



The Scribe--

Searching for Jesus Christ

In the Old Testament

If you lived when Jesus was on earth, would you have become his disciple? What about after his death and resurrection? A story from the Gospel of St. Luke helps us to understand why some people became disciples, and it has to do with the Old Testament.

After Jesus died, and rose, he appeared to two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus. He asked why they were sad, and they told him, whom they thought was a stranger, all about Jesus and the tragic death which he had suffered.

He did not seem puzzled. "Don't you see," he said, "that the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus shows that he truly was the Messiah?" He then spoke of Moses and the prophets, and all the passages that referred to the Messiah, and connected them to Jesus. Like putting on glasses, the disciples finally saw clearly that Jesus was the One who would be the savior of Israel. The story of Jesus does not truly begin with the New Testament, but rather, in the pages of the Old Testament.

"The Scribe--Searching for Jesus Christ in the Old Testament," connects the **people** and **events** and **beliefs** of the Old Testament to the New Testament. The Scribe, who works for the "Biblical Times" of Jerusalem, takes us on the search. He brings to light what was foretold--that which Jesus probably shared with the disciples on the road to Emmaus.



The Scribe Speaks

My job, as Resident Scribe for the "Biblical Times," is to study our history as God's people, and report my findings. Malachi of Jerusalem, Editor of the Times, sends over a draft story for my comments. I look into the scriptures, and when I find something that will add wisdom to the news, I write. As drawing helps me gather my thoughts, I often illustrate my commentary.

I, Jonah, take my job seriously, as did my father before me. Our family motto says it all: "History in the Service of Wisdom." We Scribes have the responsibility to look to our past in order to understand, and make wise decisions about, the present. Our history is the history of God's chosen people--a tool for God to speak to us today.

Subj: John the Baptizer
Date: 27 A.D.
From: Malachi@BTimes
To: Jonah@Solomon's Portico

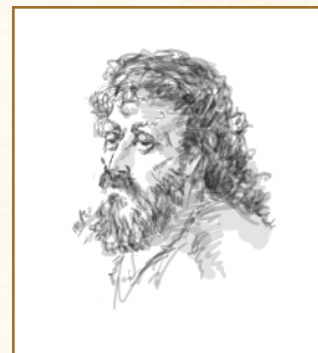
Issue 1

Hello Jonah,

Please review the draft headline story, and write your response. Have you been out to see this fellow--seems to be gathering a crowd each day.

Who is John the Baptizer?

Priests are known for being conservative and having good manners. Since that is how they always act, we have to wonder: How is it that the John, who has ancestors on both sides who were priests, turns out to be so strange? For example: he sleeps in the desert and wears camel-hair clothes. And he keeps arguing and disagreeing with religious leaders. It's true we have had some prophets in the past who were sort of unusual, but were any of them as wild as John?



For months now John has been a familiar figure in the Jordan river valley. People have heard him several times yelling out, "Repent, for the Kingdom is at hand!" Lately, though, he has come up with some new twists. He talks about someone else who "is coming" – who will separate those who are worthy from the unworthy, like a winnowing fork that separates "the wheat from the chaff."

Then, when people ask for the name of the "one who is coming," John comes up with more unusual expressions, saying for example, that he cannot "untie the sandal" of the Coming One. Simon of Bethany, a local sandal-maker, has had several people ask about such a sandal since John made that comment, and has told reporters he knows of no sandal that cannot be untied.

While many of the things John says are hard to understand, a lot of people are wondering who he really is and who the "One" he talks about can be. One idea going the rounds is that he is actually the prophet Elijah come back, for there are many people who are sure Elijah will come back to Israel to pave the way for the Messiah. John says that isn't who he is. But you look at how he dresses, what he preaches and how he does it, and his ideas about what's coming in the future, and you wonder.

A relative of John, Jesus of Nazareth, is also attracting attention. Recently, Jesus asked John to baptize him. After they talked about it for a short time, Jesus walked into the Jordan River and was baptized. The man who told us all this said he heard a strange sort of rumbling. Other people thought it was the voice of God. All this has caused people to wonder if Jesus might be the "Coming One" John has talked about. But Jesus seems to have gone into the wilderness after the baptism, and couldn't be reached for comment.



From the desk of The Scribe
"History in Service of Wisdom"

Let us recall the mighty acts of Elijah . . .

There has never been anyone quite like Elijah. He outran chariots going full gallop. In the desert ravens fed him. In one dazzling display he faced down Ahab, one of our most powerful kings. You'd have to say he was wild--for God!

King Ahab's wife, Jezebel, had brought worship of the foreign god, Baal, into Israel. Lots of people began to worship Baal. Elijah knew this had to stop. He told the people of Israel to witness a test of the gods. Both he and the prophets of Baal would set up sacrifices in advance. Each would kill a bull to be offered, make the altars, set up the sacrifice, and do all that was necessary, except light the fire.

The day came, and then the moment of truth. Elijah told the prophets of Baal to call on their god to light the wood and burn their sacrifice. They called on their god for hours--with no result! Elijah then prepared his offering to the true God. First, he asked the people standing by to pour water on it three times, so it would be completely soaked. Then he called on the Lord. Immediately fire came, burning up the sacrifice, the stone altar, and even the dust around it.



The end of Elijah's life was no less spectacular. Elijah was carried to heaven in a chariot of fire, without even dying. Our tradition tells us he will return just before the Messiah comes-- to prepare the way for the one who will establish the Everlasting Kingdom.

So, now we have John the Baptizer, living in the desert where Elijah lived, with the same fearless devotion to God. And, he is calling on people to change their lives! I can see some striking similarities, but how can we know? Only the future will tell. One thing seems sure: If John is Elijah, the future looks exciting indeed!

Subj: Use of God's Name?
Date: 27 A.D.
From: Malachi@BTimes
To: Jonah@Solomon's Portico

Issue 2

Jonah,
We're trying to verify these facts before press time--don't want to get this one wrong.

Traveling Teacher in Samaria

SYCHAR: A local woman had a remarkable conversation with Jesus of Nazareth. Our reporter, a distant relative of the woman interviewed her for this story. The whole thing began in an unusual way--with Jesus violating two taboos at once: he, a Jewish man, started a conversation with a woman who was not related to him and who was also a Samaritan.



Biblical Times: How did he begin?

Fotini: He asked me for a drink when I was getting water from the well, and his boldness surprised me.

BT: What did you say?

Fotini: I asked him how it could be that he, a Jew, would ask a drink from me, a Samaritan and a woman. He answered by saying if I knew who it was asking for a drink, I would ask him for a drink instead. This was puzzling, for he didn't even have a bucket to carry the water. He told me he could give me "living water." I said, "Sir, please do that!"

BT: Did he?

Fotini: He then said something that really puzzled me, "Go and get your husband." When I told him I didn't have a husband, he told me I had had five husbands, and the man I am now with is not my husband. At that point I knew he was a prophet. For how could he have known? So, I asked him a very important question: "Where should we worship, on Mount Gerizim or in Jerusalem. He told me we are to worship in neither place.

BT: What does that mean anyway?

Fotini: We are to worship, according to Jesus, "in spirit and truth." I said to him, "I know the Messiah is coming and when he comes he will tell us all things."

BT: That is clear enough!

Fotini: Yes, but he answered, "I who speak to you am he."

BT: He said, "I am?"

Fotini: Yes, that was what he meant!

We learned that Fotini brought several people to her village to see Jesus. He stayed in Samaria for two days.



From the desk of The Scribe

"History in Service of Wisdom"

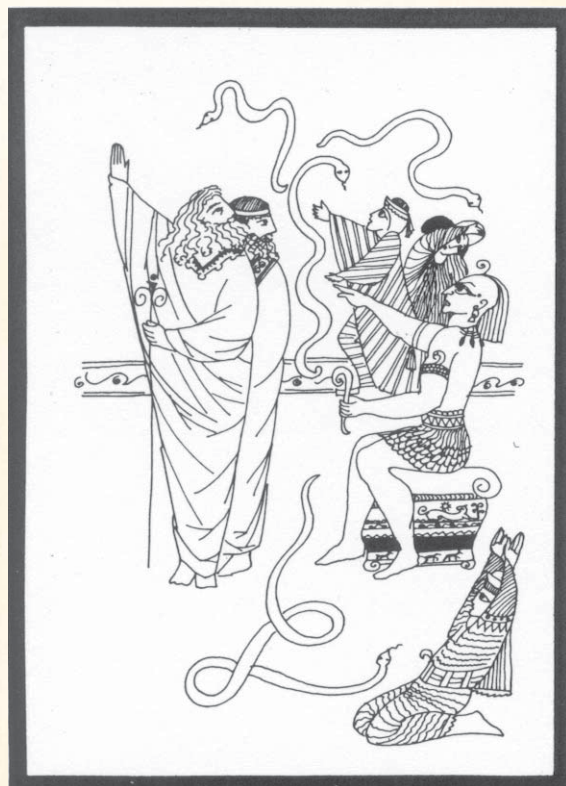
Let us recall God's name!

It is reported that Jesus, the traveling teacher from Nazareth, has spoken with a Samaritan woman. As they talked, he referred to himself as "I AM." Has he forgotten this is the sacred name of our God? Let us call to mind the story of when Moses was called by God to lead our people, and learned God's name. Let's look back to the time our people were enslaved in Egypt.

Our ancestors lived among the Egyptians for four hundred years, and learned the names of their gods: for example, the one they named Isis, goddess of life, was connected with the River Nile. Sakhmet, supposedly a very powerful goddess, was ruler of plagues; another, they called Osiris, was supposed to be the god who governed life and death. They were used, therefore, to gods with names. So it made sense for Moses to ask the Lord about His name. Moses said, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?"

God's answer showed He is not simply one of many gods. Rather the Lord is The One Who Is, or, as He said, "I am who I am." He thus told Moses to say that "I am" sent him. Then God showed them what that meant.

When Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go, "I AM" gave the people the victory. He quickly showed Sakhmet was helpless against Him. She could not prevent the plagues God brought on Egypt. And Osiris was no help when the angel of death claimed all of Egypt's firstborn on the night we call "passover." The mighty name of God reminds us always that we serve the Eternal One, whose name is, in itself, holy and set apart only for Him.



Subj: Keeping the Sabbath
Date: 27 A.D.
From: Malachi@BTimes
To: Jonah@Solomon's Portico

Issue 3

Jonah,

Your wisdom requested, as always.

A Closer Look at Jesus' Sabbath Record



Jesus healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath recently. That was not the first time he had healed someone on the Sabbath. His disregard of the commandment, to keep the Sabbath holy by not working, has enraged religious leaders.

Several months ago, and Jesus was teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath. People watching and listening soon found out, though, that Jesus was no ordinary teacher. While teaching, Jesus was confronted by an evil spirit stirring up trouble against him. He stood up and sent it screaming from the synagogue. It was not, by any measure, a typical Sabbath!

More recently, Jesus was traveling through some fields with his disciples who were picking heads of grain and eating them on the Sabbath. He was confronted by some Pharisees about his disciples breaking the Sabbath law. Jesus brought up the example of King David. Once when he was traveling on a Sabbath, he and his men ate the sacred bread at the Temple. What Jesus added then was: "Consider that the Temple priests work on the Sabbath." While this seemed to silence those who would criticize him (at least at the moment), Jesus' last comment raised more questions: "The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."



From the desk of The Scribe

"History in Service of Wisdom"

We cannot defy God's law!

Before Moses died, he passed on final words of blessing. These contain a simple but important point: the Law is the "possession" of Israel. Other nations "possess" other things like size, wealth, or military power. But only God's people, Israel, possess his Law. What a gift—an entire body of wisdom and teaching by which His people can order their lives. With the covenant Law, Israel was to be the one nation which knew the ways of God and could teach them to the world.

When our ancestors forgot, from time to time, God's gift, he sent prophets to remind them of the covenant he had made with them. Our old poets also understood the importance of the Law. One of our greatest song-writers, Asaph, sang centuries ago, "He established a decree in Ja-

cob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he told our ancestors to teach to their children; that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and rise up and tell them to their children, so they would put their hope in God, and not forget his works, but keep his commandments."



We are in a covenant with God. He has given us the Law to set us apart and make us special among the nations--different from all others. We cannot defy the Law and remain God's people.

The Law lives on in our hearts and minds. How can Jesus go about breaking the Sabbath law and expect good Jews to follow him? Perhaps he is not interested in good Jews. I suggest he move to Samaria, where he was accepted by those who are not "our own."

Subj: Thousands Hear Jesus
Date: 27 A.D.
From: Malachi@BTimes
To: Jonah@Solomon's Portico

Issue 4

This time our reporter was there--these are the facts.

Thousands Gather on Mountain to Hear Preacher

The scene was a familiar one: a charismatic leader on a mountainside surrounded by attentive fans, announcing the start of a new movement to change the world. Jesus of Nazareth was at the center of such a scene yesterday when he spoke to thousands of people in an outdoor rally.

Jesus attracted attention some months ago and his fame as a teacher and healer has spread throughout Judea, Samaria, Syria, and now Galilee, his native land. As his fame has grown, though, so have questions about his view of the Law.

Many of his actions, such as healing on the Sabbath, have made people call him a lawbreaker. So it was time for Jesus to make his views clear.

Jesus claimed in his speech that he aims to fulfill the Law, not do away with it. He tried to explain his meaning by providing a new way of thinking about the laws we know. He seemed to dig beneath the words to show what he called the spirit of the law.

For example, Jesus says that instead of just avoiding adultery, we should also get rid of dirty thoughts. Where the Law allowed divorce, Jesus says marriage cannot be broken. The true meaning of the law against murder, is that we should never be angry with our brother. And we are to love not just our friends and brothers, but our enemies as well. Instead of fighting against our enemies--for example, against the Romans who crush and abuse us--we are to love them and pray for them. I quote his words, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."





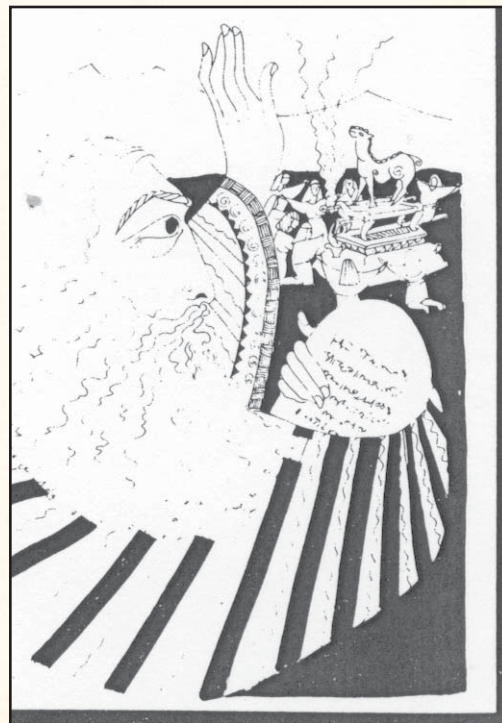
From the desk of The Scribe

"History in Service of Wisdom"

Let us recall what happened on Mount Sinai . .

About twelve hundred years ago, we, the children of Abraham, were rescued from slavery by God. God chose to enter a covenant with us through Moses. Let us look back to Mt. Sinai and what happened when Moses was summoned to climb the mountain.

Moses had been gone so long that the people began to worship a golden calf--an idol they had made. When Moses got back down from the mountain with the tablets of stone on which the covenant was written, he viewed the scene and in anger broke the tablets.



Later, after the idol-worshippers were slain Moses went back up on the mountain. When he came down, with the Law written down once more, the people gathered around him. Our ancestors then made a solemn promise to become God's people and to take Him as their only God. Recall the 10 points of the Law, called "commandments:"

You shall worship none but God; You shall not worship idols or carved images; You shall keep the Sabbath; You shall honor your father and mother; You shall not kill; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not lie; You shall not desire the property or the wife of your neighbor.

So now the headline story is about Jesus speaking to the crowds about the Law of God. I was there. I heard Jesus for the very first time. When he talked about the command, "Do not kill," the next thing he said was, "but I say to you, do not be angry with your brother." Over and over I heard him use the words, "but I say to you." What followed that phrase was always a more strict meaning of the law. As a Scribe, I was truly impressed with his knowledge of the Law. He is quite a teacher as well, however, I am still not ready to be his follower.

Subj: Jesus, again
Date: 28 A.D.
From: Malachi@BTimes
To: Jonah@Solomon's Portico

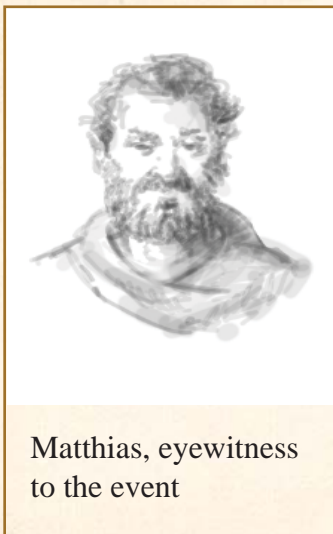
Issue 5

Jonah,

This fellow's getting bolder every day.

Jesus' Outlandish Claim

All over the country, people are talking about Jesus of Nazareth and debating about whether he is a great prophet or a dangerous troublemaker. But in one town of Israel, opinion seems to be pretty much unanimously against him—Jesus' own hometown, Nazareth.



Jesus was in Nazareth recently and attended synagogue there on the Sabbath. He read a passage from Isaiah that clearly refers to the Messiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has appointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

Then he told the people, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." In other words, he was claiming to be the Messiah!

Anywhere else in Israel, he probably would have found some to support his claim. But in Nazareth, they remember him growing up and learning carpentry from his father Joseph. They were convinced he was blaspheming. The men of Nazareth surrounded Jesus and forced him out of town, to the edge of a cliff. An eyewitness we spoke with said they meant to throw him over.

But then an amazing thing happened. "One minute he was on the edge of the cliff, surrounded by an angry mob," says our informant, "and the next minute he was on the other side of the crowd, calmly walking away to safety. Nobody knows how he got there. But I for one am glad he got away. Even if he is from Nazareth, he's no ordinary man. I wouldn't want to have his blood on my hands." Neither would we.



From the desk of The Scribe

"History in Service of Wisdom"

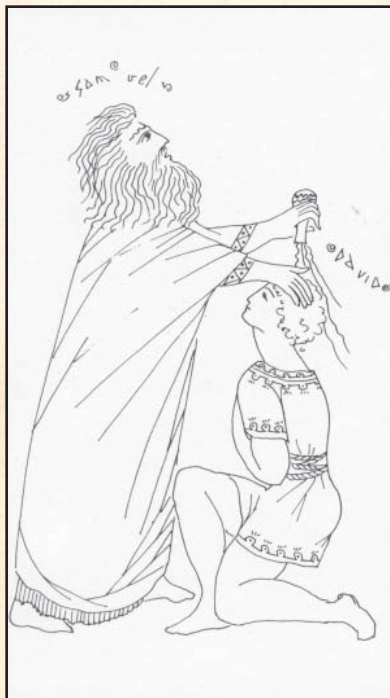
Let us consider what we know of the Messiah...

In his recent teaching in the synagogue, Jesus said he was the one, the Messiah, that the prophet Isaiah spoke of. Can this be true? Let us recall what we know about the Messiah.

Our ancestors lived through bad times: wars, slavery, invasions. During these times they asked God for a savior--someone to deliver them from their distress. Sometimes God, himself, helped from heaven. Other times he sent help through people he chose.

Prophets received word from God to anoint special men with oil, as a sign that God had chosen them. The word 'messiah' simply means 'anointed one,' and many such as Saul, Elisha, Aaron, and even Cyrus of Persia were the messiahs of old. But the greatest anointed one in the history of our people was King David.

Anointed by Samuel, David united all Israel and led us to victory over our enemies. From humble beginnings as a shepherd God made him the great shepherd of Israel, saying: "I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be ruler over my people Israel." David's descendants ruled over Judah for hundreds of years--some good, some bad.



Yet they knew another Son of David would come. He would be good, and strong. He would gather all the Israelites into his kingdom. He would be a good shepherd, one who would care for the people and teach them the ways of the Lord. They only saw this Coming One dimly, or in brief glimpses, but they spoke of him in times of deep distress. The hope arose that this One, like David, would return glory and greatness to Israel. There is more to write on this than space allows.

Subj: The Kingdom according to Jesus
Date: 28 A.D.
From: Malachi@BTimes
To: Jonah@Solomon's Portico

Issue 6

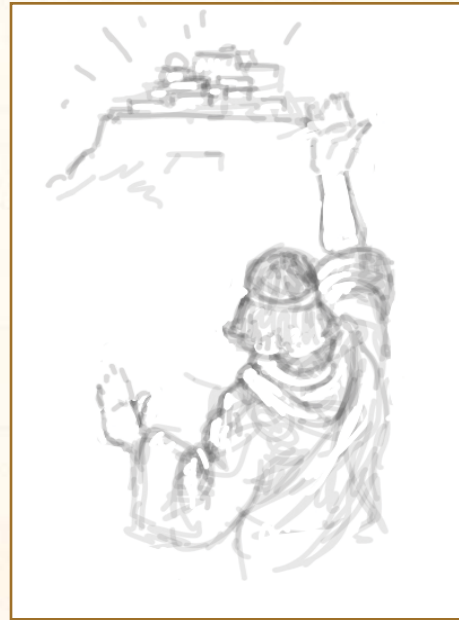
Jesus teaches on "Kingdom of God"

Timothy of Caesarea is waiting for the Kingdom of God. He explains, "Ever since the prophets spoke of it long ago, our people have known that God is going to return to us. He will restore the Kingdom." It seems that Timothy is not alone in this hope, as interest in ancient prophecies and dissatisfaction with Rome both continue to grow throughout the region.

Another reason for growing interest in a coming Kingdom has been the teaching of Jesus, the popular preacher from Nazareth. He has referred to the Kingdom often. He has instructed his followers to pray that the Kingdom would come and to seek for it earnestly.

Some religious leaders who have been critical of Jesus have also taken note of his Kingdom teaching. "The rabbi from Nazareth has only outrageous things to say," said one scholar. "He has even said that when the Kingdom is restored, many Jews will be left outside in darkness, while Gentiles enter in. This Jesus sounds like a Gentile-lover, not a leader of the Chosen People of God!"

Another ground for calling Jesus a Gentile-lover is his teaching that we should love our enemies. Another difficult and confusing teaching of Jesus is that the Kingdom should be the most important thing in a person's life. In fact, he advised followers to "seek first the Kingdom of God," without being concerned about such mundane trifles as food and clothing. Whatever else we may say of Jesus' ideas about the Kingdom of God, it seems clear that this Kingdom is not easy to attain.





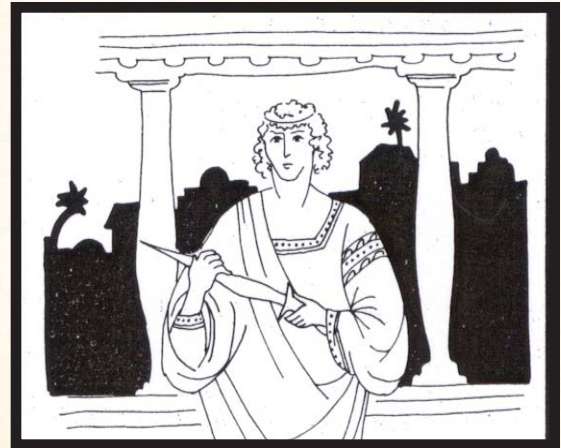
From the desk of The Scribe
"History in Service of Wisdom"

Let us consider what we know of the Messiah's Kingdom . . .

In my last column I recalled for us that the Messiah will be a kingly figure, a son of David--a royal shepherd to unite Israel and rule justly. The Messiah will also be a teacher to explain His will and to show Israel how to live in His presence. He will show us the meaning of the Scriptures and how everything must come to pass.

The Messiah will also restore true worship. No longer will there be corrupt high priests or Temple officials who care more about pleasing worldly rulers than about worshipping the Ruler of All. Israel will be united in worship of the true God.

God will destroy His enemies and there will be peace--the lion will lay down with the lamb. He will restore Israel to her rightful place--leading the world in procession to the kingdom on the mountain of God, Zion.



There God and His Messiah will preside over an enormous victory banquet. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine . . . And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever.

Subj: The recent storm
Date: 28 A.D.
From: Malachi@BTimes
To: Jonah@Solomon's Portico

Issue 7

Jonah,

You don't have to worry about job security thanks to Jesus of Nazareth.

Boat Trip Nearly A Disaster

An ordinary boat trip involving Jesus of Nazareth nearly ended in disaster. The renowned teacher was attempting to cross the sea with some of his disciples when a sudden storm overtook the boat. One of the disciples who was there, Andrew, described events.

"Everything was clear when we pushed off, and we expected smooth sailing. Then this storm kicked up out of nowhere, furious. The waves were crashing in on us, and the boat was taking water. We weren't able to keep control.

"The weird thing was, the Master slept through all this. Don't ask me how. We had to wake him to tell him what was happening. Then things got pretty strange. He asks odd questions sometimes, but we couldn't believe it when he asked why we were afraid. Then he stood and spoke to the storm, telling it to be quiet. And the really incredible thing is, the storm stopped dead at just that moment. Like it was obeying him. We knew Jesus was something special, but that really blew us away."





From the desk of The Scribe

"History in Service of Wisdom"

Let us consider the signs . . .

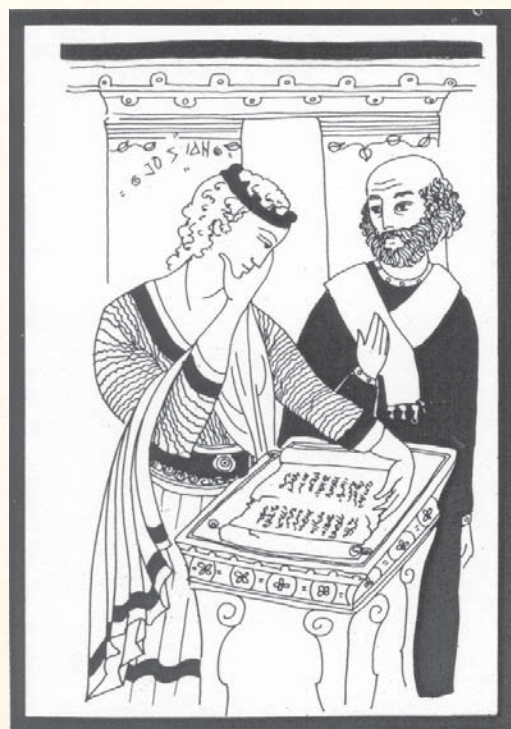
We again are commenting on an episode involving Jesus of Nazareth. In today's column, it is his strange power over the sea that has caused many to wonder, "Could Jesus be the Messiah?" For the faithful, there is only one way to know for sure: consult the Holy Scriptures. They tell us many things about our salvation and the signs that will accompany the Messiah.

The Psalms, in particular, describe the power of God who is our salvation. In Psalm 65, the psalmist addresses God this way: "O God of our salvation . . . You who still the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the peoples."

In Psalm 89, the psalmist says to God: "You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them."

And in Psalm 107, there is an extensive description of God's control of the sea: "For He commands and raises the stormy wind, which lifts up the waves of the sea. They mount up to the heavens, they go down again to the depths; their soul melts because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end. Then they cry out to the LORD in their trouble, and He brings them out of their distresses. He calms the storm, so that its waves are still. Then they are glad because they are quiet; so He guides them to their desired haven."

These passages all describe God's authority over the raging seas. The seas are mighty and sometimes chaotic, but God's power over the sea is a sign of His strength and His salvation. Perhaps no sign so far is as great as that which he performed from the deck of a storm-tossed boat in the middle of the Galilean sea. He subdued the storm with only a word. He brought his disciples safely to the other side.



Subj: Jesus provides food
Date: 29 A.D.
From: Malachi@BTimes
To: Jonah@Solomon's Portico

Issue 8

Your last column had me wondering about the Nazarene. I bet you're going to write about the manna when our ancestors were in the desert. Interesting parallel.

Jesus Provides Bread for Thousands

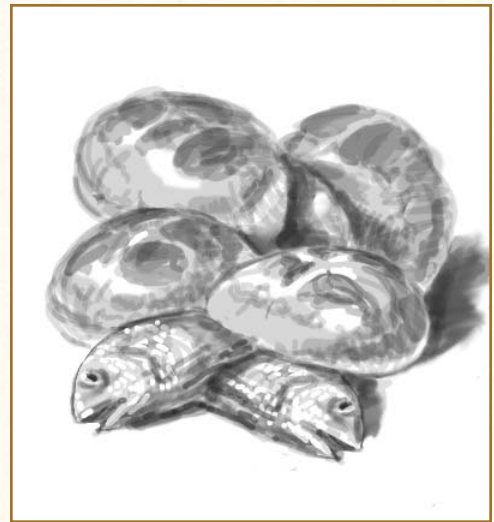
BETHSAIDA— As twilight fell on the Galilean countryside, thousands of hungry people found themselves in a deserted place without provisions. By nightfall, however, they were no longer hungry, fed as they were by one equally without provisions: Jesus of Nazareth.

The crowd had followed Jesus, who was traveling by boat on the Sea of Galilee, to a lonely spot on the shore. By the time he and his disciples disembarked, thousands were already waiting. What followed was a scene familiar to most Galileans. Jesus, surrounded by eager throngs, ministered to the sick and spoke to the crowds. But then the unexpected happened. According to one Galilean mother, "Before we knew it, it was beginning to get dark. My children were hungry, and no one in our family (including me!) had brought any bread. We were about to set off for the nearest village when we heard Jesus telling everyone to sit down."

The crowds, finding places on the grass, did sit. After speaking briefly with his disciples, Jesus stepped forward, lifted up a few loaves of bread and a couple of dried fish, and said a short prayer. Then he began handing out bread to his disciples. The disciples, like servants at a banquet, bustled through the crowd, handing out bread and fish.

According to one disciple, Philip, "Those people were hungry and none too patient. The food went fast. I don't know where it was coming from, but Jesus always had more for me when I came back to him to fill my basket." Philip continued, "Just when we finished handing out all the food, the Master sent us back out to gather all the leftovers. It's a good thing we did, because there were baskets full to spare."

This raises the question: Where did Jesus, who scarcely travels with enough provisions for his own band of disciples, let alone a huge crowd, get food for so many? No one in the crowd seemed to know for sure, but none who were familiar with Jesus seemed too surprised. As one man put it, "The Teacher loves us, and love sometimes has strange ways."





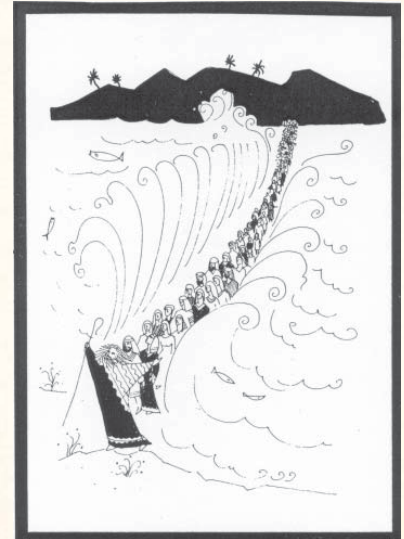
From the desk of The Scribe

"History in Service of Wisdom"

Let us recall the heavenly manna . . .

Jesus has done something extraordinary, but is it a sign? If so, a sign of what?

The Holy Scriptures tell us that God is able to feed His people, to prepare a table in the wilderness. Recall the event we know as the "exodus." Moses acted as God's voice and demanded that the Pharaoh in Egypt release the Israelites. When the Pharaoh refused, plagues were sent—10 in all—to the Egyptians. When the Pharaoh finally released God's people, God parted the Red Sea so Moses could lead them to safety. Our ancestors then began their wandering through the Red Sea, for forty years, until they arrived at the promised land.



Not long after Moses led them through the Red Sea, the Israelites began to complain. Our ancestors asked whether God had saved them from Pharaoh in Egypt only to kill them with hunger in the desert. They had left their homes with much excitement in the middle of the night, only to find themselves in the wilderness. They needed to be fed. God, in His mercy, provided manna for the ex-slaves He had brought out of Egypt—in a place where no ordinary food could be found. In so doing, He not only provided for their immediate physical need, but demonstrated His faithfulness.

I see a similarity between what Jesus did, and what God did for our ancestors. In both cases, the crowds left their homes and found themselves in a deserted place. Jesus looked out on the leaderless multitudes that had followed him, and had compassion on them—he refused to send them away empty. In like manner, Moses prayed to God to help a hungry multitude.

Now Jesus blessed and broke the few loaves of bread, and the fish, and satisfied the hunger of thousands. The Holy Scriptures show us that with God there are feasts in the desert, abundant food in places of want, and times of refreshing when our need is great. In feeding the crowds who followed him, Jesus showed himself to have power and compassion far beyond ordinary men. Perhaps the mysterious meal of Jesus by the Sea of Galilee is a sign that the God who did not forsake our hungry ancestors will not leave us hungry, ever again.

Subj: Follow-up on last story
Date: 29 A.D.
From: Malachi@BTimes
To: Jonah@Solomon's Portico

Issue 9

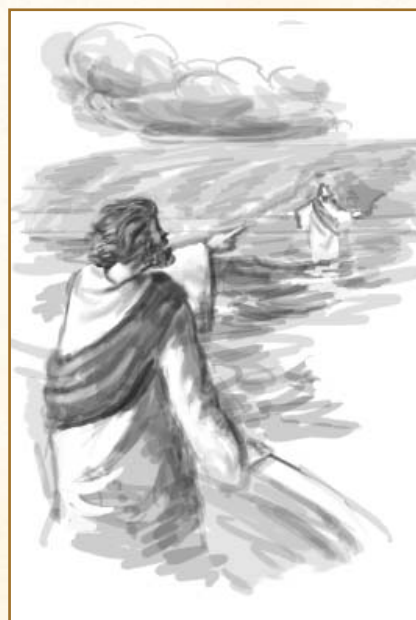
Jonah,

I am back to where I started after reading this report--he seems some kind of odd ball now.

Jesus Makes an Odd Path to Gennesaret

GENNESARET— Those familiar with Jesus have to come to expect healings and exorcisms, but no one was prepared to guess Jesus' most recent mode of travel. Just hours after hosting a feast for thousands, Jesus and his disciples arrived by boat at Gennesaret. Yet it was no ordinary voyage.

The night before, Jesus had instructed the disciples to begin sailing without him, telling them that he would meet them later. The crew of disciples set out and soon encountered stiff winds and troubled seas. "We were straining at the oars—even Judas was helping—but we couldn't make any progress," reported one of Jesus' disciples. "We were tired, and some of us were getting worried when we spotted the Master walking calmly through the storm. He got in the boat with us and everything grew quiet." Another disciple added, "The strange thing was that the Master did not seem to be looking for us. He was about to walk right by us when Peter called to him. He asked if he could come to the Master. He was told that he could, and did begin to, before he fell. Jesus grabbed him." The disciples were terrified by the experience and took some time to recover.



When they arrived in Gennesaret, Jesus was met by a crowd who had followed him, looking for more miracles. Knowing that the people were hoping for another free meal, Jesus exhorted them instead to look for the bread of heaven—which he said was he himself.

In a speech that caused great distress to his disciples, and added to his opponents' arguments, Jesus claimed to have come down from heaven. "This is the bread which came down from heaven--not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever." He claimed that he has the power to raise up to heaven all those who would believe in him. He spoke of giving his life for the world. He outraged his listeners by suggesting that they should actually eat his flesh and drink his blood—presumably, after his death. He claimed that this cannibalistic feast would guarantee eternal life to those who partook of it. Jesus has certainly given his followers a mouthful to swallow this time, and many of his followers could not stomach it. They left him in droves.



From the desk of The Scribe

"History in Service of Wisdom"

Jesus: Bread of Heaven?

As I read the news of Jesus' walking on water, I thought, "Well, that just further adds to the question of who, but God, has power over nature? I was ready to find him and speak with him, myself, at that point. Then I read the rest of the story . . . What can we possibly make of this man, Jesus, who, on the one hand seems to be God's "chosen one," since he heals the sick, casts out demons and feeds the crowds with nothing, and on the other hand, leads us into a wall by stating that we can get to heaven by eating his flesh and drinking his blood?

I am speechless, for once. I have searched tirelessly through the scriptures to find a clue from our past that can give us wisdom in regard to Jesus' recent speech. None, there are no clues. The only thing I can say is, the Messiah will usher in an everlasting kingdom--he will not die.

The debate outside my door has been loud these days. Yes, I did lean towards believing that Jesus was the Messiah previously, despite the clamor from the other scribes who disagree with me. Now, it seems to me that we must proceed cautiously with our hope that he is the Messiah.

Subj: Jesus, again
Date: 28 A.D.
From: Malachi@BTimes
To: Jonah@Solomon's Portico

Issue 10

Jonah,

This fellow's getting bolder every day.

Jesus Debates Religious Leaders

GALILEE— They came all the way from Jerusalem to see him. A group of scribes and Pharisees from the capital met with Jesus here in Galilee, as one official put it, "in order to see the young rabbi firsthand." One member of the delegation, a scholar from Jerusalem named Elishama, called the meeting "a serious disappointment." Upon meeting Jesus, he continued, "we noticed immediately that he and his disciples have no regard for the traditions of our forefathers." Evidently, Jesus failed to correct his disciples when, at the start of a meal, they "dug right in without washing hands, utensils, or anything else!" "We asked Jesus politely to explain this," Elishama continued, "but he began hurling insults at us. We do not deserve such treatment!"

An onlooker, Abiezer of Capernaum, offered a different account. "These Pharisees strolled in with their flowing robes and proud looks. They tried to belittle Jesus' disciples and Jesus stood up to them by telling them the truth. Many of us recalled how the prophets were not afraid to speak against the authorities." In the discussion that followed, Jesus criticized the Pharisees for clinging to human legal traditions while neglecting God's commandments. The example that Jesus gave concerned the honoring of parents. Abiezer described the debate: "I have always wondered about the 'Corban' law. The Pharisees say that, instead of using our money to support our aging parents, we should use our money to make offerings to God. But Jesus set them straight. He told them that it was God who commanded us to honor our parents in the first place. How could God then be pleased with an offering that is made possible by disobedience?"



As the discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees intensified, Jesus stood and called to people in the street. He gathered a large crowd around himself, glanced over at the tight group of Pharisees, and spoke loudly, "There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man." Jesus and his disciples then left the scene.



From the desk of The Scribe

"History in Service of Wisdom"

Let us consider Jesus as a prophet . . .

While many consider Jesus a teacher, I would like you to consider him as a prophet. Let me explain the similarities.

Jesus has used the words of the prophet, Isaiah, "These people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me." to speak of the Pharisees. I am sorry to say, especially since I am well acquainted with many Pharisees, that he speaks the truth. Like the leaders of old, today's Pharisees are experts in religious matters and are quite strict. And like our ancestors, they often overlook that which is most important, love and mercy. Instead, they use the Law to make themselves look better than others. I do not say this of all Pharisees, but the point needed to be made.



Another prophet of old, Micah, also told the "experts," that their worship was empty. He helped people understand what God wanted more than anything. Micah explained that God demands that his people "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God." With this brief description of our duty to God, Micah showed the strength and simplicity of true worship.

Similarly, there is something strong and simple about the teaching of Jesus. He reminds me of Micah in that way. Recently, I understand, Jesus acknowledged that there are only two great commandments. These are, "You shall love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength," and, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." May we live these, and walk humbly with our God.

Subj: A Close Call for Jesus
Date: 29 A.D.
From: Malachi@BTimes
To: Jonah@Solomon's Portico

Issue 11

Jonah,

I knew the Nazarene was headed for trouble when he criticized the Pharisees.

Jesus Escapes Stoning



JERUSALEM--A riot broke out on the Temple grounds yesterday when religious leaders clashed with Jesus in Solomon's Portico, amidst the crowd who had come to celebrate the Feast of Dedication. According to eyewitnesses, Jesus was walking alone when a group surrounded him and began to question him aggressively, demanding that he tell them whether he was the Messiah.

Jesus responded that he had already told them, but that they did not believe. He then referred to a previous occasion when he had described himself as "the good shepherd who gives his life for the sheep." He continued, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."

While the crowd were debating among themselves what this meant and who the sheep were supposed to be, Jesus went on to say that his father had given the sheep to him and that no one could take them away from him. Then he made the extraordinary claim that he would give his sheep eternal life. A whisper of "Blasphemy!" began to spread through the crowd. But when Jesus ended his speech by saying, "I and my Father are one," the whisper became a shout. People began picking up stones to stone Jesus, in accordance with the penalty prescribed by the Law for blasphemy.

Jesus asked the angry crowd why they wanted to stone him, and urged them to believe that he is one with God, because of the "works" that he has done. This response only angered his opponents more, and Jesus was forced to flee the scene.

It was not the first time that Jesus, who enjoys great popularity in Galilee, has encountered strife and controversy in Jerusalem. For here in the holy city, leaders, Temple officials, and scholars have expressed great concern over Jesus and have challenged him on numerous occasions.

After yesterday's confrontation, Jesus and his followers left the city and moved across the Jordan River, where the followers of his cousin, John the Baptizer, apparently granted him safe haven. Reports have been received that many of John's followers are now transferring their loyalty to Jesus.



From the desk of The Scribe
"History in Service of Wisdom"

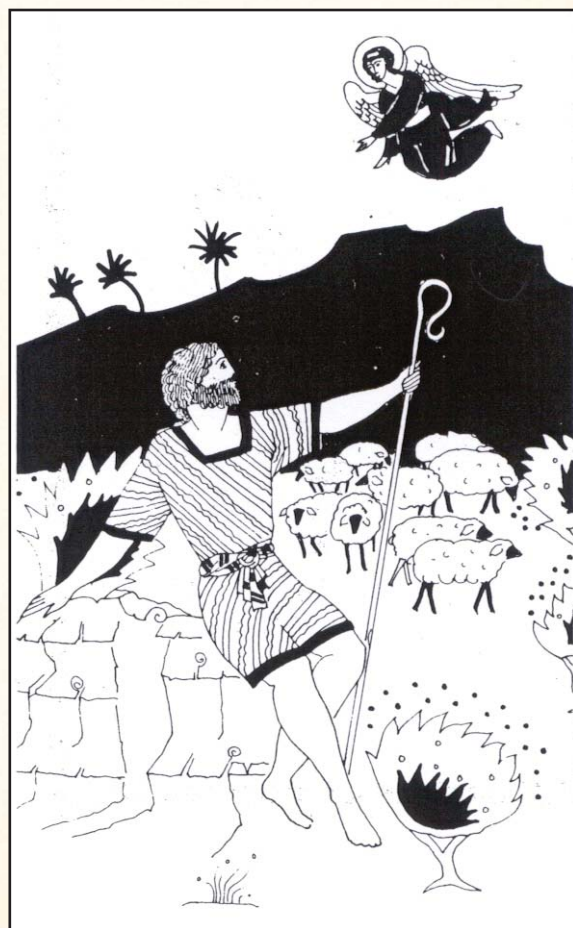
Let us recall what the Holy Scriptures teach us about the Shepherd and the end of time . . .

As I read the news, I was quick to recall that in the end days God himself will come to search, as a shepherd, for the lost sheep.

There was a time when our ancestors were ruled by King David, himself a shepherd, and the model for the messiah to come--close to God, a righteous man. After he died, the people were still living in peace and prosperity; however, they strayed from the covenant when they no longer took care of the weak and poor in their midst. Because of this, the prophets declared that God would punish his people, and bring their kingdom to its knees. But He would not abandon His people; He would set up a new and lasting Kingdom.

God Himself would come to set up the everlasting kingdom. He would, according to Jeremiah and Ezekiel, "search for His sheep and seek them out as shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep." He would restore a son of David to the throne: "They shall serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them." His people, now united and faithful to Him, would lead the whole world in worship of the true God:

Such was and is the hope of Israel. In the recent episode at the Temple, Jesus spoke of himself as the Shepherd, come to gather the sheep. The officials were correct to call this blasphemy.



Subj: New topic this time--forgiveness
Date: 29 A.D.
From: Malachi@BTimes
To: Jonah@Solomon's Portico

Issue 12

He seems to like stories.

Jesus Offers New Ideas on Forgiveness

The rabbis have always said that three is enough. If someone sins against you, they say, you owe it to them to forgive up to three times. One of Jesus' disciples, Peter, recently asked Jesus about the matter, suggesting that we might need to forgive as many as seven times. To Peter's surprise, Jesus told him that he was required to forgive his brother "seventy times seven times"—which is essentially to say, "Don't keep account."

Jesus went on to tell the story of a servant who owed the king an impossibly large amount of money that he could never repay. When he pleaded for more time, the king had mercy on him and forgave him his entire debt. But the forgiven servant then went out and found a fellow servant, who owed him only a small amount, and demanded payment. This man also begged for more time, but instead of showing the same mercy that had been shown to him, the first servant had the second one thrown into prison. The king became furious when he learned of it, and sent the first servant to be tortured until he repaid every cent of the original debt. In this way, Jesus concluded, will God deal with those who do not forgive.





From the desk of The Scribe

"History in Service of Wisdom"

Let us recall that we are to offer mercy . . .

In the news today is the of a servant who had been forgiven, but who, in turn, does not forgive. He is punished for his lack of mercy.

Our scriptures speak of God's mercy as often as they speak of his judgment. Allow me to offer several instances. In the book of Psalms we have the verses:

"O Israel, hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy and with Him is abundant redemption."

"To Thee, O Lord belong mercy and forgiveness."

"The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy."

David writes, knowing his sin, "I have trusted in your mercy."

In the words of the prophets we also read of God's mercy.

"For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee."

"He will send his fury no more, because he delights in mercy. He will turn again, and have mercy on us; he will put away our iniquities, and he will cast all our sins into the bottom of the sea."

Our God is a God of mercy. He has shown us his mercy. We, his people, are to likewise be merciful, and to forgive those who have offended us. God spoke through the prophet Hosea, these words: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice, knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."

Finally, let us recall again the words of Micah, God requires of us that we "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God."

The implication of Jesus' story is that each of us has offended God far more than our brother can ever offend us—and that He is ready to forgive us. All we have to do is be forgiving in our turn. Forgiving more than three times—rather, forgiving always.

Subj: More on forgiveness
Date: 29 A.D.
From: Malachi@BTimes
To: Jonah@Solomon's Portico

Issue 13

Another spin on the forgiveness teaching.

Jesus' Story of the Merciful Father and the Prodigal Son

Today Jesus was heard preaching by way of a story once again. In the story, the father of two sons divides his property. The older son stays to work the land, but the younger asks for his share of possessions, and immediately heads off to a foreign country. There he squanders his inheritance on wild living. After he runs out of money and returns to his senses, he decides to go back to his father, beg for his mercy, and ask to become one of his servants. When the son returns, the father runs to meet him and immediately accepts him back as a son. He orders his servants to kill the fatted calf and throw a huge party in honor of the younger son's return.

The story ends with a dialogue between the father and the older son, who has faithfully remained by his father's side all those years. He thinks the father is being unfair since he had not yet received a feast. The father bids his older son to rejoice that his brother has returned.

The crowd seemed uneasy with the ending of the story and many were heard defending the older son's cause. Jesus did not stay to receive questions.



From the desk of The Scribe
"History in Service of Wisdom"

Let us recall how God's mercy toward King David . . .

In the news today we have another story to ponder from Jesus of Nazareth.

The father loved both of his sons, yet the ways that he treated them can hardly be called equal or fair. What could Jesus possibly mean by telling such a story? Why does he often speak of forgiveness, even so far as blaspheming when he forgives the sin of a person who has come for a healing. These questions I cannot answer. However, I feel that there is something profound in the story I just quoted. The situation is so simple--we cannot help wishing for justice: for the father to turn the younger son away and celebrate the wisdom of the older son. Yet Jesus shows us another ending: the joy of finding one who was lost, and is now found. While we wish for justice, our hearts rejoice in the mercy of the father toward the younger son.

In our scriptures we often read of the Lord's mercy. Perhaps the greatest instance is that of King David after his most grievous sin. King David took Bathsheba, the wife of another man, after sending the man to his death at the front line of a battle. The prophet Nathan spoke God's words of condemnation to David, who then repented. In his words found in the psalms we read:

"For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned and done this evil in Your sight--that you may be found just when you speak, and blameless when You judge."

"You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart--these, O God, You will not despise."

David trusted in God's mercy, and it was given. Oh that God be merciful to us all.

Subj: Jesus' Friend Lazarus
Date: 30 A.D.
From: Malachi@BTimes
To: Jonah@Solomon's Portico

Issue 14

I would not believe this except for all the people who were eyewitnesses.

Lazarus Called Out of the Tomb

BETHANY— Lazarus of Bethany, who died several days ago, shuffled to the entrance of his own tomb yesterday and stood while others, stunned, slowly unwrapped his grave clothes.

Dozens of witnesses looked on as Jesus, long-time friend of Lazarus and his family, came to the tomb entrance and called his friend forth. Lazarus' return from death took place in the middle of the traditional seven-day mourning period, during which numerous friends and relatives were gathered at Lazarus' home to offer condolences and pay respects.

"We all saw it," one eyewitness explained. "Mary (Lazarus' sister) got up all of a sudden and ran out of the house. We followed and saw Mary and Jesus weeping, and then we walked behind them as they headed to the tomb."



Jesus ordered bystanders to roll the stone away. They obeyed, despite cries of protest from the crowd and from Lazarus' sister Martha. "I simply told the Master that there would be an awful stench," Martha said, "but that was before I knew what he was going to do."

According to witnesses, Jesus uttered a short prayer and then shouted Lazarus' name into the darkness of the tomb. "Jesus' voice went right through me. Never in my life have I heard a voice like that," commented one observer. It was then that Lazarus emerged.

Prior to Lazarus' death, rumors had circulated that Jesus, who had healed so many, might come to the aid of his close friend. Many religious leaders from nearby Jerusalem were thus watching the situation closely. When Lazarus died and several days passed, speculation about a miraculous healing by Jesus died down and the leaders returned to Jerusalem. The Pharisees, though, did not expect Jesus to march into Bethany after they had left and raise his friend from the dead in front of a large crowd of mourners. Many of the mourners stayed on to join a feast for the returned Lazarus, while some left for Jerusalem to notify authorities of the day's events.



From the desk of The Scribe

"History in Service of Wisdom"

Let us consider belief in the resurrection . . .

Well, it has finally come to this--Jesus raising a man from the dead. This is not easily explained, so I won't try. I can, however, explain our belief in the resurrection.

When our ancestors walked the earth, they knew, as we do, that death is certain. Beyond death, they believed, was a dark and shadowy place called Sheol where the dead continued in a lesser state of existence. There they were but "shades" or shadows of their former selves, and were thus unable to praise God as the living do.

Through the prophets, God began to unveil the future of Israel. He taught more clearly about His own defeat of death.

According to the Prophet Ezekiel, the people of Israel, destroyed by warfare, would be as dead as dry bones, but God in His mercy would knit the bones together, cover them with flesh, and breathe life into them again. According to Hosea, after two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live before Him."

Two important prophecies come from Isaiah: "The people that walked in darkness, have seen a great light. To them that dwelt in the region of the shadow of death, light is risen." He also foretold the coming of a Suffering Servant who would be crushed to death but then return to "see light" and make many holy.

Then God informed Daniel that at the end of time the dead shall awake, "some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt."

So it was that our ancestors began to understand that God, the Author of Life, would not allow death, our enemy, to have the victory in the end. These days, there are those among us who doubt the resurrection. But Jesus has affirmed its reality, first in words and now most powerfully in his deed of raising a man from the dead.

The words of Jesus, the signs, his actions, all lead me to consider a future I did not think I would see.



Subj: Jesus is in Jerusalem!
Date: 30 A.D.
From: Malachi@BTimes
To: Jonah@Solomon's Portico

Issue 15

Jerusalem Crowds Hail Jesus

JERUSALEM— Passover pilgrims from all over crowded the streets and city gates in order to greet Jesus as he entered the city yesterday. They waved palm branches and spread cloaks on the ground, gestures usually reserved for royalty. Yet Jesus rode into the city on a donkey's colt and not, as kings do, on a horse or in a chariot. Some hailed him as "the King of Israel," while others sang Passover hymns such as "Hosanna!" and "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"



The large crowd, clearly supportive of Jesus, received him eagerly. Observers noted, though, that the entrance marked the first time that Jesus entered Jerusalem publicly. The significance of the public entrance did not escape the notice of Temple authorities and religious leaders. As one Pharisee put it, "We have known all along that Jesus aims to translate his popularity into power. Now Jesus' purposes have become quite clear. Neither Rome nor the Sanhedrin will look favorably on this disgraceful demonstration."



From the desk of The Scribe

"History in Service of Wisdom"

Let us consider Jesus and David . . .



Having no sooner finished my last commentary, I was handed another news story for a later edition of the Biblical Times. I did not need to read it, however, for I was there. When so many hailed him as the king of the Jews, my mind was already racing to recall what the scriptures said about David, our second king, and the one who has given us our example for the Messiah.

God, who promised to raise up a leader "after His own heart," chose David to be king over Israel. David proved himself by stepping forward to fight the Philistine champion, the giant Goliath. He defeated the Philistines and many other rival nations.

He was close to God. So much of his life, prayers, and experience of God are found in the psalms. God honored David, courageous and faithful, when he promised through later prophets that the Messiah would be one of David's descendants.

And now we have one who is being hailed as king of the Jews. It appears that we are growing ever closer to the eternal kingdom, promised to David 1000 years ago. Jesus, a shepherd. David, a shep-

herd. Both close to God; humble men destined for greatness. It is even rumored that Jesus was born in Bethlehem of the house of David. Hosanna!

With Jesus moving into Jerusalem, harness the wagons, for the Romans will soon be moving out!

Subj: Jesus at the Temple
Date: 30 A.D.
From: Malachi@BTimes
To: Jonah@Solomon's Portico

Issue 16

This Jesus is headed for ruin. By the way, Shadrach is having a clearance sale on lamps--the stock left over after this Jesus fellow knocked over his display.

Jesus Rages at Temple Merchants

JERUSALEM— Overturned tables and fallen booths littered the ground. Bullocks, goats, and sheep ran free in the Temple courts. Merchants scrambled to gather up scattered money and merchandise. And in the center of the tumult stood Jesus of Nazareth, scourge of rope in hand and anger in his voice. "He called us thieves and robbers," one merchant said, "and he started driving the animals away and upsetting our tables."

Jesus' actions quickly produced chaos and confusion. Stunned worshippers looked on as Jesus stormed from table to table rebuking the merchants, freeing animals, and flinging trays of money around. No one dared to oppose Jesus while he worked—whether from shock, fear, or both is unclear.

Jesus' own followers were equally surprised by the outburst. "None of us expected this," one of Jesus' disciples explained. "When we arrived at the Temple court, his expression changed. He shouted, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' and then he set to work. No debate, no discussion, no dialogue."



Jesus' actions came just moments after he was greeted by admiring crowds on his way into the city. He had traveled from the city gates straight up to the Temple, as Passover pilgrims traditionally do. Unlike most pilgrims, though, Jesus began, as one pilgrim from Caesarea put it, to "cleanse the Temple." The pilgrim commented further, "I was glad to see the place shaken up. It feels like a market here, and a crooked one at that. These moneychangers and animal-sellers charge tourists' prices, if you know what I mean. Many of us just can't afford to come."

Temple officials, however, criticized Jesus. One Levite asked, "Who does this Jesus think he is? He has no authority in the Temple and no right to do the things he is doing." After the merchants and moneychangers left, crowds gathered in the Temple courts to hear Jesus and bring their sick to him. The chief priests, who could not be reached for comment, reportedly met behind closed doors to discuss the situation.



From the desk of The Scribe

"History in Service of Wisdom"

Let us recall the holiness of the Temple . . .

So, people are surprised and shocked by the actions of Jesus at the Temple. I am not. I say this knowing that my editor may not print any more of my commentaries. We should have driven out the merchants and money changers long ago. The temple should be an area set apart--holy--a place where we come to meet God, without the noise of the merchants.

Jesus' actions reminded me of the occupation of the Syrian forces two centuries ago. The Syrian king Antiochus IV conquered Jerusalem and drove out faithful priests, set up an altar to Zeus in the holy Temple, and even ordered that pigs be sacrificed there to the gods of the Greeks. With the Temple thus desecrated, proper worship was impossible and the Temple fell into disrepair. Plants grew wild in its courts, and the old priests' chambers lay in ruins.

After the Syrian king was driven from the land by Judas Maccabees and his brothers, they inspected the ruined Temple. One described the sanctuary as "desolate," "profane," and filled with "putrid carcasses and idols." Priests, knowledgeable in the Law of God, began the purification process. We recall this event during eight days of celebration--Hannukah.

God's temple is meant for worship. Jesus has done what is right. Instead of the Temple officials asking, "Who does this Jesus think he is?" Let them turn the question on themselves, and all who read this as well, "Who do YOU think this Jesus is?" May he advance fearlessly, steadily and surely as he brings the kingdom God has promised.



Subj: Jesus Drawing Crowds
Date: 30 A.D.
From: Malachi@BTimes
To: Jonah@Solomon's Portico

Issue 17

I read your last commentary with dismay--don't cast your lot with the Nazarene. People are starting to take sides. I am betting there will be some kind of trouble and we surely don't need the Romans "keeping order in our streets." He is not worth the trouble he is causing.

Jesus Shocks the Crowds, and Officials, Again

Jerusalem--In Jerusalem recently, Jesus gave crowds more to think about, before he was questioned by the priests and scholars. Jesus announced, "Whoever sees me sees the one who sent me," and, "I came into the world as light, so that everyone who believes in me might not remain in darkness."

When asked about the importance of his own teachings compared with those of the patriarchs and prophets, Jesus replied, "If anyone hears my words and does not observe them, I do not condemn him." While a sigh of relief was heard from the crowd, it was quickly followed by shock as Jesus explained, "For I did not come to condemn the world, but to save the world." That day he also told the crowds that salvation depends on believing in him, and the one who sent him.

One of the bystanders also noted to this reporter yet another puzzling statement Jesus had made recently, in brief, it was that a grain of wheat must die before it lives. I quote my source, "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."

As it is not often that Jesus of Nazareth comes to Jerusalem or teaches publicly in the Temple. Priests and scholars, gathered about him. They are extremely concerned about the the Galilean preacher, and believed it to their advantage to question Jesus while he is "in their own backyard." Jesus did not seem disturbed by their questions.

The Sadducees asked Jesus cynical questions about the resurrection, but Jesus answered these with scriptural proofs. One layman who has witnessed many such exchanges said of the Temple leaders: "If they're trying to make him look bad, it's not working." Crowds of Jewish pilgrims are hanging on his every word and deed, and the Greeks, those famous seekers of wisdom, are purportedly asking for an audience with Jesus.



From the desk of The Scribe

"History in Service of Wisdom"

Let us consider a grain of wheat . . .

Just when Jesus seems poised to launch an enormous popular movement, to gather up the loyalties of Jews and Gentiles everywhere, he taught a lesson about dying. I quote the news report: "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."

To me, the idea is not new. I have thought of this many times as I studied the scriptures. Consider Abraham. He left his homeland where he was established and living well, to follow God's command to journey to a new land. He eventually did very well there, but it could not have been easy. More importantly, when God asked him to bring his only son, the one he thought he would never have, up the mountain to kill him as a sacrifice. Abraham must have died with every step he took toward that end. God stayed his hand, and Isaac was spared. God demands our loyalty, we can not have anything between us and God, if we want to be in the kingdom.

What does it mean to "hate your life?" Open your heart to this question, and ponder it long--did these "hate" their lives, or did they hate the possibility of life without God? Now that it is time for the kingdom to come, we shall see how this plays out.



Subj: He Keeps Asking for Trouble
Date: 30 A.D.
From: Malachi@BTimes
To: Jonah@Solomon's Portico

Issue 18

Heard your wife was sick--how is she doing?

Jesus Teaches About Giving All



Prominent religious leaders were on hand yesterday to greet an impressive delegation of wealthy donors. The event, which brought merchants, bankers, and landowners from all over the region, was part of an ongoing effort to raise funds for the Temple treasury. Temple staff announced the arrival of each donor and, after meticulous counting, the size of his contribution. Some of the largest offerings, when announced, drew gasps from the crowd.

A small receptacle, placed off to the side, was available for more ordinary gifts. It was little used. Jesus of Nazareth, though not part of the ceremonies, was also on hand with his disciples. He watched as an older woman, a childless widow, dropped two pennies in the receptacle and slipped away. "The Master pointed her out to us and said to our surprise that this widow had given more than any of the rich donors," one disciple said. When

asked about this strange statement, Jesus explained that the wealthy donors actually sacrificed little; their livelihood remained untouched. But the widow, he explained, entrusted all she had to God.



From the desk of The Scribe

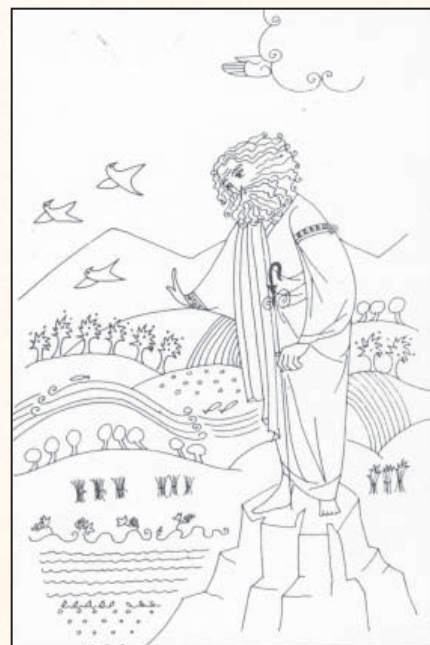
"History in Service of Wisdom"

Let us remember the tithe...

A little woman, a little gift, a very big lesson in the recent news. Here is what I bring to you from our scriptures.

After forty long years of wanderings, our ancestors stood by the River Jordan, just across from the Promised Land. Our father Moses, who was nearing the end of his life, spoke to the Israelites, reminded them of hard lessons they had learned, and encouraged them anew to obey God in the land He was giving them. This is what he said:

"The Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, . . . a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, . . . a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper. You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land that He has given you."



Everything our ancestors needed would be provided. But how were God's people to respond? Moses instructed them, once they were in the land, to set aside a tenth of their flocks and harvested crops. The Israelites were to bring these offerings to the Temple and share them with the Levites and priests, who devoted themselves full-time to the worship of God.

So it was that God, who gave our ancestors all they needed and more, required His people to give a tenth, or to tithe, in return. In tithing, our ancestors were drawn more fully into the worship of their gracious Provider. They thus gave thanks to the one who gave them all. They showed that they knew their very lives depended on Him.

God is pleased with a tithe freely given, but He is even more pleased when we give over and above the tithe. The widow whom Jesus recently commended in the Temple gave not merely a tithe, but all that she had to live on. In this she obeyed the Great Commandment: to love God with all that we have and are.

Subj: His death
Date: 30 A.D.
From: Malachi@BTimes
To: Jonah@Solomon's Portico

Issue 19

I knew he wouldn't last long in Jerusalem

Jesus Executed

JERUSALEM— Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified earlier today, died sometime in the mid-afternoon while hanging on a cross. Crowds lined the streets as Jesus was marched through the city, carrying the huge wooden crossbeam of his own cross.

Jesus' popularity, it seemed, had never been greater than it was this Passover week. Despite rumors that the authorities were plotting against him, Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem. He drove out Temple merchants, faced down religious leaders in public debates, and held forth in front of eager crowds. All of this came to an abrupt end, when Jewish authorities, escorted by Roman soldiers and guided by one of Jesus' own disciples, apprehended Jesus in the middle of the night.



After a brief interview with Annas, father-in-law of Caiaphas the high priest, Jesus was made to stand before the entire ruling council in an unprecedented night trial. Jesus said nothing as witnesses came forward to testify against him, though one comment about "the Son of Man" was declared blasphemous. A death sentence followed immediately.

Early the next morning, the Jewish authorities took Jesus to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, and informed him that they had passed a death sentence against Jesus. Pilate was reluctant to execute a man for breaking Jewish law (not Roman law) and sent him to stand before Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee. Herod demanded that Jesus perform signs to prove his "kingship," but Jesus remained silent. Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate. Pilate had Jesus scourged, but this did not satisfy Jesus' accusers. Pilate gave in to the demands of Jewish leaders and handed Jesus over to be crucified. Jesus endured the mocking and gratuitous beatings in silence, and he walked, under the weight of his own cross, to Skull Hill outside Jerusalem.

Many in the crowd urged Jesus to "save himself." One observer, a member of the Sanhedrin, explained, "If he were everything he claimed to be, he would not be dying such a pathetic death. He is a blasphemer, nothing more, and his death proves it." Just before dying on the cross, Jesus cried out in a loud voice.

His death was remarkably quick for a crucifixion. When the soldiers went around breaking the legs of the prisoners so that they would die before the beginning of the Sabbath, Jesus was already dead. They then pierced his side. Soldiers who witnessed it remarked that ordinarily, victims of crucifixion suffocate slowly and thus lose the strength to cry out long before they die. The young Galilean, who just hours before had seemed to all eyes invincible, is dead.



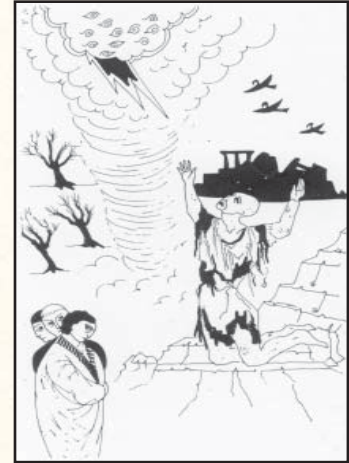
From the desk of The Scribe

"History in Service of Wisdom"

Let us recall, again, the Suffering Servant...

The crucifixion of Jesus--my head is reeling. I am not sure my words will make any sense. Nothing makes sense any more. As I read the scriptures, the Messiah is to reign forever, in a kingdom of righteous people who love God more than themselves. I know I have written on Isaiah's Suffering Servant before, but bear with me.

There is an old song the prophet Isaiah taught our people long ago. It describes a servant who, like many servants, was humble, ordinary, and unremarkable. He was mocked, rejected, despised, and even beaten until he became unrecognizable. Enemies flocked to smear his name and see to his execution. The final insult was to deny him proper burial by assigning him a tomb among the wicked.



But there was more to the servant than all this. Nobody knew it, but this poor man was in fact a servant of God. The song tells us that the servant's suffering had a purpose, one that would "startle nations" and "shut the mouths of kings." He would bear the suffering silently and nobly, and things would result that "have never been told or heard." This servant, in meeting death, would bear the sin of all and carry our weaknesses. Though dead and buried among the wicked, he would somehow see light, make many holy, and be exalted by God. "Therefore," says God as the song ends, "I will allot him a portion with the great . . . because he poured out himself to death," for the sinful,

It reminds us of the strange ways of God, whereby the humble overcome the proud and the lowly defeat the powerful. More than this, it prepares mind, heart, and imagination for the possibility that a rescue--dare we hope--may yet come to a sinful and ignorant people. Whether Jesus, the lowly carpenter's son from Nazareth, is the awaited Suffering Servant is not yet clear. Crushed and beaten he certainly was, but exalted and full of light he is not . . .

Subj: Resurrection!!!???
Date: 30 A.D.
From: Malachi@BTimes
To: Jonah@Solomon's Portico

Issue 20

I've sent two stories of the same event . . . I think the followers of the Nazarene have gone mad with grief.

Jesus' Tomb Is Empty!

JERUSALEM— Yesterday, Roman soldiers notified Jewish leaders that the tomb where Jesus was placed just days ago is now empty. According to a Roman military spokesman, a guard detail had been set at the tomb after Jesus' burial, and it remained there round the clock at the special request of the chief priests. "Roman guards do not fail," he explained. "We are trained to carry out our duties—or to die trying."

Speculation continues, however, in part because of the testimony of some of Jesus' followers. Several women had gone to the tomb early on Sunday to anoint Jesus' body. According to them, the soldiers were "unconscious" and not asleep. They met a "rather frightening man" at the tomb who told them that Jesus was alive. Shortly after leaving the tomb site, the women reported seeing Jesus himself on the road alone. Temple officials, responding to the report, pointed out that the testimony of a woman has no weight in a court of law.



Men Report Encounter with Jesus

EMMAUS— Two men met a stranger on the road who they claim was Jesus of Nazareth come back from the dead. Cleopas of Emmaus and his companion, a certain physician named Luke, were traveling from Jerusalem to Emmaus by foot. Along the way, a traveler approached them and joined their conversation. "It was very odd," Cleopas reported. "This man seemed at first to know little about what has been happening in Jerusalem. Instead he seemed far more interested in what the Scriptures teach about the Messiah. As it turns out, the two things are sides of the same coin."

The two, evidently disciples, did not recognize the man at first, but later judged him to be Jesus. "When we sat down to eat together, we realized quite suddenly that it was the Master—something about the way he blessed and broke bread," Cleopas explained. "Just as quickly, though, the Master vanished from our sight." According to the two men, who left Emmaus after the sighting and headed right back to Jerusalem, the strange traveler was both familiar and unfamiliar, both like Jesus and unlike him. How the two men can be so sure it was Jesus thus remains unclear.



From the desk of The Scribe

"History in Service of Wisdom"

An Empty Tomb? What Are We to Think?

Despair filled my heart only a few days ago. My head was clouded with doubts. Today, I find my head clearing and my heart swelling. The city of Jerusalem is filled with rumors and stories of Jesus returned from the dead, including one from a respected physician.

We who have read the news of Jesus these past few years have many recollections of him. We heard how Jesus calmed angry seas with a simple command. We heard how he fed thousands with a few loaves and fish, as Moses fed the people in the desert. He stood, like the prophets of old, against religious abuse and hypocrisy. Sickness, disease, and demons fled from him. The orphans and widows, the poor and forgotten flocked to him and found joy in his words. It would seem that he was indeed "the son going about the Father's business," as he once said, and that he was truly the Messiah of God.



To be fair, consider the evidence that flies against that conclusion. We recall many occasions when Jesus preached words hard to stomach. What could he possibly mean by saying so seriously, "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood will have life eternal"? His finest moment, when he rode into Jerusalem to the praises of the crowd, was followed only a few days later by the sight of him crucified outside the city gates. The Scriptures teach that the Messiah will usher in a new age--God will restore the line of David and the fortunes of Israel. Yet, Jesus, abandoned by his own followers, died a horrible and humiliating death; and the Romans remain.

The question of who he was, or is??? remains as well. Was (is??) he the Messiah? If you do not see a column from me, you will know that I am seeking the answer, and I will keep seeking, no matter how long it takes, until I find it.

Subj: THE Final Story on Jesus
Date: 30 A.D.
From: Malachi@BTimes
To: Jonah@Solomon's Portico

Issue 21

Jonah, Are you back to your senses? I can't believe you were taken in by the Nazarene!

Interview with Disciple About Final Teachings

In response to requests, we offer this interview with John son of Zebedee.

Biblical Times: Now that Jesus has purportedly risen from the dead, many of our readers are more interested in his teachings than ever before. Is it true that Jesus gave an extensive teaching to the twelve core disciples on Thursday night at the Passover meal?

John: Yes, it's true. It was after we had eaten the Passover, which itself was different. Jesus took the bread and wine, raised them, and blessed and thanked God. After we had partaken of them, he told us that each time we share the Passover, it is to be in his memory. Then Jesus said one of us would betray him--Judas left about then--and Jesus began to speak.

BT: Can you give us a recap of the main points?

John: I'll try, though, there was so much he shared with us. One of the first things he said was, "Little children, I shall be with you only a little while longer . . ." With those words, our worst fears were confirmed--he would soon be killed. He tried to comfort us; he told us that he would not leave us orphans, but would come to us. He also said, "In my Father's house are many mansions; I go to prepare a place for you." I heard these words, but my heart was heavy . . .

BT: John . . . ? Please continue.

John: I am sorry--I'll never forget how I felt that night. You know, many things happened that night--that longest of nights. Do you believe He washed our feet! Truly, he did! Then the garden, the arrest, Peter cutting off the soldier's ear . . . But, you have asked for his teachings, so let me recall these again. The Master explained that we would be sorrowful, but that our sorrow would be turned to joy--like a woman who is in labor, and after, rejoices at the birth of her child. He said that after he left he would send us a helper, called the "Spirit of Truth." He warned us that the world would hate us because we followed him, but he also said, "In the world you will have tribulation," he then spoke slowly but firmly, "but take courage, for I have overcome the world."

BT: Hmm . . . Did he speak of God as his father?

John: Yes. He said, "As the father loved me, I also have loved you; abide in my love." He told us that anyone who had seen him, had seen the Father. He said, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my commandments," and that he and the father would make their home with that person.

BT: Anything else you can tell our readers about his words that night?

John: Yes. He told us to stay connected to him--to abide in him. He said, "I am the vine, and you are the branches . . . without me, you can do nothing." He explained that we did not choose to follow him, but rather, he chose us. "Peace I leave with you" he said to us, and despite my grief I felt still and calm. He continued, "I have told you all of this before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe."

BT: Thank you, John.



From the desk of The Scribe

"History in Service of Wisdom"

Subj: THE FINAL STORY

Issue 22

Date: 30 A.D.

From: Malachi@BTimes

To: Jonah@Solomon's Portico

Jonah, I was disappointed when you did not submit a column as per my last email. You are in danger of losing your job, especially if you continue to sympathize with the followers of the Nazarene.

Is Jesus Gone for Good?

The Galilean, Jesus, has been reported alive once again, this time on a mountain near Jerusalem. One of his disciples, on conditions of anonymity, gave us this interview.

Biblical Times: Who was present at this appearance of Jesus?

Disciple of Jesus: Eleven of us, his closest followers. And his mother Mary was there too.

BT: Was it really him? Was he a spirit? What did he say to you?

DJ: Yes, it was him, may God be praised! The Master told us to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to come and baptize us--we are still puzzled by that--then we asked him if he was going to restore the kingdom to Israel, but he basically said that was not our concern. He told us that all power, in heaven and on earth, had been given to him. He told us that we are to "baptize all nations," those were his words; and we are to teach them all he has taught us.

BT: Are you and the others prepared to do what he commanded?

DJ: I think I speak for all when I say, no, we are not ready. But let me tell you what happened next. He said, "Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." And then he went away from us. It wasn't like other times since his resurrection, when he walked out of the room, or even just disappeared. One minute he was standing there, blessing us, and the next minute he was rising into the heavens. He went up and up, and then a cloud came down around him and we couldn't see him any more.

BT: Do you expect him to come back again?

DJ: Yes and no. After he was gone, we saw two shining white men standing there. They told us that Jesus would return in the same manner as we saw him go. Some of the other disciples think he will come back soon, but I don't. You know, we feel his presence, even when we can't see him.

BT: Can you explain what you mean?

There is a mysterious peace when we gather in prayer. On the night before his death, at the Passover, he blessed and shared bread and wine, and told us to remember him when we do so. We've been doing this the day after each Sabbath. We especially sense his presence when we offer this thanksgiving. One brother said it is what the scriptures speak of, the feeling of entering into the Lord's rest, of being right where you are supposed to be. There is no greater feeling.

BT: What will you do now?

DJ: We will wait, in Jerusalem.



From the desk of The Scribe

"History in Service of Wisdom"

Let us believe in Jesus, the Messiah

I return to you after spending several days in the company of the disciples of Jesus. What I am about to say may cost me my job, but even if I must pay with my life, I would have no regret.

I speak to you from my heart, and from my mind when I say, that Jesus, crushed and beaten by God's enemies, has now seen light. As the Psalmist says, God would not allow His Holy One to see corruption. Jesus, whom death could not hold, has emerged, resurrected from the tomb. I believe he is the Messiah.

Yes, Jesus. Think back on all we have read about him. He called us to repent and return to God. He healed the deaf, the crippled, the blind, just as the prophet Isaiah foretold. He taught us like no other teacher ever did—with authority, wit, and stories that made us look into our hearts. He embraced the poor, suffering, and sinners. Only the self-righteous Pharisees were neither impressed with his wisdom and authority, nor touched by his care for the poor, widows, and orphans.

As for myself, may God have mercy on my questioning of the last three years. As I reread my columns that have to do with Jesus, I see clearly now that our 2000 years as God's people prepared us for, and previewed, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. I thought, as do many still, that his suffering and death on the cross proved he was NOT the Messiah. Now I see, so clearly, that he submitted to death as Isaiah prophesied of the Suffering Servant.

What the future holds, I do not know. Jesus has lately appeared to tell us that he had been given all authority in heaven and on earth—just as the prophet Daniel foretold of the Son of Man, the Messiah.

It is all true, wonderfully, mysteriously true. Jesus, a true son of Israel, is Israel's true King, and immortal Savior. ALLELUJAH!

