



A Gentle Ramble through the Bible

STUDY GUIDE

WHO IS JESUS REALLY?

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Okay, then. Have at it!*

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REFERENCE

Tools for Your Backpack

Click here to get to the [Reference Material](#).

There you will find:

- [How to Approach a Difficult Passage](#)
- A handy table of [Nations of the Bible](#)
- Links and info on free and low-cost [Bible study tools](#)
- Some great info on the [Twelve Tribes of Israel](#)
- An [Index of the Psalms](#) showing authors (if known) and showing which stories or passages each psalm relates to
- A very helpful [Table of the Kings of Israel and Judah](#) side-by-side, along with the names of the prophets called to speak the word of the Lord to them
- A helpful framework for [making sense out of the books of the Prophets](#)
- A chart organizing the chapters of [Jeremiah in Chronological Order](#)
- [Maccabees Chronology](#) showing material covered in each class as we go along
- [Timeline of the Gospels](#) (up to the Last Supper)

CLASS #107: **Flesh and Blood**

Eat My Flesh and Drink My Blood

In John's version, and only John's version, the feeding of the 5000 with loaves and fishes and the story of Jesus walking on water is immediately followed by Jesus saying:

You are looking for me because I gave you food. Don't work for food that spoils. All you need to do is believe in me and you will never be hungry or thirsty again. God's will is that no one is banished, but that everyone will have eternal life.

I am that bread of life. I have seen God and I am sent by God. My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Eat my flesh¹ and drink my blood, and I will raise you up on the last day.²

Imagine you know nothing of the coming crucifixion:

1. Imagine yourself as *one of the Jews* in the synagogue hearing this. What would be your reaction?

2. Imagine yourself as a *disciple*, having seen Jesus feed 5000 people with a little kid's lunch and having just seen him walk on water and calm a storm. How might you react to these words?

Now imagine you are Matthew or Mark writing in hindsight. You've lived through the Last Supper, the crucifixion, and the resurrection and you are reading John's words for the first time.

3. Assuming you were present when Jesus spoke these words, how might you remember these words now and relate them to Jesus' death and resurrection?

4. Why, as Matthew or Mark, might you have decided to omit this passage? What if you weren't present when Jesus spoke these words?

Do you, here in our present day, think Jesus said these words or were they John's attempt to find meaning for the crucifixion and resurrection in Jesus' breaking of the bread for the 5000 and walking on water? (No right or wrong answer here)

¹ No wiggle room in the words "flesh" and "blood." The word for flesh is *sarx*, as in sarcophagus. The Greek means actual, literal, human flesh. Ditto for blood.

² Paraphrased and condensed from John 6:25-59.

CLASS #108: Jews or Gentiles?

Who Did Jesus Come To?

When a Gentile (Syro-Phoenician) woman asks Jesus to heal her daughter, Matthew and Mark's versions of Jesus' response are different.

These are my translations directly from the Greek:

Mark 7:27 (*remember--Mark's version is the earliest written and Matthew often copies and expands*)
First permit the children to eat their fill, for it is not good to take the food of the children and throw it to the puppies.

Matthew 15: 24, 26 (*remember--Matthew's overall focus is to prove Jesus is the prophesied Messiah*)
I was not sent at all, if not to the sheep of the house of Israel who are being utterly destroyed...It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the puppies.

Compare these two versions. How are they the same? How are they different? Can you tell which one is what Jesus actually said? If so, how? If not, what are your ideas about what he might have said and why?

Here is a typical translation of Matthew 15:24,26:

Matthew 15: 24, 26 (NIV)
I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel...It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.

Compare this NIV translation to my translation of **Matthew** in the box above. Both are correct--we are simply making different choices in how we are rendering the Greek words into English. How are the translations different? Does this change our understanding of what Jesus was saying?

Bonus Question: Why do you think Jesus uses the words "children" and "puppies"?

CLASS #109: Working the Chiasm

Walking on Water and Healing the Deaf-Mute

We stumble across another chiasm in Mark today. In class we discover that Jesus walking on water is paired up with the healing of the deaf-mute. We know from how chiasms work that the two events must have important similarities, but also important differences as a result of the central, focal statement of the chiasm.

Walking on Water

Mark 6:45-52 Jesus makes his disciples leave for Bethsaida [Jewish territory and home of several of the disciples], while he goes to pray alone. He sees them struggle to row against the wind all night. Then, in the morning, he walks on the water intending [or hoping, wishing] to pass right by them [though this could be translated as hoping to come to them].

But they thought it was a ghost and were agitated until Jesus said, “Take courage, it is I.” And he got in the boat with them and the wind calmed.

They were completely overwhelmed [beside themselves], after all, they had not understood about the loaves and now they could not wrap their heads around this [their hearts were dull, obtuse]. They land the boat and Jesus heals everyone who comes to him, even if they only touch his cloak.

Center of Chiasm

Mark 7:14-23 What goes into you from the outside is not what makes you unclean; it is what is in your heart that matters.

Healing the Deaf-Mute

Mark 7:31-35 In the Decapolis [Gentile territory] the people bring Jesus a deaf-mute. Jesus heals him by putting his fingers in his ears, spitting and touching his tongue and looking to heaven, groaning [as in pushing in childbirth] as he exclaims, “Open completely up!” And the man is able to speak clearly and hear.

1. The center of the chiasm is all about what “clean” and “unclean” really mean. Compare the two mirrored stories. Who would traditionally be the “clean” and “unclean” characters?
2. How has the chiasm flipped this understanding as illustrated in the two stories?
3. Now think about the physical relationship/proximity between Jesus and the characters in the two stories. How has the chiasm flipped that?
4. What is your conclusion theologically from this pairing?

CLASS #110: The Transfiguration

There's More Here Than Meets The Eye

The story of the transfiguration is one of the most striking in Scripture. In a nutshell, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a high mountain, and there he starts shining like the sun. Suddenly, the three disciples see Elijah and Moses talking to Jesus about the things he's about to face. Peter panics and wants to start building lean-tos (shelters, booths, tabernacles)--all the same word) for each of them. Then a bright cloud descends over Jesus, Elijah, and Moses and a voice says, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." Then it's over.

1. Why might it be Elijah and Moses rather than, say, King David or Miriam?
2. What might be the significance of this happening on a high mountain? Could this also be linked to the significance of Jesus shining?
3. Why did it occur to Peter to build shelters/booths/tabernacles for them? No right or wrong answers here. Think about what this means to the Jews. It reminds me of the annual "Festival of Booths" where the Jews build outdoor shelters and have a community campout for a week to rejoice and celebrate the end of threshing and the end of the pressing of the grapes.
4. As Jesus came up out of the water at his baptism God said, "You are my beloved Son. I am so pleased with you." And now God says the same words, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." Why might God say this at Jesus' baptism and now at the transfiguration?
5. Who needed the transfiguration to happen--Jesus or the three disciples?
6. Why would John, who was **present**, have omitted this entirely from his gospel?