

Shaqah

*Beware lest any man
spoil you through
philosophy and vain
deceit after the tradition
of men, after the
rudiments of the world
and not after Christ.
Colossians 2:8*

Issue #33

www.livingspringsinstitute.org

November & December 2007

Following the Biblical Stream:

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In our last installment, we talked about the fact there is more than just numbers and names contained in chapter 5 of Genesis. In truth, these kinds of chapters probably have more value to our understanding of God's Word than we will ever know. One of the things we did last time was show a chart which can be made of the information given in this chapter which helps us gain a perspective on the world leading up to the flood. We talked more about the multiple generations living together factor, which is far different than what we know today. We also talked about the responsibility of having children, and the fact we give up a little of the control God gave to each of us with every new human we choose to bring into this world. That discussion brings us to a conversation about diversity.

There are many things in this world which man does not like, but he is responsible, in one form or another, for most all of them. We are the decision makers in our universe, and that fact includes us all, not just a portion. With every child born, the world became/becomes a slightly different

place. The cumulative effect of that is a world filled with diversity, which people find very difficult to navigate. This is why Jesus told true believers to pray, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." Matt. 6:9-10

Verse 3 of Genesis chapter 5 tells us Adam was one hundred and thirty years old when he begat Seth. Of course, this is not odd considering the next verse tells us Adam lived another eight hundred years after he begat Seth, and he continued to begat sons and daughters. However, verse 3 also comes, once again, back to a simple point. The son Adam begat was "...in his own likeness, after his image;" Now, I have talked before about the fact this point is made to emphasize God was not using a process like evolution to create the world and mankind. However, the fact continues to be re-emphasized, because keeping that fact clearly in our minds is very important to our understanding of another point. Adam was a man who simply "knew" his wife, and after doing so, Eve was with

child. Following what we would call the gestation period, Eve gave birth to a child which was after the likeness of his parents. I think we often forget, this is just as God intended it. As we bring more humans into this world, it was God's intent that we bring forth children which are after our own seed. However, this is not to say if we are brown haired and brown eyed we will have a child with brown hair and brown eyes, but it does mean we will have a child which is composed of our genetics. Both parents will pass on to the child things which already exist in themselves. Most people will look at this issue as only talking about the fact humans are all similar, but pointing this out multiple times has the value of preparing us to handle what we observe to be true about human individuality. The flip side of the fact we are all common could not be more obvious to parents. One of the first, clearest facts to many parents is that their children have a mind of their own, and often when you have more than one child, you find them to be very different from one another. The point here is that the obvious observable facts in life are that we are all very different, but we should not fear, because scripture verses like these tell us over and over that we are all of the same seed!

We are not evolving. Which means humans can grow as individuals but that will never change the fact as we give birth to new humans they will all have to start from the same foundational traits we all have started from. So, in spite of those days when we look at our children and ask, "Is this really my child?" Yes, we bare seed after our own kind; and the fact we all came from only two original humans who are the parents of us all, is a fact even evolutionists

have trouble denying! This means all the diversity we see in humans today was in some way a part of the genetic makeup God originally contained in just Adam, because even Eve was made from Adam. (Gen. 2:21-23) Chapters like Genesis 5 make it clear to us all that mankind populated this planet by having children "the old fashion way"! On this issue also, there is no argument between the creationist and the evolutionist. So, whether we are white, black, brown or some other color, and no matter how individuals differ in their likes and dislikes, there should be no question about our commonality. The truth is self-evident that all mankind was created equally, and this makes it an odd fact that so many people think we can solve all humanities problems by focusing on our commonality.

We should ask ourselves, why do humans often think of a desire to see the obvious similarities in all of us as the solution to humanities greatest struggles, and why has our desire to see the similarities in each other grown to be almost an obsession? In spite of the little to no ground we have gained, we believe and continue to teach that focusing on the obvious fact we are common is a good thing; but ironically, our obsession with similarity is not the solution, it's actually a big part of our problems! The simple answer to the question about why we obsess over similarities, is that similarities are not what we have trouble with. What we have great trouble with is our diversity. When we look into the history of man, both modern and ancient, the argument can clearly be made that the number one problem among humans is that we are not all the same in every way. We do not look the same. We do not have the

same desires and passions. This means we do not all like the same kind of houses or foods. We do not all like the same kind of scenery or climate. What one finds beautiful another finds ugly. What one finds useful another thinks is hindering. What one finds valuable another believes is trash. Diversity is the problem, not our similarities - right? Wrong, but the fact we often do not like diversity is why people are so easily convinced that obsessing over what makes us alike is the cure!

A simple fact of life is that you do not fix a problem by ignoring it. If you have a clogged drain, you don't just ignore it and say, "I'm just going to focus on the fact water still comes out of the faucet!" Our obsession with commonality is similar to doing just that. This is why we say things like, "I want to focus on the things which bring us together not on the things which keep us apart." Of course, we would all like to do this all the time, because those things we agree on are the easy stuff. We don't want to unclog the drain; we want to focus on the fact we can still get water. Then everyone will be happy, but only until the floor begins to flood!

The trouble is, we have difficulty defining our problems. You see, diversity is not a real problem. The real problem is our sinful nature. In fact, similarities can be directly blamed for more problems than diversity! History clearly shows us our needs and desires for things similar are a far bigger problem. The fact we all need farmland to grow food, and we all need much of the same raw materials to build

with, has caused most of our conflicts. The modern fact that we all desire cheap energy to sustain our "advanced" societies is spurring nuclear proliferation; and even if it does not start with the intent of being "weapons grade," it does put a society just steps away from such a goal. So, in reality, obsessing over our similarities is not really the neutral and safe ground which we seem to think it is!

The truth of the matter is that we do not really want to focus on similarities because they are safe but because they are what we want. Why does diversity clog up the drain? The answer is that we want to do something different with the sink than God built it for. This fact clearly shows itself at the Tower of Babel, but we seem to miss the point of that story entirely. The bottom line is that diversity should not bother us at all, and at the heart of the reason for why it does is the fact so many people ultimately want to see humanity working together just as it did at the Tower of Babel. You see, there's no reason to fear some kind of alien invasion or talk about one race being better than another. We are all humans who came from common parents! The only reason there are as many people on this planet as there are is because we chose to beget them. So, why should we fear or even care that we do not all like the same things? Why does it bother us that we do not all think alike, or want to do the same things? Especially in the face of truth which tells us wanting the same things is often what causes our greatest conflicts? The bottom line truth is that many people desire we work together, even if all of us are not



interested in working on the same thing! This is why we care so much about focusing on the things we agree on. If we can find common ground, we can work on those things and forget the things which make us different. Being different is not a problem if we are not insistent on everyone working together in some way, toward some common goal; and the only reason we are bothered so much by the differences of others is because we feel it threatens the grand thought of what we could accomplish if we all worked together.

This is why so many people, especially in today's world, are concerned about something offending them even when the thing does not touch them directly. As believers in the fact there is one true God, we are faced with this more and more. People who do not believe in God or claim to believe in a different kind of god(s) are constantly fighting to see every reference to God erased from our present as well as the facts of our past. When people do this they are not just focusing on the things which we agree on, they are attempting to wipe clean the fact there are differences at all! Diversity gets in the way of man finding a common goal. However, all of us having a common goal is not what is most productive and advantageous to our lives! This is a truth of creation and the reason God confounded our languages at the Tower of Babel.

Now, I realize there are many people who do not agree with that statement, but sin makes it solidly true. If we followed the spirit of saying, "Let's focus on the thing which we agree on," we would be talking

about those things which are truly necessary to work together on. We would be saying exactly what the Bible tells us to do. We would love each other in spite of how different we were. We would be willing to help our brother or sister in need without caring who they were or how different their life seemed. (Ex. 23:1-9) We would not say things like, "I don't see color." We would say, "I can see color because seeing color does not bother or offend me," and we would not expect everyone to change in order to meet our views. We would not feel that diversity deprived us in some way of what we want. We (as well as others) would be free to share our opinions even when others did not like them. They in turn would be able to share the fact they disagreed with our opinion, and explain why. In our sin filled world it's very difficult to see this process at work, and we often derail this process, even when it happens, because our obsession with commonality says even this must be a means to a neutral end, not just a freedom. The truth is, we do not like diversity, but if it did not bother us so much, the freedom to debate would be under no pressures leading to conflict or anger. Then we would see that the freedom to differ and debate those differences is a process which has value in understanding ourselves, and growing the individual human mind even if the end result is often continuing disagreement. This is applying the second law of humanity as well as furthering our ability to execute it. (Matt. 22:36-40)

American President Gerald Ford often reminded, "We can disagree without being disagreeable." Why is this possible? Be-

cause there should be no disagreement that we all come from common roots. Which means we have the ability to understand, on some level, everything which we do not agree with. Disagreement and diversity does not and should not be in and of itself offensive to us. Some people may never agree, and true believers in God should not work to accept into their personal lives sinful ideas. That is the whole point. We do not all have to do and believe the same things, but there is also no reason aggression has to break out over disagreement. God told us to be fruitful and multiply. (Gen. 1:27-28) When reading this, we often only talk about the idea of our right to have children, but we do not talk about the right to be fruitful. It's the right of each individual's life to mean something of their own choosing, but the more we are forced to focus only on the things in which we are similar the more of our diversity and individuality we lose! Giving up pieces of individuality, even for a time, is also an individual choice. This is how God created it to be. God created us to be diverse. Our diversity was launched from the safe ground of our commonality, and in spite of the fact we give birth to children after our image, each child adds to the diversity of our world. It's when we attempt to change or ignore this fact of life that we cause hardship and suffering.

We seem to see how this is dangerous when it's taken to its profound and drastic end of the stick. Such was the actions of Hitler. Many people think of Hitler as just a cold blooded lunatic like so many other murdering, self centered dictators. When in

fact, he did believe he was doing humanity a favor. Hitler believed the way to bring prosperity to the earth was to make all men so similar, they would even look the same. He believed there was a supreme race which could go further and do more, especially if it was not encumbered by those not a part of it, and more importantly those who believed things which were contrary to this ideology. This is what led to Hitler's mass murder. This is also why Hitler put the Jews first and foremost on his list of those who had to go! The Jews hold God's truth about diversity in their law, and that is, to this very day, contrary to the law most humans favor and are trying to develop. In this light, we see the problem; but instead of admitting the problem, we just keep slamming our heads against the same brick wall! There is no great need to focus on what makes us similar. The simple fact is, we are similar! Our differences should not be destroying us, they should be what is moving us ahead. Selfishness is not wanting to be an individual with individual desires, likes and ideas. Selfishness is when we want our desires in spite of the harm we may do to others, and true selfishness shows itself in no greater form than when we wish to deny others from being different just because they are!

Ask yourself this, why do people desire to "engineer" their children? While it's true children have their own mind, there is still no example in which it's more clear that the outcome is going to be something similar to ourselves than in the case of having children. Many will claim they are "designing" their children because they do

not like themselves or because they want to give their children more opportunity than they had. However, there is still the point that the child will be “designed” by us. We will choose what is “good,” but if we are not good, how can we make such a choice? If we are good, why do we need to do anything besides let nature take its course? The simple fact is, we do not want to accept just what nature taking its course might give us. That would be God’s plan. We desire to have a child which fits our parameters of what constitutes an intelligent, healthy, good looking human being. The real trouble is that we don’t really desire to be individuals living in a world full of individuals. We want to be individuals who get to see our ideas moved forward even if that inhibits the lives of others. This is the attitude which causes one man to enslave another, one to judge another, and often claim, “I am offended” by others.

Tolerance is not what most people are talking about when talking about tolerance and even when they are, they are talking about “tolerance!” With apologies to Mr. Webster, the simple definition of tolerance is, to tolerate. To say you will tolerate is to say you will put up with it. This is what we’re talking about. Often when people speak of tolerance, they are not even putting up with others. They are not truly talking about a concept which says, we are focusing on what brings us together, but one which says we will only listen to or accept those things which are common to us all. Those things which are not common are tagged as evil things which tear us apart, and they are by no means tolerated! The other part is that even when we do tolerate, that is all we are doing. We are not

trying to hear or see what someone else is thinking. We are not appreciative of God’s created diversity; and we are certainly not looking at the good things which can be produced by differences in thinking. We may talk about what we can do together with our differences once we find how they can fit together, but what we do not appreciate is the fact that some differences have tremendous value in being just what they are with nothing added. An individual does not have to simply contribute to what others are working on to be a contributing member of society.

Life is not always about the stone soup story. All individual value does not lie in the fact they can add something to the pot, and that is what we so often do not understand. Again, this is why people have literally enslaved other people. Governments often enslave their people to accomplish what they see as valuable. Groups enslave other groups or individuals to accomplish what they find valuable. However, slavery and the like is just a more violent form of what many of us are trying to do in a much more diplomatic form. What we need to learn is that diversity exists because God created it in the beginning. We need to stop fighting it. We also need to stop trying to make people embrace it! What God created was individuals. One male and one female. Together they could choose to beget what? Individuals!

Until next time, Shalom!

DECODING THE TRUTH

PART VI

In this series, we have covered many different things, but the main point we just keep coming back to is that simple fact, we all must choose. There are many books out there which will teach many different philosophies about who Jesus was and is. However, the Gospels preserved for us in the New Testament and the writing which follows, all tell us the same thing. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise given to us from the creation, trusted in by men like Job, Abraham, and Moses, reconfirmed and illustrated through the chosen nation of Israel and the law God entrusted to them, and proclaimed to be just around the corner by John the Baptist. However, the choice is not a hard one if we are only willing to give Jesus a chance through seeking to actually know Him.

One of the biggest points made in this series, which I hope will stick with us all, is that Gnostics teach us God is unknowable, but the Bible tells us God is very knowable. This is why I say over and over in my writings that it's so dangerous to believe faith is simply blind belief. To believe this is to have nothing more than a Gnostic has. It's to say we have chosen what to put our trust in and now we are simply hoping

for the best, but that is not what true faith is. Faith is the substance of what

we hope for, which is: an eternal relationship with a very personable, knowable God, like the one who created man and came to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden even after they had sinned. (Gen. 3:6-9) Faith is the evidence that a place has been prepared for us that after this life passes - and we all know it will - we can be where God is! (Heb. 11:1, John 14:1-3)

So, the choice is not between two blind leaps, but between the foolish thoughts of man and his hope he can save himself, and therefore, not have to yield to a perfect God and a true relationship which proves God is the best thing a human could ever have. We get this opportunity not because Jesus was a man who died and left behind a wife and kids to start some secret order, but because Jesus is alive for evermore. Jesus did not entangle Himself with the pleasures of this flesh, but promised us a place with Him and a new incorruptible flesh. (John 6:24-71) He did not leave us comfortless but prayed The Father send us The Holy Ghost. (John 14:15-17) Through The Holy Ghost's guidance, we are reminded of the fact Jesus is not only alive but returning to

gather all those who desire to be with Him unto a place He has prepared for us, where the sin of this world and life will no longer grieve and vex our souls. (John 14:25-26, Rev. 21:1-4) Jesus was/is not simply one of many guides emanated from a higher power. He is The Highest Power in all that exists. (John 14:9) He told us so with His own mouth, (John 10:27-33) and that is why it is ridiculous to doubt that Jesus was who He said He was and still believe He was a great prophet of some sort instead of a crazy man. There just isn't any middle ground!

For example, it has been suggested by some false teachers that in Matthew chapter 16, Jesus was confused about who He really was and that was His reason for asking His apostles, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" This, of course, is an absurd interpretation of the Scripture, but there's the issue in a nutshell. Jesus was either accomplishing something special or He was mentally unstable, conflicted and confused!

The truth is, Jesus wanted to know what the disciples were hearing as they walked among others; and He wanted to know whether they had, by walking with Him, come to the right understanding in spite of the confused public opinion which surrounded them. In this story, we see the disciples explaining

that many people believed Jesus was a reincarnation, or the like, of some past prophet or the contemporary John the Baptist. This is a very interesting fact. If people believed Jesus was some reincarnation of a long deceased prophet or somehow a very recent one, then they understood what a prophet was. The people obviously did not feel so far removed from long ago prophets that they did not understand even John the Baptist was one; and the significant point here is that they all understood Jesus was not, "simply a prophet." The answer was not that Jesus was a prophet "like" Elijah, Elisha, or John the Baptist; it was that He was somehow one of those prophets in a new form. This is because even the common people understood Jesus was something special, something unique, something more than even the greatest prophets they had ever known! What they came up with was the idea that Jesus was a great prophet of the past who had somehow come back in some new, more powerful form. This shows a very Gnostic way of thinking. In their minds, a great prophet who had originally been just a man, ascended through death or another means and then returned as something greater than any man could be in the first place. This is also why they believed the possibilities as to whom Jesus had been in the past were wide open. Any great prophet would do, because in Gnostic

thinking, any man can ascend if he works to do so. Thoughts like this are why the Bible makes it clear that only one man can ascend to The Father, and only through Him do we have the opportunity to follow. (John 3:13)

Now, that was the common man's take on the issue; but if we look at what the religious leaders of the day had to say about Jesus, we find they tried to simply blow Jesus off as a nobody, for the most part. They tried to point out the simpleness of Jesus' humanity. They were trying to say, look this is no one special, He's just a man like the rest of us. This shows us one good thing: the Jewish religious leaders were not Gnostic in their thoughts. They did not attempt to pass Jesus off as a prophet, not even of the false kind. Jesus had power which they tried to say was of Satan, at times, (Matt. 12:22-30) and they found constant offence in Jesus showing Himself as The Messiah, but they never said He was something great. They wanted it to be clear that Jesus was not, in their interpretation, anything special, much less the rightful King of Israel.

However, this contrast between the common people and the religious leaders shows us two distinct viewpoints which prove Jesus was something very special, different, and unique. Religious leaders who should have been

giving the answers as to who Jesus was and explaining why He was able to do the things He did, only tried to point out that Jesus did not come from the kind of political circumstances they believed even a great prophet should come from; thus, He was a nobody, in spite of His works. (Mark 11:27-33, John 18:19-23) However, the inaccuracy of that view could not have been more clear to the common people of the day. All the evidence showed them there was something more going on! The people did not know exactly what Jesus was, but by leaning on human understanding, they had their theories. These, of course, were incorrect, but it did show a base understanding in which could be used to teach the people the truth! It would be the disciples' responsibility to teach that truth to anyone willing to hear it, and it's that responsibility which has been passed on to every true believer ever since.

Through their refusal to accept Jesus for who He really was, the religious leaders had created a convenient void in teaching which the disciples could fill with the truth. The disciples, being mostly common men themselves, could reach out to the common man with the message the people needed so greatly; but this could only happen if the disciples had a firm grasp on the truth themselves. This is the problem we are facing today. So many people

claiming to be followers of The Messiah do not have a firm grasp on the truth about who Jesus really is. Jesus wanted to make the point to His disciples that if they were to have value, they had to understand the truth for themselves. Thus, Jesus asks the disciples point-blank, "But whom say ye that I am?" It would be Peter who would state, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

This was the conclusion the religious leaders wanted to avoid, and they would eventually use this truth for the reason to demand Jesus' death. However, it was this understanding that Jesus specifically tells His disciples would be the foundation upon which He would build His true church. (Matt. 16:16-19) Those who could understand the explanation for the extraordinary nature of Jesus was that He was The Messiah they and their ancestors had been waiting for all these long centuries, would be the ones who would benefit. Those who could see Jesus was The Lamb Abraham told Isaac God would provide, (Gen. 22:8) The Emmanuel spoken of by the prophet, (Isa. 7:14, Matt. 1:22-23) The Passover sacrifice and the first fruits portrayed in the law of Moses, (Lev. 23) would be the ones who could celebrate, and began to explain to others the fact God had kept His promise to all mankind.

Those who understood Jesus was The Christ, The Son of The Living God, could proclaim the good news that God had provided more than just another great prophet, but the ultimate sacrifice which would give what the blood of animals could only remind us would be needed for our redemption. Abraham knew as he walked with Isaac that even the sacrifice of his son would not save their souls. God would have to provide a more excellent sacrifice. (Heb. 10:11-13) The simplicity of the gospel message was and is, that God, through Jesus, has provided Himself a lamb!

This is exactly why, if you truly believe in the Word of God, the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) included, you must receive Jesus as who He said He was or simply reject Jesus altogether and look for another! The idea that Jesus is one of many great prophets or guides is ludicrous. Jesus did not come preaching what others had preached. Every true prophet and teacher in the Jewish nation had taught that we should live our lives waiting for the day when God would make a way. They emphasized points like the one made by the prophet Micah, about not being able to save yourself with rivers of oil, multiple animal sacrifices or even the giving of your children. (Micah 6:7) John the Baptist said prepare ye the way, (Matt. 3:1-3) but Jesus

said “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” John 14:6 Prophets of old cried, “Heal me, O Lord,…” Jeremiah 17:14 Jesus said “...thy sins be forgiven thee.” (Mark 2:1-12) Jesus was not a destroyer of the law but the fulfillment! (Matt. 5:17)

With all the evidence surrounding Jesus’ life, the question is, why was this fact not obvious to all the people of Jesus’ day? The Scripture had clearly taught that The Messiah would come. It also taught that the world should look unto Israel for The Messiah. This means The Messiah would need to be a Jew. Another fact is that The Messiah would be specifically from the house of King David. (Jer. 33:14-21) So, this narrows our search down to the descendants of one specific house! So, why could they not see it? The entire problem was the people were doing just what we so often do today, they were basing their thoughts, not on the Word of God, but on the traditions of men. The problem came clearly down to the fact far too many people, not just of the past but of the present, listen more to the traditions of men than they do the Bible itself. The religious leaders said Jesus could not be God because He was just a common man; but the Bible never said it mattered that when Jesus was born He was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. The prophets never described a grand royal

birth for The Messiah. What they did say was He would be humble (Isa. 53:1-5) and born in Bethlehem, (Micah 5:1-4) which He clearly was! Joseph would eventually take his family back to Nazareth where Jesus would spend His youth, and the religious leaders would say, “...out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.” John 7:52 What a truly odd thing to say. The prophets said The Messiah would come out of Nazareth! (Matt. 2:22-23)

The people seemed to understand what a prophet was, for they recognized John the Baptist, but they obviously did not hear his words. John said there is “..but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose:” Luke 3:16 When Jesus came to John to be baptized, John told Jesus he had need to be baptized of Jesus. (Matt. 3:13-15) John clearly told his followers he must decrease and Jesus must increase. (John 3:30) This was all significant because the Bible shows us great prophets of the past clearly lived and worked at the same time as each other with no problem; but John said he would have to decrease leaving only Jesus to increase in recognition. John, as a great prophet, was clearly saying that Jesus was not just another prophet among many. Jesus was The One! Jesus was not a prophet: He was the fulfillment of what the prophets had been telling everyone right up into Jesus’ lifetime!

The problem was that the religious leaders had a thought about what The Messiah should look like. They had an idea which was based on current political circumstances which said The Messiah's immediate goal would be to free Israel from her enemies: that He would come as a great leader and, in many ways, a powerful military leader. They greatly desired this; and these thoughts did not just cause them to overlook the humble Jesus as The Messiah, but it caused them to see a man whom, even if He was The Messiah, they did not want! If The Messiah was going to be a man who simply did great works, even for those Gentiles which oppressed them, instead of a great ruler to break the back of their Roman overlords, then He was not The Messiah they wanted. This shows us just how deep our belief in ourselves goes! As bad as it is to believe so strongly what we think the picture will look like is what it must look like, right to the point of missing the truth when it is right before our eyes, it is still not as dangerous as the arrogance which tells us we can reject the true picture because we desire another!

The common people of Jesus' day said He was something above just a great prophet. Well, if He was more than a great prophet, why did more of them not simply conclude He was The

Messiah? The likely answer is that many of them did not know enough for themselves what the Bible said; they did not feel comfortable making such a profound claim! Many of them had not been paying enough attention to what the religious leaders had been telling them over the years. So, they were not so deeply submerged in the thoughts which said a humble man from Galilee could not be the conquering hero the religious leaders desired. However, declaring Jesus The Messiah still seemed out of reach for the majority. Jesus needed people who could get past all the false beliefs and see He was The Messiah of Scripture.

Lack of true Biblical understanding put the common people into about two different groups when it came to Jesus' trial and death. For the disciples and those who followed Jesus regularly, there was great amazement at the fact Jesus was crucified. They were stunned that the man they believed was The Messiah had been killed. Not only had He been killed, but He had been crucified like a criminal alongside true criminals; and to make matters worse, He was killed by the very Gentile overlords which they believed The Messiah had come to overthrow. So, they spent that time between the awful day of Jesus' crucifixion and the day they came to understand He was alive, won-

dering what went wrong and worrying about what would happen to them! As far as they knew, they would all be considered traitors and rounded up into prison or given the same penalty as Jesus. Once they found out Jesus was alive, they were excited but still confused. It's at this point they ask the direct question about when Jesus would restore again the kingdom to Israel. Jesus simply tells them, it's not for us to know the times and seasons which The Father has put in His own power. (Acts 1:6-8) As they stood on the Mount of Olives and watched Jesus ascend into heaven, they were still a bit stunned about what to do next; and it took angels from God to get them to go and simply do what Jesus had already instructed them was next: that was to go back into Jerusalem and wait for the promise of The Holy Ghost! (Acts 1:9-14) It would not be until after they had received The Holy Ghost that they would finally understand what the true picture was! (Acts 2)

The second circumstance this misunderstanding of the common people created shows up at that moment of choice during Jesus' trial. The Romans had a custom which stated that every year one prisoner would be released unto the people. This was done as a gesture on the Romans' part to say we may not understand your way of life completely. This means we may have imprisoned some of your citizens for things you do

not consider crimes or because you do not believe they were guilty of the crime they were imprisoned for. It was a way for the Romans to say, we trust you in some small way to make choices even if we do not fully agree. A way for them to say, we may have made a mistake and this gives you a way to correct it. In many ways, it was an avenue for the Romans to try and understand the people a little better; but before you think I'm trying to make the Romans out to be some incredibly wise and benevolent rulers, understand, they did not do this for the people, they did it for themselves! By doing this, they were taking the pulse of the people! Giving the Jews this choice once a year gave the Romans a chance to see what kind of mood the people were in. The Romans could evaluate what they were up against. First, what prisoner did the Jews choose to release; and second, how did the religious leaders and common people contrast between each other in making the choice and responding to who was released. The year Jesus was brought, Pilot decided there was no better time than the present to use this once a year sampling. The religious leaders had brought a man before Pilot in whom he found no fault. (Luke 23:4) Someone Pilot could not figure out why they would want to kill. They had told Pilot it was because Jesus claimed to be The King of the Jews; but a king of their own people seemed to Pilot the very thing the Jews desired,

not feared! So, Pilot brought out a man known for true insurrection and placed him next to Jesus. Then Pilot asked the crowd, as a whole, who they would desire to be released that year? There can be little doubt that Pilot was stunned at the response of the people to let Barrabbas go. Thus, he asked them what he should do with Jesus? Their response was to crucify Him! (Matt. 27:11-26)

This may be the most amazing human moment in all the New Testament! How could a people who thought Jesus even more than just a great prophet and who had seen His many miracles firsthand, not pick Jesus? The answer is that in the end, they trusted in the religious leadership more than the knowledge they should have had for themselves! They simply leaned on the idea that if the religious leaders said Jesus could not be The Messiah, He must not be. It was one thing to support Jesus if the religious leaders had tried to arrest Him in the temple as Jesus performed miracles, but following Him once it appeared He could not or would not free Himself from Pilot, was another thing altogether!

Now, some would feel sorry for the people. They would ask, how were the people to know the truth? The answer

to that question is simply this: they should have been listening to the reading of the law and seeking to understand it, not just going through the religious motions. The fact people were simply going through religious motions is why Jesus drove out the money changers from the temple. Sacrificing was no longer a profound personal experience but a convenience store kind of activity. Jesus said, "My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves." (Matt. 21:10-13)

One day a man was brought to Jesus' disciples who was possessed with a demon which the disciples could not cast out. When Jesus came, He simply commanded the demon to leave and he did so! Afterward, the disciples came to Jesus and asked Him why they could not cast out the demon, and Jesus told them, "This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting." Mark 9:29 By this, Jesus was teaching us something even wider than just casting out demons. He was teaching that we will find ourselves in situations which, if we are not ready for, we will not be able to handle. We will not be able to prepare ourselves in the moment. In some cases, the will of God can only be accomplished because we have put in prior work. This is why Jesus pointed to prayer and fasting.

There is no way for us to know day by day what circumstances may come our way. We must spend our time drawing close to the heart of God. Then, whether it's demons or a challenge of some other sort, we will be ready to hear God's instruction and allow God's presence to flow through us!

The problem the people faced the day they were asked to make a choice between Barabbas and Jesus was, they had not prepared their hearts and lives the way they should have. They may not have completely bought into or understood the religious leaders' picture of what The Messiah should look like, but they had sold their souls to the idea they should simply go along with what seemed like the more educated belief of the day. If we do not want to find ourselves in this same situation, we must ask ourselves, do we know the Bible for ourselves? The Psalmist wrote, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Psalms 119:105 You see, we can never know every bump and turn in the path which is before us, but knowing the Word causes us to be able to navigate that path in spite of the lack of specific knowledge. What the people of Jesus' day needed was not some, carved in stone, picture of who and what The Messiah was going to look like and what He was going to specifically do day by day. What they needed was a knowledge of the Word which would

have given them the sight to see who The Messiah was when they found themselves standing in front of Him!

You can look to many books, whether works of fiction and/or ancient manuscripts; but the reason the Gospel of John tells us Jesus is The Word is because true recognition of The Messiah comes only through seeking a personal walk with God. A personal walk is why Abraham knew who God was the day He visited Abraham's tent. (Gen. 18) In spite of all his personal flaws, Jacob knew who God was when he wrestled that night at the ford Jabbok. (Gen. 32:24-29) Moses knew who He was as he came shoeless before a burning bush in the wilderness and was instructed per Moses' question about who should I tell them sent me, to tell them, "I AM hath sent me unto you."; (Ex. 3:1-14) and in spite of what everyone else may have believed, Peter knew Him and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Matthew 16:16

Jesus is not dead, and there are no blood descendants or ancient manuscripts hiding in a cave or castle somewhere which you must find before you can know the truth. The truth has always and only been know by those who seek to know God for themselves in spite of how different their belief may seem in contrast to the mainstream belief of the day! Does this mean you have to be in contrast? No. It's not the

contrast or lack thereof which is important; it's the fact that knowing the truth is more important to you than any contrast it may create! We can look far and wide, asking everyone we meet who they believe Jesus is, but the only answer which really matters in the end is the answer to the question Jesus is asking each and everyone of us still today, "But whom say ye that I am?" Matthew 16:15

Now, the time has come for me to close this series, but as I do, I want to leave you with this thought. If you are worried or ever do worry that you may not really know or understand the truth about who The Messiah really is, think about the story of Saul who became Paul. Saul was incredibly passionate in his belief that those followers of Jesus were incorrect. That passion put him on a road one day to Damascus, with papers in hand, giving him the authority to imprison and kill Jesus' followers there, but he did not make it unscathed. Jesus came to Saul on that road, and with a literal blinding light, asked Saul why he persecuted God? Because Saul knew who he was talking to, he asked much the same question as Moses had asked. Saul simply asked, "Who art thou, Lord?" and Saul was informed that he was persecuting the very Messiah he was looking for. From that day forward, Saul's life changed. Not from

being the one who was passionate about the work of God, but about his recognition of The Messiah. (Acts 9:1-21) An unknowable god cannot do such a thing, but a living God, Who's desire is to walk with you, can and will if you are seeking to know Him! "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Matthew 6:33

There is, of course, much, much more I could instruct and teach on the issue of Gnostic belief; but teaching the truth is not best done by running around attempting to stomp out every flame of false doctrine which ignites in our world. Teaching the truth is best done by simply teaching the Word for what it is. That being said, I hope you have enjoyed this series and that it has been a help to you. I hope it has given you a perspective from which to defend the truth in your own heart, as well as those times when you are asked by others to give an account of your faith. (I Pet. 3:15-17) I also hope this series has been a general blessing and encouragement to your life as you seek to walk with The God who has created all things! So, for this series, I say one last time, may The God of grace and mercy guide you into all truth as you study His Word!