

Lesson 37 – Back into Judea
About 2/15/30 AD
The Temporary Return to Judea after a Retreat of about Two Weeks
The Raising of Lazarus

John 11:1a **Now a man named Lazarus was sick.**

The name “Lazarus” is a form of the Hebrew name אֶלְעָזָר {el·ä·zär'} or “Eleazar.” It means “whom God helps.” Remember, this was within no more than a few days after Jesus told the “Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man.”

Lazarus was a prominent man. He was well known in both the small village of Bethany and the nearby large city of Jerusalem. Before Jesus had left Judea to cross the Jordan into Perea, Lazarus and his sisters had entertained Jesus and his large number of traveling disciples.¹ He was thus already well known to be an adherent and follower of Jesus and His teachings.

John 11:1b **He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.**

We know that Martha had a separate household in Bethany with her husband Simon, who had evidently been cured of leprosy by Jesus (Matthew 26:6). Mary seems to have been single and probably lived with her brother Lazarus. Bethany was about a mile and seven eighths from the old “sheep gate” of Jerusalem which is just to the northeast of the Temple. Bethany was on the road to Jericho (see map on page 2). The road circled the southern slope of the Mount of Olives. The Mount of Olives lay between Bethany and Jerusalem. During Jewish Feasts, the Mount of Olives was the site where many of the pilgrims camped.

John 11:2 **This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.**

This anointing with perfume didn't happen until about two months later, on the evening before Palm Sunday. It was recorded later in John's gospel (John 12:3). Here John, writing in about 90 AD wrote as if it was a story that his readers should already know from other sources. This was because it had previously been recorded in Matthew 26:6-7 and Mark 14:13. This supports the generally accepted contention that the Gospels of Matthew and Mark were written before the Gospel of John (probably before 50 AD).

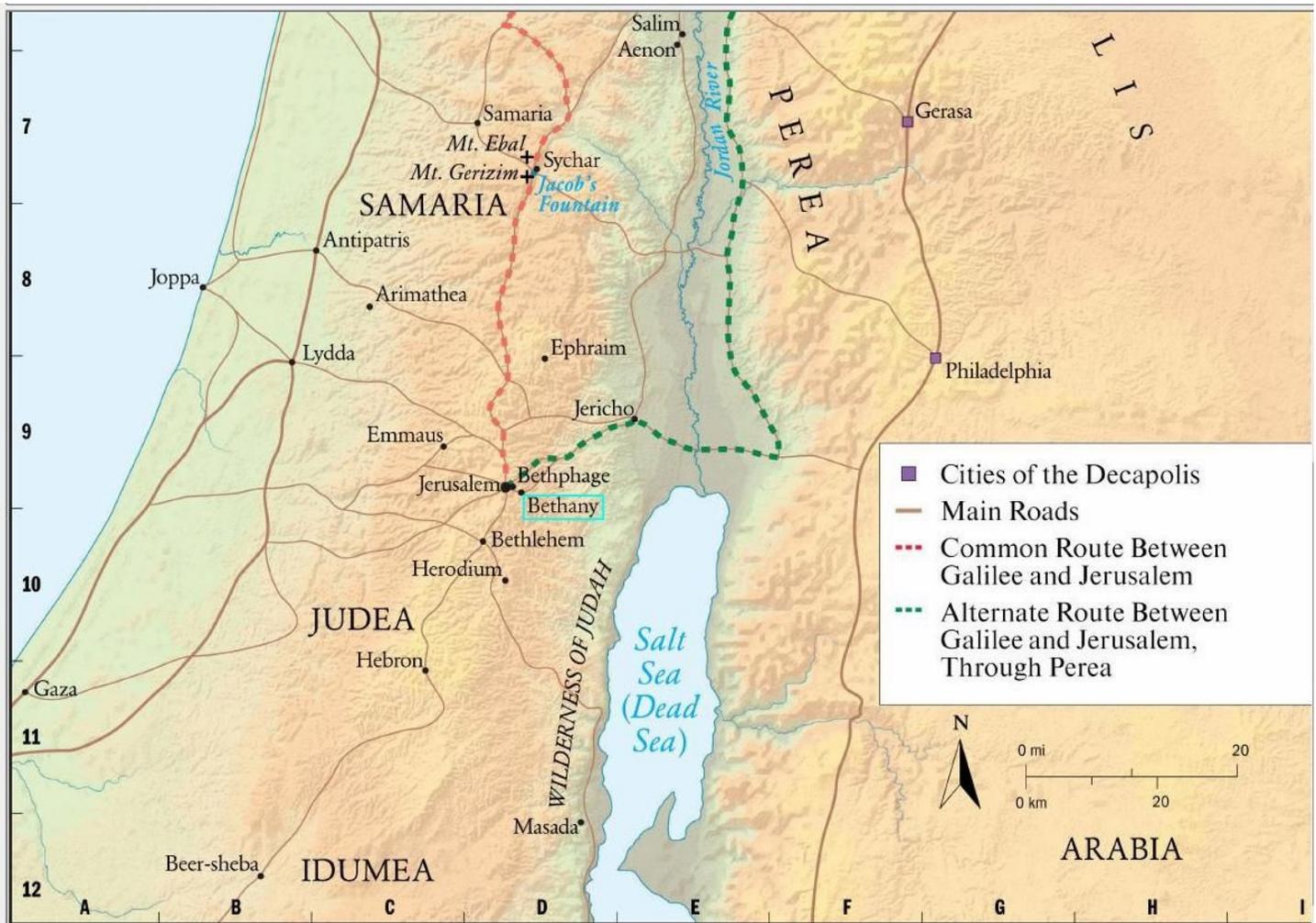
John 11:3 **So the sisters sent word to Jesus,² “Lord, the one you love is sick.”**

It is quite probable that, besides His trip to Bethany just after the Feast of Tabernacles in 29 AD, Jesus had visited Lazarus and his family during His year of ministry in Judea during 27

¹ *Lesson 32 - Luke 10:38.*

² *This tells us that although Jesus was in Perea, he wasn't hard to find.*

AD. It is also possible that He had even known Lazarus before that. It is interesting that the sisters called Lazarus “the one Jesus loved.” That was also the name that John called himself.³ It is also worth noting that the sisters didn’t ask Jesus to come back to Bethany at that time. Neither did they ask Jesus to heal Lazarus from afar. They should have known He could have done that, Jesus had showed that He could do that from the episode of the royal official’s servant who he healed in Capernaum while He was still in Cana (John 4:46-54). Their reaction when He arrived back too late indicated that they had expected Him to drop everything and return at the receipt of their message.



John 11:4 When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.”

Jesus knew that the final result of this sickness wouldn’t be the death of Lazarus, but the glory of God. Jesus already knew what He was going to do, and why He was going to do it.

³ In his Gospel this was the only name by which John identified himself (John 13:23, John 20:2, John 21:7, John 21:20).

John 11:5 Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

This established the fact that Jesus' delay came from love.

John 11:6 When therefore he heard that he was sick, he abode at that time two days in the place where he was. ASV

This was saying that because Jesus loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus He waited and let Lazarus die. This is an important lesson for each of us. Often it is a much greater blessing from God to let us go through the storm than for Him to deliver us from the storm. Those experiences are the ones that really deepen our faith.

John 11:7 Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

Up until then, they had been in Perea, away from the reach of the Sanhedrin.

John 11:8 "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?"

They had tried to stone Jesus about a month before during the Feast of Dedication (John 10:31).

John 11:9a Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight?"⁴

The twelve hours of daylight to which Jesus was referring were the hours of His life. He knew how it would end and that He had to walk it out until He could say "It is finished." He knew that His life and death would always stand as the light and revelation of the love of God.

John 11:9b A man who walks by day ~~will~~ *does* ⁵ not stumble, for he sees by this world's light.

Jesus' life would be the true "light of the world" by which we should walk. The difference between walking by physical light or in physical darkness was an analogy to the difference between walking in the spiritual light of Jesus' life or in the spiritual darkness of the rejection of that light. The one who walked in the light of the Word would walk securely in the hand of God.

John 11:10 It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light."

⁴ *Until the 18th century an hour was usually taken as the 12th part of the period between sunrise and sunset or between sunset and sunrise and varied with the seasons. Each hour of daylight was measure by a sundial. In winter the hours were shorter, and they were longer in the summer.*

⁵ *This is in the present tense, not the future, as the Greek and all the other English translations agree.*

The one who rejected the light would never see where he was going and would inevitably fall.

John 11:11 After he had said this, he went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.”

Jesus introduced His disciples to the idea that physical death was just a pleasant sleep before awakening.

John 11:12-13 His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.”⁶ Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

Sometimes Jesus’ disciples seemed to be awfully slow on the uptake. However, as I look back on my life, I realize I am in no position to judge.

John 11:14-15 So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

The death and resurrection of Lazarus wouldn’t just be a blessing for Mary and Martha, it would also be a lesson and a blessing for the disciples. Jesus had been telling them that He would die and be raised again. After this they should have had no reason to fear when Jesus was crucified and buried.

John 11:16a Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples,

The Hebrew name “Thomas” means “twin.” The Greek equivalent name which also means “twin” is “Didymus.” From the circumstance that in the lists of the apostles he is always mentioned along with Matthew, who was the son of Alphaeus (Mark 3:18), and that these two are always followed by James,⁷ who was also the son of Alphaeus, it has been supposed that these three, Matthew, Thomas, and James, were brothers and that Thomas was possibly the twin of one of them.

John 11:16b “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

This remark begs the question, “What did Thomas mean?” Was he expressing courage that he was willing to die with the Lord? After all, they had just expressed concern about the danger of going back to Judea. Or was Thomas expressing disapproval of the plan and predicting a dire result for all of them in hopes that Jesus would think better of going? We know that Thomas was the skeptic of the group who said in John 20:25 “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it

⁶ Even in ancient times they realized that sleep is sometimes the best medicine.

⁷ This was not the James who was the brother of John the Apostle.

(Jesus' resurrection).” Considering that, I think the second interpretation is probably more on the mark.

In defense of Thomas, I have to say that after the ascension of Christ, he had learned from his mistakes. He was possibly the most successful of all the Twelve in taking the Gospel to “all the world.” Although he died a martyr’s death in India, he and his converts reached India, the ancestors of the Mongols in the steppes of Central Asia, and China.

John 11:17 On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.⁸

This indicates that from the time when Jesus started back toward Bethany (when Lazarus was dead) until he got there was five days.⁹ He did not hurry. He must have ministered and preached to the crowds along the way. By a straight hard walk Jesus could have reached Bethany from Perea on the other side of the Jordan in no more than two days.

John 11:18 Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem,

The original Greek translated “less than two miles” is ὡς σταδίων δεκαπέντε {hōs stā'-dē-ōn de-kā-pe'n-te} which is literally “about fifteen stadia.” That is about one and seven eighths of a mile since a stadia was equivalent to an eighth of a mile. A stadia was the usual length of a running track around the inside of a typical ancient Greek stadium.

John 11:19 and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.

This tells us that many Jews had come from Jerusalem. This also indicates that Lazarus and his family were important and well known in Jerusalem. We know they were rich from the expense of the perfume with which Mary later anointed Jesus. We also know that from the fact that they could afford to host Jesus and His large entourage. Among other things, the prominence of Lazarus ensured that his resurrection would be seen by the many prominent people who had known him and whose testimony could not be easily impeached or dismissed. Below is Edersheim’s relevant comment on the arrival of Jesus in Bethany, and the Jewish practices of mourning in the 1st Century:

The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, by Alfred Edersheim. First published 1883, Book - THE DESCENT: FROM THE MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION INTO THE VALLEY OF HUMILIATION AND DEATH. Chapter XXI

⁸ *Jesus was only in the tomb three days.*

⁹ *According to Jewish practice the dead were buried on the day of their death. That meant before sundown.*

“Jesus had come to Bethany. But in the house of mourning they knew it not. As Bethany was only about fifteen furlongs, or about two miles, from Jerusalem, many from the City, who were on terms of friendship with what was evidently a distinguished family, had come in obedience to one of the most binding Rabbinic directions, that of comforting the mourners. In the funeral procession the sexes had been separated, and the practice probably prevailed even at that time for the women to return alone from the grave. This may explain why afterwards ¹⁰ the women went and returned alone to the Tomb of our Lord. The mourning, which began before the burial, had been shared by the friends who sat silent on the ground, or were busy preparing the mourning meal. As the company left the dead, each had taken leave of the deceased with a ‘Depart in peace!’ Then they had formed into lines, through which the mourners passed amidst expressions of sympathy, repeated (at least seven times) as the procession halted on the return to the house of mourning. Then began the mourning in the house, which really lasted thirty days, of which the first three were those of greatest, the others, during the seven days, or the special week of sorrow, of less intense mourning. But on the Sabbath, as God’s holy day, all mourning was intermitted, and so ‘they rested on the Sabbath, according to the commandment.’”

John 11:20a **When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him,**

Jesus would have been coming up the Jericho to Jerusalem road from the direction of Perea.

John 11:20b **but Mary stayed at home.**

We have already seen that Martha and Mary were of two different temperaments. Martha was a doer and Mary was a thinker. In some ways, Martha reminds me of Peter and Mary reminds me of John. Each had their place in God’s plan.

John 11:21 **“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died.**

Martha got up and went down the road to meet Jesus. When she met Jesus, she rebuked Him for not coming earlier.

John 11:22 **But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”**

Remember that Jesus had already raised at least two people from the dead in Galilee; Jairus’ daughter (Matthew 9:23-26, Mark 5:35-43, Luke 8:49-56) and the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17). Martha could not have been ignorant of this. She seemed to be pleading for this indirectly.

¹⁰ *After Jesus burial.*

John 11:23-24 Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

Jesus promised the resurrection of her brother, but Martha thought Jesus meant the resurrection at the last day. She basically said “I already know about that resurrection, but I want my brother back now!”

John 11:25-26a Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.

Jesus reminded Martha that neither Lazarus nor any other believer ever dies in a real sense.

John 11:26b-27 Do you believe this?” “Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”

Jesus reminded Martha of what she already knew and believed. She affirmed her faith in Jesus. She seemed to have accepted that she had to be content to wait on God’s will.

John 11:28 And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.”

Evidently, before Martha left Him, Jesus had asked Martha to go home and send Mary to Him.

John 11:29-30 When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village but was still at the place where Martha had met him.

Jesus hadn’t moved from the spot outside of the village where He had encountered Martha. We already know that Jesus had known what He was going to do when He got to Bethany. The next verse seems to indicate that where He stopped was close to the Tomb of Lazarus.

John 11:31 When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

None of the mourners knew where Mary was going but deduced from the way she was heading that she was going to the tomb. As a result, all of them followed her. The usual burying place of those who could afford it was a rock hewn vault set in a garden, much like Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb.

John 11:32 When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

Here Mary seemed to be softly rebuking the Lord for not coming when they had first sent for Him.

John 11:33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

It is easy to see why Jesus was moved, but why was He troubled? I believe it is related to Paul's statement in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 "Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope." I think Jesus was troubled because He saw the Jews who had come along with Mary grieving as if they had no hope. He was about to demonstrate the hope that He was bringing.

John 11:34 "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied.

The "they" here seems to have been the crowd who had thought Mary was on the way to the tomb in the first place.

John 11:35 Jesus wept.

This is well known as the shortest verse in the Bible. We can be sure that He wasn't weeping for Lazarus. He already knew that He was about to bring Lazarus back from Paradise to this vale of tears. Perhaps His weeping was related to what He had said of Israel the week before as recorded by Luke:

Luke 13:34b "How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"

John 11:36-38a Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb.

I can't help thinking that Jesus was moved because the people did not yet realize that He had come to suffer death for every man (Hebrews 2:9).

John 11:38b-39 It was a cave ¹¹ with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."

¹¹ This seemed to have been a natural cavern which had been converted to the purpose of a tomb. As such it would probably have been large enough to have been used as a family mausoleum for Lazarus and his ancestors. It wasn't a "rock carved tomb" like the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.

Martha didn't understand what Jesus was going to do. Always the gracious hostess, she seems not to have wanted to expose the guests who had come to mourn to the stench of a rotting body.

John 11:40-41a Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” So, they took away the stone.

Jesus' statement seemed to have removed Martha's objection and she must have acquiesced to the removal of the stone.

John 11:41b Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me.

At this point Jesus knew that Lazarus was already alive and waiting to be called. He had known four days before that when the moment came, Lazarus would be alive. That was probably when He had first prayed to the Father for this miracle.

John 11:42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

However, because of the primitive understanding of the people there, Jesus spoke His prayer aloud. This did two things. It announced that it was Jesus' prayer that called forth the miracle. It also helped make clear that the miracle was performed by the power of the Father. During Jesus' incarnation, all of the miracles that were done were called forth by Jesus' prayers to the Father.

John 11:43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”

Finally, came Jesus' command for Lazarus to come out. I can't help wondering how much Lazarus knew of what had happened and where he was. I like to believe that his soul was conscious in Paradise during the whole four days, and that when his soul was reunited with his restored body, he had a full understanding of what was happening.

John 11:44 The dead man ¹² came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

As you must imagine, bound the way he was, probably laid flat on a horizontal surface in the cave, the exit of Lazarus must have been anything but graceful. I would love to know what he said to the Jews when he was unwrapped. They must have had many questions. We do know that His testimony was so powerful that the Jews wanted to kill him along with Jesus (John 12:10).

¹² Lazarus' physical body had actually died. See discussion on pages 10-12 on Hebrews 9:27.

John 11:45 Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary,¹³ and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him.

Many of those who saw this miracle at the tomb responded with saving faith. Some reacted differently. It is interesting that it says that the Jews had come to visit Mary in her grief. I think it speaks to how well she was beloved.

John 11:46 But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

Those that didn't believe were alarmed and returned to the Pharisees in Jerusalem and warned them of what Jesus was doing.

John 11:47a Then the chief ~~priests~~ *High Priests* and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin.

The High Priests, namely Annas and his son-in-law Caiaphas, who were the leaders of the Sadducees.¹⁴ The Sadducees, in conjunction with the Pharisees made up the Sanhedrin. Together, they called for an emergency meeting.

John 11:47b “What are we accomplishing?” they asked.

From the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, some two to three months before, their determined policy had been to kill Jesus. However, although they had tried to arrest Him, and had been on the point of stoning Him in the Temple, until that point had not advanced their real goal of getting the Romans kill him. Instead, they had adopted a policy of just watching Him closely and challenging Him in public. However, that policy had not produced anything with which to accuse Him before the Romans, or even any argument from the scriptures by which they could accuse and try Him openly before the people.

John 11:47c-48 “Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”

Note the hardness of their hearts. They didn't challenge the fact that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. They were actually upset that Jesus had displayed the signs of the Messiah. He was turning out to be the Messiah they had never really wanted. Their real motivation for seeking to destroy Jesus was that they felt he was challenging their prestige and authority in the eyes of the Romans. They also proposed that if they, the Sanhedrin, lost the place granted them by the Romans the nation couldn't survive.

¹³ This also indicates that Mary had lived with her brother Lazarus who must have been single.

¹⁴ The Sadducees, who didn't believe in life after death, must have been particularly outraged.

John 11:49a Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up,

Caiaphas was the “officiating” High Priest for that year. Although by Old Testament Law, each High Priest was supposed to serve until he died, in this last century of the Temple, they always served much shorter terms. At a time chosen by the powers, they would be replaced by another “officiating” High Priest. After they had served their shortened term they were still called a “High Priest,” but did not “officiate” in the Temple and serve in that capacity. At times during the first century AD there were as many as eight High Priests, although at this time there were only two, Annas and Caiaphas.¹⁵

John 11:49b “You know nothing at all!

By this Caiaphas expressed his disdain for their previous policy of waiting for a good excuse. He was in charge of the Temple, so he was probably responsible for the two previous attempts to seize or stone Jesus in the Temple.

John 11:50 You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.”

Here Caiaphas made a statement which tried to rationalize his proposed murder of an innocent man. He reasoned that what they were going to do was in the interest of the nation as a whole.

John 11:51-52 He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one.

Caiaphas was an unbeliever, and his motivation was evil. However, the Spirit of God impelled him, in his role of High Priest, to speak an accurate and prophetic assessment of what was to follow. He was accurately stating what had been the LORD’s gracious plan from eternity past. Because of His position as Spiritual head of the Jewish nation, the LORD caused him to proclaim the truth although he didn’t understand the true meaning of what he had said. In the actual event, the rejection of the meaning of Jesus’ death would result in the physical destruction of the Jewish nation in 70 AD. However, His crucifixion would eternally save all those who would trust in Him. This would apply to both the Jews, and “the scattered children of God” (the Gentiles) and make both of them one (the Church).

John 11:53 So from that day on they plotted to take his life.

This was the reaction of these “rich men” to having someone coming back from the dead to warn them. These were like the rich man’s “brothers” that Jesus had recently warned about in

¹⁵ Luke 3:2 “during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John.”

the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. Those “brothers” (the Pharisees and Sadducees) had rejected the written Word and the living Word. They also rejected the testimony of the “risen from the dead” Lazarus. They would kill anybody who spoke truth against their lie.

Discussion of Hebrews 9:27 Can a Man Die more than Once?

There is a passage in Hebrews that some have tripped over regarding this passage. The passage is Hebrews 9:27. Most translations of the passage from the original say: “Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.” I have heard some Bible teachers, who are at least honest enough to tackle hard subjects, say that because of what Hebrews 9:27 supposedly said, Lazarus could not have really died, because he subsequently died again. If that applied to Lazarus’ resurrection, it also would apply to the scriptural records of six other people who died and came to life again only to eventually die again.¹⁶ The six other cases are, the widow’s son raised by Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-23), the son of the woman of Shunem raised by Elisha (2 Kings 4:17-35), the man raised by coming in contact with the bones of Elisha (2 Kings 13:21), the son of the widow of Nain raised by Jesus Christ (Luke 7:11-15), the daughter of Jairus raised by Jesus Christ (Matthew 9:23-25, Mark 5:35-42, and Luke 8:49-52), and Tabitha / Dorcas of Lydda raised by Peter (Acts 9:36-41).

This would seem to present us with a dilemma. Either Hebrews 9:27 is wrong (an impossibility) or it is mistranslated or misunderstood. The last is true. It is mistranslated. I will explain.

With the Book of Hebrews, we have two problems with arriving at an accurate translation. First, Hebrews was originally written in Aramaic, the language of the Jews to whom it was written. The copy which has survived was a later Greek translation. The Greek translation demonstrates several faulty translations of the Old Testament in Hebrews 1:7, Hebrews 2:7, Hebrews 4:3-4. Thus, we know we have to remember that the translations of Hebrews that we have are English translations of a Greek translation of an original Aramaic text.

A look at the entire passage in the Greek gives us the solution to the problem. It is mistranslated. The problem relates to a proper understanding of the way the Greek word (ἄπαξ {hä'-päks}) is used in the passage. It appears three times in the passage. It is better understood here as “first” rather than “once.” I have shown the proposed change below:

Hebrews 9:26-28 “Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared ~~once for all~~ *first* (ἄπαξ {hä'-päks}) at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined (or “appointed” KJV,ASV,RSV) to die ~~once~~ *first* (ἄπαξ {hä'-päks}), and after that to face judgment, so Christ

¹⁶ *And possibly Paul the writer of Hebrews himself (Acts 14:19).*

was sacrificed ~~once~~ *first* (ἅπαξ {hä'-päks}) to take away the sins of many ~~people~~; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”

The Greek word here is (ἅπαξ {hä'-päks}). Its entry in Strongs is: ἅπαξ (adverb) - once, once more, once for all; the Greek idiom “once and yet twice” means to do something repeatedly, “again and again” (Php 4:16). Notice that the emphasis can be, not on the uniqueness of the event but the sequence. Think of the English use of “once” in the following sentence. “Once you have bathed, you will not be dirty.” The emphasis there is on the sequence. We do not understand the sentence to mean that having bathed “once,” we will never be dirty again, but rather, that having “first” bathed we will not be dirty. You can see the logic of this translation in verse 26:

Hebrews 9:26 “Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared ~~once for all~~ *first* (ἅπαξ {hä'-päks}) at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.”

In this first occurrence of (ἅπαξ {hä'-päks}) the whole concept is that before Christ could come to set up His Kingdom on earth He had to “first” atone for sin by His own blood. The sequence is clearly what is in view. Unfortunately, the passage has just finished speaking about how the High Priest had to go in many times, as in year after year as opposed to Christ’s one time offering. Thus, the first translation of ἅπαξ as “once” as in “unique” seemed logical. Translated as such in this first instance, it is a true statement. Unfortunately, it led them to translate all the occurrences of (ἅπαξ {hä'-päks}) as “once” as in “unique.” We see that in verse 27:

Hebrews 9:27 “Just as man is destined (or “appointed” KJV, ASV, RSV) to die (ἅπαξ {hä'-päks}) ~~once~~ *first*, and after that to face judgment,”

In this second occurrence of ἅπαξ {hä'-päks} the concept is clearly on sequence of time, not uniqueness. That is made clear by the contrast in the verse of the “first” time to an “after” time. Also, the statement that a man is “appointed” a time points to “sequence.”

Hebrews 9:28 “so Christ was sacrificed ~~once~~ *first* (ἅπαξ {hä'-päks}) to take away the sins of many ~~people~~; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”

In this third occurrence of (ἅπαξ {hä'-päks}) the concept is also on sequence. The first time Christ comes, He comes to take away sin. The second time he comes (the Second Advent) He comes bringing salvation and deliverance from the forces of Satan (Matthew 24:30-31 , Mark 13:26-27, Zechariah 14:4).

So then, the Bible **does not say** that a man can only die “once” as in “one time.” That clears up the seeming contradiction with the clear record of scripture. It only says that he must die “first,” before judgment. Of course, the Bible clearly teaches that when Adam sinned, he died

spiritually and passed on his first death to us (Romans 5:12, 1 Corinthians 15:22, Ephesians 2:1, Colossians 2:13). Then he died physically. So, in fact, we have all died “twice.”

Jesus’ Withdrawal back out of Judea

John 11:54 **Therefore Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the Jews. Instead he withdrew to a region near the desert, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples.**

In view of Luke 17:11 which follows, this was evidently near to the border of Galilee and Samaria in the desert that is the lower Jordan River valley. The ancient territory of Ephraim was part of Samaria in 30 AD.

Since the Lord started His last journey toward the Cross from this village, the name of the village, Ephraim, could be seen as a fulfillment of the prophecy in Zechariah 9:13-14 “I will bend Judah as I bend my bow and fill it with Ephraim. -- Then the LORD will appear over them; his arrow will flash like lightning.”

The Healing of the Ten Lepers

Luke 17:11 **Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.¹⁷**

He was “on His way to Jerusalem” as His final destination, although not necessarily by direct route. At this time, although He had long since set His face to go to Jerusalem and the cross (Luke 9:51), He was waiting for the Last Passover to meet His destiny.

Samaria was under the jurisdiction of Pontius Pilate. The Jewish Sanhedrin had no influence there and neither did Herod Antipas. The two parties who wanted to arrest Jesus could not harm him there.

Luke 17:12-13 **As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”**

Lepers were forbidden ¹⁸ to approach people because of the danger of spreading their infection. These men evidently stood at a distance and used the combined volume of all ten voices to be heard.

Luke 17:14 **When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.”**

¹⁷ *The “Ephraim” of John 11:54.*

¹⁸ *Leviticus 13:1-46.*

This seems to indicate that Jesus came near enough to them to see their disease and speak to them face to face.

Luke 17:14b And as they went, they were cleansed.

Evidently, the lepers weren't healed immediately, but by God's providence were allowed to travel a short way before they saw that they were healed.

Luke 17:15-16 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

Remember, not more than a few months before, James and John had wanted to call down fire on an entire Samaritan village (Luke 9:52-54).

Luke 17:17a Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed?"

Although the healing hadn't taken place in front of Him, Jesus was confident that all ten had been healed.

Luke 17:17b-18 Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

The text doesn't say for certain that the leper at Jesus' feet was the only Samaritan among the ten. However, the fact that Jesus made a point of pointing out the readiness to believe of this one Samaritan inclines me to believe he was the only Samaritan among the ten. Perhaps this comment was made for the benefit of the disciples who, after Pentecost, would find the people of Samaria more ready believe than the Jews.

Luke 17:19 Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

The Samaritan had already been physically healed from the certain death that was leprosy. However, by coming back and worshipping Jesus, his faith had healed him from the far worse death for which he had been headed. That was the second death at the Great White Throne Judgment. What of the other nine who were probably Jews? Their ingratitude would soon be reflected in the population of Jerusalem.

The Kingdom of God

Luke 17:20a Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come,

The word "once" here doesn't locate the time of this question. It could have been any time during Jesus' ministry. However, verse 25 which follows, seems to anticipate the nearness of Jesus' suffering and rejection.

Luke 17:20b-21 **Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.”**

Though a physical kingdom will come on this earth when Jesus returns, more importantly the spiritual Kingdom of God comes to each person to be accepted or rejected in his own soul. If God’s Kingdom is ever established in your soul, it is God’s territory, and He will never give it up. That Kingdom of the soul could only truly be accomplished after Jesus proclaimed, “it is finished!”

Luke 17:22a **Then he said to his disciples,**

Notice that this next was addressed to Jesus’ disciples who were believers (except for Judas).

Luke 17:22b **“The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it.**

This could be taken as a prophecy that none of Jesus’ twelve disciples would live to see the Second Advent and the return of Christ as King. That was certainly fulfilled.

Luke 17:23-24 **Men will tell you, ‘There he is!’ or ‘Here he is!’ Do not go running off after them. For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other.**

Here, the “day of the Son of Man” seems to refer to the whole period from the Rapture through the Great Tribulation to Jesus’ coming as King. His return will be twofold. First, just before the Great Tribulation, He will come in the air and gather all believers on the earth to him. Then at the end of the Tribulation He will return to rule. The first time, there will be no doubt about where to find Him, because living believers will be drawn to muster before Him in the air.¹⁹ The second time He returns there will be also be no confusion. He will return to the Mount of Olives with clouds of angels and chariots of fire.

Luke 17:25 **But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.**

This was speaking of the conclusion of His First Advent and His upcoming trial, rejection, and crucifixion in Jerusalem.

Luke 17:26 **“Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man.**

¹⁹ *Believers who have died beforehand will be called from their places in heaven to stand up in the same divine roll call of Jesus’ body in the air.*

This returned the subject to the Second Advent, which will be preceded by the Rapture and Great Tribulation.

Luke 17:27 **People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.**²⁰

There will be little warning ²¹ before the Great Tribulation starts. Suddenly, disaster upon disaster will occur. However, as with the Flood, when the believers (Noah and his family) were carried off to safety by Noah's Ark, before the Great Tribulation all believers will be carried off to safety by the Rapture of the Church. They will be delivered by being taken to meet Christ in the air as prophesied in 2 Corinthians and 1 Thessalonians:

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 "Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed -- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised (*stood forth*) incorruptible, and we will be changed."

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 "According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise (*stand forth*) first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so, we will be with the Lord forever."

Luke 17:28-30 **"It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all."**²² **"It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed.**

Similarly, the disaster that befell Sodom was much like what will happen during the end of the Great Tribulation.

Luke 17:31-32 **On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. Remember Lot's wife!**

Before the Second Coming of Christ, the believers will flee from Jerusalem twice. First at the three-and-a-half-year mark, they will flee into the desert (Revelation 12:6-17). Second, at the

²⁰ *Genesis 6:1-7*

²¹ *I believe there will be only a ten-day interval between the Rapture and the beginning of the Great Tribulation (see my notes on Revelation).*

²² *Genesis 19:24*

end at the seven-year mark they will flee Jerusalem through a valley the Lord will create (Zechariah 14:4-5).

Luke 17:33 Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.

This standard for the saints of the Tribulation will be the same one which Jesus had taught His disciples of that day:

Luke 9:23b-26 “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself²³ and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.”

See also Matthew 16:25, Mark 8:34b-35, and John 12:25.

Luke 17:34a I tell you, on that night

I believe that the term “that night” refers to the night of spiritual darkness that will enfold the world just before the light of Christ’s return breaks forth. This view is reinforced by the fact that besides the people in bed (a nighttime activity) there will be people both grinding grain and out in the field (a daytime activity).

Luke 17:34b-36 two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left.” There shall be two men in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left.

This doesn’t refer to the Rapture but the Second Coming. At the Rapture the ones that are taken will be taken to meet the LORD in the air. This scene at the Second Coming referred to the taking of all **unbelievers** from the face of the earth to await the Great White Throne Judgment. Presumably they will wait in Torments, the section of Hell we studied last week which is reserved for human unbelievers.

Luke 17:37a “Where, Lord?” they asked.

The disciples were asking where the Lord would return.

Luke 17:37b He replied, “Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather.”

We know from Zechariah that the Lord will return to the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem:

²³ *Leviticus 23:29*

Zechariah 14:4 “On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem.”

We also know that in the Valley of Decision (Valley of Jehoshaphat) which lies eastward between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. is where the greatest carnage of the final conflict will be.²⁴ There, according to Ezekiel, many birds of prey will gather to feast on the slain enemies of the LORD:

Ezekiel 32:3-10 ““This is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘With a great throng²⁵ of people²⁶ I will cast my net over you (*the Beast and his forces*), and they will haul you up in my net. I will throw you on the land and hurl you on the open field. I will let all the birds of the air settle on you and all the beasts of the earth gorge themselves on you. I will spread your flesh on the mountains and fill the valleys with your remains. I will drench the land with your flowing blood all the way to the mountains, and the ravines will be filled with your flesh. When²⁷ I snuff you out, I will cover the heavens and darken their stars; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon will not give its light. All the shining lights in the heavens I will darken over you; I will bring darkness over your land, declares the Sovereign LORD. I will trouble the hearts of many peoples when I bring about your destruction among the nations, among lands you have not known. I will cause many peoples to be appalled at you, and their kings will shudder with horror because of you when I brandish my sword before them. On the day of your downfall each of them will tremble every moment for his life.”

²⁴ See Joel 3:12-14. It is also known as the Valley of Berachah (1 Chronicles 20:24-27).

²⁵ The great throng are all those who the LORD allows to participate on His side in the final battle.

²⁶ The Hebrew word here (אִמּוּ {am}) can mean “people, compatriots, or kinsmen.” All who are in Christ, are His “kinsmen.” Perhaps that is the sense here.

²⁷ The Tribulation.