

Royal Officer's Son

Recently I saw a bobcat lying on the ground. He attracted my attention because his ears were moving and the sunlight was illuminating just the tips. A bobcat is like a lynx, smaller than a lion but much larger and deadlier than a household cat. They exist from southern Canada down into southern Mexico. But someone could claim that they are just a large house cat. Someone else could say that they are just a small lion. Someone could even say that they do not exist at all. For some even a photograph would not be enough. Physical evidence is not always enough to cause us to believe that something is true. The truth is that I must be willing to believe what someone shows me or tells me; otherwise, I will not believe. This is true in every aspect of life. For example, if a politician tells us that something is true, most of us immediately have doubts because we have learned that often politicians cannot be trusted. Yet, most of us will believe teachers or professors because we believe they are trustworthy. Why do you believe what you believe?

TRIP TO GALILEE. The wonderful response of the many men and women at the Passover Feast in Jerusalem (John 2:13-25) must have been exciting and, yet, discouraging because of their weak faith. While Jesus' miracles and teaching brought the highly regarded religious leader Nicodemus to His door one night, trouble was also developing among the religious leaders in Judea. Jesus' ministry resulted in some who believed, many who wanted to see more signs and miracles, and a few among the politically and religiously powerful who were unhappy with Jesus.

At the same time, John the Baptist was imprisoned in Galilee by King Herod. This could have encouraged the Pharisees to take action. Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us that Jesus understood the danger, and as a result Jesus left Jerusalem for a safer region - Galilee.

Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee . . . (NASB) Matt. 4:12

Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (NASB) Mark 1:14-15

And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district.

And He began teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all. (NASB) Luke 4:14-15

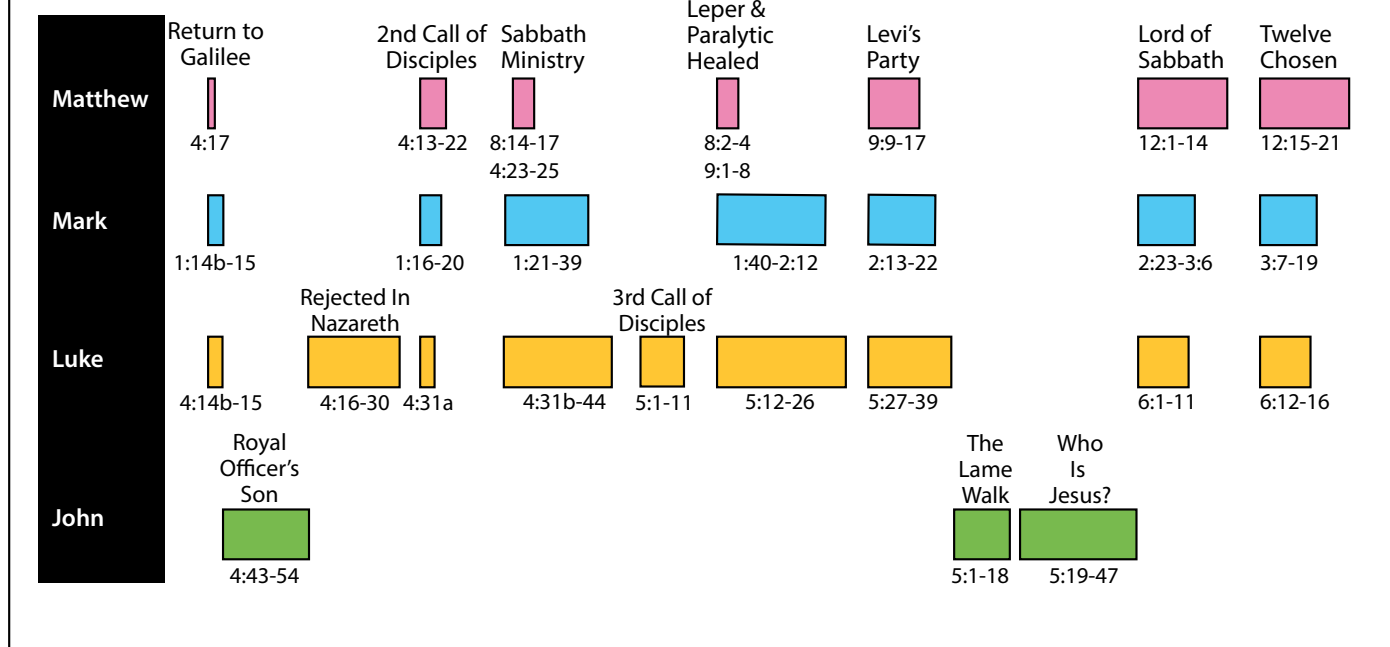
The Greek word in Matthew 4:12 which is translated as "withdrew" really has the idea of "escape." That is, Jesus left



He Exists Because I See Him?

Life and Heart of Jesus

Jesus' Ministry in Galilee (Mid A.D. 31)



Jerusalem and the surrounding area. He escaped not because He was afraid but because it was not yet time for the strong opposition to develop which would result in His death. It was time to leave. He would return later in order to teach and perform miracles once again. So Jesus escaped pending trouble and the “weak-faithed” crowds in Judea.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke did not record Jesus’ trip through Samaria. Mark tells us that Jesus preached the same message that John the Baptist preached, and Luke says that Jesus went to Galilee in the power of the Holy Spirit. Only John recorded Jesus’ trip into Samaria because he wanted us to know that Jesus was the Messiah and also to encourage us to also seek “living water.” Jesus entered the region of Samaria in order to meet “the woman at the well” and to let her and those in her town know that He was their Messiah.

SAMARITANS BELIEVED! In our last study, we discovered that the Samaritans were not eager for Jesus to leave. In fact, they asked Him questions and encouraged Him to stay for two days. John 4:41 tells us that they did not believe Him because of some trick, sign, miracle, or wonder that He performed. They did not need twentieth century “before”

and “after” photographs of His miracles in order to believe in Him. They did not believe in Him because He had a large church, or because He was a famous man. Nor did they believe Jesus because He was charismatic or rich. No, Jesus had none of those things. They simply believed in Him because He had demonstrated that He was a prophet - the Messiah of Israel. They did not need more proof, but they trusted what He had to say. John 4:41 says,

Many more believed because of His word; and they were saying to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world.” (NASB) John 4:41-42

They listened and believed. This was unusual because even the crowds in Jerusalem had to see signs and wonders before they would believe in Jesus (John 2:23-25). The Samaritans were not stupid people either, but their hearts were different. The crowds in Jerusalem needed a show. The faith of the Jerusalem crowds needed signs and wonders. They had doubt and were looking for proof. Their faith - in fact they

had faith at all - was thin and as a result Jesus was unwilling to entrust Himself to them.

But the Samaritans' hearts were different. They were seeking a Messiah. One sign was sufficient in order for them to believe! They heard and believed. Jesus was not looking for intellectuals, the rich, or the famous, but for those who would yield to Him and believe. And they did. So after two wonderful days with the people of Sychar, Jesus leaves Samaria and continues on His trip to Galilee.

After the two days He went forth from there into Galilee. For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country. So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things that He did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they themselves also went to the feast. (NASB) John 4:43-45

WITHOUT HONOR. The proverb "that a prophet has no honor in his own country" is a well known phrase that is used by many people. It can be found in newspapers, books, and on the internet. Those who use the phrase may not realize that they are actually quoting the Bible. The proverb is true. That is, greater respect comes from those outside of our family or social group than from those within, if it comes at all.

The Greek word translated as "country" in John 4:44 is PATPIS. It refers to an area of land associated with one's

family. This proverb also occurs in Matt. 13:54-57; Mark 6:1-4; and Luke 4:16-24, and each time it refers to Nazareth and the surrounding area. Nazareth and the surrounding area was Jesus' PATRIS because his parents, Joseph and Mary, had lived in the region before becoming engaged. After Jesus' birth and the brief trip to Egypt, they returned there to raise Him.

Why did Jesus go to Galilee if He was without honor in His homeland? The answer is found in the fact that He had

so much honor in Judea that trouble was chasing after Him just like a bobcat after a small animal. By going to Galilee Jesus was able to escape popularity, at least for a while. He went there because He had little honor and to avoid an immediate encounter with the Pharisees. For now He could continue His ministry in peace.

Therefore He came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine.

And there was a royal official whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and was imploring Him to come down and heal his son; for he was at the point of death. (NASB) John 4:46-47

THE ROYAL OFFICIAL. Some time after Jesus had arrived in Cana, a royal official traveled from Capernaum to visit Jesus. This man was most likely an official of King Herod, the Tetrarch of Galilee. If true, he would have been a



significant individual. We know that this man came to Jesus for a serious reason because he had traveled 16 miles (25.7 Km) from Capernaum to Cana in order to ask Jesus to heal his sick son.

The Greek word for “sick” is in the imperfect tense which means that the official’s son had been sick for a long time. We do not know the nature of the son’s illness. It is not important; otherwise, the Holy Spirit would have told us. The Holy Spirit simply wants us to know that he had been sick a long time. Have you ever noticed that God does not tell us everything in the Bible? He does the same with each one of us. He never tells us more than we need to know. God expects us to trust Him while we do His will. If God told us the end result of following His will, some of us would not follow Him because some of us would not like the outcome!

Recently, a man was grieving his situation after doing God’s will. He saw what God had to say in the Bible. He obeyed, but he did not enjoy the outcome. Would he have done God’s will if he had known the pain that would have followed? God does not tell us everything about the official’s son. God only wants us to understand the message that He is trying to send us in this study.

Since the official’s son was very sick and since the father loved his son greatly, he started begging or imploring Jesus to come to his home and heal his son. The original language tells us that this official was repeatedly begging Jesus. He was not timid. He asked Jesus to come “down” to Capernaum. He said “down” because Capernaum was at a lower altitude than Cana. Capernaum is on the shore of Galilee at an altitude of 686 ft (209 m) below sea level. The father was serious and passionate because his son was near death. If we look closely at the passage, we discover that the father believed 1) that Jesus needed come to go to Capernaum in order to heal his son, and 2) that Jesus did not have power over death. The father did not believe that Jesus could raise the dead. He did not understand that Jesus did not need to go to Capernaum and He did not need to go immediately.

SIGNS AND WONDERS. How did Jesus respond to him? Most of us would have been offended by Jesus’ next words. Jesus did not offer to go to Capernaum. He did not promise to heal his son. Instead, Jesus saw the man’s heart and saw

a very unusual person. He was not like the crowd standing around Him. This official was like the Samaritans. He did not need signs to believe. He had already heard the new reports and believed. The crowd needed to be like him. So Jesus said to the crowd,

So Jesus said to him, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe.” (NASB) John 4:48

The word “signs” refers to significant events such as healings - events that should capture our attention. The word “wonders” includes special indications of coming events - a special event that is greater than a “sign.” Together they cover every miraculous event that Jesus performed. “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe.” They were just like the people in Jerusalem. They needed signs and wonders to believe. Jesus’ words were not enough. They had doubts and were looking to be convinced. They were not like the Samaritans who simply believed Jesus after discovering that He was the Messiah. When Jesus said that they “will not believe,” He used a double negative - “they will not, not believe!” This is a strong statement. They will NOT believe without signs and wonders. It is sad when people do not believe God and want signs and wonders for proof.

THE SAME IS TRUE TODAY. The same is true today for many people. Unless they see signs, they will not believe. Most of the people in the crowds in Jesus’ day needed signs and wonders to be repeated again and again to help them continue believing. The truth was - Jesus would never be able to do enough signs and wonders to cause them to believe. Yes, they were thrilled with Jesus’ “magic show,” but they were unwilling to believe in Jesus. There have always been churches filled with those who seek a show or signs. Some pastors give their congregation a good show with exciting preaching filled with watered down biblical content. Other pastors and teachers repeatedly promise their people “signs and wonders” to encourage them to believe that God is present and at work. Jesus had a different approach, He rebuked the crowds for seeking a sign. There was something more important than a sign or a wonder. It was choosing to believe in Jesus and do what He said!

Jesus was not saying that we should avoid looking for objective proof that He was the Messiah, the Living God, the Savior of the world. In fact, later in John's gospel we read that the Holy Spirit recorded many of the signs that Jesus did so that we would believe,

Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (NASB) John 20:30-31

Objective proof has been given to us so that we would believe that Jesus is both our God and Messiah.

... who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord . . . (NASB) Rom. 1:4

Jesus has fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies which

help my unbelief." (NASB) Mark 9:24

Strong faith believes what it hears from the Word of God and not what it sees. Faith is focused on Jesus and Jesus alone.

Those who constantly seek signs and wonders in the Christian life will not be men and women of faith. They will be men and women who have settled for something less. They are pursuing the sensational and have missed Jesus. They are seeking to increase their faith in the wrong way. It is a sin to doubt God. It is sin to not believe!

JESUS' PASSION. The royal official came to Jesus because he did believe and as a result, he asked Jesus to come with him and heal his son.

The royal official said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies." (NASB) John 4:49

But Jesus responded by refusing to go with Him and com-

trong faith is focused on Jesus and Jesus

predicted the coming of the Messiah in the good news from Matthew, and Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke so that Theophilus might believe.

If we step back and look at the wonderful landscape spread out before us, we discover that Jesus was not telling the people that there is not a place for signs and wonders, but that signs and wonders should have led them to trust in God - Himself. Their goal was wrong. Signs and wonders are not the goal. The goal is to trust in what Jesus said or did. When signs and wonders continue to be needed, something is wrong!

Hebrews 10:38 says that God wants His righteous ones to live by faith. He does not say that we are to live by signs and wonders. Anyone who does needs to confess their lack of faith as a sin and follow the example of the father who asked,

Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, "I do believe;

manded him to go home alone.

Jesus said to him, "Go; your son lives." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started off. (NASB) John 4:50

Jesus' words are short, "Go; your son lives!" Jesus did not perform any signs or wonders. Jesus did absolutely nothing that the father and the crowd could see! Jesus did nothing to encourage him that his son was healed or would live. He only used words, "Your son lives!" The crowds needed to see signs and wonders, but not this official. He already believed. He believed because of the news that he had heard about Jesus. He could have asked for a sign before going back home as proof that Jesus had healed his son, but he did not do that. Jesus told him to go home and he did. He had no questions! He just went. He just believed! Now - do you doubt that the man already believed in Jesus when he first came to Him?

THE MIRACLE. So the official went down to Capernaum and some of his slaves met him on the road.

As he was now going down, his slaves met him, saying that his son was living. So he inquired of them the hour when he began to get better. Then they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." So the father knew that it was at that hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives"; and he himself believed and his whole household. (NASB) John 4:51-53

The official soon discovered that his son had started to get well when Jesus said, "Your son lives."

The man did not ask for a sign or a wonder, but a sign was given - the most unbelievable sign anyone could imagine. Jesus performed a miracle 16 miles (25.7 Km) away. Jesus did not see the son, talk to the son, or touch him. Jesus performed no visible sign or wonder. He did not use any words, but yet the official believed Jesus. As a result, the official and all of his household believed in Jesus too!

CONCLUSION. The Holy Spirit closes the door on this historical event by telling us that this was Jesus' second sign.

This is again a second sign that Jesus performed when He had come out of Judea into Galilee. (NASB) John 4:54

Why another sign? We were given another sign because God knows that most of us need to see Jesus perform signs and wonders. Otherwise, we will not believe. But most of all, God wants us to believe in Him because He said it and not because He performed it. When you believe someone, you believe that person!

If you are a Christian, do you know that God has promised to meet all of your needs (Matt. 6:25-34)? Do you know that God has said He will help you pray (Rom. 8:26)? Do you know that God is your real employer and the One who

grants you favor with men (Prov. 3:1-4)? Yet some doubt Him and some of us seek a sign from this One who really cares. Some ignore God's commands in the Bible and then cannot understand why trouble occurs in the church, at work, or at home.

When we look for something other than Jesus, we will ignore the clear teaching of scripture. Just like the crowd, truth was not found in Jesus but in something else. Just like the crowd, Christians ignore the holy standard called out in scripture for pastors, leaders, and the people in a church. Just like the crowd, we are not men and women of the Word of God but followers after that which appeals to us. We refuse to believe what we read from the Bible. We tend to be seekers after the appealing and dynamic.

If you are a Christian and you are doubting God your best response is to answer the following three questions: 1) "Am I really a Christian?" 2) "Is there a sin in my life that I

am struggling with?" and 3) "Do I understand what it means to become a Christian?"

Those who do not believe His Word will look for something more than simply believing the words that God recorded for us to read. They will miss the real Jesus and settle for something less.

The reason for your doubts will be found in your answers. If you are not sure that you are a Christian, then tell God that you believe in Him and ask that your sins be forgiven. If there is a sin in your life that you are struggling with, then confess it to Him and ask Him to help you stop. If you are not sure what it means to be a Christian, then read "God Wants You To Believe in Him."

This study has been a call to believe in God. The Holy Spirit wants us to believe what God has said in the Bible. That is it! He wants to believe His Word and then to follow. How are you doing?