

September

A scenic view of a body of water, likely a lake or a wide river, with a sandy beach in the foreground. Palm trees are visible on the left and right sides of the frame, their fronds reaching towards the sky. The sky is a clear, pale blue. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and serene.

THE 2026 BIBLE DISCOVERY GUIDE
NAHUM — LUKE

BIBLE
DISCOVERY

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Contributors

Rod Hembree
Corie Bobechko
Ryan Hembree
Janice Hembree
Matlock Bobechko

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The Transition

God has revealed to humanity His personal character and divine attributes over thousands of years. God's Word documents two kinds of progressive revelation: General and Special.

General Revelation refers to how God has revealed His eternal attributes and divine nature through our commonly shared human experience — creation, conscience, and reason. There is no possible way the universe came into existence by itself before it existed, nor is there any way for moral law to be true and objective without a moral law giver— God is moral truth.

Special Revelation is God's divine self-revelation, unique knowledge and experience unveiling God's personal character and nature for our redemption and salvation, such as the Scriptures, prophecies, theophanies, supernatural events, miracles, the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the indwelling of His Holy Spirit. These special encounters with the Lord are divinely appointed to bring us closer to Him, to save us from our fallen state. Unlike General Revelation, which is perceived through nature and

available to everyone, Special Revelation is holy and only truly shared among the children of God.

The New Testament is all about how to find Special Revelation in our lives through the Son of God, Jesus Christ, to live and love the way He did. Here we encounter God's Holy Spirit who is the gift and seal of redemption for all who believe in His holy name. The New Testament is God's final fulfilment of progressive revelation, until He returns to remove the veil from our eyes to see His full glory, face to face.

Let's study and learn from God and His special revelation, how to live and love the way we are supposed to and not the way social media or the current culture tells us. Let's set our mind on things above and not on things in this world.

Many blessings,



Rod Hembree, Th.D, DE.



CHARLES ROD HEMBREE is the founding pastor of *Good Friends Fellowship* in Ontario, Canada. He brings his extensive production background and Biblical training together to serve the Body of Christ as the Executive Director of Bible Discovery.

How to use this Bible in a Year Guide

Make the most of your devotional time with our Guide to the Bible in a year. Each Guide provides valuable context and theological insight to help strengthen your faith and dig deeper into the richness of God's Word every day.

The following three tips will help you make the most of your daily Bible reading and Guide:

SPOTLIGHT ON...



In every Guide, you'll find a section with specific highlights from the perspectives of history, apologetics, theology, and more. These viewpoints provide a holistic context from which to view the month's Bible reading, giving us a greater understanding of the Word, and equipping us to grasp the impact of the Bible in these important fields.

DAILY READING



The readings are in traditional order, with a date corresponding to the Hebrew calendar. Each reading consists of a daily insight and a focus on three major takeaways from the day's Bible passage. Challenge yourself to meditate on the *Discovering The Truth* and *Today's Prayer* sections as you go about your day.

WATCH THE DAILY SHOW



Catch our companion TV series for even more valuable insight and theological discussion, hosted daily by the Hembree family. Join Rod, Janice, Ryan and Corie in this insightful, thirty-minute devotional show that will change the way you see and read the Bible. Visit **BibleDiscoveryTv.com** to watch our show online or to find a TV channel in your area.

Eye for Eye Tooth for Tooth

Did Jesus abolish the “Law of the Tooth?”



In His famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declared: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” (MATTHEW 5:17) Yet a few verses later, He seems to do exactly that. He says, “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.” (MATTHEW 5:38-42) This law Jesus is referring to is part of the Mosaic Law^[1] and is often referred to by scholars as the “Law of the Tooth” or in Latin, the *lex talionis*. According to this law, if you cause injury to someone then you are required to repay him accordingly: “life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.” (EXODUS 21:23-25 NKJV) But now Jesus is calling for no repayment. So wasn’t Jesus abolishing this law? No. And to help us see why not let’s consider three points.

1. Jesus did not deny the practice of this principle in the courtroom only in personal relationships.

In its original context, this “law of the tooth,” was intended as a guide for the government not personal vendettas. And “Jesus did not deny the validity of this principle for the courtroom, but He denied its usage in personal relationships (MATTHEW 5:38-42). There should be no personal retaliation or revenge.”^[2]

2. Jesus wasn’t correcting a flaw in the Old Testament text but rather was correcting flawed interpretations of it.

As one Bible scholar notes, “The words You have

heard that it was said...But I tell you appear repeatedly throughout Matthew 5, contrasting the Pharisaical interpretation of the Law with Jesus’ fulfilment of the Law’s true intent (v. 17).”^[3] Indeed,

JESUS EXPANDS THIS LAW TO INCLUDE NOT ONLY PHYSICAL ACTS BUT ALSO THE THOUGHTS OF OUR HEARTS.

“Many Jews sought to retaliate against Roman rule through violent resistance movements, but Jesus commanded his disciples to reverse the situation from taking to giving.”^[4]

3. Context, context, context!

Any Biblical passage taken in isolation is at risk of being misinterpreted. Pay attention to the larger context of these verses. What’s Jesus doing with each of these laws? He’s not abolishing them but, in fact, is taking them a step further showing “that the lifestyle of the kingdom of God is more demanding than what the law of Moses laid down.” For example, the Mosaic Law says that we are not to murder or commit adultery. But Jesus expands this law to include not only physical acts but also the thoughts of our hearts. Similarly, when it comes to “eye for eye and tooth for tooth,” Jesus is again upping the ante. When God first gave this command to Moses it was already a huge leap forward from the surrounding cultures who often inflicted brutal punishments far beyond the crime. So God mercifully put limits in place.^[5]^[6] “But now Jesus takes a further step. ‘Don’t retaliate at all,’ he says to his disciples. ‘Don’t harbor a spirit of resentment; if someone does you an injury or puts you to inconvenience, show yourself master of the situation by doing something to his advantage... (continued on page 39)

The Magi of Matthew

Between the central themes of Matthew and the "Revelation of the Magi".



Do you like a good mystery? I love a good mystery, a real enigmatic prehistory excavation in which there's no written record to decipher the physical remains, or a good Biblical mystery, when the Bible gives us a brief description with no further explanation. It's the possibilities that intrigue. We know there's an answer, even if the possibility of us uncovering such an answer is slim.

Now, I want to look at the case of the Magi in Matthew's Gospel. A case that does have a satisfying answer. The Magi are given a relatively large amount of space in Matthew, but they aren't fully explained:

AFTER JESUS WAS BORN IN BETHLEHEM IN JUDEA, DURING THE TIME OF KING HEROD, MAGI FROM THE EAST CAME TO JERUSALEM...

MATTHEW 2:1

Their history isn't given, the details of their journey, their country of origin, or even the reason for their choice of gifts. And so, it's to be expected that all sorts of ideas and stories about the Magi have popped up not just today, but from almost the earliest of Christians. There are two main stories that I'd like to highlight for us today, an ancient one and a modern one.

The ancient one is called the *Revelation of the Magi* and it has experienced a resurgence of interest in recent years due to a translation done in 2010. It is known today from one surviving manuscript housed in the Vatican, an eighth century book written in Syriac. Though the only surviving copy is from the eighth century, the story itself is believed to have been written in the early third century, and a Latin summary of it is known from a fifth century Christian commentary on Matthew. Anyway, this *Revelation of the Magi* is an inventive Christian story that aims to give a theological

message through God revealing the Christ to pagans. The details that the early authors invented to fill in the gaps are really interesting and sometimes weird. In this story there are twelve plus magi, which makes a lot of sense, our tradition of three magi comes purely from the number of gifts that they are said to bring in Matthew: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But the number of magi is not given in the Gospel, and it's fair to expect that of any group of people travelling far would be a party of more than three. In the *Revelation of the Magi*, they are said to come from the land of Shir, which based on readings from other ancient documents was basically modern China. Other early and later Christian sources point to Persia, or Babylon for the origin of the Magi. The Magi in this story are descendants of Seth, son of Adam, and have preserved his special prophecies about the Messiah in a mountainous cave for all of those thousands of years, and the star of the Nativity is, for lack of better words, a shapeshifting Christ child that appears only to them in a vision of a star. This version of the story was not adopted by the Church, and it may not have been meant to, it clearly had a theological purpose, much like many books that are written today, but may have been clearly written as pious fiction, also like many books today.

So, now onto a more modern take. When we look at Matthew's overall themes, I think it is possible to extract a probable reason that Matthew included the account of the Magi. And as fun as it is, I don't think he included it so that we could speculate on their ancestry, their country, motivations, or divine visions. I think it makes more sense that Matthew included the account of the Magi to further shame his generation. The very people who would see the Christ, experience His miracles and teachings and yet, still choose to reject Him. In Matthew's nativity, we see a lot of

(continued on page 39)

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No Wasted Words

DISCOVERING THE WORD

Although we don't know a lot about the prophet Nahum, it is known that his name means "comfort" and that he prophesied about one hundred years after Jonah. Like Jonah, Nahum preaches to the city of Nineveh, except this time the city does not repent like they did in Jonah's day. This is so interesting to me because I am reminded that God never wastes words; whatever He says will happen, does happen. In Jonah's day the prophet was frustrated to witness God's amazing capacity for forgiveness and mercy, but in Nahum's day a different generation of people were not willing to repent. As a result, judgment came. The first chapter of Nahum's direct and quick message speaks of God's wrath on His enemies. The second chapter speaks about the destruction of Nineveh, and the third chapter articulates Nineveh's woes. Sooner or later, we all must give an account of our actions to the LORD.

DISCOVERING GOD — NAHUM 2:1-13

Israel is seen as advanced and strong in Nahum's prophecy. The times change and so do the people. God knows when the people are ready to be restored.
(v. 1-4)

Nahum prophesies it is God who restores His people. When we obey God, we are strong because of Him.
(v. 5-7)

Nahum prophesies that Nineveh will be destroyed, and it was. Let's remember that our power is nothing in comparison to God.
(v. 8-13)

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

Sooner or later, we must all give an account for our actions to God; every sin will be judged, if it is not forgiven. We live in a time in which we can call on the Lord Jesus Christ and confess our sins, He is faithful to forgive us. This time will end soon, and God will judge sin.

TODAY'S PRAYER

LORD, HELP ME TO FOLLOW YOU IN MY LIFE, EVERY DAY, IN EVERY WAY.

Rich = Advantage?

DISCOVERING THE WORD

The rich gain the advantage. What does that mean? When we hear rich, most of us will automatically think of physical wealth. There are more things of value in this life though, and many who have earned large amounts of money have discovered their lack of them. Habakkuk was a prophet frustrated with the rise of Babylon after the fall of Judah's King Josiah. King Josiah's revival was large and powerful, but it was motivated by a change in his own heart rather than a change in the nation's heart. Habakkuk asks God directly, "Why do You show me iniquity, and cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; There is strife, and contention arises" (HABAKKUK 1:3). God answers him directly, and it's a fascinating reply.

DISCOVERING GOD — HABAKKUK 2:1-11

The prophet was deeply troubled and wanted an answer. As he waited, the LORD answered.

There are times when God answers and it is not what we expect or think.

(v. 1)

The just in heart shall live by faith in God. Money does not answer all of our needs, faith in God does.

(v. 2-9)

It is a shame to covet money. Our best investment is to accept Jesus Christ as the Lord of our life and follow Him only.

(v. 10-11)

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

While Habakkuk's book does not offer us easy answers to the problems of the evil in this world, he gives us solid reasons to grow our faith in a holy, sovereign, and just God. There are many things we do not understand, events that we cannot explain, but God knows everything and will bring justice.

TODAY'S PRAYER

LORD, THANK YOU FOR YOUR MERCY AND YOUR JUSTICE, PLEASE KEEP MY HEART CLOSE TO YOU.

The Day of the LORD

DISCOVERING THE WORD

Zephaniah’s name means “Yahweh has hidden”, and his genealogy is traced back four generations for us showing that he was the great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah. This sets Zephaniah apart from the prophet Jeremiah, who was also speaking to Judah at the same time. Both of these men prophesied during the reign of King Josiah of Judah. Josiah’s reign was a time of religious restoration, bringing the nation back to the worship of God and the observance of the Mosaic Law. Despite this, Zephaniah prophesied about the day of the LORD that would bring judgment and doom to people devoted to sin. He also promised restoration, a common thread of hope among the gloom. As we read Zephaniah, we will see how hard his prophecies seem, and as we read on, we will discover that he speaks of great relief for those who trust in the LORD and have committed their lives to Him.

DISCOVERING GOD — ZEPHANIAH 1:1-16

We must worship only God. There is no room for compromise.
(v. 1-6)

Money was a huge part of worship. God does not need our money but our money is given to whom we serve.
(v. 7-11)

The great day of the LORD is unlike any other day that has happened. If we have given our lives to Jesus Christ, we are protected from the judgment of God.
(v. 12-16)

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

The LORD has spoken through His prophets in His Word. We should trust in God and wait patiently for Him to fulfill His will and purposes. While we should be concerned about, pray for and warn others of the seriousness of unbelief, let’s live faithfully in hope for the future day of blessing that God has promised to every believer.

TODAY'S PRAYER

LORD, AS I READ YOUR WORD, FILL ME WITH YOUR HOLY SPIRIT TO HELP ME UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU HAVE SAID.

God Gains Order

DISCOVERING THE WORD

There is a reordering of priorities that happens in the lives of the people of God. Everyone has priority structures even if they don't realize it, and Christians have a distinct and different one. When we choose to follow Christ, we put God first in all that we think and do. This is sometimes difficult or challenging to do. It means having faith, trusting. The Bible beautifully describes faith as the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (HEBREWS 11:1). When we see the prophet Haggai, the people of God seem to have forgotten that they weren't perfect. Haggai's message was likely delivered around 520 BC. His name means "festival", and he is mentioned in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14, but little else is known about him personally. As we will see, after people responded to his message, Haggai will encourage them that God was with them!

DISCOVERING GOD — HAGGAI 1:1-15

Through Haggai, God asks the people why they do not have enough food and clothes. The needs of people are fulfilled when their priorities are right with God.
(v. 1-6)

The priorities of God shifted their ability to succeed. God reminds us that when we put His priorities first, He takes care of us.
(v. 7-11)

When the people listened to Haggai, God moved on their spirits. Thinking the way God has called us to think means we do the things God wants us to do.
(v. 12-15)

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

While it is true that we need to work so that we can eat and live, we also need to remember that God has created us to think and live the way He has called us to. The Bible tells us that God knows what we need, and when we seek Him and His righteousness first, He provides all that we need (MATTHEW 6:33).

TODAY'S PRAYER

**LORD, THANK YOU FOR
YOUR GOODNESS IN MY
LIFE. HELP ME TO THINK
AND LIVE THE WAY YOU
HAVE CALLED ME TO.**

Coverage

DISCOVERING THE WORD

About two months after the prophet Haggai prophesied, Zechariah began his work as a prophet of God. Zechariah contains a broad overview of God's plan for the world. He clearly mentions the coming of the future Messiah, and ventures into the second coming of Christ, as well. How interesting it must have been to have heard Zechariah preach in person. He called the people to repentance, to spiritual renewal, and to right relationship with God. As we work through Zechariah's writings, we will see that God never forgets, He never throws out, He never lets sins go undealt with. If we don't deal with them, He will. He is the perfect Judge and keeper of truth. God always does what He says He will do. Let's pay careful attention as we read.

DISCOVERING GOD — ZECHARIAH 1:1-17

The Bible is the Word of the LORD. The Bible is the way God deals with and confronts all of us, where we are with what we have.
(v. 1-6)

God always knows what is happening everywhere and at all times on the earth. The LORD God is perfect and we are not. We must confess our sins to gain access to His redemption.
(v. 7-11)

God has chosen Jerusalem. This is the city where the LORD will return and reign from.
(v. 12-17)

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

The LORD knows the future, and the past has already been written, but in the present we can make ourselves right with God by confessing our sins to Him and asking Christ to become the Lord of our life. My urgent request is that everyone get right with God, now.

TODAY'S PRAYER

LORD, I HEAR YOUR CALL TO REPENTANCE. FORGIVE MY SINS AND HELP ME TO FOLLOW YOU ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE.

Learning

DISCOVERING THE WORD

Psalm 119 is 176 verses long but its division into twenty-two sections is what is historically interesting. Each of these twenty-two sections correspond to a letter of the Hebrew alphabet which was meant to aid in memorization. This is why many devout young Jewish men commit themselves to memorizing Psalm 119 for their coming of age; their bar mitzvah that marks their transition into religious adulthood at age thirteen. Translations of Psalm 119 into any other language naturally lose this structure with the loss of the Hebrew alphabet, and knowledge of it must be added back in through notes or commentary.

Psalm 119 is brilliant in the way it engages the mind and soul. It stands as a reminder that it is not only the words of God’s Holy Spirit that are important, but also the technical arrangement of them that helps us to imbed His words into memory; reading and remembering so that we can follow God in our lives.

God’s path for our lives involves us knowing His Word and doing His Word: Just knowing it is not enough, but we must know it so that we can do it. We also need the Holy Spirit who enables us to understand and empowers us to live faithfully in God’s ways. When we come to Jesus Christ for forgiveness, He gives us His righteousness and makes us new so that we can walk in the ways of God. Through the work of Christ, God sends us the Holy Spirit who helps us understand the Scriptures and how they apply to our lives.

DISCOVER: PSALM 119:1 – 176

**Your word I have hidden in my heart,
that I might not sin against You.**
Blessed are You, O LORD! Teach me
Your statutes.

GUIDED PRAYER

LORD, help me to understand Your
Words as I put them into my memory
and into action in my everyday life.

Wickedness

DISCOVERING THE WORD

The LORD helps us to understand evil by comparing it to things we know. A good example here is the evil woman of Zechariah 5. Obviously, women are not inherently representative of evil, in fact the Scriptures have already utilized a woman to represent godly wisdom (**SEE EXAMPLES IN PROVERBS 1, 8 & 9**). Even in the book of Proverbs where we see the woman Wisdom, we are also given a counter picture of the woman Folly. Folly is seductive, deceitful and has no shame. As the kingdom of Israel and Judah developed they too would be called a foolish woman, an unfaithful, adulterous wife of God (**EZEKIEL 16**). Likewise in Zechariah, wickedness is that woman Folly, a seductive and dangerous force for evil. Two other creatures, pictured as winged women come at the LORD's command to take the basket with the evil woman to Babylon. Zechariah doesn't understand all of his vision, but God provides an angel to explain it to him, benefiting both him and us. The vision of evil is clear, it is a force that is against the work of God, but that will ultimately fail.

DISCOVERING GOD — ZECHARIAH 5:1-10

There is a scroll of judgment that covers the earth. The LORD will judge every sin. Praise the LORD, that Christians have their sins covered by Christ!
(v. 1-4)

Wickedness is expressed by God as living. Sin originates through wickedness which is living and active.
(v. 5-8)

The land of Shinar is where ancient Babylon is. Evil will gather itself to confront God, in the end days.
(v. 9-10)

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

Sin lives in each of our hearts and it's not a simple thing. It takes prayer and action to deal with all the ways sin has been bound up in our lives. The first step is always that sin must be forgiven through Jesus Christ. Let's daily come to God and ask for His forgiveness, His leadership, and righteous guidance.

TODAY'S PRAYER

**LORD, I HUMBLY SUBMIT
MY LIFE TO YOU TODAY.
TEACH ME YOUR WAYS
AND LEAD ME IN YOUR
PATHS.**

Hope

DISCOVERING THE WORD

In Zechariah 9, we see a stunning turn from the destruction of nations and cities to the sure hope of a future King from the line of David. There is and will be judgment from God, but there is also salvation in the one previously called the Branch, the Messiah. Prophecies like this explain why people at the time of Jesus were looking for the Messiah. We see this expectation realized in Jesus in the Gospels, we also see people’s expectations challenged in some ways by Jesus. Today, we read one of the specific messianic prophecies recorded in the Old Testament, in this case written in the 5th century BC. About 500 years later, Jesus would ride into Jerusalem, the awaited King in the line of David. The fulfillment of all things had begun. And as Zechariah’s prophecies all indicate, the hope for Israel never came from the nations that they chose to put their trust in, their sure hope always came from God.

DISCOVERING GOD — ZECHARIAH 9:9–17

He shall have dominion from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. Zechariah quotes Psalm 72:8, as his prophetic word emerges.
(v. 9–10)

It is God who makes Israel strong and restored. The LORD always accomplishes His will, nothing or no one can stop Him.
(v. 11–13)

God will be seen in the restoration of Israel. The LORD will fulfill all He has promised as time comes to an end.
(v. 14–17)

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

Time is coming to an end; nothing on earth lasts forever. The Bible explains that everything has its time (ECCLESIASTES 3), and even time itself will come to a conclusion. What is important is who we put our trust in. Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life.

TODAY'S PRAYER

LORD, I PRAY THAT YOU WOULD HELP ME TO SUBMIT TO YOU NOW.

Jerusalem

DISCOVERING THE WORD

For many years, the old city of Jerusalem has been divided up into four parts that correspond with four large religious groups. Meant to promote peaceful living, this arrangement reflects the historic state of Israel itself: fought over, vied for. History records battles, wars, and invasions for us that have centered on control of Jerusalem and the territory she controlled. What is its secret? Some point to its physical placement in the ancient Near East making it valuable, which is true, but even beyond that the Bible tells us that the city belongs to the LORD. And God is not finished yet. There are still more historic events slated to happen at Jerusalem. Psalm 122:6 tells us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem! The reason, I believe, is because in the future millennial kingdom, Jesus will rule from Jerusalem for 1,000 years. As we continue to read Zechariah, we'll see that he often repeats, "in those days". Let's consider how and why he explains the role of Jerusalem in the end of days.

DISCOVERING GOD — ZECHARIAH 12:1-9

God says that Jerusalem will emerge as an important city in the end of days. Every nation who attempts to manipulate or control it will fall and be judged.
(v. 1-3)

Jerusalem will become a powerful city because of God and His presence. The Jewish people will be restored to the city.
(v. 4-6)

Nations who reject Jerusalem will fall and fail. As the end of time approaches, God will build up the city of Jerusalem.
(v. 7-9)

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

It's a very interesting time to be alive because Jerusalem has been built up in recent history. As this and other issues come up in the news, remember that we must bring our opinions back to God and work them out according to the Scriptures. Who we believe God to be has a huge impact on our worldview.

TODAY'S PRAYER

LORD, I PRAY FOR THE PEACE OF JERUSALEM, AS YOU HAVE COMMANDED IN PSALM 122:6.

God’s Messenger

DISCOVERING THE WORD

Malachi’s ministry began around 420 BC. His name means “God’s messenger” and so some have suggested that this isn’t his proper name but, rather, a title that he used in his prophetic ministry. Malachi’s message is refreshingly uplifting; he offered God’s love to a disheartened people. Israel, at the time, could not understand the meaning of what God wanted from them, they had been focused on the half-hearted giving of offerings. Through Malachi we see that giving offerings to God is not about the physical offering alone, they are supposed to be whole-hearted worship. Offerings are to outwardly reflect our love and devotion to God. As we continue to read in Malachi, this ancient prophet will help us establish a good understanding of giving to God. Let’s be grateful in all ways for what God has done for us.

DISCOVERING GOD — MALACHI 1:1-14

Through Malachi, God says that He will magnify the borders of Israel.

We must remember that the LORD is not done with Israel.
(v. 1-5)

Offerings are not just about our giving but about being accepted by God.

When we give we should pray that the LORD will accept our offerings.
(v. 6-10)

It is important that we give to God our best. As we give offerings, we should pray and ask the LORD to show us how to give our best to Him.
(v. 11-14)

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

Our love and generosity to God comes from a recognition of His love and generosity toward us. Let’s work on developing a healthy desire to give our best to God.

TODAY’S PRAYER

**LORD, I DESIRE TO
HONOUR YOU WITH ALL
THAT I HAVE. HELP ME
AND KEEP ME FOCUSED
ON YOU.**

John the Baptist

DISCOVERING THE WORD

The Gospel of Matthew is known for his extensive and unique use of the Old Testament. Matthew likely wrote his Gospel around 60 AD, when the book of Mark was already circulating among the church. There are thirty-three quotes from the Old Testament in Matthew and as some have noted, several comments related to money as well, which may hint at Matthew's background as a tax collector. At the time of his call to become a disciple of Jesus, Matthew records his occupation as tax collector, a very unpopular profession that sees him grouped with sinners, in general. For Matthew, there is no question that Jesus fulfilled the Jewish expectation of how and when the Messiah would be born. In our reading today, he introduces us to John the Baptist, a key witness pointing to Jesus as Christ. John was from a priestly family, but he did not live like a typical priest. John's food and clothing reflected his prophetic forerunner, Elijah.

DISCOVERING GOD — MATTHEW 3:1–17

John was not your typical priest. His ministry called people to repent from their sins and turn to God, and he prepared the way for the arrival of Jesus.
(v. 1–6)

John preached that Jesus would come and baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. We should come to Christ and confess our sins to Him—get right with God.
(v. 7–12)

Jesus Christ was baptized. John knew that he was lesser and Christ was great, yet Jesus gave John permission to baptize Him
(v. 13–17)

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

When we are baptized, we are following the example of Jesus Christ. It is good to display our testimony in this way. Our old lives are put to death with Christ, and our new lives rose again with Him. Amen!

TODAY'S PRAYER

**LORD, I WANT TO FOLLOW
YOU IN ALL I DO AND SAY.
HELP ME TO LEARN YOUR
WORD AND WAYS.**

Ask, Seek, Knock

DISCOVERING THE WORD

Jesus Christ encourages us to ask, seek, and knock in persistent prayer when it comes to unanswered questions. The LORD wants us to know all about Him, and to know Him. In my experience, He makes us more curious as people. It is one of the beautiful things about being a follower of Christ that God encourages us to develop our minds, hearts, and creativity. As we read through the gospels, we will see Jesus Christ live out the Word of God, and not always in ways that were expected. A classic example is the Sermon on the Mount of Matthew 5 to 7. Jesus explains the differences between what was taught and commonly accepted about the commands of God and what God meant by those commands. In chapter 7, we find what God desires for us and what we should seek after as Christians.

DISCOVERING GOD — MATTHEW 7:1-14

Judging is a weakness, not a strength. We are responsible for our own lives, not controlling the lives of others.
(v. 1-6)

Jesus told us to ask, seek, and knock. We are to be persistent in our prayers.
(v. 7-12)

Jesus told us that living the life of Christ will not be easy, but He is with us. We need to follow Jesus and His teachings. He will help us.
(v. 13-14)

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

There are so many different voices that we can access today telling us what God wants. In this environment, it is important for us to be able to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to us. We need to make time for prayer and quiet reflection, asking the Lord to help us live for Him and make good and right decisions.

TODAY'S PRAYER

LORD, PLEASE HELP ME TO DEVELOP A ROBUST PRAYER LIFE. HELP ME HEAR YOUR VOICE AS I LEARN AND GROW.

Lies

DISCOVERING THE WORD

There are many ways that we can lie to others and to ourselves. It is a huge problem, and it points to humanity’s underlying problem: sin. We can find all sorts of ways to justify our sin, but what if, instead, we held ourselves to a radical standard of integrity?

Psalm 120 is a song of Ascents, originally written for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem. This psalm discusses people who lie; those who have a deceitful tongue. It says, “What shall be given to you, or what shall be done to you, you false tongue?” (PSALM 120:3). This reminds me of Jesus’ discussion of lies in the gospels, “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” (JOHN 8:44).

The Bible clearly tells us that the devil is motivated by deceit and is the father of all lies. This is in contrast to the truth: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (JOHN 1:14).

The special revelation of Jesus Christ came in all truth. The question becomes: Who will we listen to? Will we accept the truth of Christ, or will we love lies more? The world has done a good job at making lies attractive. But a great cover, does not mean a great book. The truth may be harsher at first, but it is a real friend to us.

DISCOVER: PSALM 120:1–7

My soul has dwelt too long with one who hates peace. I am for peace;
But when I speak, they are for war.

GUIDED PRAYER

LORD, help me to live and love in truth.
May my words be Your words of life and truth and not of lies.

Three Lessons

DISCOVERING THE WORD

As we study the ministry of Jesus Christ today, we will focus in on three specific lessons. The first seventeen verses of Matthew 9 show us the power of God through Christ. Jesus heals a paralytic, He calls Matthew the tax collector to be His disciple and by extension the future writer of this very gospel, and then Jesus answers a question about fasting. The Gospels are so much more than a biographical story of an ancient teacher, they reveal a lot about human nature and God’s truth. In Matthew 9, we see the outward religious rules and regulations of the day bump up against Jesus’ teachings. Relationship with God Almighty needs to go beyond observing rules and regulations, it needs to be real and honest and true. We are taught how to adjust our thinking so that we can see and understand the work God wants to do in our lives.

DISCOVERING GOD — MATTHEW 9:1–17

Jesus Christ demonstrated His authority and power by forgiving a man of his sins and healing him.
Healing and forgiveness of sin is all part of God’s power.
(v. 1–8)

Jesus Christ came for those who realize they need a Saviour. Sinners are the Church; we are righteous only through Christ.
(v. 9–13)

Jesus Christ told John’s disciples and the Pharisees that the work of Jesus Christ is a new thing.
We need to see Christ as the Head of a new Kingdom.
(v. 14–17)

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

When we choose to follow Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, God brings us into His Kingdom. The kingdoms of this world shift and change, but we Christians serve in God’s Kingdom through Jesus.

TODAY’S PRAYER

LORD, THANK YOU FOR SAVING AND HEALING ME IN JESUS’ MIGHTY NAME! I WILL WORSHIP YOU WITH MY LIFE.

Wisdom is Justified

DISCOVERING THE WORD

There is no way to truly understand wisdom or discover your meaning in this life, unless you have a relationship with God. Proverbs 1:7 says, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” It is only the beginning when we come into relationship with Jesus Christ, we then have the mind of Christ which helps us understand the work and ways of God. In short, Jesus Christ told us that, “But wisdom is justified by her children” (MATTHEW 11:19B). In other words, wisdom grows in us as Christ grows in our lives, and we change as people. As we grow in wisdom, we will live according to God’s desires, not our own. Though this sounds strange, as we deny ourselves and live according to God’s desires, we become satisfied as people, freed from the burden of our sinful ways. This is what Jesus Christ taught in Matthew 11. Let’s take time to listen and reflect on Christ’s words.

DISCOVERING GOD — MATTHEW 11:1-19

When we are not offended by Jesus Christ, we are blessed by Him.

There is only one way to heaven, to believe and accept Jesus Christ as Lord.
(v. 1-6)

John the Baptist was the beginning sign of Jesus Christ. As a Christian, you are greater in the power of God than you realize.
(v. 7-11)

Jesus Christ told us that wisdom has its children. True wisdom is not about being smart, it’s about being right with God.
(v. 12-19)

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

It is God who has made us right with Him. There is no one who can separate us from the love of God or destroy our eternal life with Him. Praise the LORD!

TODAY'S PRAYER

FATHER GOD, THANK YOU
FOR YOUR SON. HELP ME
TO FOLLOW HIM WELL,
GROW ME IN YOUR WAYS.

Religious Defilement

DISCOVERING THE WORD

Jesus Christ said some harsh things to the Pharisees of His time. Remember that the Pharisees seem to have been birthed during the time of the exile of the Jews. They distinguished themselves by focusing on learning the Law of God and oral tradition, the passed-on teachings about the Law of God; this they taught to the people. The problem was that the oral teachings about the Law of God was seen as the Law of God, to break a historic teacher’s rule was to break God’s Law. This is what we see Jesus critiquing. Jesus pointed to the actual laws of God and their purpose. Ironically, the laws of the Pharisees sometimes undermined the actual Law of God that they were claiming to uphold. We need to be so careful that we don’t put ourselves or others in God’s place. He is morality, He is truth, He knows the way. We are not equal to God. We must keep realistic humility and go to the Bible for truth.

DISCOVERING GOD — MATTHEW 15:1–20

Jesus told the Pharisees that their oral traditions were against God’s Law. God’s ways are about how we treat each other, not about what we can gain from it.
(v. 1–9)

Jesus taught the people that the Law of God is not the religion of man. The laws of Christ are aimed at the welfare of people.
(v. 10–11)

Jesus told the disciples that the Pharisees did not understand His teaching. Evil comes from what we think, not what we eat.
(v. 12–20)

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

How we think about each other comes from our foundational beliefs, like who we believe made us. If God is the center of our thinking then we work to please God and not to please ourselves. Let’s allow the Holy Spirit to guide our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.

TODAY’S PRAYER

LORD, I PLACE YOU AT THE CENTER OF MY LIFE. HELP ME TO ALWAYS FOLLOW YOU.

Precious Are the Children

DISCOVERING THE WORD

A lot of Jesus’ teaching was culturally shocking to the people of His time. One of those teachings was about who was greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. The question was asked by His disciples, and Jesus had them call a child to demonstrate His answer: The greatest in the Kingdom of God was someone who was as dependent on God and innocent as a child. He added that anyone that would welcome a little child on His behalf was welcoming Him. I can imagine the shock of the disciples, who had, at times, attempted to keep children away from Jesus thinking that He had more important issues to deal with. Through this we learn important lessons, not the least of which being that God values and loves children! It could be said that God holds a special place for them. Jesus told His disciples, “I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven” (MATTHEW 18:10). What are we to make of this special placement of children in the Kingdom of God?

DISCOVERING GOD — MATTHEW 18:1–15

Jesus told His disciples that children are paramount in His thinking. We are to take our children seriously. Children’s ministry is critical for God’s Church. (v. 1–5)

Jesus claimed “woe” to the world because of its evil against children. The Lord Jesus condemns the man or woman who abuses children. (v. 6–9)

Jesus told us that He closely watches over children. We must prioritize children for safety and care. (v. 10–15)

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

Jesus warns us that we should never look down on children. They should never be despised or neglected. How we view and treat children reflects who we believe God is. If the LORD is Creator of everything, He has created children and their angels are always in the presence of God.

TODAY'S PRAYER

LORD, I PRAY FOR CHILDREN EVERYWHERE IN THE WORLD. RESCUE THEM LORD, BY YOUR SPIRIT.

Few Are Chosen

DISCOVERING THE WORD

The word parable is defined as a short allegorical story designed to illustrate or teach a truth, religious principle, or moral lesson. When Jesus spoke in parables, we get to see this in action, and we have the benefit of hindsight, being able to read through them again, and of course Jesus' explanations to His disciples. To communicate truths about the Kingdom of God, Jesus used a parable about a wedding feast and its guests. Two conditions of people are represented: First, those who despised the wedding, and second, those who came but did not respect the importance of the wedding. Both kinds of guests gained the same result. Jesus concludes the story with the summarizing statement: "For many are called, but few are chosen" (MATTHEW 22:14). While all are called to and hear the invitation to the Kingdom of God, few respond with faithful obedience to Christ.

DISCOVERING GOD — MATTHEW 22:1-14

There are those who do not take Jesus Christ and His Kingdom seriously.

The most important thing we have in this life is from Jesus Christ and our eternal future with Him.

(v. 1-7)

God opens His invitation to everyone. It is important that each of us come to God through Jesus Christ.

(v. 8-10)

God knows those who are not serious about their faith and will cast them out of His Kingdom. Let's get serious about pursuing God's way and His will!

(v. 11-14)

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

There are many who have initially come to the Lord Jesus Christ, but have not really taken Him seriously. God knows those who have truly committed their lives to Him. Let's be those! Let's fix our mind on things above and not on things in this world.

TODAY'S PRAYER

LORD, I CHOOSE YOU TODAY,
WITH ALL OF MY HEART,
SOUL, MIND, AND STRENGTH.
HELP ME THROUGH YOUR
HOLY SPIRIT, EVERY DAY.

The End

DISCOVERING THE WORD

In Matthew 24, Jesus speaks about the end of time as we know it. As the Word that became flesh and lived among us, Jesus was in a unique position to speak on the subject of God’s ultimate plan for us. That plan does not include us continuing to live in our fallen state forever. Jesus speaks of the enemies of God, and of the sequence that leads up to the end of time. Nothing and no one can interfere with God’s ultimate plan. It is best for us to listen to and learn from the words of Jesus on this. God’s plan of salvation has been since the beginning, and it will come to pass. Today, we live in a time of grace between the first coming of Christ and His second coming. Someday soon this time will conclude, and Jesus’ words will be fulfilled. Let’s look at the signs of the times that are given in our reading.

DISCOVERING GOD — MATTHEW 24:1-14

Jesus was not impressed with the various Temple buildings. God confronts what we have built with the truth of what will happen.
(v. 1-2)

The disciples ask Christ *when and what* the signs of the end will be. Jesus answers all our questions with the harsh truth.
(v. 3-8)

God told us there will be a cost to following Christ. Persecution is not an easy or popular aspect of following Jesus Christ.
(v. 9-14)

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

Jesus wasn’t trying to be controversial or interesting when He spoke about the end times. He wasn’t trying to become popular. He didn’t have a weird ulterior motive. He was simply telling the truth. Jesus’ words means that we must face the truth about our sinful selves. He alone can save us from sin, He has the power and the will to forgive us.

TODAY'S PRAYER

LORD, HELP ME HEAR YOUR VOICE AND TO TRUST AND UNDERSTAND WHAT YOUR PROPHECIES MEAN.

God’s Saving Grace

DISCOVERING THE WORD

God’s saving grace is amazing! Stunning! Remarkable! We are reminded through the lyrics of Psalm 124 that it is God who saves us. In fact, the psalmist puts into writing his wonder of where the people of God would be without God and His intervening. They would be gone!

In a time when the music industry values selfish-gain, ungodliness and debauchery, the music of the Psalms is a breath of fresh air. The LORD God made music for us to enjoy and as an avenue for healing and communication. Through it we can learn, through it we can praise the name of our great Creator.

“Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth” (PSALM 124:8). These words close the eighth verse of the Song of Ascents of David, that is Psalm 124. It is a wonderful passage of Scripture to memorize and to meditate on with its simple and profound question: If it were not for God, where would we be? God is the reason we still have people living and breathing.

An important thing to remember is the amazing grace that God has extended to each one of us. God’s grace is what Psalm 124 makes me meditate on. What about you?

DISCOVER: PSALM 124:1–8

“If it had not been the LORD who was on our side,” let Israel now say— if it had not been the LORD who was on our side, when men rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us alive.

GUIDED PRAYER

LORD, I praise Your name for Your wonderful and amazing grace!

Trials of Pain

DISCOVERING THE WORD

Many of the prophets before Jesus had experienced difficult trials and bitter rejection, but what we see with Jesus has a special sharpness to it. The One who created humanity, the One who chose the nation of Israel itself, being rejected by them, has a different depth to it. In Matthew, we are told of the two trials that Jesus faced. First, Jesus was brought before the high priest and the religious elite of Jerusalem. Then he was brought before the Roman governor, the one that wielded the power of Roman law. Matthew 27:4 records that even Judas, the betrayer, turned his bribe money in because he said, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood”. Jesus knew what He would be facing, and He knew that it was our sins that would cost Him His life. In the book of Genesis, the LORD said, “...for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (GENESIS 2:17). Jesus willingly laid down His life to pay for the cost of our sins.

DISCOVERING GOD — MATTHEW 27:1-14

Jesus faced the religious counsel and was condemned. Now He would face the political counsel. Judas, the betrayer, knew that Jesus was innocent of the accusations.
(v. 1-4)

Zechariah prophesied the condemning words in Zech. 11:12-13. Jeremiah is identified because of his gathering of the prophets. God is clear and speaks through His prophets.
(v. 5-10)

Jesus Christ was not defensive. There is never a reason for God to be defensive.
(v. 11-14)

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

The events of the conviction and crucifixion of Jesus Christ, as Matthew reports them, are true and well-established. Everything that Jesus went through was public – all could see it. God was revealing His nature and His plan of salvation for His children.

TODAY'S PRAYER

LORD, THANK YOU FOR YOUR CLARITY AND FOR PRESERVING HISTORY FOR US IN THE BIBLE.

First Gospel Written

DISCOVERING THE WORD

The Gospel of Mark is action-packed and vividly records the miracles and works of Jesus Christ. It is relatively short, is believed to be the first and earliest gospel written, and it records the acts and achievements of Jesus as the Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Though the work itself does not name an author, Church history unanimously points to John Mark. Mark is mentioned ten times in the New Testament. His Hebrew name was John, and his Roman name was Mark. Mark is recorded as a cousin of Barnabas who was a famous ministry partner of Paul. In Acts 12:12, we're told that Mark's widowed mother Mary was close to Peter. For that reason and others, it is believed that Peter was a main source of information for Mark's Gospel. With this background information in mind, let's embark on a study of this telling of Jesus' ministry on earth that so clearly shook the culture.

DISCOVERING GOD — MARK 1:1-11

Mark begins his message with a proclamation.

The subject is Jesus Christ; He is the main event.

(v. 1-3)

John the Baptist highlights the coming Jesus Christ.

The message remains the same and has always been about Jesus Christ.

(v. 4-8)

We see the evidence of God's Holy Spirit, in the first eleven verses of Mark chapter 1. The Holy Spirit is real; He is God.

(v. 9-11)

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

Mark's style of writing is to the point. He does not spend a lot of time on extra details but focuses on main events. All in his first chapter, Jesus is born, is baptized by John the Baptist, the disciples are called, and the ministry is established.

TODAY'S PRAYER

LORD, WITH THE POWER OF YOUR HOLY SPIRIT, HELP ME TO KEEP YOU FRONT AND CENTER IN MY LIFE.

The Word

DISCOVERING THE WORD

The parables that Jesus chose to tell are so interesting. They teach us about the Kingdom of God, about ourselves, our relationship with the world and with God. One of the parables in our reading today is about a farmer scattering seeds. This story crosses time and cultures easily because we all must grow food to live. This story is often referred to as the Parable of the Sower and there are three elements of the parable that I'd like to focus on. The sower is the one whose effort scatters the seeds which represent the Word of God. However, the sower can't control the sprouting of the seeds, that is God's domain: As He has designed seeds to grow, so has He designed His Word to grow in our lives. Where the seeds land is another element. The end result of the work of the sower and the work of the seed depends on the condition of the soil. Jesus uses this parable to describe the spreading of His Word and the condition of the human heart to receive it.

DISCOVERING GOD — MARK 4:1-20

Jesus' teaching highlights the importance of spreading God's Word and the condition of the heart to receive it. We should be faithful and consistent to cast the seed of God's Word.
(v. 1-9)

Jesus told parables so that we would remember them. The Bible is a book of God speaking to His creation.
(v. 10-12)

Jesus spoke to His disciples in simple terms so they could understand His message. The Bible is presented so we can understand it with the help of God's Holy Spirit.
(v. 13-20)

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

Mark records the message of Jesus, along with the way that He taught it. The Bible is a book ever deep with meaning. It is never outdated nor read and completely understood.

TODAY'S PRAYER

TEACH ME, HOLY SPIRIT!
HELP ME LEARN WHAT
YOU ARE SAYING AND
HOW TO FOLLOW YOUR
LEADING.

Four Thousand to One

DISCOVERING THE WORD

The wilderness is not an easy place to be. Think about it! There are no restaurants, shops or markets to get food from, no bathrooms or places that provide human conveniences. Jesus knew the circumstances well, and He knew that the people who were following Him were doing so at the sacrifice of their own comfort, especially since it had been three days. Not wanting them to leave hungry, Jesus wanted to provide food for them. He asked His disciples how many loaves of bread they had left. It is interesting that Jesus didn't create a meal from nothing; He decided to utilize the little that His disciples had. He multiplied it many thousands of times over while His disciples watched and participated in distributing the food. How often does Jesus want to do the same for us? The feeding of the four thousand tells us a lot about who God is, and what He will do for us even when we have very little resources. Let's believe Him and move forward in the right things.

DISCOVERING GOD — MARK 8:1-10

Jesus gave thanks for the food even before they had enough to feed the crowd. We should thank God for who He is, because He can do all things.
(v. 1-7)

Seven large baskets of leftovers were gathered up after everyone had eaten their fill. The Lord Jesus is gracious to always provide more than enough for us.
(v. 8)

Jesus did this miracle like breathing. Though we are amazed, God is not. Miracles are His way of providing and helping us.
(v. 9-10)

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

Every day, we have miracles that we take for granted. Let's remember that the LORD is the God of miracles and He will provide what we need when we need it. We must work but God helps us to get our food and clothing, in order that we might live.

TODAY'S PRAYER

LORD, THANK YOU FOR YOUR AMAZING, DAILY MIRACLES!

Timeless God

DISCOVERING THE WORD

The transfiguration of Jesus would have assured the watching disciples that the future glory of God through His Son was coming: The Kingdom of Heaven was indeed upon them. Not only was Jesus transfigured, but He was also joined by historic representatives of the Law of God and the Prophets in the attendance of Moses and Elijah. For us, and in the hindsight of Peter, James and John, the transfiguration also revealed Christ clearly as God. In the moment, the three disciples seem to have not known quite what to think or do. Peter even suggested making booths for each of them. But God would quiet all of that when He told them to listen to the words of Jesus. This event was also likely meant to provide comfort for the disciples during the ordeal of the crucifixion and burial of Jesus. Though they may have been confused in the moment, they knew what they had seen, they knew who Jesus was. After the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, Peter, James and John became key eyewitnesses in the Church establishing the gospel and moving forward with the work of God.

DISCOVERING GOD — MARK 9:1–10

One of the powers of the Kingdom of God is that it is not bound by time.
Time is a created temporal dimension we are physically bound by.
(v. 1–4)

Peter loses control of his mouth in fear. Fear is a powerful motivator. We must remember who God is: Our Provider Protector.
(v. 5–6)

God said we must hear Jesus Christ His Son above all others. There are many who give good advice, but only Jesus gives words of truth and life.
(v. 7–10)

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

Too many of us are interested in how many people we can get to hear our ideas. Rather than seeking people to learn from us, we should be seeking the face of God to learn from Him. Jesus’ instruction brings us an abundant life in Him. Let’s carefully listen to Him and obey.

TODAY'S PRAYER

LORD, TEACH ME YOUR WAY AND SHOW ME YOUR PATH. I WANT TO LISTEN TO YOU AND YOUR WORD.

Entry of the King

DISCOVERING THE WORD

Near the end of His earthly ministry, the King entered Jerusalem. It was part of His plan all along. The people responded to Him with great fervor, thinking He would enter the city and become their long-awaited king to overthrow Roman rule. But there was a problem: Sin and Satan. Satan was ruler of this world, and Rome his puppet (JOHN 12:31; 1 JOHN 5:19). Sin desires to subject itself to Satan, and we are under its authority. Sin is not something that we can just resolve on our own, it is embedded into human nature. The consequence of our disorderly and rebellious nature is death. Christ had to do something about sin, sorrow, suffering, and death, by becoming man in the likeness of sinful flesh and nailing it to the cross once for all, so that all who follow the King of kings may be citizens of an everlasting Kingdom not made by human hands. We must believe in the gospel, repent of our sins, accept Him as the Lord of our life, and follow Him daily. This was the first time Jesus officially entered the city of Jerusalem as rightful heir to the throne of David, its once yet future King.

DISCOVERING GOD — MARK 11:1-11

Jesus set everything up for His first entry into Jerusalem as King.

God knows all we must do and knows how we will respond.
(v. 1-8)

Years before the triumphal entry God prophesied in the Psalms what the people would say. God is never surprised at anything.
(v. 9-10)

Jesus noticed everything that was in place before His crucifixion. God knows exactly what we will confront and what we are facing, even right now.
(v. 11)

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

There is no question that the LORD knows everything we are going through. When we pray, let's remember that God desires us to articulate what we are requesting so that we see His mighty hand answer our prayers.

TODAY'S PRAYER

**LORD, HELP ME PAY
ATTENTION TO EVERY
PRAYER YOU ANSWER AND
TO EARNESTLY SEEK YOUR
RESPONSE.**

Following God

DISCOVERING THE WORD

In today’s world, culture tends to celebrate freedom as the number one reason we live our lives. Yet Psalm 126 is written to celebrate coming gladness and joy—Israel’s release and return from exile. This act of God changed the weeping of the people into laughter. Perhaps the freedom we think about today is not exactly what we think it is. Why? Freedom is the ability to make our own decisions that are not forced or based on someone else’s demands. That is good. But to continue thinking, with that freedom, we can also make very wrong decisions that affects others.

The effect of our personal decisions on the lives of others is often not good, and sometimes evil consequences can follow. So while there is a celebration for freedom, let’s also understand the truth. With that freedom to choose comes the responsibility of how our decisions can deeply impact others. The freedom to follow Jesus Christ is a free will decision, but the desire and choice to continue following Christ every day of our lives is also a free will decision. Our freedom in Christ is the essence of joy itself—freedom from sin, sorrow, suffering, and death.

When the psalmist declares, “When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing” (PSALM 126:1-2), we celebrate what the LORD’s will is for us. Amen!

DISCOVER: PSALM 126:1–6

**Bring back our captivity, O LORD,
as the streams in the South.**
Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy.

GUIDED PRAYER

LORD, thank You for the restoration and joy You bring into my life. You are my God and I will follow You!

Scourged by Soldiers

DISCOVERING THE WORD

It is difficult to grasp and easy to forget the spiritual pain that Jesus Christ endured at the crucifixion. Remember that Christ is the King of the Jews. The chief priests wanted Him dead, while the Roman military wanted to make an example of any Jewish leader who emerged in society and did not co-operate with their authority. So when the people insisted that Jesus be killed, Pilate sent Him to the soldiers to be scourged or flogged, which was a regular way to first torture those who were to be crucified. The soldiers also used this time to mock and humiliate Christ. Interesting to note that it was later at Jesus’ death that a centurion declared Jesus was the Son of God. The scene as described in Mark around the scourging of Jesus is stunning, He didn’t say anything. This was utter humiliation because of sin—not His sin, but ours. Jesus Christ gave not only His life but carried the pain of being rejected in this life, because of our sin. Sin is an awful, horrible thing, yet Christ paid for the cost of it, once and for all. Something we could not do, nor can ever do.

DISCOVERING GOD — MARK 15:1-20

Jesus Christ did not speak—He knew why He was being crucified.

The Lord paid a debt we could not pay.

(v. 1-5)

Barabbas, the murderer, was released, instead of Jesus.

Christians tend to bear the cost that others perpetrate toward God.

(v. 6-15)

Jesus was mocked by the military men of the empire.

The cost of sin is too much for humans. But Christ is fully God, as well.

(v. 16-20)

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

Remember the suffering Jesus endured for our sin. It’s only through His death we can be forgiven and restored to God. That’s why we come to the Lord Jesus in total repentance, feeling regret, and turning away from our sin, yet at the same time realizing the release of our sin over us and the gift of eternal life because of what Christ has done.

TODAY’S PRAYER

LORD, THANK YOU FOR SAVING ME, TO DELIVER ME FROM MY SIN. HELP ME EVERY DAY TO TURN FROM SIN AND TURN TOWARD YOU.

Details of Luke

DISCOVERING THE WORD

Luke’s Gospel is written to a man named Theophilus, whose name means “lover of God”. His Gospel is part one of a two-part series. Part two is the book of Acts, which refers to the acts of the apostles after Pentecost—Christ’s ascension and the Spirit’s descension and indwelling. Unlike the other authors, Luke was a Gentile. He was a physician who spent a tremendous amount of time with the apostle Paul, travelling with him on his missionary journeys. Luke’s Gospel account is often seen as more historical in its reporting, researching the culture and times in which Christ lived and tends to remember details that Matthew does not record. It seems that his profession and ethnicity assisted him in how he reported Jesus’ miracles. The Gospel of Matthew was likely written around the same time as Luke, about AD 60. Remember that the style of Luke’s Gospel is very different than the Gospels of Matthew and Mark—Matthew was centered around the Jews, Mark focused on the Romans, and Luke was written to the Gentiles.

DISCOVERING GOD — LUKE 1:1–17

Luke wrote his Gospel to a man named Theophilus.

This Gospel is personal and direct. A doctor’s report is clear and carefully written.

(v. 1–4)

Luke highlights John the Baptist as the son of a priest, filled by the Holy Spirit before birth.

Christians need to pay attention to the filling of God’s Holy Spirit.

(v. 5–15)

John the Baptist was a big part of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Christians today are also a big part of the testimony of Jesus Christ.

(v. 16–17)

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

A testimony is a proven, written record that illustrates a change in something. As Christians, our life story is our testimony of what God has done for us and how we change in His power as we obey Him. Let’s live it out to the glory and praise of God!

TODAY’S PRAYER

LORD, GRANT ME THE
COURAGE TO LIVE OUT
AND SHARE MY STORY
WITH ALL WHO ASK.

Temptations

DISCOVERING THE WORD

Sin has made us susceptible to temptation. Our passions, appetites, and desires that lead us into sin stem out of human frailty. In contrast, Jesus Christ's perseverance against Satan in the wilderness—overcoming temptation and our human proclivities to live by our base desires—is just amazing! The root of temptation is pride, and Christ's humility is on full display. Satan has a head knowledge of God's Word, and so he manipulates it to get what he wants out of it. But he was not speaking to just any man, he was speaking to the Word of God Himself. The devil quoted Scripture to use Christ's own words against Him, but Christ countered each temptation with Scripture, proving that all desires that are not rooted in God's Word are vain—fragile, empty, and void, with no understanding of the truth (JOHN 8:44). Friends, simply memorizing God's Word is not enough. Understanding and applying God's Word through the Holy Spirit is essential to living in God's Kingdom daily. Jesus Christ defeated Satan and the temptation to sin by rightly dividing the truth of God's wonderful Word.

DISCOVERING GOD — LUKE 4:1-13

Satan told Jesus to change a stone into a loaf of bread to feed Himself.

Jesus depended on God's strength to sustain Him, not bread alone.
(v. 1-4)

Who we worship is the key to truly knowing God.

We must worship only God.
(v. 5-8)

Jesus taught we should never test God to see if He will fail.

We must trust God and serve Him as Christ did, so pride does not takeover.
(v. 9-13)

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

How do we know what God has commanded us to do? By following the example of Jesus Christ and serving Him alone. As we do, God's Holy Spirit helps us to learn and faithfully follow and grow in Christ.

TODAY'S PRAYER

LORD, I DESIRE TO FOLLOW YOU COMPLETELY. HELP ME BE STRONG AND STAY CLOSE TO YOU.

[illegible]

This way of reacting to violence and compulsion is the way of Christ” [7] who Himself “stood silent before his accusers, allowing himself to be crucified, thereby winning the ultimate battle over the enemy (COLOSSIANS 2:15)... Jesus came to defeat the work of Satan. He gave his followers authority...to overcome the power of the enemy (LUKE 10:19) and the forces of evil in society (EPH. 6:13). James and Peter tells us to resist the devil (JAMES 4:7; 1 PETER 5:9), yet Jesus also wants to conquer our desire to retaliate and avenge. God’s people must work for justice but not take personal revenge.”[8]

So, what Jesus said was true. He didn't come and abolish the law. He did, however, come to fulfill it and to teach us what the true intent of the Law was from the beginning. ■

- 1 It is first introduced in Exodus 21:23-25 and then restated in shortened forms in Leviticus 24:19-20 and Deuteronomy 19:21.
- 2 Jack S. Deere, The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament, Deuteronomy 19:21, P298, General Editors John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck.
- 3 NIV Quest Study Bible, Aren't there Times when we should Resist an Evil Person?, Matthew 5:39, P1429.
- 4 NIV Grace and Truth Study Bible, Matthew 5:38-42, R. Albert Mohler, Jr.
- 5 F.F. Bruce, Hard Sayings of the Bible, Matthew 5:39 Turn the Other Cheek, P362-365, General Editors Walter C. Kaiser Jr., Peter H. Davids, F.F. Bruce, Manfred T. Brauch.
- 6 Though Jesus is taking these laws a step further in the eyes of the people, really, He's just showing what the true intent of the Law always was.
- 7 F.F. Bruce, Hard Sayings of the Bible, Matthew 5:39 Turn the Other Cheek, P362-365, General Editors Walter C. Kaiser Jr., Peter H. Davids, F.F. Bruce, Manfred T. Brauch.
- 8 NIV Quest Study Bible, Aren't there Times when we should Resist an Evil Person?, Matthew 5:39, P1429.

unexpected things, a lot of irony. The magi, who evidently don't know the Scriptures because they don't know where the Messiah is supposed to be born, they go to Jerusalem to ask Herod where to go, the chief priests and scribes are taken by surprise. They know the Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem, but God hasn't given them a sign. The people who should be ready for the Messiah, because not only are they God's chosen people, they are teachers of the Scriptures, they have all the knowledge necessary, but they aren't ready for Him. The people who have the head knowledge of the Scriptures have wasted it. Instead, God has chosen to reveal Himself to those who are foolish in terms of their understanding of the Scriptures (**1 CORINTHIANS 1:27**). The Magi, who should be seen as fools, are elevated to wise men because of the calling and the mercy of God. ■

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