

Chapter 7

Jesus of Nazareth: God's Ultimate Covenant with Humanity



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JESUS—God's Son as a Human Being

God sent His Son down from Heaven to live and die as one of us--a tangible and completely natural human being. We have discussed some of this within the section concerning when God asked Abraham to sacrifice his only son to Him. Abraham's willingness to do so made God indebted to return the identical behavior to His covenant partner. However, He needed to wait very, very patiently for the "fullness" of time to arise for His Son's appearance to have the greatest impact.

Fortunately for us, God never allowed Himself to grow weary to restore our bond with Him prematurely, as Abraham's wife did to get him the child that God had promised. Her impatience in attempting to procure a son for Abraham from another woman drastically altered God's original plan and the adverse effects are still increasing. Rather, God delayed as long as was necessary, and finally one day the time was ripe for His Son to be born.

"I will walk among you (as a man)...." (Leviticus 26:12 --- prophesy to set up Jesus' birth, first revealed in Genesis 3:15)

"When the fullness of the time had come God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law." (Galatians 4:4)

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1:14a))

"Unto us a Child is born,.. is given... and His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end." (Isaiah 9:6-7)

"In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead, bodily." (Colossians 2:9)

"He was in the world ; and, the world was made through Him and, the world did not recognize Him. He came to His own and His own did not accept Him." (John 1:10-11)

God prophesied that He would indeed become like one of us, and the Father expressly sent His Son for that purpose. He sent Him in the fullness of time--when His life would be of the most service to humanity. Whether we are able to recognize this or not, it has to be true because God never lies (*Titus 1:2*) and always desires only the best for us. Therefore, in earthly terms, God the Father sent His Son when the time was "ripe" for harvest. He was the firstborn of many children whose testimonies would draw others nearer to His Father through Him.

"Jesus said to (Thomas), 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me you would have known my Father also (John 10:30) ; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.'" (John 14:6-7)

God's Son, Jesus of Nazareth, was the Christ--the Savior of mankind was the human equivalent of all of the character and attributes of His Father, except for the constraints of existing in a physical body. For example, as a man He was no longer ever present as He had been in spirit form. Likewise, Jesus was no longer immortal and had blood; therefore He could be killed, whereas He could not have been before. This is how He was able to sacrifice Himself to redeem the rest of us from having to be affected by the curses of the Law.

"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law having become a curse in our place." (Galatians 3:13)

Too many people never recognize Who Jesus really was, not just a remarkable person but actually the Son of God. Even if they acknowledge His existence and the impact that His life had upon this planet, they do not accept the significance of His resurrection. Therefore, although the consequences of this can affect them, too, until they choose to accept it for themselves personally, they will live and die unaffected by it except only peripherally.

Peter Recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah

"Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi and went out to the towns,

and on the road. As He was done praying His disciples joined Him and He asked His disciples, 'Who do men/the crowds say that I am?'

So they said. 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elija, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets who has risen again'.

He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' (Romans 10:9-11)

Simon Peter answered and said to Him, 'You are the Christ--the Son of the Living God!'

Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah; for flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father Who is in Heaven. And, I also say to you that you are Peter (in Greek, "Petros"), and on this rock (in Greek, "petra") I will build My Church and (even) the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. (Romans 8:31)

'And, I give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in Heaven (likewise), and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in Heaven (as well).

Then, He strictly warned and commanded His disciples/them that they should tell no one about Him that He was Jesus the Christ." (Matthew 16:13-20, Mark 8:27-30 & Luke 9:18-21)

Why did Jesus ask His disciples Whom they thought He was? Why not just tell them straightforwardly? They had to learn it themselves through the witness of the Holy Spirit, as Peter did. Otherwise, they would not have to use their faith, only their physical, human, fleshly senses. As it says in *II Corinthians 5:7*, "*We walk by faith, not by sight*." Evidently, this tangible "soil" is not the good ground mentioned in the parable of the Sower and is not sufficient for lasting faith in God. Plus, why did Jesus warn and even command them not to tell anyone else Who He was? It was, and still is, imperative that each of us comes to recognize and accept Him as our Savior and Lord separately as Peter did through the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, not hearsay no matter how reliable. Otherwise the seed planted will last only temporarily not having any root but wonder, which does not endure. This learning is, as the parable of the Sower likewise teaches, "*by the wayside*".

Jesus did similar things on several occasions; for example: (a) He warned a leper not to relate that He had healed him, rather to go directly and show himself to the priest, as Moses had commanded. However, this man did the opposite; he blabbed it freely. The Bible states that because of this reckless, although well intended, behavior in a single individual Jesus could no longer walk unhindered through the city but was from then on limited to preaching in the outskirts where people had to come to Him. By not following Jesus' instructions precisely, this one person unknowingly restricted His entire ministry right from the start. Imagine the consequences to all of mankind over centuries after multitudes of us have not followed His commands. (b) He commanded a father and mother not to discuss with anyone how He had healed their daughter. This is especially interesting because Jesus did this in the private home of a very prominent and public figure, with his friends and family waiting outside; so, they indeed would realize that, in this case, Jesus not only healed her but raised her from recently dying, and (c) Although John the Baptist recognized Jesus as being God's Son when he baptized Him to begin His earthly ministry, he later sent some of His disciples to ask

Jesus if He was indeed "the Coming One", or should they be on the lookout for Another. Jesus responded by telling them to return and tell John the things that they heard Him say and watch Him do. Jesus never once told them straightforwardly Who He was. They had to discover this unwavering knowledge about Him in their hearts by the witness of the Holy Spirit, not Jesus' Own testimony.

Consider the difference between "Petros", an individual stone versus "petra", and a huge bolder. They are comprised of the same genetic material, but the latter is far stronger because it is not divided. The massive rock on which *Jesus* builds the Church is through that insight that enters our hearts only by way of God the Father Himself, through His Spirit. He often uses other people to transmit this knowledge, but we each have to consciously and deliberately receive it to benefit absolutely from its influence and power.

Pay attention to the reactions of the other disciples. They evidently tried to answer Jesus' question without committing themselves too much by telling Him what other people thought. They were quite evasive about answering Him directly. It was apparent that they not only had posed the question before among themselves, but they had listened to gossip as well. They clearly had let others' doubts about Him contribute to their own evaluations, thus leading themselves to fluctuate also. They still were not "*fully convinced*" (*Romans 4:19-21*) that He was their long awaited Savior promised by God the Father.

Why did Jesus pledge to give His followers the keys to the Kingdom, not the key? You would think that once inside everything automatically would be available to us; so, what's the difference? If I give you the key to my house, you indeed can enter, but you cannot enter any place that is locked, such as a storage attic. Likewise, you don't have my ignition or trunk keys for my car. Also, if I have a strong box that holds special, private papers or other valuables, you do not have complete entrance to those either. Therefore, Jesus saying the "keys" to the Kingdom was very significant. When we follow Him He will let us see and manipulate every single thing to which that He has access, as we become ready to handle it wisely.

Observe the ramifications of binding versus loosing things, as well as our responsibilities to oversee and let God direct and guide us what to do and when. Living in the Garden of Eden, a tangible, perfect, earthly extenuation of God's Kingdom in Heaven, the first man and woman had to have been able to do just what Jesus could. He instructed His disciples to imitate His behavior, sometimes even by overriding natural principles. His commanding this to them likewise included the rest of mankind forever.

What are people supposed to do with this authority? What would God want mankind to bind and loose? Should we bind or loose love, joy, peace, perseverance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, stability, generosity, prosperity, and health? What about anger, dissension, hatred, war, disease, poverty, crime, immorality, idolatry, envy, and self-centeredness? God gave all of us the freewill to decide how we will respond to stimuli, as well as revealing in His Scriptures which choices are good.

What Was the Difference between Remaining under the Authority of the Law instead of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

*"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah--not according to the Covenant that I made with their fathers... My Covenant which they broke.... I will put My Law in their minds and write It on their hearts (Hebrews ^{*****}₁; and I will be their God and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, "Know the Lord"; for, they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,' says the Lord. 'For, I will forgive their iniquity and their sin I will remember no more.'" (Jeremiah 31:31-34)*

"Behold! My Servant, Whom I uphold, Elect One in Whom My soul delights, I have put My Spirit upon Him. (Genesis 2:7) He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.... He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail, nor be discouraged till He has established justice in the earth.... I, the Lord, have called You to righteousness, and will hold Your hand. I will keep You and give You as a Covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles--to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison those who sit in darkness of the prison house. I am the Lord, that is My Name, and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to carved images. Behold, the former things have come to pass and new things I declare." (Isaiah 42:1-9)

"What the Law could not do in that It was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His Own Son in the likeness of flesh. On account of sin, He condemned sin in the flesh that the righteous requirement of the Law be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." (Romans 8:3-4)

"Therefore, by the deeds of the Law, no flesh is justified in His sight; for by the Law is the knowledge of sin. (Genesis 3:5) But, now the righteousness of God apart from the Law is revealed... through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe; for, there is no difference for we all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:20-23)

"The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but have everlasting Life in Christ Jesus, our Lord." (II Peter 3:9)

God's last covenant with all of humanity will be different from all preceding ones because people will carry it within themselves. It will not merely be a demonstration of certain behavior, but it will even change and mold their hearts and minds. Mankind will not be able to break this final all-encompassing covenant and it will last forever. This covenant will extend to all people everywhere and will obliterate the effects of sin from God's standpoint, not just neutralize them for awhile.

God would send a Servant Who would be able to live as the Adams, and

everyone else after them, should have. God would delight in His conduct because He would bring only honesty and truth to mankind, never deception or falsehood. This new covenant would come by means of a Person, not just stone tablets. He would symbolize everything that God was and did and would liberate spiritual captives from Satan's control just as God freed the Israelites from being slaves in Egypt. There would never be another human being ever born like Him. God's Son would be made of flesh but not live, which is to say, be dominated by His physical senses. He would be able to fulfill all of the faithful requirements of the Law and never break any of it. Therefore, He would be able to overcome every curse contained therein and receive only the blessings.

The Law brought knowledge of what sin was. From it no one could be sanctioned because they always would rebel against it at one time or another. Every other human being ever born would rebel against God, except this Man. It was, and always has been, God's fervent desire that each individual return to His Kingdom. No matter what they ever have done in their lives, God does not want for them to Die spiritually, but live/Live through His Son, Christ Jesus.

The Great High Priest of the New Covenant

"This is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest Who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty of the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the True Temple which the Lord erected, and not man, for every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore, it is necessary that this One also have something to offer. For if He were on earth He would not be a priest since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the Law—who serve the copy and shadow of the Heavenly things as Moses was Divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, 'See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.

But now, He has obtained a more excellent ministry inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better Covenant which was established on better promises. For, if that First Covenant had been faultless then no place would have been sought for a Second. Because, finding fault with them, He says, 'Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah--not according to the Covenant that I made with their fathers... because they did not continue in My Covenant, and I disregarded them,' says the Lord.

'For this is the Covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days,' says the Lord. 'I will put My Law in their minds and write It on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. (Jeremiah 31:33, Psalm 40:8) None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none of his brothers, saying, 'Know the Lord.' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness; and, their sins and their Lawless deeds I will remember no more.'

In that He says, 'A New Covenant,' He has made the First obsolete. Now, what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.... But,

Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect Tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His Own blood He entered the Most Holy place once and for all, having retained eternal redemption.

For, if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, Who through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God John 14:30), cleanse your conscious from dead works, to serve the living God? And, for this reason He is the Mediator of the New Covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

'For, where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator, for a testament is in force after men are dead since it has no power at all while the testator lives.... And, according to the Law, at most all things are purified with blood and without the shedding of blood there is no remission. (Leviticus 17:11--"the life of the flesh is in the blood") Therefore, it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the Heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

'For, Christ has not the holy places made with hands which are copies of the True, but into Heaven Itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us. (Hebrews 4:15) Not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another--He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world. But, now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And, as it is appointed for men to die once, but after that the judgments, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time apart from sin, for salvation.

'For, the Law, having a shadow of the good things to come and not the very images of the things, can never with these same sacrifices which they offer continually, year after year, make those who approach perfect for then would they not have ceased to be offered? For, the worshippers, once purified, would have no more consciousness of sins. But, in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year for it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

'Therefore, when He came into the world He said, 'Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices You have no pleasure.'

Then I said, 'Behold, I have come--in the volume of the Book it is written for Me--to do Your will, O God.' Previously saying, 'Sacrifice and offerings, burnt offerings, and offerings You did not desire nor have pleasure in them.' (which are offered according to the Law).

Then He said, 'Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.'

He takes away the First that He may establish the Second. By that we have been sanctified, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once and for all." (Hebrews 8:1-13--10:10)

Christ acts as a Divine High Priest in Heaven exactly as priests are supposed to act on earth, only unlike them He was without flaw. He has offered a sacrifice to God exactly as all other priests were instructed to do to guard mankind from sin. However, God's Son offering His Own self and blood was sufficient to eliminate the consequences of all of mankind's rebellion against His Father once and for all time. Unlike regular offerings, His was sufficient to overcome every sin imaginable so He never will have to repeat His sacrifice.

Consider the direct links from God's ultimate covenant--the one He promised and ratified with the blood of His Son--and all other previous ones that He made with any other people. There is a connection that does not annul or invalidate the others, but rather enhances them and binds them as a unit, commonly referred to as the Old Testament. If a person decides not to receive what God's Son did for them they will remain under the blessings and cursings that the previous contracts and the Law automatically will bring upon them.

As stated above, all previous blood sacrifices were nothing more than mere temporary copies of the eternal offering that God's Son made for us by submitting Himself to be tortured, killed, and receive our punishment for ever rebelling against God. The New Covenant was necessary because of the flaws in all of the others--no one ever before Jesus of Nazareth was able to sustain their part of the agreement, thereby voiding it in some way. The Son of Man was the sole person ever to remain constant and faithful to God's path for His life, especially when He expressly did not want to— from the Garden of Gethsemene to the cross.

"Therefore, God has exalted Him and given Him the Name which is above every name that at the Name of Jesus, every knee should bow--of those in Heaven and of those on earth and of those under the earth and that every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord." (Philippians 2:9-11)

Christ had to die in order for His last will and testament to become effective. People's bequests after they die take precedent even over what they wanted to take place when they were alive. There is a stronger legal foundation to ensure that any individual's wishes are carried out after they are dead than beforehand. Jesus of Nazareth actually died and God raised Him up so that He could witness the work that He came here to do initiated by His followers.

If any of the blood offerings made to God under the Law had been sufficient to undo the split between mankind and their Creator, there would have been no need for any other to be made between mankind and God. However, the previous ones were not sufficient compensation to undo the ravages that sin had brought to the world because the participants could not sustain themselves from ever sinning. Hence, it was absolutely necessary for God's Son to die as He did. Jesus of Nazareth did not choose to be murdered; in fact, He asked His Father repeatedly if there was any other way to redeem mankind without Him being tortured and killed in our place. However, He bowed His Own will to His Father's and in doing so ratified the New, or Second, Covenant.

How Did a Person Accept and Receive Jesus' Ransom?

(1) Believe and Confess

"But what does It say? "The Word is near you--in your mouth and in your heart--that is, the Word of faith that we preach: (1) that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and (2) believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead you will be saved. For, with the heart one believes unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For, the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." For, there is no distinction between Jew and (non-Jew); for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For, whoever calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved." (Romans 10:8-13)

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The Bible has stated that God's Word lives inside every person born after the life of His Son. However, in order for it to be of value it must be activated, like putting batteries in a flashlight. The mechanism is useless to do its intended function unless both parts work together as a unit. And, the batteries must be placed a certain way for the light to shine. In order to be saved, or ransomed from Satan's kingdom governed by our senses into God's Kingdom ruled by invisible faith people must do two things: believe and then acknowledge that the Gospel is true for them individually. Both a person's consciousness as well as his/her communication needs to be activated and aligned properly for salvation to take place. Race, sex, age, economic or social situation, and intelligence do not matter whatsoever in God's eyes as to who is qualified to take part in Christ's free gift of redemption or anything that it entails. Whoever petitions to be included automatically will be.

(2) Be 'Born Again'

"There was a man named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, 'Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs You do unless God is with him.'

Jesus answered and said, 'Most assuredly I say to you (that) unless one is born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God.'

Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?'

Jesus answered, 'Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. That which is born of flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again. The wind blows where it wishes and you can hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit (Genesis 2:7, Matthew 3:16, Mark 1:10, Luke 4:1 & 15-21, John 1:32, Acts 2:1-4 & 10:38

Nicodemus answered and said, 'How can these things be?'

Jesus answered and said to him, 'Are you the teacher of Israel and do not

know these things? Most assuredly I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen and you do not receive Our witness. (Genesis 1:26, plurality of the Godhead) If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you Heavenly things?

'No one has ascended into Heaven but He Who came down from Heaven, that is, the Son of Man Who is in Heaven. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life, for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son (Genesis 22:12) that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For, God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world, through Him, might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the Name of the only begotten Son of God.

And, this is the condemnation--that the light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For, everyone who practices evil hates the light and does not come to the light lest his deeds should be exposed. But, he who does the truth comes to the light that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."
(John 3:1-21)

One of the Jewish religious leaders sought out Jesus to speak with Him privately. He went at night, probably because he feared the censure of his peers by talking to a Man Whom they considered to be a dangerous radical, not a Godly person at all. Although it appeared that both he and Jesus were speaking about the same event--birth--Nicodemus was referring to the *physical* birth of a person from his/her mother, whereas Jesus was describing the rebirth of the *soul and spirit* from out of one spiritual kingdom to another. Although Jesus clearly stated that they were separate occurrences, Nicodemus never understood the different allusions.

Jesus was astounded that a teacher of the Law did not comprehend what He was teaching. He added that if Nicodemus did not grasp this fundamental idea, which had to do with things that took place on the earth, then he never would be able to grasp invisible Heavenly principles. He even made a reference to the Trinity, yet Nicodemus did not pick up on it. Jesus explained to Nicodemus why God the Father sent Him to be born as a human being. The priest did not perceive this instruction either, although he easily should have been able to grasp it due to the preponderance of prophecies concerning Him.

Jesus made mention of the difference between good and evil, that the people who choose to accept the latter will not tolerate the former. They want what they do to remain a secret because they fear the exposure and consequences that the truth will bring upon them.

(3) Live to God through the Christ

"Do you not know that as many of us were baptized into Christ Jesus were (also) baptized into His death/Death? Therefore, we were buried with Him

through baptism into death/Death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead/Dead by the glory of the Father, ever so we also should walk in the newness of Life. For, we have been united together in the likeness of His death/Death certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection knowing this: that our old nature was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For, he who has died/Died has been freed from sin.

Now, if we died/Died with Christ, we believe that we also shall live/Live with Him, knowing that Christ having been raised from the dead dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For, the death/Death that He died/Died, He died/Died to sin once for all. But, the life/Life that He lives/Lives He lives/Lives to God. Likewise, you also reckoning yourselves to be Dead indeed to sin, but Alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal bod, that you should obey its lusts." (Romans 6:3-12)

Christ's death and suffering encompassed the fulfillment of the requirements of the Law for all of humanity. Just as He died, conquered death/Death, and rose again, so shall everybody who decides accept His ransom and follow Him. He conquered all sin against God because He lived as one of us, yet resisting every single temptation not to do so that Satan brought to Him.

"We do not have a High Priest Who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15)

"(God the Father) made (His Son) Who knew no sin, to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God." (II Corinthians 5:21)

It is our responsibility, not God's, to withstand temptation. He gave us His Son as the perfect model to imitate, for He always did His Father's wishes over His Own, knowing that the Spirit Being had a much broader vision of the consequences that any decisions and actions would generate. Jesus even died because that was the only way to redeem mankind. It is ludicrous to even consider for a moment that He wanted to be tortured and despised by people. He was not a masochist.

"Therefore, (1) submit to God. (2) Resist the devil and he will flee from you." (James 4:7. See also Matthew 4:1-11)

Jesus' Requirements for following Him

"It happened as they journeyed on the road that a certain scribe came and said, 'Teacher/Lord, I will follow You wherever you go.'

And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere (permanent) to lay His head.'

Then He said to another of his disciples, 'Follow Me.'

But he said, 'Let me go first and bury my father.'

But Jesus said to him, 'Follow Me. Let the Dead bury their own dead, but

you go and preach the Kingdom of God."

And, another also said, "Lord, I will follow You; but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house,"

But Jesus said to him, "No one having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the Kingdom of God.'" (Matthew 8:19-22 & Luke 9:57-62)

These three men may have been traveling with Jesus for awhile, but not as long or closely as His twelve main disciples. We can infer that they, too, were followers because Jesus alludes to that fact when He talks about people who already have put their "hand", or dedication, to something. As well, the first man referred to pledge what was to him eternal loyalty to Jesus and the second straightforwardly was referred to as a disciple of Jesus and His ministry.

Because of Jesus' individual reactions to all three, He had to have sensed deficiency in each man, which would contribute to a lack of endurance over the long haul. In contrast, when He invited Peter and his brother Andrew (in the midst of casting their nets for fish) to accompany him, they immediately stopped what they were doing and complied. Additionally, when Jesus also called James and his brother John, they left instantly, even though they were in the midst of mending their fishing nets after working, they not only dropped what they were doing, but left their father alone to finish their work, as well as abandoned their professions and homes not knowing what lay ahead. Soon afterward, Jesus called Philip, who went and brought Nathaniel.

It is likely that the first man, a scribe, had a high position in that society, as well as possessions and a settled home that he felt he needed to provide him stability and security. Jesus knew that if he had to give them up he eventually would miss the respect that his position brought to him and these worldly things too much to be an effective disciple at that time. This individual needed to be able to let go of his "earthly treasures" and learn to trust that God understood and would provide for all of his future needs. In the parable of the Sower, this man most likely would fit into the category that Jesus described about people living among "thorns".

*"When He was alone, those around him with the twelve asked Him about the parable and He said to them, 'Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? Then hear **the Parable of the Sower**. The parable is this:*

The sower sows the Word. And these are the ones by the wayside where the Word is sown. When anyone hears the Word of the Kingdom and does not understand it, Satan comes immediately (Job 1:7, I Peter 5:8, Ephesians 4:27 and 6:10-18, II Corinthians 10:4-5) and takes away the Word that was sown in their hearts, lest they believe and be saved. This is he who received the seed by the wayside.

These, likewise, are the ones sown on stony ground/the rock, who when they hear the Word immediately receive it with joy (and) gladness, yet they have no root in themselves and so endure (only) for a while. Afterward, when tribulation, or persecution, or temptation arises because of the Word immediately they stumble (and) fall away.

Now, these are the ones who received seed among thorns. They are the

ones who hear the Word, go out, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, pleasures of life, and the desires for other things entering in choke the Word and it becomes unfruitful. They bring no fruit to maturity.

But, these are the ones sown on good ground. Those who hear the Word and understand it with a noble and good heart, accept it, keep it, and indeed bear fruit with patience and produce, some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, and some a hundred." (Matthew 13:18-23, Mark 4:13-20 & Luke 8:11-15)

We do not know the background of the second man, but he likewise may have been living among "thorns". He also seemed to need human validation, more than Godly approval because he wanted to go and bury his father before He went with Jesus, thus categorizing him additionally "on the wayside". That means that Jesus knew that this man would receive Jesus' teachings gladly with an open heart up until a certain point, but would abide in them only for awhile, for, he, too, needed human approval more than God's.

There are numerous reasons why we give in to this type of pressure and stress. In this man's case, people might try to convince him that he would be demonstrating God's love more to the rest of the world by paying his respects to his father, and family, than by abandoning them while they still were grieving. They would look at outward things more than what was not physically visible to them. Jesus, however, taught that human traditions actually could nullify what God desired by becoming habits and strongholds in our lives to the point that a person even ignored God in favor of them.

"Why do you also transgress the commandments of God because of your tradition?... you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition." (Matthew 15:3-6)

By the way, the above comments were not intended, in any way, to negate God's commandments concerning our parents. Remember that Jesus did not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it and the fifth commandment of the Law states that we are to honor our fathers and mothers. Therefore, holding memorial services to commemorate their lives observes that decree. In addition, we are to obey our parents. Even Jesus Himself did so. (Luke 2:51, John 2:1-5)

So, why would Jesus say what He did to the man who wanted to follow Him, but only after he had buried his father? That man has his priorities reversed; he was putting his *earthly* father first, and his Heavenly one second. In essence, he wanted to give his time and energy to the branch, not the vine that nourishes it. This particular man did not even mention that he wanted to follow Jesus, when invited the only thing he mentioned was his earthly father. It is possible that, given the context, he felt pressured to follow Jesus, even when he himself knew inwardly that he was not ready to be fully dedicated to His teaching and cause.

Additionally, it seemed almost as if he was almost surprised at Jesus' question, since right beforehand another person specifically had requested to follow Jesus but He had dissuaded him. The second man could have been merely responding to the looks that the others present gave him because they felt the Lord was presenting him with a

great opportunity Himself. This guy's reaction almost seems to be more of a desire to politely get out of a predicament than a sincere refusal.

Interestingly, if he had wanted and asked to follow Jesus, He very well might have instructed him to wrap things up with his family first. When God asked Solomon what he wanted Him to give him, he did not ask for long life, riches, or the destruction of his enemies, rather an understanding heart to be able to govern his people wisely. This unselfish request pleased the Lord so much that He gave Solomon much, much more. In fact, according to the Bible, Solomon turned out to be the richest man ever born right up until the ministry of Jesus. Once Solomon placed God above anything else in his life, He Himself gave him the rest of his earthly desires.

The third man seemed to be a mixture of the two others. He declares his loyalty to Jesus, but.... This man desired to follow Jesus more closely and intimately, yet he, too, felt enough peer pressure SO that he felt more of an obligation to be polite to his family than to God. He was not a person who would stand up to the pressures that his family, and probably his friends, too, would convince him were more important following Jesus completely.

"If anyone comes to Me and (is not willing to) forsake his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And, whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For, which of you intending to build a tower does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it--lest after he has laid the foundation and is not able to finish all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build, but was not able to finish.'

Or, what King going to make war against another king does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So, likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.'" (Luke 14:26-33)

In order to follow the example of Jesus' life, we, too, must be willing to give up everything that God tells us will be detrimental to His overall plans for us, including family, friends, home, possessions, and social status. In addition, we must do so voluntarily, not merely to illustrate to other people our faith in God. He knows what our hearts and minds truly feel and think. We cannot fake true love, honor, or obedience in His eyes. Additionally, we should stop to consider and pray about this obligation to Him before we resolve to follow His will so that we never decide to overrule His desires with our own self-centered agendas.