

CFM Matt. 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20-21 – Ep 208



In this outline are a few links to some of my favorite books that have really helped me understand the context and content of the scriptures. [Click here to see all of my favorite books on Amazon](#). As an Amazon Affiliate, I do earn a small commission from qualifying purchases (at no extra cost to you).

The Last Week of the Savior's Mortal Ministry

Focus: Sunday morning and beyond

17 Events

1. Earthquake, angels open the tomb (Matt. 28.2-4).
2. Women find the tomb empty, see angels (Matt. 28.1-8; Mark 16.1-8; Luke 24.1-11; John 20.1-2).
3. Peter and John run to the tomb (Luke 24.12; John 20.18).
4. Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16.9-11; John 20.11-18).
5. Jesus appears to other women (Matt. 28.9-10).
6. Many rise from the dead at the time of Jesus' resurrection (Matt. 27.52-53).
7. Officials bribe the soldiers who guarded the tomb (Matt. 28.11-15).
8. Jesus appears to two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Mark 16.12-13; Luke 24.13-35).
9. Jesus appears to his disciples (Mark 16.14; Luke 24.36-39; John 20.19-23).
10. Thomas' statement, "Except I see... I will not believe" (John 20.24-25).
11. Eight days later, Thomas sees Jesus (John 20.26-29).
12. John writes, "These signs are written, that ye might believe" (John 20.30-31).
13. Peter goes fishing (John 21.1-19).
14. Peter asks Jesus about John (John 21.20-22).
15. John is translated (John 21.23-25; 3 Nephi 28.6; D&C 7).
16. Jesus commissions the Twelve (Matt. 28.16-20; Mark 16.15-18; Mormon 9.22-24).
17. Jesus ascends into heaven (Mark 16.19-20; Luke 24.50-53).

In order to faithfully adhere to the chronological order of events as presented in the gospel narratives, we made the deliberate decision to structure our podcast recordings accordingly. We acknowledge that this deviation from the prescribed lesson plans outlined in the Come Follow Me format may pose challenges for those using our podcasts for personal study or lesson planning. Please accept our apologies for any inconvenience. We appreciate your listenership.

1. Earthquake, angels open the tomb (Matt. 28.2-4).

And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men (Matt. 28.2-4)

Angels, especially visibly fiery ones (many ancient Jewish people believed that angels consisted of fire), generally terrified people (e.g., Judg 6:22-23; 13:19-20; cf. 4 Ezra 10:25-27; 3 Enoch 22:4-9). Jewish apocalyptic literature sometimes portrayed angels or other figures with superhuman radiance. Jewish people normally expected angels to be clothed in white (though this was also true of priests and of some others). Stones closing tombs were usually extremely heavy and diskshaped, so rolling it back singlehandedly and sitting on it underlines the superhuman character of the angel.¹

2. Women find the tomb empty, see angels (Matt. 28.1-8; Mark 16.1-8; Luke 24.1-11; John 20.1-2).

And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you. And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word (Matt. 28.5-8).

President Hinckley taught:

"Here was the greatest miracle of human history. Earlier he had told them, 'I am the resurrection and the life.' (John 11:25.) But they had not understood. Now they knew. He had died in misery and pain and loneliness. Now, on the third day, he arose in power and beauty and life, 'the firstfruits of them that slept,' the assurance for men of all ages that 'as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.' (1 Corinthians 15:20, 22.)

"On Calvary he was the dying Jesus. From the tomb he emerged the living Christ. The cross had been the bitter fruit of Judas's betrayal, the summary of Peter's denial. The empty tomb now became the testimony of His divinity, the assurance of eternal life, the answer to Job's unanswered question: 'If a man die, shall he live again?' (Job 14:14.)"²

3. Peter and John run to the tomb (Luke 24.12; John 20.1-8).

Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in (John 20.3-5).

4. Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16.9-11; John 20.11-18).

“Stop clinging to me” Μή μου ἄπτου (John 20.17)³

¹ [Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament \(IVP Bible Background Commentary Set\)*, IVP Academic, 2014, p. 124.](#)

² [Gordon B. Hinckley, *Be Thou an Example*, Deseret Book, 2000, p. 88.](#)

³ In the context, “touch” probably refers to “embrace.” [Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John*](#), Baker Academic, p. 1193. Keener continues, explaining the way the Greek expresses this verse, “Jesus’ prohibition here is a present imperative with Μή, which most often would be read as, “Stop touching me,” or perhaps, “Stop attempting to touch me,” rather than simply, “Do not touch me.” Because of the context, the command probably means here (as the verb sometimes means elsewhere) not merely “Stop touching me” but “Stop holding on to me,” suggesting a persistent clinging that fits the emotional character of the encounter (cf. Matt 28:9–10).”

Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God (John 20.15-17).

There are several theories as to why Jesus commanded Mary Magdalene to stop clinging to him in John 20:17. Here are some possible readings of this passage in John 20:

1. **Symbolic Meaning:** Others argue that Jesus was using Mary's desire to touch him as a symbolic gesture of the transition from his physical presence on earth to his spiritual presence in heaven. He was essentially telling her to let go of the earthly mortal Jesus and embrace the heavenly, resurrected one.
2. **A prohibition regarding touching the Divine:** In the case of Jesus' commandment to Mary Magdalene to not touch him in John 20:17, there are several ways in which this prohibition can be seen as relating to the prohibition in Exodus 19.12-13.⁴ First, both commands were given in the context of encountering the divine. The Israelites were warned not to approach the mountain because it was where God was present, while Mary Magdalene had just encountered the resurrected Jesus, whom Christians understand to be the Son of God. Second, both commands emphasize the holiness of the divine presence. In Exodus, the prohibition against touching the mountain was meant to underscore the Israelites' need for purification before approaching the holy God. Similarly, Jesus may have been emphasizing his own holiness and the need for Mary to approach him in a different way, now that he had been resurrected and glorified. Third, both commands can be seen as a kind of transitional phase in the relationship between God and humanity. In Exodus, the Israelites were still learning how to approach and relate to God after their liberation from Egypt. In the Gospel of John, Mary Magdalene was still learning how to relate to the resurrected Jesus and the implications of his victory over death. Of course, this whole argument is undone by simply reading John 20.27. So perhaps this verse has more to do with Jesus' ascension to his Father than it does simply holding him at this particular moment.
3. **A series of ascents:** Some have suggested that Jesus' warning in 20.17 that Mary not "touch" him before his ascension implies an ascension before the appearance in which Jesus invites Thomas's touch (John 20.25–27).⁵ The concept of ascension was familiar enough in ancient traditions that it required little explanation. However, Jesus' ascension differed in specific ways from most similar stories. Ancient stories of esoteric ascents included depictions of individuals

⁴ And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: **whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death: There shall not an hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned**, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live: when the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount (Exodus 19.12-13).

⁵ E.g., Smith, *John* (1999), 378. Haenchen, *John*, 2:210 even suggests a demythologized tradition in which Jesus had returned as a spirit but still awaited an earthly body.

rising (*T. Ab.* 20.12A⁶; 7.13; 14.7B) and having the heavens opened,⁷ newly divinized immortals ascending to heaven, and traditions about Enoch, Elijah, Ezra, and others who were believed to have escaped death (1 Macc. 2.58; 1 Enoch 39.3). Additionally, there were frequent stories about angels ascending to heaven.⁸

4. **Timing:** Jesus must depart soon. Mary's embrace is hindering his ascent, after which time he will descend back to visit his followers in Jerusalem and discuss what they are to do next. But for now, he must go.
5. **Literary Device:** Some scholars suggest that the command to stop clinging to him was simply a literary device used by the author of the Gospel of John to emphasize the new relationship between Jesus and his followers after his resurrection. Jesus was no longer simply a mortal being, subject to death, but a resurrected individual, and in a different relationship to mortals than he had been prior to his resurrection.

It is important to note that these are all ideas and interpretations, and as far as I can tell, there is no consensus about which reading is the "right" way to interpret this passage. The meaning of Jesus' command may always be somewhat ambiguous and open to interpretation, at least as I see it.

One argument that I think we can dismiss is that Jesus was commanding her to stop clinging to him because of any purity laws or that she was a woman. As Keener explains, "One could try to distinguish the prohibition for Mary from the invitation to Thomas by suggesting that Mary as a woman might be impure (Lev 15:19–30), but apart from lacking clues in the text, this position would violate Johannine thought about purity as well as about gender (e.g., 2:6; 4:9)."⁹

James E. Talmage wrote:

"One may wonder why Jesus had forbidden Mary Magdalene to touch Him, and then, so soon after, had permitted other women to hold Him by the feet as they bowed in reverence. We may assume that Mary's emotional approach had been prompted more by a feeling of personal yet holy affection than by an impulse of devotional worship such as the other women evinced. Though the resurrected Christ manifested the same friendly and intimate regard as He had shown in the mortal state toward those with whom He had been closely associated, He was no longer one of them in the literal sense. There was about Him a divine dignity that forbade close personal familiarity. To Mary Magdalene Christ had said: 'Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father.' If the second clause was spoken in explanation of the first, we have to infer that no human hand was to be permitted to touch the Lord's resurrected and immortalized body until after He had presented Himself to the Father. It appears reasonable and probable that between Mary's impulsive attempt to touch the Lord, and the action of the other women

⁶ "And they buried him in the promised land at the oak of Mamre, while the angels escorted his precious soul and ascended into heaven singing the thrice-holy hymn to God, the master of all, and they set down for the worship of the God and Father." [Testament of Abraham](#) 20.12.

⁷ And being thus overcome with the Spirit, he was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open, and he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God (1 Ne. 1.8).

⁸ See: Keener, *Gospel*, p. 1195.

⁹ Keener, *Gospel*, p. 1193.

who held Him by the feet as they bowed in worshipful reverence, Christ did ascend to the Father, and that later He returned to earth to continue His ministry in the resurrected state.”¹⁰

Peter Saw Him Early

Paul may be hinting at the order of events when he writes:

And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time (1 Corinthians 15.4-8).

Luke 24.34 seems to indicate that perhaps Peter received a special witness of the resurrection prior to the other members of the Quorum of the Twelve.

5. Jesus appears to other women (Matt. 28.9-10).

In this presentation, Julie Smith discusses the witnesses of women and the importance of their voice in the early church. See: Julie Smith, “[Women Received Their Dead](#)” | Julie Smith (BYU New Testament Commentary Conference Oct 2019).

6. Many rise from the dead at the time of Jesus’ resurrection (Matt. 27.52-53).

And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word. And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me (Matt. 28.8-10).

Whereas reports of ghosts were not very controversial in antiquity, bodily resurrection differed and was, in the Roman empire, distinctively Jewish (see Dan 12:2). *The witness of women was generally considered unreliable in that culture; Josephus even claims that the Torah rejects women’s testimony in view of the weakness of their gender.* Jesus, however, goes against the culture by revealing himself to the women and telling them to bear his message to the other disciples. This detail is definitely not one that ancient Christians would have invented; it did not appeal to their culture.¹¹

Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her (John 20.18).

Whereas Mary first announced to the leading disciples that someone had carried off the body (20:2), she now announces that she has seen the Lord and that he told her “these matters” (20:18)—presumably, that his ascension is coming and therefore his revelations to them are urgent (20:17). *Mary announces her personal-eyewitness experience even though she must be aware of the prejudice against women’s testimony in her culture;*¹² she could offer it in defiance of such prejudice but most likely offers it simply

¹⁰ James E. Talmage, [Jesus the Christ](#), p. 325.

¹¹ Keener, *Background*, p. 124, emphasis added.

¹² See, e.g., Josephus *Ant.* 4.219; *m. Yebam.* 15:1, 8–10; 16:7; *Ketub.* 1:6–9; *t. Yebam.* 14:10; *Sipra VDDeho.* pp. 7.45.1.1; cf. Hesiod *Op.* 375; Livy 6.34.6–7; Babrius 16.10; Phaedrus 4.15; Avianus *Fables* 15–16; Justinian *Inst.* 2.10.6.

because it is necessary and because she has nothing else to offer; she trusts the one who sent her to make it adequate (cf. 12:7).¹³

7. Officials bribe the soldiers who guarded the tomb (Matt. 28.11-15).

Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day (Matt. 28.11-15).

Guards faced serious consequences for falling asleep on the job (indeed, Roman guards could be executed), including jobs guarding the corpses of crucifixion victims (see the first century Roman writer Petronius *Satyricon* 112). But the priestly aristocracy had enough influence to protect their own interests. Like Judas (26:15), the guards act partly on mercenary motives; the bribe and the potential penalty they face for allowing Jesus' body to disappear ensures their cooperation. (The officials' promise to protect the guards from Pilate may involve more bribery; despite Roman policy, Pilate is known to have been susceptible to this form of persuasion.) Matthew would be unlikely to report a charge against the resurrection that had not actually been made (28:15), and his report indicates that the Jerusalem authorities had sought to explain the empty tomb—but had never tried to deny it.¹⁴

8. Jesus appears to two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Mark 16.12-13; Luke 24.13-35).

And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs (Luke 24.13).¹⁵

Sixty stadia was about seven miles. Apparently more than one place in Palestine was called Emmaus (1 Maccabees 3:57; 4:3; Josephus reports a different one). The exact site of Luke's Emmaus is no longer known.¹⁶

Emmaus = "warm baths."¹⁷

¹³ Keener, [Gospel of John](#), p. 1196, emphasis added.

¹⁴ Keener, [Background](#), p. 124.

¹⁵ Καὶ ἰδοὺ, δύο ἐξ αὐτῶν ἦσαν πορευόμενοι ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ εἰς κώμην ἀπέχουσαν σταδίου ἐξήκοντα ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλήμ ἣ ὄνομα Ἐμμοαῦς "And behold, two of them journeyed in the same day into the village that was **sixty stadia** away from Jerusalem named Emmaus" (Luke 24.13 my translation).

¹⁶ Keener, [Background](#), p. 243.

¹⁷ The name "Emmaus" has been associated with various locations in the past, and one possible interpretation of the name is that it means "warm baths" in Greek. However, it is unclear whether this etymology is accurate or whether it has any theological significance for the narrative in Luke 24. Some scholars suggest that the name "Emmaus" may reflect the ancient practice of using hot springs or thermal baths for medicinal or therapeutic purposes. In this sense, Emmaus may represent a place of healing or rejuvenation, which could be seen as a metaphorical reflection of the transformative power of Jesus' resurrection. However, this interpretation remains speculative and lacks strong textual evidence. Other scholars argue that the etymology of "Emmaus" is uncertain, and that the name may have originated from a different language or cultural context. In any case, the theological significance of the Emmaus narrative in Luke 24 is not dependent on the specific meaning or origin of the place name. The focus of the narrative is on the encounter between the resurrected Jesus and the two disciples, and the transformative impact of this encounter on their faith and perspective.

The location of Emmaus mentioned in Luke 24.13-35 is not definitively known, and there have been various interpretations regarding its unknown nature. Some have suggested that Emmaus was a real place, possibly located near Jerusalem, while others suggest that it may be a symbolic location or a literary device used by Luke to emphasize a theological point.

One possible interpretation is that Emmaus represents a symbol of spiritual journey or pilgrimage. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus were initially discouraged and disillusioned after Jesus' crucifixion, but their encounter with the resurrected Jesus transformed their perspective and renewed their faith. This transformation can be seen as a metaphorical journey from doubt to belief, from despair to hope, and from darkness to light. In this sense, Emmaus may represent a place of transformation or conversion.

Another possible reading of this story in Luke 24 is that Emmaus represents a symbol of hospitality and community. The two disciples invited Jesus to stay with them and share a meal, which led to their recognition of him in the breaking of the bread. This gesture of hospitality and fellowship may reflect Luke's emphasis on the importance of community and justice in the early Christian community. We must remember that the early Christian community was one where they broke bread in remembrance of Jesus, and talked about Jesus in a meal setting in their homes. I like this interpretation, because all of us are on a spiritual journey to Emmaus in this sense. We all seek community and belonging. We all have had doubts from time to time. We all need to remember Jesus to have his spirit to be with us. In this sense, Emmaus may represent a place of communion and solidarity, an invitation to have communion with the Saints and rest from the troubles of this challenging world.

Finally, some have suggested that Emmaus may be a literary device used by Luke to emphasize the universal scope of Jesus' resurrection. ***The fact that the location of Emmaus is not definitively known may reflect Luke's intention to highlight the significance of Jesus' resurrection beyond a specific historical or geographical context.*** In this sense, Emmaus may represent a place of encounter with the risen Christ that is accessible to all people, regardless of their background or location. I also like this as well, for in this manner, Emmaus is where ever you happen to be, just a sixty stadia walk away!

9. Jesus appears to his disciples (Mark 16.14; Luke 24.36-39; John 20.19-23).

And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have (Luke 24.36-39).

The narrative of Luke 24.36-39 presents the disciples' initial hesitation in accepting the resurrected Jesus due to their assumption that he may be a disembodied spirit or a "ghost." This perception was not uncommon among the popular belief systems of the time, which included an acceptance of the concept of ghosts (as seen in Mark 6.49) while seemingly neglecting the theological implications that such a belief contradicts the notions of the afterlife in paradisiacal or Gehenna and the doctrine of physical resurrection. Jesus, however, refutes this assumption and assures the disciples that he is not a mere specter, a phantom, a spirit, but rather, an exemplar of bodily resurrection, the shape, form, and literal person they knew as a mortal, yet now brought back to life from the ravages of the tortures of the Roman soldiers and the cruel cross of Calvary. It would seem from my reading of this text, however, that

Jesus is not appearing in all his glory in this experience, but as a resurrected being that would appear more or less as a mortal.

Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained (John 20.21-23).

It is interesting to note that the Savior sometimes deviated from protocol. Instead of laying his hands to give the Gift of the Holy Ghost, he simply breathed upon the apostles and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." Additionally, the Lord performed many miracles without the laying on of hands, showing that form should never supersede function. While it is the Lord's prerogative to give gifts in different ways, we as Latter-day Saints have been instructed to administer certain ordinances in specific ways, such as baptism and the laying on of hands for the Gift of the Holy Ghost and for the sick.

Another important concept to consider is the absence of a manifestation of the Spirit when the apostles received the Holy Ghost. The fullness of the Spirit was not felt until nearly 50 days later, on the day of Pentecost. This delay is significant because it is common for individuals to not experience a spiritual outpouring immediately after confirmation. The process of being born again often occurs gradually, with the purification by the Spirit happening later than the ordinance, in a piecemeal fashion, line upon line. While some may feel the Spirit right away, others may not experience it until later on. Lifetime members may not remember their feelings on the day of their baptism, but they will never forget the time when the Spirit significantly changed their heart and life.

10. Thomas' statement, "Except I see... I will not believe" (John 20.24-25).

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe (John 20.24-25).

Jesus has lost none except Judas (17:12), and "the Twelve" remain a defined group even without Judas (20:24).³⁶⁷ Thus Jesus must appear once more while Thomas is present; this happens after eight days (20:26) to suggest the following Sunday, perhaps to emphasize the worship experience of early Christians as the context for Jesus' revelations (cf. Rev 1:10). Thomas may suppose that his fellow disciples had seen merely a ghost if in fact they had seen anything at all; but ghost stories were not resurrections, and Thomas is unwilling to believe. Because Thomas plays no significant individual role in other extant first-century traditions (i.e., the Synoptics), some scholars have proposed special reasons for Thomas being the particular disciple to fill this role here, proposing a specific Thomas tradition existing in this period. One approach connects Thomas with the beloved disciple, thereby affecting how readers encounter that disciple as a model for faith. Yet it appears difficult to reconcile the anonymous disciple with Thomas.

Another approach takes Thomas's appearances in this Gospel as instances of polemic against the Thomas tradition that stood behind the Gospel of Thomas and its community.¹⁸ If we nuance this view to

¹⁸ "The Gospel of Thomas is an early Christian gospel comprising 114 sayings and parables of Jesus organized into a simple list. It has no narrative structure and says virtually nothing about Jesus' life, his death, or his resurrection. It is often referred to as a "sayings gospel" and compared to "Q," the lost sayings collection that is thought to have

allow for traditions that later became the Gospel of Thomas rather than that work itself, this approach is possible and plausible. It is not, however, by any means certain. Synoptic tradition recognizes that the disciples responded with skepticism, and some more than others (Matt 28:17; Luke 24:11, 24, 38, 41); it is not impossible that John simply preserves a more detailed tradition where a notably skeptical disciple is named, one who was eager to follow Jesus (11:16; 14:5) though too devastated by Jesus' death to accept the apostolic witness of his colleagues (20:25). That a tradition that later became the Gospel of Thomas adapted some ideas once related to Thomas is possible¹⁹, but it is also possible that it merely exploited his name.²⁰

11. Eight days later, Thomas sees Jesus (John 20.26-29).

And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed (John 20.26-29).

President Benson's witness of the Savior:

"There were witnesses then who saw Him. There have been many in this dispensation who have seen Him. As one of those special witnesses so called in this day, I testify to you that He lives. There is no truth

been used by the authors of Matthew and Luke." [Stephen J. Patterson, "The Gospel of Thomas," Oxford Bibliographies](#), accessed 3.3.2023.

¹⁹ The Gospel of Thomas is a non-canonical early Christian text that consists of a collection of sayings attributed to Jesus. There are several reasons why the Gospel of Thomas was never canonized in the early Christian Church, including:

1. The Gospel of Thomas was not widely known or accepted by the early Christian communities, unlike the canonical gospels.
2. The Gospel of Thomas contains many sayings (there are 114, many are recognizable to most Christians, some are not) that are similar to those found in the canonical gospels, but they are presented in a different context, and some of them are presented in a more esoteric or mystical way, which might have made them less accessible to the average believer.
3. The Gospel of Thomas lacks a narrative structure, and it does not include an account of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, which were essential components of the canonical gospels.
4. The Gospel of Thomas contains some teachings that were considered heretical by the early Christian Church, such as the idea that salvation is achieved through knowledge or enlightenment, rather than through faith in Jesus Christ.
5. The authorship of the Gospel of Thomas is unknown, and it was not written by one of the apostles or a close associate of Jesus, which might have made it less authoritative in the eyes of the early Christian Church.

For the following reasons: the lack of widespread acceptance, the differences in content and style, and the presence of some teachings that were considered heretical - all contributed to the Gospel of Thomas being excluded from the canon of the early Christian Church as they struggled to decide what should be in the official canon in the fourth century.

²⁰ Keener, [Gospel of John](#), p. 1208.

or fact of which I am more assured or more confident than the truth of the literal resurrection of our Lord."²¹

President Benson also cautions the Saints:

"we must be careful, as we seek to become more and more godlike, that we do not become discouraged and lose hope. Becoming Christlike is a lifetime pursuit and very often involves growth and change that is slow, almost imperceptible. The scriptures record remarkable accounts of men whose lives changed dramatically, in an instant, as it were: Alma the Younger, Paul on the road to Damascus, Enos praying far into the night, King Lamoni. Such astonishing examples of the power to change even those steeped in sin give confidence that the Atonement can reach even those deepest in despair.

But we must be cautious as we discuss these remarkable examples. Though they are real and powerful, they are the exception more than the rule. For every Paul, for every Enos, and for every King Lamoni, there are hundreds and thousands of people who find the process of repentance much more subtle, much more imperceptible. Day by day they move closer to the Lord, little realizing they are building a godlike life. ***They live quiet lives of godness, service, and commitment.*** They are like the Lamanites, who the Lord said were baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and they knew it not. (3 Ne. 9:20). We must not lose hope. Hope is an anchor to the souls of men. Satan would have us cast away that anchor. In this way he can bring discouragement and surrender. But we must not lose hope. The Lord is pleased with every effort, even the tiny, daily ones in which we strive to be more like Him. Though we may see that we have far to go on the road to perfection, ***we must not give up hope.***"²²

12. John writes, "These signs are written, that ye might believe" (John 20.30-31).

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name (John 20.30-31).

Jesus' blessing (v. 29) applies to the readers of John who believe through the apostolic testimony (v. 31), and Thomas's confession (v. 28) helps define the content of saving faith in verse 31. Verse 30 is the culmination of John's signs motif: signs sometimes lead to faith and sometimes lead to opposition. Narrators sometimes noted that they had many more stories than they could recount (v. 30).²³

13. Peter goes fishing (John 21.1-19).

Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus (John 21.3-4).

²¹ Ezra Taft Benson, "[Jesus Christ: Our Savior, Our God](#)," *Ensign*, Apr. 1991, 4.

²² President Ezra Taft Benson, "[Mighty Change of Heart](#)," *Ensign*, Oct. 1989, emphasis added. See also: Robert L. Millet, *Alive in Christ: The Miracle of Spiritual Rebirth*, Deseret Book, 1997. Pres. Benson continues, "If we will strive to incorporate these principles into our lives and implement them on a daily basis, we shall then qualify to be more than members of record in the Church of Jesus Christ. As true members, we have claim to His promise: "Whosoever is of my church, and endureth of my church to the end, him will I establish upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them." ([D&C 10:69](#).) My prayer is that we may all win that promise for ourselves."

²³ Keener, *Background*, p. 311.

Elder Holland taught the Saints:

After a joyful reunion with the resurrected Jesus, Peter had an exchange with the Savior that I consider the crucial turning point of the apostolic ministry generally and certainly for Peter personally, moving this great rock of a man to a majestic life of devoted service and leadership. Looking at their battered little boats, their frayed nets, and a stunning pile of 153 fish, Jesus said to His senior Apostle, "Peter, do you love me more than you love all this?" Peter said, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee."

The Savior responds to that reply but continues to look into the eyes of His disciple and says again, "Peter, do you love me?" Undoubtedly confused a bit by the repetition of the question, the great fisherman answers a second time, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee."

The Savior again gives a brief response, but with relentless scrutiny He asks for the third time, "Peter, do you love me?" By now surely Peter is feeling truly uncomfortable. Perhaps there is in his heart the memory of only a few days earlier when he had been asked another question three times and he had answered equally emphatically-but in the negative. Or perhaps he began to wonder if he misunderstood the Master Teacher's question. Or perhaps he was searching his heart, seeking honest confirmation of the answer he had given so readily, almost automatically. Whatever his feelings, Peter said for the third time, "Lord, . . . thou knowest that I love thee."

To which Jesus responded (and here again I acknowledge my nonscriptural elaboration), perhaps saying something like: "Then Peter, why are you here? Why are we back on this same shore, by these same nets, having this same conversation? Wasn't it obvious then and isn't it obvious now that if I want fish, I can get fish? What I need, Peter, are disciples-and I need them forever. I need someone to feed my sheep and save my lambs. I need someone to preach my gospel and defend my faith. I need someone who loves me, truly, truly loves me, and loves what our Father in Heaven has commissioned me to do. Ours is not a feeble message. It is not a fleeting task. It is not hapless; it is not hopeless; it is not to be consigned to the ash heap of history. It is the work of Almighty God, and it is to change the world. So, Peter, for the second and presumably the last time, I am asking you to leave all this and to go teach and testify, labor and serve loyally until the day in which they will do to you exactly what they did to me."

Then, turning to all the Apostles, He might well have said something like: "Were you as foolhardy as the scribes and Pharisees? As Herod and Pilate? Did you, like they, think that this work could be killed simply by killing me? Did you, like they, think the cross and the nails and the tomb were the end of it all and each could blissfully go back to being whatever you were before? Children, did not my life and my love touch your hearts more deeply than this?"²⁴

"Feed my sheep" (John 21.16).

President Benson taught:

"There are no new solutions to this old problem of sheep straying elsewhere for food. The charge Jesus gave to Peter, which He emphasized by repeating it three times, is the proven solution: 'Feed my lambs. Feed my sheep. Feed my sheep.' (See John 21:15-17.)

²⁴ Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, ["The First Great Commandment," October 2012 General Conference.](#)

"As in the glorious admonition of the Book of Mormon, those baptized into the church of Christ must be constantly 'remembered and nourished by the good word of God.' (Moro. 6:4.)

"The answer, then, is found in prayerfully shepherding and feeding the flock-in other words, personal watchcare. There must be real, heartfelt concern by a true and loving shepherd, not just the shallow concern that a hireling might show.

"As we discuss the concept of a true shepherd, we recognize that the Lord has given this responsibility to priesthood holders. But sisters also have callings of 'shepherding' in the charitable and loving service they render to one another, and to others. Thus, we must all learn to be true shepherds. We must manifest the same love to others that the Good Shepherd has for all of us. Each soul is precious to Him. His invitation beckons every member-every son and daughter of God."²⁵

Lovest thou me more than these? ... Lovest thou me? (John 21.15-17)

Some writers have confused readers about the nature of John's words for love in chapter 21 of his Gospel. Let us, therefore, rather patiently and carefully examine the passage in question. After they had eaten (that is, after the sacramental meal reestablishing the open expression of the disciples' devotion to the Savior), the Lord said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?" Peter replied, "Oh, yes, my Lord; you know that I love you." (John 21:15; translation by the author.) In Jesus' words "than these," we understand "than you love these [fish]," a gentle chastisement of Peter. For he (and we) ought to love the Lord's work more than the things of this world. Without directly raising the question, the Lord caused Peter to reflect: Why should I be more concerned about material goods than about preaching the gospel? Even lacking specific instructions, Peter should try to help others. His responsibility as one of the apostles gave new direction to life, or at least it should have done so. After Pentecost it did.

But Peter was afflicted with one of the most common diseases of mankind: discouragement. Even while anticipating the success of the Lord's kingdom, he had experienced the death of his Master, whom he had denied knowing three times. Perhaps the anguish of his actions and of his dashed expectations weighed upon him. In such circumstances people often revert to old habitual pursuits. That is what Peter did. He went fishing, taking with him other apostles. So when the Lord inquired whether Peter loved him more than worldly pursuits or tangible goods, the question acted as a purging influence, bringing Peter to acknowledge the strength and depth of his testimony, which had been temporarily obscured. The resurrected Lord masterfully taught Peter by having him recognize and state the true priorities of his life. He then exhorted Peter to put these priorities into practice.

While it is true that there are several words for love in Greek, John 21:15-17 is probably not the best passage to differentiate the meanings. But because many have treated this exchange as though it were intended to urge Peter to a higher form of love, we should examine more closely John's account of Jesus' words here. Since the Greek language is extremely rich in vocabulary and grammar, it exhibits many synonyms. In the New Testament, at least four different word groups (verbs, nouns, or adjectives based on the same stem) may be translated by a meaning in the range of the English love: *phileo*, *agapao*, *stergo*, *aspazomai*. Furthermore, another word group based on *eros*, commonly used in classical

²⁵ President Ezra Taft Benson, "Feed My Sheep," *Ensign*, Sept. 1987.

literature to describe a purely sensuous or passionate love, does not appear in the New Testament (though it appears twice in the Septuagint or Greek Old Testament used by the early Christian Church).

In Greek, the noun *eros* is used both for love and for the boy Cupid (from the Latin noun *cupido* or "desire"), who, according to the myths of classical antiquity, stirs up longing and desire in the hearts of people by shooting them with his arrows. We would expect that the notion of *eros* would receive a strong condemnation in the scriptures, particularly in cataloguing evils and vices that are prevalent in the world and that members of the church should avoid. But the entire word group is lacking from the New Testament, and only occasionally does it appear in later Christian writings. John does not use it; to suggest the word in the context of John 21 is offensive, contrary to the entire episode.

The word *aspazomai* (often translated "greet" or "salute") includes warm and affectionate greetings, often with a kiss. The welcome may include a friend, relative, or peer, or it may extend to acclaiming a king; in Matthew 5:47 it clearly means to cherish, love, and be fond of someone. While the verb and its related noun are common enough in the synoptic Gospels, and while John uses the verb in his epistles, he does not include it in his Gospel. If he had intended to convey a development of love, he likely would have used this word to mean general, natural human love, warmth, and respect for one another.

Another word with a more specific sense was *stergo*. It was originally used by poets for the word love, with the nuance of love between parents and children; but by the time of the New Testament, prose writers also used it. Most commonly, the meaning was the love a parent felt for a child; Euripides pathetically used it thus in his play *Medea*. While love as a verb does not occur in the New Testament, other early Christian writers in the late first and second centuries used it. But one form of the stem does appear in the writings of Paul in a very pejorative or negative sense. In Romans 1:31 (in a list of vices) and in 2 Timothy 3:3 (talking of the last days), Paul uses an adjective with a negative prefix (like unloving): *astorgos*. This is not surprising, for Paul had an extensive familiarity with Greek literature and quoted from some Greek poets. John knew Greek very well, though he probably did not enjoy Paul's familiarity with classical literature. Nevertheless, inasmuch as John wrote the Gospel in Greek (and that, too, quite probably for the church at the Greek city of Ephesus after he wrote Revelation, according to early Christian sources), he could well have drawn upon Paul and other Christian or non-Christian Greek works for this sense of the word. He did not. Never, even speaking of God's love for his own Son, does he use the positive sense of the verb. Instead, he writes *phileo* or *agapao*, without making a distinction between the two words.

Generally, *phileo* has a broad meaning of love and affection, from kindness to a passionate kiss, from respect to deep love. John used the verb *phileo* to describe God's love for his Son (John 5:20) and the disciples (John 16:27), and Christ's love for Lazarus (John 11:3, 36). Jesus uses the noun friends (*philoï*) in an elevated manner (John 15:15); the disciples are his friends (*philoï*) if they keep his commandments (John 15:14). Negatively, *phileo* is used to describe a person loving his own life (John 12:25), just as John in 1 John 2:15 uses *agapao* to describe loving or lusting after the things of this world. (At James 4:4 "friendship of the world" is *philia*.)

In Greek, *agapao* and its related words (for example, *agapazo* in Homer) carry a range of meaning: to treat with affection, to caress, to be fond of, to love, to be contented with or pleased at, to show affection, to value or esteem. In John we find *agapao* to describe God loving the world (John 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:9-10), God loving his Son, and his Son loving the disciples (John 15:9), the love of his disciples for one another (John 13:34-35; 15:12, 17), and the obedience stemming from love (John 14:23-24; 15:10). But

in Christian usage the noun came to mean a love-feast or meal shared in connection with church services (much as we might say sacrament meeting). The adjective beloved (*agapetos*) is used of Christ in the synoptics (Matt. 3:17; 17:5) and of members of the church in the writings of Paul and the general epistles, including John.

In John 21 Jesus twice asks, "Do you love me?" (*agapas me*) and Peter responds, "I love you" (*philo se*). Jesus asks the same question the third time, now using the other verb, *phileis me*, to which Peter responds with *philo se*, the same as the first two times. His protestation of love would be ludicrous if he had replied with a word that had a distinctly lesser meaning than the word used by the Lord. Likewise, if the words were not synonymous, why would John have Jesus alter his words?

Thus we conclude that *agapao* and *phileo* occur interchangeably in this context of John's Gospel. Although some popular Christian ministers and Latter-day Saint speakers have endeavored to see in John 21 levels of love and some sort of qualitative personal growth, there is nothing in John's words to warrant such a conclusion. Literary, stylistic, and vocabulary considerations require interpreting the phrases as deliberate repetition of the same point by using synonyms.²⁶

Peter's Death Predicted

When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God (John 21.18-19).

As we read in Eusebius's account of early Christian history, Peter did indeed die in Rome, crucified upside down. That he had developed the determination of character to emulate the Savior and remain true to the testimony he had uttered three times on the shore to his resurrected Lord illustrates that at least for John, the sealing of the Atonement by the Resurrection was the focal point of the life of Christ. To gain and to bear testimony of that event was far more significant than the utterance by Peter near Caesarea. (Matt. 16:16.) Hence, John's account minimizes the very things that some people at Rome were extolling: Peter and his confession of faith.

This same attitude toward Peter may be seen in John's references to "the beloved disciple" and to the walking on the sea (John 6:16-21) without mentioning Peter walking on the water, an event recorded only in Matthew 14:28-33. In John 21 the post resurrection appearance of the Lord furnishes an analogous situation, but John notes only that Peter attempted to approach Jesus—by swimming. Similarly, at the beginning of John 20, both Peter and John hastened to the tomb, though John, perhaps with an inward smile, notes that "the other disciple" ran ahead faster than Peter. Yet, after looking inside, he did not have the audacity to enter the tomb. Peter, on the other hand, rushed right in. (John 20:4-7.)

Whereas Matthew gives us the magnificent testimony of Peter at Caesarea shortly after Jesus fed the multitude, John's report of the event is somewhat more subdued: "Lord, to whom will we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we have come to trust [or, in Greek, have faith, believe] and know that thou art God's holy one." (John 6:68-69; translation by the author.) Like most of us, Peter's actions

²⁶ Thomas W. Mackay, "The Resurrected Lord and his Apostles," *Studies in Scripture, Vol. 5: The Gospels*, edited by Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson, Deseret Book, 2004.

warranted occasional reproach and encouragement, but he was at base a good, dedicated, and energetic person. He willingly surrendered his life to and for his Lord.²⁷

14. Peter asks Jesus about John (John 21.20-22).

Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me (John 21.20-22).

15. John is translated (John 21.23-25; 3 Nephi 28.6; D&C 7)

Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen (John 21.23-25).

Of all the events recounted in John 21, the translation or transformed physical condition of John is most enigmatic for the world. That it stands in stark contrast to Peter's future is only one aspect, for John was the beloved disciple. Curiously, although this scripture states that John would not die until the Savior returned (John 21:23), Eusebius records that John met death. The compression of John's narrative has deliberately obscured the circumstances of the Lord's promise to John presupposed by John 21:21-23. Early commentators are perplexed by the passage; Latter-day Saints fare better because we have other sources on the subject, section 7 of the Doctrine and Covenants and chapter 28 of 3 Nephi.²⁸

What D&C 7 Tells Us

In the Doctrine and Covenants we have a brief transcript of a writing of John from a leather scroll that Joseph Smith saw in a vision. Since the language of that text is close to the Gospel of John but more expansive and in a more personal tone, we may have in section 7, as well as in section 93, some of John's earlier or more complete Gospel that we are told will be brought forth in our dispensation (D&C 93:18), depending on our faith. Certainly the first-person narrative of section 7 contrasts sharply with the third-person account in John ("the disciple whom Jesus loved" [*phileo* at John 20:2 and *agapao* at John 21:20]). But section 7 requires that the reader know John 21 or at least the point made in John 21:20-23. Yet section 7 clarifies why John would remain untouched by death, while the other disciples would come to the Lord: John was to preach the gospel and to prophesy among the nations in order to prepare the way for the return of the Lord. From John 21:22-23 we learn that John was to remain until Jesus should come, but, as noted above, John does not elaborate the point in his Gospel that has been transmitted to us.²⁹

3 Nephi 28

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

In 3 Nephi 28 we find a reference to John's condition, for three of the Nephite Twelve sought the same promise and privilege that Jesus had granted to John. From Mormon's statements we conclude that John and the three Nephite disciples entered a condition analogous to that experienced by Enoch and his city: they are no longer subjected to mortal conditions and restrictions known to us; they can disguise themselves; they have supernatural mobility; they can exercise tremendous priesthood powers; Satan no longer has power over them to tempt them; and they will undergo another change to their eternal condition when the Lord comes. Mormon himself, curious as to how they could be above death, asked and learned that when they were changed, pain, sorrow, and death could not affect them. (3 Nephi 28:37-38.) Therefore, 3 Nephi 28 is really our best description of what happened also to John.³⁰

16. Jesus commissions the Twelve (Matt. 28.16-20; Mark 16.15-18; Mormon 9.22-24).

Ancient works sometimes contrasted characters: the true testimony of the women (28:1- 10), in contrast to the false testimony of the guards (28:11-15), offers the proper model for the testimony of the church (28:16-20). Ancient works sometimes summarized major themes in their conclusions; Jesus' closing words in 28:18-20 connect many dominant themes in Matthew's Gospel, including Jesus' authority, his commandments, his identity and God's interest in even Gentiles (cf. 1:3-5; 2:1-2; 3:9; 4:15; 8:5, 11, 28; 11:21-22; 12:41-42; 15:22; 24:14; 25:31-32; 27:54). Some have pointed out that Matthew 28:16-20 resembles some Old Testament "commissioning narratives."³¹

17. Jesus ascends into heaven (Mark 16.19-20; Luke 24.50-53).

And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen (Luke 24.49-53).

Endowed with Power ἐνδύσθητε δύναμιν (Luke 24.49)

"It is common in Christendom to suppose that Jesus here commanded his apostles to tarry in Jerusalem until the promised gift of the Holy Ghost was received, which gift would constitute an endowment of power from on high. Perhaps the statement can be so used, for certainly the disciples were marvelously and powerfully endowed when the Holy Spirit came into their lives on the day of Pentecost.

"But from latter-day revelation we learn that the Lord had something more in mind in issuing this instruction. In this dispensation, after the elders had received the gift of the Holy Ghost and as early as January, 1831, the Lord began to reveal unto them that he had an endowment in store for the faithful (D&C 38:22; 43:16), 'a blessing such as is not known among the children of men.' (D&C 39:15.) In June, 1833, he said: 'I gave unto you a commandment that you should build a house, in the which house I design to endow those whom I have chosen with power from on high; **For this is the promise of the Father unto you; therefore I command you to tarry, even as mine apostles at Jerusalem.**' (D&C 95.8-9; 105.11-12, 18, 33.)

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Keener, *Background*, p. 124.

"Thus the apostles-or any ministers or missionaries in any age-are not fully qualified to go forth, preach the gospel, and build up the kingdom, unless they have the gift of the Holy Ghost and also are endowed with power from on high, meaning have received certain knowledge, powers, and special blessings, normally given only in the Lord's Temple."³²

The Significance of the Forty Day Teaching of Christ

Hugh Nibley discusses this idea:

Let us talk a little about ordinances. Very nearly all of the early Christian documents (and there are over 200 of them) have to do with what the Lord taught the apostles after the resurrection. What was said in the forty days? The New Testament does not tell us. What did he tell the apostles? According to these documents, he gave them the ordinances of the temple — but only to the apostles, to be held in secret. They would last only two generations, he explains, then they would be taken away. So they were not to pass beyond the general authorities, but were given to them as a special blessing to make that dispensation complete. They would be restored later on (in our dispensation). The ordinances are described in great detail. You could almost go through the temple using just these documents, for so much is there. Now it is public property; anyone can use it. However, the authority remains in one church...

That's what gnosis is: the knowledge of what the Lord taught the apostles after the resurrection. When he came back, he found the apostles not believing; they all took to their heels and ran away. When Mary and Joanna told them that they had actually seen their living Lord, they said, "You're crazy" ("nonsense" is the actual word used in Luke 24:11); "You're very foolish and unbalanced; you're out of your mind." Then they saw the Lord, but Thomas wasn't there. "I won't believe it," Thomas said, though all the apostles testified they had seen the Lord. Thomas (and he was a good apostle — the firmest of the lot) persisted, "No, I can't believe it until I've seen for myself" (cf. John 20:25). They didn't understand or invent the resurrection story, as the theory goes. It wasn't their idea at all. They actually fought the precept. When somebody told them the Lord was resurrected, they didn't say, "Hooray! It was just as we thought. We knew it would happen!" It was the last thing in the world they would have invented.

This is when the Lord gave them the special teachings. It says, "Then they were able to go out and preach the gospel." Before then they weren't ready to. But we don't have anything that the Lord taught them. At the end of Luke, we learn that he came to them behind locked doors, and when he did, he rebuked them for their unbelief and their hardness of heart. He gave them the opening words of the plea, "O fools, and slow of heart" (Luke 24:25, 27, 44-45). That is about all we have in the New Testament of what he taught them during the forty days. Now what about these forty days? Isn't this the most important teaching of them all? We have one-half hour of reading time of what the Lord taught the apostles during the three years that he was with them, and that was not enough to convert them. They just did not understand what the resurrection was all about during that time. Yet that's all we have. Can we understand so much better than the apostles? We say, oh yes, in light of the resurrection. But, oh no! The Lord had to stay with them; he had to teach them time after time.

We have sixteen accounts of his returns and teachings. We also have the marvelous account in 3 Nephi of the Lord coming and teaching the apostles after the resurrection. But what did he teach them? That is

³² Bruce R. McConkie, [Doctrinal New Testament Commentary](#), 3 vols. Bookcraft, 1965-1973, 1: 859.

the point. He must have given them something extremely important to change their whole view of everything, because then they were ready to go into the world and preach the gospel.

The forty-day documents have four things in common. First of all, they were *secret* — for the apostles only, not for general knowledge. They were not handed down; that is why they could be faked later on. Of course, people knew the sort of thing the Lord taught, and consequently the sort of thing to fake — so everybody pretended to have the knowledge, but nobody did.

Second, they paint a very *gloomy picture*. In all of these accounts, the apostles ask the Lord, "What's going to happen to us now? What's going to happen to the church? Why are we going to all this trouble in this dispensation if it's all going to be taken away?" The Lord tells them, This is for two generations now, then it's going to be taken away; a lesser church will be left in its place; it will be kept on the fire, so to speak; the true church will return later when I return with my Father. This of course was a doctrine the Christians didn't like. It was very bad news for the later church to have the Lord telling the apostles that all these things were going to be taken away. Yet he had said the same thing in several places in the New Testament. 123 The documents make this very clear; thus these teachings were unpopular.

Third, the Lord taught them *strange doctrines*, and the Christian world didn't like that sort of thing at all. The churches liked spiritual things, the things that came out of the university of Alexandria.

Fourth (the main thing), the Lord gave the apostles the *ordinances*. We can't speak about these ordinances specifically, only in general.

Sent Ones

There is the doctrine of the "Sent One" — somebody who is sent. Recently, a great deal of attention is being paid to this doctrine of the "Sent One." Geo Widengren, a Swede, has written a book on the subject of "The One Who Is Sent" — the one who is sent from one world to another with a message and instructions. In fact, the word apostle means "sent one." Instead of personally intervening by direct methods into the affairs of men, God sends his agents to act for him. The purpose of the Sent Ones, all agree, is to help the struggling lower creatures out, by instructing them in what they have to do to survive here and hereafter, and where necessary to show them how to go about following instructions. Their great work is, thus, to uplift and to give help to those beneath them. The greatest of the Sent Ones is, of course, the Savior himself. "The Lord brings earth up to Heaven," as 1 Jeu says.

During the forty days the Lord said in the *Epistle of the Apostles* (its proper title is *What the Lord Told the Apostles in Secret Conversations after the Resurrection*), "I have been sent with all authority from my Father to lead all those in darkness into the light." He promises the apostles, "I will send Gabriel to visit you in your prison and to represent me." This follows the principle of the spark: one Sent One represents another. The apostles are sent out in the same way: "I have the word of the Father, and the Father is in me . . . and I send you out as guides to others." These exact same things happen in John 14:16 and in 3 Nephi 11:12: you represent me as I represent the Father.

The Sent Ones emerge most frequently and most dramatically in the apocryphal literature in the story of Adam. "After the physical Adam was created," says the new apocryphal *Book of John*, "a messenger was sent to the head of all creations, Adam, and at his call Adam awoke and said, 'How the precious, beautiful life has been planted in this place. But it is hard on me down here.' Then the Sent One reminded Adam and said, 'But your beautiful throne awaits you, Adam. Why then do you, the image of

God, sit here complaining? All this is being done for your good. I have been sent to teach you, Adam, and to free you from this world. Listen and return to the light." Then the messenger gives him instructions. The *Ginza* (which means "a treasure, mystery, what is hidden and precious") tells us, "when Adam stood praying for light and knowledge, a helper came to him, gave him a garment, and told him, 'Those men who gave you the garment will assist you throughout your life until you are ready to leave earth.'" The commonest account, also found in the *Ginza*, is that "When Adam was created, he was found in a deep sleep, from which he was awakened by a helper, who forthwith began to instruct him. And at his death also, the Sent Ones came to take Adam back to the great first Paternal House and to the places in which he formerly dwelt."...

Throughout Christian literature, going to heaven is consistently described as a return to an old home, which raises the notion of premortal existence. In the *First Apocalypse of James*, the Lord says to the apostles, "They will ask you where you are going. Your answer: The place from which I came. I return to that place." "The elect are those individuals," says the *Gospel of Thomas*, "who shall find the Kingdom, because they came from it in the first place." *The Gospel of Truth* dwells at length on the theme of the return:

Whoever has this knowledge is a being from on high. When he is called, he hears, answers, and turns toward him who calls and reascends to him. He knows when he is called; he knows whence he has come, and where he is going. He has turned many from error and proceeded unto places which belong to them, but from which they have strayed. Joy to the man who has rediscovered himself, awakened, and has helped others to wake up.³³

³³ Hugh Nibley, "Apocryphal Writings and Teachings of the Dead Sea Scrolls," [*Temple and Cosmos: Beyond This Ignorant Present*](#), Deseret Book, 1992, p. 264-335.