

11.2 EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITINGS

There is a vast amount of early Christian writings covering a wide range of styles and types. There are letters, gospels, histories, theological defenses (**apologetics**), creeds, hymns, liturgies, martyrdom tales, and much more. This literature spans a time period from about 50 to 500. I will focus mostly on New Testament texts because of their decisive influence on the people who have become Christians. However, we will also sample some other texts of importance.

11.2.1 New Testament Letters

The **Old Testament** and the **New Testament** make up the two main parts of Christian scriptures. In chapter 10 we looked at some of the literature from the Jewish *Tanakh* that is also included in the Christian Old Testament. Here I will focus on some of the writings that were accepted into the New Testament **canon** (an authoritative collection of literature).

The story of the formation of the New Testament canon is a long, complex, and fascinating story. We cannot tell it here, but we must be aware that there existed a vast amount of literature that Christians had to sort through and argue about before any of it became part of what we call the New Testament (a name that was in common use by the fourth century). For example, there were numerous **gospel** writings (writings that tell about the Good News revealed by God in Jesus the Redeemer) of which only four now appear in the New Testament.

The New Testament is only one collection of some of these writings and, in fact, is not the earliest. Early converts circulated various collections of Paul's letters, and different congregations used individual gospels. A Christian teacher named Marcion, who lived in the middle of the second century, formulated a list of writings that did not include the Old Testament, but did include ten Pauline letters and an abridged Gospel of Luke.

Marcionism attracted large numbers of converts and continued well in the fifth century. Many Marcionite Christians became martyrs, giving up their life for their faith. However, these churches were opposed by some other groups of early Christians who claimed that their views about Christianity—not Marcion's views—were orthodox (correct). The or-

thodox group condemned Marcion and, in response to Marcion's canon, proposed a canon of its own. This new canon included the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the books in the Jewish *Tanakh* as well as additional literature) and, eventually, the twenty-seven books that are now part of the New Testament. The earliest list of the books that are part of the New Testament as we know it dates from 367, over three hundred years after the death of Jesus. Even after 367, different churches used differing canons.

The earliest writings in the New Testament are the writings of the apostle Paul, a Jewish convert to Christianity, who was primarily responsible for carrying the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles. He was well educated in Jewish literature and a devout Jew. It seems he was also familiar with Greek and Roman philosophy, especially the ethical thinking of the Stoics. When he heard that some Jews were claiming Jesus was the Messiah, he set about persecuting them. However, after a dramatic conversion experience involving a vision of the risen Christ, he became a leading advocate of the messianic movement centering on Jesus.

After his conversion, Paul established dozens of churches and corresponded with many of them. Our first sample of his correspondence comes from a letter to the church in Galatia (ca. 55), written after Jewish Christians attempted to persuade the new Gentile converts in Galatia that they had to adhere to Jewish law in order to be followers of Jesus. This letter is the earliest written account of first-century church politics.

In the same year, Paul also wrote to the church he founded in Corinth (see the second selection). The topic is not politics, but life after death. Two Jewish sects in Paul's day, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, had been arguing about the resurrection of the body. The Sadducees rejected the idea on the grounds that it was not mentioned in Hebrew scripture, but the Pharisees accepted the idea. Paul had been a member of the Pharisaic sect before converting to the messianic Jesus movement. The ideas he learned from the Pharisees provided a framework for interpreting the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Our final selection comes from Paul's famous and influential letter to the Romans (ca. 56–58). It appears Paul wrote this letter in Corinth while on his way to Jerusalem carrying contributions to the Jerusalem church from the Christians in Greece and Asia Minor. Paul planned a missionary trip to Spain after

his work in Jerusalem was complete, and he was writing to Christians in Rome (where others had already established a church) to tell them he planned to visit on his way to Spain.

After a salutation and thanksgiving, Paul explains his understanding of the gospel. He wishes to clarify the relationship between the Jewish law and the good news about the Messiah (Christ) with respect to the issues of justification and salvation. He says, as you will shortly see, some very dramatic and radical things about the way of law and the way of faith.



From Paul's Letter to the Galatians (1–2)

READING QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Paul is so insistent about Gentiles not having to follow the Jewish law?
2. How important is the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead?
3. How does Paul answer the questions about how the dead will be raised and what sort of bodies they will have?
4. If the law cannot save, what is its purpose?
5. How is salvation realized?

ON FAITH AND FREEDOM

1

From Paul, an apostle, not by human appointment or human commission, but by commission from Jesus Christ and from God the Father who raised him from the dead. ²I and the group of friends now with me send greetings to the Christian congregations of Galatia.

³Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴who sacrificed himself for our sins, to rescue us out of this present age of wickedness, as our God and Father willed; ⁵to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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⁶I am astonished to find you turning so quickly away from him who called you by grace, and following a different gospel. ⁷Not that it is in fact another gospel; only there are persons who unsettle your minds by trying to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸But if anyone, if we ourselves or an angel from heaven, should preach a gospel at variance with the gospel we preached to you, he shall be held outcast. ⁹I now repeat what I have said before: if anyone preaches a gospel at variance with the gospel which you received, let him be outcast!

¹⁰Does my language now sound as if I were canvassing for men's support? Whose support do I want but God's alone? Do you think I am currying favour with men? If I still sought men's favour, I should be no servant of Christ.

¹¹I must make it clear to you, my friends, that the gospel you heard me preach is no human invention. ¹²I did not take it over from any man; no man taught it me; I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

¹³You have heard what my manner of life was when I was still a practising Jew: how savagely I persecuted the church of God, and tried to destroy it; ¹⁴and how in the practice of our national religion I was outstripping many of my Jewish contemporaries in my boundless devotion to the traditions of my ancestors. ¹⁵But then in his good pleasure God, who had set me apart from birth and called me through his grace, chose to ¹⁶reveal his Son to me and through me, in order that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles. When that happened, without consulting any human being, ¹⁷without going up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before me, I went off at once to Arabia, and afterwards returned to Damascus.

¹⁸Three years later I did go up to Jerusalem to get to know Cephas. I stayed with him for a fortnight, ¹⁹without seeing any other of the apostles, except James the Lord's brother. ²⁰What I write is plain truth; before God I am not lying.

²¹Next I went to the regions of Syria and Cilicia, ²²and remained unknown by sight to Christ's congregations in Judaea. ²³They only heard it said, "Our former persecutor is preaching the good news of the faith which once he tried to destroy"; ²⁴and they praised God for me.

2

Next, fourteen years later, I went again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus with us. ²I went up because it had been revealed by God that I should do so. I laid before them—but at a private interview with the men of repute—the gospel which I am accustomed to preach to

the Gentiles, to make sure that the race I had run, and was running, should not be run in vain. ³Yet even my companion Titus, Greek though he is, was not compelled to be circumcised. ⁴That course was urged only as a concession to certain sham-Christians, interlopers who had stolen in to spy upon the liberty we enjoy in the fellowship of Christ Jesus. These men wanted to bring us into bondage, ⁵but not for one moment did I yield to their dictation; I was determined that the full truth of the Gospel should be maintained for you.

⁶But as for the men of high reputation (not that their importance matters to me: God does not recognize these personal distinctions)—these men of repute, I say, did not prolong the consultation, ⁷but on the contrary acknowledged that I had been entrusted with the Gospel for Gentiles as surely as Peter had been entrusted with the Gospel for Jews. ⁸For God whose action made Peter an apostle to the Jews, also made me an apostle to the Gentiles.

⁹Recognizing, then, the favour thus bestowed upon me, those reputed pillars of our society, James, Cephas, and John, accepted Barnabas and myself as partners, and shook hands upon it, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles while they went to the Jews. ¹⁰All they asked was that we should keep their poor in mind, which was the very thing I made it my business to do.

¹¹But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. ¹²For until certain persons came from James he was taking his meals with gentile Christians; but when they came he drew back and began to hold aloof, because he was afraid of the advocates of circumcision. ¹³The other Jewish Christians showed the same lack of principle; even Barnabas was carried away and played false like the rest. ¹⁴But when I saw that their conduct did not square with the truth of the Gospel, I said to Cephas, before the whole congregation, "If you, a Jew born and bred, live like a Gentile, and not like a Jew, how can you insist that Gentiles must live like Jews?"

¹⁵We ourselves are Jews by birth, not Gentiles and sinners. ¹⁶But we know that no man is ever justified by doing what the law demands, but only through faith in Christ Jesus; so we too have put our faith in Jesus Christ, in order that we might be justified through this faith, and not through deeds dictated by law; for by such deeds, Scripture says, no mortal man shall be justified.

¹⁷If now, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves no less than the Gentiles turn out to be sinners against the law, does that mean that Christ is an abettor of sin? No, never! ¹⁸No, if I start building up again a system which I have pulled down, then it is that I show myself up as a transgressor of the law. ¹⁹For through the

law I died to law—to live for God. I have been crucified with Christ: ²⁰the life I now live is not my life, but the life which Christ lives in me; and my present bodily life is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me. ²¹I will not nullify the grace of God; if righteousness comes by law, then Christ died for nothing.



*From Paul's Letter to
the First Corinthians
(15: 12–28, 35–57)*

ON LIFE AFTER DEATH

15

... ¹²Now if this is what we proclaim, that Christ was raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³If there be no resurrection, then Christ was not raised; ¹⁴and if Christ was not raised, then our gospel is null and void, and so is your faith; ¹⁵and we turn out to be lying witnesses for God, because we bore witness that he raised Christ to life, whereas, if the dead are not raised, he did not raise him. ¹⁶For if the dead are not raised, it follows that Christ was not raised; ¹⁷and if Christ was not raised, your faith has nothing in it and you are still in your old state of sin. ¹⁸It follows also that those who have died within Christ's fellowship are utterly lost. ¹⁹If it is for this life only that Christ has given us hope, we of all men are most to be pitied.

²⁰But the truth is, Christ was raised to life—the firstfruits of the harvest of the dead. ²¹For since it was a man who brought death into the world, a man also brought resurrection of the dead. ²²As in Adam all men die, so in Christ all will be brought to life; ²³but each in his own proper place: Christ the firstfruits, and afterwards, at his coming, those who belong to Christ. ²⁴Then comes the end, when he delivers up the kingdom to God the Father, after abolishing every kind of domination, authority, and power. ²⁵For he is destined to reign until God has put all enemies under his feet; ²⁶and the last enemy to be abolished is death. ²⁷Scripture says, "He has put all things in subjection under his feet." But in saying "all

things," it clearly means to exclude God who subordinates them; ²⁸and when all things are thus subject to him, then the Son himself will also be made subordinate to God who made all things subject to him, and thus God will be all in all. . . .

³⁵But, you may ask, how are the dead raised? In what kind of body? ³⁶How foolish! The seed you sow does not come to life unless it has first died; ³⁷and what you sow is not the body that shall be, but a naked grain, perhaps of wheat, or of some other kind; ³⁸and God clothes it with the body of his choice, each seed with its own particular body. ³⁹All flesh is not the same flesh: there is flesh of men, flesh of beasts, of birds, and of fishes—all different. ⁴⁰There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies; and the splendour of the heavenly bodies is one thing, the splendour of the earthly, another. ⁴¹The sun has a splendour of its own, the moon another splendour, and the stars another, for star differs from star in brightness. ⁴²So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown in the earth as a perishable thing is raised imperishable. ⁴³Sown in humiliation, it is raised in glory; sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴sown as an animal body, it is raised as a spiritual body.

If there is such a thing as an animal body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵It is in this sense that Scripture says, "The first man, Adam, became an animate being," whereas the last Adam has become a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶Observe, the spiritual does not come first; the animal body comes first, and then the spiritual. ⁴⁷The first man was made "of the dust of the earth": the second man is from heaven. ⁴⁸The man made of dust is the pattern of all men of dust, and the heavenly man is the pattern of all the heavenly. ⁴⁹As we have worn the likeness of the man made of dust, so we shall wear the likeness of the heavenly man.

⁵⁰What I mean, my brothers, is this: flesh and blood can never possess the kingdom of God, and the perishable cannot possess immortality. ⁵¹Listen! I will unfold a mystery: we shall not all die, but we shall all be changed in a flash, ⁵²in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet-call. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will rise immortal, and we shall be changed. ⁵³This perishable being must be clothed with the imperishable, and what is mortal must be clothed with immortality. ⁵⁴And when our mortality has been clothed with immortality, then the saying of Scripture will come true: "Death is swallowed up; victory is won!" ⁵⁵"O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?" ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and sin gains its power from the law; ⁵⁷but, God be praised, he gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.



*From Paul's Letter to
the Romans (3:9–28)*

ON JUSTIFICATION BY
FAITH (ROMANS 3)

3

...⁹What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all! For we have already drawn up the accusation that Jews and Greeks alike are all under the power of sin.

¹⁰This has scriptural warrant:

"There is no just man, not one;

¹¹no one who understands, no one who seeks God.

¹²All have swerved aside, all alike have become debased;

there is no one to show kindness; no, not one.

¹³Their throat is an open grave,
they use their tongues for treachery,

adders' venom is on their lips,

¹⁴and their mouth is full of bitter curses.

¹⁵Their feet hasten to shed blood,

¹⁶ruin and misery lie along their paths,

¹⁷they are strangers to the high-road of peace,

¹⁸and reverence for God does not enter their thoughts."

¹⁹Now all the words of the law are addressed, as we know, to those who are within the pale of the law, so that no one may have anything to say in self-defence, but the whole world may be exposed to the judgement of God. ²⁰For (again from Scripture) "no human being can be justified in the sight of God" for having kept the law: law brings only the consciousness of sin.

²¹But now, quite independently of law, God's justice has been brought to light. The Law and the prophets both bear witness to it: ²²it is God's way of righting wrong, effective through faith in Christ for all who have such faith—all, without distinction. ²³For all alike have sinned, and are deprived of the divine splendour, ²⁴and all are justified by God's free grace alone, ²⁵through his act of liberation in the person of Christ Jesus. For God designed him to be the means of expiating sin by his sacrificial death, effective through faith. God meant by this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had overlooked the sins of the past—²⁶to demonstrate

his justice now in the present, showing that he is himself just and also justifies any man who puts his faith in Jesus.

²⁷What room then is left for human pride? It is excluded. And on what principle? The keeping of the law would not exclude it, but faith does. ²⁸For our argument is that a man is justified by faith quite apart from success in keeping the law.

11.2.2 Synoptic Gospels

The first three books (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) of the New Testament are called the **synoptic Gospels** because they contain similar, though not identical, accounts of Jesus' life and ministry. Matthew and Luke use material from Mark and from a collection of Jesus' sayings now lost. The collection of Jesus' sayings is called **Q** for the German word *Quelle* meaning "source." Some biblical scholars reject the notion that Q ever existed.

The Gospel of Mark appeared around 70 and Matthew and Luke around 85. All three Gospels, along with the Fourth Gospel (John), at first circulated among Christian communities anonymously and were not attributed to the **apostles** until around 150.

The authors of these Gospels present different interpretations of Jesus' life, and their writings were intended for different audiences. The Gospel of Matthew is a manual of Christian teaching designed to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy and is the Messiah anticipated by some Jews. The audience appears to be Jewish or at least people well versed in Jewish literature. According to some (but not all) ancient manuscripts, Mark opens his Gospel by giving to Jesus the title "Son of God," and that theme is reinforced in subsequent verses (1:11, 5:7, 9:7, 14:61–62, 15:39). Mark records far fewer sayings of Jesus than either Matthew or Luke. According to a very old tradition, Mark (also known as John) composed his Gospel at Rome as a summary of Peter's preaching. However, many scholars now believe that Mark's Gospel originated in Palestine or Syria. The Gospel of Luke is the first volume of a two-volume work (the second volume is the Book of Acts) in which the author describes the works and words of Jesus in terms of a divine-human savior figure whose mission is, among other things, to extend compassion to all who are needy. A special section, unique to Luke (9:51–18:14), contains many of the most famous parables including the Prodigal Son.

In the selections that follow are parallel accounts of the birth of Jesus, his sermons and parables, the

Passover meal Jesus shared with his disciples, and Jesus' death and resurrection so that you can compare both the similarities and differences in the synoptic Gospel accounts. Careful comparison will reveal how the different Gospel writers make different points with their versions of the same events.



The Birth of Jesus

READING QUESTIONS

1. How do the two birth stories differ? What do you think accounts for the differences?
2. Compare the "Beatitudes" in Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount (5:3–12) with those found in Luke's account of the Sermon on the Plain (6:17, 20–23). How are they the same and different? Do the differences change the meaning?
3. Why do you think Matthew portrays Jesus as being concerned with Jewish law and establishing a "higher righteousness," but Luke does not?
4. Why do you think Luke includes the "Alas" sayings (verses 24–26) and Matthew does not?
5. Assuming these teachings represent the teachings of the historical Jesus, what impression of Jesus do they leave you with?
6. How do you interpret the Parable of the Prodigal Son? Compare it to the Parable of the Lost Son found in the *Lotus Sutra* (Reading 7.4.1).
7. What differences and similarities do you notice in the three accounts of the Last Supper? How would you explain them?
8. Make a list of the differences and similarities you notice in the three accounts of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. How would you explain them?
9. What religious significance do you find in these stories of death and resurrection?

MATTHEW 1:18–25, 2:1–15

1

... ¹⁸This is the story of the birth of the Messiah. Mary his mother was betrothed to Joseph; before their marriage she found that she was with child by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Being a man of principle, and at the same time wanting to save her from exposure, Joseph desired to have the marriage contract set aside quietly. ²⁰He had resolved on this, when an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph son of David," said the angel, "do not be afraid to take Mary home with you as your

wife. It is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived this child. ²¹She will bear a son; and you shall give him the name Jesus (Saviour), for he will save his people from their sins." ²²All this happened in order to fulfil what the Lord declared through the prophet: ²³"The virgin will conceive and bear a son, and he shall be called Emmanuel," a name which means "God is with us." ²⁴Rising from sleep Joseph did as the angel had directed him; he took Mary home to be his wife, ²⁵but had no intercourse with her until her son was born. And he named the child Jesus.

2

Jesus was born at Bethlehem in Judaea during the reign of Herod. After his birth astrologers from the east arrived in Jerusalem, ²asking, "Where is the child who is born to be king of the Jews? We observed the rising of his star, and we have come to pay him homage." ³King Herod was greatly perturbed when he heard this; and so was the whole of Jerusalem. ⁴He called a meeting of the chief priests and lawyers of the Jewish people, and put before them the question: "Where is it that the Messiah is to be born?" "At Bethlehem in Judaea," ⁵they replied; and they referred him to the prophecy which reads: ⁶"Bethlehem in the land of Judah, you are far from least in the eyes of the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a leader to be the shepherd of my people Israel."

⁷Herod next called the astrologers to meet him in private, and ascertained from them the time when the star had appeared. ⁸He then sent them on to Bethlehem, and said, "Go and make a careful inquiry for the child. When you have found him, report to me, so that I may go myself and pay him homage."

⁹They set out at the king's bidding; and the star which they had seen at its rising went ahead of them until it stopped above the place where the child lay. ¹⁰At the sight of the star they were overjoyed. ¹¹Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and bowed to the ground in homage to him; then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned home another way.

¹³After they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, and said to him, "Rise up, take the child and his mother and escape with them to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the child to do away with him." ¹⁴So Joseph rose from sleep, and taking mother and child by night he went away with them to Egypt, ¹⁵and there he stayed till Herod's death. This was to fulfil what the Lord had declared through the prophet: "I called my son out of Egypt."

LUKE 2:1-21

2

In those days a decree was issued by the Emperor Augustus for a registration to be made throughout the Roman world. ²This was the first registration of its kind; it took place when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³For this purpose everyone made his way to his own town; ⁴and so Joseph went up to Judaea from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to register at the city of David, called Bethlehem, because he was of the house of David by descent; ⁵and with him went Mary who was betrothed to him. She was expecting a child, ⁶and while they were there the time came for her baby to be born, ⁷and she gave birth to a son, her first-born. She wrapped him in his swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them to lodge in the house.

⁸Now in this same district there were shepherds out in the fields, keeping watch through the night over their flock, ⁹when suddenly there stood before them an angel of the Lord, and the splendour of the Lord shone round them. They were terror-stricken, ¹⁰but the angel said, "Do not be afraid; I have good news for you: there is great joy coming to the whole people. ¹¹Today in the city of David a deliverer has been born to you—the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²And this is your sign: you will find a baby lying wrapped in his swaddling clothes, in a manger." ¹³All at once there was with the angel a great company of the heavenly host, singing the praises of God:

¹⁴"Glory to God in highest heaven,
and on earth his peace for men on whom his favour rests."

¹⁵After the angels had left them and gone into heaven the shepherds said to one another, "Come, we must go straight to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶So they went with all speed and found their way to Mary and Joseph; and the baby was lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw him, they recounted what they had been told about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard were astonished at what the shepherds said. ¹⁹But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered over them. ²⁰Meanwhile the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for what they had heard and seen; it had all happened as they had been told.

²¹Eight days later the time came to circumcise him, and he was given the name Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived.

*Sermons on the Mount*

MATTHEW 5-7

5

When he saw the crowds he went up the hill. ²There he took his seat, and when his disciples had gathered round him he began to address them. And this is the teaching he gave:

³"How blest are those who know their need of God; the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

⁴How blest are the sorrowful;
they shall find consolation.

⁵How blest are those of a gentle spirit;
they shall have the earth for their possession.

⁶How blest are those who hunger and thirst to see right prevail;
they shall be satisfied.

⁷How blest are those who show mercy;
mercy shall be shown to them.

⁸How blest are those whose hearts are pure;
they shall see God.

⁹How blest are the peacemakers;
God shall call them his sons.

¹⁰How blest are those who have suffered persecution for the cause of right;
the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

¹¹"How blest you are, when you suffer insults and persecution and every kind of calumny for my sake. ¹²Accept it with gladness and exultation, for you have a rich reward in heaven; in the same way they persecuted the prophets before you.

¹³"You are salt to the world. And if salt becomes tasteless, how is its saltiness to be restored? It is now good for nothing but to be thrown away and trodden underfoot.

¹⁴"You are light for all the world. A town that stands on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵When a lamp is lit, it is not put under the meal-tub, but on the lamp-stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶And you, like the lamp, must shed light among your fellows, so that, when they see the good you do, they may give praise to your Father in heaven.

¹⁷"Do not suppose that I have come to abolish the Law and the prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to complete. ¹⁸I tell you this: so long as heaven and earth endure, not a letter, not a stroke, will disappear from the Law until all that must happen has happened. ¹⁹If any

man therefore sets aside even the least of the Law's demands, and teaches others to do the same, he will have the lowest place in the kingdom of Heaven, whereas anyone who keeps the Law, and teaches others so, will stand high in the kingdom of Heaven. ²⁰I tell you, unless you show yourselves far better men than the Pharisees and the doctors of the law, you can never enter the kingdom of Heaven.

²¹"You have learned that our forefathers were told, 'Do not commit murder; anyone who commits murder must be brought to judgement.' ²²But what I tell you is this: Anyone who nurses anger against his brother must be brought to judgement. If he abuses his brother he must answer for it to the court; if he sneers at him he will have to answer for it in the fires of hell.

²³"If, when you are bringing your gift to the altar, you suddenly remember that your brother has a grievance against you, ²⁴leave your gift where it is before the altar. First go and make your peace with your brother, and only then come back and offer your gift.

²⁵"If someone sues you, come to terms with him promptly while you are both on your way to court; otherwise he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the constable, and you will be put in jail. ²⁶I tell you, once you are there you will not be let out till you have paid the last farthing.

²⁷"You have learned that they were told, 'Do not commit adultery.' ²⁸But what I tell you is this: If a man looks on a woman with a lustful eye, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

²⁹"If your right eye is your undoing, tear it out and fling it away; it is better for you to lose one part of your body than for the whole of it to be thrown into hell. ³⁰And if your right hand is your undoing, cut it off and fling it away; it is better for you to lose one part of your body than for the whole of it to go to hell.

³¹"They were told, 'A man who divorces his wife must give her a note of dismissal.' ³²But what I tell you is this: If a man divorces his wife for any cause other than unchastity he involves her in adultery; and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

³³"Again, you have learned that our forefathers were told, 'Do not break your oath,' and, 'Oaths sworn to the Lord must be kept.' ³⁴But what I tell you is this: You are not to swear at all—not by heaven, for it is God's throne, ³⁵nor by earth, for it is his footstool, nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King, ³⁶nor by your own head, because you cannot turn one hair of it white or black. ³⁷Plain 'Yes' or 'No' is all you need to say; anything beyond that comes from the devil.

³⁸"You have learned that they were told, 'Eye for eye, tooth for tooth.' ³⁹But what I tell you is this: Do not set yourself against the man who wrongs you. If someone

slaps you on the right cheek, turn and offer him your left. ⁴⁰If a man wants to sue you for your shirt, let him have your coat as well. ⁴¹If a man in authority makes you go one mile, go with him two. ⁴²Give when you are asked to give; and do not turn your back on a man who wants to borrow.

⁴³"You have learned that they were told, 'Love your neighbour, hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴But what I tell you is this: Love your enemies and pray for your persecutors; ⁴⁵only so can you be children of your heavenly Father, who makes his sun rise on good and bad alike, and sends the rain on the honest and the dishonest. ⁴⁶If you love only those who love you, what reward can you expect? Surely the tax-gatherers do as much as that. ⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers, what is there extraordinary about that? Even the heathen do as much. ⁴⁸There must be no limit to your goodness, as your heavenly Father's goodness knows no bounds.

6

"Be careful not to make a show of your religion before men; if you do, no reward awaits you in your Father's house in heaven.

²"Thus, when you do some act of charity, do not announce it with a flourish of trumpets, as the hypocrites do in synagogue and in the streets to win admiration from men. I tell you this: they have their reward already. ³No; when you do some act of charity, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing; ⁴your good deed must be secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

⁵"Again, when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; they love to say their prayers standing up in synagogue and at the street-corners, for everyone to see them. I tell you this: they have their reward already. ⁶But when you pray, go into a room by yourself, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is there in the secret place; and your Father who sees what is secret will reward you.

⁷"In your prayers do not go babbling on like the heathen, who imagine that the more they say the more likely they are to be heard. ⁸Do not imitate them. Your Father knows what your needs are before you ask him.

⁹"This is how you should pray:

'Our Father in heaven,
thy name be hallowed;

¹⁰thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

¹¹Give us today our daily bread.

¹²Forgive us the wrong we have done,

as we have forgiven those who have wronged us.

¹³And do not bring us to the test,
but save us from the evil one.⁷

¹⁴For if you forgive others the wrongs they have done, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; ¹⁵but if you do not forgive others, then the wrongs you have done will not be forgiven by your Father.

¹⁶"So too when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites: they make their faces unsightly so that other people may see that they are fasting. I tell you this: they have their reward already. ¹⁷But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that men may not see that you are fasting, ¹⁸but only your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees what is secret will give you your reward.

¹⁹"Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth, where it grows rusty and moth-eaten, and thieves break in to steal it. ²⁰Store up treasure in heaven, where there is no moth and no rust to spoil it, no thieves to break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

²²"The lamp of the body is the eye. ²³If your eyes are sound, you will have light for your whole body; if the eyes are bad, your whole body will be in darkness. If then the only light you have is darkness, the darkness is doubly dark.

²⁴"No servant can be the slave of two masters; for either he will hate the first and love the second, or he will be devoted to the first and think nothing of the second. You cannot serve God and Money.

²⁵"Therefore I bid you put away anxious thoughts about food and drink to keep you alive, and clothes to cover your body. Surely life is more than food, the body more than clothes. ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow and reap and store in barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. You are worth more than the birds!

²⁷Is there a man of you who by anxious thought can add a foot to his height? ²⁸And why be anxious about clothes? Consider how the lilies grow in the fields; they do not work, they do not spin; ²⁹and yet, I tell you, even Solomon in all his splendour was not attired like one of these. ³⁰But if that is how God clothes the grass in the fields, which is there today, and tomorrow is thrown on the stove, will he not all the more clothe you? How little faith you have! ³¹No, do not ask anxiously, 'What are we to eat? What are we to drink? What shall we wear?' ³²All these are things for the heathen to run after, not for you, because your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³Set your mind on God's kingdom and his justice before everything else, and all the rest will come to you

as well. ³⁴So do not be anxious about tomorrow; tomorrow will look after itself. Each day has troubles enough of its own.

7

¹"Pass no judgement, and you will not be judged. ²For as you judge others, so you will yourselves be judged, and whatever measure you deal out to others will be dealt back to you. ³Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye, with never a thought for the great plank in your own? ⁴Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is that plank in your own? ⁵You hypocrite! First take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's.

⁶"Do not give dogs what is holy; do not throw your pearls to the pigs: they will only trample on them, and turn and tear you to pieces.

⁷"Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened. ⁸For everyone who asks receives, he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

⁹"Is there a man among you who will offer his son a stone when he asks for bread, ¹⁰or a snake when he asks for fish? ¹¹If you, then, bad as you are, know how to give your children what is good for them, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him!

¹²"Always treat others as you would like them to treat you: that is the Law and the prophets.

¹³"Enter by the narrow gate. The gate is wide that leads to perdition, there is plenty of room on the road, and many go that way; ¹⁴but the gate that leads to life is small and the road is narrow, and those who find it are few.

¹⁵"Beware of false prophets, men who come to you dressed up as sheep while underneath they are savage wolves. ¹⁶You will recognize them by the fruits they bear. Can grapes be picked from briars, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷In the same way, a good tree always yields good fruit, and a poor tree bad fruit. ¹⁸A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, or a poor tree good fruit. ¹⁹And when a tree does not yield good fruit it is cut down and burnt. ²⁰That is why I say you will recognize them by their fruits.

²¹"Not everyone who calls me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but only those who do the will of my heavenly Father. ²²When that day comes, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy

in your name, cast out devils in your name, and in your name perform many miracles?' ²³Then I will tell them to their face, 'I never knew you; out of my sight, you and your wicked ways!'

²⁴What then of the man who hears these words of mine and acts upon them? He is like a man who had the sense to build his house on rock. ²⁵The rain came down, the floods rose, the wind blew, and beat upon that house; but it did not fall, because its foundations were on rock. ²⁶But what of the man who hears these words of mine and does not act upon them? He is like a man who was foolish enough to build his house on sand. ²⁷The rain came down, the floods rose, the wind blew, and beat upon that house; down it fell with a great crash."

²⁸When Jesus had finished this discourse the people were astounded at his teaching; ²⁹unlike their own teachers he taught with a note of authority.

LUKE 6:17-49

6

. . . ¹⁷He came down the hill with them and took his stand on level ground. There was a large concourse of his disciples and great numbers of people from Jerusalem and Judaea and from the seaboard of Tyre and Sidon, who had come to listen to him, and to be cured of their diseases. ¹⁸Those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured; ¹⁹and everyone in the crowd was trying to touch him, because power went out from him and cured them all.

²⁰Then turning to his disciples he began to speak:

"How blest are you who are in need; the kingdom of God is yours.

²¹"How blest are you who now go hungry; your hunger shall be satisfied.

"How blest are you who weep now; you shall laugh.

²²"How blest you are when men hate you, when they outlaw you and insult you, and ban your very name as infamous, because of the Son of Man. ²³On that day be glad and dance for joy; for assuredly you have a rich reward in heaven; in just the same way did their fathers treat the prophets.

²⁴"But alas for you who are rich; you have had your time of happiness.

²⁵"Alas for you who are well-fed now; you shall go hungry.

"Alas for you who laugh now; you shall mourn and weep.

²⁶"Alas for you when all speak well of you; just so did their fathers treat the false prophets.

²⁷"But to you who hear me I say:

"Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; ²⁸bless those who curse you; pray for those who treat you spitefully. ²⁹When a man hits you on the cheek, offer him the other cheek too; when a man takes your coat, let him have your shirt as well. ³⁰Give to everyone who asks you; when a man takes what is yours, do not demand it back. ³¹Treat others as you would like them to treat you.

³²"If you love only those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them.

³³Again, if you do good only to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do as much.

³⁴And if you lend only where you expect to be repaid, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to each other to be repaid in full. ³⁵But you must love your enemies and do good; and lend without expecting any return; and you will have a rich reward: you will be sons of the Most High, because he himself is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. ³⁶Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate.

³⁷"Pass no judgement, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; acquit, and you will be acquitted; ³⁸give, and gifts will be given you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be poured into your lap; for whatever measure you deal out to others will be dealt to you in return."

³⁹He also offered them a parable: "Can one blind man be guide to another? Will they not both fall into the ditch? ⁴⁰A pupil is not superior to his teacher; but everyone, when his training is complete, will reach his teacher's level.

⁴¹"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye, with never a thought for the great plank in your own? ⁴²How can you say to your brother, 'My dear brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you are blind to the plank in your own? You hypocrite! First take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's.

⁴³"There is no such thing as a good tree producing worthless fruit, nor yet a worthless tree producing good fruit. ⁴⁴For each tree is known by its own fruit: you do not gather figs from thistles, and you do not pick grapes from brambles. ⁴⁵A good man produces good from the store of good within himself; and an evil man from evil within produces evil. For the words that the mouth utters come from the overflowing of the heart.

⁴⁶"Why do you keep calling me 'Lord, Lord'—and never do what I tell you? ⁴⁷Everyone who comes to me

and hears what I say, and acts upon it—I will show you what he is like. ⁴⁸He is like a man who, in building his house, dug deep and laid the foundations on rock. When the flood came, the river burst upon that house, but could not shift it, because it had been soundly built. ⁴⁹But he who hears and does not act is like a man who built his house on the soil without foundations. As soon as the river burst upon it, the house collapsed, and fell with a great crash.”



The Prodigal Son

LUKE 15:11-32

15

... ¹¹Again he said: “There was once a man who had two sons; ¹²and the younger said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the property.’ So he divided his estate between them. ¹³A few days later the younger son turned the whole of his share into cash and left home for a distant country, where he squandered it in reckless living. ¹⁴He had spent it all, when a severe famine fell upon that country and he began to feel the pinch. ¹⁵So he went and attached himself to one of the local landowners, who sent him on to his farm to mind the pigs. ¹⁶He would have been glad to fill his belly with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷Then he came to his senses and said, ‘How many of my father’s paid servants have more food than they can eat, and here am I, starving to death! ¹⁸I will set off and go to my father, and say to him, “Father, I have sinned, against God and against you; ¹⁹I am no longer fit to be called your son; treat me as one of your paid servants.”’ ²⁰So he set out for his father’s house. But while he was still a long way off his father saw him, and his heart went out to him. He ran to meet him, flung his arms round him, and kissed him. ²¹The son said, ‘Father, I have sinned, against God and against you; I am no longer fit to be called your son.’ ²²But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! fetch a robe, my best one, and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. ²³Bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us have a feast to celebrate the day. ²⁴For this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found.’ And the festivities began.

²⁵“Now the elder son was out on the farm; and on his way back, as he approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶He called one of the servants and asked what it meant. ²⁷The servant told him, ‘Your brother has come home, and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and pleaded with him; ²⁹but he retorted, ‘You know how I have slaved for you all these years; I never once disobeyed your orders; and you never gave me so much as a kid, for a feast with my friends. ³⁰But now that this son of yours turns up, after running through your money with his women, you kill the fatted calf for him.’ ³¹‘My boy,’ said the father, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³²How could we help celebrating this happy day? Your brother here was dead and has come back to life, was lost and is found.’”



The Last Supper

MARK 14:1-25

14

Now the festival of Passover and Unleavened Bread was only two days off; and the chief priests and the doctors of the law were trying to devise some cunning plan to seize him and put him to death. ²“It must not be during the festival,” they said, “or we should have rioting among the people.”

³Jesus was at Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper. As he sat at table, a woman came in carrying a small bottle of very costly perfume, pure oil of nard. She broke it open and poured the oil over his head. ⁴Some of those present said to one another angrily, “Why this waste? ⁵The perfume might have been sold for thirty pounds and the money given to the poor”; and they turned upon her with fury. ⁶But Jesus said, “Let her alone. Why must you make trouble for her? It is a fine thing she has done for me. ⁷You have the poor among you always, and you can help them whenever you like; but you will not always have me. ⁸She has done what lay in her power; she is beforehand with anointing my body for burial. ⁹I tell you this: wherever in all the world the Gospel is proclaimed, what she has done will be told as her memorial.”

¹⁰Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray him to them. ¹¹When they heard what he had come for, they were greatly pleased, and promised him money; and he began to look for a good opportunity to betray him.

¹²Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lambs were being slaughtered, his disciples said to him, "Where would you like us to go and prepare for your Passover supper?" ¹³So he sent out two of his disciples with these instructions: "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a jar of water. Follow him, ¹⁴and when he enters a house give this message to the householder: 'The Master says, "Where is the room reserved for me to eat the Passover with my disciples?"'" ¹⁵He will show you a large room upstairs, set out in readiness. Make the preparations for us there." ¹⁶Then the disciples went off, and when they came into the city they found everything just as he had told them. So they prepared for Passover.

¹⁷In the evening he came to the house with the Twelve. ¹⁸As they sat at supper Jesus said, "I tell you this: one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me." ¹⁹At this they were dismayed; and one by one they said to him, "Not I, surely?" ²⁰"It is one of the Twelve," he said, "who is dipping into the same bowl with me. ²¹The Son of Man is going the way appointed for him in the scriptures; but alas for that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would be better for that man if he had never been born."

²²During supper he took bread, and having said the blessing he broke it and gave it to them, with the words: "Take this; this is my body." ²³Then he took a cup, and having offered thanks to God he gave it to them; and they all drank from it. ²⁴And he said, "This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, shed for many. ²⁵I tell you this: never again shall I drink from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

MATTHEW 26:20-29

26

... ²⁰In the evening he sat down with the twelve disciples; ²¹and during supper he said, "I tell you this: one of you will betray me." ²²In great distress they exclaimed one after the other, "Can you mean me, Lord?" ²³He answered, "One who has dipped his hand into this bowl with me will betray me. ²⁴The Son of Man is going the

way appointed for him in the scriptures; but alas for that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would be better for that man if he had never been born." ²⁵Then Judas spoke, the one who was to betray him: "Rabbi, can you mean me?" Jesus replied, "The words are yours."

²⁶During supper Jesus took bread, and having said the blessing he broke it and gave it to the disciples with the words: "Take this and eat; this is my body." ²⁷Then he took a cup, and having offered thanks to God he gave it to them with the words: "Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸For this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, shed for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹I tell you, never again shall I drink from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in the kingdom of my Father."

LUKE 22:7-38

22

... ⁷Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover victim had to be slaughtered, ⁸and Jesus sent Peter and John with these instructions: "Go and prepare for our Passover supper." ⁹"Where would you like us to make the preparations?" they asked. ¹⁰He replied, "As soon as you set foot in the city a man will meet you carrying a jar of water. Follow him into the house that he enters and give this message to the householder: ¹¹'The Master says, "Where is the room in which I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"'" ¹²He will show you a large room upstairs all set out: make the preparations there." ¹³They went and found everything as he had said. So they prepared for Passover.

¹⁴When the time came he took his place at table, and the apostles with him; ¹⁵and he said to them, "How I have longed to eat this Passover with you before my death! ¹⁶For I tell you, never again shall I eat it until the time when it finds its fulfilment in the kingdom of God."

¹⁷Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and share it among yourselves; ¹⁸for I tell you, from this moment I shall drink from the fruit of the vine no more until the time when the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹And he took bread, gave thanks, and broke it; and he gave it to them, with the words: "This is my body."

²¹"But mark this—my betrayer is here, his hand with mine on the table. ²²For the Son of Man is going his appointed way; but alas for that man by whom he is betrayed!" ²³At this they began to ask among themselves

which of them it could possibly be who was to do this thing.

²⁴Then a jealous dispute broke out: who among them should rank highest? ²⁵But he said, "In the world, kings lord it over their subjects; and those in authority are called their country's 'Benefactors.' ²⁶Not so with you: on the contrary, the highest among you must bear himself like the youngest, the chief of you like a servant. ²⁷For who is greater—the one who sits at table or the servant who waits on him? Surely the one who sits at table. Yet here am I among you like a servant.

²⁸"You are the men who have stood firmly by me in my times of trial; ²⁹and now I vest in you the kingship which my Father vested in me; ³⁰you shall eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones as judges of the twelve tribes of Israel.

³¹"Simon, Simon, take heed: Satan has been given leave to sift all of you like wheat; ³²but for you I have prayed that your faith may not fail; and when you have come to yourself, you must lend strength to your brothers." ³³"Lord," he replied, "I am ready to go with you to prison and death." ³⁴Jesus said, "I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow tonight until you have three times over denied that you know me."

³⁵He said to them, "When I sent you out barefoot without purse or pack, were you ever short of anything?" "No," they answered. ³⁶"It is different now," he said; "whoever has a purse had better take it with him, and his pack too; and if he has no sword, let him sell his cloak to buy one. ³⁷For Scripture says, 'And he was counted among the outlaws,' and these words, I tell you, must find fulfilment in me; indeed, all that is written of me is being fulfilled." ³⁸"Look, Lord," they said, "we have two swords here." "Enough, enough!" he replied.



Crucifixion and Resurrection

MARK 15:21-16:8

15

... ²¹Then they took him out to crucify him. A man called Simon, from Cyrene, the father of Alexander and

Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they pressed him into service to carry his cross.

²²They brought him to the place called Golgotha, which means "Place of a skull." ²³He was offered drugged wine, but he would not take it. ²⁴Then they fastened him to the cross. They divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should have.

²⁵The hour of the crucifixion was nine in the morning, ²⁶and the inscription giving the charge against him read, "The king of the Jews." ²⁷Two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and the other on his left.

²⁹The passers-by hurled abuse at him: "Aha!" they cried, wagging their heads, "you would pull the temple down, would you, and build it in three days? ³⁰Come down from the cross and save yourself!" ³¹So too the chief priests and lawyers jested with one another: "He saved others," they said, "but he cannot save himself. ³²Let the Messiah, the king of Israel, come down now from the cross. If we see that, we shall believe." Even those who were crucified with him taunted him.

³³At midday a darkness fell over the whole land, which lasted till three in the afternoon; ³⁴and at three Jesus cried aloud, "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*," which means, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" ³⁵Some of the bystanders, on hearing this, said, "Hark, he is calling Elijah." ³⁶A man ran and soaked a sponge in sour wine and held it to his lips on the end of a cane. "Let us see," he said, "if Elijah will come to take him down." ³⁷Then Jesus gave a loud cry and died. ³⁸And the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. ³⁹And when the centurion who was standing opposite him saw how he died, he said, "Truly this man was a son of God."

⁴⁰A number of women were also present, watching from a distance. Among them were Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome, ⁴¹who had all followed him and waited on him when he was in Galilee, and there were several others who had come up to Jerusalem with him.

⁴²By this time evening had come; and as it was Preparation-day (that is, the day before the Sabbath), ⁴³Joseph of Arimathaea, a respected member of the Council, a man who looked forward to the kingdom of God, bravely went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁴⁴Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead; so he sent for the centurion and asked him whether it was long since he died. ⁴⁵And when he heard the centurion's report, he gave Joseph leave to take the dead body. ⁴⁶So Joseph bought a linen sheet, took him down from the cross, and wrapped him in the sheet. Then he laid him in a tomb cut out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the entrance. ⁴⁷And Mary of Mag-

You may wish to compare these accounts with John 19:17-20:18.

dala and Mary the mother of Joseph were watching and saw where he was laid.

16

When the Sabbath was over, Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought aromatic oils intending to go and anoint him; ²and very early on the Sunday morning, just after sunrise, they came to the tomb. ³They were wondering among themselves who would roll away the stone for them from the entrance to the tomb, ⁴when they looked up and saw that the stone, huge as it was, had been rolled back already. ⁵They went into the tomb, where they saw a youth sitting on the right-hand side, wearing a white robe; and they were dumbfounded. ⁶But he said to them, "Fear nothing; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised again; he is not here; look, there is the place where they laid him. ⁷But go and give this message to his disciples and Peter: 'He is going on before you into Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.'" ⁸Then they went out and ran away from the tomb, beside themselves with terror. They said nothing to anybody, for they were afraid.

And they delivered all these instructions briefly to Peter and his companions. Afterwards Jesus himself sent out by them from east to west the sacred and imperishable message of eternal salvation.

MATTHEW 27:32-28:20

27

... ³²Then they led him away to be crucified. On their way out they met a man from Cyrene, Simon by name, and pressed him into service to carry his cross.

³³So they came to a place called Golgotha (which means "Place of a skull") ³⁴and there he was offered a draught of wine mixed with gall; but when he had tasted it he would not drink.

³⁵After fastening him to the cross they divided his clothes among them by casting lots, ³⁶and then sat down there to keep watch. ³⁷Over his head was placed the inscription giving the charge: "This is Jesus the king of the Jews."

³⁸Two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and the other on his left.

³⁹The passers-by hurled abuse at him: ⁴⁰they wagged their heads and cried, "You would pull the temple down, would you, and build it in three days? Come down from

the cross and save yourself, if you are indeed the Son of God." ⁴¹So too the chief priests with the lawyers and elders mocked at him: ⁴²"He saved others," they said, "but he cannot save himself. King of Israel, indeed! Let him come down now from the cross, and then we will believe him. ⁴³Did he trust in God? Let God rescue him, if he wants him—for he said he was God's Son." ⁴⁴Even the bandits who were crucified with him taunted him in the same way.

⁴⁵From midday a darkness fell over the whole land, which lasted until three in the afternoon; ⁴⁶and about three Jesus cried aloud, "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*," which means, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" ⁴⁷Some of the bystanders, on hearing this, said, "He is calling Elijah." ⁴⁸One of them ran at once and fetched a sponge, which he soaked in sour wine, and held it to his lips on the end of a cane. ⁴⁹But the others said, "Let us see if Elijah will come to save him."

⁵⁰Jesus again gave a loud cry, and breathed his last. ⁵¹At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. There was an earthquake, the rocks split ⁵²and the graves opened, and many of God's saints were raised from sleep; ⁵³and coming out of their graves after his resurrection they entered the Holy City, where many saw them. ⁵⁴And when the centurion and his men who were keeping watch over Jesus saw the earthquake and all that was happening, they were filled with awe, and they said, "Truly this man was a son of God."

⁵⁵A number of women were also present, watching from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and waited on him. ⁵⁶Among them were Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

⁵⁷When evening fell, there came a man of Arimathea, Joseph by name, who was a man of means, and had himself become a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸He approached Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave orders that he should have it. ⁵⁹Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen sheet, ⁶⁰and laid it in his own unused tomb, which he had cut out of the rock; he then rolled a large stone against the entrance, and went away. ⁶¹Mary of Magdala was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the grave.

⁶²Next day, the morning after that Friday, the chief priests and the Pharisees came in a body to Pilate. ⁶³"Your Excellency," they said, "we recall how that impostor said while he was still alive, 'I am to be raised again after three days.' ⁶⁴So will you give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day? Otherwise his disciples may come, steal the body, and then tell the people that he has been raised from the dead; and the final de-

ception will be worse than the first.” ⁶⁵You may have your guard,” said Pilate; “go and make it secure as best you can.” ⁶⁶So they went and made the grave secure; they sealed the stone, and left the guard in charge.

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The Sabbath was over, and it was about daybreak on Sunday, when Mary of Magdala and the other Mary came to look at the grave. ²Suddenly there was a violent earthquake; an angel of the Lord descended from heaven; he came to the stone and rolled it away, and sat himself down on it. ³His face shone like lightning; his garments were white as snow. ⁴At the sight of him the guards shook with fear and lay like the dead.

⁵The angel then addressed the women: “You,” he said, “have nothing to fear. I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; he has been raised again, as he said he would be. Come and see the place where he was laid, ⁷and then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has been raised from the dead and is going on before you into Galilee; there you will see him.’ That is what I had to tell you.”

⁸They hurried away from the tomb in awe and great joy, and ran to tell the disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus was there in their path. He gave them his greeting, and they came up and clasped his feet, falling prostrate before him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and take word to my brothers that they are to leave for Galilee. They will see me there.”

¹¹The women had started on their way when some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. ¹²After meeting with the elders and conferring together, the chief priests offered the soldiers a substantial bribe and ¹³told them to say, “His disciples came by night and stole the body while we were asleep.” They added, ¹⁴“If this should reach the Governor’s ears, we will put matters right with him and see that you do not suffer.” ¹⁵So they took the money and did as they were told. This story became widely known, and is current in Jewish circles to this day.

¹⁶The eleven disciples made their way to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to meet him. ¹⁷When they saw him, they fell prostrate before him, though some were doubtful. ¹⁸Jesus then came up and spoke to them. He said, “Full authority in heaven and on earth has been committed to me. ¹⁹Go forth therefore and make all nations my disciples; baptize men everywhere in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you. And be assured, I am with you always, to the end of time.”

LUKE 23:26–24:11

23

... ²⁶As they led him away to execution they seized upon a man called Simon, from Cyrene, on his way in from the country, put the cross on his back, and made him walk behind Jesus carrying it.

²⁷Great numbers of people followed, many women among them, who mourned and lamented over him. ²⁸Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; no, weep for yourselves and your children. ²⁹For the days are surely coming when they will say, ‘Happy are the barren, the wombs that never bore a child, the breasts that never fed one.’ ³⁰Then they will start saying to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ ³¹For if these things are done when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

³²There were two others with him, criminals who were being led away to execution; ³³and when they reached the place called The Skull, they crucified him there, and the criminals with him, one on his right and the other on his left. ³⁴Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing.”

³⁵They divided his clothes among them by casting lots. The people stood looking on, and their rulers jeered at him: “He saved others: now let him save himself, if this is God’s Messiah, his Chosen.” ³⁶The soldiers joined in the mockery and came forward offering him their sour wine. ³⁷“If you are the king of the Jews,” they said, “save yourself.” ³⁸There was an inscription above his head which ran: “This is the king of the Jews.”

³⁹One of the criminals who hung there with him taunted him: “Are not you the Messiah? Save yourself, and us.” ⁴⁰But the other rebuked him: “Have you no fear of God? You are under the same sentence as he. ⁴¹For us it is plain justice; we are paying the price for our misdeeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” ⁴²And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come to your throne.” ⁴³He answered, “I tell you this: today you shall be with me in Paradise.”

⁴⁴By now it was about midday and a darkness fell over the whole land, which lasted until three in the afternoon; ⁴⁵the sun’s light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶Then Jesus gave a loud cry and said, “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit”; and with these words he died. ⁴⁷The centurion saw it all, and gave praise to God. “Beyond all doubt,” he said, “this man was innocent.”

⁴⁸The crowd who had assembled for the spectacle, when they saw what had happened, went home beating their breasts.

⁴⁹His friends had all been standing at a distance; the women who had accompanied him from Galilee stood with them and watched it all.

⁵⁰Now there was a man called Joseph, a member of the Council, a good, upright man, ⁵¹who had dissented from their policy and the action they had taken. He came from the Judean town of Arimathaea, and he was one who looked forward to the kingdom of God. ⁵²This man now approached Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁵³Taking it down from the cross, he wrapped it in a linen sheet, and laid it in a tomb cut out of the rock, in which no one had been laid before. ⁵⁴It was Friday, and the Sabbath was about to begin.

⁵⁵The women who had accompanied him from Galilee followed; they took note of the tomb and observed how his body was laid. ⁵⁶Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes; and on the Sabbath they rested in obedience to the commandment.

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²But on the Sunday morning very early they came to the tomb bringing the spices they had prepared. Finding that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb, ³they went inside; but the body was not to be found. ⁴While they stood utterly at a loss, all of a sudden two men in dazzling garments were at their side. ⁵They were terrified, and stood with eyes cast down, but the men said, "Why search among the dead for one who lives?" ⁶Remember what he told you while he was still in Galilee, ⁷about the Son of Man: how he must be given up into the power of sinful men and be crucified, and must rise again on the third day." ⁸Then they recalled his words ⁹and, returning from the tomb, they reported all this to the Eleven and all the others.

¹⁰The women were Mary of Magdala, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and they, with the other women, told the apostles. ¹¹But the story appeared to them to be nonsense, and they would not believe them.

11.2.3 The Gospel of John

The fourth Gospel, known as the Gospel of John, was written around 90. Tradition ascribes it to the apostle John, but we do not know who the author is. It is quite different in style, tone, purpose, and content from the synoptic Gospels. Ninety percent of the material in John does not appear in the synoptic Gospels, including the prologue and the miracle of the resurrection of Lazarus, which we will sample below.

John begins his Gospel not with a birth narrative, but with a philosophical statement about the rela-

tionships among God, the Word, or *Logos*, of God, and Jesus. The concept of *logos* already had a long philosophical history before John used it. A Greek philosopher named Heraclitus had used it to designate the rational order of the ever-changing universe. Stoic philosophers of John's day used it to designate not only a divine reason but also the power of reason humans possess that allows them to make sense of their experiences. Philo of Alexandria (see Reading 10.3.1), who died only forty years before this Gospel was written, had already used it to designate the creative Word of God referred to in Genesis. Now John uses it to interpret Jesus.

John's use of *logos* in this prologue is the foundation for one of the most influential **Christologies** (theories of Christ) found in Christianity. It is called, appropriately enough, the Logos Christology, and it lays the foundation for later struggles over the doctrine of the **Trinity** as we shall shortly see.



The Word Made Flesh (John 1:1–18)

READING QUESTIONS

1. How does John characterize Jesus?
2. What message do you think John intends to send by paralleling his opening prologue with the opening verse of Genesis?
3. Do you think the story of the resurrection of Lazarus is intended to prefigure Jesus' own resurrection? Why or why not?

1

When all things began, the Word already was. The Word dwelt with God, and what God was, the Word was. ²The Word, then, was with God at the beginning, ³and through him all things came to be; no single thing was created without him. All that came to be was alive with his life, ⁴and that life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines on in the dark, and the darkness has never mastered it.

⁶There appeared a man named John, sent from God; ⁷he came as a witness to testify to the light, that all might become believers through him. ⁸He was not himself the light; he came to bear witness to the light. ⁹The real light which enlightens every man was even then coming into the world.

¹⁰He was in the world; but the world, though it owed its being to him, did not recognize him. ¹¹He entered his own realm, and his own would not receive him. ¹²But to all who did receive him, to those who have yielded him their allegiance, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³not born of any human stock, or by the fleshly desire of a human father, but the offspring of God himself. ¹⁴So the Word became flesh; he came to dwell among us, and we saw his glory, such glory as befits the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.

¹⁵Here is John's testimony to him: he cried aloud, "This is the man I meant when I said, 'He comes after me, but takes rank before me'; for before I was born, he already was."

¹⁶Out of his full store we have all received grace upon grace; ¹⁷for while the Law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God; but God's only Son, he who is nearest to the Father's heart, he has made him known.



The Resurrection of Lazarus (John 11:17-44)

11

... ¹⁷On his arrival Jesus found that Lazarus had already been four days in the tomb. ¹⁸Bethany was just under two miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁹and many of the people had come from the city to Martha and Mary to condole with them on their brother's death. ²⁰As soon as she heard that Jesus was on his way, Martha went to meet him, while Mary stayed at home.

²¹Martha said to Jesus, "If you had been here, sir, my brother would not have died. ²²Even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will grant you." ²³Jesus said, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴"I know that he will rise again," said Martha, "at the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and I am life. If a man has faith in me, even though he die, he shall come to life; ²⁶and no one who is alive and has faith shall ever die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷"Lord, I do," she answered; "I now believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God who was to come into the world."

²⁸With these words she went to call her sister Mary, and taking her aside, she said, "The Master is here; he is asking for you." ²⁹When Mary heard this she rose up quickly and went to him. ³⁰Jesus had not yet reached the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met

him. ³¹The Jews who were in the house condoling with Mary, when they saw her start up and leave the house, went after her, for they supposed that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

³²So Mary came to the place where Jesus was. As soon as she caught sight of him she fell at his feet and said, "O sir, if you had only been here my brother would not have died." ³³When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews her companions weeping, he sighed heavily and was deeply moved. ³⁴"Where have you laid him?" he asked. They replied, "Come and see, sir." ³⁵Jesus wept. ³⁶The Jews said, "How dearly he must have loved him!" ³⁷But some of them said, "Could not this man, who opened the blind man's eyes, have done something to keep Lazarus from dying?"

³⁸Jesus again sighed deeply; then he went over to the tomb. It was a cave, with a stone placed against it. ³⁹Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the dead man's sister, said to him, "Sir, by now there will be a stench; he has been there four days." ⁴⁰Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you have faith you will see the glory of God?" ⁴¹So they removed the stone.

Then Jesus looked upwards and said, "Father, I thank thee; thou hast heard me. ⁴²I knew already that thou always hearest me, but I spoke for the sake of the people standing round, that they might believe that thou didst send me."

⁴³Then he raised his voice in a great cry: "Lazarus, come forth." ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet swathed in linen bands, his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said, "Loose him; let him go."

11.2.4 The Gospel of Mary (Magdalene)

Imagine the excitement when, in 1945 in Nag Hammadi, Egypt, forty-five Coptic translations of Greek manuscripts dating from the fourth to the fifth century were found. The originals of these manuscripts, which go back even earlier, have revolutionized our understanding of early Christianity. They indicate that early Christianity was far more diverse than had previously been thought. One of these manuscripts, *The Gospel of Thomas*, contains 114 sayings attributed to Jesus that predate the sayings contained in the New Testament Gospels.

Scholars believe these texts belonged to a Christian movement named **Gnosticism** (*gnosis* means "knowledge"). The Gnostics claimed that Jesus had passed on a secret, oral tradition of teachings that stressed knowledge as the key to salvation. According to some of these teachings, the human soul is derived

from the divine. Hence, to know the soul is to know its divine origin and destiny.

Although there are many different beliefs associated with Gnosticism, many Gnostic Christians apparently emphasized a sharp dualism between spirit and matter. Some believed that God is the primal, divine Mother and Father of all reality. Others believed God radiates divine qualities, one of which is the female spirit of Wisdom that is the womb of everything. Some Gnostic texts mention a divine trinity of father, mother, and son. These texts also defend the role of women as teachers of divine knowledge, although it is difficult to determine the exact role and status of women among Gnostic Christians. By 200, feminine imagery associated with God was disappearing among the Christian groups that eventually defeated Gnosticism's bid for acceptance as the true gospel. The emerging Orthodox Church was becoming more firmly dominated by male authority.

Below is what remains of a Gnostic text called the Gospel of Mary, named for an early female disciple of Jesus called Mary Magdalene. In the text we find Mary instructing Peter, who challenges her teaching, but Levi comes to her defense.

While hundreds of manuscript copies of the canonical Gospels survived into the modern period, only three fragmentary manuscripts of the Gospel of Mary survived; two third-century Greek fragments published in 1938 and 1983 and a longer, fifth-century Coptic translation. Roughly half the Gospel appears to be lost. We do not know who wrote it. Neither do we know when or where it was written, but the best scholarly evidence points to either Syria or Egypt in the late first or early second century.



Mary Magdalene Teaches Peter

READING QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Jesus, in this Gospel, says the disciples should lay down no new rules?
2. Why do you think the author has Peter question Mary's account and Levi come to her defense?

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1. [Six manuscript pages are missing.]

2. "... Will matter then be utterly destroyed or not?"

The Savior replied, "Every nature, every modeled form, every creature, exists in and with each other. They will dissolve again into their own proper root. For the nature of matter is dissolved into what belongs to its nature. Anyone with two ears capable of hearing should listen!"

3. Then Peter said to him, "You have been expounding every topic to us; tell us one further thing. What is the sin of the world?"

The Savior replied, "There is no such thing as sin; rather, you yourselves are what produces sin when you act according to the nature of adultery, which is called 'sin.' For this reason, the Good came among you approaching what belongs to every nature. It will set it within its root."

Then he continued. He said, "This is why you get sick and die, for [you love] what de[c]ei[ve]s you. Anyone with a mind should use it to think!

[Ma]tter gav[e bi]rth to a passion which has no [true] image because it derives from what is contrary to nature. Then a disturbing confusion occurred in the whole body. This is why I told you. 'Be content of heart.' And do not conform [to the body], but form yourselves in the presence of that other image of nature. Anyone with two ears capable of hearing should listen!"

4. When the Blessed One had said this, he greeted them all. "Peace be with you!" he said. Acquire my peace within yourselves!

Be on your guard so that no one deceives you by saying, 'Look over here!' or 'Look over there!' For the seed of true humanity exists within you. Follow it! Those who search for it will find it.

Go then, preach the good news of the domain. Do not lay down any rule beyond what I ordained for you, nor promulgate law like the lawgiver, or else it will dominate you."

After he said these things, he left them.

5. But they were distressed and wept greatly. How are we going to go out to the rest of the world to preach the good news, about the domain of the seed of true humanity?" they said. "If they didn't spare him, how will they spare us?"

Then Mary stood up. She greeted them all and addressed her brothers: "Do not weep and be distressed nor let your hearts be irresolute. For his grace will be with you all and will shelter you. Rather we should praise his greatness, for he has joined us together and made us true human beings."

When Mary said these things, she turned their minds [to]ward the Good, and they began to [as]k about the wor[d]s of the Savi[or].

6. Peter said to Mary, "Sister, we know that the Savior loved you more than any other woman. Tell us the words of the Savior that you know, but which we haven't heard."

Mary responded, "I will rep[ort to you as much as] I remember that you don't know." And she began to speak these words to them.

7. She said, "I saw the Lord in a vision and I said to him, 'Lord, I saw you today in a vision.'

"He said to me, 'Congratulations to you for not wavering at seeing me. For where the mind is, there is the treasure.'

"I said to him, 'Lord, how does a person who sees a vision see it—[with] the soul [or] with the spirit?'

"The Savior answered, 'The [visionary] does not see with the soul or with the spirit, but with the mind which exists between these two—that is [what] sees the vision and that is w[hat . . .]'

8. [Four manuscript pages are missing.]

9. . . . "And Desire said, 'I did not see you go down, yet now I see you go up. So why do you lie since you belong to me?'

"The soul answered, 'I saw you. You did not see me nor did you know me. You [mis]took the garment [I wore] for my [true] self. And you did not recognize me.'

"After it had said these things, [the soul] left rejoicing greatly.

Again, it came to the third Power, which is called 'Ignorance.' [It] examined the soul closely, saying, 'Where are you going? You are bound by fornication. Indeed you are bound! Do not pass judgment!'

"And the soul said, 'Why do you judge me, since I have not passed judgment? I am bound, but I have not bound. They did not recognize me, but I have recognized that the universe is to be dissolved, both the things of earth and those of heaven.'

"When the soul had overcome the third Power, it went upward and it saw the fourth Power. It had seven forms. The first form is Darkness; the second, Desire; the third, Ignorance; the fourth Zeal of Death; the fifth, the Domain of the Flesh; the sixth, the Foolish Wisdom of the Flesh, and seventh is the Wisdom of the Wrathful Person. These are seven Powers of Wrath.

"They interrogated the soul, 'Where are you coming from, human-killer, and where are you going, space-conqueror?'

"The soul replied, 'What binds me has been slain, and what surrounds me has been destroyed, and my desire has been brought to an end, and my ignorance has died. In a world, I was set loose from a world and in a type, from a type which is above, and [from] the chain

of forgetfulness that exists in time. For now on, for the rest of the course of the [due] measure of the time of the age, I will rest i[n] silence.'"

When Mary said these things, she fell silent, since it was up to this point that the Savior had spoken to her.

10. Andrew sai[d, "B]rothers, what is your opinion of what was just said? I for one don't believe that the S[a]vior said these things, be[cause] these opinions seem to be so different from h[is th]ought."

After reflecting on these ma[tt]ers, [Peter said], "Has the Sa[vior] spoken secretly to a wo[m]an and [not] openly so that [we] would all hear? [Surely] he did [not wish to indicate] that [she] is more worthy than we are?"

Then Mary wept and said to Peter, "Peter, my brother, what are you imagining about this? Do you think that I've made all this up secretly by myself or that I am telling lies about the Savior?"

Levi said to Peter, "Peter, you have a constant inclination to anger and you are always ready to give way to it. And even now you are doing exactly that by questioning the woman as if you're her adversary. If the Savior considered her to be worthy, who are you to disregard her? For he knew her completely [and] loved her devotedly.

"Instead, we should be ashamed and, once we clothe ourselves with perfect humanity, we should do what we were commanded. We should announce the good news as the Savior ordered, and not be laying down any rules or making laws."

After he said these things, Levi left [and] began to announce the good news.

11.2.5 The Martyrdom of Perpetua

It has been said that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. No doubt those who were willing to die for their faith provided good examples to not only the faithful but also those non-Christians who witnessed or heard about their bravery.

It is difficult to know how many Christian martyrs there were prior to the end of the Roman persecutions. Recent evidence indicates that the Roman persecutions and killing of Christians was not as widespread as people once believed. However, it did happen, and what follows is a rare early first-person account. It is even more rare because it was written by a woman, named Perpetua, who died in Carthage on March 7 in 203.

Soon after Perpetua's death her story spread rapidly among Christians and a cult devoted to her de-

veloped. She was held up as a prime example of faithfulness in the face of death and as an inspiration to other Christians to remain faithful even unto death.



PERPETUA

Perpetua's Vision

READING QUESTION

1. Why do you think Perpetua interprets her vision as she does?

A few days later we were imprisoned. I was terrified because never before had I experienced such darkness. What a terrible day! Because of crowded conditions and rough treatment by the soldiers the heat was unbearable. My condition was aggravated by my anxiety for my baby. Then Tertius and Pomponius, those kind deacons who were taking care of our needs, paid for us to be moved for a few hours to a better part of the prison where we might refresh ourselves. Leaving the dungeon we all went about our own business. I nursed my child, who was already weak from hunger. In my anxiety for the infant I spoke to my mother about him, tried to console my brother, and asked that they care for my son. I suffered intensely because I sensed their agony on my account. These were the trials I had to endure for many days. Then I was granted the privilege of having my son remain with me in prison. Being relieved of my anxiety and concern for the infant, I immediately regained my strength. Suddenly the prison became my palace, and I loved being there rather than any other place.

Then my brother said to me, "Dear sister, you already have such a great reputation that you could ask for a vision indicating whether you will be condemned or freed." Since I knew that I could speak with the Lord, whose great favors I had already experienced, I confidently promised to do so. I said I would tell my brother about it the next day. Then I made my request and this is what I saw.

There was a bronze ladder of extraordinary height reaching up to heaven, but it was so narrow that only one person could ascend at a time. Every conceivable kind of iron weapon was attached to the sides of the ladder: swords, lances, hooks, and daggers. If anyone climbed up carelessly or without looking upwards, he/she would be mangled as the flesh adhered to the weapons. Crouching directly beneath the ladder was a monstrous dragon who threatened those climbing up and tried to frighten them from ascent.

Saturus went up first. Because of his concern for us he had given himself up voluntarily after we had been arrested. He had been our source of strength but was not with us at the time of the arrest. When he reached the top of the ladder he turned to me and said, "Perpetua, I'm waiting for you, but be careful not to be bitten by the dragon." I told him that in the name of Jesus Christ the dragon could not harm me. At this the dragon slowly lowered its head as though afraid of me. Using its head as the first step, I began my ascent.

At the summit I saw an immense garden, in the center of which sat a tall, grey-haired man dressed like a shepherd, milking sheep. Standing around him were several thousand white-robed people. As he raised his head he noticed me and said, "Welcome, my child." Then he beckoned me to approach and gave me a small morsel of the cheese he was making. I accepted it with cupped hands and ate it. When all those surrounding us said "Amen," I awoke, still tasting the sweet cheese. I immediately told my brother about the vision, and we both realized that we were to experience the sufferings of martyrdom. From then on we gave up having any hope in this world.

A few days later there was a rumor that our case was to be heard. My father, completely exhausted from his anxiety, came from the city to see me, with the intention of weakening my faith. "Daughter," he said, "have pity on my grey head. Have pity on your father if I have the honor to be called father by you, if with these hands I have brought you to the prime of your life, and if I have always favored you above your brothers, do not abandon me to the reproach of men. Consider your brothers; consider your mother and your aunt; consider your son who cannot live without you. Give up your stubbornness before you destroy all of us. None of us will be able to speak freely if anything happens to you."

These were the things my father said out of love, kissing my hands and throwing himself at my feet. With tears he called me not daughter, but woman. I was very upset because of my father's condition. He was the only member of my family who would find no reason for joy in my suffering. I tried to comfort him saying, "What-

From Patricia Wilson-Kastner et al., *A Lost Tradition: Women Writers of the Early Church* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1981), pp. 20–22. Copyright © 1981 Patricia Kastner.

ever God wants at this tribunal will happen, for remember that our power comes not from ourselves but from God.” But utterly dejected, my father left me.

One day as we were eating we were suddenly rushed off for a hearing. We arrived at the forum and the news spread quickly throughout the area near the forum, and a huge crowd gathered. We went up to the prisoners’ platform. All the others confessed when they were questioned. When my turn came my father appeared with my son. Dragging me from the step, he begged: “Have pity on your son!”

Hilarion, the governor, who assumed power after the death of the proconsul Minucius Timinianus, said, “Have pity on your father’s grey head; have pity on your infant son; offer sacrifice for the emperors’ welfare.” But I answered, “I will not.” Hilarion asked, “Are you a Christian?” And I answered, “I am a Christian.” And when my father persisted in his attempts to dissuade me, Hilarion ordered him thrown out, and he was beaten with a rod. My father’s injury hurt me as much as if I myself had been beaten, and I grieved because of his pathetic old age. Then the sentence was passed; all of us were condemned to the beasts. We were overjoyed as we went back to the prison cell. Since I was still nursing my child who was ordinarily in the cell with me, I quickly sent the deacon Pomponius to my father’s house to ask for the baby, but my father refused to give him up. Then God saw to it that my child no longer needed my nursing, nor were my breasts inflamed. After that I was no longer tortured by anxiety about my child or by pain in my breasts.

11.2.6 The Council of Nicaea

When the Roman emperor Constantine converted to Christianity, it not only meant the immediate end of any official persecutions of Christians, but also meant that being a Christian now became fashionable. This laid the foundations for what we call Christendom, the political and religious domination of Christianity.

Constantine needed a united Christianity in order to support a united empire that was increasingly feeling the strains between Latin culture in the West and Greek culture in the East. Christians, however, were not united. There were a number of different Christian churches with differing interpretations of the Christian message. Constantine asked the bishops of various sections of the empire to meet in Nicaea in 325 to hammer out differences.

One of the many issues the bishops had to face was the issue of how the three main divine powers (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in which Christians

believed were related. Some Christians, following a teacher named Sabellius, developed a theory called **modalistic monarchianism**. According to this theory, there is one God who has different modes or ways of relating to humans. Sometimes God relates to us as Father the Creator, at other times as Son the Redeemer, or as Holy Spirit, the Teacher of Truth. Another group of Christians followed a teacher named Arius (250–336) who argued that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were not equally divine. The Father is the eternal God, and the Son and Spirit proceeded from the Father before the creation of the world.

Arius was an elder in the church at Alexandria. Another Alexandrian named Athanasius (296–373) opposed Arius’s views. He thought they amounted to little more than tritheism (believing in three gods). An effort at compromise was made by suggesting that the Son and Spirit were of similar substance (*homoiousia* in Greek) as the eternal Father. The followers of Athanasius would not accept this wording—it was too weak. Nothing less than same substance (*homoousia* in Greek) would do.

So the debate came down to a single “iota,” and people wondered what the bishops at Nicaea would do. What they did, with Constantine presiding, was take an already existing confession of faith, or **creed**, and insert *homoousia* into it so that it now read that the Son was of “one substance” with the Father.

This did not end the debate and Arian Christians, although condemned as heretical by the Council of Nicaea, did not cease to believe their own version. The Nicene Creed, as it came to be called, was further modified by the Council of Constantinople in 381 and, according to some scholars, was reformulated again at the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

In the interesting history of the creed, another debate over wording arose. At a local council in Toledo in 589, the Latin word *filioque* (meaning “and the son”) was inserted so that the creed now read “I believe that the Holy Spirit . . . who proceeds from the Father *and the Son*.” This change was unacceptable to the Eastern churches in part because it had been made by a local council of bishops in the West rather than an ecumenical council (a council of bishops of the whole church). There were already considerable tensions between East and West over such issues as the authority of the bishop of Rome, which the West acknowledged as pope and the East did not, and differences over modes of worship. The addition of the *filioque* clause was the straw that broke the camel’s

back, and in 1054 the **Great Schism** split the Eastern and Western Churches. Now there were two main branches of Christianity: the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox. The Nicene Creed is used by both branches to this day, but in the East the *filioque* clause is omitted (the version below includes it).

Many scholars have argued that these fights over correct belief ended up dividing Christians even more deeply and, by placing so much emphasis on belief, turned Christianity into more of an orthodoxy-type religion than an orthopraxy-type such as Judaism. Correct belief (*ortho-doxa*) became more important than correct practice (*ortho-praxis*).

While this is true to a certain extent, we must not forget some of the more important theological reasons for these debates. Even though these were debates over how to word doctrines, behind the debates was a deep religious concern with issues of worship and salvation. Many felt that nothing but a fully divine and eternal Son of God (Jesus) could firmly secure human salvation and be worthy of human worship.



Nicene Creed

READING QUESTIONS

1. What qualities does the Nicene Creed attribute to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (Spirit)?
2. Why do you think more is said about the Son than about the Father and the Holy Ghost?
3. What do you think the phrase “being of one substance with the father” means?

I believe in one God the father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of God, begotten of his father before all worlds, God of God, light of light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the father, by whom all things were made. Who for us men, and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again

From *The Book of Common Prayer* (London, 1855).

according to the scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the father. And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead: whose kingdom shall have no end. And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the father and the son, who with the father and the son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets. And I believe in one catholic and apostolic church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins, and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

11.3 CHRISTIANITY IN THE MIDDLE AGES

It is difficult to decide exactly what time period is named by the Middle Ages. Generally it refers to that time between the end of antiquity and the beginning of the Renaissance. The term is also culture bound since it refers primarily to a period in the development of Western European culture. However, it is generally agreed that during this time period Christianity spread throughout the European continent, both East and West, moving steadily North as Islam captured more and more territory formerly held by Christian rulers in the South and the East.

As the fortunes of the Roman Empire declined in the West, so did the quality of city life and civil order. However, the bishop of the church in Rome became increasingly powerful, and, as the quality of city life began an upward curve, the pope in Rome became the peer of emperors and the bishops of the church were at the side of princes. The Latin Christian church with headquarters in Rome became the largest landowner in Europe and a power no one could afford to ignore.

The Middle Ages saw the building of the great cathedrals of Europe and a flowering in art, architecture, and religious culture never before seen in western Europe. Crusades were launched to liberate land from the Islamic control, and the great universities of Europe were founded. Monastic life flourished, and more countries were steadily converted.

11.3.1 A Tale of Two Cities

Aurelius Augustinus (354–430), North African bishop of Hippo, is the most influential Christian theologian of late antiquity. He lived during the decline and fall of the Roman Empire and before the