

NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

ADVENT SEASON WEEKLY FAMILY DEVOTIONS

WEEK 5: BY REASON OF USE

“Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:12-14).

In Hebrews 5, the writer rebukes the Jews to whom he is writing for not knowing God’s Word any better than they did. The Scriptures came to the world through the Jews (Romans 3:2), and these had the Word of God and should have been teaching it to the nations (Deuteronomy 4:5-8). Yet, these had been lazy with that Word, had refused the meat thereof, and were therefore dull of hearing, unable to see plain truth concerning Messiah or discern the difference between God’s truth and the traditions of men. Therefore, the wavering Jews being addressed, wavering back and forth between trusting Messiah and trusting manmade religion (cf. Hebrews 6,10), needed to be taught again the most basic of biblical truths. For these had read the Scriptures, but had failed to use them; and their senses, therefore, had not been exercised to discern the difference between good and evil, much less right and almost right.

Are we any different? Are we dull of hearing? Are we sucking on the milk when we should be chewing on the meat of God’s Word and teaching others? Are we properly equipped through use of the Scriptures to know the difference between good and evil, to know the difference between God’s truth and manmade tradition, and to know the difference between right and almost right? Are we easily frustrated when men claim a contradiction in God’s Word and we have no answer? Let’s test ourselves this week with both the milk and the meat of the Holy Scriptures.

DAY 1

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:1-16; Micah 4:8; Genesis 35:19-21

1. Too often, as noted in the devotional study from Week 4, we accept traditions concerning biblical narratives and historical events as fact without ever questioning them, and sometimes without even knowing it, we elevate tradition over the authority of the Scriptures. Christmas traditions claim Jesus was born in a stable or cave in Bethlehem, and we assume the shepherds just figured out this specific location in a rather large community with many stables and barnyards and were able to get there quickly without directions. Today, therefore, we have the *Church of the Nativity* sitting atop the very spot where Catholic tradition claims Jesus was born in a cave that served as a stable. It’s a place where wicked Christ-denying Arab Muslims require superstitious “Christian” pilgrims to hire them as guides for outrageous prices and only then grant access to a “church” that rivals any Hindu temple in terms of cheesy idolatry. Inside, these pilgrims can see a silver-plated, star-shaped hole in the floor, the “exact spot where baby Jesus came out of Mary and first touched the ground.” And, these can set their iPhones and jewelry inside this hole for “good luck.” An ancient error (a location based upon testimony far more questionable than the women who accused Judge Roy Moore) + a majority opinion (99% of the world’s nativity scenes) ≠ truth, my friends. Read Luke 2:1-16 carefully. Do the Scriptures say anything about a stable or a cave? What is the only detail the New Testament gives us concerning the specific location of Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem?
2. The angels told the shepherds that they would find the babe somewhere in Bethlehem wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. That’s it. Yet, the shepherds found this manger quickly in a rather large farming community as if they knew exactly where to look. How did they know (Hint: the same way the wise men from the east knew that a star meant they should go looking for a King of the Jews in the Land of Israel)?

3. Micah 4 is an amazing prophetic chapter that pairs with Micah 5 that we read last week. In these two chapters, we see a number of things foretold:
 - a. New Jerusalem summed up as John details it in Revelation 21 (Micah 4:1-2, Revelation 21:1-27)
 - b. The future worldwide Messianic Kingdom where there is private property, no manmade socialism, and liberty of thought (Micah 4:3-5)
 - c. Mt. Zion as the capital of of Israel and the world, despite what the United Nations thinks or passes in an asinine resolution (Micah 4:7)
 - d. The near-horizon Babylonian Captivity prophesied as a sign to Israel to authenticate that the events prophesied on the far-horizon concerning Messiah and Jerusalem would assuredly come to pass (Micah 4:9-10)
 - e. The Tribulation (Micah 4:12-13)
 - f. That Gentiles would smite the Messiah, the future Judge of Israel, on the face (Micah 5:1; see this fulfilled in John 19:1-3)
 - g. Messiah would come out of Bethlehem, and though smitten, will rule the world nonetheless (Micah 5:1-2)
 - h. Messiah would be God in human flesh (Micah 5:2)
 - i. A time when Messiah would give up the nation of Israel, the Church Age (Micah 5:3)
 - j. Messiah's overthrow of the Assyrian, the Antichrist (Micah 5:4-15, see also Isaiah 10:5,12 where the Assyrian is associated with the time "when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and Jerusalem")
 - k. Messiah's vengeance and fury upon all the heathen kings who afflicted Israel (Micah 5:15), just cause for Herod to be troubled and fearful when Micah 5 was consulted at the coming of the wise men

We also see a first advent or dominion of Messiah distinguished from His second advent or dominion when He shall rule over all the earth. Micah 5:2 tells us the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Now, read Micah 4:8 carefully. Where specifically does the prophet say the "first dominion" of Messiah would arrive in Bethlehem?

4. The phrase translated "tower of the flock" in Micah 4:8 is the exact same Hebrew phrase translated "tower of Edar" in Genesis 35:21. Where was the tower of Edar, and what happened very close to this spot?

DAY 2

Scripture Reading: Leviticus 15:19-23; Job 38:8-11; Numbers 28:1-4; Mark 15:25-37

1. Tradition would have us believe that Mary and Joseph got stuck in a stable with random rags as a last resort to give birth to the Son of God and that the "innkeeper" was some dishonorable man without compassion who would turn a pregnant wife and a son of David out into the night to fend for themselves. Moreover, such tradition assumes that Joseph, who went "to his own city" (Luke 2:3) didn't have a place to stay and had made no arrangements for his pregnant wife. Nothing could be further or farther from the truth. The word for "inn" in Luke 2:27 is the same Greek word used in Luke 22:11 for a "guestchamber" of a house, a "large upper room" where Jesus and His disciples would eat the Passover. The "inn" was not a

motel, it was a guestchamber connected to a residence. Read Leviticus 15:19-23. Why was there no room in the guestchamber? Crowded, perhaps, but why could Mary not have stayed there?

2. Jesus was born in a safe place with a manger and swaddling bands. It was also a private place nearby that happened to be important in terms of Messianic prophecy. What does this say about the innkeeper contrary to religious tradition?
3. In Job 38:8-11, darkness is described as a “swaddlingband.” And what was the purpose of that swaddlingband?
4. We don’t know the day of Christ’s birth, with the Scriptures we can only approximate. Those who strain at a gnat and swallow a camel concerning the celebration of Christmas on December 25th, however, often pontificate that there is no way Christ could have been born at the end of December because there were shepherds in the fields, and these would not have been outside with their flocks in the winter (as if winter in Israel is like winter in Siberia or something). Read God’s commandment to Israel in Numbers 28:1-4. Why would it have been necessary for shepherds to be watching and grazing sheep all year round in the vicinity of Jerusalem? Who exactly do you think these shepherds were?
5. What kind of lambs had to be offered for the daily morning and evening sacrifices in the Temple? That means the shepherds had an important duty as soon as the lambs were born. What instruments do you think helped them restrain and protect the newborn lambs so they could perform this very important duty?
6. The Jewish Talmud, though full of ridiculous oral tradition with no basis in Scripture, sheds much light on ancient and modern Jewish culture. In the *Mishnah*, the so-called “oral law” written down, it is recorded that the morning’s daily sacrifice of a lamb in the Temple was at the 3rd hour (9:00am) and that the evening’s daily sacrifice in the Temple was at the 9th hour (3:00pm), coinciding with the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb on the Feast of Passover. Read Mark 15:25-37. When John the Baptist called Jesus “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), he spoke quite literally. How so?

DAY 3

Scripture Reading: I Peter 1:18-25; Luke 2:17-20

1. The Tower of Edar, or the tower of the flock, was a shepherd’s watchtower on the north side of Bethlehem near the road to Jerusalem. It was a military post of sorts to watch into the valley and protect the city. Later, according to Jewish historical tradition, this tower came to be used as a place of refuge for the ewe lambs to give birth “in the same country” where the shepherds would be “abiding in the field and keeping watch over their flocks by night” (Luke 2:8). Once the lambs were born, they were restrained with swaddling bands so they could be inspected for blemishes. Those that were without spot were then wrapped to protect them from injury. Thus, Bethlehem + manger + swaddling clothes + Micah 4:8 could only have meant one place where the shepherds were to go and see, the same place where they were accustomed to inspecting lambs destined for Temple sacrifice. Therefore, these “came with haste” (Luke 2:16) and found something to inspect. Read I Peter 1:18-25. The Apostle speaks of those redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, “as of a lamb without spot and blemish.” Like John the Baptist referenced above, Peter spoke quite literally. How so?
2. Peter also speaks of those redeemed by the blood of Christ as being born again of incorruptible seed, “the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (I Peter 1:23). And, this Word endures forever. Therefore, what is our responsibility concerning the Word of God as relates back to Hebrews 5:12-14?
3. Sadly, religious tradition often completely overlooks one of the most important lessons of Christ’s birth narrative described in Luke 2. The Word of God came to both Mary and the shepherds; they saw it fulfilled; and they responded to that fulfillment. Read Luke 2:17-20 carefully. What three very important verbal responses should we emulate when truth from the Word of God is revealed to us or fulfilled in us? What do you think is the difference between a response and a reaction? How was the follow-up behavior of both Mary and the shepherds a response as opposed to a reaction?

DAY 4

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 49:6; Luke 2:25-39; Acts 22:21-23; Matthew 2:13-23

1. Were the words of Simeon to Mary and Joseph new revelation concerning the Messiah? Did the Gospel go to the Gentiles simply because the Jews rejected it, or was it always purposed to do so? What does the reaction of the religious Jews to Paul's testimony in Acts 22:21-23 say about their knowledge of the Scriptures compared to that of Simeon?
2. Jewish religious tradition and religious leadership at the time of Christ's birth looked for a Messiah who would come once and overthrow the Romans. But, Anna the prophetess, even 91 years since she was married and 86 years since she was widowed, spoke of who Messiah would be in the Temple "to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem." How were these people different from the religious leaders and the sheeple who followed them? Who were more like the Jews rebuked in Hebrews 5?
3. Scoffers claim that the Messianic birth narratives in Luke and Matthew contradict one another and that both can't be true chronologically, often pointing to Luke 2:39 as the proof. Interestingly, "the law" is sometimes used by both Jesus and the Jews to describe the entire Old Testament, including the Prophets and the Writings, and not just the Books of Moses (cf. John 10:34, 12:34, 15:25). Read Matthew 2:13-23. What three important things, therefore, in "the law" (from Hosea 11:1, Jeremiah 31:15-16, and Isaiah 53 respectively) would be included in Luke's "when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord"?
4. What happened between Luke 2:38 and Luke 2:39? What happens to an apparent contradiction in the Scriptures when one can digest the meat of the word versus just the milk?

DAY 5

Scripture Reading: Malachi 3:16-18; Isaiah 28:9-13

1. God sent the Prophet Malachi to speak to the remnant of Israel that had returned from Babylon and had seen the rebuilding of the Temple. These had grown stagnant, religious as opposed to spiritual, and dull of hearing just like the Jews rebuked in Hebrews 5. Like many churches in America today, these engaged in fake worship with fake tears, elevated tradition over the Word of God, and despised the concept of divine judgment. To these, God's, through His prophet, foretold things related to Luke 1 (Malachi 3:1-2), concluded with a stark warning (Malachi 4:6), and then went silent for about 400 years until the events of Luke 1 came to pass. All those to whom Malachi prophesied heard God's Words and choked on the milk thereof, but according to Malachi 3:16-18, to whom was it that the LORD hearkened and remembered? In addition to hearing the Word of God, what did this special remnant also do?
2. According to Hebrews 5, those that can digest the meat of God's Word and use it have their senses exercised to discern right from wrong. The "by reason of use" mentioned in Hebrews 5:14 is defined in Malachi 3:16-18 and results in those who can likewise discern, not just between right and wrong, but also between those who genuinely serve God (what is right) and those who merely claim to do so (what is almost right). What is the key to this discernment when it comes to God's Word (see verse 16)?
3. According to Isaiah 28:9-12, those weaned from the milk and those to whom can be taught knowledge are not those who simply read God's Word or hear it, but those who study and apply the Scriptures precept by precept, line by line, here a little and there a little (i.e. comparing Scripture with Scripture). However, "yet they would not hear" (28:12b), and line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little can quickly become a snare that leads astray. Rabbinic Judaism and American Churchianity are prime examples of this: rabbis and educated "pastors" know line upon line, but they do not know the Scriptures and cannot see the forest for the trees. According to Malachi 3:16-18, what must accompany the study of the Scriptures to prevent this travesty?