

THE NEW TESTAMENT

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A 21ST CENTURY TRANSLATION

Translated by Michael Straus

The New Testament: A 21st Century Translation

Translation © Michael Straus (2019),
from texts published as B. Aland, K. Aland, J. Karavidopoulos,
C. M. Martini and B. M. Metzger (eds.), *The Greek New Testament* (5th edition)
(Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 2014);
Institute for New Testament Textual Research (ed.),
Novum Testamentum Graece (28th edition, 3rd corrected printing)
(Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 2014); and M. A. Robinson and W. G. Pierpont,
The New Testament in the Original Greek
(Southborough: Chilton Book Publishing, 2005).

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199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3, Eugene, OR 97401.

Wipf & Stock
An Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers
199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3
Eugene, OR 97401
www.wipfandstock.com
paperback isbn: 978-1-5326-4876-2
hardcover isbn: 978-1-5326-4877-9
ebook isbn: 978-1-5326-4878-6
Manufactured in the U.S.A.

The SymbolGreekU and NewJerusalemV fonts
used in this work are available from
www.linguistsoftware.com/lgku.htm
+1-425-775-1130.

Illustrations: Anna Pipes
Design: Practical People
Notes on the type:
Set in Amster by Francisco Gálvez

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

My goal in this translation has been to bring some fresh turns of phrase to the gospels, histories, letters and revelatory texts already familiar to English-speaking readers and listeners, not least because they are the source of a number of sayings and stories embedded in our language by virtue of the long dominance of the King James Version of the Bible. Anyone undertaking a new translation necessarily works in the shadow of the King James because even though the Hebrew and Greek texts available at the time had their flaws, the quality of the English – the lion's share of which comes from William Tyndale's individual translation – can hardly be improved upon. Some later translations relying on better materials have thus improved the accuracy of the text but rarely the rhythm and force of the style.

There are of course also a number of exceptional modern translations. I appreciate in particular J. B. Phillips' translations of the letters and Reynolds Price's of certain gospels, both writers retaining a deep respect for the texts while varying their approaches, the one freely using common English phrases and the other adhering to Greek's at times staccato strangeness.¹ I likewise admire Robert Alter's uniquely creative and at the same time faithful translations of Old Testament texts.²

My general view is that translations that reflect an individual translator's own way of writing or speaking are the most successful in conveying the corresponding style and personality of a given author. Sometimes that's not always a plus factor, of course, as might be seen in David Bentley Hart's recent translation, where he admittedly writes in "bad English" in an effort to convey what he considers "bad Greek."³ I get his theory, but

1 J.B. Phillips, *Letters to Young Churches* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952); R. Price, *Three Gospels* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1996).

2 R. Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004); R. Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007); R. Alter, *The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010).

3 D. B. Hart, *The New Testament: A Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

the result is predictably clunky, obscure and more of interest for academic study than enjoyment by general readers. At the same time, translations born of committee efforts are generally lifeless and bland, reflecting no one's style but rather the homogenized result of multiple linguistic as well as doctrinal compromises. Notable failures in this category include the Revised Standard Version and its numerous progeny, whose dominant usage should not be confused with quality.

While as a general matter I believe it is possible to preserve in translation the sense, mood and character of a text, there are also inherent limits to conveying all of an original language's subtleties. Greek, for example, is a particle-loving language and is thus liberally sprinkled with tiny words that often function more as structural signposts than as translatable signifiers. This is in large part because Greek sentences and paragraphs depend not so much on word order as on inflected forms. English, on the other hand, does rely on word order for meaning. One major translation task is therefore to adhere to relatively normal English word order without losing some of the ambiguities and complexities found in oftentimes lengthy and even convoluted Greek sentence structures.

Moreover, given the inescapable underlay of Ancient Greek's centuries of usage in epic, lyric, history, rhetoric and drama, as well as in everyday life and commerce, it is often unclear how much of that background context must be considered in trying to find an apt English equivalent to the Koine Greek of the New Testament. But even if classical or historical meanings are considered it is at best challenging to know for certain what nuances were preserved in the language at the time the texts were written.

I also found it essential to consider the Hebrew Scriptures – or more often in this case, the Greek Septuagint version of those books. It is clear, for example, that by and large the New Testament writers were deeply familiar with them. Indeed, Old Testament references and allusions as well as paraphrases and direct quotations permeate the entire New Testament, albeit in some instances (such as the Letter to the Hebrews) more than others. I have footnoted many of these references accordingly. And in places where the writers presupposed the reader's familiarity with the myriad personages of the Hebrew Scriptures (such as in the long genealogy that opens Matthew's Gospel), I added pithy descriptions of those figures on the theory that the implicit historical facts might not always be brought to mind.

To a great extent it is misleading to use terms such as “Old” and “New” in referring to the two broad divisions of the Bible as commonly presented. The earlier writings are subject to multiple ways of being categorized, such as by reference to Law, History, Prophets, Wisdom and similar groupings. Nor is there general agreement as to the ordering of those works, with considerable variance between the structure of the Hebrew and Christian Bibles as well as within the Christian canon itself, *e.g.*, whether to include any of the so-called Apocryphal books, something that still divides Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox communities. That is why I prefer to think of the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Letters and Revelation as a possible way to group works that follow on but are not in discontinuity with all that came before.⁴ Of course, this isn't the place to rewrite religious or literary history and I therefore also use “Old” and New as the form of shorthand they've become. But I also opted for “New Covenant” rather than “New Testament,” both because it is a more accurate translation of the relevant Greek word and because it focuses on the relational nature of what was being established. Where I found it helpful I've therefore also tried to reflect both in language and references the diverse ways in which the New Covenant writers saw continuity and fulfillment of the Old in the New.

As would any translator, I always faced uncertainty which English word to select from within the range of permissible meanings. Even against the background of earlier usage, there is no straight-line path from the ways in which words and concepts such as goodness, excellence, virtue, wickedness or justice were used in Greek classical literature (with its own context of religious and philosophical thought), or the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, to the ways in which they were used, adopted or modified by those writing during the 1st century as the Christian community began its formation. And it bears keeping in mind that nearly all these writers (Luke being the most likely exception) were themselves Jews.

The vocabulary and grammar of the New Covenant texts also reveal these writers to have a wide range of educational, cultural and literary backgrounds – some writers perhaps simply dictating their memories, others drawing on years of rabbinical studies, and others steeped in Hebrew, Latin

4 I haven't taken note for present purposes of further subdivisions that can be made, such as the “Synoptic Gospels” as separate from John's Gospel, or Paul's Letters as separate from others, and variations on those themes.

and Greek history and literature. I do not pretend to be fully confident that I have sufficiently conveyed the meanings of such terms as "righteousness," "timelessness," "judgment," "word/logos," "works," "faith," "sin," "ransom" or even "body," "soul" and "spirit." Solutions such as the sometimes elaborate strings of modifiers found in the Amplified Bible may highlight the difficult choices but do not resolve them.

Notwithstanding, uncertainty doesn't mean inaccessibility or even obscurity. Any shifts and developments in a word's meaning over time or by its appropriation within a new context remain, in my view, subordinate to the shared dilemmas, passions and distresses of human experience over time, *all* of which can be expressed in any language. What I mean is that a good translation can and should provide a reader of the translated text with essentially the same intellectual and emotional responses as the original would have to a reader of that text. For me the goal of translation is to reach below "surface" dissimilarities of language in order to convey "those deep-seated universals, genetic, historical, social, from which all grammars derive..."⁵ A successful translation therefore does not seek to recover what George Steiner calls "the lost Vulgate of Eden," but it also rejects the "monodist" position that real translation is impossible.⁶

It is also important to distinguish among different sorts of translation issues. The Greek text sometimes reflects the writer's own observations of events and reporting of speech, but at other times reflects a writer's effort to put into words what he perceived to be God's thoughts and words, *i.e.*, understanding himself to be inspired, quite literally, by the Holy Spirit. In such instances I tried to infer, imagine and/or intuit what might have been the thoughts, images and emotions that inspired the original writer and then sought to present them in English, building on the Greek text as at least an indicator of that first animating inspiration. Does that mean that I fairly caught the sense of that inspiration, or farther still that my translation of such passages is somehow likewise inspired? I'm happy to leave all that for someone else to decide. Either way, I did not consider myself free to find new truths or beliefs in these sacred texts on grounds that I might be "inspired" to find such meaning. It's sufficient for theologians to

5 G. Steiner, *After Babel* (3rd ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 76-7.

6 *Id.* at 65, 77.

argue about matters of faith, justification, judgment and the like without a translator purporting to wade into such debates with a wholly novel word choice.

I therefore did not consider it my job to resolve such issues but rather to provide a penumbra of meanings without departing from the core of what can faithfully be derived from the Greek itself. Inspiration, in that sense, for me meant thoughtfully and at times imaginatively considering the underlying message that a given writer sought to convey and then trying to present it in a way that same writer might have appreciated were he to read it in English today. That isn't too difficult in dealing with pure narrative. The harder choices come in books like the Letter to the Romans, which treats of such weighty questions as the freedom of the will, the nature of evil, the deathly consequences of sin, the history and future of Israel, the resurrection of the dead and like matters. Will differences among the Protestants, Roman Catholics or Greek Orthodox on these issues be resolved by one or another translation choice? I seriously doubt it. But one shouldn't add fuel to the fire. In order to respect a range of legitimate interpretations I therefore tended not to use the same English word every time I translated a given word in Greek.

Here's an example of what I mean. A number of Greek words build on a common root that may variously be translated as "righteous," "just," "upright," "rectified" or "vindicated." The English words chosen might thus alternatively suggest individual actions, divine imputation, some form of judicial acquittal, or compliance with ritual demands. It follows that the choice of words to express such concepts in English may, depending on the context, give rise to differing doctrinal emphases on such essential questions as the nature of forgiveness, redemption and propitiation. I therefore tried to allow for such possibilities as the text could fairly allow. I did so in part because I am suspicious of doctrines that rely overmuch on one or another choice within a given range of meanings. In other words, I tended to take a "both/and" rather than "either/or" approach.

The same was true in translating certain genitival constructions, notably passages that could be read to say that salvation is obtained through the subjectively genitive "faith of Jesus" (*i.e.*, by operation of his own faith and obedience), or the objectively genitive "faith in Jesus" (*i.e.*, by operation of one's own faith and trust). I don't view these alternatives as mutually

exclusive, however. If anything, the expansiveness of the genitive construction in Greek has the virtue of legitimately embracing both understandings. I consider this a positive form of ambiguity and therefore alternated between the options, a choice that may well be unsatisfactory to partisans on either side of the debate.⁷

Apart from this, how should one translate certain lyrical passages such as those in the Letter to the Colossians that describe Jesus in what can fairly be called non-literal, impressionistic or spiritually abstracted language? Passages, for example, that refer to him as “the radiant image of the invisible God, the offspring of Heaven, the firstborn of all creation,” embodying “the whole plenitude of divine perfection”? Such images cannot be limited by words and I therefore often dispensed with standard grammatical forms and punctuation as a way of signaling the limits of language.

Consider too how daunting it is to deal with the prologue to the Gospel of John. The King James has it thus: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.” But here is how I translated the same opening verses: “The Word existed before all Time, timelessly present with God and himself true God. He was with God at the outset.”

The original Greek is quite simply written and the King James is a highly defensible literal rendering, one that has in fact been followed by virtually all other translations. Yet the meaning of the words remains elusive. I must have revised my translation dozens of times before settling on the current version, ultimately taking considerable liberty in word usage and phrasing. It’s the portion of the book I’m probably least satisfied with, and it legitimately remains open to criticism. For me the chief obstacle was in dealing with John’s use of the past tense “was” when speaking of a being who by definition exists beyond time. So even though I tried to convey the sense of the Word/Logos as “timeless” it was nearly impossible not to use temporal references, such as that the Word “existed” before all time or “was” with God from the beginning.

I’m not defending the way I’ve handled it and the past tense “was” and

7 Compare, e.g., R. B. Hays, *The Faith of Christ* (2nd ed.) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) with J. D. G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); see generally M. F. Bird and P. M. Sprinkle (eds.), *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical and Theological Studies* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010).

“existed” do appear in the Greek itself. I’m simply noting that this passage *par excellence* proves my point that sometimes the best one can hope for is to choose words that at least allusively suggest the mystery that writers like John or Paul felt when they set pen to paper. In other words, if Paul or John understood themselves to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, then a translator owes it to the text to seek words suggestive of that inspiration.⁸

One compelling and alternative way to deal with John’s prologue is that chosen by Dr. Hart, whose translation of the same two opening verses reads thus: “In the origin there was the Logos, and the Logos was present with GOD, and the Logos was god; this one was present with GOD in the origin.”

One immediately sees the varied ways he deals with the language, including by means of orthographic distinctions. Dr. Hart carefully identified the multiple meanings of the core Greek word “logos” and further analyzed the fraught theological issues at stake in how it was used in the so-called Trinitarian Debates of the 4th century. Recognizing the limitations of translating “logos” into a single word (as it were), he ultimately decided the best course was to appropriate the transliterated Greek itself rather than rendering “Logos” as “Word” or something else. He correctly observed that translating it as “Word” would do little more than replicate the King James and therefore not add much to our understanding that wasn’t already there.⁹

The difficulty of the passage, as he and others have noted, is that no single word in English can possibly capture the fullness of the Greek word “logos.” Yes, it means “word” but it also means “speech,” “declaration,” “thought,” “reason” or variants on those. Dr. Hart also explains that at the time of John’s writing the word likely carried with it an implied reference to, and possible rebuttal of, Platonist metaphysics and/or incipient Gnostic heresies, none of which would be readily apparent to most English readers. And Dr. Hart identifies a further series of complexities in the passage whereby certain grammatical aspects might give rise to uncertainty whether John is referring to “God” or “God Most High” or to “a god.”¹⁰ These

8 See 1 Timothy 3:16.

9 Hart, *op. cit.* at 533-37 (separately written as “A Note on the Prologue of John’s Gospel – An Exemplary Case of the Untranslatable”).

10 *Id.* at 168, note a. These words would not have been written with an initial capital letter in the original. The same of course is true for “logos” and “Logos.” The small

he addressed orthographically with variations on large and small capital letters, an ingenious solution but one requiring something of a road map (which he also provides).

My point in focusing on this particular passage is that it exemplifies the pitfalls of overly literal renderings. They can be deceptively simple and thereby mask the nuances and more complex and profound meanings that the words seek to convey. But as I said, I'm not completely happy with my own resolution of these issues. I opted principally to focus on what I see as the "time versus timelessness" aspects of the opening verses, *i.e.*, to emphasize what is perhaps but one of multiple senses embedded in the text. I recognize the risk of doing so in that the other senses may thus become less emphasized. But that's also the virtue of readers having multiple translations available to consult, where other aspects of the verses can be explored.

More generally, a Biblical text presents particular challenges in those places where it purports to speak *not* as the voice of its specific writer but as the voice of the one speaking to/inspiring that writer. Hans-Georg Gadamer argues that the "usual function of writing [lies] in its referring back to some original act of saying..."¹¹ The challenge would thus be in divining the nature and substantive content of that "original act." In that sense the translation of a Biblical text may require more poetry than science.

This is among the reasons I haven't felt governed by a particular theory or school of translation. In other words, I don't rely on an overarching rule that the text should be translated "literally," or "word-for-word," or with "dynamic equivalence," or "thought-for-thought," or "paraphrastically," or "idiomatically." For better or worse, I tried to find something of each of those approaches that would allow me to respond to the nature of a given book, letter or individual passage rather than force the text to fit a preconceived translation theory.

For example, sometimes the text *is* plain – as in the factual reporting of a sea voyage and shipwreck – and presenting it in a reasonably literal way will best capture the sense of the original. But sometimes the text is

and capital letter distinctions found in later Greek writings are therefore themselves interpretations of meaning without clear textual justification. But I admit that I've freely alternated between small and capital letters myself, in particular in dealing with highly abstracted terms.

11 H.-G. Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 141-42.

obscure, telegraphic or even convoluted, as can be the case with some of Paul's argumentation. Yet at other times the writing is elevated, abstract and laced with spiritual terms that reflect the writer's effort to convey in words experiences or thoughts that have no clear linguistic let alone physical equivalent. Hence the language can be metaphorical, allusive and imprecise, yielding more to poetry than prose.

I therefore found it better to try to figure out what the nature of a given passage was – whether visual or poetic, factual or conceptual – and treat it accordingly. At times I found it necessary to reconfigure the text in a way I thought it might have been had it first been written in English. That occasionally meant reducing some of the text to footnotes where the writer had interjected parenthetical observations that might otherwise interrupt the flow of the work. Paul tended to do this frequently, with thoughts that seem to have occurred to him in the middle of another thought the way they can while one is speaking – something that argues in favor of many of the letters being dictated to an amanuensis rather than first generated by writing. One such example was his comment to Timothy that he might try drinking a little wine from time to time to help settle his stomach, a thought that comes in the middle of another thought. Footnotes are admittedly a modern form of dealing with such interjections, but one that I hope is useful in that context.¹²

Without at all purporting to assume the poet's mantle, I took my admittedly eclectic approach analogously to the task John Dryden set for himself in his translation from Virgil:

I thought fit to steer betwixt the two extremes of paraphrase and literal translation; to keep as near my author as I could, without losing all his graces, the most eminent of which are in the beauty of his words.... I have endeavor'd to make Virgil speak such English as he would himself have spoken, if he had been born in England, and in this present age.¹³

12 Where a descriptive footnote is mine rather than the writer's I generally show it as a "translator's note." I also used Greek or Hebrew fonts for various names and places where translating or transliterating them might diminish their force. I therefore left them in the original form but also add my own indication what the word means "in English," a phrase clearly not in the original.

13 Virgil, *Aeneid* (J. Dryden, trans.) (New York: P. F. Collier and Son, 1909), 64, available at <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/virgil-the-aeneid-dryden-trans>.

That sometimes required my adding words as aids to meaning. I take some comfort in Martin Luther's defense when he was criticized for adding the adverb *allein* (the German word for "alone") to his translation of Romans 3:28, even though the word does not appear in any known Greek text. A plain English rendering would be, "We know that a person is justified by faith apart from works of the Law." As per Luther it reads something like, "We know that a person is justified *solely* by faith/by faith *alone*, apart from works of the Law." Luther took the challenge as the opportunity to state his governing approach to translation in such circumstances:

I also know that in Romans 3, the word *solum* is not present in either the Greek or Latin text ... [but] it conveys the sense of the text – if the translation is to be clear and accurate, it belongs there.¹⁴

At times I also used anachronistic language, thus updating persons or settings in the parables to the present time as a way of keeping them lively; or quoting from Shakespeare or Milton as a means of universalizing the thoughts presented. At other times I simply appropriated the King James for certain passages so perfectly written or so embedded in our minds and culture that it would be either futile or arrogant to change them. And on other occasions – particularly with the Book of Revelation – I dispensed with normal English grammar and usage, used musical scores, or translated the Greek into languages other than English, all in aid of the admittedly impossible task of conveying what the writer himself states are sights and sounds that words cannot convey of a setting filled with people and creatures speaking and singing in myriad tongues.

Ultimately my aim is not to compete with let alone supplant other translations so much as to shed light on passages that may otherwise seem obscure; capture aspects of the man Jesus' personality as presented distinctively in the Gospels; convey in relatively plain language Christian doctrine and experience as related in Acts and the Epistles; and reflect the atemporal nature of the Book of Revelation. My goal has therefore been to arrive at

¹⁴ M. Luther, *On Translating: An Open Letter* (G. Mann, trans.) (Project Wittenburg, 1995), 9, also available at <https://archive.org/stream/anopenletterontr00272gut/ltran11.txt>.

the English translation I felt best captured the sense either of a particular Greek word or passage, avoiding the overly-literal where the text itself is far from plain.

At the same time I hope this translation is more accessible to the ordinary reader than what can be the daunting format of so-called “authorized” versions – I mean this work, in other words, to be user-friendly. That’s one reason I eliminated verse numbers and sometimes even chapter numbers, none of which appear in the original Greek text but are simply later additions included for greater ease of reference. One goal is thus for the texts to read more novelistically in the case of the Gospels, as historical narrative in the case of the Acts, recognizably as letters in the case of the Epistles, and fluidly in the case of John’s Revelation.

I also made a conscious effort not unduly to subordinate distinctive aspects of a particular writer’s style. That explains some of the formal differences among the several books, such as my use of more action vocabulary in Mark; elevated and almost abstract language in John; stream-of-consciousness elements in Revelation; paragraph-long sentences in the letters to the Ephesians or Colossians; or even italics to suggest handwriting where Paul states that he himself is writing all or part of a letter. In other words, it’s no accident that each of the books reads somewhat differently in style. Even so, at the end of the day this translation probably reveals more about my own writing style and manner of speech than it does about the authors’. But I don’t presume to have captured all there is to convey or to have met all legitimate scholarly demands, let alone to have presented a volume acceptable for liturgical use.

Now, as far as acknowledgments go, it’s impossible to know where to start let alone where to end. This translation is the product not only of my studies in both Attic and Koine Greek but also and more importantly of decades of immersion in the Bible itself. It is the product as well of a loving family, who both tolerated and supported my studies and writing time. To go beyond that would shortchange someone, I’m sure. I therefore find it more than sufficient to close with the unpayable debt I owe in thankfulness to Philippa, Philippa and Marc.

Michael Straus

GOSPELS

ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

1

This is the genealogy of Yeshua, the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was father to Isaac by his wife Sarah in their old age, according to God's promise. Isaac was father to Jacob and Jacob to Judah and his brothers. Judah fathered the twins Perez and Zerah incestuously by Tamar his Canaanite daughter-in-law, mistaking her for a whore. Now Perez was father to Hezron, then Hezron to Aram, Aram to Amminadab, Amminadab to Nahshon and Nahshon to Salmon. Salmon fathered Boaz by Rahab, the harlot of Jericho, and Boaz fathered Obed by Ruth the Moabite. In turn, Obed was father to Jesse and Jesse to David the King.

David then fathered Solomon by Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, first committing adultery with her and then procuring Uriah's death. For his part, King Solomon was father to Rehoboam by Naamah the Ammonite. King Rehoboam, under whom the kingdom split in two, was father to Abijah; King Abijah to Asa by his wife Micaiah, granddaughter of David's rebel son Absalom; King Asa to Jehoshaphat, who suppressed the worship of idols; King Jehoshaphat to Joram, who married Athaliah, the Baal-worshipping daughter of wicked King Ahab and his wife Jezebel; King Joram to Uzziah, who was struck by leprosy for transgressing the Temple

altar; King Uzziah to Jotham, who did right in God's sight; King Jotham to Ahaz, who sacrificed his children in the fire; King Ahaz to Hezekiah, who restored the Passover Festival to Israel; King Hezekiah to Manasseh, who practiced witchcraft and set up in the Temple an idol he himself had made; King Manasseh to Amon, who did evil and was assassinated in his palace; King Amon to Josiah, who renewed Israel's covenant with God; and King Josiah to Jechoniah and his brothers about the time the people were taken captive and exiled to Babylon.

But after they were taken to Babylon, King Jechoniah fathered Salathiel and Salathiel fathered Zerubbabel, who laid the foundations of the Second Temple. Zerubbabel fathered Abiud, Abiud Eliakim, Eliakim Azor, Azor Zadok, Zadok Achim, Achim Eliud, Eliud Eleazar, Eleazar Matthan and Matthan Jacob. Now Jacob was father to Joseph, Mary's husband, and Yeshua – the Anointed One – was born of Mary.

So it was that fourteen generations passed between the time of Abraham and David and another fourteen from David to the captivity in Babylon and another fourteen from the time of the captivity until the coming of the Messiah.

Yeshua's own genesis was as follows.

While his mother Mary was engaged to Joseph but before they had sex with one another, Mary became pregnant – and that by the Holy Spirit. Her fiancé Joseph was a just man, unwilling to expose her to public shame and disgrace. Instead, he thought he could secretly release her from her pledge. But while he was trying to figure out what to do an angel of the Lord came to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to marry Mary. She's with child by the hand of the Holy Spirit and will bear a son. You will name him יֵשׁוּעַ (which in English means 'he will save'), because he will rescue his people from their sins."

All of this happened to fulfill the word of the Lord through his prophet – Watch! A virgin will be with child and bear a son and people will call him *עִמָּנוּאֵל* (which in English means God is with us).² Once he woke up Joseph did as the angel commanded and took Mary into his house yet did not have sex with her until after she had given birth to a son, whom he named Yeshua.

¹ *Isaiah* 7:14, 8:8.

² *Isaiah* 8:10.

2

This Yeshua was born in Bethlehem of Judea during King Herod's reign. At some point after his birth certain Magi, men of the Orient steeped in the movements of the stars, came to Jerusalem and asked around, "Where is the child born King of the Jews? We've seen his star ascendant in the eastern quadrant and have come to worship him."³ But when King Herod heard this he was agitated – indeed, so was all Jerusalem with him. Once Herod had gathered all the nation's chief priests and scribes he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. They responded, "In Bethlehem of Judea, just as the prophet wrote –

And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah,
for a leader shall emerge from you
and he will shepherd my people Israel."⁴

Herod summoned the astrologers to meet with him in private, at which point he pressured them to tell him precisely when the star began to appear. Then he sent them off to Bethlehem and directed them, "Investigate this matter of the child carefully. Let me know once you've found out who and where he is, because I'd like to come worship him too." The wise men heard the king out and left. As they travelled, the star they had seen in the eastern sky went ahead of them until it stood over the child's abode.

The wise men eagerly followed the star's guiding and rejoiced on entering the house it led them to. There they saw the child with Mary his mother and, kneeling before him, they worshiped. Then they opened treasure boxes they had brought with them, presenting him with gifts – gold, frankincense and myrrh.⁵ But in a dream the wise men were given divine warning not to return to Herod. They therefore left Bethlehem by an alternate route, heading straight back to their own country.

Once they had left, an angel of the Lord again appeared to Joseph in a dream and instructed him, "Rise up! Take the child and his mother

3 See *Numbers* 24:17.

4 *Micah* 5:2; 2 *Samuel* 5:2.

5 *Psalms* 45:8; *Song of Songs* 3:6, 5:5; 1 *Kings* 10:2; *Proverbs* 7:17.

and flee into Egypt.⁶ Herod will be out looking for the child with an aim to kill him. So just stay put until you hear from me.” Joseph packed up that night, took the child and his mother and escaped to Egypt, planning to live there at least until Herod died. In this way the word of the Lord through the prophet was fulfilled, to wit, I called my son out from Egypt.⁷

Herod of course went crazy when he found out the Magi had slipped by him. In a fury he ordered his men to murder all the babies in Bethlehem and its surrounding villages aged two years and under, based on the time frame he’d exacted from the star-gazers. So too was the word of Jeremiah fulfilled –

A cry was heard in Rama,
great wailing and lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children,
refusing to be consoled, for they are gone.⁸

But once Herod was dead the Lord’s messenger again appeared in Joseph’s dreams and directed him, “Rise, take the child and his mother and head back to Israel. Those who sought to kill the child are themselves now dead.” So Joseph gathered his belonging and returned with his family to the land of Israel. Yet he was afraid to settle in Judea again because he’d been warned by God in another dream that it was still a danger zone with Archelaus having assumed the kingship after Herod. Joseph therefore changed course and headed instead for the Galilean District, settling in the backwater village of Nazareth. This too fulfilled a word of the prophets that the Messiah would be known as a man from Nazareth.⁹

3

During this same period John was preaching and baptizing in the wilderness regions of Judea saying, “Turn back from your ways – the kingdom of Heaven is come near.”

6 *Exodus* 5:22-23.

7 *Hosea* 11:1.

8 *Jeremiah* 31:15.

9 *Cf. Judges* 13:5; *Isaiah* 11:1

This is just what Isaiah spoke about when he wrote,

A voice cries out in the desert –

“Prepare the way of the Lord, straighten his paths!”¹⁰

Now John himself wore clothes woven of camel’s hair, tying them on his waist with a leather belt, and he fed himself on locusts and wild bees’ honey. People from Jerusalem and indeed from all around Judea and the Jordan region came to be baptized by him in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins.

But when John saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees on their way to be baptized he said, “You’re a serpents’ brood – who warned *you* to flee from the wrath to come?”¹¹ You’ll need to lead changed lives if you want to confirm your repentance. Oh and don’t get the idea that it’s enough to say, ‘we’ve got Abraham as our father.’ The truth is God can bring forth children to Abraham from the pebbles on this river bank. I’m telling you the axe is poised above the root of the trees. Every tree that fails to yield healthy fruit will be cut down and tossed to the fire. And yes, I’m immersing now you in water so you’ll turn from your ways – but someone more powerful than I is following me and I’m not worthy so much as to carry his sandals. *He* will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and with fire. He has his winnowing tools in hand, ready to cleanse the threshed grain, gathering the wheat into the storehouse and burning the chaff with a fire that can’t be put out.”

Then Yeshua came down from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. Yet John faced him down.

“I’m the one who needs to be baptized by you, not the other way around – so why are *you* coming to me?”

“Let it go for now. It’s fit that we observe ritual propriety.”

John yielded to him.

But the moment Yeshua was baptized, even as he came up from the water, the Heavens were split and John saw the Spirit of God descending, lighting on Yeshua gently as a dove, all as a voice from Heaven spoke, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.¹²

¹⁰ *Isaiah* 40:3.

¹¹ *Malachi* 3:1.

¹² *Psalms* 2:7; *Isaiah* 42:1.

4

The Spirit then led Yeshua into the wilderness to be tested for a time by the Accuser of the Brethren. He fasted there forty days and forty nights.¹³ Hungry as he was for food, it was just then the Prince of This World approached with a challenge.

“If you’re really the Son of God then turn these stones to bread.”

Yeshua countered with a verse, “Man doesn’t survive on bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”¹⁴

Then the Prince of Darkness whisked him away to the Holy City, stood him on the Temple’s parapet and tempted him, “Prove to everyone you’re really the Son of God – jump! As the Scriptures tell us,

He will command his angels to protect you,
suspending you in the palms of their hands –
your feet won’t even touch the stone.”¹⁵

Yeshua rebuked him again, “Don’t provoke the Lord your God.”¹⁶

Taking him once more, the Adversary set him atop the highest mountain and gave him a view of the kingdoms of the world in all their glory, promising Yeshua, “I will give all these things to you, if only you will bow down and worship me.”

But yet again Yeshua rejected him, “Get out of my sight, Satan. You know the Scriptures – You will worship the Lord your God and serve him alone.”¹⁷

Then the Wicked One left him as swift angels swept to his side, tending to his needs.¹⁸

After this, Yeshua heard that John had been arrested. He therefore withdrew to Galilee where, leaving Nazareth behind, he settled in Capernaum-by-the-Sea in the lands first given to the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali. He thus fulfilled Isaiah’s prophetic word,

¹³ *Exodus* 24:28; *Deuteronomy* 9:9, 18.

¹⁴ *Deuteronomy* 8:3.

¹⁵ *Psalms* 91:11-12.

¹⁶ *Deuteronomy* 6:16; cf. W. Shakespeare, *Macbeth* 1.3.123-26.

¹⁷ *Deuteronomy* 6:13; *Joshua* 22:5.

¹⁸ *1 Kings* 19:5-8.

Bright dawn broke along the Via Maris
 across from Jordan,
 a light shining on those who sat in darkness,
 there among the tribes of Zebulon and Naphtali
 there under the shadow of death
 there among those of Upper Galilee.¹⁹

From that point on Yeshua began to preach and he urged the people, “Turn from your ways – the kingdom of Heaven has drawn near.”

Walking by the Sea of Galilee Yeshua saw two brothers casting throw-nets, they being fishermen. These were Simon (nicknamed Πέτρος, which transliterated into English is Peter but in Greek means “the Rock”) and Andreas. He said, “Come with me and I’ll make you fishers of men.” They quickly left their nets behind and followed him. Walking a bit further along the shore he saw another two brothers, Jacob and John, sons of Zebedee. They were mending nets in a boat with their father when Yeshua called them to join as well. Right away they left their boat – and their father too – and followed him.

Yeshua went all around Galilee teaching in its synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom to the people and healing them of every kind of sickness and disease. He also became famous throughout the entire Syrian region, where they carried to him people with diverse illnesses and diseases, some suffering in constant pain as well as people who were demon-possessed or epileptic or paralyzed – and he healed them all. Not surprisingly, a major crowd began to follow him everywhere, with people streaming in from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem and the Trans-Jordan.

5

Seeing the multitudes gathered, Yeshua went up to the hill country west of the Sea of Galilee. Once he’d found a good place to sit his disciples gathered to listen and he shared with them freely, teaching lessons like these:

“You who are now downcast and oppressed, lift up your heads – God

¹⁹ *Isaiah* 9:1-2.

will give you the kingdom of Heaven! You who mourn will be comforted²⁰ and you the humble will inherit the Promised Land.²¹ Do you hunger and thirst for God's righteousness? He'll give you your fill.²²

And blessed are you who show mercy, because he will be merciful to you.²³ So too, the pure in heart will see God.²⁴ Peacemakers – you'll be known as God's children.²⁵ Happy are those who bear the marks of persecution, because theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. The fact is, you should consider yourselves fortunate when people revile and oppress you, slandering you for my sake. When that happens rejoice and be glad, because your reward is great in Heaven – they persecuted the prophets before you in just the same way.²⁶

"You are the salt of the Earth but if salt loses its strength and becomes tasteless, what good is it? It's good for nothing other than to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.²⁷ You are the light of the world – and a city perched on a hilltop cannot be hidden.²⁸ No one would light a candle and then dump a bushel of grain on it. No, you'd put it on a candlestick and let it shine throughout the house. So don't hide your light but let it shine before all mankind. That way they'll see your good deeds and give glory to your heavenly Father.

"I don't want you to think I've come to destroy the Law or the Prophets. Far from it – I've come not to destroy but to fulfill. Listen to me carefully: Heaven and Earth may well pass away but not a single – not one ink stroke – shall disappear from the Law until all things are fulfilled. Therefore whoever dispenses with the least of these commandments and teaches people to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of Heaven, while whoever both observes and teaches them will be called the greatest. My point is that unless in God's eyes your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of Heaven.

20 *Isaiah* 61:2.

21 *Psalms* 37:11.

22 *Psalms* 16:15, 42:1-2, 107:9; *Isaiah* 41:17, 55:1-2.

23 *Psalms* 18:25-26.

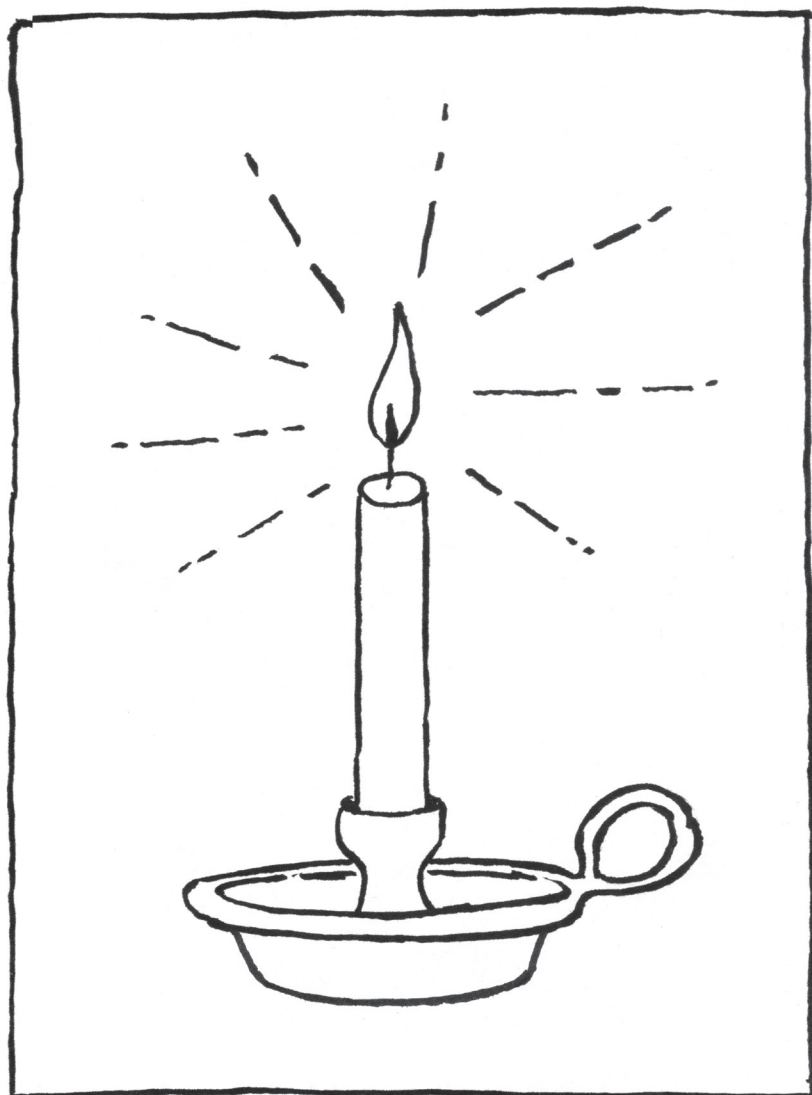
24 *Deuteronomy* 6:5; *Psalms* 24:3-5.

25 *Psalms* 34:14; cf. W. Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part 2*, 2.1.35.

26 E.g., *Jeremiah* 20:2; 2 *Chronicles* 24:21.

27 Cf. *Genesis* 19:26; 2 *Kings* 2:20.

28 *Isaiah* 2:1.



“You’ve heard it was said to those who lived in past times, don’t murder²⁹ and that anyone caught doing so would face judgment. But I’m telling you anyone who’s angry with his brother will also stand condemned.³⁰ Indeed, if anyone says to his brother רֵקָא (which in English means numbskull), he will answer to the Sanhedrin. And whoever calls his brother a fool risks the smoldering fires of הַגֵּי הַיְדֵּשׁ (which in English means the Valley of Hinnom).³¹

“Therefore if you’re on the way to take your gift to the altar and realize your brother has something against you, hold off presenting your gift and first go set things right with your brother – after that you can offer your gift to God.³² If you are sued, settle the case quickly. Otherwise, the odds are you’ll run into the plaintiff on the road, he’ll haul you before a judge, the judge will hand you over to the bailiff and the bailiff will throw you in jail. I’m telling you if that happens you won’t get out of there until you’ve paid the last penny.

“It’s true that Moses told the people, don’t commit adultery.³³ But I’m telling you that as soon as you’ve looked at someone else’s wife with a mind to sleep with her you’ve already committed adultery in your heart.³⁴ This being the case, if your right eye is leading you into scandal take it out and throw it away. Isn’t it better for you to lose one part of your body than to have your whole self cast into the fire? So likewise if your right hand is causing you up to stray cut it off and toss it. It’s *clearly* better for you to lose one part of your body than have your whole self burnt in Gehenna’s flames.

“Moses *did* add that if anyone wishes to divorce his wife he must provide her with a divorce decree.³⁵ But I’m saying that anyone who divorces his wife other than for unfaithfulness pushes her to commit adultery, because anyone who marries a woman who’s been unlawfully divorced commits adultery with her.

“Again, you’ve heard the ancients were told, don’t swear falsely but

29 Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17.

30 Cf. Leviticus 19:17-18.

31 And which, transliterated into Greek as Γέεννα and then again into English, sometimes reads Gehenna. See Jeremiah 7:31; 2 Kings 23:10.

32 Isaiah 1:10-17; Jeremiah 8:8-11; Amos 5:21-24; Micah 6:6-8.

33 Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18.

34 Exodus 20:17.

35 Deuteronomy 24:1.

give over to the Lord all that you've promised.³⁶ Yet now I'm telling you categorically – don't swear any oath *at all*, not 'by Heaven,' not 'by God's throne,' not 'by the Earth' (that being God's footstool)³⁷ and not 'by Jerusalem' (since that's the city of the Great King).³⁸ Don't even swear by your own head, because you can't turn one hair white or black. Instead, when you give your word just let it be 'yes, yes' or 'no, no.' Anything more than this comes from the Evil One.

"You've also heard you should repay an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.³⁹ But I say, don't resist an evildoer. If someone punches you on the right side turn to him your left. If someone asks for your shirt give him your jacket as well. If someone dragoons you into going a mile with him, go two. Lend to those who find they must borrow – don't turn away someone in need!

"Now, you've also heard you should love your neighbor⁴⁰ and hate your enemy.⁴¹ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.⁴² As God's children you should be like your Father in Heaven: he causes the sun to rise on the evil as well as the good, the rain to fall on the just as well as the unjust. If you love those who love you do you think you deserve a medal? Don't men of the world do that too? And if you only greet your brothers, what's so special about that? Don't the Goyim do the same? But *you* – you must be all embracing in your love and holy, even as your Father in Heaven is holy.⁴³

6

"Be careful you don't put on a show of your piety for everyone to see. If you do, then you'd better enjoy it now because you've forfeited any reward from my Father in Heaven. Instead, whenever you do something charitable don't tell everyone what you're up to – that's what the hypocrites do, publicizing their gifts to the rest of the congregation, putting up

36 *Leviticus* 19:12; *Numbers* 30:3; *Deuteronomy* 23:22.

37 *Isaiah* 66:1.

38 *Psalms* 48:2.

39 *Exodus* 21:24; *Leviticus* 24:20; *Deuteronomy* 19:21.

40 *Leviticus* 19:18.

41 *Psalms* 139:21-22.

42 W. Shakespeare, *Macbeth* 3.1.90-93.

43 *Leviticus* 11:45, 19:2, 20:26; *Deuteronomy* 18:13

billboards on the highways, always seeking praise from men. They have their reward. But whenever you're moved to donate money or goods don't let your left hand know what your right is doing. Make your donations anonymously – and don't worry, your Father, who sees what goes on in secret, will vouchsafe your reward.

“Whenever you pray don’t be like the hypocrites. They make it a point to pray where everyone can see them – and I mean not just in the assemblies but out in the town square and on street corners as well. They too have their reward. But whenever *you* pray go into an inner room of your house, lock the door and pray to your Father in secret – and your Father, who sees all that happens, even the hidden things, will reward you.

“And when you pray don’t babble on the way the Goyim do, thinking the more they talk the more they’ll be listened to. Don’t be like them. There’s nothing you need that your Father doesn’t know about ahead of time. So pray like this –

Our Father, who art in Heaven,
 hallowed be thy name;
 Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
 on Earth as it is in Heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread;
 And forgive us our trespasses,
 as we forgive those who trespass against us.
 And lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil.
 For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory,
 forever and ever, amen.

If you forgive those who do you wrong your Father in Heaven will also forgive you. But if you don't forgive others their sins neither will your Father forgive yours.

“And whenever you fast don’t be all gloomy like the hypocrites. They hide their faces with ashes or dirt so everyone will see they’re fasting. I’m telling you, they have their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head with oil and scrub your face. That way no one will know you’re fasting – no one other than your Father who sees in secret, that is, and he will guarantee your reward.

“Don’t heap up riches for yourselves on Earth, where moths and rust can

eat away at them or thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where moths can't devour and rust can't corrode, where thieves can't break in and robbers can't steal, because wherever you keep your treasures that's where your heart will be.⁴⁴ You gather light by focusing – so if you focus your eyes on what's good and true your soul will be filled with light. But if you eye what's evil you darken the soul – and if darkness hides in your soul how great must that darkness be!

“No one can serve two masters. He will hate the one and love the other or honor the one and scorn the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. That's why I'm telling you not to worry yourselves to death what you'll eat or what you'll wear. Isn't the soul more than food, the body more than the clothes it wears? Look at the birds that fly through the skies. They don't plant crops or harvest them or store them in a barn – and yet your Father in Heaven makes sure they have food to eat. Aren't you worth a lot more than they are? And besides, where does all your worrying get you? Worrying won't make you live longer.⁴⁵

“As far as clothing is concerned, learn something from wildflowers, how they grow. They don't work, they don't weave, and yet Solomon in all his glory was never draped with such finery. If God so adorns the grass of the field, which is here today and gone tomorrow, how much more will he clothe you, you faithless people! That's why I say you'll just get ulcers with all your worrying, all your ‘What are we going to eat? What are we going to drink? What are we going to wear?’ That's what the Goyim fret about all day. Just remember what I've told you – your Father in Heaven knows everything you need. Therefore seek out first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be provided you. And don't anguish about what tomorrow will bring. Tomorrow will bring its own worries. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.

7

“Don't condemn other people or you may end up condemned yourself. After all, you'll be judged by the same standards you apply to others, mea-

44 Cf. W. Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part 2*, 2.1.19-20.

45 Cf. *Psalms* 39:5.

sure for measure by the same yardstick you use on them. Are you so focused on that splinter in your brother's eye that you can't see the log stuck in your own? And how can you say to him, 'Here, let me take that splinter out of your eye,' when the log is still blocking your sight? You hypocrite – first remove the log from your own eye and then you'll see clearly enough to take the splinter out of your brother's.

"Don't mix what's holy with what's not.⁴⁶ You wouldn't cast pearls before swine, after all, because they'd first grind them underfoot then turn and tear you to pieces.

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; whoever seeks finds; and the door is opened to all who knock. Would any one of you give a stone to your daughter if she asked for bread? Or a rattlesnake if your son asked for a fish? You're corrupt by nature yet still know how to give good gifts to your children –so how much more does your Father in Heaven know how to give good things to *his* children?

"Whatever you want other people to do for you, do the same for them – *and right there you have all the Law and the Prophets!*

"Take the road less travelled. There's a 10-lane crowded highway leading straight to destruction, but the path to Heaven's Gate is straightened with suffering and few there are who find it.

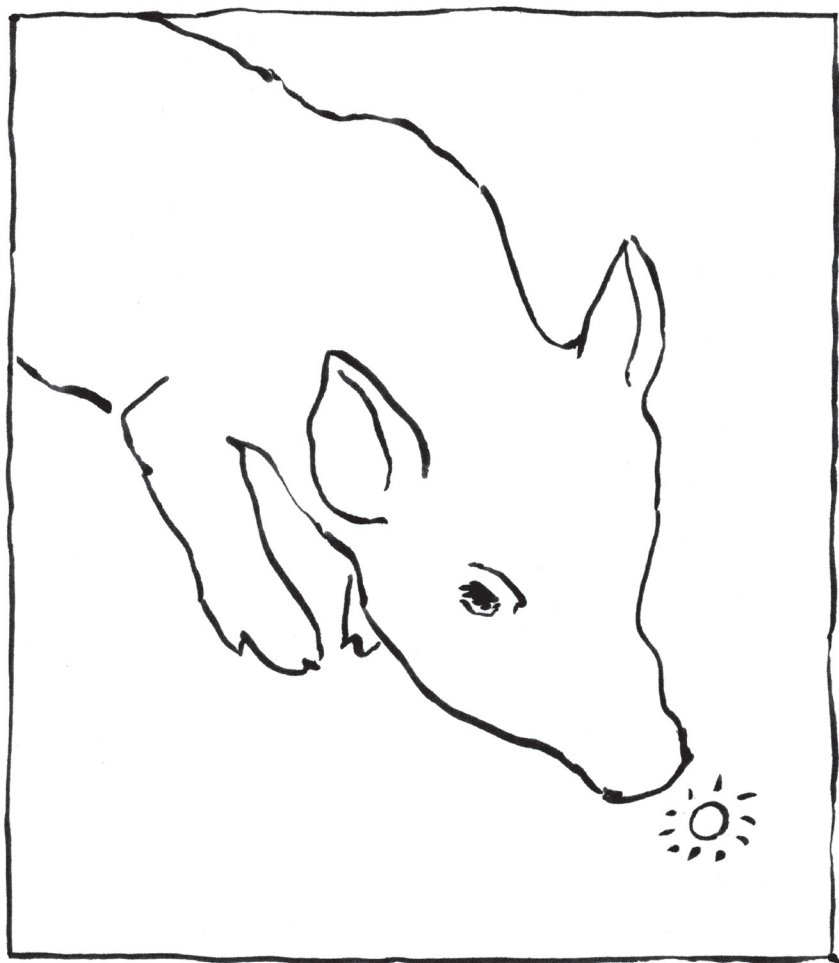
"Keep an eye out for false prophets. To all outward appearances they're mild as sheep but on the inside they're ravenous wolves. You'll know them by their fruits – you can't pick grapes from thorns or figs from thistles. Every good tree yields healthy fruit but every bad tree, rotten.⁴⁷ By the same token you don't harvest rotten fruit from a good tree or healthy fruit from a bad tree. But every tree that doesn't yield healthy fruit will be cut down and thrown to the fire.⁴⁸

"You'll know the bad ones through and through by the fruit they bear. That's why not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of Heaven but only those who do the will of my Father in Heaven. Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name and didn't we cast out demons in your name and didn't we perform many miracles in your name?' But I will tell them the plain truth –

⁴⁶ *Leviticus* 22:2-16.

⁴⁷ W. Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, 3.2.116.

⁴⁸ *Isaiah* 5:1-7.



‘I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of iniquity.’⁴⁹

“Anyone who hears these words of mine and does what I say can well be compared to a practical man building his house on a rock foundation. Rain and floods may come, gale winds may beat on the house, but it won’t fall because it’s founded on the rock.⁵⁰ On the other hand, whoever hears what I’m saying but doesn’t heed my words is like the fool who built his house on sand. When the rain and floods came and the storms with them they beat on the house until it fell, and great indeed was its fall.”

Yeshua ended this series of talks at that point, leaving the crowds overwhelmed, speechless, astounded by his teaching. Why? Because unlike their own scholars, he taught them with authority,.

8

When he left the hill country large crowds trailed him. And as he walked along the way a leper rushed up to him, knelt down and said, “Lord, if you want to you can cleanse me from this disease.”

Reaching out his hand Yeshua touched him⁵¹ and said, “I do wish it – be cleansed!” And immediately the leprosy disappeared.

Then Yeshua said to him, “See that you don’t tell anyone – just get yourself straight to the Temple and offer the gift that Moses required,⁵² as a testimony to the priests.”

When he entered Capernaum a Roman centurion called out to him and said, “Lord, my young servant has been horribly injured and now lays paralyzed and suffering in our house.”

“I will go there and heal him.”

“No, Lord. I’m not worthy to have you under my roof. Just speak the word and my servant will be healed. You see, I know all about obedience because I’m subject to higher authority myself. I have soldiers under my command who also obey me – I tell one soldier ‘Go!’ and he goes, another ‘Come!’ and he comes, or my servant ‘Do this!’ and he does it.”

49 *Psalms* 6-8.

50 *E.g.*, 2 *Samuel* 22:2, 32, 47; *Psalms* 28:1, 30:2.

51 *Cf. Leviticus* 5:3; *see generally Leviticus* 13 and 14.

52 *Leviticus* 14:10 ff.

Hearing this Yeshua marveled and said to his followers, "I'm telling you the truth, I've not found such great faith as this before, no, not in all Israel. Many will come from the East and from the West⁵³ to feast in the kingdom of Heaven with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but the sons of the kingdom will be cast into outer darkness. And there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Then he said to the centurion, "Go, let it be to you in accordance with your faith." And the boy was healed that very hour.

Yeshua then went to Peter's house, where he saw Peter's mother-in-law abed, sick with fever. He touched her hand, the fever left her immediately and she got up and waited on them. When evening came the people brought many who were possessed by demons. He cast the spirits out with a word and also healed the badly ill. Thus was fulfilled the word of the prophet Isaiah,

He alone took on our weakness and bore our diseases.⁵⁴

When Yeshua saw the crowds gathering around him after these healings he ordered his people to take him across to the other side of the sea. But before he could leave one of the scribes approached him and said, "Teacher, I wish to follow you wherever you go."

"Foxes have dens and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no bed to call his own."

Another of his disciples said to him, "Lord, let me first stand vigil with my father until his death."

"No, follow me now – and let the dead bury their own dead."⁵⁵

His disciples then followed him, embarking together in the boat. Yet once they had crossed halfway a sudden squall whipped winds across the shallow sea, washing waves over the boat. But Yeshua lay slumbering in the stern.

Rouosting him his disciples cried out, "Lord, save us! We're about to die!"

"What are you afraid of, you people of such little faith?"

Then he got up and ordered the wind and the waves to cease.

53 *Psalms* 107:3; *Isaiah* 43:5, 49:12.

54 *Isaiah* 53:4.

55 *Numbers* 6:6-7; *Leviticus* 21:11.

A spreading calm fell over the sea. His men were stunned, terrified really, wondering, “What kind of a person *is* this whom even the winds and the sea obey??”⁵⁶

When they arrived at the far shore they started to enter the land of the Gadarenes, but two demoniacs came down from the hillside tombs and blocked Yeshua’s path. These were men totally gone from their senses, fiercely violent, so fearsome that none could safely pass. They screamed at him, “Son of God! What are *you* doing here?! Have you come to torment us before it’s time?”

Now, a herd of pigs was feeding a far distance from them and the demons urged him persistently, “If you’re going to cast us out of these men then at least send us to the herd of pigs.”

“Go!”

So the unclean spirits freed the men and entered the pigs, whereupon the herd flung itself over a sharp sea bank, perishing in the waters below. The swineherds fled back to their village and told everyone what had happened – at which point the townspeople raced out to run Yeshua off, shouting “Get the Hell out of here and leave us alone!”

9

Yeshua therefore got back in the boat and returned to his own hometown. Then and there they brought a cripple to him, borne on a pallet bed. When he saw their faith Yeshua said to the man, “Cheer up, my child, your sins are forgiven.”

However, some of the scribes who heard him said to themselves, “This man is a blasphemer, nothing but a heretic!”

But Yeshua knew what was in their hearts and asked, “Why do you harbor evil thoughts? Tell me, which do *you* think it’s easier for me to say – ‘your sins are forgiven’? or ‘rise up and walk’? You need to know that the Son of Man has power on Earth to forgive sins.”

Turning then to the crippled man he said, “Rise now! Pick up your pallet and walk back home.” Standing straight the man headed right back to his house. When they saw this the crowd turned fearful, yet

⁵⁶ Job 38:8-11; Psalms 65:5-8, 89:8-9.

glorified God for having given such power to mankind.

As he left the place, Yeshua spied a revenuer named Matthew collecting customs duties and said, “Follow me.” So he got up from his desk and followed him.

Later, when Yeshua and his disciples were having dinner at Matthew’s home, a number of high-rollers and other sinners also showed up to break bread. When the Pharisees saw them they said to the disciples, “What’s this? How is it your teacher is eating with money grubbers and miscreants?”

But Yeshua himself responded, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor, just sick ones. You need to learn what the prophet meant when he said, I want mercy not sacrifice,⁵⁷ because I haven’t come to call the righteous but the sinners.”

Then John’s disciples approached him and asked, “Why is it that we and the Pharisees fast often but your disciples don’t bother to fast at all?”

“Should the children of the bridegroom mourn while he’s with them?⁵⁸ However, before long the bridegroom will be taken away from them⁵⁹ and then they will fast. No one patches up an old coat by sewing an unshrunk patch onto it because the added piece will pull at the old cloth and tear a worse hole. It’s the same idea with wine – no one pours new wine into worn-out wineskins because it will cause them to burst open and then you’ll lose the wine *and* the wineskins. That’s why they put new wine into new wineskins, preserving both.”

As he was speaking, the president of the local synagogue came up to him and knelt beseeching him, “My little girl is at the point of death – but if you would just come and touch her, I know she’ll live.”

Yeshua went with him, his disciples tagging along. But as he went a woman who’d heard what the synagogue leader had said came up from behind Yeshua⁶⁰ and touched the tassel of his garment⁶¹ – she’d been suffering 12 years with prolonged menstrual bleeding and thought to herself, “If I can but touch him, or even his clothes, I’ll be healed.”

At that Yeshua whirled around and when he saw her said, “Cheer up, daughter, your faith has made you well.” And indeed the woman

⁵⁷ *Hosea 6:6.*

⁵⁸ *Hosea 2:12.*

⁵⁹ *Isaiah 53:8.*

⁶⁰ *Cf. Leviticus 15:25 ff.*

⁶¹ *Numbers 15:38-39; Deuteronomy 22:12.*

was healed from that moment.

Yeshua continued on. Reaching the elder's house he saw a death scene complete with pipers and mourners, the whole house thrown into turmoil. Yet he said to them, "Clear out of here! This girl isn't dead – she's just sleeping." They all mocked him as a fool. But after the crowd was gone Yeshua went inside, took hold of the girl's hand and she sat right up. And so his fame spread across that whole region.

When he left there two blind men followed after crying out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!"

Back at Matthew's house he said to the two of them, "Do you believe I can make this happen?"

"Yes, Lord."

He touched their eyes and said, "Then let it be to you according to your faith." And right then their eyes were opened wide up. Yet Yeshua warned them sternly, "See that you don't let anyone know about this." But they went out anyway and advertised him to everyone they ran into, all throughout the area.

As Yeshua walked on the people brought him a man possessed by a mute spirit. Once Yeshua had set him free from that demon the man began to speak. The crowd around him was astonished and said, "It's never been seen like this before in all of Israel." But the Pharisees said, "This man must be casting out demons by the power of their Prince."

Yeshua continued his journeys through every town and village teaching in their synagogues and preaching the good news of the kingdom, healing the people from any sort of sickness and disease. As he watched the crowds he felt deep compassion for them, seeing them beaten down, helpless, confused – much like sheep without a shepherd to guide them.⁶² And so he said to his disciples, "The crop is ripe to harvest but there are hardly any workers around. You must pray the master of the harvest to send his laborers out to the field."

62 *Numbers 27:17; 1 Kings 22:17; Ezekiel 34:5; Zechariah 11:16.*

10

After that Yeshua summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, that they might cast them out, and power to heal all manner of sickness and disease. These are the names of the twelve apostles. First, Simon, also called Peter; then Andreas his brother; Jacob the son of Zebedee; John his brother; Philip; Bartholomew; Thomas; Matthew the customs officer; Jacob the son of Alphaeus; Thaddeus; Simon from Qana; and Judas from Kerioth, who also betrayed him.

Yeshua gave orders to these twelve as he sent them out, telling them, “Stay off any road that would take you into foreign territory and also don’t go into villages where you’re likely to find Samaritans⁶³ – go instead to search for the lost sheep of the House of Israel.⁶⁴ As you go, tell people ‘the kingdom of Heaven is come near.’ Heal those who are weak, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You’ve received freely, give freely as well. Leave your gold or silver or copper coins at home, don’t bring a backpack filled with extra shoes and clothes and don’t go buying a new walking stick. Why? Because a worker is entitled to a meal.⁶⁵

“Whenever you go into a town or village ask around to find out who is a suitable host and stay in that home until you leave. And when you enter such a home, let your greeting בְּשָׁלוֹם תֵּלְכֻּם – or in English, ‘Peace be upon you.’ If the household is inclined to receive you, let your peace remain upon it; but if not, let your peace return to you. If no one will receive you or hear your words then when you leave that house and city, shake off the dust from your feet. I’m telling you that when Judgment Day comes that city will have it worse than Sodom or Gomorrah.⁶⁶ “I’m sending you out like sheep into a pack of wolves – so be shrewd as snakes⁶⁷ yet pure as doves. But also don’t be naïve. The chances are that people will hale you before their courts⁶⁸ or even flog you in their

63 2 Kings 17:24-41.

64 Jeremiah 50:6.

65 Deuteronomy 25:4.

66 Deuteronomy 32:32; Isaiah 1:10; Lamentations 4:6; Ezekiel 16:46-57.

67 Genesis 3:1.

68 Deuteronomy 16:18.

congregations. You will be taken to stand in front of kings and princes, for my sake, in order to be witnesses to them and to the nations. But when you are handed over don't anguish about what you're going to say or how you're going to say it. You'll be given the words you need at the time you need them.⁶⁹ After all, it's not so much you who are speaking but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. But brother will betray brother even to death, and a father his child, and children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. Everyone will hate you because of my name, but whoever holds out to the end will be saved. If you're persecuted in one city, flee to another. You can be sure you won't have made the rounds of all the cities of Israel by the time the Son of Man comes.⁷⁰

"The disciple doesn't rule over his teacher and neither does a servant rule over his master. It's enough for the disciple to be *like* his teacher or the servant *like* his master. If they've already called the master of the house **אֲדֹנָי הַבָּעֵל** – which in English means 'Lord of the Flies'⁷¹ – what worse can they say about the members of his household? So don't be afraid of them.

"There's nothing hidden but won't be revealed, no hiding place so secret it won't be found. Whatever I say to you in the nighttime, speak in the daylight; and whatever your ears have heard, shout from the rooftops. Oh and don't be afraid of those who can kill the body – they can't kill the soul. Fear instead the one who can destroy both body and soul in Gehenna's unquenchable fire.⁷² Don't two sparrows go for a penny? Yet not one of them can fall to the ground without your Father knowing.⁷³ The truth is that even the hairs on your head are numbered. So don't be afraid – you're worth a lot more than sparrows.

"Whoever acknowledges me in front of other people will I acknowledge before my Father in Heaven. But whoever denies me in front of other people will I deny before my Father in Heaven.⁷⁴ Don't have it in your mind that I've come to blanket the world in peace. My coming doesn't bring peace, but a sword. What I mean is that because of me a

69 Exodus 4:12.

70 Daniel 7:13.

71 2 Kings 1:2-3, 6, 16.

72 Psalms 34:9, 89:7; Isaiah 8:13-14.

73 Cf. W. Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 5.2.219-220.

74 1 Samuel 2:30.

man is set against his father and a daughter against her mother and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, such that a man's enemies are those of his own household.⁷⁵ Whoever cares for father or mother more than me is not worthy of me and whoever cares for son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.⁷⁶ Whoever will not bear her cross and follow after me is not worthy of me. Whoever treasures her life in this world will lose it, but whoever loses her life for my sake will gain it, even life that cannot be lost.

"Whoever receives you receives me and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. Whoever receives a prophet as a prophet will have a prophet's reward⁷⁷ and whoever receives a righteous man as a righteous man will have a righteous man's reward. And what if someone gives just a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple? I'm telling you, he won't lose his reward."

11

Once Yeshua had given these instructions to his disciples, he left to teach and preach in his own cities. Now John, still bound in prison, heard about the Messiah's deeds and sent his own disciples to ask Yeshua, "Are you the one who is to come or should we be waiting for someone else?"

"When you go back to John tell him what you've seen and heard – that the blind see again, the crippled walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have the good news preached to them⁷⁸ – and blessed is he who is not offended by me."

Continuing on his way, Yeshua began to talk to the crowd about John, "What did you go out to the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But tell me, why did you go? Were you hoping to see some spectacle? Maybe someone wearing haute couture? Hardly – those people live in kings' palaces. Tell me, you went to see a prophet, didn't

⁷⁵ *Micah* 7:6.

⁷⁶ *Deuteronomy* 33:9; *Exodus* 33:26-29.

⁷⁷ *1 Kings* 17:8-24; *2 Kings* 4:8-37.

⁷⁸ *Isaiah* 35:5, 61:1-2.

you? And indeed you saw not just a prophet but much more than a prophet, because John is the very one of whom it was written,

Watch! I am sending my messenger out
before your appearing,
to prepare your way ahead of you.⁷⁹

“Listen to this truth: no one greater than John the Baptizer has yet been born of women. Even so, the least one in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he.⁸⁰ From John’s days until now people had to force their way into the kingdom of Heaven, and zealous people have indeed grabbed hold of it. That’s because all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. But if you are able to take it in, this man is Elijah, who shall come.⁸¹ Whoever has ears, let him hear. But what can I compare this people to? It’s like children in the marketplace calling out to one another and saying,

‘We played the flute for you but you didn’t dance;
we sang a dirge but you didn’t mourn.’

“John came neither eating nor drinking and they said, ‘He’s demon-possessed.’ And now the Son of Man comes both eating and drinking and they say, ‘Look! There’s a glutton and a drunk, a friend of users, cheaters, six-time losers.’⁸² Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.”

Then Yeshua began to reproach the cities where so many of his miracles were performed, because they refused to turn from their ways. “Alas for you, Chorazin, alas for you, Bethsaida. If the mighty deeds done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon they would’ve long since repented in sackcloth and ashes.⁸³ I tell you that Tyre and Sidon will better endure the Day of Judgment than you. And you, Capernaum, do you think you’ll be exalted to Heaven?⁸⁴ No, I say you’ll be cast down to the underworld. If the great miracles performed in you had been

79 *Exodus 23:20; Malachi 3:1.*

80 *Zechariah 12:8.*

81 *Malachi 4:5-6.*

82 *Cf. B. Dylan, Subterranean Homesick Blues (1965).*

83 *Isaiah 23; Ezekiel 26-28; Amos 1:9-10; Jonah 3:6.*

84 *Isaiah 14:13-14.*

performed in Sodom it would be standing to this day. And so I tell you that Sodom will have an easier time of it in the Day of Judgment than you will.⁸⁵

“I praise you, Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, because you’ve hidden these things from the wise and learned but revealed them to children – for so it pleased you. All things have been given me by my Father. No one has known the Son except the Father and no one has known the Father except the Son, and those to whom the Son may wish to reveal him.

“Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke⁸⁶ upon you, and learn of me;
for I am meek and lowly in heart:⁸⁷
and you shall find rest unto your souls.⁸⁸
For my yoke is easy,
And my burden is light.”

12

One Sabbath Yeshua happened to walk through some grain fields. Since his disciples were hungry, they started to pluck some of the ripe grain off the stalks. When the Pharisees saw this they said to Yeshua, “Look! Don’t you see your disciples are violating the Sabbath laws?”

But he replied, “Don’t you know what David and his soldiers did when they were hungry, how they went into the House of the Lord and ate the sanctified bread, something forbidden to David as well as his men but set aside for the priests alone?⁸⁹ Or maybe you haven’t considered that according to the Law priests don’t violate the Sabbath when performing their Temple duties?⁹⁰ What you’re missing here is that

⁸⁵ *Deuteronomy* 32:32; *Isaiah* 1:10; *Lamentations* 4:6; *Ezekiel* 16:46-57.

⁸⁶ *Jeremiah* 2:20; *Lamentations* 3:27.

⁸⁷ *Isaiah* 42:2-3; *Zechariah* 9:9.

⁸⁸ *Jeremiah* 6:16.

⁸⁹ *1 Samuel* 21:1-6; see *Leviticus* 24:8.

⁹⁰ *Numbers* 28:9-10.

something greater than the Temple is in your presence. If you had only understood what these words mean – I want to see mercy, not sacrifice⁹¹ – you wouldn’t go blaming the guiltless, because the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.”

Having crossed back into Galilee he entered one of the local synagogues. It chanced there was someone at worship that day whose hand had been withered by a wasting disease. Some of the leaders asked Yeshua, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” – seeing if they could find something to charge him with.

But he answered them with another question, “Suppose you had a sheep and it fell into a pit on the Sabbath. Would you leave it there or lift it out to rescue? And how much more valuable people are than sheep! So yes, of course it’s lawful to heal on the Sabbath.”

Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand!” He did so and his hand returned to normal that very moment.

At that the Pharisees left the scene to plot against Yeshua, trying to figure out how they might kill him. But he knew their thoughts and departed, a large crowd following him. He healed all who came to him. But he also warned them not to reveal him openly to others, so that Isaiah’s prophecy might be fulfilled,

Behold the servant whom I’ve chosen, my beloved one,
 in whom my soul is well pleased;
 I will put my Spirit upon him
 and he will proclaim God’s justice to the nations.
 He will not strive neither will he shout,
 nor will anyone hear his voice in the town square.
 He won’t so much as crush a bruised reed
 or quench a smoldering wick
 until the day he emerges victorious in judgment.
 And the nations will put their hope in his name.⁹²

Then the people brought a blind man to him, one who was also demon-possessed and mute. But Yeshua healed him too, so that once dumb he now spoke, once blind he now saw. The crowd was pretty

⁹¹ *Hosea 6:6.*

⁹² *Isaiah 42:1-4.*

much beside itself and said as one, “Can this be anyone *other* than the Son of David?”

But when the Pharisees heard that they said, “He couldn’t cast out demons unless he did so with the power of Beelzebub, the Prince of Demons.”

Knowing their thoughts Yeshua told them, “Every kingdom divided against itself must fall and any city or household divided against itself cannot stand. So if Satan casts out Satan he is divided against himself. Why then does his kingdom still survive? And if I cast out demons by the power of Beelzebub then by whose power do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if I am casting out demons by the Spirit of God, then be sure that the kingdom of God has come upon you.

“Think about it: how can anyone enter into a strong man’s home and snatch his goods unless he first binds the strong man? Once he does that he can freely steal everything the man has. Whoever isn’t with me is against me and whoever doesn’t gather with me scatters. That’s why I say that every sin or cursing word will be forgiven people except for blasphemy against the Spirit – that will never be forgiven. So if anyone speaks a word against the Son of Man it will be forgiven him. But if anyone should slander the Holy Spirit he will not be forgiven it, neither in this age nor the age to come.

“Either make the tree good and its fruit good or the tree rotten and its fruit rotten, because a tree is known by its fruit. You serpent’s brood – how can you, being evil, say anything good? The mouth speaks whatever flows in abundance from the heart. Therefore a good man brings forth good things from the good stored within him, but an evil man evil from his wicked storehouse. I tell you that at the Judgment Day people will have to answer for every idle word they speak – because by your words you will be justified and by your words condemned.”

Some of the scribes and Pharisees responded, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.”

“A wicked and adulterous people require a sign, but no sign will be given it save the sign of Jonah the prophet. Just as Jonah was in the belly of the sea-monster three days and three nights⁹³ so too will the Son

93 *Jonah* 1:17.

of Man be in the depths of Sheol three days and three nights.⁹⁴ The men of Nineveh will stand up in judgment against this people and condemn it, because *they* turned from their ways at the preaching of Jonah and, I assure you, there is more than Jonah here. The Queen of Sheba will also rise up in judgment against this people and condemn it, because she came from the far ends of the Earth to hear Solomon's wisdom⁹⁵ and, again, one greater than Solomon is here.

"When the unclean spirit leaves someone it wanders about in dry places seeking a place to rest, but doesn't find it. He then says to himself, 'I will return to the home I left.' When he gets there he finds the place empty, swept clean and fit for habitation. He next grabs seven other spirits even filthier than he and they take up residence there – and that man ends up in worse shape than when he started. So it will be with this wicked people."

While he was still speaking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, hoping to catch a word with him. Someone came and told Yeshua, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you."

"Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" Stretching his hand out to his followers he said, "Look! These are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in Heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother."

13

Later that day Yeshua left the house and taught by the sea. But the crowds gathering around him were so large that he had to get into a small boat, push a bit offshore and teach them from there while the people stood on the beach to listen. He spoke to them of many things – but he did so by way of parables, analogies and similes, such as this one:

"A man went out to sow seeds. As he sowed some of the seeds fell alongside the road, where birds swooped down and snatched them away for food. Some other of the seeds fell on rocky ground, where the soil

⁹⁴ *Jonah* 2:2.

⁹⁵ *1 Kings* 10:1-13.

was thin at best. Those seeds sprouted too quickly because there was no depth to the soil. So once the sun had risen and scorched the plants with its heat they withered and died for lack of roots. Yet some other seeds fell among the thorns and thistles and these grew up strangled. But some of the seeds fell on rich soil and grew to yield fruit, some 30, some 60 and some even 100 times as much as others. May whoever has ears hear what I say.”

Afterwards his disciples said to him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?”

“You have the benefit of knowing the secrets of the kingdom of Heaven, but that knowledge hasn’t been given to them. It follows that whoever has, to him more will be given, even to the point of overflowing; while whoever lacks, even that which he has will be taken away. That’s why I speak to them in stories and proverbs – because even though they see, they don’t perceive and even though they hear, they don’t take it in and therefore don’t understand. And so Isaiah’s prophecy is being fulfilled in them,

You will hear with the ear but not understand
and see with the eyes but not comprehend.
For the caul has fattened around this people’s heart,
their ears grown heavy of hearing,
their eyes shut to sight –
lest they see with their eyes
and hear with their ears
and understand in their heart
and turn to me and be healed.⁹⁶

But blessed are your eyes because they see and your ears because they hear.⁹⁷ I tell you truly that many prophets and just men longed to see what you see and hear what you hear, but did not.

⁹⁶ *Isaiah* 6:9–10.

⁹⁷ *Proverbs* 20:12.



“Listen therefore while I explain the tale of the sower. If anyone hears the message of the kingdom but doesn’t let it penetrate, the Wicked One comes and snatches away what had been sown in his heart. He’s like the seeds by the roadside. And then there are people who hear the word and receive it eagerly with joy. But that’s only for the time being, because they aren’t very deep inside. As soon as they face pain or persecution for the sake of the gospel they get offended and fall away. So they’re like the seeds that fell on rocky ground. And what about the seeds that fell among the thorns and thistles? That’s a portrait of people who hear the gospel but let the cares of ordinary life as well as the lure of riches crowd out the word, and thus they become unfruitful. And then of course there are people who hear the word and understand it. They are like seeds planted in good soil because they grow and mature and yield fruit for the kingdom, some of them 30 times as much as others, some 60 and some 100.”

Then he gave them another illustration.

“The kingdom of Heaven is also like a man who planted healthy seeds in his tilled field. But while his workers were sleeping an enemy of his snuck in, sowed weeds among the planted grain and then left. When the wheat grew up so did the weeds that were mixed in the furrows. The landowner’s workers came to him and said, ‘Didn’t you sow good seed in your field? How come it’s now full of weeds?’ He said to them, ‘It’s not your fault – some enemy of mine did this.’ The workers asked, ‘Do you want us to pull the weeds now?’ But he said, ‘No, you can’t look into the seeds of time and say which will grow and which will not.’⁹⁸ Just let them keep growing together until the harvest. Then I’ll tell the reapers to gather the weeds first and bundle them up to be thoroughly burned, and only afterwards to harvest the wheat and bring it into my granary.”

Again he explained things in another parable:

“The kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed that a man planted in fertile soil. As you know, it’s the tiniest seed there is. But once it grows into a tree it’s the greatest of them all, spreading wide its branches, welcoming the birds of the sky to build their nests.”⁹⁹

He also made this comparison:

“The kingdom of Heaven is like a bit of yeast a woman kneads into three large measures of flour, causing the whole loaf to rise.”

98 *Ecclesiastes* 11:6; cf. W. Shakespeare, *Macbeth* 1.3.58-59.

99 *Ezekiel* 17:23, 31:6; *Daniel* 4:10-12, 20-22.

Thus spoke Yeshua in figurative form, speaking to the masses by way of illustrations alone. And so the prophet's word was fulfilled,

I will open my mouth in parables
and tell of things hidden
since the foundation of the world.¹⁰⁰

Leaving the crowds behind, he returned to the household then hosting him. His disciples gathered around him again and asked him to explain the tale of the weeds in the field. So he said:

"The Son of Man is the one who sowed good seeds in the field; the field is the world itself; and the seeds are the children of the kingdom. But the Devil is the sower's enemy and the weeds are *his* children. Therefore the harvest is the end of all time and the harvesters the angels of God. Just as the weeds were gathered and burned with fire so it will be at the Last Judgment: the Son of Man will send his angels to gather out from his kingdom the lawless as well as any who cause others to fall. They will toss them into a fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. But then those whom God has justified will shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let whoever has ears hear.

"And the kingdom of Heaven is also like treasure buried in a field. If someone knew it was hidden there he would in sheer joy take everything he owned to the marketplace, sell it and go buy that land.

"Again, if you want to understand the kingdom of Heaven think of a jeweler on the watch for precious pearls. If he finds one perfect pearl he'll trade away his others just to buy it.

"I can also compare the kingdom of Heaven to a dragnet cast into the sea, where it snags every type of fish. Once it's pulled up and hauled to shore the fishermen sit down to gather the good fish into their baskets and toss the rotten aside. That's what will happen at the end of the age when the angels separate the evil ones from the midst of the righteous and toss them into a fiery furnace – there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

Then Yeshua asked them, "Do you understand everything I've said?"

"Yes!"

"So it is that anyone schooled in the teachings of the kingdom is like a

¹⁰⁰ *Psalms* 78:2.

homeowner who reaches into his treasure box and brings out good things old and good things new.”

Once he had finished sharing these lessons Yeshua headed back to his childhood village, where he taught the people in their synagogue, leaving them so perplexed and amazed that they questioned themselves, “Where did he get all this wisdom and power? Isn’t he just the local builder’s son? And isn’t that his mother Mary? And aren’t those his brothers Jacob and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And aren’t his sisters all right here with us? Just where did he get all this?” And they found him deeply offensive.

But Yeshua said to them, “It seems that a prophet is honored everywhere except in his own town and by his own family.” So because of their lack of faith he couldn’t do much for them in the way of miracles.



14

During this same time Herod the Tetrarch of Judea heard the news about Yeshua and said to his servants, “This man must be John the Baptist risen from the dead and that’s why he has the power to work such miracles!”

Herod, you see, had arrested John and thrown him into prison at the behest of his half-brother Philip’s ex-wife Herodias, whom he took and married even though John had told him repeatedly, “You cannot have that woman.”¹⁰¹

Herod was willing to kill John for her sake but was also afraid of the people, because they held John to be a prophet. When Herod’s birthday

¹⁰¹ *Leviticus* 18:16.

celebration came around, however, Herodias sent her teenage daughter in to dance among the guests. The girl pleased Herod, so much so that he swore her a gift of anything her heart desired. But having been put up to the whole thing by her mother, she demanded of Herod – “Give me now the head of John the Baptist on a silver platter.”

Herod was struck to the heart at this, but he gave in to her because he’d sworn an oath with everyone around the banquet table watching and listening. Dispatching his men, he therefore had John beheaded in the prison. The head was brought up on a platter, given to the girl, and she in turn gave it to her mother. Then John’s disciples came and asked for his corpse, which they duly buried, afterwards coming to inform Yeshua.

When Yeshua heard what had happened he left that region by boat, heading toward a wilderness area where he could be alone. But when the people heard he had gone they left the city and followed in his direction on foot. When he got there he found a great multitude already waiting for him. He felt compassion for them and healed any that were sick. But by the time mid-afternoon rolled around his disciples told him, “We’re in a desert place and the time is now far gone – send the crowd back to town so they can try to buy some food for themselves before the markets close.”

“There’s no need for them to go. Just give them what you have.”

“We don’t have anything here except five loaves of bread and two fish.”

“Bring me whatever you’ve got.”

He then made the people sit down on the grass. Having taken the five loaves and two fish in his hands he lifted his eyes to Heaven and blessed the food, breaking and passing it to his disciples, who then distributed it to the people. There were around five thousand men there, plus women and children, and they all ate and were satisfied – yet they still had enough leftovers to fill twelve baskets.¹⁰²

Right after that Yeshua pressed his men to get into the boat and go ahead of him to the opposite shore while he stayed behind to disperse the people. Once the crowd had gone he went up the mountain to pray. When night fell he was there alone. By that time the boat was pretty far distant from the land, yet struggling against a contrary wind with the waves beating harshly against it. They were still out there rowing around 4 or 5 in the morning when Yeshua came striding toward them

¹⁰² 2 *Kings* 4:42-44.

on the surface of the sea. When the disciples saw him they screamed in terror, frightened to death, thinking they saw a ghost. But right away Yeshua called out to them, “Chill! It’s just me. Nothing to be scared about.”

Peter shouted back, “Lord, if it’s really you, command me to come to you on the water.”

“Come!”

Getting out of the boat Peter walked on the water to Yeshua – but then he focused on the strength of the wind and took fright, at which point he lost his footing and began to sink, crying out, “Lord, save me!”

Instantly Yeshua reaching out, grabbed Peter’s hand and lifted him back up – “What little faith you have! Why did you think twice?”

Once they were both back in boat the wind softened. The men in the boat worshipped him, saying “Truly you are the Son of God!”

Having finally crossed the sea they landed in the district of Genesaret. When the local people recognized him they sent around to their neighbors to bring all the sick to him, praying they might just touch the hem of his garment. And as many as touched were fully healed.

15

After this, certain Pharisees and scribes came to Yeshua from Jerusalem and asked him, “How is it your disciples don’t follow the traditions the forefathers handed down? Don’t you know your disciples don’t wash their hands before they sit down to a meal?”

“How is it you use your *own* traditions as a way to ignore the commandment of God? For example, God told you to honor your father and your mother¹⁰³ and whoever speaks evil to his parents must surely die.¹⁰⁴ But you say ‘anyone is free of his duty to support his parents if he tells them that whatever he would’ve given them has already been dedicated to the Temple.’ You thereby nullify God’s commandment with your own. What hypocrites! Isaiah had it right about you when he said,

¹⁰³ Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16.

¹⁰⁴ Exodus 21:7.

This people honors me with their lips
 but their heart is far from me.
 It's useless for them to worship me as long as they
 teach as doctrine the commandments of men."¹⁰⁵

Summoning the mass he said, "Listen and learn. It isn't what people take into their mouths that makes them unclean, it's what comes out of them."

His disciples said, "Don't you realize you've offended the Pharisees by saying that?"

"Any plant my Father in Heaven hasn't planted¹⁰⁶ will be torn up by the roots. Let them be – they are blind guides guiding the blind and if the blind lead the blind they'll both fall into a ditch."

But when Peter asked him to explain his saying Yeshua exclaimed, "You still don't get the message? Doesn't everyone know that the food you put in your mouth passes through the system and in due course is flushed down the toilet? But whatever is spoken by the mouth has its seed in the heart and *that's* where you find things that contaminate people – because out of the heart come wicked thoughts, murders, adulteries, perversions, thefts, perjuries, slanders. Those are the things to be worried about, not whether someone washes his hands before he eats."

Withdrawing from that place Yeshua moved up to southern Lebanon, to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. A local Canaanite woman met up with him and cried out, "Lord, have mercy on me, you Son of David – my daughter is horribly tormented by demons!"

He ignored her.

His disciples urged, "Send her away! She keeps following us and screaming."

Finally Yeshua said to the woman, "I've been sent to the lost sheep of the House of Israel, none others."

She persisted, falling in worship before him and begging, "Lord, help me!"

"But it would be wrong for me to take bread from the children's mouths and throw it to the little dogs."

"True Lord, but even dogs are allowed to eat scraps that fall from the

¹⁰⁵ *Isaiah* 29:13.

¹⁰⁶ *Isaiah* 60:21, 61:3.

master's table."

"O woman, you have great faith! Let it be to you as you wish." And her daughter was healed that very hour.

Moving on from there Yeshua came back to the Sea of Galilee, where he set himself a place on the hillside to continue his teaching. A great multitude came, bringing with them people who were lame or blind or deformed or mute, along with many others like them, laying them before Yeshua's feet. And he healed them all, leaving the crowd speechless in their amazement when they saw the dumb speak, the crooked go straight, the lame walk and the blind see.¹⁰⁷ And they gave glory to the God of Israel.

Yeshua then called his disciples to himself and said, "I am moved in my heart for these people because they've already stayed with me for three days and haven't gotten anything to eat. I don't want them starving lest they faint dead away on the road home."

"Where are we supposed to get food in this wilderness to feed such a large crowd?"

"How much bread do you have?"

"Seven loaves and a couple of fish."

Having ordered the people to sit down on the ground he took the seven loaves and the few fish and once he had said grace he broke and gave the food to his disciples, who then gave it to the crowd. Everyone ate and was full, yet they still had seven baskets full of crumbs and broken pieces left over. That was after four thousand men had finished eating – and we're not even counting the women and children. So having dismissed the multitude they embarked and sailed over to the shores of Magdala.

16

Once there, both the Pharisees and Sadducees approached to test him, demanding he show them a sign from Heaven.

But he said, "You have a saying, 'red sky at night, sailor's delight; red sky at morning, sailor take warning.' How is it you can read the signs in the sky but can't read the signs of the times? A wicked and adulterous people seeks a sign, but no sign will be given it other than the sign of Jo-

¹⁰⁷ *Isaiah* 35:5-6.

nah.” So they left him and went away.

Now it happened that when they crossed over on the boat his disciples had forgotten to take any bread with them. But Yeshua said to them, “See that you watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” So they argued among themselves about what he meant, supposing it was because they hadn’t brought any bread.

Knowing what they were thinking Yeshua asked, “What are you faithless people fighting about? You think I’m speaking about the bread you didn’t bring along? Do you *still* not get it? Is it really possible you’ve already forgotten about the five loaves that fed five thousand, or how many basketsful were left over? Or about the seven loaves and the four thousand and how many basketsful you had left then? Don’t you see I’m not talking about bread but about the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees?”

Then they understood he wasn’t telling them to watch out for yeast that makes bread rise but to beware of the leavening effects of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

When Yeshua came next to the region around Caesarea Philippi he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

“Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, while some say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.”

“Yes but *you*, who do you say I am?”

Simon Peter said, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

“Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you but my Father which is in Heaven. People have nicknamed you ‘the Rock’ – well, I tell you I will build my faithful people on a foundation of living stones so that the very gates of Hell¹⁰⁸ will not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, such that whatever you prohibit on Earth will be judged so in Heaven and whatever you rule lawful on Earth will be judged so in Heaven.” Then he ordered the disciples not to tell anyone he was the Messiah.

At that point Yeshua began to explain to his disciples how he needed to go to Jerusalem – where he would suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, yet be raised up on the third day.

But on hearing this Peter reproached him, “God forbid! That will never happen to you!”

¹⁰⁸ *Isaiah* 38:10.

“Get behind me, Tempter! You’re a stumbling stone to me – you have your mind set on the things that men care about, not on God’s concerns.”

Then he said to his disciples, “If anyone wants to come after me let him leave his own path, take up his cross and follow me. Whoever wishes to preserve his life will lose it but whoever lets go his life for my sake will find it. What good does it do anyone to gain the whole world but lose his soul? Or what would anyone give in exchange for his soul?¹⁰⁹ But the Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father together with his angels and repay each person according to what he has done. And I tell you in truth, some of those standing here now will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingly power.”

17

Six days later Yeshua took Peter, Jacob and his brother John up to a high mountain. They were by themselves and Yeshua was transformed before them, his face as the sun in radiant brilliance, his clothes as if white light¹¹⁰ – and not only that but Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with Yeshua.

Peter said, “Lord, it’s divine being here! Let me build three tabernacles in this place – one for Moses, one for Elijah and one just for you!”

But before he’d finished speaking a glowing cloud overshadowed them and a voice from within the cloud spoke, “This is my Son, whom I love. He pleases me greatly – listen to him!”¹¹¹

When they heard that the disciples trembling fell down in fear. But taking hold of them Yeshua said, “Stand up, don’t be afraid.” Slowly raising their eyes they saw no one else, save Yeshua.

Once they had descended the mountain Yeshua commanded them, “Don’t tell anyone what you’ve seen until after the Son of Man is raised from the dead.”

But the disciples asked him, “Why then do the scribes say Elijah must come beforehand?”

¹⁰⁹ *Psalms* 48:7-9.

¹¹⁰ *Exodus* 34:29-35.

¹¹¹ *Exodus* 24:15-18.