

The Major Cities of Jesus' Life: History, Events, Significance

Zooming in on the Land of Jesus

(Maps/Slides)

Background(1): Our Geography Starts with Sepphoris

“Sepphoris was one of the leading cities of Lower Galilee from the early Roman period. Yet much of its history extended back into the OT period. It lay scarcely 4 miles NW of Nazareth on a high hill in a mountainous plain at an elevation of 286 m above sea level. The territory of Sepphoris extended 10 miles NW to the territory of Acco-Ptolemais and 9 miles SE to Mt. Tabor, **which suggests that Nazareth belonged to the territory of Sepphoris.**

The rabbis believed that Sepphoris was founded by Joshua the son of Nun, and some identified Sepphoris as biblical Kitron (Judg 1:30) or even Rakkath (Josh 19:35; *b. Meg.* 6a). The name of the city means “bird,” and one rabbi explained that it got its name because it perched on a hill like a bird (*b. Meg.* 6a).

Sepphoris entered recorded history for the first time in 103 B.C.E. Ptolemy Lathyrus, the King of Cyprus, was at war with King Alexander Jannaeus of Israel. Ptolemy besieged Acco-Ptolemais, then successfully besieged Asochis hardly 5 miles from Sepphoris. He then besieged Sepphoris itself on a Sabbath, but with no success (*Ant* 13.12.5).

If Sepphoris was already a secure, walled city at this period, then it was **likely Greek in character**, as was Ptolemais, Shikmona, Dora, Strato's Tower, Joppa, Azotus (Ashdod), and other coastal cities. Since Ptolemy besieged Sepphoris on the Sabbath in order to gain advantage, it is **likely that it had a large Jewish population.**

There is no historical information about the city at the coming of Rome in 63 B.C.E. However in 55 B.C.E. Gabinius, Proconsul in Syria, recognized the strategic importance of Sepphoris and located one of the five Roman Synedria or Councils there, and the only one for Galilee (*Ant* 15.5.4 §91; *JW* 1.8.5 §170). During the winter of 39/38 B.C.E., Herod the Great took Sepphoris during a snowstorm immediately after Antigonus abandoned it (*Ant* 14.15.4; *JW* 1.16.2). **Herod retained the city as his N headquarters for the remainder of his reign.**

Judah the son of Hezekiah led the Sepphoreans in revolt immediately upon the death of Herod the Great in 4 B.C.E. The Roman governor of Syria, Varus, responded swiftly. He dispatched to Sepphoris a portion of his legions and auxiliary troops under his son and under Caius, a friend, while Varus marched on to Sebaste. **His legions sacked Sepphoris, reduced the city to ashes, and sold its inhabitants as slaves** (*Ant* 17.10.9; *JW* 2.5.1).

Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great by the Samaritan wife Malthace, inherited Galilee and Perea (Transjordan) at the death of his father. Antipas immediately set to work to rebuild Sepphoris and its wall, employing craftsmen from villages all over Galilee. It was Sepphoris that Josephus called the “ornament of all Galilee” and “the strongest city in Galilee” (*JW* 2.511; *Ant* 18.27). Evidently it surpassed Tiberias and Julias in beauty and opulence (*Ant* 18.2.1). Antipas probably granted Sepphoris the rank of capital of Galilee (*Ant* 18.2.1).

The works of Herod Antipas at Sepphoris included a theatre that seated 3000, a palace, and an upper and lower city with an upper and lower market. The upper city was predominantly Jewish by the time of the Second Revolt and likely earlier (*b. Yoma* 11a). There was also an “old fort” (*m. Arak.* 9.6), which was under the command of a hyparch. There was an archive (*m. Qidd.* 4.6), and certain archives were brought from Tiberias to Sepphoris in the days of Nero (*Life* 38). The Romans later replaced the “old archives” with the “new archives.” Excavations at Sepphoris show that workmen quarried stone on the site itself for Antipas’ rebuilding of the city.

Other information about the appearance of this Roman city of mixed population comes from the rabbis. They knew the upper and lower market (*b. Erub.* 5b), a fortified upper city, a colonnaded street in the middle of the city (*j. Ketub.* 1.25d), a city wall that required repairs from time to time (*b. B. Bat.* 7b–8a), a city gate (*Eccl. Rab.* 3), many shops (*Bar. B. Bat.* 75a), inns, synagogues, schools or academies (*j. Pe a* 20b, 27–31), private dwellings with upper stories and sometimes with a Roman-style dining room (*Lev. Rab.* c.16.2), and “the wheels of Sepphoris,” evidently referring to water wheels that lifted water to the upper city (*Eccl. Rab.* 12.6). There was a flowing spring below the city (*m. Ketub.* 1.10). The territory of Sepphoris extended 16 miles in every direction, according to the rabbis, and flowed with milk and honey (*b. Ketub.* 111b, *b. Meg.* 6a). Water ran down to the city on two aqueducts from springs at Abel 3 miles to the E (*m. Erub.* 8.7). The road from Tiberias to Sepphoris was marked by stadia with castra and a “Syrian monument” (*j. Erub.* 6.31b).

The destruction of Sepphoris by Varus and its rebuilding by Antipas seems to mark its transition from a Greek city to a loyalist Roman city of Jewish and gentile population. Certainly the rabbis referred to the “old government” of Sepphoris (*m. Qidd.* 4.5), which suggests they remembered the change. After this period many Latin and Greek names appear in the record, including the names of Jews (*Sipre Dt.* 13; *Mid. Tannaim* 7.2; *t. Bab. Metzia* 3.11).

Pharisaic families are scarcely mentioned in the 1st century in Sepphoris. Instead we find references to those with **some sort of priestly connection. Sepphoris was therefore likely a priestly or Sadducean city.** For example, Jose ben Illem of Sepphoris served as substitute for the High Priest Matthias in Jerusalem on the Day of Atonement, and Arsela of Sepphoris led the scapegoat from the temple into the desert on the Day of Atonement (*m. Yoma* 6.5; *j. Ber.* 3.6b; *t. Ta an.* 1 end; *j. Yoma* 6.43c; *j. Ma as. Š.* 5.56a). In this regard it is important that, after 70 C.E. and the destruction of the Second Temple, the second priestly course of Jed aiah settled at Sepphoris (*Mishmaroth* 2).

R. Halaphta was a city official and religious leader in Sepphoris during the second half of the 1st century C.E. (*b. Ta an.* 16b). The beginnings of Pharisaic Judaism at Sepphoris lie in the meeting of R. Halaphta, R. Eleasar ben 'Asaria the smith, R. Huspith the interpreter, R. Jeshebab, and R. Johanan ben Nuri. They met in the smith's shop to decide a religious question (*t. Kelim B. Bat.* 2.2).

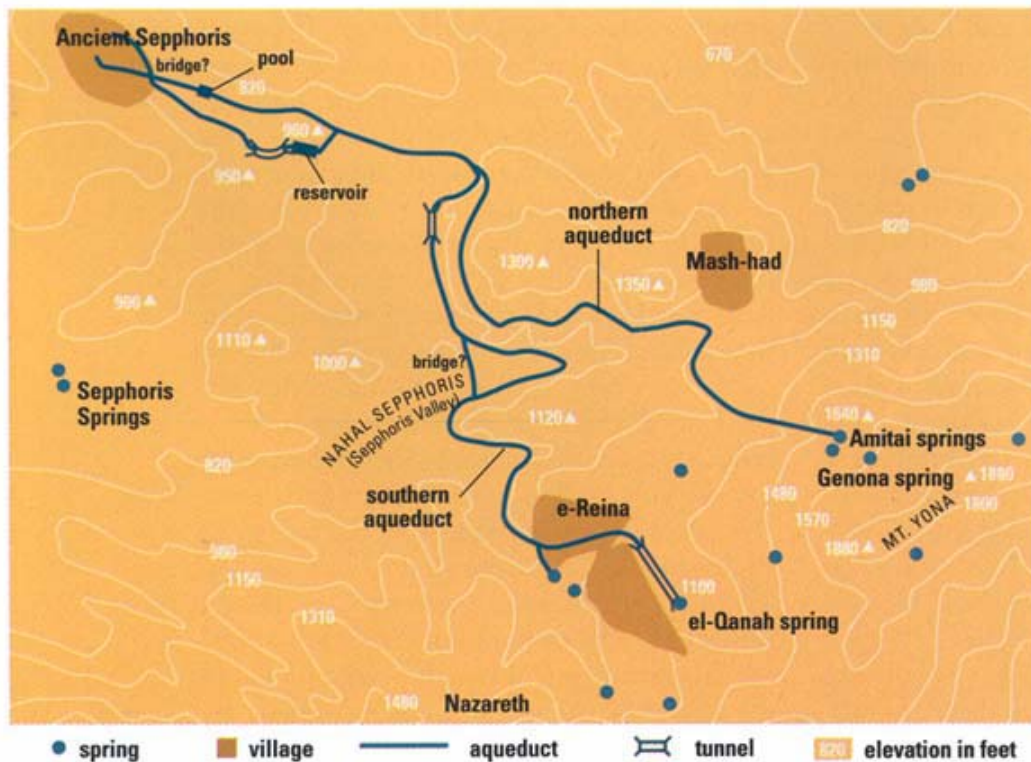
Sepphoris did not figure directly in the ministry of Jesus, though it is worth noting that **one logical route from Nazareth to Cana of Galilee ran through Sepphoris.**" [Anchor Bible Dictionary]

- **The Water System:** "I first learned of Sepphoris's ancient water system in 1975 from a local resident named Buki. He told me about a huge underground cavern three stories high and stretching more than two football fields long. It sounded to me a little like a flight of fancy. "When I see it, I'll believe it," I said. So Buki led me down a steep slope into the middle of an enormous hall 30 feet high, 625 feet long, 10 feet wide and capable of holding more than a million gallons (160,000 cubic feet = 4,300 cubic meters)—enough to supply water to 15,000 people for 2 weeks.

Bringing water to a city on a hill like Sepphoris, which rises 250 feet above the surrounding valley, is no easy task. That is why the earliest residents of the town simply relied on rainwater collected in cisterns. But by the first century C.E., this water supply proved insufficient for the growing city.

Not far from the foot of the hill of ancient Sepphoris lie copious springs (the Sepphoris Springs) that today irrigate the surrounding valley. But despite their proximity to the town, the springs were of marginal use to the ancient residents, who would have had to use pack animals to haul the water up the side of the hill. To channel water into the city, they needed to find a spring elevated higher than Sepphoris, so that the force of gravity would conduct the water across the surrounding valley and up the slope into the city.

The closest elevated springs lie further east, near the foot of Mt. Yona, just north of Nazareth—about 4 miles southeast of Sepphoris. Which meant that the city dwellers had to build a fairly extensive aqueduct if they wanted to take advantage of this fresh water supply. And so they did.



[BAR 26:04 (July/Aug 2000). Biblical Archaeology Society.]

- After the death of Herod the Great in 4 B.C., Herod Antipas governed the tetrarchy of Galilee (Luke 3:1) until A.D. 39. **Jesus referred to him as “that fox” (13:32). Sepphoris was his capital at first, three miles (five km.) north of Nazareth, but about A.D. 20 he built a new capital on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and named it Tiberias, after the reigning emperor.** Herod Agrippa I succeeded him and took the title of “king.” After his death in 44 (Acts 12:23) Galilee was joined for a while to the Roman province of Syria, after which it was given to Agrippa II. It became the land of Zealots and patriots who, in their hatred of foreign rule and in their longing for the Messiah, incited the populace to rebellion, and this led Rome to destroy Jerusalem in A.D. 70. After the fall of Jerusalem, Galilee became famous for its rabbis and schools of Jewish learning. The Sanhedrin or Great Council was moved to Sepphoris and then to Tiberias on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. This is most interesting in light of the fact that when Herod Antipas built Tiberias on top of a cemetery, strict Jews utterly abhorred the place. The Mishna was compiled here, and the Gemara was added, forming the Palestinian Talmud. The remains of splendid synagogues in Galilee, such as those at Capernaum and Korazin, still attest to the prosperity of the Jews there from the second to the seventh century. [NIBD]
- At the death of Herod, Judah ben Hezekiah led some citizens of Sepphoris in revolt, perhaps hoping for independent status after long years as Herod’s capital (Josephus Ant. 17.10.9 §289; J.W. 2.4.1 §56). Instead the Roman governor Varus retaliated with great force, **destroying the city** and killing the men, selling its women and children as slaves. Herod Antipas, the new tetrarch, **ordered the razed city rebuilt as a Roman city, building it as the “ornament of all Galilee,”** according to Josephus (Ant. 18.2.1 §27). Later, when the city had passed to the hegemony of Herod Antipas, the same Judah ben Hezekiah plundered

weapons and money from Sepphoris (Josephus Ant. 17.10.5 §271; J.W. 2.5.1 §68).
[Dictionary of New Testament background]

- It appears that in the year **A.D. 7** Judas the Galilean collected a band of the *Sicarii* and laid plans for an organized rebellion at Sepphoris, **four m. distant from Jesus' boyhood home** at Nazareth. The uprising was ruthlessly suppressed, and 2000 of the rebels were crucified. **It may be that the Lord had some early knowledge of them.** [ZPEB]
- **Jesus lived out his life within an area roughly 50 miles wide and 150 miles long**, from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south. Apart from Jerusalem, the places he is reported to have visited are **not important to the secular history of the region**. He ignored Sepphoris (the most prominent city in Galilee at the time), Tiberias (dominant port on the Sea of Galilee), Caesarea (Roman capital of Palestine), and Samaria-Sebaste (longtime provincial center)—probably because of their non-Jewish character. He was raised in the humble village of Nazareth, and lived there until about 30 years of age. Capernaum became the center for his Galilean ministry. He passed through Samaria on occasion, and ministered in Perea. He was betrayed and crucified in Jerusalem. He was raised in triumph on the third day [BEB]

Background(2): Herodium and the Bethlehem-to-Nazareth Migration

- Archaeological evidence in the region of Nazareth indicates that many people had moved there from Judea, from the area near Bethlehem. Joseph may have had friends or relatives in Nazareth (cf. Lk 2:4). Nazareth was on a major road from the coast to Syria and only a few miles from the culturally diverse city of Sepphoris, which was being rebuilt at this time. Though small, Nazareth would not have been isolated from broader cultural currents of antiquity. ... Pottery samples suggest a recent migration of people from the Bethlehem area to Nazareth around this time; Joseph's legal residence is apparently still Bethlehem, where he had been raised [BBC]
- **Herodium**. A palace-fortress built by Herod the Great on the site known in Arabic as Jebel el-Fureidis. It is situated 13 km S of Jerusalem, 6 km SE of Bethlehem (N of the biblical Tekoa), on the edge of the Judean desert. [ABD]



Background(3): The Region of Galilee

- Galilee, taken from the Heb., *galil* ‘ring, circle’, hence a ‘district, region’, this is the regional name of part of N Palestine, which was the scene of Christ’s boyhood and early ministry. The origin of the name as applied here is uncertain. It occurs occasionally in the OT (e.g. Jos. 20:7; 1 Ki. 9:11), and notably in Is. 9:1 [*Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan— 2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.*]. The latter reference probably recalls the region’s history: it originally formed part of the lands allocated to the twelve tribes, but, owing to the pressure from peoples farther N, its Jewish population found themselves in a kind of N salient, surrounded on three sides by non-Jewish populations—‘the nations’. Under the Maccabees, the Gentile influence upon the Jews became so strong that the latter were actually withdrawn S for half a century. Thus Galilee had to be recolonized, and this fact, together with its diversity of population, contributed to the contempt felt for the Galileans by the S Jews (Jn. 7:52) [*New Bible Atlas*]
- “The major trade route from Damascus to Egypt is called the Via Maris (the Way of the Sea). From Egypt this route enters Galilee from the SW through the pass of the Wadi ’Ara at Megiddo (alternative passes were at Taanach and Jokneam). At Megiddo the road branches: one way runs NW to the plain of Acco along the Phoen. coast to Anatolia; the second artery moves E to Damascus between the Hill of Moreh and Mt. Tabor to Kinneret on the NW corner of the Sea of Galilee, then N to Hazor where one branch of it continues due N to Ijon and the other branch crosses the main ford of the Jordan River about two m. S of Hazor and continues to Damascus; the third route leaves Megiddo heading E to Beth-shan, past Ashtoreth, the capital of Bashan, and joins the King’s highway to Damascus. **Canaanite fortresses guarded this route: Hazor in the N; Bethshan at the junction of the Esdraelon and Jordan valleys; Ibleam in the Esdraelon valley; and Megiddo, Taanach, and Jokneam at the passes leading S. Most minor routes throughout Galilee run E-W following the E-W basins crossing Lower Galilee.** N-S traffic is most difficult due to the many ranges and faults which run in every direction in Upper Galilee. **Roads in Galilee usually follow the spurs rather than the valleys when climbing on to the mountain plateau, because a wadi leaving a plateau usually becomes a steep valley, often impassable.** The **main road from Acco (Ptolemais) to Tiberias** went just N of Sepphoris across Lower Galilee **joining the Nazareth-Tiberias road.** Another significant artery ran through Upper Galilee from Tyre to Abel-beth-maacah at the base of Mt. Hermon. This highway system put the region of Galilee in contact with the entire Near E.” [ZPEB]
- **General description.** The region of Galilee is approximately sixty miles long from N to S and thirty miles wide from W to E. Of all the regions of Pal. **Galilee contains the coolest, most picturesque and lush mountainous district.** The terrain is diversified, containing volcanic and limestone hills with alluvial fertile plains. It has been compared with portions of the Carolina and Virginia piedmont. The entire region is watered by springs, heavy mountain dew, and an annual precipitation of about twenty-five inches.

- From the ThinkTank:
 - The population was **concentrated in small towns, rather than the big cities**. "The vast majority of Jews in Jesus' lifetime in Galilee, Transjordan, and Judea lived in small towns, not in the large cities such as Tiberias and Jerusalem" [NTSE:83].
 - The populace would have been **predominately Jewish in religion**. The Maccabees (c. mid 1st century BC) **forced all the Gentiles in Palestine to either leave or convert to Judaism**. The result was a predominantly Jewish cast to the culture, in most of the land [NTSE:82].
 - The **Jews in the villages were generally alienated from the Jews living in the cities**: "It remains true, however, that the Jews living in the towns of Capernum and Tarichaea were alienated from the Jews in the Greek cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias" [NTSE:104; SHJ:109, 118], with this being not altogether unrelieved [GLA:71].
 - Galilee had 204 villages, organized into 5 regions called toparchies, which reported into Herod Antipas, whose headquarters were in the city of Tiberias [BSNT:43ff]. **The region was densely populated** [GLA:55].
 - The capital of Galilee was Tiberias, although the only other large city--Sepphoris--constantly battled with it for the place of administrative preeminence [GLA:67]. **They were both being either rebuilt or refurbished, adding to the tax burden of the area** [SHJ:104].
 - The capital cities were predominately Jewish in population, but were thoroughly Hellenistic [SHJ:84; GLA:17; NTSE:90] in organization and administration. **Herod build Tiberias on a graveyard and used animal figures as decorations--both practices were anathema to strict Jews--and forced Jews to live there (but compensated them with land grants)** [SHJ:86, 89, 108f; GLA:17]. Sepphoris was a few miles northwest of Nazareth had all the features of a Hellenistic city--"including a theater, hippodrome, and temples" [GLA:15], although it was a "priestly city, populated by wealthy Jewish landowners who favored the Romans during the Jewish wars" [NTSE:92].
 - Hellenism had made considerable impact on Galilean trade, political organization, language, and commerce [SHJ:105; NTSE:89], but in matters of religion, the regular pilgrimage of Galileans to Jerusalem "demonstrates the religious and cultural loyalty of Galilean Jews to the Temple of Jerusalem" [NTSE:94]. **Their loyalty to Jerusalem did NOT imply their acceptance of the full range of Pharisaic demands--for example, the rural populace simply did NOT observe their purity laws** [NTSE:103]. So Martin [NTF:91]: **"The common people were alienated from official religion. No matter how much they admired the zeal of the Pharisees and were impressed by the grandeur of the temple ritual, accepting the religious regimen was, for the mass of them, an invitation to assume a heavy yoke."**
 - Exports were mainly the salted fish of Taricheae [SHJ:110], pottery from Kefar Hanania [SHJ:111], and oil [SHJ:82].
 - Imports typically came through Acco-Ptolemais, and originated in such regions as Babylon (beer), Egypt (barley beer, smoked fish, lentils, parchment, papyrus, jewelry), Bythinia (cheese), Spain (mackerel), Lydia (wines, asses), and Tyre (dye).

- “With the invasion of the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III in 734 B.C., the chief cities of Galilee passed into his hands (15:29; 16:7). Though some Israelites still remained in Galilee after this attack (2 Chron 30:10 f.), the Israelite period of dominion over Galilee ended quickly with Samaria’s fall to Assyria in 722 B.C. **The kingdom of Israel, including the region of Galilee, was assimilated by Assyria. “Galilee of the nations” (Isa 9:1) probably referred to the mixture of Jews and Gentiles then living in that area.** ... Following the Babylonian captivity, information about the history of Galilee is sparse, though the area was continually inhabited. It was ruled by Babylon, Persia, Greece, and the Seleucid empire until the Maccabees conquered parts of it and began the process of Jewish resettlement. ... Under Rome Herod the Great was made military commander of Galilee in 47 B.C. He subdued the various bands of thieves which plagued the country (Jos. Antiq. XIV, ix, 2). **When Herod came to his throne in 37 B.C., a period of peace and prosperity came to Galilee which continued until the banishment of his son Antipas in A.D. 40.** At Herod’s death in 4 B.C., Galilee fell to Antipas who made his capital at Tiberias on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, naming it after the emperor. ... Herod Antipas reigned over Galilee throughout Jesus Christ’s entire life with the exception of his infancy. Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, was raised in Nazareth of Galilee and made Capernaum at the N end of the Sea of Galilee the headquarters of His ministry. There was a considerable Jewish population in Galilee at this time which would explain, in part, Christ’s following there. **Most of His ministry was around the Sea of Galilee. The Sermon on the Mount, His Transfiguration, nineteen of his thirty-two parables, and twenty-five of his thirty-three recorded miracles occurred in Galilee.** The Messiah received His warmest welcome in Galilee, **but the Jews from the S regarded the northern Jews with some contempt,** feeling that nothing good could come out of Nazareth (John 1:46; 7:52) and that a claim of a Messiah from Nazareth could hardly be taken seriously (Matt 21:11). Late in Jesus’ Galilean ministry, when opposition had increased, He spent considerable time in Upper Galilee.”

Bethlehemites Mary and Joseph travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem for the Census:

- *“In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to **Nazareth**, a town in **Galilee**, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary.” (Luke 1.26f)... “In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ... And everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of **Nazareth** in **Galilee** to Judea, to **Bethlehem** the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.” [Luke 2.1ff]*
- The famed city of David, as it came to be styled. It lies 9 km S of Jerusalem. Its earlier name was Ephrath (Gn. 35:19), and it was known as Bethlehem Judah, or Bethlehem Ephrathah, to distinguish it from the other city of the same name. **Rachel’s tomb was near it; David’s ancestors lived there;** the Philistines placed a garrison there; and the Messiah was destined to be born there. Jesus was accordingly born there, and the stories of the shepherds and the Magi centre upon it. Bethlehem suffered at the hands of Hadrian in the 2nd century ad, and all Jews were expelled from it; and it seems that the site of the nativity grotto was lost for two centuries; so the Church of the Nativity erected by Helena in the reign of Constantine may or may not mark the true site. [New Bible Dictionary.]

- As an **early Canaanite settlement** it was associated with the patriarchs, for Rachel died and was buried in its vicinity (Gn 35:16, 19; 48:7). The earliest known historical reference to Bethlehem occurs in the Amarna texts (14th century b.c.) in which battle reports refer to *bitil u-lahama* south of Jerusalem. ... A branch of Caleb's family settled there, and Caleb's son Salma was known as "the father of Bethlehem" (1 Chr 2:51). **Bethlehem was the home** of a young Levite who served as priest to Micah (Jgs 17:8), and of Boaz, **Ruth**, Obed, and Jesse, the Bethlehemite, David's father (Ru 4:11, 17; 1 Sm 16:1, 4). Bethlehem was the birthplace of David (1 Sm 17:12) and the home of one of David's mighty men, Elhanan (2 Sm 23:24; 1 Chr 11:26). It was the scene of a daring exploit by three of David's warriors; they broke through the cordon of Philistine marauders occupying Bethlehem to bring David water from the well (or cistern) "near the city gate" of his hometown (2 Sm 23:14–17). Much later, Bethlehem is mentioned as being adjacent to the village of Geruth Chimham, where Jews fleeing from the Babylonians stayed en route to Egypt (Jer 41:17). People from Bethlehem were among those returning from the Babylonian exile (Ezr 2:21; Neh 7:26; 1 Esd 5:17). When Jesus was born there in NT times, Bethlehem was only a village (Mt 2:1–16; Lk 2:4–6, 15; Jn 7:42). **It lay near the N-S highway connecting Jerusalem with Hebron to the south. A transverse route across the Judean hill country followed the Valley of Elah to Bethlehem, one of 7 such E-W roads.** The central mountain ridge of Judea sloping E and W contracts from an average width of 8 miles to only 2 miles or less between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. **This feature provided a natural borderland, Jerusalem being the most southerly border town of the northern region, and Bethlehem the most important northern border town of the southern area of Judea. So although it remained small, Bethlehem was never a daughter settlement of Jerusalem.** The arid Judean wilderness extended westward right to the gates of such cities as Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Tekoa, and Hebron, enhancing their strategic locations as outposts looking out on the desert. Bethlehem is situated on one of the highest summits of the Judean tableland. Its cultivated fields still occupy patches between the many ravines. Eastward, drought and desert nomads set the limit to cultivation, the land becoming pastureland. As an ecological borderland, wheat gave place to barley, a more drought-resistant grain (Ru 2:23). We know of shepherds in the area from stories of the boyhood of David (1 Sm 17:40) and of Christ's nativity (Lk 2:8). **As a border garrison, Bethlehem guaranteed the independence of Judea; hence the efforts of the Philistines to control it (2 Sm 23:14) and of Rehoboam to fortify it further (2 Chr**
- The main road they (the Magi) would need to take northward from Bethlehem went directly through Jerusalem, then eastward through Syria. Given the probably large size of their entourage, the Magi could not approach Jerusalem without being noticed, as Herod knew very well. Indeed, no major route could take them homeward without passing through Jerusalem. They probably ventured far south to Hebron, then followed the rugged road to Gaza on the coast, where another road could lead them northward. **This route would then have carried them through Nazareth, then Capernaum and on to Damascus [BBC]**

The Return to Nazareth in Galilee

- *After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt 20 and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead." So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, 23 and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."*
- **After Herod died . . . Joseph** was again instructed by **an angel of the Lord**. This was the third of four times an angel appeared to him **in a dream** (cf. 1:20; 2:13, 19, 22). He was made aware of Herod's death and told to return **to the land** (v. 20). Joseph obediently followed the Lord's instruction and was planning to return **to the land of Israel**, perhaps to Bethlehem. However, a son of Herod, **Archelaus**, was ruling over the territories of **Judea**, Samaria, and Idumea. Archelaus, noted for tyranny, murder, and instability, was **probably insane as a result of close family intermarriages**. (He ruled from 4 B.C. to A.D. 6.). God's warning to Joseph (again **in a dream**, Matt. 2:22; cf. 1:20; 2:13, 19) was not to return to Bethlehem, but instead to move back to the northern **district of Galilee** to the **town of Nazareth**. The ruler of this region was Antipas, another son of Herod (cf. 14:1; Luke 23:7-12), but he was a capable ruler [BKC]

Nazareth in Galilee: The city of Jesus' pre-ministry years

Jesus travels from Nazareth to where John the Baptist is baptizing. After His public baptism, He faces the trials/temptations in the Wilderness, and then begins His traveling ministry. During His travels, He visits Nazareth (his home town) and Cana (nearby). After His rejection at Nazareth, He establishes His teaching HQ at Capernaum.

And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth. 40 And the Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.... 51 And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth; and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart. [Luke 2, NASB]

- "Village in the Roman province of Galilee, the home of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. Always small and isolated, Nazareth is not mentioned in the OT, the Apocrypha, intertestamental Jewish writings, or the histories of Josephus. The town lies just north of the plain of Esdraelon in the limestone hills of the southern Lebanon range. It is situated S,SE on 3 sides of a hill. This location forms a sheltered valley with a moderate climate favorable to fruits and wildflowers. **Trade routes and roads passed near Nazareth, but the village itself was not on any main road.** Nazareth is about **15 miles west of the Sea of Galilee** and 20 miles east of the Mediterranean. Jerusalem lies about 70 miles south. Archaeological remains indicate that the ancient town was higher on the western hill than the present village (cf. Lk 4:29). In the time of Christ, Nazareth, along with the entire region of south Galilee, lay outside the mainstream of Jewish life, providing the background for Nathanael's wry remark to Philip, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (Jn 1:46). [Baker encyclopedia of the Bible]

- “The fact that the family moved to Nazareth was once again said to be in fulfillment of prophecy (Matt. 2:23). However, the words **He will be called a Nazarene**, were not directly spoken by any Old Testament prophet, though several prophecies come close to this expression. Isaiah said the Messiah would be “from [Jesse’s] roots” like “a Branch” (Isa. 11:1). “Branch” is the Hebrew word *netzer* which has consonants like those in the word “Nazarene” and which carry the idea of having an insignificant beginning... Since Matthew used the plural **prophets**, perhaps his idea was not based on a specific prophecy but on the idea that appeared in a number of prophecies concerning Messiah’s despised character. Nazareth was the town which housed the Roman garrison for the northern regions of Galilee. Therefore most Jews would not have any associations with that city. In fact those who lived in Nazareth were thought of as compromisers who consorted with the enemy, the Romans. Therefore to call one “a Nazarene” was to use a term of contempt. So because Joseph and his family settled in Nazareth, the Messiah was later despised and considered contemptible in the eyes of many in Israel. This was Nathanael’s reaction when he heard Jesus was from Nazareth (John 1:46): “Can anything good come from there?” This concept fit several Old Testament prophecies that speak of the lowly character of the Messiah (e.g., Isa. 42:1-4) [BKC]
- *The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” 46 Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” 47 When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” 48 Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” 49 Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” 50 Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” 51 And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you (plural), you (plural) will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.” [NRSV (Jn 1:43)]*
- In the fourth Gospel, Nathanael serves as a symbol for the true Jew who overcomes initial skepticism to believe in Christ. This is confirmed by three observations: (1) his initial reaction to Jesus parallels that of others who believed in the Law and the Prophets (7:15, 27, 41; 9:41); (2) **Jesus’ perception of Nathanael under a fig tree (1:48) identifies the latter’s devotion to the Torah (In rabbinic literature the proper place to study the Torah is under a fig tree.)**; (3) Jesus’ identification of Nathanael as “an Israelite, in whom is no guile” may be intended to **contrast Nathanael with Jacob, the father of the Israelite nation**. In Genesis 25–32, Jacob is certainly sly and cunning in his dealings with Esau and Laban. John 1:51 **strengthens the ties between Nathanael and Jacob by presenting the imagery of angels** ascending and descending reminiscent of Jacob’s dream and by locating the event in Galilee close to Bethel and Jabbok, the sites of Jacob’s experiences. Nathanael is thus a symbol of the pious Israelite for whom Christ came (v 31). His response typifies what the fourth evangelist understands as **the appropriate response of the true Israelite to Jesus—from initial skepticism to faith** (cf. Rom 9:6). [Baker encyclopedia of the Bible.]

- *Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. 15 He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. 16 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. 17 The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 18 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” 20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, 21 and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” 22 All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” they asked. 23 Jesus said to them, “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’” 24 “I tell you the truth,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown. 25 I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. 26 Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. 27 And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.” 28 All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. 29 They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. 30 But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. [Luke 4.14ff]*
- *And coming to His home town He began teaching them in their synagogue, so that they became astonished, and said, “Where did this man get this wisdom, and these miraculous powers? 55 “Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? 56 “And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?” 57 And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his home town, and in his own household.” 58 And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief. [NASB, (Mt 13:54)]*
- *Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. 2 When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. “Where did this man get these things?” they asked. “What’s this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! 3 Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. 4 Jesus said to them, “Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor.” 5 He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. 6 And he was amazed at their lack of faith. [NIV (Mk 6:1).]*
- The "good news" (v. 18) Jesus was to proclaim recalls both the joyful announcement in 1:19 and the frequent use of the term elsewhere in Luke. It also builds on Isaiah 40:9; 41:27; and especially 52:7. The "poor," like the "prisoners," the "blind," and the "oppressed," are not only the unfortunate of this world but those who have special need of dependence on God. The words "to release the oppressed" fill out the meaning of the previous words. Luke 7:22

cites some ways Jesus fulfilled this mission... The "year of the Lord's favor" (v. 19) is reminiscent of the Jubilee (one year in every fifty) when debts were forgiven and slaves set free (Lev 25:8-17). It means not so much a time that is "acceptable" to people but the time in history when God in sovereign grace brings freedom from the guilt and effects of sin. The inclusion of this quotation is consistent with Luke's stress on the dawning of the new age of salvation. ... **The omission of the next phrase in Isaiah 61:2—"the day of vengeance of our God"—is also significant. Jesus' audience would suppose that the day of their own salvation would be the day of judgment on their pagan enemies. But the delay of judgment means that this time of the Lord's favor benefits the Gentiles also.** Jesus affirms (vv. 24-27) that Gentiles are also recipients of God's grace, even when Jews were not so blessed. ... As prophet and Messiah, he will minister to the social outcasts and needy, including Gentiles, in the power of the Spirit. [EBC]

- **Jesus' Rejection in His Hometown** The Old Testament often reiterates the principle of the prophet without honor: Jeremiah, Moses, Joseph and so forth; subsequent Jewish tradition emphasized this concept even more. **That Jesus is "unable" to do works because of their unbelief presumes a limitation not of his power but of his mission: to heal without morally directed faith would be to act like the pagan magicians of antiquity.** ... In 6:3, Jesus is called a "carpenter." Early in Jesus' childhood, Sepphoris, then capital of Galilee, had been destroyed by the Romans, and rebuilding had begun immediately. **Thus carpenters were no doubt in demand in Nazareth, a village four miles from the ruins of Sepphoris; and Joseph, Jesus' father, probably taught his son his own trade, as was common for fathers to do in those days.** After Sepphoris had been rebuilt, they probably did most carpentry work from their home, as most Galilean carpenters did. The observation that Jesus is a carpenter is meant to identify him, not to suggest the unlikelihood of a carpenter being a teacher, for **we also know of other carpenters who became famous teachers (e.g., Shammai).** [The IVP Bible background commentary (Mk 6:7)]
- **4:14–15.** Visiting rabbis were often given opportunities to teach; but **Nazareth, a village of sixteen hundred to two thousand inhabitants,** already knew Jesus and would be **less open to thinking about him in new ways.**

4:16. The people would have known that Jesus was devout and skilled in Hebrew from his previous readings in his hometown synagogue. One customarily sat while expounding Scripture (Mt 5:1) but stood while reading it.

4:17. Synagogues later followed regular lectionary readings, but in this period readers had more freedom to choose the reading from the Prophets; even later, readers in the Prophets were allowed to "skip" passages. **The synagogue attendant (*chazan*—v. 20) presumably chose which book to read (different books of the Old Testament were on different scrolls).** "Opening" the book meant unrolling the Hebrew scroll to the right place.

4:18–19. Isaiah in this passage (61:1–2; cf. 58:6) seems to describe Israel's future in terms of the year of Jubilee, or year of release, from Leviticus 25; the Dead Sea Scrolls read Isaiah 61 in this way. ... That Luke ends the quote on a note of salvation is probably intentional, **but his readers who know Scripture well would know how the passage continues.**

4:20. Teachers normally sat to expound Scripture. The synagogue attendant was the *chazan*, the official responsible for the upkeep of the building, the scrolls and so forth; this position was eventually a paid one (but lower in authority than "rulers" of a synagogue). Synagogues were probably less formal than churches or synagogues generally are today, so the attentiveness of those present is significant.

4:21–22. Immediacy (“today”; cf. 2:11; 19:5, 9; 23:43) is the initial key to the coming offense; the text Jesus reads is supposed to be fulfilled in the messianic era, **and the inhabitants of Nazareth saw neither Messiah nor messianic era before them. Because they lived only four miles from Sepphoris, they were well aware of how the Romans had destroyed that Galilean capital after a messianic-style revolt in a.d. 6; that this region was thereafter cautious about messianic announcements is clear from the fact that the rebuilt Sepphoris did not join in the later revolt of a.d. 66. . . .**

4:23–24. The tradition that Israel rejected its own prophets was strong in Judaism; for instance, Jeremiah was persecuted by his own priestly town, Anathoth (Jer 1:1; 11:18–23). The proverb in 4:23 is attested in some form in Greek classical and medical literature, and some rabbis cited a similar Aramaic proverb.

4:25–27. Jesus mentions the socially weak (widows) and marginalized (lepers) here, but the **main point is that non-Jews were the ones to accept two of the major signs prophets** of the Old Testament. **Sidon and Syria were among the particularly despised areas.** Jesus’ point: Nazareth will not receive him, but non-Jews will.

4:28–29. A mob could not legally execute capital punishment in Jewish Palestine; the crowd is thus unusually angry—especially to attempt this execution on the sabbath (v. 16). Although Nazareth does not appear to have been built on a hill per se, like many ancient cities it was set in the hill country, with plenty of jagged rocks and cliffs nearby. **Stoning began with throwing the criminal over a cliff, then hurling rocks nearly the size of one’s head on top of the victim. One aimed for the chest first, but at such a distance one’s aim would not be particularly accurate.**

4:30. Whether the Lord hides him (cf. Jer 36:26), his attitude silences them, or his townspeople suddenly realize what they are doing to one of their own, Jesus walks through the crowd unharmed—his hour had not yet come. [The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament (Lk 4:14).]

- **28-30** Nazareth lay among the ridges of the southern slopes of the Galilean hills. Jesus allowed the crowds to drive him (v. 29) out of the town (as he later did on going to the place of crucifixion). But it was not yet his time to die, and by some unexplained means he made his way out (v. 30). [EBC]
- Even Jesus was amazed (*ethaumasen*, “astonished”; cf. 5:20; 12:17; 15:5, 44) at their unbelief, their unwillingness to believe that His wisdom and power were from God. So far as is known, He never returned to Nazareth. [BKC]

Cana in Galilee: Two miracles of Jesus, and the home of Nathanael

- **Nathanael.** A disciple of Jesus from Cana in Galilee (John 1:45–51; 21:2).
- Cana was a village in the hills of Galilee. Its exact location is disputed, but the best site seems to be that of Khirbet Qana, about nine miles north of Nazareth. It lay on a road that ran from Ptolemais on the Mediterranean coast southeastward to Sepphoris, the center of Roman administration in Galilee, and thence southward through Nazareth to Samaria and Jerusalem. [EBC]

- “A village in Galilee, noted as the location of Christ’s first miracle, where at the marriage feast He turned water into wine (John 2:1-11). Following a period of travel He again visited Cana (4:46). The only other mention of this place is in 21:2, as the home of Nathanael. There was also a village named Kanah (Heb. Qanah), near Tyre (Josh 19:28), hence it became necessary to designate the “Cana of Galilee” as such in order to clarify its provenience. . . . the site being located some eight to nine m. directly N of Nazareth, and is so shown on maps in most newer atlases. It is situated on the N edge of the plain called Sahl el-Battuf. The topography includes marshes, and the site, though not as yet excavated, shows potsherds from the Roman and Byzantine periods, together with some sherds and coins from the time of Christ. There is also evidence of cisterns and other construction. [ZPEB]
- *On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. 3 And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, “They have no wine.” 4 Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.” 5 His mother said to the servants, “Whatever He says to you, do it.” 6 Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. 7 Jesus said to them, “Fill the waterpots with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. 8 And He said to them, “Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast.” And they took it. 9 When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. 10 And he said to him, “Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!” [Jn 2; NKJV]*
- **2:2-3.** Oriental wedding feasts often lasted seven days. The feast followed the groom’s taking of his bride to his home or his father’s house, before the consummation of the marriage. When the supply of wine was used up, Mary turned to Jesus in hope that He could solve the problem. **Did Mary expect a miracle? In the light of verse 11 this is not likely. Mary had not yet seen any miracles done by her Son.**
2:4-5. The word woman applied to His mother may seem strange to a modern reader, but it was a polite, kind expression (cf. 19:26: “When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” 27 Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.”). However, the clause, Why do you involve Me? was a common expression in Greek that referred to a difference in realms or relations. Demons spoke these words when they were confronted by Christ (“What do You want with us?” [Mark 1:24]; “What do You want with me?” [Mark 5:7]). Mary had to learn a painful lesson (cf. Luke 2:35), namely, that Jesus was committed to God the Father’s will and the time for His manifestation was in the Father’s hand. **My time has not yet come or similar words occur five times in John** (2:4; 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20). **Later the fact that His time had come is mentioned three times** (12:23; 13:1; 17:1). **Mary’s response to the servants (Do whatever He tells you) revealed her submission to her Son. Even though she did not fully understand, she trusted Him.**
2:6-8. The water in the six . . . water jars (of 20 to 30 gallons each) was used for Jewish purification rites **before and after** meals (cf. Matt. 15:1-2). **The contrast between the old order and the new way is evident** (cf. John 4:13; 7:38-39). .. Probably the water jars were outside. The master of the banquet, in charge of the festivities, would not know he was

drinking from the purification jars. For a Jew this would be unthinkable. The servants dipped out the water, which had become wine.

2:9-10. As the master of the banquet tasted the . . . wine, he found it to be superior to what they had been drinking. In contrast with a common custom in which the best wine was served first and the lesser quality later, he affirmed that this wine, served last, was the best. The significance of this miracle is that Christianity is an advance over Judaism. God has kept the best gift—His Son—until now.

2:11. The significance of the miracle was explained by John as a manifestation of Christ's glory. **In contrast with the ministry of Moses who turned water into blood as a sign of God's judgment (Ex. 7:14-24), Jesus brings joy. His first miracle was a gracious indication of the joy which He provides by the Spirit.** The sign points to Jesus as the Word in the flesh, who is the mighty Creator. Each year He turns water to wine in the agricultural and fermentation processes. Here He simply did the process immediately. The 120 gallons of fine wine were **His gift to the young couple.** The first miracle—a **transformation—pointed to the kind of transforming ministry Jesus would have** (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). [BKC]

- “Cana” may be Kefar Kanna (over three miles from Nazareth), but most scholars prefer Khirbet Kana (over eight miles from Nazareth). **Either site would be close enough to Nazareth to explain how the host knows Jesus' family.**

2:2. Weddings lasted seven days, and **hosts invited as many people as possible, especially distinguished guests like prominent teachers.**

2:3. To run out of wine at a wedding was **a social faux pas that would become the subject of jests for years;** the host was responsible to provide his guests with adequate wine for seven days.

The women's quarters were near the place where the wine was stored; **thus Mary learns of the shortage of wine before word reaches Jesus and the other men. Her words probably suggest that he should do something; guests were to help defray the expense of the wedding with their gifts, and it seems that their friend needs some extra gifts now.**

2:4. “Woman” was a respectful address (like “Ma’am”) but hardly customary for one's mother. Jesus' statement here establishes polite distance (though “What have I to do with you” is usually a harsh, not a polite, expression in biblical language). Because Jesus' “hour” in John refers especially to the cross, **here Jesus is saying, “Once I begin doing miracles, I begin the road to the cross.”**

2:5. **Like many Old Testament seekers of God who would not take no for an answer** (Gen 32:26–30; Ex 33:12–34:9; 1 Kings 18:36–37; 2 Kings 2:2, 4, 6, 9; 4:14–28), **Mary acts in confidence that Jesus will hear her entreaty.** Ancient Jewish readers, who told stories of miracle workers who insisted that God would send rain, would read Mary's action as demonstrating strong faith.

2:6. The description of the stone jars indicates that they contained enough water to fill a Jewish immersion pool used for ceremonial purification. **Although Pharisees forbade storing such water in jars, some Jews were less strict; thus these large jars were being reserved for ritual purposes.** Stone jars were common because they were less likely to contract ritual uncleanness than those made of other substances.

2:7. **Using the jars for another purpose would temporarily defile them; Jesus shows more concern for his friend's wedding than for contemporary ritual.**

2:8. “Master of the banquet” was a position of honor (Ecclus 32:1–2); one of his primary duties was to **regulate the distribution of wine to prevent excess** that would (especially in a Jewish context) ruin the party. At least in Greek banquets, guests elected this person to preside over the entertainment and to control the level of dilution for the wine; **thus some observers might have held him partly responsible for the host’s running out of wine prematurely.**

2:9–10. Soon after the grape vintage, all wine would contain some alcohol (neither refrigeration nor hermetic sealing existed). But the alcohol level of the wine was not increased artificially (distillation was not in use); rather, the wine was watered down, with two to three parts water to one part wine. Sometimes at Greek parties drunkenness was induced through less dilution or the addition of herbal toxins, but Jewish teachers disapproved of such practices; **that drunkenness is part of the celebration at Cana is unlikely.** Yet one would normally serve the better wine first because, drunk or not, guests’ senses would become more dulled as the seven days of banqueting proceeded.” [BBC]

- **2–3** The disciple group invited with Jesus will have been viewed **as his family, for whose contributions to the marriage feast he will have been responsible.** It is a natural assumption that this motivated Mary’s drawing the attention of Jesus to the lack of wine—**not that she hoped for a miracle, but that his presence with the disciples, jointly embarked on a mendicant ministry which rendered them unable to fulfill the obligation of guests, contributed to the embarrassing situation.**

4 ... τί ἔμοι καὶ σοί; is a well known but ambiguous expression, which can express **a hostile or peaceful attitude** (contrast Judg 11:12 with 2 Chron 35:21). **2 Kgs 3:13 is of interest, in that it expresses rejection, yet the prophet gives what is asked; so here is an apparent rejection of Mary’s initiative, yet a granting of the request for intervention.** The question may, however, have a gentler tone; an analogical expression from east Syrian “Chaldean” suggests not division but unity of thought, which could here be rendered, “Why are you speaking to me of this need? With you, I understand it”. γύναι has caused needless perplexity. While it is an unusual mode of address to one’s mother, it also may be affectionate. Apart from John 19:26, which cannot be intended to express distance, a significant occurrence of the term is found in Josephus, Ant. 17.74: the wife of Pheroras tells Herod (the Great) how her husband summoned her in his illness, beginning his statement with “Woman.” The example is important, since Pheroras had great affection for his wife; he refused Herod’s request that he send her away, and his persistence in keeping her led to a rupture of relations between the two men. [WBC]

- **2-3** A wedding is always a gala occasion, and in a village like Cana it would be a community celebration. “Refreshments” were provided for all guests. Of these, wine was very important. **To fail in providing adequately for the guests would involve social disgrace. In the closely knit communities of Jesus’ day, such an error would never be forgotten and would haunt the newly married couple all their lives.** The situation prompted Mary’s urgency when she informed Jesus of the emergency.
4-5 Jesus’ reply to Mary was not so abrupt as it seems. “Woman” (gynai) was a polite form of address. Jesus used it when he spoke to his mother from the cross (19:26) and **also when he spoke to Mary Magdalene after the Resurrection (20:15).** Two translations of Jesus’ rejoinder to his mother are possible: (1) **“What business is that of ours?”** or (2) **“What authority do you have over me?”** The second alternative is based on the analogy of the question of the demoniac, **“What do you want with us, Son of God?”** (Matt 8:29), which

employs exactly the same phraseology. **Since Jesus' mother expressed neither surprise nor resentment, the former translation is probably more acceptable in this instance.** She acknowledged that he should act independently, and she confidently told the servants to follow his orders. She fully expected that he would take appropriate action. [EBC]

- *After the two days he left for Galilee. 44 (Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.) 45 When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, for they also had been there. 46 **Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum.** 47 When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death. 48 “Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders,” Jesus told him, “you will never believe.” 49 The royal official said, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” 50 Jesus replied, “You may go. Your son will live.” The man took Jesus at his word and departed. 51 While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. 52 When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, “The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour.” 53 Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” So he and all his household believed. [NIV (Jn 4:43).]*
- The Galileans hoped Jesus would duplicate the signs they had witnessed in Jerusalem while they were attending the Passover Feast. **They were disappointed to discover that Jesus had no intention of exhibiting his powers to satisfy their curiosity.**
46 The reason for revisiting Cana is not given. It may be that Jesus expected to find some disciples who had believed on him after the miracle at the wedding. **The royal official (basilikos) may have been a member of Herod's court.** His son had been ill for some time and was not recovering from his sickness. Therefore, the father felt compelled to seek some further aid. **It is possible that the official was a Gentile. If so, the three persons Jesus interviewed in this early ministry represented the Jews, the Samaritans, and the Gentiles—in short, the world he came to save.** John's Gospel, though it chronicles chiefly the ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem, has a much wider horizon than the area of his residence.
47 The report that Jesus had healed people in Jerusalem must have reached this man's ears. Learning that Jesus had returned to Galilee, the man immediately sought Jesus out and urged him to heal his son, who was dangerously ill. The imperfect tense of the verb "begged" (erota, from erotao, to "ask" or "request") implies repeated or persistent action. The request was not casual but insistent.
48 The reply of Jesus seems like a heartless rejection. He seemed to insinuate that the official, like the rest of the Galileans, was only giving an excuse for eliciting a miracle from him. **On the other hand, Jesus' words may express his hope more than his exasperation.** He desired a belief characterized by dedication rather than amazement, and the second half of the episode shows that his aim was to inculcate a genuine commitment rather than merely to perform a cure. **49** The genuine distress of the father is demonstrated by his words: "Sir, come down at once before my little boy dies!" (lit. tr.). The use of the aorist tense of "die" (apothanein) to describe the impending crisis is in contrast with the present tense in v. 47 (apothneskein), which describes the progress of the illness. This indicates that the case was desperate. **50** Jesus' response still seems somewhat impersonal and casual. **By dismissing the official with the statement that his son was alive, Jesus created a dilemma of faith.** If the father refused to return to Capernaum without taking Jesus with him, he would show

that he did not believe Jesus' word and would consequently receive no benefit because of his distrust. On the other hand, if he followed Jesus' order, he would be returning to the dying boy with no outward assurance that the lad would recover. **He was forced to make the difficult choice between insisting on evidence and thus showing disbelief and of exercising faith without any tangible proof to encourage him. The official chose the second horn of the dilemma; he "took Jesus at his word" (ASV "believed the word") and set out on his return journey. He learned faith by the compulsion of necessity.** 51-52 People are amazed by coincidences, but generally they do not attribute them to the direct activity of God. The official took a "chance" and went home as Jesus had commanded him to, and a miraculous report greeted him "while he was still on the way." There is an interesting progression in the description of the boy's condition. First the news came that "his boy was living." But more than that, the man was curious to know "the time when his son got better." Finally, he was told, "The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour." 53-54 **When the father considered the details of his meeting with Jesus and the good news concerning his son's recovery, he was convinced that it was more than coincidence at work. The timing was miraculous, and the boy's recovery was more than even circumstances could have brought about.** [EBC]

- **4:46.** Capernaum was close to a full day's walk from there (Cana). "Royal official" (NASB, NIV) probably means that this man is one of Herod Antipas's court officials, although Herod's official title was tetrarch rather than king. Jesus was extremely unfavorable toward Antipas (Lk 13:32; 23:9; for reasons, cf. Mk 6:17-29); **this man who comes to Jesus would be a wealthy aristocrat, probably much influenced by Greco-Roman culture and not very religious by general Palestinian Jewish standards.** [4:47.] "Come down" (KJV, NASB, NRSV) is more accurate than "come" (NIV) because Capernaum, on the Sea of Galilee, was lower in elevation than Cana. [4:50-54.] **Long-distance miracles were rare by Old Testament, other Jewish and Greco-Roman standards; people generally believed prophets and Greek magicians more easily if they were present in person.** The rare stories of long-distance miracles suggested to ancient readers that these miracle workers had extraordinary power. **For Jesus, the only prerequisite for such miracles is seekers' faith in his power.** [BBC]
- **4:46-47.** ... His son had been sick, and undoubtedly he had exhausted all the local means at his disposal. Failure of position and money to solve his problem drove him from Capernaum to the village of Cana, 20 to 25 miles away, hoping that the Healer would save his son from death. **4:48.** Jesus' address to him, though sharp, was necessary. A faith built only on miraculous signs is not a complete faith (cf. 2:23-25). Many (*you people*) hesitate to believe in Jesus apart from seeing miraculous signs (*sēmeia*) and wonders (*terata*). Faith in Jesus is absolutely necessary, **but not all believers are given public portents** (cf. Matt. 16:1-4; 1 Cor. 1:22). **4:49. The official was in no position emotionally to argue his case theologically. All he could plead for was mercy,** for his child was at the point of death. **4:50. Jesus' calm reply to the official's desperate request created a crisis.** Jesus announced, You may go. Your son will live. **If the official really believed that Jesus could make a difference in Capernaum, he must also believe Him now in Cana.** So he took Jesus at His word and left. **4:51-53. On the way back the official must have pondered Jesus' promise every step of his journey.** His servants met him with good news. [BKC]

Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee: Jesus' headquarters

- **Capernaum.** The most important city on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was here that Jesus established His headquarters for the major part of His public ministry (Mt. 4:13). In Mt. 9:1 Capernaum is called “his own city.” At least three of Jesus’ disciples came from there. Peter and Andrew, originally from Bethsaida (Jn. 1:44), had apparently moved to Capernaum (Mk. 1:29). It was from a tax office in the same city that Matthew rose to follow Jesus (Mt. 9:9). Many miracles were performed in and around Capernaum: e.g., the paralyzed servant of the centurion was healed (Mt. 8:5–13); a paralytic, carried to Jesus by four friends and let down through the roof, picked up his bed and walked (Mk. 2:1–12); and Peter’s mother-in-law was cured of a fever (Mk. 1:29–31). While we know Capernaum as an important place in Jesus’ Galilean ministry, **its larger significance is indicated by the presence of a Roman centurion and detachment of troops (Mt. 8:5–9), a customs station (Mt. 9:9), and a high officer of the king (Jn. 4:46).** [ISBE]
- Population: **Estimates range from "a thousand at most" [AHSG:114], to the standard estimate of 12-15K [SHJ:136], up to 20K [GLA:27].** It is understood to have been one of the **most densely populated areas in the Roman world [SHJ:136].** This would have been a mixture of Jew and Gentile--but predominately Jewish...”[NTSE:83]. (from the ThinkTank)
- After Jesus began his ministry, he moved to Capernaum (Matt 4:13; Mark 2:1). Capernaum had a synagogue which had been built with the sponsorship of the local centurion (Luke 7:2–5). While in Capernaum, Jesus healed several people (Matt 8:5; Mark 1:21–28; 2:1–12; Luke 7:1–10; John 4:46–54) and taught in the synagogue (Luke 4:31–38; cf. John 6:22–59). **The city, however, eventually received a scathing denunciation when Jesus condemned its stubbornness as worse than Sodom’s (Matt 11:23–24).** Later, during the First Jewish Revolt, Josephus was taken to Capernaum for his initial medical treatment after he was injured in battle (Life 72) [ABD]
- *When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. 13 Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:*
*“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—
the people living in darkness have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”*
From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” (Mt 4.12ff)
- *Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath began to teach the people. They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority. In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an evil spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, “Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are —the Holy One of God!” “Be quiet!” Jesus said sternly. “Come out of him!” Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him. All the people were amazed and said to each other, “What is this teaching? With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!” And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area. (Lk 4.31ff)*

- The incident Luke next gives is perhaps more striking than the parallel in Mark (1:21-34) because it exemplifies the liberating work described in the preceding Isaiah quotation (vv. 18-19). The reaction of the people, though comparable to that in the preceding incident (vv. 20-22), differs from it in one important aspect. **Now they are astonished that this teacher, who in their eyes was not even a rabbi, taught with authority (v. 32). The contrast is sharpened in Mark 1:22 by the additional words "not as the teachers of the law." The majority of rabbis would base their teaching on the chain of tradition, citing the opinions of their predecessors.** By omitting this specific comparison, Luke may simply be deferring to his Gentile readership, who would perhaps not be as aware as Jewish readers of rabbinical custom. **33-35** Demon possession is too frequent and integral to the Gospel narratives to minimize or, worse, to discard it as Hellenistic superstition. This is only the first mention of it in Luke, the climax of such incidents coming in 11:14-22. Significantly, Jesus is confronted by demonic activity during his first public ministry Luke describes following the introductory sermon at Nazareth. **The "good news of the kingdom of God" (v. 43) Jesus was proclaiming signaled an attack on the forces of evil.** Luke wants us to understand the centrality of the kingdom in Jesus' ministry and in that of his disciples. (See his unique use of the expression "kingdom of God" in such passages as 9:27, 60, 62.) A holy war is being launched and, as v. 34 suggests, the demons know it. This war will be carried on by Jesus' disciples (9:1-3; 10:8-9, 17). ... The possessed man shrieks and utters an expression of "indignant surprise". The word "Ha" (v. 34) is followed by an idiomatic rhetorical question (*ti hemin kai soi*, "What do you want with us?") that may be rendered "What do we have to do with each other?" or, loosely, "Why this interference?". The demon, perhaps exemplifying James's comment that "the demons believe and shudder" (James 2:19), senses the purpose of Jesus' presence. In keeping with the pattern in the Gospels, testimony to the truth about Christ comes from a number of different and unexpected sources. ... Jesus responded sternly with a command to be silent (v. 35). In Jesus' action we may see the beginning of **a pattern of prohibiting the premature proclamation of his identity. Throughout the Gospels Jesus guards the fact of his messiahship, probably (1) to prevent a misinterpretation that would draw to him revolutionary minded dissidents seeking a leader against Rome; (2) to allow his messianic works themselves to establish his authority among true believers (cf. 7:18-23); and (3) to avoid an inappropriate self-proclamation as Messiah, especially if there was, as it now appears, an understanding that the true Messiah would allow others to proclaim him as such, rather than doing so himself.** If none of these is the reason here, Jesus is at least maintaining his authority by silencing the enemy. What follows is not technically an exorcism, because Jesus does not use an incantation or invoke the authority of another. Instead he speaks a simple word of command on his own authority. Luke, always interested in the physical condition of people, observes that the demon came out violently but without hurting the man. [EBC]
- 4:33-34.** Demons were often associated with magic, and magicians tried to subdue other spiritual forces by invoking their names. **If the demon is trying to subdue Jesus in this way** ("I know who you are" was used to subdue spiritual powers in magical texts), as some scholars have suggested—**his ploy does not work. [4:35-37.] Exorcists had two main methods of expelling demons:** (1) scaring the demon out or making it too sick to stay—for example, by putting a smelly root up the possessed person's nose in the hope that the demon would not be able to stand it—or (2) invoking the name of a higher spirit to get rid of the lower one. **The people are amazed that Jesus can be effective by simply ordering the demons to leave.** [BBC]

- “he rebuked,” with its Semitic equivalent רעג, *gāʿar* when used of God or with reference to evil spirits, is **an activity of power, not merely of criticism**. It not only **identifies** the evil but also **subdues** it. [WBC]

The Healing of Peter’s Mother-in-Law:

As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them [Mark]

Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now Simon’s mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them. [Luke]

- **The House of Simon Peter:** The house of Simon Peter at Capernaum is mentioned many times in the Gospels, so much so that in referring to his house, the Evangelists do so with or without the article (Matt 17:25; Mark 2:1; 3:20; 9:33); alternatively they refer to it with the name of Peter (Matt 8:14) or of Simon and Andrew (Mark 1:29)... The house of Simon Peter was found in 1968 in the first campaign of the excavations. It is situated in the SE corner of a vast insula which extends from the shore of the lake to the Hellenistic *decumanus* [E-W road]. Its N side lies under the balcony of the synagogue; its E side faces an open area which adjoins the *cardo maximus* [central N-S road] and to which reference is made in Mark 1:33 and 2:2. **The archaeological finds show that this house had already been built in the Hellenistic period, and that therefore, Simon Peter must have acquired it when he settled with his clan at Capernaum.** The entry to the vast dwelling was from the open space to the E. The plan of the house had **three** courts, around which were arranged the numerous living rooms. Among these rooms were two situated on the S side of the N court, which was the court into which one entered from the street. **These two rooms were transformed in the apostolic period into a “house church”;** here the excavators found part of the paving of the floor, which was surfaced with lime plaster. The walls of the house–church were likewise covered with plaster and had painted decorations consisting of Judeo–Christian emblems. [ABD]
- Peter was married (1Cor 9:5: *Don’t we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord’s brothers and Cephas*) and **had moved with his brother Andrew from their home in Bethsaida** (John 1:44) to Capernaum, possibly to remain near Jesus (Matt 4:13). His mother-in-law's fever (8:14) may have been malarial; fever itself was considered a disease, not a symptom, at that time (cf. John 4:52; Acts 28:8). **Jewish Halakah forbade touching persons with many kinds of fever** (SBK, 1:479f.). **But Jesus healed with a touch** (8:15). **As in v. 3, the touch did not defile the healer but healed the defiled.** [EBC, Mt]
- “This being the case, some think that here and in Luke 8:24 (cf. Matt 8:26; Mark 4:39) there must be demonic influence behind fever and storm (because of Jesus’ ‘personal-looking’ rebukes). However, **this is not the case in God's shaking of the heavens or the Red Sea (Job 26:11; Ps 106:9 [105:9 LXX]) and need not be assumed here.**

- “Ancient **medical writers** distinguished between a ‘small’ (*mikros*) and a ‘great’ (*megalos*) fever. Luke clarifies that Peter’s mother-in-law has the latter, thus emphasizing Jesus’ healing power. Though such a clarification cannot prove that a physician wrote this Gospel (other educated writers might make such a distinction), it provides one more piece of evidence for Luke’s authorship of this Gospel” [ZIBBC]
- The setting of the story shows verisimilitude: **Jesus and his companions would be going to Simon’s home for the main meal of the Sabbath, served just after the synagogue service** (cf. 14:1). ... Although the use of συνέχομαι may be due to Luke’s predilection for the word (6x; Acts, 3x; Mt., 4:24; Mk., Ox), **it is in fact the correct term to use for ‘being afflicted’ by illness** (Plato, Gorg. 512a; Jos. Ant. 13:398; Mt. 4:24; Acts 28:8) and stresses the severity of the complaint (H. Koester, TDNT VII, 877-885). ... Here he stands over her, since she is lying on a pallet on the ground; ἐφίστημι is Lucan (2:9; et al.), and for the use of ἐπάνω cf. 2 Sa. 1:9; Schlatter, 50. Then Jesus rebukes the fever, in the same way as he had rebuked the demon (4:35; cf. Mk. 4:39 of rebuking the sea). The use of the word stresses that both miracles are wrought by the word of Jesus (cf. 18:42; Acts 3:7). [NIGTC]

The Calling of the first disciples/miraculous catch of fish:

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, he saw at the water’s edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.” Simon answered, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.” When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon’s partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men.” So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him. (Lk 5)

- **1-3** Luke begins this story mentioning the pressure of the crowds, as he occasionally does elsewhere (8:42, 45; 19:3). Their attention is on the "word of God" spoken by Jesus. **The shore of the lake provided an excellent, acoustically serviceable amphitheater.** Luke, being observant of detail, draws our attention to two boats, and then singles out Simon as the owner of one of them. Jesus gets into the boat and again teaches, his voice carrying across the water to the crowds.
- ZEBEDEE (zeb'e-de, Gr. Zebedaios, meaning uncertain). A fisherman on the Sea of Galilee (Mark 1:20), the father of James and John (Matt 4:21; Mark 1:19). He was the husband of Salome and in all probability lived in the vicinity of Bethsaida (Matt 27:56; Mark 15:40). **Because of Mark’s reference to his hired servants, one would judge that he had been a man of means and influence** (Mark 1:20). Our only glimpse of him in the Bible is with his sons in their boat mending their nets (Matt 4:21-22; Mark 1:19-20). [NIDB]

- **ZEBEDEE.** A Galilean fisherman, husband of Salome, father of the Apostles James and John (Matt 4:21; 10:2). Perhaps resided in Bethsaida or Capernaum.

Zebedee appears in all four gospels as the father of two of Jesus' most prominent disciples, James and John, who with Peter stood at the center of the Twelve. The three were privileged to witness the Transfiguration (Matt 17:1-8), the raising of Jairus' daughter: "He permitted no one to enter with him, except Peter and John and James" (Luke 8:51), and the private sorrow in Gethsemane (Matt 26:37). Zebedee, therefore, became known not because of his deeds (at least, none are recorded), but because he was the father of two famous sons who were among the Lord's Twelve Apostles, **one of whom wrote the beloved gospel according to John.**

Zebedee and his two sons **operated a thriving fishing business** on the Sea of Galilee in partnership with another set of renowned brothers, Andrew and Peter (Luke 5:7-10). **It must have been one of the larger public establishments of Capernaum because there were hired men** (Mark 1:20). **No doubt Zebedee was a man of means and influence**, so much so that some believe **he marketed some of his choice produce among the elite in Jerusalem (John 18:16).**

The fishing business was radically changed the day that the call came to the two brothers. The picture we have from the gospels portrays Zebedee in a boat with his two sons and hired men, mending their nets on the shore of the Sea of Galilee when Jesus came by. "And...saw...James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in a boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him" (Matt 4:21, 22; Mark 1:19, 20). Although it must have harmed the fishing business somewhat, there is no record that he protested their forsaking a profitable business which one day would be theirs. On the contrary, there is reason to believe he continued the business because after the Resurrection Peter said: "I am going fishing" (John 21:3). **It is possible that the business furnished much financial support for Jesus and His disciples during the years of our Lord's ministry.**

Zebedee's wife was Salome (Matt 27:56; Mark 15:40; 16:1) who also basked in the light of her sons because she is always designated as "the mother of the sons of Zebedee" (Matt 27:56). **The whole family must have been avid supporters of Jesus because Salome accompanied Jesus during His ministry in Galilee to serve Him** (Mark 15:40). **She was later present at the crucifixion (Matt 27:55), and was among the women who went to the tomb to anoint the Lord** (Mark 16:1). Yet she and her sons revealed private ambitions when she asked the Master for special favors for her two sons in the kingdom: "Command that these two sons of mine may sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom" (Matt 20:20 ff.; cf. Mark 10:35). The Lord's refusal and patient teaching brought spiritual understanding **because the entire family of Zebedee remained loyal to the end.**

- **Fishers of People.** Like Moses' experience as a shepherd, David's as a commander and Joseph's as an administrator, **the background of these disciples as fishermen can provide them a perspective that will help them for their new task.**
5:1–2. Nets would collect things other than edible fish, thus requiring cleaning. Edible fish in the inland "Sea" of Galilee (the Lake of Gennesaret) today include varieties of carp; Josephus says that the lake of Galilee held several kinds of fish.
5:4–5. Peter's obedience is exemplary; a fisherman might trust a rabbi's teaching on religious matters but need not do so in his own field of expertise, fishing. The fishermen

had labored with a dragnet at night, which should have caught them many more fish than Jesus' instructions in 5:5. Sources suggest that fish were more easily caught at night than in the day in the lake of Galilee; they would be sold in the morning.

5:6. Jesus' multiplication of food and of creatures has Old Testament precedent (e.g., food—Ex 16:13; 2 Kings 4:1–7, 42–44; **creatures**—Ex 8:6, 17, 24; 10:13).

5:7. Because the overhead cost of equipment was high, fishermen often worked together in cooperatives; families would sometimes work together to increase their profits. Other fishing cooperatives are known from ancient Palestine, so it is not unusual for Simon and Andrew to be in business with the family of Zebedee (5:10). Men working from more than one boat could let down larger nets than those working from only one; fish could then be emptied onto the boat or the nets hauled ashore.

5:10. “Fishers of people” could allude to two Old Testament texts (Jer 16:16; Hab 1:15), **transforming an image of impending judgment into one of rescue from that judgment**; but Jesus is probably just transforming their vocation as fishermen, **as God made Moses and David “shepherds” of his people.**

5:11. Fishermen made a better-than-average income (even if they had had a bad night—5:5), so leaving their job is an act of radical commitment that they would expect to adversely affect them economically. [BBC]

“When the nets were lowered they enclosed (συγκλείω, Rom. 11:32; Gal. 3:22f.) a great quantity of fish (cf. 6:17; 23:27; Acts 14:1; 17:4). **See especially Jn. 21:6** (*And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were **not able to draw it** for the multitude of fishes. 7 Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, **It is the Lord***) [NIGTC]

The Call of Matthew

And as Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man, called Matthew, sitting in the tax office; and He said to him, “Follow Me!” And he rose, and followed Him (Mt 9:9)

- **9:9.** Levi may have been a tax farmer working for Herod; situated at an office in Capernaum, **he was more likely a customs agent, charging import duties on wares brought through this town on important nearby trade routes. Even more than the fishermen, he had a secure and prosperous job, which he surrendered to follow Jesus' call.**
9:10. Most people regarded a man of wealth inviting a religious teacher over for dinner as honorable behavior. **Tax gatherers, however, were regarded as collaborators with the Romans and were despised by religious people.** Some commentators have argued that “sinners” may refer to all who did not eat food in ritual purity, but the term probably refers to anyone who lived sinfully rather than religiously, as if they did not care what the religious community thought of them.
9:11. Table fellowship indicated intimate relations among those who shared it. The Pharisees were particularly scrupulous about their special rules on eating and did not like to eat with less scrupulous people, especially people like tax gatherers and sinners. **Here they assume that Jesus, being a wise teacher, ought to share their religious convictions, which they believed were scriptural (Ps 1:1).**

9:12. Jesus' reply plays on a common image of the day (comparing physicians and teachers) to make his point. Quick, witty repartee was characteristic of popular teachers in both Jewish and Greek traditions.

9:13. Other rabbis often said, "Go and learn" or "Come and see" to direct hearers to scriptural proofs for their position. **Hosea 6:6 does not reject sacrifice or ritual, but elevates right relationship with God and right treatment of the poor, the oppressed and the outcasts above sacrifice and ritual** (cf. similarly 1 Sam 15:22; Ps 40:6; 50:7–15; 51:16; 69:30–31; Prov 21:3). [BBC, Matthew]

- **5:27–28.** Customs officials were employees in Herod's civil service; they made good wages and **were not likely to get their jobs back once they left them, especially on such short notice.**

5:29. Jesus' invitation for Levi to follow him constituted a great honor, especially for one who would have normally been excluded from religious circles. That Levi should respond by throwing a party for him is not surprising; **repaying honor was an important part of social life in antiquity.** Table fellowship indicated intimate relations among those who shared it, and given the nature of ancient banquets, it was natural for a well-to-do person to invite his (former) colleagues and also subordinates to a feast. [BBC, Luke]

- "Tax collectors, or tax farmers, in that culture were **despised as greedy, self-serving, and parasitic. They grew rich at the expense of the poor by extorting from them more than was required by their superiors in order to fill their own pockets.** They furthermore often **compromised regulations for purity in their handling of pagan money and their dealings with Gentiles.** That Jesus should call a tax collector to be his disciple must have been in itself **scandalous.** We hear no objection to that here, but when in the following narrative Jesus fraternizes with tax collectors and sinners (the "lower" end of society), we do encounter a protest.

10–11 Luke (5:29) makes clearest what we are left to infer in Matthew, viz., that Levi-Matthew threw a *δοχὴν μεγάλην*, "great banquet," in honor of Jesus, who had first invited the unworthy tax collector to be with him "in the house," although unspecified by Matthew, refers probably to Matthew's own house (only Luke 5:29 makes this absolutely clear) in keeping with the tax collector's financial well-being. The "reclining at table" in itself points to a special meal rather than an ordinary one. With the characteristic ἰδοῦ, "look," Matthew calls his reader's attention to the strange combination of guests around this banquet table: together with "Jesus and his disciples" (τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ) were πολλοὶ τελῶναι καὶ ἁμαρτωλοί, "many tax collectors and sinners." The tax collectors were probably Matthew's own (and now former) colleagues who were now given the chance to meet this Jesus, Matthew's new master. The "sinners," presumably friends of the same crowd, were contaminated by association **but probably also disreputable figures in their own right who had abandoned the law. Clearly righteousness was the last concern of this crowd, and yet here they were sitting at the same table with Jesus and his disciples.** It must be noted here that table fellowship in that culture was regarded as a very important symbol of the closeness, indeed the **oneness**, of those participating. **This is one reason, for example, that Jews were not allowed to sit at the same table with Gentiles.** For Jesus and his disciples to be at the same table with tax collectors and sinners implied a full acceptance of them. (With this background, the symbolism of the messianic banquet in 8:11 becomes all the more remarkable.) Thus the question of the Pharisees, who were guardians of such separation in the cause of righteousness, comes as no surprise. For Jesus' association with

tax collectors and sinners challenges a basic principle of the Pharisees and from their perspective calls into question his real commitment to doing God's will. "Why does your teacher [ὁ διδάσκαλος ὑμῶν] eat with tax collectors and sinners?" they ask the disciples.

The word order of the question puts "tax collectors and sinners" first for emphasis. διδάσκαλος is used here again in the mouth of Jesus' opponents (cf. on 8:19).

12 Although the question was addressed to the disciples, it inquired about the reason not for their conduct but for their teacher's conduct. In rabbinic tradition the closeness between a rabbi and his disciples is such that a rabbi is responsible for the conduct of his disciples and vice versa. In this instance, Jesus himself takes the initiative to answer the question. "the healthy have no need of a physician, but rather those who are sick," may well be or allude to a proverbial saying. The parable from Diogenes (fourth century b.c.) points to such a conclusion: "neither does a physician ... who is capable of giving health practice among those who are well" (Stobaeus, Eclogues 3.462.14). The sense in which Jesus means the words to be understood is conveyed in the parallel final sentence of the pericope (which in Mark [and Luke] follows this proverb directly): "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (v 13b). In this context the symbolism of the proverb is transparent: the healthy are the righteous; the ill are the sinners.

13 If the Pharisees refer to Jesus as "teacher," Jesus will give them something to learn. μάθετε, "learn," has the same root as μαθητής, "disciple" or "learner." In the formulaic school language of the Pharisees themselves, Jesus the teacher tells them: Go and learn the meaning of a particular text of Scripture (Hosea 6:6), which he now quotes: Ἐλεος θέλω καὶ οὐ θυσίαν, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice." The quotation is perhaps from the LXX, but modified by Matthew to agree more closely with the Hebrew. Although Hos 6:6 was used after the destruction of the temple to indicate that the sacrifices were unnecessary, this was not the point of Jesus: "and not" here can mean "more than." θυσία, "sacrifice," here stands for strict obedience to the commandments of God. From the logic of the Pharisees' position, the verse should read "I desire sacrifice and not mercy," or at least substantiate the conclusion that sacrifice (obedience) is more important than mercy. **Yet Hosea, speaking for Yahweh, put the emphasis upon mercy (Hebrew hiesed, "steadfast love") even to the extent of denying the absolute importance of sacrifice. Mercy is a better way of obedience.** The same verse, which is obviously important to Matthew, is quoted by Jesus to the Pharisees in 12:7 in the context of the question of Sabbath observance. There too he makes the point that some things are more important than strict obedience to the letter of the law. At its heart, Jesus' healing ministry is about mercy—the granting of unmerited favor to the unworthy. Thus he can now summarize the purpose of his coming, the central work of his ministry, in the words "I did not come to call the righteous but sinners." And for this reason Jesus can be described as "friend of tax collectors and sinners" (11:19). Again, therefore, as in the preceding pericope (cf. vv. 6, 8), we are brought to the centrality of the forgiveness of sin in the ministry of Jesus. It is for this reason that he comes to call sinners (cf. Luke 19:10) and that sinners are often the quickest to respond to him. In 21:31 Jesus will say, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." [Word Biblical Commentary : Matthew 1-13.]

- "The locale is probably the outskirts of Capernaum. Matthew was sitting "at the tax collector's booth," a customs and excise booth at the border between the territories of Philip and Herod Antipas. Having demonstrated his authority to forgive sins (vv. 1-8), Jesus now calls to himself a man whose occupation made him a pariah--a sinner and an associate of sinners (cf. 1Ti 1:15). Since Jews not uncommonly had two or more names, the simple

equation of Levi (see Mk 2:14) and Matthew (a name likely meaning "gift of God") is the most obvious course to take. Some suggest that Matthew's work as a tax collector assured his fluency in Aramaic and Greek and that his accuracy in keeping records fitted him for note taking and later writing his gospel.

12-13 These verses again connect Jesus' healing ministry with his "healing" of sinners (see comment on 8:17). The sick need a doctor and Jesus heals them; likewise the sinful need mercy and forgiveness, and Jesus heals them. The Pharisees were not so healthy as they thought (cf. 7:1-5); more important, they did not understand the purpose of Jesus' mission. Expecting a Messiah who would crush the sinful and support the righteous, they had little place for one who accepted and transformed the sinner and dismissed the "righteous" as hypocrites. [EBC, Matt]

- On "*I came not to...*": "No statement of Jesus in this gospel is more profound than this one. A doctor ministers not to healthy persons but to those who are sick. So Jesus came not to call the "*righteous*" (GK G1465; here meaning the self-righteous) but "*sinners*" (i.e., those who are alienated from God in their lives). Jesus' call is to salvation; and, in order to share in it, there must be a recognition of need. A self-righteous person is incapable of recognizing that need, but a sinner can". [EBC, Mr 2.17]
- From the ThinkTank...

"But it is the religious and civic rejection that is most striking in this case. The later Rabbinic writings (seeming to agree with the general picture of the Gospels) portray the religious establishment **as rendering the tax-collector as almost impossible to save**. Jeremias, in discussing the "despised trade lists" in the literature [JTJ:chapter 14], shows the almost irredeemable nature of tax-collectors [p. 310-311]:

"In the same way experience had shown that tax- collectors and publicans, whose **post went to the highest bidder**, together with their subordinates, almost always abused their position to enrich themselves by dishonesty. 'For herdsmen, tax collectors and publicans is repentance hard', it was once said (b. B.K. 94b Bar.). **The reason was that they could never know every person they had injured or cheated, and to whom they must make amends.**"

E.P. Sanders points out that this judgment was based on the conviction that these trades were usurious [HJ:34-35], and a radical violation of Leviticus 25.36-38.

But it gets worse...The literature about tax-collectors (of all types, by the way) is almost unanimous in painting tax-collectors as greedy and dishonest, with only one exception by Josephus [HFJ:228-229]. In fact, **in the Rabbinic material (Nedarim iii.4) it was okay for the common Jew to lie to one about his property (!), and beggars and merchants were not even supposed to take money from their cash-box (Baba kamma 10.1,2)** [for discussion, see Schurer, HJP:1.2.17, p. 71, note 108].

But it gets worse yet...If the later rabbinic traditions DO have a substantial measure of applicability to the earlier setting we are discussing, then Jeremias' discussion of 'official' viewpoints of tax-collectors points to abject civil rejection as well [JTJ:311-312]:

"But men who followed the trades in list IV were not only despised, nay hated, by the people; **they were *de jure* and officially deprived of rights and ostracized.** **Anyone engaging in such trades could never be a judge, and his inadmissibility as a witness put him on the same footing as a gentile slave** (M.R. Sh. i.8). In other words **he was deprived of civil and political rights to which every Israelite had claim**, even those such as bastards who were of seriously blemished descent. This makes us realize the enormity of Jesus' act in calling a publican to be one of his intimate disciples (Matt. 9.9 par.; 10.3), and announcing the Good News to publicans and 'sinners' by sitting down to eat with them."

On the other hand, we have no way of knowing to what extent these rabbinic admonitions and perspectives would have been shared by the populace of Capernaum--although, as Galileans they were certainly in conflict with other rabbinic traditions in other settings. Although only 5% of the Palestinian populace of the day was even associated with a "party" (i.e. Pharisee, Sadducee, Zealot, Essene) [NTF:90], the Pharisees played a very important part in public life, due largely to their close connection with country, lay-run synagogues [NTF:80, 85-86].

But overall, we get a view of Matthew as a wealthy, unpopular, ostracized Jew in the town of Capernaum. His employer would have been Herod Antipas (not as bad as his predecessors, but not really popular at the time--see below). He would have not had access to the traditional Jewish cultic rituals that presupposed Jerusalem or official sanction (e.g. public feasts). **As a highly literate individual (and probably selected for the post in part due to that)**, and as probably a Jew, he would have had perhaps better-than-average access to the biblical materials as well. His social circles would have been with "outcasts" (many wealthy and/or aristocratic and/or official personages). “

The Faith of the Centurion

When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." So Jesus went with them.

He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well. (Lk 7:1)

- **A Pagan’s Amazing Faith. 7:1–2.** The nearest Roman legion was stationed in Syria, but many troops were also stationed at Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast; perhaps smaller groups were stationed or settled (after retirement?) at various points in Palestine. Centurions commanded a “century” (i.e., 100), which **in practice consisted of sixty to eighty troops.** Centurions were the backbone of the Roman army, in charge of discipline.

7:3–5. Non-Jews who feared God and donated substantial sums to the Jewish community were well respected. Centurions’ salaries were much higher than those of their troops, but for this centurion to have built the local synagogue represented a great financial sacrifice. The main point lies in the contrasting views of worthiness (7:4, 6).

7:6. The centurion was not a full convert to Judaism and thus retained some of his **uncleanness as a Gentile, especially in regard to the food in his home. To invite a Jewish teacher into such a home would have been offensive under normal circumstances,** but in this case the community’s **elders** want to make an exception (7:3).

7:7. During their twenty or so years of service in the Roman army, soldiers were not permitted to marry. Many had illegal local concubines, an arrangement that the army overlooked and the concubines found profitable. **But centurions, who could be moved around more frequently, would be less likely than ordinary soldiers to have such relationships; they often married only after retirement.** By ancient definitions, however, a household could include servants, and household servants and masters sometimes grew very close—especially if they made up the entire family unit.

7:8. The centurion demonstrates that he understands the principle of authority that Jesus exercises. Roman soldiers were very disciplined and except in rare times of mutiny followed orders carefully. [BBC]
- “The theme of the opening section is the faith of a gentile centurion who recognised the authority which Jesus had to perform cures in the name of God. He displayed not only faith but also humility over against Jesus, considering himself unworthy to approach him personally. His action in sending a group of Jews to speak on his behalf to Jesus bears witness both to the reputation for piety which he had with them and also to their willingness to bring him into relationship with Jesus. His story is thus an example of the fact that God is willing to accept all men alike and that everyone who fears him and performs righteousness is acceptable to him (Acts 10:34f.). At the same time the story shows that the Jews had no compunctions about bringing such a man into contact with Jesus.... Nevertheless, despite this commendation of Jews who adopted such an attitude, the story voices criticism of the general lack of faith which Jesus found among the Jews, and provides evidence for the condemnation uttered in 7:31-35. ... Schlatter, 251, rightly notes that while the Jews point to the good works of the centurion, Jesus commends the faith which lies behind them as the thing that ultimately matters.

(2). Luke adds that he was ἔντιμος to his master, a word that here means ‘honoured, respected’ (14:8; Phil. 2:29), rather than ‘precious, valuable’ (1 Pet. 2:4, 5**), and indicates why the centurion was so concerned over him; Luke’s own concern for the inferior members of society is perhaps also reflected.

(5) Jews use the term ἔθνος to refer to themselves over against gentiles (23:2; Acts 10:22; et al.; Jn. 11:48-52; 18:35). The centurion is regarded as worthy of help from a Jewish prophet because of his loving attitude to the Jewish people. He showed this especially by building the (local) synagogue for them. The giving of contributions by gentiles towards the upkeep of synagogues is well attested: t. Meg. 3:5 (224) (SB IV:1, 142f.). That a gentile should have built the synagogue itself, however, is unusual. Possibly he was simply a large, or the main,

benefactor. The opportunities for personal enrichment in the police force were good, even for an honest man, and therefore the centurion could have had the means to give.

(6) Jesus' positive acceptance of the recommendation is seen in his accompanying of the elders towards the centurion's house (cf. Acts 10:20). But the main point in the verse is what happened while he was on the way (ἔπορεύετο, imperfect; MH III, 66): Jesus was by this time (ἤδη) not far from the house... The centurion sent a group of his friends with a message to be delivered to Jesus as if he himself were actually saying it. ... Jesus is addressed as κύριος, the gentile equivalent for 'Rabbi' (cf. 5:8; 6:46). The request μὴ σκύλλου, 'do not trouble yourself', recurs in 8:49 par. Mk. 5:35 when Jairus' friends tell him not to trouble Jesus because his sick daughter has died. ... The centurion does not feel worthy (ἰκανός, 3:16; cf. ἄξιος, v. 4) that Jesus should come under his roof (στέγη, Mt. 8:8; Mk. 2:4**). The thought is hardly of ritual uncleanness but of unworthiness, like that felt by John the Baptist, before the authority of a teacher sent from God.

(7) Its point is that if the centurion is not worthy to have Jesus in his house, it follows that he is not worthy to meet him outside it. Let Jesus therefore simply say the word, and the boy will be healed without the need for any personal contact. ... For healing by a word cf. Ps. 107:20; Mt. 8:16.

(8) The centurion knows that Jesus can heal simply by a command, for he also is a person who is under authority and can use his delegated authority to give orders that others must obey; so Jesus being under the authority of God can give orders to others.

(9) When Jesus hears this deduction from the character of military discipline to the nature of his own authority under God, he expresses surprise at the centurion (θαυμάζω with acc. of person, 2 Thes. 1:10). To these Jewish witnesses Jesus declares solemnly that he has not found so great faith in the power of God revealed in himself even in Israel among the very people who might be expected to believe in his power.

(10) ... the messengers returned home and found the slave well ... The narrative describes a healing which takes place without any contact between Jesus and the patient, as in Mk. 7:24-29, where it is again a case of curing a gentile. Such cures were believed to be possible by Jews at the time (cf. Ber. 34b, in SB II, 441), and hence it is not surprising that similar stories were related about Jesus. [NIGTC]

- From the ThinkTank:

“This soldier would not actually have been a *Roman* centurion, but an *auxiliary* centurion, likely chosen from the surrounding areas of Caesarea and the Decapolis [RLRS:124; GLA:104], perhaps even commanding a group of Hellenistic-Jewish soldiers [EBC, in. loc. Matt 8.5] in service to Herod. On a border town, especially a major trade route, they would be a '**peacekeeping**' force. **There was a Roman road there, which typically had soldiers stationed there for police activities** (e.g. retarding bandits and brigands) [Atlas of the Roman World, Facts on File:1982, p. 156-157].

This centurion is painted in glowing terms by Luke (in his parallel account), in virtue of his attitude toward the Jews of the city, with the additional historical detail (Luke 7.2f): *The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. 4 When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, 5 because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." 6 So Jesus went with them. .*

There is an interesting piece of archaeological data that illuminates this [BAFCSP:203-204]:

"Perhaps archaeology also has something to contribute. The splendid limestone synagogue visible today in Capernaum is to be dated to the end of the 4th century AD. But underneath the assembly hall lies a basalt building of the same ground plan. By means of the ceramics below the walls that earlier building was dated by S. Loffreda to the 3rd century AD. Exactly under the central nave of the two later buildings is located a pavement of basalt stones dating back to the 1st century AD. **According to Loffreda we have here the remains of the centurion's synagogue. Nearby, but separated by an uninhabited piece of land, V. Tsferis found other houses of the 1st century AD. They were built in a better fashion than the houses of the main settlement, and one of them was a typical Roman bathhouse.** We may think of the centurion living here, **separated as a pagan mercenary** (cf. Lk 7.6) from the Jewish village."

Although in normal circumstances one could expect the Roman soldiers to be "missionaries" for the imperial cult (and in a century or two later, for the cult of Mithras), in the case of local militia/mercenaries, this would not typically be the case. Instead, they would be 'carriers' for the local religions of THEIR source of origin. In this case we have a centurion who was obviously impressed with the beauty and strength of the core Jewish faith.

Sychar in Samaria: Jesus crosses the line of honor/shame to help someone...

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, "Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John" —although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized—he left Judea and started back to Galilee. But he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this

mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.” Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?” Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” They left the city and were on their way to him. ... Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.” [John 4]

- SYCHAR (si'k ar, Gr. Sychar). A village of Samaria located near Jacob’s well, where Jesus met the Samaritan woman (John 4:5). It was situated **on the main road that led from Jerusalem through Samaria to Galilee**. No mention is made of it in the OT, but there is a Suchar or Sichar referred to in the rabbinical writings. Sychar is most often identified with the modern Askar, though the identification is not certain. It is situated close to Shechem (with which it has often been incorrectly identified) and **on the eastern slope of Mount Ebal**. The site, which by continuous tradition has been **identified with Jacob’s well, lies about half a mile (about one km.) to the south**. In Jesus’ day Sychar was **only a small village**. [NIBD]
- **1-3** Jesus' early ministry in the region of Judea was gaining attention, especially by the Pharisees, who constituted the ruling religious class. The growth of any messianic movement could easily be interpreted as having **political overtones**, and **Jesus did not want to become involved in any outward conflict with the state, whether Jewish or Roman**. In order to avoid a direct clash, he left Judea and journeyed northward to Galilee. **4-5** The **shortest route from Jerusalem to Galilee lay on the high road straight through Samaritan territory**. Many Jews **would not travel by that road**, for they regarded any contact with Samaritans as defiling. By the time of Jesus a strong rivalry and hatred between Jews and Samaritans prevailed. The words "had to" translate an expression of necessity. As the Savior of all humanity, Jesus felt he had to confront the smoldering suspicion and enmity between Jews and Samaritans by ministering to his enemies. Sychar was a small village near Shechem, about half a mile from Jacob's well, which is located in the modern Shechem or Nablus. **6** The well of Jacob lies at the foot of **Mount Gerizim, the center of Samaritan worship**. The "sixth hour" would probably have been about **noon**, reckoning from daybreak. It was an unusual time for a woman to come to a village well for water. Perhaps the Samaritan woman had a sudden need, or perhaps she did not care to meet the other women of the community, who may have shunned her because of her general character.

7-8 Undoubtedly the woman was surprised to find a man sitting by the well. Jesus' initial approach was a simple request for water, which would presuppose a favorable response. One would hardly refuse a drink of cold water to a thirsty traveler in the heat of the day. **The request did have a surprising element, however, for no Jewish rabbi would have volunteered to carry on a public conversation with a woman, nor would he have deigned to drink from a Samaritan's cup, as she implied by her answer.**

9-10 There was a trace of sarcasm in the woman's reply, as if she meant, "We Samaritans are the dirt under your feet until you want something; then we are good enough!" Jesus paid no attention to her flippancy or to her bitterness. He was more interested in winning the woman than in winning an argument. He appealed to her curiosity by the phrase "If you knew," implying that because of the nature of his person he could bestow on her a gift of God that would be greater than any ordinary water. His allusion was intended to lift her level of thinking from that of material need to spiritual realities.

11 The woman heard his words but missed his meaning. **"Living water" meant to her fresh spring water such as the well supplied.** She could not understand how he could provide this water without having any means of drawing it from the well (the well was over seventy-five feet deep).

12 The woman's reference to **"our father Jacob" was perhaps designed to bolster the importance of the Samaritans in the eyes of a Jewish rabbi. She was well aware of the low esteem the Jews had of her people.**

13-15 Jesus' second reply emphasized the contrast between the water in the well and what he intended to give. The material water would allay thirst only temporarily; the spiritual water would quench the inner thirst forever. The water in the well had to be drawn up with hard labor; the spiritual water would bubble up from within. Because of her nonspiritual perspective, the woman's interests were selfish.

16-17 Jesus' request to call her husband was both proper and strategic--proper because it was not regarded as good etiquette for a woman to talk with a man unless her husband were present; strategic because it placed her in a dilemma from which she could not free herself without admitting her need. She had no husband, and she would not want to confess her sexual irregularities to a stranger. The abruptness of her reply shows that she was at last emotionally touched.

18 Jesus shocked the woman when he lifted the curtain on her past life. **The conversation had passed from the small-talk stage to the personal.** Her evil deeds were being exposed by the light, but was she willing to acknowledge the truth?

19-20 Realizing his superhuman knowledge, **the woman called him a prophet; but then she tried to divert him. Since his probing was becoming uncomfortably personal, she began to argue a religious issue.** She raised the old controversy between Jews and Samaritans, whether worship should be offered on Mount Gerizim, at the foot of which they stood, or at Jerusalem, where Solomon's temple had been built. **The Samaritans founded their claim on the historic fact that when Moses instructed the people concerning the entrance into the Promised Land, he commanded that they set up an altar on Mount Ebal and that the tribes should be divided, half on Ebal and half on Gerizim.** As the Levites read the Law, the people responded antiphonally (Dt 27:1-28:68). The Jews held that since Solomon had been commissioned to build the temple in Jerusalem, the center of worship should be located there. The controversy was endless, and Jesus did not intend to allow himself to be drawn into a futile discussion.

21-23 Jesus avoided the argument by elevating the issue above mere location. He made no concessions and intimated that the Samaritans' worship was confused: "You Samaritans worship what you do not know." Probably he was alluding to the error of the woman's

ancestors, who had accepted a syncretism of foreign deities with the ancestral God of the Jewish faith. **To Jesus, true worship is that of the spirit, which means that the worshiper must deal honestly and openly with God. She, on the contrary, had been furtive and unwilling to open her heart to God.**

24 "God is spirit" carries one of the four noun descriptions of God found in the NT (the other three are "God is light" [1Jn 1:5]; "God is love" [1Jn 4:8, 16]; and "God is a consuming fire" [Heb 12:29]). Jesus was endeavoring to convey to the woman that God cannot be confined to one place nor conceived of as a material being. Only "the Word become flesh" (cf. 1:14) could represent him adequately.

25 Mystified by Jesus' words, the woman finally confessed her ignorance and at the same time expressed her longing for the Messiah. **It was the one nebulous hope that she had of finding God, for she expected that the coming Messiah would explain the mysteries of life. There was a Samaritan tradition that the prophet predicted by Moses in Dt 18:15 would come to teach God's people all things. On this sincere though vague hope Jesus founded his appeal to her spiritual consciousness.**

26 This is the one occasion when Jesus voluntarily declared his messiahship. In the Synoptic Gospels, normally he did not make such a public claim; on the contrary, he urged his disciples to silence (Mt 16:20; Mk 8:29-30; Lk 9:20-21). **In Galilee, where there were many would-be messiahs and a constant unrest based on the messianic hope, such a claim would have been dangerous.** In Samaria the concept would probably have been regarded more as religious than political and would have elicited a ready hearing for his teaching rather than a subversive revolt.

27 The disciples had left Jesus at the well. He was tired, and there would have been no need for him to have accompanied them into the town to buy food. They were surprised to find him talking with a woman--an apparent violation of custom--but they respected him too highly to question his behavior.

28-29 As the disciples approached, the woman made her way back to Sychar to report the interview to her fellow villagers. **She was so excited that she forgot her water pot.** At the village she was bold enough to suggest that perhaps the new person she had met might be the Messiah. "You don't suppose this could be the Messiah, do you?" would be a fair translation of her words.

30 **The elders of Sychar would probably not accept theological information from a woman of her reputation, and she did not venture to make a dogmatic pronouncement.** Nevertheless, her manner was so sincere and her invitation so urgent that they immediately proceeded to the well to investigate.

39-42 These few verses indicate two necessary and interrelated bases for belief: (1) the testimony of others and (2) personal contact with Jesus. **This woman's witness opened the way to him for the villagers.** If he could penetrate the shell of her materialism and present a message that would transform her, the Samaritans also could believe that he might be the Messiah. **That stage of belief was only introductory, however. The second stage was hearing him for themselves, and it brought them to the settled conviction expressed in "we know" (v.42).** They had progressed from a faith built on the witness of another to a faith built on their own experience [EBC]

- **A Gift for a Samaritan Sinner.** In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus' gift of the Spirit supersedes the ritual waters of John the Baptist (1:26, 33), ceremonial purification (2:6), proselyte baptism (3:5) and the Feast of Tabernacles (7:37-39; 9:7). It also apparently supersedes water having other religious symbolism associated with holy sites, such as healing

sanctuaries (5:2–8) and Jacob’s well (4:7–26). For John’s readers, who have the Spirit but lack many of the rituals of their opponents, these contrasts would constitute an encouragement.

4:7. That this Samaritan woman comes to the well alone rather than in the company of other women probably indicates that the rest of the women of Sychar did not like her, in this case because of her sexual activities. Although Jewish teachers warned against talking much with women in general, they would have **especially avoided Samaritan women, who, they declared, were unclean from birth. Other ancient accounts show that even asking water of a woman could be interpreted as flirting with her—especially if she had come alone due to a reputation for looseness. Jesus breaks all the rules of Jewish piety here.** In addition, both Isaac (Gen 24:17) and Jacob (Gen 29:10) met their wives at wells; such precedent created the sort of potential ambiguity at this well that religious people wished to avoid altogether.

4:10. “Living water” simply meant “fresh” or “flowing” as opposed to stagnant or well water, but given John’s propensity for double meanings (see 3:5), here the term may also mean “water of life.”

4:12. Her saying “our father Jacob” is an affront to the Jewish teaching that the Jewish people were children of Jacob, and the Samaritans were at best half-breeds. The one who is greater than Jacob does not argue the point with her; it is peripheral to the issue he wishes to drive home.

4:16–17. In view of the ambiguity of the situation (see comment on 4:7), her statement, “I have no husband,” could mean “I am available.” Jesus removes the ambiguity, which stems from his refusal to observe customs that reflected ethnic and gender prejudice, not from any actual flirtation on his part.

4:18. Jesus clarifies her ambiguous statement: she had been married five times and is not married to the man with whom she now lives. Samaritans were no less pious and strict than Jews, and her behavior would have resulted in ostracism from the Samaritan religious community—which would have been nearly coextensive with the whole Samaritan community.

4:19. Prophets were considered capable of knowing others’ thoughts (see comment on 1:42). Although this frequent designation for Jesus is inadequate (4:44; 6:14; 7:40; 9:17), it at least moves the conversation beyond 4:17. The Samaritans awaited not just any prophet, however, but the greatest prophet, one like Moses (Deut 18:15–18); see John 4:25.

4:20. Mount Gerizim, **the Samaritans’ holy site equivalent to Judaism’s Jerusalem, was in full view of Jacob’s well.** She uses the past tense for “worship” precisely because of her continuing consciousness of Jews’ and Samaritans’ racial separation: **roughly two centuries before, the Jewish king had obliterated the Samaritan temple on that mountain, and it had remained in ruins ever since.** Samaritans mocked the Jewish holy site and once, under cover of night, even sought to defile the Jerusalem temple. Jews similarly ridiculed Mount Gerizim and even built many of their synagogues so worshippers could face Jerusalem.

4:27. **Jewish piety warned men not to talk much with women** (some rabbis added, even with one’s own wife!), both because of temptation and because of what others might think. That the disciples are amazed yet trust their teacher enough not to ask about this situation is a sign of their respect for him, an attitude considered appropriate for faithful disciples. (A few later Jewish traditions report rabbis who disintegrated disrespectful disciples into heaps of ashes with their eyes, but such stories are meant only to illustrate the general principle that one ought not to challenge one’s teacher!)

4:28–30. Judaism did not have much regard for the witness of a woman, and the witness of an adulteress would be worthless; the situation was probably the same among the Samaritans.

Nevertheless, she witnesses the way Philip had (1:46). That she is distracted from her original purpose for coming to the well (4:28) and leaves behind her water pot suggests that Jesus' water has replaced the water of Jacob's well for her.

4:39–42. The Samaritans believe because they meet Jesus (cf. 1:46–49), **but the woman's relationship to her community also changes through her having become his first witness there.** For Jesus to lodge there, eating Samaritan food and teaching Samaritans (v. 40) would be ... shocking, extremely difficult, somewhat dangerous. The Jesus of the Gospels is more concerned with people than with custom. [BBC]

- **4:9.** This rendering may well be correct. A Rabbinic law of a.d. 66 stated that Samaritan women were considered as continually menstruating and thus unclean. Therefore a Jew who drank from a Samaritan woman's vessel would become ceremonially unclean.

“The Samaritans occupied a curious middle position between Jews and Gentiles. **Their origins went back to the intermarriage of Israelites left behind during the Assyrian exile of the northern kingdom with Gentiles (2 Kings 17:24). The Samaritans themselves, however, claimed descent from Joseph by way of the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim** (Josephus, Ant. 9.14.3 §291; 11.8.6 §§341, 344). In contrast, at least some Jews preferred to trace the Samaritans' ancestry back to Shechem, the rapist of Dinah, the sister of Jacob's twelve sons (Gen. 34). Because they occupied territory that according to the Jews belonged to the two above-mentioned tribes (which had not yet returned from exile), **they saw the Samaritans as an obstacle to the fulfillment of God's end-time promises to the Jews** (cf. Sir. 50:26: “**the foolish people** that live in Shechem”; T Levi 5-6).

In Jesus' day, relations between Jews and Samaritans were generally characterized by **bitter hostility** (e.g., Levi 7:2, which calls Shechem “**City of the Senseless**”). In an apparent attempt to ease the tension, Herod the Great married a Samaritan woman named Malthace, who bore him both Antipas and Archelaus (Josephus, J.W. 1.28.4 §562; Ant. 17.1.3 §20), but to little avail. On the whole, Samaritans were considered to be **irremediably impure**. Despite their recognition of the five books of Moses, they were suspected of being an idolatrous cult on the basis of their veneration of Mount Gerizim as a holy mountain (cf. m. Hui. 2:8). The Jewish historian Josephus portrays **the Shechemites as a refuge for Jewish religious apostates** (Ant. 11.11.7 §§346-47). He also records an occasion (between A.D. 6-9) when some Samaritans tried to desecrate the Jerusalem temple on the eve of the Passover (Ant. 18.2.2 §§29-30) and another instance (in A.D. 52) when they attacked Jewish pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem (Ant. 20.6.1-3 §§118-36). To call someone—especially a fellow-Jew—a “Samaritan” was a gross insult (cf. b. Sotah 22a)A-16 and may have been tantamount to accusing him of religious apostasy (cf. 8:48; Josephus, Ant. 11.8.6 §340). When Jesus sent out the Twelve, he explicitly instructed them not to enter any town of the Samaritans, thus upholding an ethnic (as well as salvation-historical) distinction between these people and the Jews (Matt. 10:5). At a later time, Jesus' disciples were indignant when they were not welcome in a Samaritan village because Jesus was headed for Jerusalem (Luke 9:51-56; cf. Josephus, Ant. 20.1.1 §6). **Jesus himself broke with his Jewish contemporaries' hostility toward Samaritans** (see Luke 10:33; 17:16). **His coming had created a level playing field where ethnic distinctions gave way to spiritual considerations bound up with obedience to God and acceptance of Jesus as Messiah** (cf. esp. John 4:23-24).” [ZIBBC]

Jericho on the Jordan: Ancient City

- Jericho, also called the City of Palms (Deut 34:3), is located **five miles (eight km.) west of the Jordan** and **seven miles (twelve km.) north of the Dead Sea**, some 800 feet (250 m.) below sea level. **Its climate is tropical**, with great heat during the summer. **In the winter it becomes a resort for people fleeing the colder weather of the Palestinian hill country.** In ancient times **date palm** trees flourished here; and balsam, from which medicine was extracted, was the source of great income. Today there are many banana groves here. **The presence of springs of water makes the locality a green oasis in the middle of the dry Jordan rift area.** There are **three Jerichos**. The **OT** city was situated on a mound now called Tell es-Sultan, a mile NW of the modern town. **NT** Jericho is on a higher elevation nearby. **Modern** Jericho, called Er Riha by the Arabs, **has a population of about ten thousand people** of very mixed racial descent. **Jericho is probably the oldest city in the world.** Its strategic site by a ford of the Jordan controlled the ancient trade routes from the East. After crossing the river these branched out, one going toward Bethel and Shechem in the north, another westward to Jerusalem, and a third to Hebron in the south. **Thus Jericho controlled the access to the hill country of Palestine from Transjordan** [NIBD]
- Being in the broad part of the plain of the Jordan, it lies nearly 1000 feet below sea level and about **3500 feet below Jerusalem, which is a mere 14 miles away.** This simple topographical fact explains the incidental words in Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan, "down from Jerusalem to Jericho." First, it must be understood that the **Jericho of NT times was built by Herod more than a mile to the south of the OT site**, at the **mouth of the Wadi Qilt**. It is possible to sort out the healing of the blind men episodes in the synoptic Gospels by understanding that Jesus was passing from the site of ancient Jericho (Mt 20:29; Mk 10:46) and approaching Herodian Jericho (Lk 18:35). The modern city of Jericho includes both these sites. [Baker encyclopedia of the Bible.]
- **OT Jericho** is today represented by a much eroded ovoid-shaped mound identified as Tell es-Sultan on the NW outskirts of the modern town. This tell is about ten m. NW of the mouth of the Dead Sea and about seventeen m. ENE of Jerusalem. **Because the occupation of the site lasted many centuries, there has been built up a mound which rises some fifty ft. above bedrock.** A modern road cuts into the E side of the Tell. Across the road from the Tell is the spring of Ain es-Sultan which explains the attraction of the site from the earliest times. It is this copious spring which waters the modern oasis. Tell es-Sultan is about 400 yards long from N to S and covers about ten acres. **NT Jericho.** Herod the Great and his successors built a winter capital S of OT Jericho on both banks of the Wadi Qelt. Usually the winter climate at this site is warm and pleasant compared to the frequent damp and chilly winter days and nights in Jerusalem. The site for Herodian Jericho was determined by the constant ample supply of water in the Wadi Qelt at a point where the stream opens out onto the plain of the Jordan River. **A small fortress had been erected on the site as a control point over a road from the Jordan Valley to Jerusalem.** [ZPEB]
- In the time of Christ, Jericho was an important place **yielding a large revenue to the royal family.** Since the road from the fords of the Jordan to Jerusalem passed through it, **it became a stopping place for Galilean pilgrims to Jerusalem, who came south through Perea to avoid defilement by contact with Samaritans.** Thus Jesus passed through it on a number of occasions. Nearby are the supposed sites of his baptism (in the Jordan) and his

temptation... The conversion of Zacchaeus occurred here (Luke 19:1-10), one of the most graphic of the Gospel narratives. In the parable of the Good Samaritan (10:29-37) the traveler was attacked as he was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, a winding road, often passing between crags, going through the desolate Judean wilderness, which was frequently a hiding place of criminals. [NIBD]

- In NT times, the town of Jericho was sited S of the old mound. In that region, Herod the Great (40/37–4 bc) and his successors built a winter palace with ornamental gardens, near the famous palm and balsam groves that yielded lucrative revenues. Fragmentary ruins that may be connected with these great buildings have been excavated. ... Herod brought water by aqueduct from the Wadi Qilt. The environs of NT Jericho witnessed Christ's healing of blind men, including Bartimaeus (Mt. 20:29; Mk. 10:46; Lk. 18:35). **Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:1) was not the only wealthy Jew who had his home in this fashionable district.** The immortal story of the good Samaritan is set on the narrow, bandit-infested road from Jerusalem down to Jericho (Lk. 10:30–37). [New Bible Dictionary. 3rd ed.]

Biblical/Other Events Connected with Jericho

- Part of the Land Moses saw before his death (Deut 34.3)
- Joshua/spies/Rahab, and the "walls come tumblin' down"
- Border between Ephraim and Benjamin, but given to Benjamin
- Controlled by Moab during period of the Judges (Judg 3.13)
- Place where David's ambassadors were to wait for their beards to regrow (2 Sam 10.5)
- One of the locations of the Schools of the Prophets (2 Kings 2.5,15)
- Elisha healed the bitter waters there (2 Kings 2.19ff)
- Captives of Judah returned by Israel to Jericho (2 Chron 28.15)
- During Hellenistic period, became famous for dates and balsam
- Given by Cleopatra by Mark Anthony who later sold it to Herod the Great
- The winter palace/fortress built by Herod the Great
- Fell to the Romans in 70ad, while the Jews tried to destroy the valuable trees (Pliny: 'a battle raged over every tree')

A Worse Tax-Collector?! Zacchaeus...

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'" But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." [Lk 19; NIV]

- Zacchaeus, as tax collector at Jericho (Luke 19:1-10), had a **lucrative position**. Jericho was **the winter capital of the kingdom**. In addition, **rich balsam groves** were nearby and **the tax on the product was considerable**. When Jesus of Nazareth was entertained by the tax collector in Jericho, **it would likely be in a home in keeping with Herod's grand building program. The finest villas in Pompeii would be similar**. One of the Hel. forts had **sycamore** timbers in it indicating that this wood was common in the area. The gospel accounts make reference to the presence of blind beggars in the vicinity of Jericho (Matt 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43). **Wherever wealth exists in the Middle E, a multiplicity of beggars can be noted.** [ZPEB]
- **1-4** Zacchaeus was a **"chief tax collector," holding a higher office in the Roman tax system than Levi did** (5:27-30). This system, under which an officer **gained his income by extorting more money from the people than he had contracted to pay the Roman government**, had evidently worked well for Zacchaeus. His location in the major customs center of Jericho was ideal. **Zacchaeus's desire to see Jesus was surpassed by the fact that Jesus wanted to see him.**
8 Zacchaeus's announcement sounds abrupt and is probably intended to seem so. After all, for Luke (following Jesus) the use of possessions is a major indicator of one's spiritual condition (cf. 14:33; 18:22). There is no doubt that Zacchaeus had really "cheated" people. **"Four times the amount"** was far more than what the OT specified for restitution (Lev 5:16; Num 5:7) [BUT NOTE: but this was correct **sometimes**, Ex 22:1 *"If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he must pay back **five** head of cattle for the ox and **four** sheep for the sheep.*]. Whether or not Zacchaeus knew of these laws, his offer was unusually generous and was the sort of "fruit in keeping with repentance" earlier sought by John the Baptist (3:8).
9-10 Salvation did not **"come to this house"** because **Zacchaeus finally did a good deed but because he was "a son of Abraham"** (v. 9), which may mean because he was a believer and thus a spiritual descendant of Abraham. On the other hand, it may mean that "a Jew, even though he has become one of the 'lost sheep of the house of Israel', is still a part of Israel; the good Shepherd must seek for such". Verse 10 could well be considered the "key verse" of Luke.... Jesus has sought and found another of the "lost" in Jericho. He uses the occasion and the criticism of the people in v. 7 as an opportunity to restate his mission. This whole incident is the epitome of the messianic mission described in Luke 4. [EBC]

Blind Bartimeus and a friend

Now they came to Jericho. As He went out of Jericho with His disciples and a great multitude, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the road begging. 47 And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Then many warned him to be quiet; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called. Then they called the blind man, saying to him, "Be of good cheer. Rise, He is calling you." And throwing aside his garment, he rose and came to Jesus. So Jesus answered and said to him, "What do you want Me to do for you?" The blind man said to Him, "Rabboni, that I may receive my sight." Then Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road. [NKJV, Mk 10:46-52]

- “There may have been many blind people in the Jericho area; for the region produced large quantities of **balsam, believed to be very beneficial for many eye defects** (cf. Strabo 16.2.41). These two were sitting by the roadside, doubtless begging (Mark-Luke), and, hearing that Jesus was passing, cried out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"[EBC, Mt]
- **47-48 Apparently Bartimaeus had heard of Jesus' reputation as a healer.** When he discovered that Jesus was coming by, he seized the opportunity of approaching him (v. 47). The title he used to address Jesus-"**Son of David**"-is **messianic** (cf. Isa 11:1, 10; Jer 23:5-6; Ezek 34:23-24). It was **not an unambiguous** title. . . . The crowd (**they were pilgrims going up to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover**) did not appreciate Bartimaeus's loud shouting and tried to silence him, but he shouted all the more (10:49). Why they wanted him to keep quiet is not clear. Perhaps the title he gave Jesus offended them, or they did not want anyone to delay their journey to the feast. Unlike the crowd, Jesus did not try to silence Bartimaeus. This implies that he did not reject the title "Son of David." **Since Jesus was now close to the fulfillment of his messianic mission, it was no longer necessary to keep the secret.** That Bartimaeus understood the significance of the title he used is doubtful. He was essentially appealing for mercy to be healed.
49-50 The loud cry stopped Jesus (v. 49). Had the messianic title caught his attention? So he asked them to call the beggar to him. . . . The crowd's complete change of attitude toward the beggar is remarkable. Instead of trying to silence him, they encouraged him. The word translated "Cheer up!" is *tharsei*. It occurs only seven times in the NT (Matt 9:2, 22; 14:27; Mark 6:50; 10:49; John 16:33; Acts 23:11), and **six of the seven are from the lips of Jesus**. The exception is here. Bartimaeus's response was immediate (Mk 10:50). The cloak was his outer garment, which he had probably spread on the ground to receive the alms. The fact that he was able to get up and go to Jesus may imply that he was not completely blind.
51-52 Jesus did not immediately heal the blind beggar. Jesus first asked him a question to stimulate faith (v. 51). Having done that, **without any overt action or healing word on Jesus' part, he sent him away with the words** "Go, . . . your faith has healed you" (v. 52). The cure was immediate. Mark's statement that the blind man followed Jesus is best taken to mean, as NIV admirably brings out, that the man joined the crowd going up to the feast, not that he necessarily became a follower of Jesus in terms of discipleship.
The close of chapter 10 sets the stage for the climax of the story. The journey to Jerusalem is ended. Jesus is about to enter the Holy City where the last acts of the drama of redemption will take place. **His opening the eyes of the blind man stands in sharp contrast to the blindness of the religious leaders he is about to encounter there.** [EBC, Mrk]
- "The **use of the Davidic title** [cf. 15:22; 20:30; 21:9, 15; 22:42] in address to Jesus is less extraordinary than some think: in Palestine, in the time of Jesus, there was an intense Messianic expectation" (Hill, *Matthew*). **The Messianic Age was to be characterized as a time when "the eyes of the blind [would be] opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped,"** when "the lame [would] leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb shout for joy" (Isa 35:5-6). **If Jesus was really the Messiah, the blind reasoned, then he would have mercy on them; and they would have their sight.** So their need drove them to faith. Perhaps this is what lies behind the fact in the Synoptics that "Son of David" is so often associated with the needy—those possessed by demons or, as here, in need of healing [EBC, at Mt 9.27]

- Jericho was not only the home of Jesus' ancestor Rahab (1:5) but was also a day's journey from Jerusalem. The "large crowd" implies more than messianic excitement; it also reflects the multitudes of pilgrims from Galilee and elsewhere heading to Jerusalem for the feast. [EBC, Mt]
- **The disciples want to get on with the business of setting up the kingdom (10:37; 11:9–10), not understanding that stopping for a blind beggar is the sort of thing Jesus' kingdom is all about.**
10:46. The blind, the lame and others who could not engage in the traditional occupations of the day could support themselves only by begging, normally on a busy roadside. Judaism considered it righteous to help them. Jericho was a prosperous town with a good climate, and Timaeus's son no doubt received adequate support there.
10:47–48. Except for what they had learned from listening to others recite, **blind people in that time were illiterate in the law** (Braille had not been invented yet, so they could not read). **They were thus not respected as religious persons, although they were protected under the law of Moses.** They were also socially powerless, and **Jesus' followers view this blind man's loud pleas as an intrusion, the way they had viewed the children** (10:13). The disciples may have viewed Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem as a royal procession, and it was foolhardy and impudent to interrupt a royal procession.
10:49–52. By “stopping” and standing still, **Jesus allows the blind man to come to where Jesus' voice had last sounded.** [BBC, Mrk]
- The beggars want **more than alms**, and **Jesus again demonstrates the difference between his kingdom and the kind most people were expecting.** [BBC, Mt]
- Jesus characterizes his insistent, obstinate (v. 39) plea for mercy as “faith” (v. 42).

Jerusalem: The City of the Great King...

[See history in Charts]

- After Jesus was baptized by John the Baptizer, He was tempted by Satan; one of these temptations took place in the Holy City “on the pinnacle of the temple” (Mt. 4:5; Lk. 4:9).... The Synoptics give no other information about Jesus in Jerusalem until the end of His earthly ministry. The Fourth Gospel, however, records an “early Judean” ministry, **located in the temple** (2:13–25; possibly 3:1–21). **Later Jesus performed a miracle at the pool of Bethesda (Bethzatha) by the Sheep Gate** (5:1–18).... The discourse that followed (5:19–47) may have taken place in the temple. On the occasion of the Feast of Tabernacles, possibly in the second year of His ministry, He again went to Jerusalem (7:1–15) and taught in the temple. ... **the healing of the blind man took place at the pool of Siloam** (9:7). Hence it seems that John intended to show that Jesus continued in the Jerusalem area for two months or more, to set the stage, as it were, for His final appearance. [ISBE]

John refers explicitly to **two places in Jerusalem** connected with Jesus' miraculous cures. One is a "pool, in Hebrew called Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes" (5:2), where Jesus cured a man who had been lame for thirty-eight years. **Beth-zatha was a suburb immediately to the N of the Temple area**... there, a pool was discovered and excavated, and the five porticoes verified. ... On the combined basis of the NT, the ancient tradition, and the excavation, archaeologists attach a high degree of probability to the identity of the twin pool of St. Anne as the sheep pool of John 5:2. The **second specific place** in Jerusalem cited by John is the **pool of Siloam**, where Jesus instructed the blind man to wash (9:7). Mentioned also in Isa 8:6, it refers to a reservoir supplied with water from the Gihon spring by means of a canal. The pool of Siloam is located at the S end of the E hill, near where the Kidron and Tyropoeon valleys converge. In Isa 8:6, it refers to the aqueduct in use during Ahaz's reign, prior to the construction of Hezekiah's tunnel. [ABD]

Pool of Bethesda: Healing of the Invalid

After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 2 Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. 3 In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed.[4 For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had.] 5 One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" 7 The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me." 8 Jesus said to him, "Stand up, take your mat and walk." 9 At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a sabbath. 10 So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, "It is the sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat." 11 But he answered them, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Take up your mat and walk.'" 12 They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Take it up and walk'?" 13 Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there. 14 Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you." 15 The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. 16 Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath. 17 But Jesus answered them, "My Father is still working, and I also am working." 18 For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God. (John 5)

- Healing shrines were common throughout the ancient world, especially for the worship of Asclepius and other popular deities renowned for healing powers. **Most** of these shrines **required the supplicants to purify themselves** at the adjoining **fountain** or other source of water. **This passage portrays Jesus as greater than such healing sanctuaries of his day.**
5:1. ... the real issue for this narrative is that the day on which Jesus heals is a sabbath.
5:3. This site was **later used as a pagan healing shrine; given the ancient tendency to reuse older shrines, the Jewish community in Jesus' day probably viewed this pool as a place of healing.** The temple authorities **undoubtedly did not approve**—after all, sacred pools at healing shrines characterized Greek cults like that of Asclepius—but popular religion often ignores religious contradictions that are clearer to the official religious leaders.

5:5. The man had been sick there **longer than many people in antiquity lived**—for about as many years as Israel had wandered in the wilderness. Ancient reports of healings often specified how long the person had been sick to emphasize the greatness of the healer’s cure. Obviously nothing else, including this pool, had succeeded in restoring him. [BBC]

- **Verse 3b-4.** The earliest manuscripts omit these words which appear to be a late insertion to explain why the pool water was “stirred” (v. 7). People believed that an angel came and stirred it. According to local tradition, the first one in the water would be healed. **But the Bible nowhere teaches this kind of superstition, a situation which would be a most cruel contest for many ill people.** No extant Greek manuscript before a.d. 400 contains these words.
- **5:9-10.** God’s supernatural power was evident in the man’s instantaneous cure. He picked up his mat and walked. Muscles long atrophied were completely restored. **Isaiah prophesied that in the days of the Messiah the lame would “leap like a deer” (Isa. 35:1-7).** Here in Jerusalem was **a public sign that the Messiah had come.** The Sabbath was a central issue in the conflicts between Jesus and His opponents (cf. Mark 2:23; 3:4). The Mosaic Law required that work cease on the seventh day. **Additional laws were added by later Jewish religious authorities, which became very complicated and burdensome.** These human traditions often obscured the divine intention in God’s Law. “The Sabbath was made for man” (Mark 2:27) so that he could have rest and a time for worship and joy. **The Jews’ rigid tradition (not the Old Testament) taught that if anyone carried anything from a public place to a private place on the Sabbath intentionally, he deserved death by stoning.** In this case the man who was healed was in danger of losing his life.
5:11. The healed man realized this difficulty and tried to evade any responsibility for violating tradition by saying he was just following orders.
5:12-13. The authorities were naturally interested in the identity of this fellow who told the invalid to violate their rules. But the man . . . had no knowledge of Jesus. [BKC]
- Nevertheless, v 7 confirms that there was some movement of the waters, possibly due to springs. The fact that John mentions that the lame man had been there for thirty-eight years suggests that this was common knowledge. **He was probably notorious for the time he had been begging there.** The word learned (6) implies that Jesus had been informed by the bystanders. **The question Do you want to get well? may have been intended to jolt the man out of his apathy, but the answer does not reveal any faith on the man’s part.** Clearly he thought in rather magical terms, as v 7 shows, for he believed the commonly held view that only the first to get into the water had any chance of healing. He seems to have thought Jesus’ question not worth the answering. **It must be conceded, however, that his immediate response to Jesus’ command to walk was surprisingly prompt.** The problem for the Jews at first was not the healing, but the fact that it had happened on the Sabbath. **The carrying of the mat was considered an act of work. According to the Mishnah, a couch could be carried only if it had a man on it.** At this point it was the man who was held to be at fault, but in vs 16–18 it was Jesus. The discussion between the healed man and the Jews sheds light on the ignorance of the man, who had no idea of the identity of his healer (13), and the obstinacy of the authorities, whose chief concern was the ignoring of their rules. **There is an implied contrast here between the compassion of Jesus for the poor man and the lack of interest in the man on the part of the Jews.** Jesus’ withdrawal (13) followed his consistent policy in this gospel of avoiding popular acclaim. [WBC]

- Confinement to a bed for thirty-eight years would leave the sufferer so weak he would be unable to walk or even stand for any length of time. His case would be hopeless. Jesus selected for his attention the person who seemed most needy. Since he had been afflicted for thirty-eight years, he must have been well on in years. Jesus' question must have seemed rather naive to him. Who would not want to be healed from utter helplessness? **Yet the question also implies an appeal to the will, which the long years of discouragement may have paralyzed. Jesus thus challenged the man's will to be cured.**
8 The healing was not a response to a request, nor did it presuppose an expression of faith on the part of the man. Jesus asked him to do the impossible, to stand on his feet, pick up his bedroll, and go his way. Renewed by the miraculous influx of new power, the man responded at once and did so. Jesus supplied even the will to be cured! [EBC]

Pool of Siloam: Sight to the Blind

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. 4 We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." 6 When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, 7 saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. 8 The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" 9 Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." 10 But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" 11 He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." 12 They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14 Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15 Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." 16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. 17 So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

18 The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight 19 and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" 20 His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21 but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." 22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. 23 Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

24 So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." 25 He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." 26 They

said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27 He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" 28 Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29 We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." 30 The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. 32 Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." 34 They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out. [John 9]

- **1** Although Jesus had healed blind persons on other occasions (Matt 9:27-31; 12:22; 15:30; 21:14; Mark 8:22-26; 10:46-52), this "sign" was an outstanding case **because the man had been born blind.**
- 2** The interest of the disciples was prompted by theological curiosity rather than compassion. For them the blind man was an unsolved riddle rather than a sufferer to be relieved. Their query, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind" was based on a principle stated in the law: "He [God] does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation" (Exod 34:7). They construed this to mean that if a person suffered from any ailment, it must have been because his parents or grandparents had committed some sin against God (cf. Exod 20:5). To this they added the thought that perhaps he might have sinned before birth, whether as an embryo or in a preexistent state. Such a concept appears in the rabbinical writings.
- 3** Jesus refused to accept either alternative suggested by the disciples' question. He looked on the man's plight, not as retribution for some offense committed either by his parents or by himself, but as an opportunity to do God's work. **Jesus did not consider the blindness as punishment or as a matter of irrational chance; it was a challenge to manifest God's healing power in the man's life.**
- 6** To make known his intention to the blind man, Jesus made clay from dust and spittle and placed it on the sightless eyes. Lindars suggests that the use of clay parallels the creative act of God in Genesis 2:7 (p. 343). **Since the blindness was congenital, the healing would be creative rather than remedial.** However, the **emphasis of John seems to be on compassion rather than creation. The touch of a friendly hand would be reassuring. The weight of the clay would serve as an indicator to the blind man that something had been done to him, and it would be an inducement to obey Jesus' command.**
- 7** The Pool of Siloam was located at the southern end of the city, **probably a considerable distance from the place where the blind man was. The walk would call for some exertion.** Certainly the man would not want to continue sitting by the roadside with mud smeared over his eyes. If his lifelong affliction had tended to make him apathetic, he now had at least one motive for obeying what must have seemed a foolish command. How could washing in a public pool restore the sight he never had? **The trip the man made must have been a venture of faith. Jesus had not even told him that he would be healed but had merely commanded him to wash.** If the man had overheard Jesus' conversation with the disciples, he would have expected something to happen. Yet so extraordinary a miracle as giving sight to a man born blind would have seemed impossible.

8-9 The man's recovery of his sight created a genuine sensation. The effects of the miracle are described vividly by the responses of four groups or individuals: (1) the neighbors, (2) the Pharisees, (3) the parents, and (4) the man himself. The neighbors and acquaintances knew very well the man they had supported by their charity. To see him walking with normal sight was so incredible that they thought it must be a case of mistaken identity. He quickly settled the dispute by avowing that he was the man they had known.

10-12 The curiosity of the neighbors demanded an explanation. The man replied in matter-of-fact fashion, narrating the event just as it happened. His reply, however, indicates the first stage of faith: he accepted the fact. He made no attempt to evaluate Jesus' person but spoke of him simply as "the man they call Jesus." He showed no previous knowledge of him, nor had he bothered to investigate his person. In fact, the man was even unaware of Jesus' current whereabouts.

13-15 The case was so mysterious that the neighbors took the man to the religious authorities, the Pharisees, who supposedly would be able to offer an explanation. Since the day on which the miracle was performed was a Sabbath, the Sabbath law was involved. The Pharisees inquired how the man received his sight, and he repeated the story he had given first to the neighbors. **There are both parallels and contrasts between the healing in ch. 9 and that in ch. 5. Both occurred at a public pool; both concerned apparently incurable cases; and both occurred on the Sabbath, which precipitated the question of the Sabbath law.**

16 The response of the Pharisees revealed reasoning from prejudice: "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." For the Pharisees there could be no other conclusion. Others, however, were hesitant and asked how a sinner could have the power to perform such miracles. **The use of the plural "miraculous signs" (semeia) suggests that they knew other miracles of Jesus comparable to this one.** The people took into consideration the source of the miracle, not simply this single instance. The contrast of these responses brings into focus an important principle of interpretation: Should Jesus be judged by an a priori application of the law or by an a posteriori consideration of his works? **The division among the Pharisees shows that there must have been at least a small minority who were not inflexibly hostile to Jesus. Perhaps Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were among the number.** The minority's question, "How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?" sounds much like Nicodemus's opening words to Jesus: "No one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him" (3:2).

17 Again the man himself was questioned to help bring a decision in the dispute. His verdict was more definite than the preceding one: "He is a prophet," the man said. The prophets were the agents of God, and in some instances they performed miracles; for example, Elisha (2 Kings 2:19-22; 4:18-44; 5:1-14). If, then, Jesus had performed an indisputable miracle, it was prima facie evidence that he must have a divine commission. As an emissary of God, he could be empowered to heal on the Sabbath, if necessary; and he would be above the jurisdiction of any human tribunal.

18-23 The evidence was still insufficient to remove the objections of "the Jews." In this context it seems that "the Jews" was synonymous with "the Pharisees." Unconvinced of the genuineness of the cure, they proceeded to query whether the man really had been born blind; for if he had not been blind from birth, the miracle could be disputed. They interrogated his parents, who, fearing excommunication from the synagogue, evaded the issue by stating that their son was an adult capable of answering for himself.

24 To the Jews there was only one solution. The Law forbade working on the Sabbath. Jesus had healed on the Sabbath; therefore, Jesus was a sinner. So the man was commanded to "give glory to God" for his healing.

25-27 The ensuing argument between the blind man and the Pharisees was a duel between an obvious fact and a legal syllogism. The fact of the healing was undeniable and was admitted by the blind man's opponents. Their incessant questioning exhausted his patience, and **he indulged in some sarcasm** by insinuating that their repeated inquiries showed an interest in becoming disciples of Jesus.

28-29 Such a response to learned rabbis on the part of an illiterate man was surely considered insulting. The Jews quickly retorted that they were abiding by the authority of Moses, whose law for centuries had been the standard of Israel's religion. Jesus they rejected as a nobody, a vagrant prophet who did not keep the law.

30-33 Again the blind man pressed the pragmatic argument, and he also employed an argument of his own. Since, according to the assumption of the Jews, "God does not listen to sinners" (cf. Ps 66:18; Prov 28:9; Isa 1:15), how could Jesus have performed this miracle if he were under divine condemnation? Rather, the man reasoned, the healing should be ample evidence that Jesus came from God.

34 To this argument the Jews had no real answer. So they attacked the man by character assassination and made him feel unworthy to answer on his behalf or Jesus'. Then they excommunicated him, thus isolating him from his family and friends and debarring him from employment.

35-36 In contrast to the negative result of rejection is the positive result of Jesus' response. "Found" implies that Jesus looked for the man so that he might confirm his faith by discipleship. The question "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" is a summons to commitment. The Greek pronoun *su* ("you") used with the verb makes the inquiry doubly emphatic. **It demanded a personal decision in the face of opposition or rejection.** Since the healing of the man occurred after Jesus' first interview, he would not have recognized Jesus by sight; and the question, couched in the third person, would not instantly identify the questioner as the object of faith.

37-38 When Jesus said that the "Son of Man" was the person speaking, the man instantly responded by worshiping Jesus. He was ready to believe on the one who had healed him. His attitude was already positive. **Probably he recognized Jesus as his healer by his voice.** He needed only the identification to take the final step of faith. The progress in spiritual understanding of the person of Christ is marked by progressive descriptions: "The man they called Jesus" (v. 11); "he is a prophet" (v. 17); "from God" (v. 33); "Son of Man" (v. 35); and, lastly, "Lord" (v. 38). This progression illustrates the man's movement from darkness to light, both physically and spiritually.

39-41 The negative result is illustrated by the Pharisees' response. Jesus' remark, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind," makes him the pivot on which human destiny turns. The Pharisees, assuming that they could "see" without his intervention, asked in resentment, "Are we blind too?" **Jesus' reply indicated that if they had acknowledged blindness, they could be freed from sin; but if they asserted that they could see when they were really blind, there would be no remedy for them.** If they acted in ignorance of the light, they could not be held responsible for not knowing it; but if they claimed to understand it and still rejected it, they would be liable for judgment. Deliberate rejection of light means that "the light within ... is darkness" (Matt 6:23). [EBC]

- Jesus placed clay (mud with . . . saliva) on the man's eyes.... Jesus probably used the clay as an aid to develop the man's faith, not as a medicine. **Jesus' making of clay broke the Rabbinic regulations against kneading clay on the Sabbath** (cf. John 9:14). Jesus then

told the man, Wash in the pool of Siloam (this word means Sent). This is located at the southeast corner of Jerusalem, where Hezekiah's tunnel channeled water inside the city walls from the Gihon Spring.

9:34. Upstaged by a beggar, they could only insult him again and throw him out of the synagogue (cf. v. 22). They reasoned that his blindness must have been due to some specific "sin" (they forgot the Book of Job). But they were irrational. How could anybody be steeped in sin at birth? Everybody is born with a sinful nature (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 5:12), but a baby can hardly commit numerous acts of sin moments after it is born!

9:38. After Jesus revealed that He is the Son of Man, the man responded in faith (Lord, I believe) and worshiped Him. His worship of Jesus replaced his worship in the synagogue. **The Jews had cast him out of the synagogue, but Jesus does not cast out those who come to Him** (6:37).

From the ThinkTank:

"Spittle was NOT a 'magical thing', but either *medicinal*...

"There is also considerable evidence that **spittle was commonly used to treat eye diseases**. Benjamin Gordon notes: 'Spittle was among popular therapeutic agents used in ocular practice by ancient physicians...The cure of inflammatory diseases of the eye with spittle was also popular among the Romans and Egyptians...In Egypt, spittle was used as a solvent for disturbing films in the eyes'. The use of spittle for healing purposes is also attested in rabbinical sources (BB 126b; Shab. 14.14d; 18; Sotah. 16d,37). Vermes comments, 'Even in regard to healing, the closest he (Jesus) comes to the Noachic, Solomonian and Essene type of cure was when he touched the sick with his own saliva, a substance generally thought to be medicinal.'"

[[X02:JSOTGP6:139](#)]

...or a *deliberate object-lesson* to the Pharisees:

"Saliva was regarded as having healing properties—under certain circumstances (cf. *b. Bat.* 126b: "The **saliva of the firstborn of a father heals [diseases of the eye]**, but the saliva of the firstborn of the mother does not heal")" [[WBC](#), at John 9.6; note that this passage immediately follows an argument with the Jews over Jesus' unique and privileged sonship with the Father. If the spittle image was intended to provoke the thought found in the later Talmud, then the healing of the man would have illustrated that the Son was the 'firstborn of the Father' in a way others--especially the Pharisees--weren't!]

Cleansing of the Temple

And the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers seated. 15 And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the moneychangers, and overturned their tables; 16 and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a house of merchandise." 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Thy house will consume me." 18 The

Jews therefore answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, seeing that You do these things?" 19 Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews therefore said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" 21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body. 22 When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had spoken. (John 2.13ff)

*And Jesus entered the temple and cast out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who were selling doves. 13 And He *said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a robbers' den." (Matt 21.12ff)*

*And they *came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to cast out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who were selling doves; 16 and He would not permit anyone to carry goods through the temple. 17 And He began to teach and say to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a robbers' den." (Mark 11.15ff)*

- "At one time the animal merchants set up their stalls across the Kidron Valley on the slopes of the Mount of Olives, but at this point they were in the temple courts, doubtless in the Court of the Gentiles (the outermost court)" [D. A. Carson, John]
- "Jesus' complaint is not that they are guilty of sharp business practices and should therefore reform their ethical life, **but that they should not be in the temple area at all. How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!** He exclaims. Instead of solemn dignity and the murmur of prayer, there is the bellowing of cattle and bleating of sheep. Instead of brokenness and contrition, holy adoration and prolonged petition, there is noisy commerce..." [Carson, John]
- "The **court in which all this noisy and boisterous traffic took place was the only court to which Gentiles might go when they wished to pray or mediate in the Temple.** They ought to have been able to worship in peace. Instead they found themselves in the middle of a noisy bazaar. ' [Morris, John]
- "At first sight it seems unlikely that animals would be allowed into any of the Temple courts, because of the risk of their getting loose and defiling the sanctuary. But V. Eppstein argues from Rosh Hash. 31a and other passages in the Babylonian Talmud that **there was a dispute between Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, as a result of which the high priest allowed merchants to set up animal stalls within the temple precincts.**" [Morris, John (rev ed)]
- "Jesus was appalled at this disregard for the sanctity of an area consecrated for the use of Gentiles who had not yet become full proselytes to Judaism. His action in driving out the merchants and their patrons, overturning the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves, and standing guard over the court to prohibit its use as a thoroughfare, was an astonishing display of zeal for God's honor and respect for the sacredness of the Temple precincts. Ironically, **Jesus' spirited protest entailed a rigorous application of existing provisions, which prohibited anyone from entering the Temple Mount with a**

staff, sandals or his wallet, and which specifically denied the right to make of the forecourt a 'short by-path' (M. Berachoth IX.5; TB Berachoth 54a)." [William Lane, Mark]

- **The Money Changers** . The word "moneychanger" means money-banker or money-broker. They would **make large profits at the expense of the pilgrims**. Every Israelite, rich or poor, who had reached the age of twenty was obligated to pay a half shekel as an offering to Jehovah into the sacred treasury. This tribute was in every case to be paid in the exact Hebrew half shekel. At Passover everyone in the world who was an adult male and wished to worship at the Temple would bring his "offering" or purchase a sacrificial animal at the Temple. **Since there was no acceptance of foreign money with any foreign image the money changers would sell "Temple coinage" at a very high rate of exchange and assess a fixed charge for their services.**

The **judges, who sat to inspect the offerings that were brought by the pilgrims, were quick to detect any blemish in them**. This was expensive for the wealthy pilgrims, not to say how ruinous this was for the poor who could only offer their turtle-doves and pigeons. There was no defense for them or court of appeal, **seeing that the priestly authorities took a large percentage on every transaction.**

The House of God or the National Treasury. Jesus referred to the Temple as the "House of God" and called it a "House of Prayer," not just for the Jews, but for all nations. When Jesus arrived with the mass of pilgrims, He overturned the tables and called it a den of thieves and a house of merchandise. **The Temple was in some sense the national bank. It was a great public treasury with vaults containing immense stores of private wealth.** These **deposits never sat idle, but were loaned at high rates of interest.** The Jewish historian Josephus wrote an account of the burning of the archives in Jerusalem and it gives an appalling picture of **the incredible debts that were owed by the poor to the rich**. It is believed that the intention of the **burning was to 'destroy the money-lenders' tallies and to prevent the exaction of debts**. After reading about how an infuriated mob (around 30 years later) robbed the Temple booths and dragged the sons of Annas to their death, it can only be imagined how much the Jewish authorities were hated by the humble commoners.

The Wealthy and the Poor. There was tremendous wealth in Jerusalem. Many of the rich publicans (tax-gatherers) and influential leaders resided in Jerusalem, not only in their houses, but their summer residences, their large parks, and their country estates. **Their vast wealth reached unbelievable proportions in the days of Herod. These plutocratic families were powerful in government circles and "prided themselves in their excesses."** The gulf between the rich and the poor was immense and the very poor families were often driven from their homes to become the slum-dwellers of Jerusalem. By the time of Jesus Jerusalem had become **a parasitic city, lying in wait for the multitudes of pilgrims who flocked into the city in their hundreds of thousands at each Festival. ...**

Jesus promised the religious aristocracy that their "Temple would be left desolate," and not a single stone of the Temple would be left on top of another that would not be thrown down. **Not even forty years passed when it all happened**, for in 70 A.D. the legions of Rome came, led by Titus, and the Words of Christ were fulfilled. [eBible site]