, just as when Joshua crossed the Jordan (Joshua 1) and began to settle in the Promised Land (Joshua 24, especially Verse 15). Multitudes followed Yeshua and His words became more and more challenging. Even His mother and brothers had to think again about who He was.

Little by little, through various circumstances, Yeshua showed who He was. He spoke in extremely challenging ways. He did not seek to exalt Himself in the ways of the world but showed clearly who He was and is. He is greater than the Temple and greater than Solomon, the King of Israel who established the Temple and through whom a kingdom was most wonderfully established. We have read about this and all that Solomon taught, but we, like the Scribes and teachers of the Torah, need to know that the Kingdom of Heaven is the greater end purpose of God through Yeshua.

Chapter 13. We, like Yeshua's disciples, have the privilege of understanding the purpose of the parables, because the explanation is written in the Bible. The Bible is available throughout the world as the best selling Book of all time, translated into many languages. Even so, the situation is the same as when Yeshua first taught. The Word of God falls onto the same sort of ground as described in the Parable of the Sower , dividing those who desire to know Him from those who reject Him. It is wonderful that we have, translated into our own languages without losing their Spiritual power, many of the exact words that Yeshua spoke. Read them for yourself and let the Holy Spirit interpret them and build you up in faith. Note Verse 32. The Scribes were responsible for the accuracy of the written Word. We are greatly indebted to them for recording the Scriptures from generation to generation. They had procedures for checking every word and letter and if even one letter was written incorrectly the entire document would be rejected. Yeshua had the Scribes in mind when He said that not one jot or tittle will pass from Torah until all is fulfilled (Matthew 5:17). We use the word *jot* in English. It refers to the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the *yod*. A *tittle* is a small stroke of a Hebrew letter. Sometimes Hebrew letters are distinguished from one another by just a small stroke of a pen. An example of this is ם the letter *Caph*, and ך the letter *Beth*. To make any small change on the text would change its meaning. Yeshua said that there was not to be even a minute change in Torah. The Scribes already knew this was the case in writing down the Scriptures, and so Yeshua showed that He was confirming this principle in His teaching. He was being careful to interpret Torah accurately. Yeshua also had in mind something else. He was bringing in the New Covenant: from that time on, the Torah would be written on our hearts. He was saying that He would write this accurately. Hence, in Matthew 13:52, He is indicating that the best teachers are those who are careful to understand as heart truths, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the fine details of the written Word. They are able to draw on resources from the Tanakh in light of the New Covenant – the written Word with the life of the Spirit. We must be such people.

Chapter 14. Herod's kingdom was glorious to the human eye, but corrupt at the heart. The empires of Persia, Babylon, Greece and Rome all illustrated the power of man independent of God. Their glory is superficial because their heart is corrupt. Supported by Rome, Herod brought superficial power to dominate and control Israel. By contrast, Yeshua brought the Kingdom of Heaven to the hearts of humble people. Neither He nor John the Baptist feared

the consequences of condemning the ungodly. In this Chapter the evil of Herod's court rose to a height and John the Baptist became a martyr.

In the same Chapter we read of the Kingdom continuing to break forth as Yeshua demonstrated, through signs and wonders, who He is. Just as God gave manna in the wilderness, so Yeshua fed the five thousand through multiplication of the loaves and fishes and through the Words that He spoke. He is Lord of Creation and walked on the waters. Waters symbolize the empires of this world, as we see in the Book of Revelation, and Yeshua helps us to put them underfoot. There are many aspects to the truths of what Yeshua did and we can search them out day by day, year by year, as we study the Bible. Peter touched on some of the great truths of Yeshua and His teaching when, for a few moments, he walked on the water. He also learned about the battle of faith when he began to sink. Meditate upon these incidents over and over again. Know the Bible well, and the Holy Spirit will highlight linked ideas as you pray for understanding while studying carefully.

In Matthew 9:19-22, we read of a woman who had faith to be healed and touched the hem of Yeshua's garment. In Chapter 14, we read that others were healed in the same way. This probably reflected a practice of the day. According to the traditions passed on through Moses, every Jewish man must have tassles, called *tzit tzit*, on the hem of their garment. They were a reminder of the Torah. By the time Yeshua came to Israel the *tzit tzit* of the rabbis were quite ornate, woven with various patterns to symbolize the laws of God. Therefore, to touch the hem of a rabbi's garment was to touch, as it were, the law itself. Yeshua is the Torah made flesh and so the expectation of those who touched His garment rose to its highest level, when power to heal came from Him according to their faith.

Chapter 15. The teaching of Yeshua continued. He interpreted the Torah accurately and corrected misconceptions. As you read what Yeshua did and taught, see how the Holy Spirit prompts you to understand Torah as it was intended. Yeshua did not replace what God taught through Moses with a different set of rules. He showed us that God's teaching had been misinterpreted, and turned into religious obligations – duties to perform. He showed that God's teaching was concerned with principles of the heart. Our hearts are either the source of good or evil. The principles taught by Moses are manifestations of heart principles. These principles are written on our hearts by the Holy Spirit and have a multitude of applications beyond what the religious authorities had discovered. Law brings freedom. The religious authorities had turned the Laws of God into bondage. Yeshua came to set us free within the true parameters of Torah. When the Torah is on our heart we are truly free, because we have learned to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, who will not cause us to break one of God's laws. It takes time to reach maturity – we are disciples. With the Bible as our written source of inspiration, through prayer we learn step by step. Yeshua taught His disciples face to face, demonstrating the power and fruits of the Kingdom. In so doing, He

also confronted the religious authorities of His day, who either became His followers or rejected Him, seeking to kill Him, thinking Him to be a false prophet.

Chapter 16. In the midst of all that Yeshua said and did, came the visit to Caesarea Philippi. Yeshua chose this place on purpose. It was established in honour of Philip of Macedon and was a place where the Greek God Pan was worshipped. The question that Yeshua asked is relevant to every person in all generations. *Who do people say I am...Who do you say I am?* Yeshua told the Pharisees (Chapter 12, Verses 31-32), that they would not be condemned for their opinion of Him as the Son of Man. He came, as a man, as a sign pointing to the Father, and it is natural to try to reason out who this man is. Those who reject Him as Son of God through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, however, cannot be forgiven their sins. So the question, *who do you say I am?* is the one to stop us all in our tracks and bring us to the point of commitment. In the context of the idols of Greece and Rome and false gods at Caesarea Philippi, Peter gave the answer that only the Holy Spirit can inspire. Yeshua is building His community on this rock of truth. He is building up His community of disciples. They are the ones who are inspired as to who He is, just as Peter was. Note that Peter's declaration of faith was the beginning and not the end of His path of discipleship. He failed to understand that Yeshua must go to the Cross. *Get behind me satan* is a harsh statement. Perhaps it was the spiritual adversary, satan, who had caused Peter to make an error of judgement. More likely, Yeshua was using the term figuratively: the word *satan* refers to someone who stands in opposition to the right path. Either way we must be warned that disciples still make errors of judgement even after they have made their confession of faith! Consider this important incident carefully.

Day 5

Chapter 17. Yeshua took three of His disciples onto a mountain as witnesses to His transfiguration. Approximately 1500 years before, Moses had gone up to a high mountain to talk with God. Elijah the Prophet had also met with God on a mountain, several hundreds of years before. They were two witnesses from Heaven who stood with Yeshua confirming who He is. The third heavenly witness was the voice of God, who, for a second time, declared Yeshua to be His Son. Three witnesses on earth and three from Heaven verified that Yeshua is both Son of Man and Son of God. Peter associated this event with the Feast of Tabernacles because this Feast will be fulfilled when the Kingdom of Heaven comes to earth. That is why he wanted to make three booths (*sukkot*), the temporary dwelling places that Moses taught the Children of Israel to make at this Feast. Peter was mistaken because Pesach comes before Sukkot: Yeshua had not yet fulfilled Pesach by suffering on the Cross as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Chapter 18. Yeshua continued to teach principles concerning the Kingdom of Heaven. Read this for yourself and see what the Holy Spirit teaches you. Notice that Yeshua taught about authority through the principles of binding and loosing. Soon He was to go to the Father and His disciples would be left to interpret Torah for their families and communities. The custom of the Jews was that ten men were needed to make up a group called a *minyan*, who meet together in the Synagogues to discuss matters of Torah. Yeshua said that He would be among His disciples through the ministry of the Holy Spirit when just *two or three* of us gather together for His purposes (in His Name). Such gatherings are for times of fellowship with one another, and also for times of study and prayer, listening to the Holy Spirit for understanding of how to interpret Torah in our lives. This teaching was a preparation for when Yeshua would not be with us in person, and when authority would be given to local communities all over the world rather than to a centralized religious authority. As Yeshua said before His Crucifixion, He would be ruling from the Father's side in Heaven – the throne-room of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is important for local communities of disciples to recognise that responsibility and authority is given in this way. This is how we will become strong together.

Chapter 19. Yeshua taught about the importance of marriage. Sometimes, when we read this passage, we think that He is simply confirming the rules for divorce. We then might become like the religious leaders of the day who did not discover the heart of the issue. God likens His relationship with us to marriage. He hates divorce and is jealous for our love. He wants us to serve Him alone and not any other god. Serving a foreign god is spiritual adultery. Adultery at the human level is symptomatic of an adulterous heart. Marriage was given to us as a great gift. Adam was given Eve. Eve came from his body, demonstrating the unity of the flesh that is intended when a man takes a wife. Divorce was never intended by

God, but it happens because we sin. Yeshua wants us to be pure in our human relationships and, even more, to be pure in our spiritual relationships, not being tempted to follow false gods and depart from our relationship with Him. Solomon knew this and taught it in the Book of Proverbs. Yeshua confirmed God's intent.

Once more He taught the level of commitment needed by His disciples, when He spoke to the rich young ruler.

Chapter 20. Soon Yeshua was to go to Jerusalem to fulfill Passover. He began to prepare His disciples for what would take place there and continued to teach the principles of the Kingdom of Heaven. He made sure that His disciples understood that authority in the Kingdom was given for service and not for self-exaltation. How much we need to consider these matters in the Church today! He did not miss any opportunity to minister to those in need and who truly sought Him, even as they made their way to Jerusalem.

Day 6

Chapter 21. When Yeshua was baptized in the Jordan, John proclaimed, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that Yeshua is the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Not even His close disciples understood what this meant until after His Crucifixion. Yeshua carried His great burden alone, and set His face towards Jerusalem knowing how He was shortly to become the fulfillment of the Passover Lamb.

Passover had been celebrated since Israel first came out of Egypt. Each family took a spotless lamb into their home, inspected it for several days to ensure that there was no blemish, and then slaughtered it in remembrance of the Passover Meal in Egypt. The precise details are in Exodus 12. From the days of the Temple, sacrificial lambs would also be taken to be slaughtered as sacrifice for sin. Yeshua knew that all these types and shadows pointed to Him and entered Jerusalem during Passover week. He appeared before the people for several days, inspected, as it were, to show Himself spotless. Psalm 118 is a Messianic Psalm, pointing to the day when Yeshua came to earth. Verse 26 was known as the proclamation of Messiah's coming – *blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord*. Multitudes had gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast and this coincided with Yeshua entering the city. The Messianic cry went up as Yeshua came down the Mount of Olives on a donkey. This was symbolic of a man of peace. A man of war would enter on a horse trained for battle. The people realized that something wonderful was happening but, in their fervour, they did not understand the precise way Yeshua would fulfill His ministry. He had not come to free them from the Romans but to free them from the chains of sin. Soon it would appear that He had failed them, but Yeshua knew exactly what He was doing and, once He had suffered for them, those who truly sought after God would then understand.

The Feast of Passover coincides with the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Leaven is symbolic of sin. Every Jewish family would cleanse their house of leaven in the days prior to the Feast. This was fulfilled when Yeshua cleansed the Temple, which had become a place of trading rather than a House of Prayer.

Yeshua did many things during these days in Jerusalem that brought a climax to His ministry on earth. He had ministered for three years to announce the Kingdom which was to break forth through the power of the Holy Spirit. Among the things He did was to curse a barren fig tree. This was a prophetic pointer to a new kind of authority coming to the community of God's people. The days of the New Covenant were about to break forth. The fig tree is a broad-leaved tree. Disciples of a rabbi would find shade under such a tree to meditate on what their rabbi had taught them. Each rabbi had disciples who were under his authority and so the fig tree was symbolic of sitting under their authority. Yeshua, in cursing a lifeless fig tree, was implying that lifeless interpretations of Torah were being judged and authority would be taken from those who taught in this way. True life was coming to Torah and the Holy Spirit would be sent to those whom God would appoint to teach New Covenant fulfillment of Torah. The religious leaders were conscious of what Yeshua was saying. He followed up the sign of the cursed fig tree with stern warnings. He was not taking the

authority from the Jews and giving it to Gentiles. In coming days, through His Apostles, a better authority structure would emerge, centred on Himself, the King of the Jews. Then, beginning in Jerusalem, He would extend His Kingdom to include congregations throughout the world.

Chapter 22. The leaders of the various sects of Judaism were openly challenged by Yeshua in the preparatory days before Passover. The chief sects were the Pharisees and Sadducees who sent representatives to test Him with various questions. He silenced them with His answers. His words were uncompromising but they were, nevertheless, filled with a loving invitation to reform and follow Him. He continued to preach the Kingdom of Heaven, the fulfillment of all that Israel had been promised over many centuries – if only they had eyes to see it.

Chapter 23. These are the strongest words spoken by Yeshua to the religious leaders. He warned them in no uncertain terms that they were in error concerning some of their interpretations of Torah. The worst condemnation was that they were hypocrites, who might know the truth but not live it. Woe would come upon them if they continued in this way. What else could Yeshua do? After He had suffered on the Cross there would be no way to the Father than through faith in Him, Son of Man and Son of God. He would be negligent as a Prophet if He did not warn them clearly. They were in danger of holding onto religious frameworks that would become more and more lifeless. Man to man, He faced up to them. It is totally Hebraic to have such frank confrontations whilst also maintaining a love for one another. He wept over Jerusalem because of His love for His own people. This was a fulfillment of Jeremiah's weeping over Jerusalem at the time of the Babylonian exile. Jeremiah warned the Jews for many years that this would happen but they did not heed his warning, so Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians. The Book of Lamentations was a Prophetic pointer to the day when Yeshua would once more weep over the City. A city is a people as well as buildings. Soon the buildings would crumble once more, this time under Rome, and the people become exiled again. Yeshua foresaw all this as He wept for His people. He recalled the Messianic proclamation that had been spoken when He entered Jerusalem – *blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord*. He indicated that this would be spoken once more, but He would not return to this earth until He heard it afresh. In the words He spoke, behind the sadness for the things that would come upon His people, there is hope. One day the Messianic cry will go up from the heart of Israel and this will herald the return of the King. This day, now fast approaching after 2000 years of exile, is coming to its climax in the midst of world affairs.

Matthew 24. These are the clearest words in the entire Bible concerning world affairs leading up to the return of the Lord. They can be read alongside the other prophecies of the

end times and help us to gain more understanding. The seven trumpets of Revelation confirm the sequence of events we find in this Chapter. Yeshua also interprets the Prophecies of Daniel and Zechariah. There is layer upon layer of prophecy. We must read this prophecy over and over so that the various events of the world are put in context. Yeshua has forewarned us. There was a partial fulfillment of verses 15 to 28 when Jerusalem fell to the Romans in 70 AD. There is to be a greater fulfillment in the End Times. It is better to read these prophecies over and over as the days proceed than to try to gain a complete understanding of the timeline of events in advance. This has led to many errors of interpretation. We are to watch and pray. These are two spiritual ministries inspired by the Holy Spirit. With our Bible before us and the affairs of the world around us, the Holy Spirit will interpret the Prophecies and help us to pray. The signs of the Lord's coming are increasing in the world today. Note the mention of the fig tree in Verse 32. We considered how this is a symbol of authority to interpret Torah and it is also linked in some way to Israel. When we see Israel coming to the forefront of world history it will coincide with a restoration of authority to interpret Torah. With 2000 years of Christianity behind us we are beginning to see a fresh awakening to deeper and more balanced interpretation of Scriptural truth. These are indeed days of renewal and great expectation. With the antichrist system also creeping upon the world we will need to be digging deeper into Scriptural understanding in order to avoid deception. These are days of preparation. All that Yeshua said is coming to pass.

Day 7

A Day for Rest and Further Reflection

Chapter 25. Verses 1 to 13 contain the Parable of the wise and foolish virgins. It is perhaps the most relevant parable for today. It ends with the purpose of the parable – we must keep watch because the Lord is going to return. If we do not watch and pray in these important days, we are in danger of being deceived and falling into a slumber. We must be alert like the virgins depicted in the parable. The imagery of the Bridegroom coming for His Bride is used many times in Scripture to illustrate the Lord's return. We must be careful not to dissect the Parable so much as to determine an exact formula for the time and nature of His coming. Parables teach us truth but there are many faces to truth. Even this parable is not the *complete* picture. It must be read in the context of all other teaching about the end times. There have not been more appropriate days than the ones in which we live for us to take this teaching very seriously. As well as watching, we must be about the Lord's business, as is shown by the Parable of the Talents. This is another strong warning about the consequences of not understanding the signs of the times. Take careful note of the way we all will be judged. The Lord's ministry to the poor and needy is as high a priority for us as it was when He came to earth.

Chapters 26 to 28. Here then is the climax to the Gospel account. The purpose for which Yeshua first came to earth was to be the sacrifice for our sins. In Revelation 19:10, we read that the testimony of Yeshua is the spirit of prophecy. All types, shadows and biblical prophecies pointed to Him and were fulfilled in Him. Ever since the Fall, all mankind waited for this moment when the Son of God suffered on the Cross. We have read this Gospel account immediately after reading about the greatest kingdom that was ever established on earth, at the time of David and Solomon. This kingdom was a shadow of the greater Kingdom. After the suffering on the Cross, the death and burial of Yeshua and His Resurrection to the Father's side, the Kingdom of Heaven broke out to the North, South, East and West. The entire earth began to hear what Yeshua had done and that He will return to bring His people to Himself. He went to the Father to rule from Heaven. At the time of Samuel, Israel asked for a king to be like all the other nations. This was a sad day because Israel was rejecting direct rule from God. Nevertheless, God's Covenant plan took account of this and so the day came when the Kingdom was restored to the Father through His Son. Those who are His disciples, through faith in His atoning Blood shed on the Cross, are members of the Kingdom of Heaven waiting for the King's return. The Gospel account ends with the Great Commission. All authority is given to Yeshua and He will share His authority with us according to our individual callings. Authority is a spiritual gift for our area of service, to contribute to the spread of His Kingdom on earth, preparing others as disciples who will also dedicate their lives to the Kingdom and prepare for His coming.
