

MAY 1-7, 2023

Luke 12–17; John 11

“REJOICE WITH ME; FOR I HAVE FOUND MY SHEEP WHICH WAS LOST”

Summary: *Luke 12. Jesus teaches, Beware of hypocrisy; lay up treasures in heaven rather than on earth; prepare for the coming of the Lord; where much is given, much is required; preaching the gospel causes division.*

Luke 13. Jesus teaches, Repent or perish—He gives the parable of the barren fig tree, heals a woman on the Sabbath, and likens the kingdom of God to a mustard seed—He discusses whether few or many are saved and laments over Jerusalem.

Luke 14. Jesus again heals on the Sabbath—He teaches humility and gives the parable of the great supper—Those who follow Him must forsake all else.

Luke 15. Jesus gives the parables of the lost sheep, the piece of silver, and the prodigal son.

Luke 16. Jesus gives the parable of the unjust steward—He teaches of service and condemns divorce—He gives the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

Luke 17. Jesus speaks of offenses, forgiveness, and faith—Even the faithful are unprofitable servants—Ten lepers are healed—Jesus discourses on the Second Coming.

John 11. Jesus testifies that He is the Resurrection and the Life—Mary and Martha testify of Him—He raises Lazarus from the dead—Caiaphas speaks prophetically of the death of Jesus.

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

Where is Bethany, who lives there now?

About five miles
north of Bethlehem

and less than two miles east of Jerusalem is another ancient village called Bethany. The word *Beth-ani* means house of the poor. There are still honorably poorer people living here, (Arab Christians as well as Moslems). Their faith is exemplary. For more than twenty years I had been visiting the poor crusader-built room of the family of the late Abu Issa Mukahal, a Moslem married to a Christian Arab woman, Shifa. Before she passed away, she demonstrated her simple faith by raising eight children in that one room. Over the years the children had added one more room and a kitchen hut. At last count, twenty-one grandchildren

assembled there almost daily. There was only one full-time job and some scattered temporary jobs to support them all. Shifa often began preparing food by reaming out carrots and small zucchini squashes to stuff with rice and crumbs of ground meat—which she did not have. Her faith was that before the evening, some money would somehow trickle in and she would be able to purchase the last ingredients. Some tourists do sense that Bethany is still home to the honorably poor.

Who lived in Bethany in Jesus' Time?

It was the home of Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and a Mary. More commonly, nowadays, Bethany is called *Al-Azaria*. This is derived from the two-thousand-year-old name of an inhabitant of Bethany who was called Eliezer. In modern English his name became known

as Lazarus. Traditional churches mark the events involving Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. These friends of Jesus anxiously awaited His swift return to their home. They had sent a message to Him across the Jordan River that Lazarus was ill. (The message may have taken an overnight journey to reach Him, and Jesus would have needed at least another overnight journey to return if He left immediately.) However, “When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was . . . Then when Jesus came, he found that he [Lazarus] had lain in the grave four days already.” (John 11:6-17)

What was the tomb of Lazarus like?

The entrance and steps to Lazarus’s tomb were made by Christians just hundreds of years ago. However, they do lead down through the crest of a hill to the remains of a first-century Jewish tomb. Typically, such tombs had two chambers. One chamber was for the mourners, called the “weeping or mourning chamber.” This mourning or grieving time had family and friends returned for seven days, praying and weeping – except for the Sabbath day in this extended funeral. This mourning is called *Shiva* in Hebrew. The word *shiva* is also the word for seven, and the root of the Sabbath or seventh day of the week. Another chamber is the burial room, wherein the bodies were placed within a day of passing away. After three days it was customary to close the burial room but to continue mourning for the rest of the seven-day period (except for the Sabbath day). Jesus asked, “Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord come and see. [Then] Jesus said, Take ye away the stone . . . [Jesus] . . . cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.” (John 11:34-43) Lazarus’s family was amazed! They knew that within a day of his death, the body had been washed, completely immersed, and anointed with fragrant spiced oils. They probably

assisted in dressing the body, fastening his hands and feet, and reverently wrapping the *talith* (prayer garment) over his head and around his body. As they laid him in the burial chamber, they knew that he was dead, and now, before their very eyes, he was alive again. His “shuffling” out of the burial chamber must have astonished the mourners so much that Jesus had to reassure them: “Loose him and let him go.” (John 11:44)

How was Lazarus becoming-alive-again different from resurrection?

Lazarus was one of several people Jesus had raised from the dead. They would all eventually die again. Jesus himself would become the first to resurrect from the dead, never to die again. The raising of Lazarus aroused great interest among the people. The miracle was reported to the high priests who immediately felt threatened. In their minds, Jesus’ popularity imperiled their social and political standing. A council convened (one of three councils of the Sanhedrin), and Caiaphas, the (Roman appointed) High Priest that year, suggested that Jesus should die. It is worthwhile noting that in 18 CE, the Roman governor Valerius Gratus had appointed Caiaphas as the Jews’ high priest. Gratus and Caiaphas had an excellent relationship, because Caiaphas remained in office until Gratus’ successor Pontius Pilate retained him in the high priest office. Caiaphas further justified his wicked proposal by exclaiming that Jesus’ popularity was spreading to other Jews in other lands. Again, that would imperil his influence throughout the Jewish world. Caiaphas’ anger justified his call for Lazarus’ death as well. This was in sharp contrast with the respect and decorum given to death and burial practices. Since Lazarus’ death and rising, as well as Jesus’ eventual death and resurrection, are so significant to building faith, added insight to Jewish burial practices may be of value.

Where do Jewish death and burial practices originate?

“Decent burial was regarded to be of great importance in ancient Israel, as in the rest of the ancient Near East. Abraham's purchase of the cave at Machpelah as a family tomb (**Genesis 23**) and the subsequent measures taken by later patriarchs to ensure that they would be buried there occupy a prominent place in the patriarchal narratives. Biblical biographies ordinarily end with the statement that a man died, and an account of his burial reflects the value assigned to proper interment. To bury an unidentified corpse was considered to be so great a good deed that even the high priest was required to do it although it involved him in becoming ritually unclean.”

How did same-day-of-death burials evolve in Jewishness?

“There is no explicit biblical evidence as to how soon after death burial took place, but it is likely that it was within a day after death. This was dictated by the climate and by the fact that the Israelites did not embalm the dead (Jacob and Joseph were embalmed following Egyptian custom).” “In *Talmudic* times, burial took place in caves, hewn tombs, sarcophagi, and catacombs; and a secondary burial, i.e., a re-interment of the remains sometimes took place about one year after the original burial. Jewish custom insists on prompt burial as a matter of respect for the dead, a consideration of particular relevance in hot climates. The precedents set by the prompt burials of Sarah (**Genesis 23**) and of Rachel (**Genesis 35:19**) are reinforced by the *Torah's* express command that even the body of a man who had been hanged shall not remain upon the tree all night, but “you must bury him the same day.” (**Deuteronomy 21:23**). Some delays in burial are, however, justified: “Honor of the dead” demands that the proper

preparation for a coffin and shrouds be made, and that the relatives and friends pay their last respects. Certain delays are unavoidable. Funerals may not take place on the Sabbath or on the Day of Atonement; and although the rabbis at one time permitted funerals on the first day of a festival, provided that certain functions were performed by gentiles, and regarded the second day of festivals “as a weekday as far as the dead are concerned,” some modern communities prefer postponement. Where there are two interments at the same time, respect demands that the burial of a scholar precedes that of an *am ha-arez* (“average citizen”), and that of a woman always precedes that of a man.”

Who has the responsibility of burials in Judaism?

“The duty of burial is an obligation of the deceased's heir but if they cannot or do not perform it, the whole community is responsible. In *Talmudic* times, the communal fraternal societies for the burial of the dead evolved out of an appreciation of this duty. In many communities, even till modern times, acceptance into the *hevra kaddisha* (as the society is known) is considered to be an honor and only mature, respected men and women are initiated.” “One of the functions of the *hevra kaddisha* is the *Tohorah* rite. This is washing the corpse and preparing it for burial. In ancient times various cosmetics were used but these have been largely discontinued. The corpse is dressed in simple white shrouds and, as a rule, wrapped in the tallit he wore during his lifetime. The *tallit* is, however, invalidated by having one of the *zizit* (four sets of knotted strings denoting the 613 dos and don'ts commandments) removed.” “Coffins were unknown in biblical times. The corpse was laid, face upwards, on a bier and brought to his grave. The custom of burying important people in coffins developed only later. Rabbi Judah ha-

Nasi, however, ordered that holes be drilled in his coffin so that the earth touch his body. This custom is always followed where coffins are used and in countries outside Erez Israel it is also customary to put earth from Erez Israel in the coffin.” **(Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)**

How are coffins and ossuaries considered among the Jews?

“In ancient times a form of coffin was the ossuary which was a small chest in which the bones of the deceased were placed after the flesh had decayed. In various places in Israel, such as *Bet She'arim*, stone coffins, known as sarcophagi (singular – sarcophagus) have also been found. Many were elaborately carved, some with non-Jewish motifs. In the Middle Ages there was no general rule as to whether burial should be in a coffin. In Spain the coffin was not used, while in France it was, and was commonly made from the table that had witnessed the hospitality of the deceased. Coffins were also used in Eastern Europe and often rabbis' coffins were made from the desks at which they had studied. In the 16th century the idea grew that it was meritorious to be buried in direct contact with the earth --- "For dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (**Genesis 3:19**) --- and interment without a coffin became the rule for strictly Orthodox Jews. In countries where the secular authorities insisted on the use of a coffin, their bottoms were either made of loose boards or holes were drilled into them.” “In the Western world even, Orthodox Jews nowadays use coffins in compliance with the law of the land, but they are usually made plain and of cheap wood. In Israel, burial is without a coffin except for soldiers who are buried in plain wooden boxes.” **(Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)**

Where are burials among the Jews?

“Although nowadays burials always take place in a cemetery, this was not always

so. In biblical times the practice was to bury the dead in family sepulchers which might have been in natural caves or man-made buildings. In *Talmud* times, the custom developed of setting aside special places to bury the dead. This was primarily to keep the graves out of town since they can be a source of ritual impurity, particularly for the kohanim (priests). The cemetery, therefore, has no intrinsic holiness and is not “hallowed ground.” However, great care has always been taken to keep the cemetery in the best possible order out of respect for the dead and sensitivity to the mourners. No activity showing disrespect for the dead, such as animals grazing there, was allowed. Further, anything that shamed the dead, such as eating and drinking or wearing *tallit* or *tefillin* or reading from the *Torah*, is also forbidden because the dead cannot do these things.” **(Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)**

Who is prohibited from entering cemeteries?

“It is customary to visit the cemetery on the anniversary of a loved one's death, as well as during the month of Elul, preceding the High Holy Days. Cemeteries are usually owned by the community and some people reserve space next to their relatives. *Kohanim* (those who feel they are descended from Levitical or priestly heritage) are always buried in the first rows since their relatives, also kohanim, may not enter the cemetery and so can see their loved ones' graves from outside.” **(Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)** Even though there is no “Temple” for the Jews, as in ancient times, special travel rules of cleanliness applied to the priests who had to remain “unblemished” to serve in the holy temple. They stayed away from any decay or waste matter. They kept at least a specific distance away from anything dead (unless it was killed as a sacrifice in the temple). “And whosoever toucheth one that is slain

with a sword in the open fields, or a dead body, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean.” (**Numbers 19:16**) It is still a custom among some of those considering themselves to be Levites to circumvent graveyards or any place where there is death. “Apostates and suicides were at one time buried in a separate section of the cemetery, but this law is usually not followed.” (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**) “The custom of decorating graves with flowers is strongly opposed by some Orthodox rabbis on the ground that it is a “gentile custom.” Neither Conservative nor Reform Judaism, however, objects and it is also common practice in Israel, particularly in military cemeteries.”

What meaning do grave markers have?

“The first tombstone mentioned in the Bible is the monument the patriarch Jacob set up over the grave of Rachel. From other parts of the Bible and in *Talmudic* times, it seems that such monuments were set up for important people. Later the custom developed of erecting some sort of marker on the grave, most probably to be able to locate it easily, and so that *kohanim* should avoid it. Still later people started to inscribe epitaphs on the gravestones, recording the name of the person buried there, his dates and some biblical verse and statement in his praise. Some of the epitaphs described the function and position of the deceased and some, from early periods, have been found in Greek.” (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**) Greek was a common language used in those times along with Aramaic, Hebrew, and the Roman speaking language. The person’s deceased body has been returned to the bedrock, in the earth, the “burial chamber.” The second chamber is above the ground, it is like the biblical “weeping chamber.” Placing stones or pebbles on the top are a typical Jewish tradition. When I inquired the purpose of those pebbles, the answers were rather

vague, “They are memorials for those who have visited.” In my continuing research, I even used the “Google and Thummim!” – the connection I made was that the burial prayer, and the yearly memorial prayer, the *Kaddish*, always invokes a request to rebuild the temple! Each pebble or stone may be a gesture of re-building the temple. Think of it, who else on the planet connects the dead and temples? This is memorial tradition of the Jews, may be another echo of the once true religion.

How important is the funeral cortege?

“Escorting the dead to his last resting place is considered a great *mitzvah* “the fruit of which a man enjoys in this world while the stock remains for him in the world to come.” It justifies even an interruption in the study of the *Torah* and is called “the true kindness” since one can expect no reciprocation of any sort. The minimum duty is to rise as the funeral cortege passes, and accompany it for four paces.” “One who sees a funeral procession and does not escort it, states the Talmud, mocks the dead and blasphemes his Maker.” Only if the hearse passes a bridal cortege is the bride given preference; to honor the living is considered greater than to honor the dead.” (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**) With all the above umbrage given to the rituals of the dead and the death practices, it gives even more wonder and reverence to the Savior’s atonement and resurrection, the greatest gift to all mankind. “He will swallow up death in victory;” (**Isaiah 25:8**); ““I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death.” (**Hosea 13:14**); “Righteousness delivereth from death.” (**Proverbs 10:2**), (**Proverbs 11:4**); “The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.” (**Proverbs 14:27**); “He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong he issues from death.” (**Psalms 68:20**)