



Jesus' Use of *Remez* in the Gospels

By John DeLancey

(with Laura Carter, Contributor & Editor)



Introduction

It is at times difficult to fully understand the intended meaning of Jesus' teaching as preserved in the Gospels. Being far removed from the world, customs, and culture of the first century, Westerners can struggle to discover the hidden treasure of meaning in the words of Jesus.

The purpose of this project is to help unpack one particular *genre* Jesus used in some of His teachings. This *genre*, or method of teaching and interpretation, is the use of what is called **remez** (*remezim*, Hebrew plural).

Most Jewish and Hebraic scholars teach that there were four primary modes of interpreting and teaching scripture used by the rabbis in the days of Jesus and continuing throughout the *Rabbinical Period*. David Sterns (a Messianic Jew and translator of the *Jewish New Testament*) briefly describes these four rabbinical modes of interpretation. While our focus will be on the *remezim* used by Jesus, it is still beneficial to understand the other three.

"Pardes"

These four techniques are also referred to as Pardes (or PaRDeS). This acronym serves as a mnemonic device of recalling the four types of interpretation:

- P'Shat "Simple"
- Remez "Hint"
- Derash/
Midrash "Search"
- Sod "Secret"

As listed in the *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Stern, David H., Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), these modes of interpreting and teaching include:

- **P'shat** (פשוט - "simple") - the plain, literal sense of the text, more or less what modern scholars mean by "grammatical-historical exegesis", which looks to the grammar of the language and the historical setting as background for deciding what a passage means. It is about discovering the **straight forward meaning** of the text.
- **Remez** (רמז - "hint") - wherein a word, phrase or other element in the text **hints** at a truth not conveyed by the p'shat interpretation and teaching mode. The implied presupposition is that Jesus hinted at things (i.e. verses, partial verses, phrases, themes, etc.) already conveyed in the Hebrew scriptures that would have been familiar to His audience.
- **Derash** or **Midrash** (דרש - "search") - an allegorical or homiletical application of a text. This is a species of *eisegesis*—reading **one's own thoughts** into the text, as opposed to exegesis, which is extracting from the text what it actually says. David Flusser defines it as "a creative exegesis and understanding of the text of the Bible and its stories, an attempt to discover all the various senses implicit in the biblical verse." This technique is controversial today since it is seen as subjective.
- **Sod** (סוד - "secret") - a **mystical** or **hidden meaning** arrived at by operating on the numerical values of the Hebrew letters, noting unusual spellings, transposing letters, and the like. The implied presupposition is that God invests meaning in the minutest details of scripture, even the individual letters.

These four techniques are also referred to as *Pardes* (also seen as PaRDeS). This acronym serves as a mnemonic device of recalling the four types of interpretation noted above.

More about *Remezim*

Compiled in this project is a good collection of examples of Jesus' use of *remezim* seen in His teaching. This list of *remezim* are organized in the order they appear in the Gospels.

To elaborate on the stated definition of *remez* from above (the word means *hint*), we often use a form of *remez* in our Western culture today. For instance, when I say "Mary had a little lamb", I am using *remez*. I am assuming

you know the rest of the children's song without me needing to sing the entire song. I'm simply *hinting* by mentioning only one phrase of the song. Similarly, when I say, "I pledge allegiance to the flag," I do not need to recite the entire *Pledge of Allegiance*, for I am assuming you know to what I am referring. That is *remez*, namely, hinting at something broader and already committed to memory.

About its use, Hebraic scholar David Bivin (in *Jerusalem Perspective*, 1999) described *remez* this way:

“Jewish teachers, instead of fully quoting verses of Scripture, commonly alluded to the passages upon which their lessons were based. By using the remez technique, a teacher conveyed a great deal of information with remarkable brevity, in much the same way a poet can express complex ideas through metaphors.”

Bivin continues:

“The rabbis could teach in this manner because most Jews of the period—and certainly all disciples of sages—were well-versed in the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings. The substance of an allusion sometimes was found in a passage immediately before or after the verse at which the teacher had hinted. To quote the entire passage was unnecessary since most in the audience had learned large segments of Scripture by rote. The moment a teacher made an allusion, the whole passage flashed across the mind's eye of the biblically literate listener.”

Today when it comes to biblical connections, I suppose it's something like sharing a *cross-reference* that links us to an assumed understood Hebrew Scripture connection.

To determine whether a *remez* is being used to unfold a deeper hinted meaning and/or a connection with a passage or phrase from the Hebrew scriptures can indeed be challenging, for it is not always apparent. The list I share below are examples of *remezim* with fairly solid connections. Of course, we cannot be totally certain in assuming Jesus used a specific *remez* in each case. In no case did I want to *stretch* a passage in order to see a *remez* that isn't there. However, the connections and implications I share, in my humble perspective, are strong examples of Jesus' use of *remezim* in His teaching and interpretation.

Lastly, I organized each example of *remezim* in the following way:

- The specific reference as found in the Gospels.¹
- An explanation. These explanations vary in length and in detail.
- Within the explanation is the *remez* or "hint" of a specific Hebrew scriptural connection Jesus sought to use to bring forth a more deeply-exposed meaning to His teaching.
- An implication. This gets to the heart of the matter, namely, what was the ultimate underlying meaning of Jesus' teaching. Jesus' implication has practical meaning for us today as followers (*talmidim*) of Yeshua Jesus.

A Few Hebrew Words

Jesus most likely used a mix of Hebrew and Aramaic in His teaching. His teaching incorporated three attributes by which the heavens and earth were created:

"By wisdom (*hokmah*) the LORD laid the earth's foundations, by understanding (*tevunah*) He set the heavens in place; by his knowledge (*da'at*) the watery depths were divided, and the clouds let drop the dew" (Proverbs 3:19-20).

Treasures found in the pages of the Hebrew and Christian Testaments are priceless. Those first century hearers knew the stories of old. As Jesus used *remez* in His teachings, new insight was gained into the meaning and purpose of God's kingdom. These treasures of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge are found as we follow Jesus and adhere to His way!

¹ Unless otherwise noted, I have used the NIV translation on the noted scriptural passages.

It is my humble intention to share this list with you for the purpose of getting to the heart of Jesus' teaching. This includes exposing how Jesus used *remezim*, a well-known teaching and interpretive genre of His day. Sometimes the *remezim* Jesus used in His teachings are obvious *hints* to passages or phrases within the Hebrew Bible that everyone in His audience would have understood. Other times, Jesus' use of *remezim* are subtle hints to a deeper application perhaps targeted to the more religious community.

"Talmidim" (תלמידים)

The Hebrew word "Talmidim" (*talmid*, singular) means "disciples" or "followers" and comes from the root word *lamad* (למד) meaning "to learn."

However, the word goes much deeper than just the concept of being merely a student or learner. A student wanted to know what their rabbi knew, but a disciple wanted to be who their rabbi was.

Talmidim desired to "walk in the dust" and "sit at the feet" of their rabbi. They followed him everywhere to learn of him and to do that, they would even move in with their rabbi to further glean from his day to day activities.

In the words of Yose ben Yoezer, a 2nd century BC sage (*Mishnah Avon*, 1:4):

"Let your home be a meeting-house for the sages, and cover yourself with the dust of their feet, and drink in their words thirstily."

Additionally, some of the examples of *remezim* even include what can be called *physical* or *action remezim*. This suggests that while Jesus may not have used a spoken *remezim* in a specific passage I've listed below, His actions *hinted* at something important or significant that His audience would have understood.

This listing of **61 remezim** of Jesus (at present count) is not exhaustive by any means. Admittedly, among this list are a few examples of the words of Jesus that *appear* to be *remezim*, although we cannot be certain of the suggested specific Hebrew Scripture link. I have also listed 8 additional *remezim* used by others in the Gospels.

Please view this collection as an initial listing. However, I do hope this will further intrigue you to look for others I have not included here, or have missed entirely.

Ultimately, may this be a valuable resource that will lead you to a deepened understand of the teaching of Jesus as well as a heightened desire to learn more about the Hebraic Jesus as one of His faithful **talmidim** (followers). I contend that if we want to know *what* Jesus taught, we first have to learn *how* He taught. The use of *remezim* by Jesus is only one of many ways that will help us understand His teachings more thoroughly.

I do not consider myself an authoritative voice on the topic of *remez*. Rather, in my studies over the last two decades I have attempted to learn more and more about the Hebraic context of Jesus' teaching, namely, *how* Jesus taught! Therefore, this is a *working* document and not complete in any sense of the word.

Please feel free to communicate with me your *own* discovery of further *remezim* that you uncover in your own study of the life and teaching ministry of Jesus. Please email me your discoveries, insights, and questions at DrJohn@biblicalisrael.com.

May we be all faithful students and followers (*talmidim*) of Jesus together!
Humble blessings in Christ,

JOHN

Rev. Dr. John DeLancey

Director of *Biblical Israel Ministries & Tours*



About Biblical Israel Ministries & Tours

Our ministry, *Biblical Israel Ministries & Tours* (BIMT), not only offers the teaching of the Bible in the context of the land of Israel, but also unique and non-touristy life-transforming study tours to Israel. Our web site (scan the QR code below) is a good place to begin searching for a trip that may best fit your schedule and interest. Many Israel trips include optional extensions to other biblical lands (Jordan, Egypt, Greece, and Turkey). We also offer Greece and Turkey trips (with option to Italy). We welcome you to join us!

This *Remez* project is offered free of charge. If you would feel led to share a financial gift of any amount, or become a supporting partner of BIMT (a 501c3 non-profit ministry), we welcome your support. Our web site and our phone/tablet app provide easy and safe ways for you to offer a financial gift.

Biblical Israel Ministries & Tours

12565 Jackson Run Road
Sugar Grove, PA 16350
412-999-5697
www.biblicalisrael tours.com



Rev. Dr. John DeLancey



Table of Contents

Passage:	Remezim Scripture:
Matthew 4:18-22	Genesis 12:1; Deuteronomy 5:33, 13:4
Matthew 5:1-2	Exodus 19:3
Matthew 5:38-39	Lamentations 3:30
Matthew 5:40	Exodus 22:26-27, Deuteronomy 24:10-13
Matthew 5:41	Proverbs 25:21-22
Matthew 6:11	Exodus 16:15-16, Deuteronomy 8:3
Matthew 7:7-8	Jeremiah 29:13, 2 Chronicles 15:1-2
Matthew 7:15-20	Jeremiah 6:13-14, 14:14
Matthew 9:14-15	Isaiah 58:2-9
Matthew 10:23 (and others)	Daniel 7:13-14
Matthew 11:2-6	Zechariah 9:9, 9:11; Malachi 3:1; Isaiah 29:18-19, 35:5-6, 61:1-2
Matthew 11:11-12	Micah 2:12-13
Matthew 11:28-30	Jeremiah 6:16
Matthew 13:1-9	Genesis 26:12
Matthew 13:10-15	Isaiah 6:10
Matthew 13:31-32	Ezekiel 17:22-24
Matthew 13:33	Genesis 18:3-6
Matthew 13:44-46	Proverbs 2:1-5
Matthew 13:47-50	Ezekiel 47:9-10, Psalm 112:10
Matthew 13:52	Proverbs 2:4-7
Matthew 14:25-27	Job 9:6-8, Joshua 1:5
Matthew 18:19-20	Exodus 20:24
Matthew 18:23-27	Deuteronomy 15:9-11
Matthew 19:11-12	Isaiah 56:3-5
Matthew 20:1-2	Isaiah 5:1-2,7; Proverbs 28:22
Matthew 21:1-5	Isaiah 62:11, Zechariah 9:9
Matthew 21:13	Isaiah 56:7, Jeremiah 7:11
Matthew 21:15-16	Psalm 8:2
Matthew 21:18-22	Jeremiah 8:13
Matthew 21:33-44	Psalm 118:22-23, Isaiah 5:1-2
Matthew 22:2-14	Genesis 12:2-3, Hosea 2:23, Psalm 112:10, Isaiah 61:10
Matthew 23:13	Ezekiel 13:1-5, 10-12
Matthew 24:15-30	Daniel 9:27, Isaac 13:9-13
Matthew 25:1-13	Jeremiah 25:8-11, 2:32
Matthew 25:14-18 2.....	Kings 22:4-7
Matthew 25:31-36	Ezekiel 34:16-19
Matthew 26:21-32	Zechariah 13:7
Mark 9:49-50	Leviticus 2:13, Numbers 18:19, 2 Chronicles 13:5

Passage:**Remezim Scripture:**

Mark 11:15-17	Isaiah 56:6-7, Jeremiah 7:9-12
Mark 12:41-44	Deuteronomy 14:22, 28-29
Mark 15:34	Psalm 22:1, 24:8-10
Luke 2:46-50	2 Samuel 7:14, Psalm 2:7
Luke 4:16-21	Isaiah 58:6, 61:1-2
Luke 6:36-38	Isaiah 65:6-7; Psalm 79:12; Proverbs 19:17, 28:27; Jeremiah 32:19
Luke 7:14-17	2 Kings 4:32-36
Luke 9:27-36	Psalm 2:7, Deuteronomy 18:15
Luke 9:61-62	Psalm 2:7
Luke 11:19-20	Psalm 2:7
Luke 12:32-34	Proverbs 19:17, 22:9, 14:31
Luke 13:6-8	Isaiah 10:33,34
Luke 15:20-24	Genesis 46:28-29
Luke 19:9-10	Ezekiel 34 (various portions)
Luke 23:26-31	Hosea 10:5-8, Ezekiel 20:47-48, 21:6-7
Luke 24:46-49	Hosea 6:1-2
John 1:51	Genesis 28:10-13, 17
John 6:35, 41, 57-58	Exodus 16, Deuteronomy 8:3
John 6:70-71	Zechariah 3:1-2
John 7:37-38	Isaiah 12:2-3, 55:1
John 8:3-9	Jeremiah 17:13
John 8:52-59	Exodus 3:14
John 13:18-20	Psalm 41: 7-9

Additional Remezim Used by Others

Matthew 1:21-23	Isaiah 7:14
Matthew 2:13-15	Hosea 11:1
Matthew 3:1-3	Isaiah 40:3-5
Matthew 3:4	2 Kings 1:8, Zechariah 13:4
Matthew 3:16-17	Psalm 2:7, Isaiah 42:1
Matthew 4:13-17	Isaiah 9:1-2
John 1:1-4	Genesis 1:1-3
John 1:29-31	Genesis 22:8, Isaiah 53:7

The Listing of “Remezim” in the Gospels

Matthew 4:18-22 - As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Explanation:

The calling of Peter, Andrew, James, and John to become His followers (*talmidim*) took place early in His ministry. The most likely location of this transforming moment for these four fishermen was somewhere along the shoreline of Capernaum, the town from which Jesus would center His Galilean ministry. The *remez* that Jesus used in the calling of these initial four disciples is disguised in our English translation of the phrase, “Come, follow me.”

Jesus most likely spoke Hebrew (although others would suggest *Aramaic*, another Semitic language adopted by Jews while exiled in Babylon). The Hebrew words for “Come, follow me” are *Lech Acharai*, literally meaning “walk after me.”

While we cannot be certain, it seems the *remez* (hint) Jesus used here could very well be tied to the story of God’s calling of Abraham (Abram then). Genesis 12:1 records: “The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.” We find an interesting Hebrew phrase here with varied meaning, yet so similar. The phrase used is “*Lech lecha*” or literally, “Go to yourself,” “Go!”, “go for you”, “go forth”, and even “imitate.” According to my good friend Moshe, an Orthodox Jew who lives in Jerusalem, “*Lech*’ is critical because it is a call of faith to keep going forward in spite of one’s self-doubt or failures. It implies going forward with faith.” Could it be that God was calling Abram to a new inward journey of faith?

In comparison, Jesus says something slightly different to these four disciples, “*Lech Acharai*.” Is it plausible that Jesus was now calling these fishermen *to something* in addition to that inward journey of faith, one that includes going forward with faith and physically *walking* after Him?

The concept of walking after God with one’s whole being was also shared by Moses:

“Walk (“telechu” - a form of lech) in obedience to all that the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will

Lech Acharai (לך אחרי)

In 1st century Judaism, the process of becoming a rabbi was extensive:

1. *Beit Sefer* – house of the book. The first step for the student ages 6-10 was to memorize the *Book of Instruction*, which consisted of the first five books or “the *Torah*” (187 chapters and about 5800 verses!). This step must be accomplished with great proficiency and took place in local synagogues.
2. *Beit Talmud* – house of learning. At the age of 10-14, the very best students would memorize the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures - the “Prophets” and the “Writings” (1,074 chapters and over 27,570 verses, for a total of 1,261 chapters and over 33,300 verses!).
3. *Beit Midrash* - house of interpretation / study. At the age of 14, students would request of their rabbi to become one of his *talmidim* (students), and seek entrance into his “Beit Midrash.” If the rabbi saw the student’s potential, he would say in Hebrew *Lech Acharai* - “Come, follow me.” They not only gleaned from the Rabbi’s vast knowledge, but they learned to be *like* the one they learned from.

possess" (Deuteronomy 5:33).

Additionally, Moses wrote: *"It is the LORD your God you must follow (again, "telechu"), and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him"* (Deuteronomy 13:4). It is interesting that the word *radaph* (רדף) which means follow or pursue/chase down, is not used here. Rather, a form of *lech* (to walk) is used.

In contrast to the obedient response of the four disciples, we read of a rich man in Luke 18 who is extended the same invitation to become a disciple. In order to do so, he first had to sell his riches and give it to the poor. He decided that was just too much to ask and turned down the invitation.

Implication:

Jesus said "Lech Acharai" when calling His first disciples. They responded by leaving family, profession, and possession and walking (*lech*) after Him. Jesus wants us to not only *follow* Him, but also *walk* after and imitate Him (see Ephesians 5:1). Jesus is calling us to a new inward journey of faith with Him!

S'mekah

This is a Hebrew word that means "authority."

Jesus taught as one who had been deemed with "s'mekah" and not as the regular "teachers of the teachers" or Rabbis.

Speaking of rabbis with s'mekah, Bob Dodson shares: *"They were given an unusual stamp of approval as someone so gifted at what they did that they had God's stamp of approval. Two other rabbis who had s'mekah had to confer this title on you and say that you too, had God's stamp of approval and that your authority came from God himself."*

If you were deemed with having s'mekah, you could travel and take a group of talmidim with you. You also had the right and authority to make new interpretations of the law because of s'mekah."

A rabbi with s'mekah would say, *"You have heard it said, but I say..."* This rabbi is displaying his authority to not only quote Scripture, but also to interpret it in a new or fresh way.

Matthew 5:1-2 - *Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.*

Explanation:

First of all, an expansion on Jewish culture is in order. When scripture was read, it was customary for the rabbi to stand. However when he was ready to teach, he sat down (see Luke 4:20). So here, Jesus is teaching them something.

The location of where Jesus is teaching is clear: *"He went up on the mountainside."* This seems to be a "physical" or "action" *remez* that hints at well understood and significant connotations. It is meant to help the audience that day recall Moses going up Mount Sinai to receive the law from God (Exodus 19:3). Here in the Galilee, Jesus is presenting a new interpretation of the Law.

Then, the text says that Jesus *"sat down."* The act of *sitting down* has an important undertone in scripture. Sitting down is a sign of what is called in Hebrew *"s'mekah"* (authority). Whereas there is not a reference to Moses assuming a sitting position when teaching the Israelites in the desert, nonetheless the act of Jesus sitting down to teach conveys that He possessed authority in delivering His interpretation of the law.

Additionally, the text says: *"He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying..."* This is a sign of "speaking authoritatively" in a new way. What came out of the mouth of Jesus the Messiah that day somewhere on the

slopes of the Sea of Galilee was the *Living Torah* of the Kingdom of Heaven, fulfilling and transcending the law of Moses given at Sinai.

Implication:

Jesus was demonstrating His *authority* in His teaching, speaking on behalf of God. When He delivered His “Sermon on the Mount,” Jesus was fulfilling the Torah, not replacing it, and setting it on a firmer foundation (see Matthew 5:17-19).

Matthew 5:38-39 - (Jesus speaking) *“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.”*

Explanation:

On a western hillside somewhere overlooking the Sea of Galilee is where Jesus shared His *Sermon on the Mount*. The purpose of His teaching was to outline the expected attitude and behavior of a kingdom follower. One of these expectations included how to respond to someone who dishonors you. Getting revenge upon someone who has wronged you is not an appropriate kingdom response.

In the first century the Romans controlled the Jewish population of Judea, Samaria, and the Galilee. These soldiers thrived on offending and insulting the personal dignity of Jews. One form of physical abuse included slapping.

New Testament scholar NT. Wright shared: “To be struck on the right cheek, in that world, almost certainly meant being hit with the back of the right hand. That’s not just violence, but an insult; it implies that you’re inferior...”. Such an act by a Roman soldier upon the right cheek of any Jew would be considered a dishonorable, not to mention humiliating, insult.

Jesus may have *hinted* at what was recorded by Jeremiah with regard to the suffering of Jews in Babylonian captivity: *“Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him, and let him be filled with disgrace”* (Lamentations 3:30). With this *remez*, why would Jesus instruct His followers to offer the **left cheek** as well? This is where cultural context matters.

Whereas striking a person with the back of their right hand and making contact with the right cheek implied they were inferior, striking with an open right palm or fist upon the left cheek of another would be implying the person being struck was actually considered an *equal*. By offering

“Turning the Other Cheek”

“Jesus is not suggesting that his followers should stand around and take abuse. First, turning the left cheek was a bold rejection of the insult itself. Second, it challenged the aggressor to repeat the offense, while requiring that they now strike with the palm of their hand, something done not to a lesser but to an equal. In other words, turning the other cheek strongly declares that the opposer holds no power for condescending shame because the victim’s honor is not dependent on human approval—it comes from somewhere else. This kind of action reshapes the relationship, pushing the adversary to either back down or to treat them as an equal.”

Craig Keener, *Gospel of Matthew*

the other cheek, one was comparing himself as an equal, even a peer, to the Roman soldier. Imagine the ire that would generate!

Thus, as Jesus suggested, the giving of the other cheek (i.e. left cheek) displayed an assertion of one's kingdom position in a brave and peaceful countermove. Jesus was not advocating that his kingdom followers should lay down and take the abuse, but rather He was encouraging His followers to confidently take a stand in this profound way. This is how Jesus responded Himself during His own trial and crucifixion (1 Peter 2:20-23).

Implication:

Turning the *other cheek* was a kingdom response in a peaceful and dignified way to cultural insults and ridicule. The action of a kingdom of God citizen should be a humble yet powerful response to unjust actions against you. It is a Christ-like response to those who oppose us.

Generosity

"Hebrew Bible law does allow Israelites to also use someone's outer garment, or coat, as collateral for a loan, but the coat must be returned by nightfall because the person likely needs it for warmth. To voluntarily give up the coat would be exceedingly generous. Jesus is teaching a way of life that trusts in the power of a generous response and does not repay greed with greed."

(Bible Project Scholar Team)

Generosity isn't always about our money. The Bible places it at the end of the list. We are to give of our time, talents, and treasures as a reflection of the generous heart of God beating within us.

Matthew 5:40 - *"And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well."*

Explanation:

Following Jesus' teaching (just two verses prior) on "turning the other cheek," an additional thought is conveyed, this time about being compassionate.

In Jesus' day, most people wore an under-garment linen tunic (the *shirt* in our text) as well as an outer cloak (the coat). The poor primarily owned only a tunic, and not the cloak. This outer garment was made of a thicker material and was more expensive. Not only did one use this layer during the day, but it could also provide a warm covering at night, especially useful while sleeping in the open.

Jesus assumed most of His audience on the hillside that day knew the Mosaic Law. Many would be well-versed in Old Testament passages, thus the connection would be clear regarding the shirt and the cloak.

In the book of Exodus Moses relays this message from God: *"If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it by sunset, because that cloak is the only covering your neighbor has. What else can they sleep in? When they cry out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate"* (Exodus 22:26-27). Additionally, we find similar words in this passage from Deuteronomy:

"When you make a loan of any kind to your neighbor, do not go into their house to get what is offered to you as a pledge. Stay outside and let the neighbor to whom you are making the loan bring the pledge out to you. If the neighbor is poor, do not go to sleep with their pledge in your possession. Return their cloak by sunset so that your neighbor may sleep in it. Then they will thank you, and it will be regarded as a righteous act in the sight of the LORD your God" (Deut. 24:10-13).

Was Jesus *hinting* back to what God had instructed His people through Moses? Was using this *remez* a way of teaching kingdom followers to counter harmful greed with creative generosity towards others? It would seem so.

Implication:

Jesus wants His followers to have hearts that mimic the heart of God. Generosity and kindness towards others, especially those in need, shows we understand what gracious generosity really looks like.

Matthew 5:41 - *"If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles."*

Explanation:

Jesus offers another word about generosity by sharing an apparent *remez* from the Book of Proverbs: *"If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you"* (Proverbs 25:21-22). In His Sermon, Jesus suggests going *above and beyond* what was expected when given an opportunity to show generosity. And even if that someone may be degrading you, that level of kindness has the power to affect change.

The Roman oppression of Jews in the First century was real. Roman soldiers could force Jews to perform the most menial and undignified tasks for them. This included carrying the soldier's military equipment, their loads, or containers of water up to a distance of 1,000 paces (the equivalent of about a mile).

Jesus' admonition to do more than expected and to graciously give of oneself beyond what was demanded was viewed as an opportunity to display generosity.

Implication:

Jesus expected His followers to go the *extra mile* by sharing generously, even with your enemies. As one shows this spirit of generosity, God is pleased.

Matthew 6:11 - *"Give us today our daily bread."*

Explanation:

Within this classic (and very Jewish) prayer, Jesus taught His disciples to pray. We know the entire prayer as *The Lord's Prayer*. The reference to bread was meant to "hint" at the story of God's provision of daily manna as found in the Sinai encounter, *"Moses said to them, 'It is the bread the LORD has given*

The "Hamotzi" Prayer
רְבוּךְ אֱתָהּ יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ
*"Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu
Melech ha-olam, hamotzi
lechem min ha'aretz."*

*"Blessed are You, LORD our
God, King of the Universe,
who has brought forth bread
from the earth."*

you to eat. This is what the LORD has commanded: Everyone is to gather as much as they need. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.” (Exodus 16:15-16). Also, Jesus was hinting at the reference to manna in Deuteronomy 8:3 and provides further hinted context, *“He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”*

A common Jewish prayer (called *The Hamotzi Prayer*) said both before and after a meal today still references that it is God who *brings forth bread from the earth*. It is ultimately God who provides the necessities of life.

Implication:

Jesus is the ultimate provider of what we need in life right now. He later mentioned that He came to be the *“Living Bread”* (John 6:51-59). This followed the Feeding of the 5,000 miracle.

Matthew 7:7-8 - *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”*

Explanation:

This verse is well known and beloved. Jesus invites us to Himself. But what did those first century Jewish listeners actually hear when Jesus said, “Seek and you will find?” They were no doubt reminded of their spiritual heritage. Jesus hints at what is written by the prophet Jeremiah, *“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart”* (Jeremiah 29:13).

Spiritual fervor for God was lacking in the days of the sixth century BC leading to the Babylonian invasion of the land. Idolatry was prevalent and defined Judean culture, causing God to issue words of warning through the prophet.

The Chronicler wrote something similar about what was happening centuries before Jeremiah:

“The Spirit of God came on Azariah son of Oded. He went out to meet Asa and said to him, “Listen to me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin. The LORD is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you”
(2 Chronicles 15:1-2).

Jesus was getting to the heart of what was important. Above all, seeking God and His ways led to the opening of God’s blessing.

Implication:

Seeking Jesus opens the door of hope to the wayward follower. He is always there waiting for us to return to Him and follow Him with an undivided heart!

Matthew 7:15-20 - *"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them."*

Explanation:

In the first century, according to Josephus, there were others who claimed to be "Messianic." Understanding the term we see that messiah means "Anointed one" and in the days before and after Jesus, priests and kings also fit that title since they were also anointed. During the early days of the first century, these figures were rising up and attracting a following.

Included in the number were those within Israel's Jewish establishment of religious teachers (*"Pharisees and teachers of the Law"*). These men were famous for teaching one thing and doing another, putting them in the same camp as the false prophets back in the days of Moses (Deuteronomy 13:1-5). They were religious leaders who claimed to speak on behalf of God but led the people astray. They abandoned the pure teaching of the Law, leaning instead on their own weighty man made *Oral Law* (their own interpretation of the Law). These men and their teachings were deceitful and dangerous. Jesus condemns them here and elsewhere in Matthew 23.

In our passage, Jesus shares a rather harsh *remez* about these counterfeits by hinting back to the nature and activity of the *false prophets* living in the days of Jeremiah. Jesus' audience would have recalled how these false prophets condoned a pattern of disobedience among God's people. Jeremiah writes:

"Then the LORD said to me, 'The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds'" (Jeremiah 14:14).

Jeremiah shared similar words just a few chapters earlier about these false prophets and other teachers of the Law: *"From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit. They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace"* (Jeremiah 6:13-14).

Thus, Jesus delivers a strong warning and condemns these types of prophets for not only speaking lies, but also yielding a crop of bad fruit similar to the false prophets and teachers in the days of Isaiah; *"Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit"* (Isaiah 5:2).

Implication:

Jesus' warning of false prophets was bold and to the point! Following the wrong teacher was going to end poorly

False Prophets

The Bible describes false prophets as adulterous (Jeremiah 23:14), treacherous (Zephaniah 3:4), drunkards (Isaiah 28:7), wicked (Jeremiah 23:11), liars (Jeremiah 14:14; 23:14), and associated with divination and witchcraft (Jeremiah 14:14; Ezekiel 22:28; Acts 13:6). Scripture teaches believers to be diligent in faith and devotion to Christ's teachings so that they will be able to spot false prophets and false teachers quickly (2 Peter 1:10; 1:19—2:1; 1 John 4:1).

-Got Questions-

for people if they didn't pay attention to the fruit of these deceitful leaders. All they had to do now was recount Israel and Judah's history and then apply Jesus' lesson on false prophets. Many did not heed. Will we?

Matthew 9:14-15 - *Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast."*

Explanation:

Fasting was part of Jewish culture during the first century. The teaching of Moses (Leviticus 23:26-32) required fasting only once a year on the *Day of Atonement*. Some suggest that Pharisees fasted twice a week as an outward sign of their righteousness. Perhaps even *self-righteousness*.

In the Old Testament, fasting was usually an expression of sorrow over sin or a plea for God to physically deliver His people from national disaster. Jesus and His audience would have been familiar with what Isaiah said about fasting. Jesus seemed to be hinting at this passage:

*"...For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of their God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? 'Is not **this** (emphasis mine) the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear, then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I" (Isaiah 58:2-9).*

For the first time, Jesus introduces Himself as a Bridegroom. In doing so, He was introducing a *new paradigm of fasting*, a fast motivated by deepened desire to encounter the presence of Jesus to the fullest, not as a sign of repentance of sin or mourning as a nation in a difficult situation.

Implication:

Jesus would be with His disciples only a short time longer. He did not want them to fast for the purposes that Isaiah mentioned in the first part of the verse, but rather to make the paradigm shift to the second half of the verse and feast on His presence with them.

Matthew 10:23 - *When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.*

Matthew 12:8 - *For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.*

The “Son of Man”

“I would argue that the identification of Jesus as “the son of man” serves as an interpretative framework or grid for rightly discerning the true meaning of His sayings and actions throughout his public ministry. In other words, “Son of Man” functions as the Rosetta Stone of the story of Jesus.”

-Nick Nowalk-

Matthew 12:40 - *For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*

Matthew 13:41 - *The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.*

Matthew 16:13 - *When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”*

Matthew 16:27 - *For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.*

Matthew 16:28 - *Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

Matthew 19:28 - *Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”*

Matthew 20:28 - *Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

Matthew 24:27 - *For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.*

Matthew 24:30 - *Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.*

Matthew 24:37 - *As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.*

Matthew 24:44 - *So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.*

Matthew 25:13 - *Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming. (NKJV, note: “Son of Man” does not appear in some translations)*

Matthew 25:31 - *When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.*

Explanation:

In the Gospels and according to some counts, Jesus used the term “Son of Man” 81 times. In doing so, He borrowed the term from Daniel 7:13-14:

“I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away. And His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.”

In Jesus’ day, everyone would have understood the insinuation Jesus was making (using *remez*) in the use of this messianic title. Coming “in the clouds of heaven” signified not just Jesus’ authority but also the salvation and judgment that would accompany Him. As the “Son of Man,” Jesus fulfilled the messianic prediction, “*Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet*” (Psalm 110:1).

Implication:

Jesus was proclaiming in a very Jewish way that He was the predicted “Son of Man.” He was the One who would not only offer an everlasting and indestructible Kingdom, but also issue impending judgment upon sin. In other words, Jesus was proclaiming to be the enthroned and promised Messiah!

Matthew 11:2-6 - *When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”*

Explanation:

The context places *John the Baptizer* at Machaerus (in modern day Jordan). John actually uses two *remezim* (plural form of *remez*) in his question for Jesus.

- John hints to what Zechariah had prophesied and focused upon the phrase “*the one who is to come*.” Zechariah had said, “*Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*” (Zechariah 9:9).
- What was the Messiah/King to do? Zechariah continues, “*As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit*” (Zechariah 9:11). It is possible that John is wondering if his imprisonment would come to an end.

John also had Malachi 3:1 in mind: “*I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the LORD you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,*” says the LORD Almighty.” John no doubt understood his role to prepare the way for the Messiah (see also Isaiah 40).

Jesus responds to the inquiry of John's disciples with a *remez* of His own by using several phrases from the book of Isaiah that would have clearly indicated His role and fulfillment as the predicted Messiah/King:

- *In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see. Once more the humble will rejoice in the LORD; the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.* (Isaiah 29:18-19)
- *Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.* (Isaiah 35:5-6)
- *The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn.* (Isaiah 61:1-2)

So was Jesus the Messiah? YES! Would John the Baptizer literally experience “*release from darkness for the prisoners?*” Would the Baptizer escape death? No. However, Jesus did share this word of encouragement with him a few verses later, “*Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me*” (Matthew 11:6).

Implication:

YES indeed Jesus was the Messiah! Whereas Jesus did not directly come out and say He was the Messiah, His actions testified to the *full display* of His Messiahship for all to see! Jesus was fulfilling prophetic Scripture before their very eyes!

Matthew 11:11-12 - *Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it.*

Explanation:

Jesus uses a passage from the prophet Micah in this *remez*:

*“I will surely gather all of you, Jacob; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like **sheep in a pen**, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people. The One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will **break through the gate** and **go out**. Their King will pass through before them, the LORD at their head.”* (Micah 2:12-13)

Hebraic scholar Brad Young thinks this passage has been mistranslated. There is nothing “violent” about God’s kingdom. Rather, it appears that in light of Micah 2, the “breaking forth” of God’s advancing kingdom are through those who embrace the teaching of Jesus. Hence, the phrase, “subject to violence” should be better translated “*forcefully advancing*.”

The Sheep Pen

The imagery is that of a shepherd caring for his flock. Sheep pens were made by shepherds from either wood or stone. Sometimes caves were also used as places of shelter for the shepherd’s flock. As night approached, they would gather the flock into the sheep pen until the morning. The shepherd, acting as a guard, would sleep at the opening of the pen so that nothing could come in or out.

In the morning, he would step aside, allowing the flock to exit the pen with great excitement (i.e. “unstoppable force”). The sheep were “breaking forth” to freedom.

Likewise, the phrase, “*violent people have been raiding it*” is misleading, and is better understood as “*the strong take it by force.*”

It is King Jesus who breaks open the gate and who leads the way for us (i.e. His sheep) to follow.

Implication:

Just like sheep running “forcefully” out of a sheep pen as the shepherd stands aside, so will the Kingdom of God advance with *unstoppable force!!* Nothing can hold back the forward advancement of the Kingdom of God!

The “Yoke of Torah”

Students of Torah would yoke themselves to the Scriptures by yoking themselves to their rabbi. First century Jewish men would understand this. Jesus is telling his talmidim (followers) that it is only His way and His simplified interpretation of the Law that is an easier and lighter option to observe, without the heavy burden of the *Oral Law* and all its hundreds of rabbinic interpretations that went with it. Jesus’ way is “easy and light” compared to “difficult and heavy.”

-Ethics of the Fathers-

Remembering what *s’mekah* is, we know Jesus had the authority to teach a new and better way. He came not to abolish the Law but rather to fulfill it (e.g. place it on a firmer foundation). See Matthew 5:17.

Matthew 11:28-30 - *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*

Explanation:

The teaching of the Torah (the first five books of the Law) had a primary role in first century Jewish culture. With so many teaching rabbis, this resulted in many varied interpretations of the rules and regulations of Mosaic Law.

In this passage, Jesus is talking about not only the challenges and burdens of life in general, but the tiring toils of studying and understanding the regulations of the Law. In order to provide encouragement, Jesus hints at the truth of what the prophet Jeremiah said:

“This is what the LORD says: ‘Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.’ But you said, ‘We will not walk in it’”
(Jeremiah 6:16).

Walking by faith on the good path is how one ultimately finds God’s blessing of inner rest for one’s soul.

Additionally, the *yoke* in this passage may be a reference in this first century Jewish religious culture to something called the *yoke of the Torah or the Commandments*. This is how a Rabbi deemed with authority (*s’mekah*) would interpret the Law and pass moral and religious judgements. This gave direction for one’s *halakah* - one’s daily life and the application of the Law in one’s walk of faith. Each Rabbi had his own yoke or way of interpreting the Law.

Implication:

Only by following in the “right paths” of Jesus’ *interpretation* of Law can you *find rest for your soul*. There is no other way to true spiritual rest.

Matthew 13:1-9 - *That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown. Whoever has ears, let them hear.*

Explanation:

This well-known parable of seed falling, using a “fourfold comparison” of soil was shared by Jesus along the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee. Two similar parables recorded in Rabbinical literature (*Pirke Avot*, or “Sayings of the Fathers,” a collection of rabbinic teachings from 200 BC to 200 AD collected in the *Mishnah*) also included a fourfold comparison. Both are about a disciple’s behaviors and actions in regard to their Rabbi’s teaching.

Here is the first parable: *“There are four qualities in disciples: he who quickly understands and quickly forgets, his gain disappears in his loss; he who understands with difficulty and forgets with difficulty, his loss disappears in his gain; he who understands quickly and forgets with difficulty, his is a good portion; he who understands with difficulty and forgets quickly, his is an evil portion” (Pirke Avot 5:15).*

The second parable: *“There are four characters among those who attend the house of study: he who goes and does not practice secures the reward for going; he who practices but does not go secures the reward for practicing; he who goes and practices is a saint; he who neither goes nor practices is a wicked man” (Pirke Avot 5:17).*

About these similarities between these two parables and Jesus’ Parable of the Sower, Lois Tverberg observes, “The first is about a disciple remembering a rabbi’s teaching, and the second is about the reward for study and practicing God’s word.”

Yet a third Rabbinical parable is also interesting to observe: *“There are four types among those who sit in the presence of the rabbis: the sponge, the funnel, the strainer, and the sieve. ‘The sponge,’ which soaks up everything. ‘The funnel,’ which takes in at this end and lets out at the other. ‘The strainer,’ which lets out the wine and retains the dregs. ‘The sieve,’ which removes the chaff and retains the fine flour.” (Pirke Avot, 5:18)*

Lois Tverberg adds, “We can see that the imagery is meant to illustrate a point. Obviously, one doesn’t want to be a funnel that loses everything that it takes in. The best thing not to be the sponge either, a person who parrots

answers without discernment. Rather, a sieve is the best, because that person learns what is worthwhile and ignores what is not.”

While all of these parallels are interesting, the *remez* in this parable is the reference to “a hundred fold.” In the Hebrew Scriptures, this hints at the bountiful blessing given by God to Isaac:

“Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundredfold, because the LORD blessed him.” (Genesis 26:12).

Implication:

Jesus aimed to communicate that there is great reward and blessing in responding to and putting into practice His kingdom teaching. Like seed falling on good soil, it is wise to both listen and adhere to the teachings of Jesus.

Matthew 13:10-15 - *The disciples came to him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?” He replied, “Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. This is why I speak to them in parables: Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: ‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.’”*

Explanation:

Immediately following the *Parable of the Sower* (Matthew 13:1-9), Jesus explains why He used parables (*meshalim*). Jesus responds to His disciples question by hinting at what Isaiah said following his “commissioning” encounter with God in the Temple:

“He said, ‘Go and tell this people: Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’ Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed” (Isaiah 6:10).

It is often asked if Jesus did *not* want the crowds to understand His parable teaching? This is not the case. He knew that just like those in Isaiah’s day who hardened their hearts to the truth, people hearing His words would do the same. Unfortunately, there would be those who would reject the teaching of Jesus.

Implication:

Jesus spoke in parables as a way of sharing the kingdom of God with others. Some would understand His teaching and interpretation, while others, unfortunately, would not. Though He knew and expected this outcome, Jesus pressed on with His teaching.

Matthew 13:31-32 - *The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.*

Explanation:

It has been said that a farmer who plants mustard seed in his field would be a laughing stock. The reason for this is that in Israel it grew wild.

There were two different kinds of mustard in the world of Jesus. One form of mustard is a vine-like plant which spreads along the ground. The second is a large shrub or tree. Jesus must have had the tree image in mind as he shared this *remez* from the prophet Ezekiel:

“This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it; I will break off a tender sprig from its topmost shoots and plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches. All the trees of the forest will know that I the LORD bring down the tall tree and make the low tree grow tall. I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish”
(Ezekiel 17:22-24).

Ezekiel’s prophecy envisioned the day when God would bring growth to His people through being a blessing to Gentiles (e.g. the “birds of every kind” and “all the trees of the forest”). Jesus is suggesting generosity and love toward the Gentiles.

Implication:

The kingdom starts as something small like the mustard seed but has unstoppable potential, even including the blessing of the inclusion of Gentiles within the Kingdom!

Matthew 13:33 - *He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.”*

Explanation:

The obvious interpretation is similar to the *Mustard Seed* parable, namely, that something as small as a lump of yeast worked into dough will have an unstoppable impact. This seems counterintuitive in a Jewish world where yeast (i.e. leaven) was deemed as a picture of sin. Even today, as in antiquity, preparation for Passover (*Pesach*) includes removing any and all forms of leaven from the home, and only unleaven items are consumed.

A Seah Measurement in Antiquity

A seah is a measure of about 6 liters, so three seahs would be 18 liters – almost 5 gallons in volume. This would be a large amount of flour, enough to make quite a feast. A small lump of leavened dough would have quite a powerful effect to be able to leaven all of that dough.

-Ein Gedi Resources-

However, the apparent *remez* here is Genesis 18 when Abraham was visited by three men (angels?) at the entrance of his tent. As Abraham bows to the ground before them, this is what followed:

"If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant." "Very well," they answered, "do as you say." So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread" (Genesis 18:3-6).

Notice the reference to "three seahs" of flour! Translations differ in terminology, but in the Greek text of this passage, three measures equaled around three seahs, or 60 pounds of dough. The Jewish sages have said that *"when you are willing to be generous and hospitable to a stranger, God will equip you to do unbelievable things."* (Marty Solomon). It seems as though Jesus "redeemed" the use of leaven here.

Speaking about the act of "redeeming" leaven, Lois Tverberg adds, "It appears that Jesus is using a rabbinic technique to 'redeem' leaven in this case, hinting that Sarah used it in a good way when making a large batch of bread for their holy visitors. Even though leaven is normally used negatively to describe contamination, as hypocrisy had infiltrated the Pharisees, we see here that Jesus is saying that it can have a positive side too."

Implication:

Jesus was teaching that the kingdom is as remarkable as a woman and her flour. Just as Sarah was willing to bake so much bread for three strangers, our response should be the same, allowing the love of God to permeate our lives and multiply.

Matthew 13:44-46 (2 short kingdom parables coupled together) - *The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.*

"Hokmah" - Wisdom

חכמה

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *hokmah*, often translated "wisdom," is found 149 times. Practical knowledge, coupled with godly fear of the will of God and the willingness to arrange one's world on this basis is the dominant way in which biblical wisdom is portrayed, especially in the book of Proverbs.

-Biblical Faith-

Explanation:

The *p'shat* (straight-forward meaning) is that the kingdom of heaven (*malchut shamayim*) should be sought after with earnest zeal because of its value for one's spiritual walk of faith. However, Jesus seems to also be hinting at the importance of living wisely from the Book of Proverbs:

"My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding - indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God" (Proverbs 2:1-5).

Adding to this understanding is an insight to the word “pearl;” a Hebrew idiom for a proverb. When one becomes a follower of Jesus and His kingdom, one makes a wise and lasting choice!

Implication:

In these two short parables Jesus is suggesting that the wisdom and understanding of the kingdom is a treasure worth seeking after.

Matthew 13:47-50 - *Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

Explanation:

It has been observed that the “*p’shat*” reading (straight forward interpretation) suggests that just as there are “wheat and weeds” in the world (think about the parable about the wheat and tares, see Matthew 13:24-43), there are also “good and bad fish.”

However, a *remez* reading of this parable would suggest that Jesus is hinting at what Ezekiel said about fish in his apocalyptic vision about the river flowing out of Jerusalem into the Dead Sea,

“Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live. Fishermen will stand along the shore; from En Gedi to En Eglaim there will be places for spreading nets. The fish will be of many kinds—like the fish of the Mediterranean Sea” (Ezekiel 47:9-10).

Perhaps there is also a second *remez* to be seen as Jesus hints at the fate that awaits those who do not place their faith in Him. Psalm 112:10 says this:

“The wicked will see and be vexed, they will gnash their teeth and waste away; the longings of the wicked will come to nothing.”

Implication:

In the end of days, many Jews and Gentiles will be “caught in the net” of God’s kingdom. However, only those who hear and respond to the kingdom message of Jesus will be spared from the impending judgment reserved for those who do not place their faith in Him.

“The Fear of the LORD”

The fear of the LORD that Scripture commends and which the Gospel produces is actually the opposite of being afraid of God. The right fear of God is, quite explicitly, a blessing of the new covenant. Speaking of the new covenant, the LORD promised through Jeremiah: *“I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me” (Jeremiah 32:39-40).*

-Michael Reeves-

Matthew 13:52 - He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."

Explanation:

In the Old Testament, seeking wisdom (*hokmah*) was the equivalent to finding a *treasure*. Obtaining these treasures led to finding the true knowledge of God. Here, Jesus hinted to what Proverbs 2:4-7 said:

"and if you look for it (wisdom) as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He holds success in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless."

The teachers/sages searched for and shared countless nuggets of wisdom from the Hebrew Scriptures, wisdom passed down for generations. Jesus, on the other hand, was bringing wisdom directly from the kingdom of His Father, and understanding how to fear God was one of them. To fear God meant to stand in **awe** of Him. Jesus was the master of teaching those who would hear new treasures about the kingdom.

Implication:

"Old and new treasures" of wisdom awaits the follower of Christ who reverence God and adhere to the teaching of Jesus.

It's Time for a Club?

Jewish fisherman on the Sea of Galilee occasionally feared for their lives in the midst of storms. The Talmud preserves this story:

"Rabba said, 'Sailors told me the wave that usually makes the ships sink is visible by a ray of whitish light, and we struck it with a stick (club) upon which is engraved, I will be that I will be (Exodus 3:14). Then it became quiet.'"

(From Tractate Baba Bathra)

Matthew 14:25-27 - Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

Explanation:

This famous storm narrative may have been an action remez that has as its purpose the demonstration of the power and attributes of God. Job said this about God and how He "treads on the waves of the sea": *"He shakes the earth from its place and makes its pillars tremble. He speaks to the sun and it does not shine; he seals off the light of the stars. He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea"* (Job 9:6-8).

In the first century, there existed a Greek and Roman belief that the gods ascended from the depths of the underground to the surface of the water. Jewish sages (as mentioned in the later Talmud) have mentioned the necessity of reaching for a wooden club to beat down the ghosts. The Mishnah adds: "Rabba said, 'Sailors

told me the wave that usually makes ships sink is visible by a ray of whitish light, and we struck it with a stick upon which is engraved, I will be that I will be. Then it became quiet.” (See *Tractate Bava Batra* 73a).

It is also a possibility that in the disciples’ dire moment of believing they were going to perish in the storm, Jesus intentionally hinted at what was written in the book of Joshua as He stated, “It is I. Don’t be afraid.” Following Moses’ death, God told Joshua, “As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Joshua 1:5). As both Joshua and the disciples felt alone in their respective circumstances, Jesus assures not only His identify (e.g. “It is I”), but also His promised presence that dispelled fear (i.e. Don’t be afraid”).

Implication:

The fact that Jesus walked literally on the surface of the water demonstrated His power and control over nature. He was *not* a ghost, but rather the Son of God!

Matthew 18:19-20 - *Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.*

Explanation:

The text of Matthew 18 and the reference to “two or three” is an often misunderstood passage. This is not talking about a prayer meeting or Bible study, but rather how to approach an erring or sinful person. In the days of Moses, two witnesses were required to give testimony regarding a committed offense. Instead, Jesus seems to draw everyone’s attention to the manifest presence of God in the midst of various scenarios.

Although the quote is taken from about 70 years after the time of Jesus, Lois Tverberg interestingly observes, “There’s also a longer discussion about how many people are required for God’s presence to be among them.”

She illustrates this with this example:

Rabbi Chalafta ben Dosa (~100 AD) used to say: ‘If ten men sit together and occupy themselves with the Torah, the Divine Presence rests among them, as it is written (Psalm 82:1) “God has taken his place in the divine council.” And from where do we learn that this applies even to five? Because it is written (Amos 9:6) “...and founds his vault upon the earth...” And how do we learn that this applies even to three? Because it is written (Psalm 82:1) “...in the midst of the gods he holds judgment.” And from where can it be shown that the same applies even to two? Because it is written (Malachi 3:16) “Then those who revered the Lord spoke with one another. The LORD took note and listened.” And from where even of one? Because it is written (Exodus 20:24) “In every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you.” (Mishnah, Avot 3:4-7)

Rabbinical Connections

“When two sit together and words of Torah pass between them, the Divine Presence rests between them.” (Mishnah Avot 3:3)

“When three eat at one table and speak the words of Torah there, it is as though they have eaten from the table of God.” (Mishnah Avot 3:4)

“Whenever ten are gathered for prayer, there the Shekinah rests.” (Talmud Sanhedrin 39 Note: The “Shekinah” refers to God’s presence made manifest in a glorious way.)

“When three sit as judges, the Shekinah is with them.” (Talmud Berachot 6)

-From Ein Gedi Resources-

She adds, *"The common denominator in all of these rabbinic statements is the presence of God being especially near when his people gather to meditate on **how he wants them to live** (emphasis mine). This is really the central point of each line. Sometimes people are praying, but sometimes they aren't studying or judging a trial. Jesus' statement fits right in among them, and it sounds like his words about "two or three are gathered" have a similar intention, stressing the idea of gathering and praying as a group in order to discern his will."*

So where is the *remez*? Could it be that Jesus (and the other rabbis living after Jesus' time) was hinting at a verse from Exodus? This verse reads: "...Wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you" (Exodus 20:24). This verse comes at the end of chapter 20 - the well-known *Ten Commandments* chapter. God's parameters were pretty clear. It was about honoring God in the day to day dealings of life. It was about His presence or nearness.

Now we can connect Matthew 18. Jesus' focus was upon His own presence. Where even *"two or three are gathered in Jesus' name,"* God's presence through the Messiah was there as well! He was God in human flesh whose name was to be honored in prayer, discipline, study, and even judging.

His presence was to effect all aspects of life. In other words, the key here is not the "gather" part, but the "presence" that brings resolution, clarity, and perhaps even finality to the gathering. Not the other way around.

Implication:

Jesus was proclaiming that His own presence among the people was the very presence of God. Jesus was as the *Shekinah* of God in bodily form, namely, the dwelling nearness of God to us.

"Tzedakah"

צדקה

Tzadik comes from the root of the word *tzadek*. It which means "justice" or "righteous." A so-called "charitable deed" in Hebrew is "*tzedakah*." We see this word used this way in Jesus' teaching: "...when you do *tzedakah*, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your *tzedakah* may be in secret; and your Father, who sees in secret, shall reward you." Matthew 6:3-4, TLV

The latter teaching compiled in the Talmud reflects Jesus' teaching on merciful generosity: "*The deeds of the righteous are always performed expeditiously; no time is lost in undertaking a mitzvah or in its execution.*" (Bamidbar Rabbah 10:5)

Matthew 18:23-27 - *Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. At this the servant fell on his knees before him. "Be patient with me," he begged, "and I will pay back everything." The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.*

Explanation:

The "hint" of a Hebrew Scripture connection takes us back to what Moses spoke specifically about the practice of debt forgiveness. It was to be practiced every seventh year.

"Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: 'The seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near,' so that you do not show ill will toward the needy among your fellow Israelites and give them nothing. They may then appeal to the LORD against you, and you will be found guilty of sin. Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then

because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land"
(Deuteronomy 15:9-11).

Jesus was teaching about the importance of mercy and forgiveness. The generosity of forgiving one's debt is to be a distinguishing mark of "righteousness" (*zedakah*) within the kingdom. To be "righteous" was understood as being a person with mercy-filled generosity towards others.

Implication:

Jesus' audience knew what was required every seventh year. Yet in this parable Jesus is suggesting the kingdom of God is filled with people who display an endless amount of forgiveness and merciful generosity towards others.

Matthew 19:11-12 - *Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."*

Explanation:

In the Bible, eunuchs were typically men used as servants of a king or ruler. As a result of their impotence, they were considered as subdued men. They were deemed as having a decreased sexual appetite.

Jesus viewed those who lived as eunuchs as people with great potential to live exclusively on behalf of the Kingdom of God. Jesus hints at what Isaiah said about eunuchs:

"Let no foreigner who is bound to the LORD say, 'The LORD will surely exclude me from his people.' And let no eunuch complain, 'I am only a dry tree. For this is what the LORD says: 'To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever'" (Isaiah 56:3-5).

Jesus was emphasizing the Kingdom of God is comprised of people who are devoted to submitting fully to the reign and rule of God. God welcomes everyone into His kingdom family, giving them a name (i.e. status, renown, identity).

Incidentally, this verse that references "a memorial and a name" is used in modern Israel today as the name of Israel's Holocaust Museum & Memorial, *Yad Vashem*.

A Eunuch (סָרִיס)

The Hebrew word "sarīs" and its root meaning is translated as "eunuch." It means "to castrate." Most eunuchs would be castrated before puberty. Some eunuchs were born with specific physical defects that left them unable to bear children.

Because of their "subdued" status, eunuchs were often used by kings or rulers as servants and/or advisors. They were viewed as reliable and trustworthy.

There are many Old Testament and New Testament examples of eunuchs ruling with authority in high positions (see Esther 2:3, Daniel 1:3-18, and Acts 8:27).

Implication:

Jesus is seeking people who make the choice to a high unwavering, undistracted devotion and commitment to the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 20:1-2 - *For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.*

Explanation:

In this parable called the *Workers in the Vineyard* (unique only in Matthew), workers were employed at 9 a.m., noon, and 3 p.m. At 5 p.m. more workers were invited to work. At days end, everyone was paid, with each receiving a denarius.

“Good Eye vs. Evil Eye”

עין / הרע עין טובה

The Old Testament tells us that *“He who is has a generous eye (Hebrew *tov ayin*, good eye) will be blessed, for he gives of his bread to the poor.”* (Proverbs 22:9; see also 11:25)

However, there is a warning against the man with an “evil eye” (Hebrew *raa ayin*). This is a person who is selfish and greedy (Proverbs 23:6, 28:22). The Law commands the person with wealth not to have an “evil eye” and thus withhold help from a needy brother (Deuteronomy 15:9).

After hearing their grumbling, the landowner answered them, *“I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous”* (Matthew 20:13-15)? Jesus ends the parable, *“So the last will be first, and the first will be last”* (Matthew 20:16).

The cultural context suggests that the owner aimed to pay every worker enough to support their families which at this time was one denarius per day. Most workers were small farmers who were forced off their land because of debt they incurred from paying Roman taxes. Consequently, large pools of unemployed men gathered each morning, hoping to be hired for the day. Those still waiting in the late afternoon had little chance of earning enough to buy food for their families that day. Here, the vineyard owner chooses to pay equally to each worker a full day’s wage.

When Jesus’ audience heard about a productive vineyard that demanded a large workforce, people would likely have thought of Isaiah 5. The words and imagery of the vineyard set forth by Isaiah’s reads:

“I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a wine press as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit” (Isaiah 5:1-2).

In the use of this parable, Jesus was clearly hinting at the generosity of God in blessing every faithful worker with the same wage. After all, *“The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the nation of Israel, and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in.”* (Isaiah 5:7).

However, a secondary translation (NKJV) of Matthew 20:15 adds additional insight. The verse reads, *“Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?”* A person with an “evil eye” was one who was stingy with his money. In contrast, a person with a “good eye” was one who was

generous. This hints at a proverb of Solomon, *“A man with an evil eye hastens after riches, and does not consider that poverty will come upon him”* (Proverbs 28:22). Here, the owner (i.e. the one who had a good eye) quickly made his point and settled the grumbling by calling out the greedy nature of the workers.

Implication:

Even though the day-workers of the parable cried, “That’s not fair,” Jesus illustrates that they were incorrect. God wants the best for all His children and that reward comes to those who seek after His kingdom, thus receiving God’s generosity of grace.

Matthew 21:1-5 - *As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.” This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: “Say to Daughter Zion, See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”*

Explanation:

Jesus had been staying in Bethany (about a mile east of the Mount of Olives) and was now heading towards Jerusalem, where in a few days He will be crucified. It’s Palm Sunday. Jesus then hints at two Old Testament passages from two prophets (Isaiah and Zechariah) during the Eighth and Sixth centuries BC, respectively.

The first is from Isaiah: The LORD has made proclamation to the ends of the earth:

“Say to Daughter Zion, ‘See, your salvation comes! See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him’” (Isaiah 62:11).

The second is from Zechariah:

“Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9).

The Hebrew word for “salvation” is *yesha* (i.e. *Yeshua-Jesus*). Interestingly, a thousand years earlier Solomon was anointed King in Jerusalem after riding on the mule of his father David to the Gihon Spring. This spring is just south of the Temple Mount today within the City of David (1 Kings 1:38).

Implication:

Matthew combined these two passages and hinted that the fulfillment of the salvation of Israel (Isaiah) and the coming of the messianic King (Zechariah) is in *Yeshua HaMashiach*, Jesus of Nazareth.

Matthew 21:13 - *"It is written," he said to them, "My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it 'a den of robbers.'"*

Explanation:

Jesus is most likely in either the *Royal Stoa* or *Solomon's Portico*. Both of these areas were accessible by Jews and Gentiles alike. It was in this area where money was exchanged for Temple coins and the selling of sacrificial items such as doves and animals took place.

In this same area Jesus seemed to hint at what Isaiah said concerning Gentiles (Goyim):

"These (Gentiles) I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer...." (Isaiah 56:7).

Furthermore, Jesus had Jeremiah's harsh words to Judah in mind when He said:

"Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD" (Jeremiah 7:11).

This last *remez* came with scathing force knowing that it was Jeremiah who condemned the Southern Kingdom of Judah (Jerusalem was its capital) for not honoring the Temple for its sacredness. Jesus knew that the purpose of the Temple was to be a place of praise and prayer to God for *both* Jew and Gentile. Yet, the religious and Temple leaders (the Sanhedrin) neglected this purpose for personal gain.

Implication:

Jesus was angry! The *Court of the Gentiles*, the only place the Gentiles could worship, was crowded with these money changers and vendors, which made it difficult for the Gentiles to access. Jesus sets the record straight as He cleans house! It is a house of prayer!

The Temple Courts

In the days of Jesus, Jewish commoners and Gentiles entered the Temple using the southern steps and the *Huldah Gate* (Jewish priests entered from a western gate). This Gate led directly into the *Court of the Gentiles* just beyond the *Royal Stoa*, a roofed structure supported by 162 columns. Inside the east wall of the Temple was *Solomon's Porch* (or Portico, see John 10, Acts 3 & 5). These two areas were accessible to Jews and Gentiles alike.

However, a short wall (perhaps referred to by Paul as the "wall of partition, see Ephesians 2:14) was what separated the *Court of the Gentiles* and the *Court of Israel*. Furthermore, inside the *Court of Israel* was the *Court of the Women*. Beyond the *Nicanor Gate* was the *Court of the Priests* as well as the Temple Chamber.

Matthew 21:15-16 - *But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant. "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, 'From the lips of children and infants you, LORD, have called forth your praise.'"*

Explanation:

Within the Temple courts, Jesus was quoting from Psalm 8:2: *“Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.”* Jesus uses *remez* to condemn the religious leaders of the Temple for their attempt to silence the innocent praise of children. In doing so, Jesus denounces them, and rather harshly at that!

It is therefore no wonder that Mark (11:18) and Luke (19:47-48) end these narratives revealing the ambitions of the religious leaders; namely, they *“sought to destroy Him.”*

Implication:

Since the last phrase in Psalm 8:2 reveals *why* children and infants offer praise, Jesus was calling the Sadducees (the Temple authorities) and the priests and their accomplices, God’s enemies. Ouch!

Matthew 21:18-22 - *Early in the morning, as Jesus was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, “May you never bear fruit again!” Immediately the tree withered. When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. “How did the fig tree wither so quickly?” they asked. Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”*

Explanation:

After Jesus left the Temple (where He had just overthrown the money changers), He descended to the Kidron Valley before climbing the western slope of the Mount of Olives on His way further east to Bethany. It is on this journey where He cursed the fig tree.

This cursing appears to be a *remez* of what Jesus recalled the prophet Jeremiah saying in regard to God’s judgment upon Jerusalem for their disobedience and disregard to God’s Laws:

“I will take away their harvest, declares the LORD. There will be no grapes on the vine. There will be no figs on the tree, and their leaves will wither. What I have given them will be taken from them” (Jeremiah 8:13).

The fact that there could be both good and bad figs produced on a tree was a given (see Jeremiah 24:1-2). However, the reality of this tree having *no* figs caught the attention of everyone.

Interestingly, the fruit of the fig tree generally appears *before* the leaves. Because the fruit is green, it blends in with the leaves. Therefore, when Jesus and His disciples saw from a distance that the tree had leaves, they would have expected it to also have fruit. It didn’t. As a result, Jesus curses the tree, symbolic of the Nation of Israel in the Hebrew Scriptures (see Hosea 9:10).

The Tenant Farmer

A “tenant” (NIV) or “husbandman” (KJV) refers to the one who does agricultural work for the owner of the land on a contractual basis. The Greek word, *geōrgos*, can mean “tenant farmer” or “vine-dresser.”

In Jesus’ day, the wealthy owned much of the land and rented it to tenant farmers. The landlord typically lived elsewhere. He had tenant farmers work the vineyard, their hard work earning them a percentage of the harvest, with the balance going to the owner. On each site, the landowner would normally have a higher-ranking servant looking after his interests. The owner provided the needed capital while the tenant farmers contribute their labor and perhaps management skills. Depending on the contract, tenants made cash payments to the owner for his percentage. In Jesus’ time, the owner of the vineyard would send his servants to collect his portion of the harvest which according to contract belonged to him.

Implication:

By cursing the fig tree, Jesus was pronouncing His coming judgment on Jerusalem and all of Israel for their rejection of Him. This judgment would come in earnest just one generation later when the Temple and all it represented would fall to the Romans in AD 70.

Matthew 21:33-44 - ...*There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a wine press in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. “The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said. “But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.” Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’? Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.”*

Explanation:

In this parable, Jesus quotes from two verses in Psalm 118: *“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes”* (Psalm 118:22-23). At this point, Jesus is more than simply hinting at the fact that He is the landowner’s son but rather He is stating the fact that He is God’s Son! He takes this *remez* to a heightened and redemptive level.

Additionally and similar to the *Workers in the Vineyard* parable in Matthew 20:1-16, people would have likely thought that Jesus was hinting at the imagery of the vineyard set forth by Isaiah:

“I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a wine press as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit” (Isaiah 5:1-2).

Implication:

The religious leaders knew Jesus was condemning them directly (Matthew 21:45). In light of this, Jesus was making it known that the coming kingdom belonged to only those who accepted Him as the Messiah.

Matthew 22:2-14 - *"The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.' But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. He asked, 'How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?' The man was speechless. Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are invited, but few are chosen."*

Explanation:

It is possible that Jesus hinted at three Hebrew Scripture passages. First, we recall what Moses wrote in Genesis:

"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:2-3).

In a culture of high hospitality, those who did not respond to the wedding invitation were the cursed ones, while those from the streets were blessed for coming.

Secondly, a passage from Hosea:

"I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one.' I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God'" (Hosea 2:23).

Those from the streets were given undeserved "chosen status."

Understanding the Culture

Western and non-western ideas of time are not the same in antiquity. Here, the king sends an invitation but without a date and time. Why? Weather, supply chain, etc. were all unknown factors. Hence, people were invited with the option to decline.

The people in this parable had most certainly accepted the invitation, so the king made his plans. As completion was nearing, he would send his messengers out with the update, and then again when the preparations were complete. Imagine his outrage when some declined to come!

Now consider the words of Jesus, *"The kingdom is near."*

Perhaps there is also a third *remez* to be seen as Jesus hints at the peril that awaits those who receive an invitation yet neglect to prepare themselves. Psalm 112:10 says this, *“The wicked will see and be vexed, they will gnash their teeth and waste away; the longings of the wicked will come to nothing.”* Wearing wedding clothes was a big deal. Culturally, guests wearing the proper clothing was a tangible way of finding identity through the bridegroom. After all, it was the respectable thing to do for guests to wear wedding robes provided by the groom.

Seven Kinds of Pharisees

The Talmud lists seven types of Pharisees:

1. The **Shikmi Pharisee** — he is one who performs the action of “shechem” = shoulder, (i.e., the one who carried his deeds on his shoulder for everyone to see).
2. The **Nikpi Pharisee** — he is one who knocks his feet together (i.e., finds excuses to delay and not to do good deeds).
3. The **Kizai Pharisee** — he is one who makes his blood to flow against walls (i.e., walks into the wall to avoid looking at a woman).
4. The **‘Pestle’ Pharisee** — he is one who bows like a pestle in a mortar. (i.e., displays humility constantly)
5. The **“Performing Pharisee”** - he is one who constantly exclaims ‘What is my duty that I may perform it?’ (i.e., constantly reckoning good deeds vs. bad ones).
6. The **“God-fearing” Pharisee** — he is the one who serves God out of love
7. The **“God-fearing” Pharisee** — he is the one fears God out of fear of punishment.

-Israel Bible Center-

in this case, Jesus is inferring that He is the righteous bridegroom as mentioned in Isaiah:

“I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels”
(Isaiah 61:10).

Implication:

Jesus taught that the kingdom of God was near and an invitation to even non-Jewish people would be extended (i.e. to *Gentiles*). Those who don’t accept Jesus as the bridegroom for His people and the kingdom message He shared will be cast out to a place of “weeping and gnashing of teeth,” eternally lost.

Matthew 23:13 - (Jesus said) *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.”*

Explanation:

In this passage (Matthew 23:13-39), Jesus shares a total of seven woes against the religious leaders of His day (note: some translations list eight by not omitting verse 14). To describe them, Jesus used such phrases such as “blind guides” (vs. 16, 24), “blind fools” (v. 17), and “blind men” (v. 19, 26). He refers to them as being *“whitewashed tombs which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean”* (v. 27). Jesus even calls them “snakes” and “brood (i.e. family) of vipers!” (v. 33) The latter (“brood of vipers”) is the same term John the Baptizer used when speaking about the Pharisees and Sadducees in Matthew 3:7. This is a *remez* in itself hinting back to Genesis 3 when Satan is pictured as a snake or viper!

But here, Jesus hints at the harsh words of Ezekiel (i.e. the “woe” language) in his description of the false prophets of his day:

“The word of the LORD came to me: Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who are now prophesying. Say

to those who prophesy out of their own imagination: 'Hear the word of the LORD!' This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing! Your prophets, Israel, are like jackals among ruins. You have not gone up to the breaches in the wall to repair it for the people of Israel so that it will stand firm in the battle on the day of the LORD" (Ezekiel 13:1-5).

Additionally, where did Jesus borrow His description of the Pharisees being like whitewashed tombs? He hints at a passage mentioned by the prophet Ezekiel:

"Because they lead my people astray, saying, 'Peace,' when there is no peace, and because, when a flimsy wall is built, they cover it with whitewash, therefore tell those who cover it with whitewash that it is going to fall. Rain will come in torrents, and I will send hailstones hurtling down, and violent winds will burst forth. When the wall collapses, will people not ask you, "Where is the whitewash you covered it with?" (Ezekiel 13:10-12).

These words shared by Jesus would have hit the religious leaders quite hard. In light of Jesus' harsh words about them, we begin to see more and more why the religious leaders were becoming so indignant. Jesus was placing them in the spotlight and their hypocrisy was on full display!

Implication:

Jesus implied that the religious leaders of His day were no different than the false prophets in Ezekiel's day. They both were leading people astray!

Matthew 24:15-30 - So when you see standing in the holy place "the abomination that causes desolation," spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand— then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. At that time if anyone says to you, "Look, here is the Messiah!" or, "There he is!" do not believe it. For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you ahead of time. So if anyone tells you, "There he is, out in the wilderness," do not go out; or, "Here he is, in the inner rooms," do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. Immediately after the distress of those days "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken." Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."

The "Day of the LORD" (יּוֹם יְהוָה and ἡμέρα κυρίου)

The term "Day of the LORD" appears in both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures.

The Words of Joel

The prophets of ancient Israel referred to the cataclysmic end of the world as "the Day of the LORD" (Yom Adonai). In the Book of Acts, the apostle Peter quoted the famous end of day's vision of the prophet Joel. He says that this awesome day will be marked by great deliverance for those who call on the name of the LORD but terrible punishment for the unrighteous (Acts 2:17-21).

Signs of God's Power

Joel prophesies that certain "signs" will appear in the sky and on the earth, "The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood" (Joel 2:30-31). The Hebrew word for "sign" is mofet (תּוֹפֵת). This word indicates more than just a spectacle. In the Bible it is reserved for extraordinary displays of God's power.

-Taken from Israel Institute
for Biblical Studies-

Explanation:

Jesus' reference to *"the abomination that causes desolation"* takes us back to the Book of Daniel:

"He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.'" In the middle of the "seven" he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an "abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him" (Daniel 9:27).

The term also appears in Daniel 11:31 and 12:11. The Jewish authors of 1 Maccabees (an *Apocrypha* book) believed that Antiochus' actions in the Temple were the *"abomination of desolation"* prophesied by Daniel. Jesus used the same phrase to hint at the coming of a second *desolation* in AD 70 when the Romans would ransack, seize, and completely demolish Jerusalem and the Temple!

According to certain theological perspectives, this is also precisely when the "day of the LORD's coming" would take place. Jesus hints to and uses language taken from the prophet Isaiah in order to describe the event:

"See, the day of the LORD is coming—a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger—to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless. I will make people scarcer than pure gold, more rare than the gold of Ophir. Therefore I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the LORD Almighty, in the day of his burning anger" (Isaiah 13:9-13).

The language used by Isaiah was not meant to be taken as a type of "astronomical wonder," but rather as language portraying the coming judgment of God.

Implication:

The descriptive and apocalyptic language of Jesus was not intended to be understood literally about His Second Coming, but rather figuratively. It was a way of symbolizing the transition to take place over the next generation, bringing an end of the Temple system and ushering in the reign and rule of Christ and His kingdom.

The Marriage

The betrothal period began once the prospective groom and bride shared in the drinking of a cup of wine. This sealed the *"ketubah"* - the marriage contract and their commitment to marry. During this time (up to a year in time), the bride-to-be continued living with her parents, while the groom-to-be completed the building of an extra room attached to his parents' home. Once complete and inspected, the wedding could now take place, a celebration that lasted up to seven days. The announcement of the wedding was immediate and could take place day or night. Thus, everyone had to have oil in the lamps, with the wicks trimmed in anticipation of the groom's arrival at the home of his bride.

Matthew 25:1-13 - *"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' 'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. Later the others also came. 'Lord, Lord,' they said, 'open the door for us!' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I don't know you.' Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."*

Explanation:

The context for Matthew 24 and 25 is the coming of God's judgment. Jesus seems to be hinting of what happened 600 years before to the Judean kingdom when the Babylonians came. God used the Babylonians as a tool to remove the sounds of joy and weddings from their midst as recorded by Jeremiah:

"Therefore the LORD Almighty says this: 'Because you have not listened to my words, I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon,' declares the LORD, 'and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin. I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp. This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years'" (Jeremiah 25:8-11).

This could also be a *remez* that hinted at what the women in Jeremiah's day would never forget to bring to their wedding: *"Does a young woman forget her jewelry, a bride her wedding ornaments? Yet my people have forgotten me, days without number"* (Jeremiah 2:32).

We cannot be unprepared in this life. Half-hearted commitment is like carrying a lamp with no oil in it. The result will be devastating. Lack of preparation or forgetfulness in paying attention to what is important in life could result in missing out on the gladness and joy of knowing Jesus.

Implication:

No one knows when Jesus will come again. He said it Himself, *"Keep watch"* and *"be ready!"* Don't miss out on the joy of His coming nor forget to prepare yourself properly. *"If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, 'Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame'"* (Romans 10:9-11).

Matthew 25:14-18 - *For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. (ESV)*

Explanation:

This entire parable (Matthew 25:14-30) tells us that after the owner came home, he learned that the servant who had five talents earned another five, and the servant who had two talents made an additional two. They both

The Talent

Let's grasp the magnitude of the *talent*. One talent would be equivalent to around \$1,000. Doesn't sound like much but in the first century it was huge. It could represent 10-15 years of earnings. It would be worth upwards of \$400,000 today!

Now consider five talents, and two talents, etc. These men had a big responsibility!

“entered the joy of their master” (vs. 21, 23), and we understand why! However, the servant with one talent did not earn anything. In the end, this servant is viewed as “wicked and lazy” (v. 26) and is cast into outer darkness where there is *“weeping and gnashing of teeth”* (v. 30).

Jesus was hinting at the attitude and stewardship of those entrusted with donated offerings to the Temple almost 650 years earlier in the days of Josiah who said:

“Go up to Hilkiah the high priest and have him get ready the money that has been brought into the temple of the LORD, which the doorkeepers have collected from the people. Have them entrust it to the men appointed to supervise the work on the temple. And have these men pay the workers who repair the temple of the LORD— the carpenters, the builders and the masons. Also have them purchase timber and dressed stone to repair the temple. But they need not account for the money entrusted to them, because they are honest in their dealings” (2 Kings 22:4-7).

Like those workmen in the Temple, an honest attitude of serving and a wise investment of the offering was expected. However, some possess a tendency to covet and possibly even resent what others receive.

Implication:

Jesus was teaching not only the value but the necessity of our faithful and honest stewardship in His kingdom. We are to be wise “co-workers” (1 Corinthians 3:9).

Matthew 25:31-36 - *When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”*

Explanation:

In Matthew 24, Jesus’ disciples asked Him about the signs of the “end of the ages.” He illustrates the times with several parables. This is the setting for this passage, a difficult text to interpret. What helps bring understanding to this passage is to see that Jesus was hinting at what is mentioned by the prophet Ezekiel concerning judgment.

The prophet said:

“I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice. ‘As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats. Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet?” (Ezekiel 34:16-19).

Zechariah's Shepherd

Zechariah speaks of the shepherd (רועה) fourteen times in chapters 13–10. Along with their sheep, they were scattered in exile under foreign rulers, wandering aimlessly and not fulfilling their role (10:2). God intended the Davidic kings to shepherd his flock, but he had dismissed them as self-serving (11:3-8), worthless shepherds.

The focus is on what a tragedy this is for the flock. Without a shepherd to protect them, they were vulnerable and exposed. The greater part (two-thirds) of them were struck down and perished (13:8). Those who survived (one-third) felt like they had been put into the fire (13:9). They will be refined like silver and tested like gold. They will call on God and He will say, "They are my people." And they will say, "The LORD is our God."

-Allen Browne-
(Perth, Western Australia)

Within a chapter where Ezekiel is condemning Israel's unfaithful shepherds, God promised to do the work the unfaithful shepherds would not do, namely, He will seek His sheep and care for them. The sins of these unfaithful shepherds did not excuse the sins of their flock, they had their own accountability to God. The actions of those renegade sheep spoiled it for the other sheep. God will bring judgment upon them.

Implication:

Given the context of whom Jesus is addressing in Matthew 24-25, it appears He is condemning the Jerusalem priesthood for being both unfaithful spiritual shepherds and the renegade sheep. Jesus came to be God's faithful shepherd. He leads His flock to living waters and feeds them on His faithfulness. He supplies daily what is needed to survive.

Matthew 26:31-32 - *Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."*

Explanation:

At the conclusion of the *Last Supper* (a long Passover meal held in the Essenes' section of the city of Jerusalem), Jesus made some startling predictions. First, he predicted that Judas would eventually betray Him (Matthew 26:14-16). He also predicted that Peter would deny Him three times. Additionally, although the rest of the twelve would not *betray* Him, Jesus declares that they will *"fall away on account of me."*

This last prediction was made clear as Jesus actually quotes the words preserved by Zechariah, a sixth century BC prophet of Judah:

"Awake, sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!" declares the LORD Almighty. "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones" (Zechariah 13:7).

The *remez* here is Jesus hinting to the fact that He is actually the shepherd who will be struck, and His disciples are the ones (i.e. sheep) who will scatter. That very night, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus is arrested and bound by Caiaphas and the other religious leaders of Jerusalem. Matthew 26:56 records what happened: *"But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.*

Implication:

Jesus is the anointed *Good Shepherd* for His people and was willing to be struck down. Despite knowing His disciples would abandon Him at this most crucial time, Jesus still displayed a willingness to endure the persecution despite the failures of His own followers.

Mark 9:49-50 - *Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other.*

Explanation:

The Hebrew Scriptures clearly show the covenantal relationship God had with Israel; this covenant included rules and regulations. In Leviticus we find this requirement related to priests and the use of salt: *"Season all your grain offerings with salt. Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings; add salt to all your offerings"* (Leviticus 2:13).

In Numbers 18 we begin reading the agreements the Lord makes with Aaron. Verse 19 begins the mention of salt as a covenant:

"Whatever is set aside from the holy offerings the Israelites present to the LORD I give to you and your sons and daughters as your perpetual share. It is an everlasting covenant of salt before the LORD for both you and your offspring" (Numbers 18:19).

Additionally, we read about the preservation of David's royal line:

"Don't you know that the LORD, the God of Israel, has given the kingship of Israel to David and his descendants forever by a covenant of salt?" (2 Chronicles 13:5).

Culturally, a common practice in the ancient world was to ingest salt in the presence of witnesses as a way to make an agreement or contract legally binding. Jesus seems to be hinting at the purifying and preservation qualities and purposes of salt. Whereas the salt covenant was used as a binding contract to preserve the purity, preservation, and even cleansing of a relationship.

Implication:

Jesus knew the purpose of salt to be more than a means of flavoring food. It was to be a preserver of peace between people. It was a reminder of the kindness and compassion of God. We are the "salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13). Our lives are to be seasoned with the salt of God's covenant.

The Use of Salt

- Used to bind, stabilize, and preserve.
- Bacteria cannot thrive in salt.
- Our bodies require a small amount of sodium for our nerves and muscles to function properly.
- Saltiness is a basic human taste.
- One of the oldest food seasonings.
- Improves taste, even of unpalatable foods.
- An important item that became an article of trade. Nations even went to war to secure this special mineral.
- Used to ceremonially seal agreements
- Israelites followed God's instruction by sprinkling salt on the offering and thus entering into covenantal promise with God.
- Used even after battle to destroy the soil of the enemy.
- There are 35 verses in the Hebrew Bible where salt is mentioned. Six verses in the New Testament mention it as well.
- Shabbat bread is dipped in salt water.
- On Passover, Jews dip their vegetables in salted water as well, as a reminder of the tears shed as slaves in Egypt.

Mark 11:15-17 - *On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a 'den of robbers.'"*

Explanation:

The parallel to this same passage in Matthew was shared earlier (Matthew 21:13), with a *remez* from Jeremiah 7:11. The broader passage (Jeremiah 7:9-12) mentions the disobedient approach to Temple worship by the Judeans, an abhorrent practice that resembled the actions at Shiloh (20 miles north of Jerusalem) nearly 500 before prior to its destruction in the early 11th century BC.

Here, as Jesus was teaching within the Temple Courts of Jerusalem, He hints of an additional passage, this one from the prophet Isaiah:

"And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Isaiah 56:6-7).

As we saw earlier from the parallel text in Matthew, not only was the sacredness of the Temple being disturbed, but the free access for all to worship was hindered.

Jesus was not just displeased with those selling and "doing business" on the Temple Courts. He was hinting at a deeper issue, namely, the corruption of the religious authorities (e.g. refers to them as a "den of robbers"). This kind of behavior would be judged by God who demands pure worship.

Implication:

By overthrowing these money changers and merchants, Jesus wanted to make sure that Gentiles would be able to come and worship freely at the Temple; since the area in question was the *Court of the Gentiles*. This act also directly condemned the Temple authorities for allowing it to happen.

Mark 12:41-44 - *Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."*

Court of the Women

The Women's Court generally served the women who came to pray and bring their offerings. On occasion men also gathered there - such as during the Simchat Beit HaShoeva celebration (The "Celebration of the House of Drawing Water.") and the reading of the Torah on Yom Kippur. There was a platform between the Court of Israel and the Court of the Kohanim. Levites stood on this platform to sing the "Song of the Day."

-Temple Institute-

Explanation:

Within the *Women's Court of the Temple*, Jesus imparts His disciples with a very important lesson on "giving". Present at the Temple that day was a poor widow. According to an Old Testament command, widows were to be cared for so as to not be taken advantage of; first by a son and then by any other relative able to do so. For those who had no relative, they depended on the tithe of the third year. This passage in Deuteronomy says:

"Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year... At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands" (Deuteronomy 14:22, 28-29).

Did Jesus hint at this verse when He commended the widow for giving those two small coins? Remember it was all she had and she was supposed to be on the *receiving* end of the tithing system, not the *giving* end. No one knows her story, but she clearly trusted the Lord to meet her needs as she sacrificially dropped those two coins (*lepta* in Greek, singular: *lepton*) into one of 13 wooden collection boxes with trumpet-shaped bronze funnels. According to Dr. Leen Ritmeyer, the purpose of the funnels was "to guide the coins into the boxes that were placed under the colonnades of the *Court of the Women*. The sound these coins made against the metal would have indicated how much people offered to the Temple" (from www.ritmeyer.com).

Implication:

Jesus implied that the selfless giving of this widow is ultimately viewed by God as more generous than those who give routinely out of their abundance.

Mark 15:34 - *And about three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi Eloi, lama sabachthani?" (which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").*

Explanation:

Jesus' *remez* comes from Psalm 22. It is helpful to know that in the Jewish culture of the day, Psalm 22-24 were viewed as a group (a *triplet*, if you will) of "shepherding/kingship psalms" (with the kingship theme also seen in Psalm 20-21). Written by King David, he recounts Israel's past trust in God and then contrasts it to his own current state of mind. Yet even in David's brokenness, he still trusted and cried out to God with hope. With this in mind, Jesus, quoting something from the beginning of chapter 22, may have been speaking in an indirect way by *hinting* towards something even greater found at the end of chapter 24.

While bearing the weight of the sins of mankind on the cross, Jesus recites the first verse of chapter 22: *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* At this point was Jesus feeling forsaken by His heavenly Father? If this is indeed a *remez*, the answer to this question would be “No!” How could He feel forsaken? Just the previous night in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said: *“Not my will, but Yours be done”* (Luke 22:42). Clearly and obediently, Jesus **knew** He was fulfilling His Father’s redemptive plan. We can almost hear Jesus’ thoughts of the 23rd Psalm comforting Him.

Rather, could Jesus’ recitation of Psalm 22:1 be His way of pointing those at the foot of the cross to the last three verses of chapter 24 highlighting God’s kingship and His glory? Those Jews present would get the messianic connection. These verses exalt and glorify God:

“Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty— he is the King of glory” (Psalm 24:8-10).

The divine identity of this Messianic King named Jesus is very clear.

Both the religious and civil leaders wondered if Jesus was proclaiming to be the *King of the Jews*. Pontius Pilate asked Jesus this question directly (see Mark 15, Luke 23, John 18). As a final act of mockery, a sign was placed above His head during the final hours of His life - *“Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”* Perhaps this sign (placed by Pilate who was against this heinous act) was meant to infuriate the priests and religious leaders. The sign displayed precisely who Jesus was proclaiming to be!

Implication:

On the cross Jesus was *not* feeling forsaken by His heavenly Father. Rather, Jesus was telling those at the foot of the cross that He was in fact the *“King of glory!”* Jesus was making a kingly statement in His dying moments.

Avinu Malkeinu Prayer (אָבִינוּ מַלְכֵנוּ)

Our Father, our King, we have sinned before You.

Our Father, our King, we have no King but You.

Our Father, our King, act [benevolently] with us for the sake of Your Name.

Our Father, our King, renew for us (on fast days: bless us with) a good year.

Our Father, our King, remove from us all harsh decrees.

Our Father, our King, annul the intentions of our enemies.

Our Father, our King, foil the plans of our foes.

Our Father, our King, wipe out every oppressor and adversary from against us.

Our Father, our King, close the mouths of our adversaries and accusers.

Our Father, our King, remove pestilence, sword, famine, captivity, and destruction

from the members of Your covenant.

Our Father, our King, withhold the plague from Your inheritance.

Our Father, our King, pardon and forgive all our iniquities.

Our Father, our King, blot out and remove our transgressions from before Your eyes.

Our Father, our King, erase in Your abounding mercies all the records of our debts [sins].

Our Father, our King, bring us back to You in wholehearted repentance.

Our Father, our King, send a complete healing to the sick of Your people.

Our Father, our King, rend the evil [aspect] of the verdict decreed against us.

Our Father, our King, remember us with a favorable remembrance before You.

(Credit: Jewish Learning)

Luke 2:46-50 - After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

Explanation:

Jesus made trips from the Galilee to Jerusalem often, most often annually for the religious festivals. The Luke 2 passage places Jesus in the Temple when he is about 12 years of age. We are not told *where* (e.g. *Royal Stoa*, *Solomon's Portico*, etc.) Jesus was within this massive Temple built by Herod the Great. That detail is not nearly as important as *what* is recorded as Jesus' response to His parents, "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

The one word *avi* (meaning *father* in Hebrew), carries with it messianic connections (see Psalm 89:26: "He will call out to me, 'You are my Father...' and 1 Chronicles 17:13: "I will be his father, and he will be my son."). The plural possessive form of *avi* is *avinu* ("our father"). The *Avinu Malkeinu* ("Our Father Your King") is the title of a well-used prayer during the High Holiday and fasting services within Judaism today. The essence of this prayer was composed by Rabbi Akiva (50-135 AD) who prayed: "Our Father, our King, we have no king other than You. Our Father, our King, for Your sake, have mercy on us."

Perhaps young Jesus was more specifically hinting at what God told His forefather David when promising him kingship: "I will be his father, and he will be my son" (2 Samuel 7:14). *This promise is echoed also in Psalm 2: "You are my son; today I have become your father" (Psalm 2:7).*

Implication:

Jesus was already giving testimony of His divine sonship of the line of David at an early age. He was implying that He was the Son of God, and that His Father in heaven was *Avi*, his own father!

Luke 4:16-21 - He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the LORD is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor." Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Explanation:

Jesus' teaching in the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth marked a defining moment in His ministry. During that Shabbat gathering, it was His prerogative to read whatever passage from the scroll of the *Nevi'im* (the *Prophets*) that was handed Him. On that day, Jesus chose to read from the first two verses of Isaiah 61. He also inserted a short phrase (*"to set the oppressed free"* from Isaiah 58:6. Of the wider section of chapters (59-61) about the consequences of waywardness and the promised redemption for a righteous remnant, Jesus hints at the latter.

When Jesus finished his commentary on this passage with *"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing,"* the faithful understood and believed while the pious were severely offended. What offended them? Jesus intentionally left out the phrase from Isaiah 61:2, namely, *"the day of vengeance of our God."* Most in the first century were awaiting a type of Messiah to deal with and call down God's *vengeance* upon the Romans, the Gentile oppressors of the Jews. Jesus went on to illustrate this truth by using the examples of two *goyim* (gentiles) who had received the grace and goodness of God centuries before (i.e. a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon, Luke 4:26; and Naaman the Syrian, Luke 4:27)

Implication:

Jesus made it clear that God's redemption was coming not only for Jewish people, but also for Gentiles. His focus upon God's redemption extending to all people was made clear.

Luke 6:36-38 - *Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*

Explanation:

It is common to view only verses 37 and 38 together and not include verse 36 (*"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."*). Many translations make heading breaks between verses 36 and 37. In reading the context of the chapter, it is clear the break should end at verse 35, as Jesus is teaching on mercy and judging fairly.

With this understanding, the passage is *not* about being rewarded for giving. Rather, Jesus was primarily teaching that God was the ultimate judge and rewarder of both blessing and cursing.

The first century listener would have heard Jesus hint at a passage from the prophet Isaiah. In the end of the seventh century BC, Isaiah penned these words:

"See, it stands written before me: I will not keep silent but will pay back in full; I will pay it back into their laps—both your sins and the sins of your ancestors,' says the LORD. 'Because they burned sacrifices on the mountains and defied me on the hills, I will measure into their laps the full payment for their former deeds'" (Isaiah 65:6-7).

Jesus may also have hinted at other well-understood and similar concepts seen in other passages from David, Solomon, and Jeremiah. For instance, *“Pay back into the laps of our neighbors seven times the contempt they have hurled at you, LORD”* (Psalm 79:12). Also, *“Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward them for what they have done”* (Proverbs 19:17). Additionally, *“Those who give to the poor will lack nothing, but those who close their eyes to them receive many curses”* (Proverbs 28:27). Lastly, *“Your eyes are open to the ways of all mankind; you reward each person according to their conduct and as their deeds deserve”* (Jeremiah 32:19).

Implication:

Jesus is charging us to be kind, loving, generous, non-judgmental, and fair to all. As we heed Jesus' words, the challenge to us is to recognize our own faults.

Luke 7:14-17 - *Then he went up and touched the bier (coffin) they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. They were all filled with awe and praised God. “A great prophet has appeared among us,” they said. “God has come to help his people.” This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.*

Explanation:

The location is Nain, a town located on the northern slopes of the Hill of Moreh in the Jezreel Valley. On the southern side of this hill was the town of Shunem. This was where Elisha stretched himself over a lifeless, breathless body of a woman's son until God brought life back into him.

“When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the LORD. Then he got on the bed and lay on the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out on him, the boy's body grew warm. Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out on him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes” (2 Kings 4:32-35).

There is little doubt that this story of Elisha was passed down through countless generations. The similarity between the two stories is a touching one. Two mothers, two dead children, and finally full restoration of both. Elisha said to one mother, *“Here, take your son”* (2 Kings 4:36). And after Jesus raised the young man, He *“gave him back to his mother.”* However, while hinting at this story from the past, the difference was simply Jesus “speaking” the dead son back to life.

Implication:

Jesus displayed His authority by simply speaking the words, and the dead man returned to life. Laying directly on the man was not necessary. The preeminence of Jesus' power to raise people to life is clearly seen here. Even death must obey His command.

Luke 9:27-36 - *“Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.” About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John, and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, “Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what he was saying.) While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen.*

Explanation:

Stories of old come alive at the event of Jesus’ transfiguration. Some place the location of the *Transfiguration* on the slopes of Mt. Hermon (near Caesarea Philippi). The Catholic tradition suggests it was Mt. Tabor (in the Jezebel Valley near the Nazareth Ridge) where this event unfolded. Other suggest Mt. Arbel (on the western side of the Sea of Galilee) or Nimrod (in the northern Golan Heights complete with Crusader castle ruins today). Fact is, with the event taking place about a week’s time after the “*Who do you say I am?*” questioning (see Matthew 16:13-28 and Matthew 17:1), it could be anywhere in or close to the region of the Galilee.

The disciples, lost in wonder, try to repeat what their ancestors did when God appeared, build an altar or tabernacle. However, God made it clear that this moment was about the higher calling and exaltation of Jesus.

Two *remezim* seemed to be used by the voice of God directed to the disciples about Jesus. First, the phrase, “*This is my Son,*” is a messianic hint at what is written in Psalm 2:7. Secondly, the exhortation to “*listen to him*” reminds the listener of what God said in Deuteronomy 18:15 about the people of God listening to Moses.

Implication:

Just as God set apart Moses on Mt. Sinai to be His spokesperson to the Israelites, Jesus’ being set apart went even further, namely, He was now exalted and glorified. God took delight in His Son, as God’s servant with a redemptive purpose.

Luke 9:61-62 - *Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.” Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”*

Explanation:

It appears that Jesus was hinting at the account of Elisha in 1 Kings 19. In this narrative, Elisha is being summoned by Elijah to leave his life behind in order to unwaveringly serve God. In similarity to the Luke passage, Elisha asked to go back to say goodbye to his family.

Here is the narrative:

“So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. ‘Let me kiss my father and mother goodbye,’ he said, ‘and then I will come with you.’ ‘Go back,’ Elijah replied. ‘What have I done to you?’ So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his servant” (1 Kings 19:19-21).

Both Jesus and Elijah were calling people into service. Elisha made a full commitment to serve God by burning up what could have potentially kept him back. Furthermore, the passage never indicates him returning to his family to say goodbye. He had already determined to follow Elijah’s call.

Implication:

Jesus called His followers to fully dedicate themselves to the service of the kingdom! He calls each one of us to Himself and we must make that all-important decision to follow.

Luke 11:19-20 - *Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.*

Explanation:

Just prior to this (Luke 11:14-18), Jesus had healed a man held in bondage by a mute demon. Accusations that Jesus was driving out demons by the power of Beelzebul began.

Jesus, knowing their thoughts, makes the Luke 11 statement. Jesus hints at what happened in Egypt back in the days of Moses during the 10 plagues:

“But when the magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, they could not. Since the gnats were on people and animals everywhere, the magicians said to Pharaoh, ‘This is the finger of God.’ But Pharaoh’s heart was hard and he would not listen, just as the LORD had said” (Exodus 8:18-19).

The phrase “finger of God” is used to symbolize the power, might, and intervention of God. The use of this phrase by Jesus would have been unmistakable to those listening to Him, transporting them back to the events of their

Who was “Beelzebul”? (בעל זבול)

Beelzebul is a name given to Satan. The title only appears in the New Testament (Matthew 10:25, 12:24, 12:27; Mark 3:22; and Luke 11:15, 18, 19). When Jesus performs exorcisms, he is accused of doing so with the help of “Beelzebul, the prince of demons.” Beelzebul’s identity, however, is not limited to the Satan, or “the accuser” (השטן; ha’satan), that we encounter in the Hebrew Bible (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7; Zechariah 3:1-2; 1 Chronicles 21:1).

According to Scripture, Beelzebul was a Philistine god with whom the Israelites came into contact in the land of Canaan.

“Beelzebul” (בעל זבול) consists of two Hebrew words: “Baal” (בעל) meaning (זבול) “lord” or “master,” and “zebul” meaning “high” or “exalted.” Thus, the name for this deity would mean something like “Exalted Master,” or “Lord of the Heights.”

-Israel Bible Center-

ancestors. Jesus used the phrase to declare that the kingdom of heaven had come!

Implication:

Like Pharaoh, the religious leaders who opposed Jesus were guilty of hardening their hearts and ignoring who He was and the purpose of His coming. Jesus was implying that the coming of the kingdom had been initiated by His authority.

Luke 12:32-34 - (Jesus said to His disciples) *“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

Explanation:

People in Jewish culture were expected to give to both God and the poor. It was commanded in Deuteronomy (14:22-29). One’s tithe was to be set aside in the town and every third year given to the needy (e.g. Levites, foreigners, fatherless, widows). Although it was commanded by God, it was also considered a wise and kind gesture of caring for the less-fortunate.

Jesus may have hinted at what various proverbs said in regard to generosity towards the poor: *“Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward them for what they have done..”* (Proverbs 19:17). Also, *“The generous will themselves be blessed, for they share their food with the poor”* (Proverbs 22:9). Finally, *“Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God”* (Proverbs 14:31).

Implication:

Jesus taught the prudence of giving from the heart to the poor. One’s *treasure* must not be “self-focused” but rather “others-focused.” This is a characteristic of the kingdom!

Luke 13:6-8 - *Then Jesus told this parable: “A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’ ‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”*

Explanation:

In the Old Testament the prophets used the tree motif generally to symbolize a nation (particularly Israel), or more specifically, its leaders. A tree that is felled (brought down with an ax or by fire) was a sign of God's judgment upon that nation or leader.

This parable told by Jesus hints at the impending judgment of God upon the nation of Israel as seen in Isaiah's writing:

"See, the LORD, the LORD Almighty, will lop off the boughs with great power. The lofty trees will be felled, the tall ones will be brought low. He will cut down the forest thickets with an ax; Lebanon will fall before the Mighty One" (Isaiah 10:33, 34).

In addition to the *remez* about the image of cutting down of the fig tree is the *timing* of doing so. In the parable, three years have past before the vineyard owner considers cutting the tree down. Then an additional year extension is granted to care for the tree before the final decision would be made to cut it down. This represents the patience of the man before judgment would come to the tree. The man displaying patience is representative of God who shows mercy through His patience.

It is also not coincidental to observe what Isaiah wrote about in the very next chapter. The contrast to the reference of a fallen fig tree is stark: *"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit"* (Isaiah 11:1). The "shoot" prophesied here would be fulfilled by none other than Jesus.

Implication:

Unbelief by those within Israel who rejected Jesus as the Messiah would ultimately lead to judgment by God. This is the reason why Jesus shared, *"...Repent and believe the good news"* (Mark 1:15). In other words, repent before it is too late.

Jesus & "Treasure"

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

-Matthew 6:19-21

Luke 15:20-24 - *So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." So they began to celebrate.*

Explanation:

The parable known as the "Prodigal Son" should rather be called the *"Compassionate Father"* given Jesus' focus upon the actions of the father. Jesus was hinting at something similar that happened during the last days of Jacob:

Inheritance Laws

In the first century, inheritance laws unfolded differently than our modern-day ones. Jewish law allowed early division of one's real estate prior to death...but with a catch.

The assets had to be fully divided. The father maintained control until his death, but the heirs could still sell the land. The catch was that the buyer could not take full possession until the actual death of the owner occurred. A son asking for his part of the inheritance early was basically wishing his father dead. This would have been a terribly heartbreaking turn of events for the father.

-Brad Young-

"Now Jacob sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph to get directions to Goshen. When they arrived in the region of Goshen, Joseph had his chariot made ready and went to Goshen to meet his father Israel. As soon as Joseph appeared before him, he threw his arms around his father and wept for a long time" (Genesis 46:28-29).

Joseph was the son betrayed by his brothers and considered dead by his father. Once reunited with Jacob, Joseph threw his arms around his father. In the Luke passage, however, the contrast is noticeable: it is the father, whose son wanted *him* dead by virtue of Jewish inheritance laws, who threw his arms around his wayward son. It is a marvelous picture of God's love for all of us "prodigals."

Implication:

Jesus wanted His audience to know that they could return to the loving arms of their Father in heaven despite wandering away from the kingdom. A feast awaited him. The same loving welcome and feast await us when we repent of our sin and return to the Father.

Luke 19:9-10 - *Jesus said to him (Zacchaeus), "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*

Explanation:

We are first introduced to Zacchaeus in Luke 19. He resided in Jericho and served as the chief tax collector for that town. In this passage we read Jesus use of the term "Son of Man." It is not only a messianic term but also, as seen in Ezekiel, a term that carries the shepherding motif of seeking lost sheep:

"The word of the LORD came to me: 'Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the LORD God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? ... My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them... Thus says the LORD God, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them. For thus says the LORD God: Behold, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.'" (various portions of Ezekiel 34).

In this Ezekiel passage, God, angry with Israel's leaders for scattering and harming His flock, stated that He would become the shepherd and he would also seek and save the lost ones. Jesus was hinting from Ezekiel 34 that although God condemned the religious leaders of ancient Israel for being selfish shepherds, He would become the Good Shepherd (see John 10).

Zacchaeus was despised by his fellow Jewish residents of Jericho. Mingling in that crowd could cost him his life. So he runs ahead of the crowd to find a hidden place to view the passing Messiah. What better place than a low-limbed, broad leaf sycamore/fig tree. Instead, Jesus draws full attention to him. Zacchaeus was one of God's lost sheep found hiding in a tree. His sheep come from all walks of life, even despised tax collectors.

Implication:

To those in Jericho that day, Jesus was declaring that He was the Messiah as well as the Good Shepherd." Jesus is also implying that the religious leaders (whose influence kept Zacchaeus out of the crowd) were the bad shepherds who had scattered and harmed God's flock.

Luke 23:26-31 - *As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!'" Then they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?*

Explanation:

While bearing the heavy weight of the *patibulum* (the crossbar portion of the cross) He was carrying to Golgotha, Jesus shared a couple of *remezim* (plural of *remez*). First, He shares this phrase, "Fall on us! and to the hills, Cover us!" Here, Jesus is hinting to a passage in Hosea that preserves the 8th century BC moment of the end of the Northern Kingdom of Israel:

"The people who live in Samaria fear for the calf-idol of Beth Aven. Its people will mourn over it, and so will its idolatrous priests, those who had rejoiced over its splendor, because it is taken from them into exile. It will be carried to Assyria as tribute for the great king. Ephraim will be disgraced; Israel will be ashamed of its foreign alliances. Samaria's king will be destroyed, swept away like a twig on the surface of the waters. The high places of wickedness will be destroyed—it is the sin of Israel. Thorns and thistles will grow up and cover their altars. Then they will say to the mountains, "Cover us!" and to the hills, "Fall on us!" (Hosea 10:5-8).

Sycamore/Fig Trees

The sycamore/fig tree (שִׁקְמָה - *shikmah*, probably the *Ficus-Sycomorus*) is mentioned in the Bible in a few places. King David appointed an officer to look after the olives and sycamores of the *Shephelah* (1 Chron 27:28). It is said that King Solomon made cedars as common as sycamores (1 Kings 10:27) and Isaiah also contrasts sycamores and cedars (Isaiah 9:10). Additionally, the prophet Amos refers to his secondary occupation as a tender of sycamores which involved cutting the fruit to induce ripening (Amos 7:14).

The *Talmud* mentions that the sycamore trees were cultivated for their use as beams for the roofs of houses. A certain *Abba Saul* said, "There were sycamore tree trunks in Jericho, and the men of violence seized them by force. Whereupon the owners arose and consecrated them to heaven" (Talmud, Pesachim, 57a). Jewish commentary recorded in the Mishnah mentioned where they could be planted: "A tree may not be grown within a distance of 25 cubits from the town, or 50 cubits if it is a carob or a sycamore tree" (Mishnah, Baba Batra, 2:7). Why? Because these trees were considered unclean.

Jesus knew that within the course of just one mere generation, Jerusalem would be ransacked and destroyed, a sign of God's impending judgment upon them and their abandonment of God. Jerusalemites will pray this same prayer as those in the days of Hosea, hoping to be put out of their suffering.

Then, Jesus mentions the "green" and "dry" tree. This hints to a figurative expression appearing in the Book of Ezekiel:

"Say to the southern forest: 'Hear the word of the LORD. This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am about to set fire to you, and it will consume all your trees, both green and dry. The blazing flame will not be quenched, and every face from south to north will be scorched by it. Everyone will see that I the LORD have kindled it; it will not be quenched'" (Ezekiel 20:47-48).

The meaning of this is explained in the next chapter (Ezekiel 21).

According to David Bivin, the "forest of the south field" is the land of Israel. Furthermore, Ezekiel 21:3-4 make clear that the green trees ("green" in the sense of supple or limber) represent righteous people, while the dry trees represent the wicked. Israel was going to be punished, and all the people, both the righteous and the wicked, would be affected. Alfred Edersheim put it this way: "For if Israel has put such flame to its 'green tree' how terribly would the Divine judgment burn among the dry wood of an apostate and rebellious people, that had so delivered up its Divine King, and pronounced sentence upon itself by pronouncing it upon Him!" (*The Life & Times of Jesus the Messiah*).

Jesus was heartbroken for the people the same way Ezekiel was heartbroken. Listen to the dramatic language:

"Therefore groan, son of man! Groan before them with broken heart and bitter grief. And when they ask you, 'Why are you groaning?' you shall say, 'Because of the news that is coming. Every heart will melt with fear and every hand go limp; every spirit will become faint and every leg will be wet with urine.' It is coming! It will surely take place, declares the Sovereign LORD" (Ezekiel 21:6-7).

Implication:

If Jesus, a righteous person or "green tree," was put to death, what would happen to the flammable "dry trees," the sinful inhabitants of Jerusalem? Jesus hinted at the destruction that was to come upon those who were rejecting their own Messiah.

Luke 24:46-49 - *He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."*

Explanation:

This passage comes at the heels of the famous "Emmaus Road" encounter that involved two men and Jesus. It was not until they shared a meal together that the eyes of these travelers were opened to see Jesus as the

resurrected Messiah. With joy, they return to Jerusalem to inform the disciples of this incredible encounter.

Jesus, too, returns to Jerusalem and visits His disciples. He said to them:

“This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44).

Could it be that Jesus was *hinting* at how the Hebrew Scripture referenced extraordinary happenings on the “third day” portrayed as something incredible? For instance, after “*three days and three nights*,” Jonah was saved (Jonah 1:17). Despite the fearful presence of clouds, thunder, lightning, and a loud trumpet blast, it was “*on the morning of the third day*” that God answered Moses and summoned him to the top of Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:16). Even going back to Abraham, it was “*on the third day*” that God provided a ram in substitution of Isaac (Genesis 22:4). All incredible events happening on that third day!

But if these stories from the Hebrew Scriptures weren’t already familiar enough in the minds of Jesus’ disciples, it is likely that Jesus directly hints at one other reference of hope evolving on the “third day.” This time the remez comes from Hosea:

“Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence” (Hosea 6:1-2).

Just as Hosea promised revival of life and hope on the third day, so His disciples encountered first hand their risen Messiah. Now the task of the disciples was to take this “Good News” to the nations!

Implication:

Through Jesus’ death and resurrection, God’s redemptive plan was fulfilled. On the “third day” hope and life was restored. We now are to be messengers of God’s salvation, through Christ, to the lost world around us.

“Sullam” (סלם)

The Hebrew word “sullam” is interpreted as “ladder” or “staircase.” This word only appears once in the Hebrew Bible. The word originates from “*an unused root meaning to cast up a highway; akin to the concept of elevation or ascent*” (Strong’s Lexicon).

Most likely the image of “sullam” took the form of what is today called a *ziggurat*, with its ascending steps linking earth and heaven. The *ziggurat*, however, differs from the *sullam* by practice. The *ziggurat* was a place of pagan worship. The *sullam* leads to the one true God and Jesus our Savior.

John 1:51 - *He then added, “Very truly I tell you, you will see ‘heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on’ the Son of Man.”*

Explanation:

Two days following His baptism, Jesus is found inviting two more Galileanmen to follow Him as *talmidim* (disciples). Their names were Philip and Nathaniel (from Bethsaida and Cana respectively). Initially doubting Jesus’ authenticity because of where He grew up (“*Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?*”, John 1:46), Nathaniel now emphatically professes his belief as he hears Jesus telling him he saw him while under a fig tree, “*Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel*” (John 1:49). This statement by Nathaniel is what prompted Jesus’ response about heaven opening and angels ascending and descending.

Jesus was clearly *hinting* at the incredible encounter Jacob experienced in the text below while spending the night roughly ten miles north of Jerusalem at a place called Luz. In his vision Jacob sees a ladder or a stairway (*sullam* in Hebrew) reaching up into the heavens.

The text reads:

“Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the LORD, and he said: ‘I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac’ (Genesis 28:10-13).

At the conclusion of this life-altering encounter Jacob awakens, *“He was afraid and said, ‘How awesome (awe-inspiring) is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven’”* (Genesis 28:17). We then find Jacob, all pride replaced with humility, taking the stone he slept on and setting it up as a pillar. He pours oil over its surface and *Luz* is re-named Bethel (*Beth-El, the house of God*).

In this *remez*, Jesus is attesting to the fact that He was the One who came to serve as the ultimate “sullam.” He had come as the way of salvation between mankind and God accessed through the “gate of heaven.”

Later, Jesus would also define Himself as the “Gate” (John 10:7,9,10), a Hebraic idiom referring later to the entrance into the Tabernacle (Exodus 26:36).

Implication:

Jesus was both *the way, the truth, and the life* (John 1) as well as the gate that leads to the Father in heaven. He is the *Son of Man* serving as the “staircase” that extends between heaven and earth. He is the “Mediator” between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5).

John 6:35, 41, 57-58 - *Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. At this the Jews there began to grumble about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”*

Explanation:

In John 6 we find the miraculous story of Jesus feeding the multitudes. This miracle took place in a remote place near Bethsaida (see Luke 9:10). Bread and fish were staples of first century life in the Galilee so it's no wonder He took the opportunity to declare that He Himself was the *Bread of Life*. What prompted Him to make this bold statement?

There is no doubt that every Jew knew the miracle of the manna. God had provided their ancestors this bread during the desert wandering. In fact, they knew the story well from Exodus 16! Jesus even recalls the event in verse 32.

However, He takes the idea of God's provision further claiming that *He* in fact is the ultimate provision of bread. Why so scandalous? From generations past, inside the *Holy Chamber* of the Temple in Jerusalem was the *Table of Presence*. Twelve loaves of bread were placed here weekly representing the twelve tribes. These loaves symbolized how God had been their provision in Sinai. He gave them the bread that saved their lives. Now Jesus is claiming to be noting less than the *Bread of Life*.

Jesus hints at Moses' summary of the manna experience:

"He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD" (Deuteronomy 8:3).

Jesus, the One born in Bethlehem (literally, the *House of Bread*), is the only spiritual food that has the power to give us spiritual fulfillment and everlasting life (John 6:51).

Jesus did not come to abolish the Torah (i.e. Law) but to place it on a firmer foundation (Matthew 5:17). He came to offer spiritual satisfaction and life eternal for all who would seek and serve Him.

Implication:

More than the Unleavened Bread that was set apart for use at the Passover celebration (Leviticus 23:4-8), Jesus, the unblemished Lamb of God, (John 1:29), also was *the Bread of Life*. Jesus still beckons us today to come into His presence and feed on Him.

John 6:70-71 - *Then Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.)*

Explanation:

Using a *p-shat* approach in looking at the text (i.e. a plain meaning and literal interpretation of the text), one would take Jesus literally in concluding that Judas was Satan. Rather, Jesus may be hinting at what Satan would inspire Judas to do and he used the words of the prophet Zechariah to do it:

"Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The LORD said to Satan, 'The LORD rebuke you, Satan!'

Bread in the Bible

The Hebrew word for bread is *lechem* (לֶחֶם) and it also carries the basic meaning of solid food. Bread was made primarily of barley flour until the period of the Second Temple when wheat became the predominant grain. It was baked daily and eaten at every meal. It provided a good portion of their daily caloric intake.

Lechem is found in 30 of the 39 books of the *Tanach* / Old Testament.

Overall in some counts, bread is mentioned 361 times in the entire Bible: 280 times in the Old Testament, 81 in the New Testament, and specifically mentioned 62 times in the Gospels.

The Sages teach: "*Where there is no bread (literally flour - כֶּמֶךְ) there is no Torah; where there is no Torah, there is no bread (again, flour)*" (Mishnah, Avon 3:17). More than just communicating an inescapable fact of human existence, this teaching, when understood properly, can serve as the mission statement of Torah itself.

The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?" (Zechariah 3:1-2).

The Joshua mentioned here is the son of Jehozadak, not the Joshua who conquered the land of Canaan. This Joshua was Israel's primary representative or high priest, after Judah was exiled to Babylon in 586 BC. Though he stood beside "the Satan" with accusations leveled at him as the representative of Israel, he was acquitted and later placed in a clean robe, and given a clean turban. The high priest's turban of that day displayed a plate inscribed with Hebrew letters, meaning "*Holiness to the LORD.*"

Implication:

Jesus, our *High Priest*, hinted at the life-changing influence Satan can have even in among His own followers (i.e. talmidim)! In Zachariah, the Lord calls Joshua "burning stick. Many old translations use the word "brand" here. Joshua, representing Israel, was *marked* with God's own brand. We too, stand acquitted and bear the *brand* of God because of the shed blood of Jesus on the cross.

John 7:37-38 - *On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water (mayim chayim) will flow from within them."*

Explanation:

This is a unique type of remez that is grounded in a cultural event that took place during the *Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot)* called the *Water Libation Festival*. Taking place at this festival was a daily routine where the High Priest would walk from the Temple to the Pool of Siloam with a golden pitcher in his hand. He would scoop water from

the pool, then return to the Temple through the Water Gate. This was accompanied by the blowing of the shofar and great fanfare as he poured the water into a bowl placed on the corner of the altar. Thus began a time for prayer for the much needed rains following a dry summer. In part, this would be a display of thanks to God for providing the early rains of the season gathered into the Pool of Siloam. He did this every day during *Sukkot*.

The *remez* used by Jesus here hinted at what was recalled in the celebration of the coming of God's salvation as envisioned by Isaiah:

"Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD himself, is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation. With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation" (Isaiah 12:2-3).

The last phrase of verse 3 was used at the *Water Libation Festival* as water from the Siloam Pool would have been scooped into the pitcher.

Keep in mind also that during Sukkot they recalled the years of wondering in the desert and God's provision and instruction during those difficult

Simchat Beit Hashoavah "The Joy of Drawing Water"

The Festival of Sukkot was eight days long. The first evening and day are special, but the end of the feast even more so. In fact, the last day is the epitome of the Festival of Sukkot. "Hoshana Rabba" (a request for great salvation) is on the seventh day, the last of the week-long days of Sukkot. The week is followed by "Shemini Atzeret" (eighth day of the assembly) and "Simchat Torah" (Joy of the Torah) on the eighth day. Jesus attended this festival in Jerusalem and was part of the festivities.

- "One for Israel"-

years. The *Festival* continues with a prophetic look into future events when God, through the *Messiah*, would deliver mankind.

Imagine the uproar Jesus' statement must have caused! On the most important day of the festival, Jesus shocked the people by inviting them to come to *Him* for that "Mayim Chayim," living water.

In His statement about being the "living water," Jesus also hinted at another verse that appears at the end of Isaiah:

"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost" (Isaiah 55:1).

Implication:

On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus claimed to be none other than the sustainer of life (i.e. Living Water) to all who would drink of Him! Jesus fulfilled the words of Isaiah. Come to Jesus, all who are spiritually thirsty!

John 8:3-9 - *The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.*

Explanation:

This appears to be a physical or *action remez* of a verse mentioned by the prophet Jeremiah. The event of our passage occurred somewhere in the Temple Courts in Jerusalem (perhaps in the *Court of the Women*). Could it be that Jesus knelt down and wrote out a portion of what the prophet Jeremiah wrote? Here is the verse:

"LORD, you are the hope of Israel; all who forsake you will be put to shame. Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the LORD, the spring of living water" (Jeremiah 17:13).

The Talmud's Description of the Festival

By the time of Jesus, this *Water Libation Festival* had become part of Sukkot. Later, the *Talmud* described the ritual:

"He who has not seen the rejoicing at the place of the water-drawing has never seen rejoicing in his life. At the conclusion of the first festival day of Tabernacles they descended to the court of the women where they had made a great enactment. There were there golden candlesticks with four golden bowls on the top of each of them and four ladders to each, and four youths drawn from the priestly stock in whose hands were held jars of oil... there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that was not illumined by the light of the place of the water-drawing. Men of piety and good deeds used to dance before them with lighted torches in their hands, and sing songs and praises. And Levites without number with harps, lyres, cymbals and trumpets and other musical instruments were there upon the fifteen steps leading down from the court of the Israelites to the court of the women, corresponding to the fifteen songs of ascents in the psalms..." (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sukkah 51a and 51b)

-Taken from "One for Israel"-

If Jesus was writing something like the Jeremiah passage in the dirt, could His point have potentially been that due to accuser's lack of mercy towards this woman, *their* names, not hers, would be erased from God's book; blown away like dust in the wind? We will never know for sure.

Implication:

Jesus desires spiritual healing for all people, even those caught up in snares like the woman of this story. Repentance triumphs over destruction; forgiveness triumphs over condemnation. Jesus was appealing even to the accusers to consider the matter of their own sin. The mercy Jesus extended to her is also extended to each of us.

First Century Judaism

The idea of the *Messiah* (המשיח - HaMashiach) is steeped in a long-standing expectation and tradition. This is what hearers of Jesus' words believed at that time:

- Mashiach meant "anointed one."
- He would come from the line of David (although the Essene community believed that he would also come from the priestly line of Aaron).
- "He would come as "the King (המלך) vs. "Savior" (not divine but human).
- He would be a great political leader.
- He would serve as the "Righteous Judge" (Psalm 7:11).
- He would initiate the restoration of the land (i.e. from the Roman oppression).

First Century Judaism had no understanding of God having, or sending, His Son to earth. The idea was incomprehensible, however, some believed in faith.

John 8:52-59 - *At this they exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that whoever obeys your word will never taste death. Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?" Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and obey his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." "You are not yet fifty years old," they said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" "Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.*

Explanation:

Jesus had just been speaking "to the Jews who had believed him" (John 8:31) when he shared this seemingly controversial statement, "before Abraham was born, I am." The *p-shat* (i.e. a plain meaning and literal interpretation of the text) would have been nonsensical, namely, that Jesus was claiming to be older than Abraham. But Jesus was using a *remez* of Exodus 3:14: "God said to Moses, *"I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"* Those who opposed Jesus no doubt understood the *remez* themselves. Not liking what Jesus just implied, they intended to stone him as a blasphemer.

Implication:

Jesus was claiming His divinity by hinting at the connection between the words *I AM* and the concept of the divinity of God. Jesus was declaring His own equality with Yahweh God.

John 13:18-20 - (Jesus is speaking) *"I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill this passage of Scripture: 'He who shared my bread has turned against me.' I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am. Very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me."*

Explanation:

Just prior to making a prediction of His betrayal by Judas, Jesus hinted at the wider context of what is mentioned in Psalm 41:

"All my enemies whisper together against me; they imagine the worst for me, saying, 'A vile disease has afflicted him; he will never get up from the place where he lies.' Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread has turned against me" (Psalm 41:7-9).

It is interesting that in the ESV version, the last verse reads, *"Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me."*

We can better understand this in light of how a Jew in the First Century would have understood it. It was a sign of significant betrayal to lift one's heel against another. In this passage, David was hurt. A trusted confidant had let him down instead of defending him. Trust was lost in that moment of duplicity. Jesus' disciples would make the connection.

Just like David's friend who betrayed him, it would be Judas who would eventually betray Jesus.

Implication:

Not all those who follow Christ are true *talmidim* (disciples).

Additional Remezim in the Gospels

There are additional *remezim* that appear in the Gospels, especially by Matthew, but also by other authors as well. Matthew hints at Hebrew Scriptural connections about Jesus and even about John the Baptizer. After all, Matthew primarily wrote to a Jewish audience who would have picked up at these *hints*.

Matthew 1:21-23 - (An angel of the LORD is speaking to Joseph) *"She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the LORD had said through the prophet: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means 'God with us')."*

Explanation:

Writing about the birth of Jesus, Matthew does more than hint (*remez*) but actually quotes directly from Isaiah 7:14:

"Therefore the LORD himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."

At the time of the 8th century BC, the *p-shat* (straight-forward, simple interpretation) of the passage was not about the virgin birth of the Messiah but rather about the timetable for the removal of two kings by the Assyrians. This prophecy already had an initial fulfillment shortly following the days of Isaiah. But the *remez* here that Matthew chose to share was that of the *ultimate* fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14; the virgin birth of Jesus through Mary.

In Hebrew culture, a child's name was a big deal. He defined who he/she would become. The Isaiah verse is steeped in culture as he prophesies a "son" whose name means "Savior." Sons were a blessing from God and they all needed a Savior in the First Century to rescue them. They just didn't realize it was a spiritual rescue brought forth from a virgin!

Implication:

Jesus entered this world through the virgin named Mary, thus becoming the prophesied hope for a sin-filled world.

Matthew 2:13-15 - *When they (the wise men) had gone, an angel of the LORD appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the LORD had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'"*

"Virgin"

The word "almah" (עלמה) is a word that appears in Isaiah 7:14 and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. The word "betulah" (בתולה) also appears in the Hebrew Bible. What's the difference between the two words?

- **Almah:** The word is not the technical equivalent of virgin because when Isaiah was written there was not a word in Hebrew for "virgin." However, the word always referred to a woman who was unmarried, yet of marriageable age. In the culture of the day, virginity was the norm. If a woman in Israel was unmarried, she was thought to be a virgin. This noun is used seven times in the Old Testament.
- **Betulah:** Usually defined as a virgin or young marriageable maiden (Leviticus 21:13, Deuteronomy 22:19). It seems that in the Hebrew Bible, our word may sometimes be used for a virgin, but often more so for a young and vigorous woman. This noun is used 51 times in the Old Testament.

Explanation:

We understand the Book of Hosea to be a story of reconciliation back to God for His wayward child, Israel. At the time of Jesus' birth, Matthew includes a direct quote from the prophet Hosea and applies it to Jesus. The text Matthew used from Hosea reads: *"When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son"* (Hosea 11:1).

If we were to consider Hosea's words in a literal sense, it would clearly be seen that the prophet is speaking of the Nation of Israel, and not the Messiah. However, Matthew is hinting at the relationship between Israel and the Messiah, namely, that Jesus was indeed the long-awaited Messiah, the Anointed One (*ha Mashiach*), sent by God to accomplish reconciliation.

Implication:

Early on in his Gospel, Matthew wanted to make sure that his readers knew that Jesus was the fulfillment of Hosea 11:1 and He was indeed the coming Messiah! Jesus was the One who actualized all that God intended for the reuniting of the nation of Israel and was our hope as New Testament believers for life eternal with Him.

Jesus "Tabernacled" Among Us

During the Sinai Wanderings following the Exodus, God instructed Moses and the Israelites to build a Tabernacle (Mishkan - מִשְׁכָּן). Mishkan comes from the Hebrew root meaning "to dwell." Later, the Tabernacle would be replaced by the Temple (built by Solomon in 967 BC). In 586 BC, the Babylonians destroyed the First Temple. The Second Temple was restored in 516 BC, but later destroyed by the Romans in AD 70.

The concept of "tabernacle" is preserved by John who connects Jesus' birth to the dwelling of God in the midst of the people. The dwelling presence of God was no longer limited to a building, for everywhere Jesus went, the Temple was.

Matthew 3:1-3 - *In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the LORD, make straight paths for him.'"*

Explanation:

It was in the Judean Desert where God spoke to the prophet Isaiah. We can connect this remez Matthew gives with Isaiah 40:3-5 where he declares:

"A voice of one calling: 'In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.'"

The Judean Desert is a desolate place located east of Jerusalem and the Judean Hill Country. During the winter months some vegetation colors the desert green, with occasional wild flowers adding to its beauty. The rest of the year the desert is a white, chalky, and barren place. It is a *"dry and parched land where there is no water"* (Psalm 63:1). Both John the Baptizer and Jesus spent time in this desert. We recall John was here, clothed with camel hair garments and a leather belt, eating locusts and wild honey (Matthew 3:4). Also familiar is the account when Jesus spent 40 days and nights here while being tempted by Satan (Matthew 4:1-4).

John's role in God's plan was to prepare the way for Jesus, who God would send to open the blind eyes and prison gates, who gathering the "nations" (all people) to Himself. God receives glory at this happening. It will be a wonderful thing where man cannot take the credit of receive the glory, for the Scripture says:

"I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols"
(Isaiah 42:8).

Implication:

At Jesus' Incarnation, the full glory of God is on display -

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Jesus dwelt (i.e. "tabernacled") among mankind.

Matthew 3:4 - *John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.*

Explanation:

This is a *remez* describing John's garb, not a *fashion statement*, and his clothes were an important mention. Garments of hair told what kind of man is in the story - a prophet of God. The prophet Elijah is described this way, *"He had a garment of hair and had a leather belt around his waist. The king said, 'That was Elijah the Tishbite.'"* (2 Kings 1:8). Also, Zechariah 13:4 states, *"On that day every prophet will be ashamed of their prophetic vision. They will not put on a prophet's garment of hair in order to deceive."* The expectation for the coming of the Messiah was that a person "in the spirit of Elijah" would precede Him. John the Baptizer fulfilled this role in preparing the way for the coming of Jesus. As Matthew would later write: *"This is the one about whom it is written: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you'"* (Matthew 11:10, quoting from Malachi 3:1).

John the Baptizer was not just any prophet; he was a prophet *"in the spirit of Elijah"* (Luke 1:17)! Additionally, John was a prophet who wore his heart on his camel-hair sleeve, not only openly telling people he was the second Elijah, but with his actions, words, and even garments.

Implication:

John was called to *"prepare the way"* and he boldly proclaimed the message from God as promised in Isaiah and Malachi. He made it unmistakably that he was the forerunner for the Messiah.

Matthew 3:16-17 - As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Explanation:

At Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River, the voice from heaven responds with two *remezim*. First, there is a hint of the words by the psalmist: "*I will proclaim the LORD's decree: He said to me, 'You are my son; today I have become your father'"* (Psalm 2:7). Second, a verse from Isaiah is referenced: "*Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations*" (Isaiah 42:1).

At the time of His baptism, Jesus is confirmed as the Son of God sent from heaven in human form, relating to all humanity. Humble, He too is immersed in the waters of the river as the skies part and God's delight is displayed.

Implication:

God is pleased to have sent His Son, now set apart for a redemptive purpose.

Matthew 4:13-17 - Leaving Nazareth, He went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

Explanation:

Whereas this passage doesn't preserve any spoken *remez* of Jesus, Matthew still takes us back to Isaiah in his description of the early part of Jesus' ministry. Isaiah said:

"Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan— The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned" (Isaiah 9:1-2).

Around 700 years after these words of Isaiah were written, Jesus became the fulfillment of Scripture! Not only did the people in the regions of

"Isaiah the Prophet"

Isaiah was the son of Amoz (2 Kings 19:2, 20; 20:1; Isaiah 1:1, 2:1). His name means "*the LORD is salvation*," and this idea is reflected in his writings.

Isaiah served as a prophet in Jerusalem during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, and Manasseh of Judah. Isaiah was married and had at least two sons (see Isaiah 7:3, 8:1-3).

The prophet Isaiah prophesied from 739–681 BC. His "home base" was Jerusalem. He was instrumental in warning Judah of the impending invasion of the Assyrians towards the end of the 8th Century BC. He also shared words of encouragement, hope, and promise of the coming Messiah with his fellow Judeans.

His writings are quoted in the New Testament more than any other Old Testament prophet.

Zebulun and Naphtali know of His coming, but all of Judea and Samaria did too!

Implication:

Jesus was the light (John 1) who came into a dark and hopeless world of the First Century. Jesus came *"just at the right time"* (Galatians 4:4). The dawning of redemption came with Jesus' coming! Entrance into Jesus' kingdom starts with repentance!

John 1:1-4 - *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.*

Explanation:

Every Jew was familiar with the Creation narrative from Genesis 1:

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Genesis 1:1-3).

John was hinting at the creation story here. But why?

Why did John choose to start his gospel with those words? They were a critical launch pad pointing to the deity of Christ. The entire story of the Son begins in the first book of the Bible: *"In the beginning, God..."* (Genesis 1:1). God here is *"Elohim"* - the plural form of the name of God. Here we confirm that when God created, Jesus was with Him. That is why John begins his book in this fashion, showing that Jesus pre-existed, before time, with the Father.

Implication:

John was stating that Jesus, as God Incarnate, was both the Creator of the world *and* now the true light of the world. Hope had dawned!

John 1:29-31 - *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."*

God Speaks, Again!

Like Jesus, John's birth story begins with an angelic visitation. Miracles and events were carefully documented in Scripture to preserve its authenticity.

Bringing the voice of the prophets into the New Testament, John's life and purpose are seen. After 400 years of "silence," God is once again speaking to His children, and He is using John to "*prepare the way for the LORD*" (Isaiah 40:3 and Matthew 3:3).

Explanation:

Following Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, John the Baptizer identified Jesus as the *Lamb of God*, using *remez* himself in hinting at two passages. The first *remez* used would have been a clear *hint* to Genesis 22:8, "*God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering...*". The second *remez* was a hint at Isaiah 53:7, "*He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter...*". John's role was to prepare the way for God's redeemer!

John understood his purpose well. He saw Jesus as the *Lamb of God*! This is momentous! Without the Lamb, the people had no hope.

Implication:

Jesus came as the true sacrificial lamb. With Him, our hope is sure. It is eternal for us who chooses to follow and accept Him as God's only Son, and our Savior.

Closing Thoughts

I hope this project has started an exciting journey for you of exploring the teachings of Jesus in the context of *remez*. This has been a work in process, and is still viewed as incomplete. There are no doubt more *remezim* to discover in the Gospels.

As I mentioned in the opening, I extend an invitation to you to inform me of the *remezim* you discover yourself, adding to the list I compiled. Email me at DrJohn@biblicalisraelstours.com or call/text me at 412-999-5697.

I am humbled to have you read and interact with this project. Together, may we be united in a never-ending pursuit of knowing Jesus better. May we continually be inspired to live as *talmidim* (disciples) of Jesus. And most of all, may our Lord Jesus Christ be honored and gloried above all!

Blessings,
John

Our ministry, *Biblical Israel Ministries & Tours* (BIMT), not only offers the teaching of the Bible in the context of the land of Israel, but also unique and non-touristy life-transforming study tours to Israel. Our web site (scan the QR code below) is a good place to begin searching for a trip that may best fit your schedule and interest. Many Israel trips include optional extensions to other biblical lands (Jordan, Egypt, Greece, and Turkey). We also offer Greece and Turkey trips (with option to Italy). We welcome you to join us!

This *Remez* project is offered free of charge. If you would feel led to share a financial gift of any amount or become a supporting partner of BIMT (a 501c3 non-profit ministry), we welcome your support. Our web site and our phone/tablet App provide easy and safe ways for you to offer a financial gift.

Biblical Israel Ministries & Tours

12565 Jackson Run Road
Sugar Grove, PA 16350
412-999-5697
www.biblicalisraelstours.com

