

***Lesson 35 – after the Feast of Dedication on 12/19/29 AD
Out of Judea, Across the Jordan in Perea***

The last lesson ended with John 10:39 which recorded: “Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.” At that time, it became too dangerous for Jesus to continue in Judea, where the Sanhedrin had a great deal of power and influence even though it had to ultimately answer to Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor. Consequently, Jesus left the province of Judea.

John 10:40a **Then Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days.**

“Across the Jordan” meant the province of Perea. That was a province which was out of the jurisdiction of the Sanhedrin. It was in the territory of Herod Antipas. Being during the winter, we know that it was the rainy season, and the Jordan would have begun to be running high which made the area even more isolated from the influence of the Pharisees.

The main place that John had baptized during his ministry was on the other side of the Jordan, at the “Ford of the Jordan” opposite from Jericho (see lesson 8). According to John 1:28, another place that John had been baptizing on the other side of (*east side of*) the Jordan was Bethabara.¹ It was probably at the ford at the junction of the Jabbok with the Jordan.

John 10:40b-41 **Here he stayed, and many people came to him. They said, “Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man was true.”**

Jesus evidently stayed there for several weeks. This passage is also interesting because it tells that although John the Baptist had a powerful ministry, he never needed to perform a miracle.

John 10:42 **And in that place many believed in Jesus.**

This was the first time during Jesus’ ministry that He had been in Perea. It completed His circuit of all the territories that encompassed the original Promised Land.²

***In Perea within the next 30 days after 1/1/30 AD
Warnings to Unbelievers***

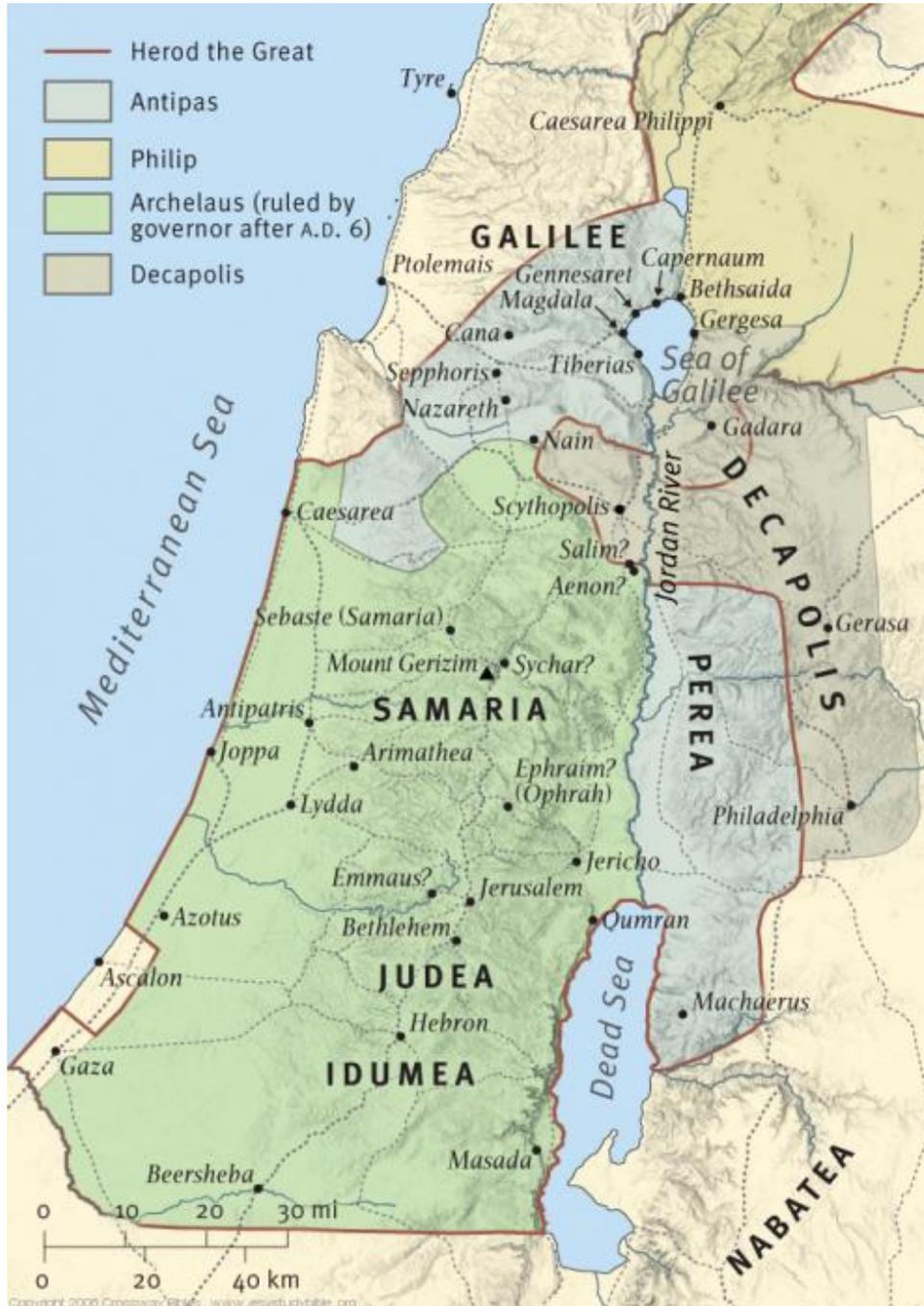
Luke 13:23a **Someone asked him, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?”**

¹ *Bethabara means “House of the Ford.” It was probably located at the one of the fords of one of the streams that flowed into the lower Jordan from the east. Sadly, the flawed Codex Sinaiticus text of John 1:28 has “Bethany” and most of our modern English translations have relied on it.*

² *This included Judea, Samaria, Galilee, the Decapolis, and Perea.*

As we read further, you will notice that Jesus never answered this question. He only indicated that many, who thought they were automatically saved because of their Jewish bloodline, would not be saved. On the other hand, many Gentiles, who the Jews did not expect could be saved, would be saved. The only definite answer we have in Scripture to this question of how many would be saved is that the Lord will save all He can. It is found in 2 Peter:

2 Peter 3:9 “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”



Roman Provinces of 1st Century AD Israel

Luke 13:23b-24a **He said to them, “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door gate,**

This is another passage that discredits the Calvinistic view of predestination. Jesus told His audience to “make every effort.” Salvation does require a decision on our part. God does not impose faith on us! We must use our free will to choose the gate.

The Greek word which the NIV has translated “door” should be “gate.” The reliable Textus Receptus has πύλη {pü'-lā} which is used in the New Testament for a gate in a city wall or the Temple. The flawed Codex Sinaiticus has θύρα {thü'-rā} which means “door.”

This was intended to connect to Jesus’ parable of the narrow gate which is recorded in Matthew:

Matthew 7:13 “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”

The Greek word translated “gate” in Matthew 7:13 is the same word πύλη {pü'-lā} which we find in Luke 13:23. Undoubtedly Jesus had told this parable many times over the previous three years of continuous teaching, so the connection would have been easy to make.

Luke 13:24b **because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.**

This passage calls to mind the passage in Revelation which describes the plight of unbelievers who are barred from entering eternal Jerusalem:

Revelation 22:14-15 “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.”

One might argue that this says that the answer to the question: “Are only a few people going to be saved? seems to be: “Few,” since “many” will not be able to enter in because they chose a different gate and a different road. Since this question was asked in the context of 1st Century Judaism, Jesus’ answer probably referred to the Jews and not the world as a whole. However, to this ignorant observer, the same case seems to be holding for the world as whole.

This warning and pleading with the Jews that their time of decision as a nation was getting short had been continued by Jesus for most of His ministry.

Luke 13:25 **Once the owner of the a house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’ “But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’**

The Greek for “the owner of a house” is actually one word - οἰκοδεσπότης {oi-ko-de-spo'-tās}. There is no “the house” which would imply a connection with the prior verse. The Greek word here is θύρα {thü'-rä}. It refers to a door, as in “a door in a house.” Since “gates” are in city walls, and “doors” are in houses it leads me to the conclusion that this verse is a similar though different analogy.

Luke 13:26-27 “Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ ‘But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’

This was a warning to the Jews of the eternal consequences of rejecting Jesus. It would make no difference at the Great Judgment that they were Jews and had lived to see the life of Jesus Christ. Rejecting Him as the Messiah and Savior classified them as “evildoers.”

Luke 13:28 “There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out.

The predominant view among the Jews in those days was that all those who were Jews had been “predestined” by God to be in Heaven. They thought that some Jews would have rewards, and some would not, but that all would be saved. Jesus was telling them they were wrong.

Luke 13:29-30 People will come from east and west and north and south and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed, there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.”

Although Jesus didn’t use the word “Gentiles” here, He was really speaking of all those that would be saved from among the Gentiles. That would have horrified most of the Jews if they had really understood what Jesus was saying.

The Pharisees Threaten Jesus

Luke 13:31 At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, “Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.”

While it was true that Herod wanted to see Jesus dead, he didn’t want to have any of the blame laid on him. He was already suffering a great loss of popularity because of his execution of John the Baptist. It seems likely that the Pharisees who were addressing Jesus here were hoping to get Jesus to come back across the Jordan to Judea where they could lay their hands on Him.

This verse helps determine that, chronologically, these events recorded in Luke followed Jesus’ trip to Jerusalem at the Feast of Dedication recorded in John 10:22-39. After that event Jesus went to Bethabara beyond the Jordan. That was in Perea, which along with Galilee was ruled by

Herod Antipas. Only if Jesus had been in Herod's territories would such a threat have any meaning.

Luke 13:32a **He replied, "Go tell that fox,**

This implies that these men had come from Herod Antipas himself and would report back to him. Herod probably wanted to frighten Jesus out of his territories. Jesus' reply (verse 33) assured Herod that he would be going to Jerusalem in Judea, out of Herod's domain. This was probably the original intent of Herod's warning. Both Herod³ and the Pharisees wanted to be able to blame the trial and execution of Jesus on the Romans. The final authority in a capital case in Judea was the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate. Herod Antipas later demonstrated this original intention when, after Pilate had relinquished to Herod the right to judge Jesus, Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate.

Luke 13:32b **'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and ~~on~~ since the third day I finish my work. NRSV**

Jesus was speaking in poetical imagery when He said He would finish His work "the third day." It was finished at the end of three full days. This was a prophecy of His Resurrection. It was far longer than three days after this day before he reached Jerusalem or the Cross. There is no "on" in the Greek as I explained in Lesson 33, page 3.⁴ As I will explain in detail in Lesson 58, the dative case of "the third day" is better translated "since the third day" rather than "on the third day."

Luke 13:33 **In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!**

Jesus knew that it was determined that He would be crucified on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem on Passover as prophesied by Scripture, and that it was impossible for Herod Antipas to harm Him before His time was come.

Luke 13:34a **"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings,**

Here Jesus reflected sorrowfully on the hard heartedness of Jerusalem.

Luke 13:34b **but you were not willing!**

³ Mark 3:6 "Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus." - This was not long after John the Baptist had been killed.

⁴ As I explained in a previous lesson, the expression "the third day" meant "after three days."

This is another one of the many places in scripture that says that God doesn't overrule the free will of man. Although the LORD wanted to save all the people of Jerusalem, He couldn't overcome their unwillingness.

Luke 13:35a Look, your house is left to you desolate.

This was prophetic of the coming destruction of both their city and their Temple, forty years to the day after they crucified Him.

Luke 13:35b I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

In the meantime, He wouldn't return to Jerusalem until that day they said, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." This was a quotation from the Messianic Psalm 118:6. They did recite this verse when Jesus next rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday:

Matthew 21:9 "The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!'"

See also Mark 11:9, John 12:13

Lessons at the Banquet of the Pharisee

Luke 14:1 One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched.

Since Luke sticks very well to a chronological scheme, we must assume that the "one Sabbath" here fell into the time frame of the rest of this passage, being after the Feast of Dedication of 29 AD and in Perea. Again, he was invited into the home of a Pharisee. The Pharisee was almost certainly an enemy of Jesus, but Jesus never turned down an invitation of either a Pharisee or a tax collector.

Luke 14:2 There in front of him was a man suffering from dropsy.

It is quite possible that this man was admitted into the house for the express purpose of testing Jesus. The fact that he was sent away after his healing indicated he was not a regular guest. The Greek word translated "dropsy" is ὕδρωπικός {hü-drō-pē-ko's}. It basically means "swollen." Dropsy, medically known as oedema, refers to the abnormal accumulation of fluids in the limbs or torso. It causes a type of swelling called oedema. It is a typical "impurities" disease. It is caused by an accumulation of waste products in the blood. It is most often a result of kidney disease. The symptoms of the disease were badly swollen limbs (see illustration on next page).

Luke 14:3-4a Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?” But they remained silent.

You may remember the recent humiliation of the Pharisees when they objected to the healing of the woman on the Sabbath (Lesson 34 – Luke 13:10-17). They weren’t going to put themselves in the position of looking so heartless again.

Luke 14:4b So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him away.



An Illustration of the effects of Dropsy (Oedema)

This healing must have been visually dramatic because the evidence of the healing must have been immediately apparent. Obviously, the swollen limbs must have immediately shrunk to normal size in the sight of everyone present.

Luke 14:5-6 Then he asked them, “If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?” And they had nothing to say.

As with the healing of the previous woman Jesus cited examples of work that was permitted by the Pharisees on the Sabbath. Although they hated His healing on the Sabbath, they knew enough by now keep quiet.

Luke 14:7 When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable:

Jesus knew that the Pharisees were largely motivated by pride of place ⁵ rather than service, so He told this parable:

Luke 14:8 “When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited.

Jesus was really speaking in this parable of the Wedding of the Lamb.⁶ In that wedding feast only those that are saved will attend. Jesus’ parable was intended to warn these proud Pharisees that while, in their mind’s eye, they would have the best seats at the table, they might be surprised to find who else had been invited and would have the preferred seats. In the parable, the surprise guests Jesus was speaking of was His Church.

Luke 14:9a If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this man your seat.’

You will note that in the parable, both were invited. Really, every person who has ever lived has been invited or called by the LORD, even these lost Pharisees.

Luke 14:9b Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place.

Of course, to be at the wedding feast one had to have accepted the invitation. Many of the Pharisees wouldn’t have accepted the invitation (see Luke 14:16-24 and Matthew 22:1-14).

Luke 14:10-11 But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests.⁷ For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”⁸

If they would exchange their pride for humility they would be rewarded.

Luke 14:12a Then Jesus said to his host,

⁵ He said of them: Matthew 23:6-7 “They love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them ‘Rabbi.’”

⁶ This will actually occur at the 2nd Advent of Christ (Revelation 19:7).

⁷ Proverbs 25:6-7a “Do not exalt yourself in the king’s presence, and do not claim a place among great men; it is better for him to say to you, “Come up here,” than for him to humiliate you before a nobleman.

⁸ Ezekiel 21:25b “The lowly will be exalted and the exalted will be brought low.”

Remember, Jesus' host was a "prominent Pharisee" (verse 1). Most of the guests were Pharisees and experts in the Law (verse 3). The host was most likely one of the proud Pharisees. They hated Jesus and were just there to find something with which to accuse Him.

Luke 14:12b "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid."

Jesus tried to point out to His host the way back from the pride that kept him from God.

Luke 14:13-14 "But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

The host needed to understand the love of God. He needed to understand that God loved the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. The expression "the poor, crippled, lame and blind" is a metaphor for the state of the entire human race. All are "poor, crippled, lame and blind." The host needed to understand that he was also one of those.

Luke 14:15 "When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."

Undoubtedly, this was one of those Pharisees at the table. He focused on Jesus' reference to "the resurrection of the righteous." Perhaps he was even trying to defuse the atmosphere after Jesus' implicit criticism of the people that the host had invited. The "resurrection of the righteous" to which Jesus had just referred and the "feast in the kingdom of God" are roughly the same thing. The other guest's assumption would have been that all those Pharisees at the table would be at that feast and resurrection. In the next parable Jesus told, He contradicted such an assumption.

Luke 14:16 "Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests."

The "certain man" in the parable represented God. The context implied that that many guests had been invited and had agreed to come and were only awaiting the setting of the party and the date. The guests that had been invited were the Jews. They had been invited by their own scriptures.

Luke 14:17 "At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'"

⁹ *This is the notification of the setting and date.*

The banquet that the parable was describing had been described in Isaiah almost 800 years before:

Isaiah 25:6-8a “On this mountain ¹⁰ the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine-- the best of meats and the finest of wines.¹¹ On this mountain (*Mt. Zion*) he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever.¹²

Luke 14:18-20 **“But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’ ‘Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’ ‘Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’**

The ones who excused themselves from the banquet represented the Pharisees and experts of the Law who had rejected Christ’s invitation to accept God’s mercy and grace. They were too proud. They wanted to justify themselves. I like Edersheim’s comment on the passage:

“The ultimate ground of their refusal was, that they felt no real desire, and saw nothing attractive in such a feast; had no real reverence for the host; in short, that to them it was not a feast at all, but something much less to be desired than what they had, and would have been obliged to give up, if they had complied with the invitation.” The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Edersheim

Luke 14:21 **“The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’**

¹⁰ Per Isaiah 24:23 the mountain being described was Mt. Zion, the mountain on which Christ was crucified.

¹¹ John 6:53-57 “Jesus said to them, ‘I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.’”

¹² Romans 5:17-18 “For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. Also, Hebrews 2:14, Hebrews 1:9b-10, 1 Corinthians 15:54-57, 1 Corinthians 15:22, Romans 6:23, Romans 6:3-5

This represented the action of God. He invited all those despised by the Pharisees. They were the ones who recognized that they were poor, crippled, blind and lame.

Luke 14:22-23 **“‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’ ‘Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and *make closely urge* ¹³ them to come in, so that my house will be full.**

Though, probably no one at the Pharisee’s dinner understood it, this was meant to represent the fact that after most of the Jews rejected Christ, the empty spaces would be filled by the Gentiles.

Luke 14:24 **I tell you, not one of those men who were invited ¹⁴ will get a taste of my banquet.”**

The comment of the man who assumed that all those self-righteous Pharisees at the table would be at “the feast in the kingdom of God” was flatly contradicted. None of them would even “get a taste.”

Lessons on the Road

Luke 14:25 **Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said:**

As we saw at the first of our lesson, at this time Jesus was travelling in the more sparsely populated province of Perea, across the Jordan from the province of Judea. Even so, large crowds were travelling with Jesus. They probably numbered in the thousands in a festival-like atmosphere. Although Herod Antipas had authority here, he would have seen that he couldn’t have arrested Jesus without creating a major incident. I think that it was at this point that Jesus saw the happy crowds and decided that He needed to warn them that were times of persecution coming soon for those who were His disciples.

¹³ The word the NIV translates as “make” is ἀναγκάζω {ä-nän-kä'-zō}. It is translated by other translations as “urge, constrain, and compel.” It is a form of the word ἀνάγκη {ä-nä'n-kā}. The “Outline of Greek Usage” in the Blue Letter Bible gives that word this definition: A necessity, imposed either by the circumstances, or by law of duty regarding to one's advantage, custom, argument.” That word is made up of two parts. The first is the Greek prefix ἀνά {ä-nä'} which means “apiece” and “each.” The second part is the Greek ἀγκάλη {än-kä'-lā} which refers to the bend of the arm. Thus, general meaning of the word in our context was that each of those found in the lanes and byways was to be taken by the arm and have explained to them why it was to their advantage to come. Thus, I think “closely urge” is a better translation in verse 23. They would still come by their own volition. The other eight occurrences of this word also indicate that the action taken included freedom of volition. See Matthew 14:22, Mark 6:45, Acts 26:11, Acts 28:19, 2 Corinthians 12:11, Galatians 2:3, Galatians 2:14, Galatians 6:12.

¹⁴ It is implied that this applies to those who were originally invited.

Luke 14:26 **“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.**”

Jesus had confirmed what were the two most important commandments:

Mark 12:29-30 “‘The most important one,’ answered Jesus, ‘is this: Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Jesus was just expanding those commands to assert that the second command, “to love your neighbor as yourself”, could not begin to be fulfilled without “loving the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind and with all our strength.” In the last lesson, in Luke 12:52-53, Jesus had warned that the Gospel would divide families. Here Jesus warned believers that in comparison to their love for God, they must “hate” other members of their families and even their own life. The inclusion of “even his own life” made it clear that the “hate” Jesus was talking about here was hatred of the things of the world in comparison with their love for the things of God.

What Jesus was saying in verse 26 was that our love of God had to be so far much more the most important command, that the secondary love was hatred by comparison. Of course, if we love God that much, we will begin to learn to love father, mother, neighbor, and self the way God loves, which is infinite.

This was just a little different way of saying what He had been teaching for at least two years. He had taught in Matthew 10:35-38 “For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law-- a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household. Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”

Luke 14:27 **And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.**

Before Jesus carried His cross to His death at Golgotha the meaning of this would not have been clear to Jesus’ disciples. Afterward, they would have understood that to be Jesus’ disciple meant to learn from Him and imitate Him in His devotion to the Father’s plan no matter what the cost. We know that to be saved, we only need to believe in Him. However, to truly be His disciple requires that we imitate Him in His obedience.

The Greek word translated “disciple” here is μαθητής {mä-thā-tā’s}. It comes from the root word μανθάνω {män-thā-nō} which means “to learn.” A “disciple” refers to someone who has learned from a master.

Luke 14:28-30 **“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’**”

Jesus was warning them that their discipleship would come with a cost. They would be very foolish if they thought they could build their “tower” of faith without an understanding that it would be a long term and expensive commitment.

Luke 14:31-32 **“Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace.**”

Jesus also warned them that in being His disciples they would in effect be going to war with the principles of the world. They needed to be resolute in bringing their forces of faith and obedience against the enemies they would face.

Luke 14:33 **In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.**

They had to be willing to give up everything they had of this world to gain the treasure of heaven. Anyone who considers himself to be a Christian must realize that his relationship with Jesus Christ is of first importance. Nothing else is even a close second. If he doesn't realize that, he may be saved, but he isn't a disciple of Christ. He is so much in the dark that he is useless in God's present Kingdom.

Luke 14:34-35 **“Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile;¹⁵ it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”**

This had been part of the Sermon on the Mount more than two years earlier in Galilee. When we studied it earlier we saw that it was a warning to the Jewish nation (the salt of the Age of Israel) that if they rejected the grace of God, they would no longer be useful as a preservative of the world but would be destroyed.

When Jesus told the above parables, He was near the end of His life and His ministry. Within three months He would be crucified for the sins of the world. In little more than four months, the Age of Israel would end, and the Age of the Church would begin.

The Lost Sheep

¹⁵ Soil or manure makes things grow. However, salt added to either will kill all plant life.

Luke 15:1-2 Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

The proud and self-righteous Pharisees felt outraged and devalued when Jesus paid the same attention to “obvious sinners” as He did to them.

Luke 15:3a Then Jesus told them this parable:

The Greek word translated “parable” is **παραβολή** {pä-rä-bo-lā'}. Literally, that Greek word means something thrown alongside. In New Testament usage it is an example by which a doctrine or precept is illustrated. It tells a story that puts one thing by the side of another for the sake of comparison. This was the first of three consecutive parables which illustrated how the LORD was always searching for sinners who would come back to Him.

Luke 15:4a “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them.

For the sake of making a point, Jesus assumed that Israel was made up of 99 saved sheep and one lost sheep. In fact, most of the people of Israel were lost:

Jeremiah 50:6 “My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray and caused them to roam on the mountains. They wandered over mountain and hill and forgot their own resting place.”

Jesus had also made clear that the very people (the Pharisees) who were complaining about these unrighteous people were in fact themselves unrighteous. He had called them “a wicked and adulterous generation” in Matthew 12:39.

Luke 15:4b Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?

Everyone knew that every shepherd of any worth would go after the lost sheep. That was the essence of his job.

Luke 15:5-6 And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’

As the teachers of Israel, the Pharisees were supposed to be the shepherds of Israel. They should have been seeking the lost sheep of Israel.

Luke 15:7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

Just before the Feast of Dedication, Jesus had told the Parable of the Good Shepherd. He had said in John 10:11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” He had also implied that the Pharisees were nothing but hired hands working for money who cared nothing for the sheep. He said of them in John 10:12-13 “The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So, when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.”

Here, a few days later, He was speaking to two audiences.

First, He was talking to the tax collectors and sinners. These people had been told all their lives that they were of no value. For them, the lesson of the parable was that God was seeking them out as the lost sheep. He would do it at great peril to Himself by leaving the “open country” to seek them in the dangerous country where lions and bandits laid in wait among the ravines and cliffs. If they were found by the Shepherd, there would be great rejoicing as they were brought to the safety of the sheepfold.

Secondly, He was being heard by the Pharisees and teachers of the law. For them, the lesson was not obvious, but it was there to learn. This was a lesson Jesus had taught them directly and obviously often before:

Matthew 9:11-13 “When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, ‘Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?’ On hearing this, Jesus said, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’¹⁶ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’”

Of course, Jesus had said of the righteousness of the Pharisees in Matthew 5:20 “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

I cannot help but wonder, if these leaders of Israel, who were supposed to be the “shepherds” of Israel, did not recall the words of Ezekiel which they had undoubtedly read:

Ezekiel 34:2-11 “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have

¹⁶ *Quoting Hosea 6:6.*

not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them. “Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock, therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them. “For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: **I myself will search for my sheep and look after them.**”

The Lost Coin

Luke 15:8-10 **“Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”**

Here, Jesus told another parable. The point of the parable of the lost coin was exactly the same as the parable of the lost sheep. Many of the “sinners” from verse 1 who were listening were women who were prostitutes and outcasts of society. Jesus put the same message in a different frame of reference so that these women could understand. There was a lot of extra care involved in finding a lost coin. The entire house must be swept out, and that involved toiling late into the night. The exercise of the search revolved around removing the dirt which obscured the coin, and holding the lamp up to see if the light of it was reflected back from the coin. That was exactly what Jesus was doing. He was sweeping out the false teaching of the legalistic Pharisees, so that the light of the Gospel could shine on the “lost coins” and be reflected back. Just three months before Jesus had proclaimed:

John 8:12 “When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’”

If the light of the Gospel was reflected back, God would find His “lost coins” and rejoice with His angels.

Jesus then went on to the third parable, the Parable of the Prodigal Son. That was also on the theme of God’s love, but it was much more complex. As we begin the parable, we need to understand that both sons were members of the family. If we use that as a reference point, it is clear that the parable concerns a Father (representing God the Father) and two sons. They were

both his children. From that we might conclude that they represented two types of believers.¹⁷ The beginning of the Church Age was only four months away. The problem presented here would soon become a problem in the Church. There would be believers like the first son in the parable who would fall into sin. There would be believers like the second son in the parable, who would forget the grace of God and become self-righteous.

The Prodigal Son

Luke 15:11a **Jesus continued: And he said:**

The Greek is εἶπεν δέ which literally means “and he said.” There is no “Jesus.” There is no “continued.” The Greek is the same in both the Textus Receptus and the Codex Sinaiticus. The general meaning is the same, but I resent the NIV translator who decided to improve on the original words of scripture. The ASV, NAS, and KJV all have the correct translation.

Luke 15:11b-12a **“There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’**

Typically, under Jewish law, the elder son received a double portion of his father’s estate upon the father’s death. In this case the younger son would only be entitled to one third of the estate and the older son would receive two thirds.

Luke 15:12b **So he divided his property between them.**

This is the comment of the Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary on Jewish property law in the 1st Century AD which is the background of this passage:

“There were two ways in which a Jewish father might pass on his property to his sons; by a will effective on his death; or by a deed of gift during his own lifetime. In the latter case, the property was legally vested in the son when the deed was executed, but the father enjoyed a life interest in the revenue. Here it is clear that the father had gone well beyond his minimum legal obligations, placing capital at his younger son’s disposal so that he might enjoy it forthwith instead of waiting for his father to die.”

Luke 15:13a **“Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had,**

The younger son would have had to have liquidated his share of the estate which undoubtedly injured the viability of the part of the estate which remained. That this was permitted demonstrated the forbearance of the father.

¹⁷ Many have mistakenly (in my opinion) taken the view that both the younger son and the older son represented different types of unbelievers. They think the younger son represented immoral persons and the older son represented the legalistic Pharisees.

Luke 15:13b **set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.**

In this story the far country was obviously a Gentile country, where raising pigs was permitted. Pigs were unclean in the Law of Moses. (Leviticus 11:7-8 “And the pig, though it has a split hoof completely divided, does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you. You must not eat their meat or touch their carcasses; they are unclean for you.”) In that time, the 1st Century AD, at least half of the Jews were scattered all over the world, from Spain to India, from Russia to Africa. The “distant country” represented a place where the son was separated from his culture (which represented the will of God). In spite of that he was still a son.

Luke 15:14 **After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.**

Having separated himself from his father and his faith, hardship came upon him.

Luke 15:15 **So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.**

Hiring himself out stood for submitting himself to the empty and unfulfilling values of the world he had chosen.

Luke 15:16 **He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.**

He found that his life was empty and unsatisfying and that the people of that world were not his friends.

Luke 15:17 **“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!’**

Finally the prodigal remembered the fulfillment he had with his Father. I believe this shows that the prodigal son could only have represented a believer. Caught in sin, he remembered what it was like to be the son of his father. An unbeliever does not have that memory to draw him back, having never been a son.

Luke 15:18 **I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.**

Here, the critical information is that the younger son acknowledged in his heart his error and turned back from it.

Luke 15:19-20 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’ So he got up and went to his father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

Notice that the father’s gracious and loving attitude toward his son did not wait on his son’s declaration of error. The son’s presence on that road was an unspoken declaration of his error. It came as a result of his seeing the truth, and acknowledging it. It was the truth that brought him back to his father. An apology was unnecessary. James 4:8 “Come near to God and he will come near to you.”

Luke 15:21 “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

Notice that the father never let the son get to the phrase “make me like one of your hired men.” He could never be a hired man. He was still part of the family.

Luke 15:22 “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.

Notice that although the younger son was acknowledged as a member of the family and taken back into its protective circle, he didn’t get back the third of the estate that he had thrown away. His sin still had consequences, though separation from the family wasn’t one of them.

Luke 15:23-24 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

Immediately, the father and all of his servants began to celebrate.

Luke 15:25-28a “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ “The older brother became angry and refused to go in.

To begin with this revealed the fact that this son had no love for his brother or understanding of the protection of his family. He should have understood that, separated from his family, the prodigal brother had been headed for disaster. He should have been watching the roads for his brother as his father had.

Luke 15:28b-29 So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat ¹⁸ so I could celebrate with my friends.

Notice that the attitude of the older son was bitter. He seemed to have the attitude of a hired hand. He thought that the father loved him because he had “slaved” for him. He had never appreciated that he could have asked for whatever he wanted because he was the father’s son.¹⁹ He never understood the father’s love.

Luke 15:30 But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

Notice that the older son misrepresented the facts. The Father had given the younger son the property. It was his property to squander. He also resented the fact that the Father operated from love and mercy.

Luke 15:31-32 “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

At the end of the parable, the conclusion of the previous two parables was repeated. That conclusion was that God and those that understand His love stand ready and willing to celebrate the recovery of the anyone (whether believer or unbeliever) who had been regarded as lost to His blessing.

Some Thoughts on the Recovery of Fellowship with God

1st John and Psalms are among those places in the Old and New Testament ²⁰ where we can see the importance of confessing or acknowledging our sin.

1 John 1:8-9 “If we (*believers*) claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

Psalms 32:5 “Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD”-- and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah”

However, it is important not fall into the error of the people who feel they have to wail and moan and even punish themselves with scourges. They somehow think that their suffering motivates the forgiveness of God for the sins of our Christian walk. Jesus presented a true picture of the process when He washed the feet of the disciples at the Last Supper. All that was required was the presentation of the dirty feet. However, a real examination of our old sin

¹⁸ Notice the difference between a fatted calf, which was of much greater size than a young goat.

¹⁹ James 4:2b “You have not because you ask not.”

²⁰ Others include Leviticus 5:5, Ezra 10:11, Psalms 28:13.

nature is necessary if we are to expose the inner darkness of our hearts to the light of God's standard! Such self-examination will cause inevitable pain and humiliation to our pride, but it is indispensable. Neither can confession be the quick and painless recitation of just any known sin. Quick and painless usually works out to mean shallow and superficial. However, after such self-examination has been made and light has been shed on the dark places of our souls, there is no place for guilt, or self-recrimination. God has cast our sin behind His back and we should move on too! As the Old Testament puts it:

Isaiah 38:17 "Behold, for (*instead of*) peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back."

Psalms 103:12 "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us."

It is clear in Scripture that self-examination is critical to the Spiritual life, but to suppose that really informed self-examination can be the first step in recovery presupposes the Carnal man is capable of spiritually evaluating his individual sins while walking in the flesh. What sin really is can only begin to be grasped by the Spiritual man, not by the Carnal man. What the Carnal man can appreciate is that he has separated his life from the will of God. The first step in Spiritual recovery is to repair that separation. How is that done? The story of the prodigal son is one place that gives us the answer. We change our attitude and turn our face toward God and seek Him. The Greek word for this in the New Testament is μετανοέω {me-tā-no-e'-ō} which is often translated "repent," but literally means to "change" (μετά) "thinking" (νοέω).