

# FOLLOWING THE PATH OF JESUS

## A Harmony Of the Gospels

A Daily Devotional Study Guide - Book 1



## *“By Bread Alone”*

**Study:** Matthew 4:1-4, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-4

**Reading:** Deuteronomy 8:1-20

**Memory:** I John 4:9-10

**P**ersonal discipline is not always easy and it is very difficult to maintain on a regular basis. There are times, especially during the cold weather of hockey season, where I get busy and fail to exercise as I should. This lack of exercise is often associated with over eating. I don't think that the time off hurts me that much until I go to play in a hockey game. I really feel my lack of discipline when I am in the heat of the game and huffing and puffing with no energy.

Today, we are going to see how important it is to stay in spiritual shape. When you become lax spiritually, you may not think it affects you until you face the temptation of the devil and struggle because you are not in the correct spiritual shape.

### What Does the Bible Say?

Putting together exactly what happened next in the life of Jesus is a little difficult. Mark tells us Jesus immediately went into the wilderness to be tested while John says “the next day” Jesus called some of the first disciples. John never recorded the exact baptism of Jesus, only the record of John the Baptist and what he said. It appears that the calling of the disciples probably took place after the temptation, though this is debatable. Sometimes, Biblical time lines are skewed a little bit since they kept track of time and days a little differently and because they wrote much less chronologically than we do today. Most of their writing was in story form or theme form and not necessarily in time order. We will start with the temptation and then move to the calling of the disciples. When exactly they happened is not really important because both of them happened.

The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness knowing that He would be tempted there by Satan. As already described, the Judean wilderness was not one full of trees, but full of barren hills and cliffs. Jesus ate nothing during His time in the wilderness which lasted for forty days and forty nights. Though there is nothing magical about this number, there are a few recorded times in scripture where others fasted for this amount of time. Mark states there were wild animals around the area which would

have made it dangerous, but that Jesus was ministered to by the angels. Most likely, He spent most of this time in great communion with the Father preparing for the ministry which was ahead of Him.

Obviously, Jesus would have been very hungry after not eating for forty days, but at the same time, He would have been spiritually strong. I understand a little about this since I once fasted from food for forty days and though physically I was hungry, spiritually, I was greatly invigorated. Satan tried to exploit the hunger of Jesus by tempting Him to turn some rocks into bread so that He could eat. Though there was nothing in the Law that would have prohibited Jesus turning the rocks into bread, the sin would have been not trusting God to provide for His needs. Satan tempted Jesus by saying, "If you are the Son of God." He was trying to get Jesus to act on His emotions and take steps ahead of God's plan rather than to wait for God to lead Him and provide for Him.

The response of Jesus was clear and simple. He told Satan that man does not live by bread alone. He quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 which was a passage telling the Israelites they needed God more than they needed daily food. It revealed that if they followed God spiritually, He would help meet their physical needs. Satan's temptation was fought with Scripture and immediately caused Satan to attempt to use another tactic.

## How Does this Apply to Me?

Are you prepared to face the temptations of Satan? Many people have suggested that Jesus was at His weakest point when these temptations came, and that is somewhat true. Jesus would have been weak physically, but would have been at a high point spiritually after spending forty days communing with His Father. He was ready to face the temptation and the battles ahead. You don't have to fast for forty days to be ready to face temptation, though fasting should be practiced much more than it is in our self-indulgent society, but you do need to be daily communing with God in order to have the strength to see and fight the temptation. If you are not in the Scripture and drawing your spiritual strength from your fellowship with Him, you will be very vulnerable to the attacks and deception of the wicked one. Let your eyes be opened to the importance of dwelling in God's Word so you will be prepared for victory.

# *"Resisting Temptation"*

**Study:** Matthew 4:5-11, Luke 4:5-13

**Reading:** I John 2:12-29

**Memory:** I John 4:9-10



Southern temple mount from the Pictorial Library of Bible Lands

The temple mount was built on a hill with the northern part being the top part of the hill. To make the mount level, Herod the Great built up the southern area with a series of underground arches. The walls of the original mount would have been several feet higher than the walls are today. The west is to the left and east is to the right.

## What Does the Bible Say?

After Jesus resisted his first temptation, Satan made another attempt to get Jesus to sin. (Matthew and Luke record the second and third temptations in opposite order.) He took Him to the pinnacle of the temple. There is some debate to what exactly the pinnacle of the temple was, and this debate has recently become even more interesting with recent discoveries. Many times, when the temple is mentioned in the New Testament, it is a not a reference to the actual temple, but the whole temple area which we know today as the temple mount. The temple mount was a massive areas that was close to the size of thirty American football fields,

while the temple itself was about a third the size of one football field. It has generally been thought that the pinnacle was located on the southeast corner of the temple mount where the retaining wall was several feet high and towered over the Kidron Valley Below. However, recent excavations at the southwest corner have uncovered stones which give evidence that the pinnacle was on the southwest corner. Whatever the exact location is not important. If Jesus would have jumped off the southeast corner, he would have fallen on the rugged mountain side several feet below, or if he would have jumped off the southwest corner he would have landed on the block paved road several feet below. Both would have caused great harm and probably certain death.

Satan was very sly in this temptation because he used Scripture in his temptation. He told Jesus that if he jumped off, God would send angels to protect Him, just as it was written in Psalm 91:11-12. Jesus responded by saying that He was not going to do something foolish just to prove He was the Son of God. He didn't need to test God's love for Him, since He knew God loved Him and would protect Him (Matthew 4:5-7, Luke 4:9-12).

The next temptation involved Satan taking Jesus to a high mountain. This was not an ordinary mountain, but a mountain where all the nations of the world could be seen in just a moment of time. In this supernatural vision, Satan told Jesus that if He bowed down to worship him, then he would give Jesus control over all the kingdoms of the world. This might not seem to be much of a temptation, but a little deeper thinking about it reveals the great temptation it was. Satan was basically saying, he would bow out and stop working his evil in the world and would let Jesus reign. This meant the world would live in righteousness without the influence of evil. Jesus had a great love and passion for the people of the world and wanted all of them to live in righteousness, but at the same time, He understood clearly the plan of the Father and the need to become sin for all men. Jesus quoted Scripture which declared that He would worship God alone and would not bow down to any other (Matthew 4:8-10, Luke 4:5-8).

Satan realized he could not get Jesus to go after the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes or the pride of life, so he departed from Jesus. The angels then came and encouraged Jesus, probably bringing Him food to eat. Luke states that Satan left Jesus for the time being, but was looking for another opportune time to test Him further (Matthew 4:11, Luke 4:13).

## *“Because You Want To”*

**Study:** John 1:35-42

**Reading:** I Corinthians 4:1-21

**Memory:** I John 4:9-10

### What Does the Bible Say?

As mentioned a few days ago, an exact time line of some of the events of the life of Jesus are a little difficult to figure out, but perhaps Jesus was baptized by John, then went to the wilderness to be tempted, and shortly after that went back by John who recognized Him as the Lamb of God. Though we studied John 1:29-34 a few days ago with the baptism of Jesus, perhaps this passage should go after the temptation because it is John declaring how he had seen the Spirit descending on Jesus and how Jesus was the lamb of God. Again, the exact time line is not as important as what happens.

John the disciple recorded that the next day after John had made the declaration about Jesus being the Lamb of God that Jesus walked by John the Baptist who was there with two of his disciples. John declared to them that Jesus was the Lamb of God and his disciples chose to leave him and follow Jesus. We will see later that this was not hurtful to John because he was directing men towards the Messiah (vs 35-37).

When Jesus noticed these men were following Him, He asked them what they wanted. They asked Jesus, “Where are you staying?” He also addressed him as Rabbi which was a reference to Him being a teacher. In those days, disciples would find a Rabbi they respected and would go with him everywhere he went learning from Him and learning to think and act like Him. Jesus told them to come with Him and follow Him and He would show them where He was abiding. This seems to be just a simple “feeling out” opportunity where Jesus invited the men to spend the day with Him to get to know Him. John recorded that they met him about the tenth hour which would have been 10:00 a.m. according to Roman time or 4:00 p.m. according to Jewish time. The fact that the time is recorded seems to indicate that the writer was one of the disciples who was following Jesus since he remembered great details about the event (vs 38-39).

We do know that one of the men who had followed Jesus that day was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. It didn't take long for Andrew to realize that Jesus was the Messiah and he wanted to tell his brother about

his experience. Andrew told Simon that he had found the Messiah. John also indicates that the Messiah, the Old Testament Hebrew term for the anointed one, is the same as the “Christ,” the New Testament Greek word for the anointed one. When Simon came to Jesus, the first thing that Jesus told him was that he would be known by a different name. Though he was officially Simon the son of Jonah, he was now going to be called Cephas which was also translated as Peter. Cephas was an Aramaic name that meant “Rock” and Peter was the Greek term for the same word. By this Jesus was declaring that He would be the leader of His follower one that would help lay the foundation for the church (vs 40-42).

### **How Does this Apply to Me?**

Have you accepted the invitation of Christ? Do you follow Him because you feel that you have to or because you have seen Him and how He lived and you want to? Though that may sound like an odd question because you haven’t seen Jesus in the flesh, you still have the ability to see Him and know Him. Many times, people feel they have to follow Jesus because they fear eternity in hell or perhaps because they grew up in church and seemed that they were given no other choice. Yet, when you feel like you “have to” do something, it becomes very difficult to love and enjoy what you are forced to do. This is why the invitation of Jesus here and other places is so special. He did not try to gain His disciples through guilt trips or fear. He offered for them to follow Him for the day. They did and immediately saw that He was the Messiah. They started to fall in love with Him from the moment they spent time with Him and that love was what was going to keep them as His followers when He was gone. That being said, I believe there are times in our lives where we need to step back from what we feel we “have to” and take time to simply observe Christ and those who are consumed with Him. A time like this should raise your desire far past the “have to” point and should fill your heart with a “want to” when it comes to following Him.

### **Thought for the day**

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## ***“Knowing All Things”***

**Study:** John 1:43-51

**Reading:** Romans 8:1-39

**Memory:** I John 4:9-10

**T**here are some cell phones being made today that give parents the ability to track where their children are at all times. Not only can parents keep in contact by calling their child’s cell phone, but they can know where their children are at by where the cell phone signal is coming from. This is supposed to help parents keep a better eye on their teenagers, though I am not sure how well it actually works.

Today, we are going to see how we as humans have limited knowledge, but God has knowledge of all things. He knows where you are at every single moment of the day.

### **What Does the Bible Say?**

John says that the day after Jesus met Simon Peter, he decided to go to Galilee. Again, putting this all together leaves a few questions in our minds, though all the details are not given. It would have taken more than one day to travel from Judea to Galilee because of the distance, so apparently, He decided to go to Galilee on the day after He met Peter, but the events didn’t occur for a few more days. It is possible, that John used the phrase, “the next day” to describe a series of events in the order they happened while not meaning literal days. Again, the exact details in a chronological time line are not really important.

We are not told where in Galilee Jesus traveled to, but we are told that he met Philip who was from the city of Bethsaida, the same city that Andrew and Peter were from. When He saw Philip, he simply asked him to become one of his followers. This would have been clearly understood in those days because Rabbis had disciples that would give their lives to follow and learn from that specific Rabbi. Most likely, there were other exchanges between Philip and Jesus because of what Philip said when he found Nathaniel. Philip had clearly seen and understood that Jesus was the Messiah that they had been looking for and this understanding had to come from spending a little time with Jesus and probably hearing the testimony of Andrew and Peter (vs 43-45).

When Philip told Nathaniel about Jesus, Nathaniel was a bit skeptical

since Jesus was from Nazareth. Nazareth was not known as a great city which produced leaders of the day. He was amazed that the Messiah would come from a city like Nazareth. The only response that Philip could say was “Come and see.” This reveals that there must have been something extremely unique about Jesus since Philip had only known Him a very short time (vs 46).

When Nathaniel met Jesus, Jesus declared that he Nathaniel was a man who was not full of deceit. This seems to reveal that Nathaniel was not only an honest man, but didn’t want to be deceived into following a false prophet. He most likely was wise with a special gift to discern what was true and what was false. To prove to Nathaniel that He was more than an ordinary man, Jesus described where Nathaniel was when Philip met him and talked to him about Jesus (vs 47-48).

This amazed Nathaniel and convinced Him that Jesus was more than just a Rabbi. Jesus then told Nathaniel that he would see much greater things than this that would reveal that He was the Messiah. Jesus told him that he would see angel rising and descending from heaven. This was most likely a reference to Jacob and his vision of a ladder extending to heaven. The picture was not meant to be physical, but spiritually describing how the power of God would be upon Jesus allowing Him to do many miraculous things (vs 49-51).

## **How Does this Apply to Me?**

Do you realize that God truly knows everything about you? This was seen through Jesus and how He had full knowledge of where Nathaniel was and what Nathaniel was thinking. Understanding that God knows all about you could be a negative if you are not doing what is right, but should be a great positive if you are following Him in the right way. When you realize that God knows where you are and exactly what you are going through, it should encourage you to follow Him with your whole heart.

## **Suggestions for Prayer**

- \* *Thank God because He cares for every detail of your life.*
- \* *Ask God to help you trust that He knows what is best.*
- \* *Praise God because He has all knowledge.*

# ***“Water Into Wine”***

**Study:** John 2:1-12

**Reading:** Luke 5:27-39, John 7:1-13

**Memory:** I John 4:9-10

## **What Does the Bible Say?**

John stated that on the third day Jesus was in Cana of Galilee at a wedding. It is not clear if this is the third day after the last event happened or the third day after Jesus had left the area where John was baptizing. The exact location of Cana is unsure, though we do know that Nathaniel was from there. It was most likely located north of Nazareth about nine miles and we read that Jesus went to a wedding and have to assume that this was a wedding of a family friend. John says that Jesus was there with “his disciples.” He has a few followers as this point, but how many of them were there with Him is unclear. It appears that John is one of them, though he does not mention himself in the passage (vs 1-2).

Mary the mother of Jesus was at the wedding and came to Jesus in a little panic because they had run out of wine. This would mean that there was nothing left to drink for all the guests. The water they had was probably from a well or cistern which would not have been good for drinking unless mixed with wine to kill the bacteria. This was a great concern to Mary and perhaps she came to Jesus hoping He could do something, but not really knowing what to expect. We are not told, but it could be that Mary knew Jesus had special miraculous powers because of things he had done at home privately, or could just be that she didn’t know what to do and was just hoping her Son could do something about it (vs 3).

The response of Jesus was quite interesting as He told her that His time had not yet come. He called his mom, “woman” here which may seem to be rude, but by it He was starting to distance himself from His earthly family, with the understanding that He was on this earth to accomplish a greater purpose. The fact that His time had not yet come indicates that there was a great divine time line that would ultimately end in His death, the purpose for which He came. The fact that Mary told the servants to do what Jesus said indicates that Mary did not find the response of her Son to be a rude one, only one of purpose (vs 4-5).

Jesus ordered the servants to fill six large stone jars with water. These jars held 20-30 gallons of water and were used for ceremonial washing.

Before Jews ate, they would go through the practice of washing their hands in a specific way so that they would be ceremonial clean. These jars would not normally hold wine, but after the servants had filled them with water, Jesus turned the water into wine. The servants took a sampling of this wine to the man who was in charge of the wedding feast and he was amazed at how good it was. There were a variety of grades of wines based on numerous factors and normally the good wine was used up first and the lower grades used up near the end of the feast. The master of the wedding took the wine Jesus had made to the bridegroom and questioned him as to why the best wine was held for the end. Though this first miracle of Jesus may seem rather insignificant, it was making a statement. What Jesus was coming to bring was like the new wine and was going to be much better than the old Jewish system that they had been stuck in based on the traditions of men (vs 6-11).

Verse 12 describes how Jesus then traveled down to Capernaum with his mother, brothers and his disciples. Though this verse may seem to be a little insignificant, what I see here is the humanity of Jesus. When you travel to the wedding of a family friend, you often spend a great deal of time with your own family, especially if you have been away for a while. If you have met other good friends along the way, you sometimes bring them with you and all spend time together. Here, it appears that they were spending time together, catching up on old times and making new memories, just like we would today (vs 12).

### **How Does this Apply to Me?**

Do you realize that Jesus cares about the simple, little things of your life? You would think that the first recorded miracle of Jesus would be a huge one. One that would make the front page news at some large event or gathering, yet the first miracle of Jesus was at the wedding of a family friend. Did they absolutely need more wine to survive? No. Could people have gone somewhere and fended for themselves to find something to drink? Probably. Running out of wine was not a life and death situation, but it had caused panic in the mind of Mary, who I would guess was a good friend of the mother of the groom. Jesus was looking out for His mother who was looking out for a friend. The miracle didn't need to be performed, but it was and reveals that Jesus cares about the little, simple cares of your life.

## ***“Cleansing the Temple”***

**Study:** John 2:13-25

**Reading:** Luke 19:41-48, 24:1-12

**Memory:** I John 4:9-10

### **What Does the Bible Say?**

Some scholars think that the cleansing of the temple mentioned in John 2 was the same incident that was recorded in the other Gospels, though the other Gospels record it happening in the last week of the ministry of Jesus. Though this could be the case, since not everything is written chronologically, it seems best to understand these as two separate events.

All Jewish males were required to attend the Passover which was followed by the feast of unleavened bread. This was prescribed in the Old Testament Law and Jesus headed to Jerusalem to participate in the feast. It must be assumed that Jesus had traveled to Jerusalem on a yearly basis since He was the age of twelve, but now that it was time for Him to start His ministry, He made Himself known while He was there. In the temple area, which would have been over 35 acres in size, Jesus found that there were many people selling animals for sacrifices and exchanging money. The Old Testament allowed for sacrifices to be sold in Jerusalem for those who were traveling from long distances so they would not have to bring animals for the journey, yet they did not need to be sold in the temple area. For their offerings, they could not place Roman money in the treasury, but needed to purchase the Temple Shekel to give as an offering and had to exchange their currency, normally at a high exchange rate. The leaders of the temple rented out space to people to be able to buy and sell in the temple which caused it to become somewhat like a mall, a place of commerce. Instead of being a place of prayer, worship and sacrifice, it was a bustling place of business, taking attention away from the main focus of the temple. Because of the convenience of this market, it led to price markups for sacrifices and exchanging money.

Jesus was furious at all the trade that was going on and he began to overturn the table of the money changers and telling those who sold the animals to leave. He did not want His Father's house to be a house of trade. John reminded the reader that this was a fulfillment of Psalm 69:9 where it is said that the Messiah would have a zeal for the house of the Lord (vs 13-17).

Many wondered who Jesus was and what gave Him the authority to do what He was doing. They wanted Him to show them some type of sign to show that He had the authority to say that God was His Father. Jesus responded by telling them that if they destroyed the temple, He would build it up in three days. This was a reference to Himself and His life, but the Jews thought He was talking about the physical temple. The Jews declared that it had taken 46 years to build the temple so their was no way Jesus could do it in three days. Herod the Great began construction of the temple area around 20 B.C. At the time of Jesus, there was still construction taking place on the temple mount, though much of it had been completed (vs 18-22).

This action, along with the performing of miracles had attracted the attention of many people in Jerusalem. Many were enthusiastic about what Jesus was doing, but Jesus realized that many were only following Him for the excitement that He provided. He didn't commit Himself to them because He knew that most were not committed to Him yet. He knew that some of these same people would reject Him a few years later and He was careful and selective on who He called to be His follower (vs 23-25).

### **How Does this Apply to Me?**

Do you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit? Do you realize that God does not want you to be consumed with the commerce of this life? Yes, you will have to deal with money and do the regular business of life in order to survive, but as temples of God, you should not be living for commerce. You have a much greater calling in life and you body is to be a place of worship and prayer. Just like the temple, it is easy to allow your body to be overrun by all the cares of this world and have the attention and focus taken away from the real purpose of your life. Take time today to examine your life and let God reveal to you any areas where you have become too consumed with the world. Ask Him to help you make your body the temple for Him.

### **Thought for the day**

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## ***“Ye Must Be Born Again”***

**Study:** John 3:1-8

**Reading:** Ezekiel 36:22-38

**Memory:** I John 4:11-12

**T**he concept of wind farms is becoming extremely popular as a way to produce energy. There are many of these farms across the country, some large and some small. In Indiana, there is a massive wind farm that extends for miles and miles. I came across this one night while I was driving on a long road trip. It was quite an amazing sight because they had the lights on the tops of these wind mills systematically set to blink in a pattern. I drove for what seemed like miles in the midst of these blinking lights, the lights extended on both sides of the highway for what seemed like miles. Though wind can't be seen, the power of it can not only be felt physically, but for centuries, people have found a way to use wind power to their advantage.

Today, we are going to see how Jesus compared the Holy Spirit to the wind. Though we can't see the Spirit of God, we can feel the effects of His working when He comes into our lives and changes us from the inside out.

### **What Does the Bible Say?**

While Jesus was in Jerusalem during the early part of His ministry, one of the religious leaders came to Jesus to ask Him some questions. The fact that he went to Jesus at night indicates that he did not want others to see that He was talking to Jesus in such an inquisitive way. Though the “signs” that Jesus did in Jerusalem were not recorded, they gave clear evidence that Jesus was not an ordinary man, but had to have been sent from God. Though Nicodemus did not ask a question to Jesus yet, Jesus proved He was God by declaring the answer to the question that Nicodemus had come to ask. He told Nicodemus that a person had to be born again, in order to be able to see the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God would have been understood by a Jew as the millennial reign of Christ. Their expectation was not heaven, but the day when the Messiah would come and they would rule with Him (vs 1-3).

The statement about being born again had puzzled Nicodemus because He knew that it was not possible to be physically born again. Jesus explained further by telling Nicodemus that he had to be born of water and

of the Spirit in order to see the kingdom of God. There has been many explanations given about the water here with the most plausible in the context is that water referred to physical birth or that it referred to baptism and repentance associated with it. No where else in scripture is the term water used to describe natural birth, but there are many places where water was used symbolically for cleansing. Though we can not be sure, it appears that Jesus was saying that a person needed to repent and be cleansed (the message that John had been declaring) and to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit (vs 4-5).

Jesus went on to declare that there is a difference between being born in the flesh and being born in the Spirit. Everyone is born in the flesh and naturally lives in the flesh, but only those who are born of the Spirit will see the kingdom of God. Jesus compared the Spirit to the wind describing how the wind blows and the affects of it can be seen, though a person couldn't see or understand the wind. The Holy Spirit can't be seen or understood, but He is very real and He transforms a life from the inside out (vs 6-8).

## **How Does this Apply to Me?**

Have you been born again? Have you repented of your sins and turned from them to Christ? Have you received the Holy Spirit who has started to change your life from the inside out? Spiritual birth is much different than converting to a religion. Religious converts convert with their minds, but still have the sinful nature living inside of them. In their flesh, they attempt to do things for God, normally in order to appease Him, so He will give them a place in heaven. Those who have been born of the Spirit have power over sin and serve God not to appease Him, but out of a thankful heart for the transformation He has made in their lives. Though it is a mental choice to choose to follow God, the spiritual power exists in those who have trusted in Him so they have the ability to overcome the wicked one.

## **Suggestions for Prayer**

- \* *Thank God for the power of the Holy Spirit on your life.*
- \* *Ask God to help you lid a Spirit filled life.*
- \* *Praise God because He dwells inside you.*