

November 15, 2008 ©Homer Kizer

Commentary — From the Margins

Denying Galilee

Shortly before He would be taken, Jesus said to His first disciples, “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.” But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee” (Matt 26:31–32). Peter denied that he would fall away. Jesus assured him that before the cock crowed in the morning (it was then well after dark), Peter would deny Jesus three times, which he did do. And endtime disciples are as the first disciples were: they cannot imagine themselves denying Jesus yet even the most vociferous of them will deny Christ three times before the cock crows on the morning of the third day.

How can the above be correct, and why would Jesus tell His disciples that they would all fall away if that were not to be the case? And after falling away, when were these first disciples gathered together again?

Endtime Christians will insist that they will never, under any conditions, deny Christ Jesus, but that is what Peter said before he denied Christ. So among endtime disciples, who is more loyal to Jesus than was Peter? And how would an endtime disciple deny Jesus? Peter denied Jesus when a servant girl asked if he wasn’t with Jesus the Galilean (Matt 26:70); then denied Jesus again when another servant girl said that he was with Jesus of Nazareth (v. 71 — Nazareth lies at the heart of the Galilee); then a third time when a bystander said that Peter’s accent betrayed him as a Galilean (v. 73). So ultimately, Peter denied Jesus by denying that he was a Galilean even though his accent said he was.

Will an endtime Christian deny Jesus by the person denying that he or she is a Galilean?

Jesus said that after He was raised up, He would go before them to Galilee; yet He told them to remain in Jerusalem until they were clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4). So if Jesus’ words are to be believed, He didn’t go before them to Galilee before returning to heaven after the forty days that He was with them (Acts 1:9). These first disciples did not return to Galilee, but remained in Jerusalem even though the two angels identified them as, “Men of Galilee” (v. 11).

Note, the angels call Jesus’ disciples men of Galilee, an obvious referent to the land of their ancestry, but not an identifying expression that the angels had to make when Jesus ascends from Jerusalem. Another referring expression could have been used by the angels. However, the only non-Galilean of the twelve first disciples was Judas Iscariot, the one chosen to betray Jesus (John 17:12). Others who were chosen by the Father and given to

Jesus could have been non-Galileans, but they weren't, which suggests that there is something special about being from Galilee.

If Jesus was to go before the men of Galilee to Galilee after His resurrection, and if these men of Galilee did not immediately return to Galilee but remained in Jerusalem, and if they continued to remain in Jerusalem until the Church allegedly "fled" to Pella then Galilee has significance that has not been recognized: the focus of Christendom has been on Jerusalem, not Galilee, even though it was to Pella where the Nazarenes went to escape the Roman army during the First Jewish Revolt (66–70 CE) — Pella is in the lower foothills of the eastern slope of the Jordan Valley, and about eighteen miles south of the Sea of Galilee. Pella might be loosely considered to be of the Galilee even though it isn't, but Pella definitely isn't the Galilee of Jesus, or of Peter, James, or John. Pella was a mostly Greek enclave that remained loyal to Rome throughout the First Rebellion, and as the Church became increasingly Greek, Pella was the logical location to sit out the war.

The Gospel of John seems to conclude with the end of chapter 20: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (vv. 30–31). But there is a chapter 21, about which scholars have questions—and chapter 21 begins, "After this [after what] Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias" (v. 1) ... the Sea of Tiberias is the Sea of Galilee. The first disciples were already there, but when were they there?

Jesus said that after he was raised up, he would go before them to Galilee; so Peter and those with Peter were not fishing prior to when Jesus was raised up. Rather, the day that Jesus was raised up, Peter and John went at dawn to the tomb and found it empty (John 20:2–10). Then on the afternoon of that same day, Jesus appeared to at least ten of His disciples, breathed on them, and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (v. 22). So Peter did not go fishing prior to the day Jesus was raised from the dead, and he did not go afterwards for the first disciples were told to stay in Jerusalem, where they remained through Pentecost, fifty days after His resurrection.

Eight days after Jesus breathed on ten of His first disciples (seven days after would have been the first day of the following week, or Sunday; so eight days would have been on Monday, the 26th day of Abib), the disciples were together again. Thomas was now with them, and though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them (John 20:26). In John's gospel, this is the second time that Jesus revealed himself to His first disciples.

However, in Luke's Gospel, the first time Jesus reveals Himself to His disciples is when He walks with two of His disciples who were going to the village of Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem (24:13–31) on the day when He was resurrected. These two returned to Jerusalem, and "they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together" (v. 33) and they told the others what had happened. While they were talking, Jesus Himself "stood among them, and said to them, 'Peace to you'" (v. 36). This would have been the second time Jesus revealed Himself to His disciples, who marveled at what they were

seeing. Jesus “said to them, ‘Have you anything to eat” (v. 41), and His disciples gave Him a piece of broiled fish and he took it and ate before them (v. 42).

That Jesus ate a piece of fish becomes interesting, for as a glorified being, He no longer had a need to eat physical food. So Jesus eating fish, and Jesus preparing a fire with fish laid out on it before Peter and the others brought their catch ashore (John 21:9) has significance, especially so when Jesus takes bread and gives it to Peter and the others and gives them fish and tells them to eat (vv. 12–13).

John’s Gospel records that the fishing occurs “the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead” (21:14) ... John’s and Luke’s accounts will need reconciled, for Jesus, when He appears to His disciples in Luke’s account on the day He was resurrected tells His disciples to remain in the city [Jerusalem] until they are clothed with power from on high.

Luke records in the book of Acts that,

He [Jesus] presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. (Acts 1:3–9 emphasis added)

At least ten (Thomas wasn’t there) of the first disciples received the Holy Spirit when Jesus breathed on them the afternoon of the day He was raised from the grave; so the coming of the Holy Spirit upon His first disciples was not an initial receiving of the Holy Spirit, but an empowerment [i.e., receiving power] by or from the Holy Spirit. It was a foreshadowing of disciples being filled with the Holy Spirit, or being baptized by the Holy Spirit. And Jesus specifically tells His disciples to remain in Jerusalem until this baptism by spirit occurs.

Did Peter and others ignore what Jesus said about remaining in Jerusalem, with what He said apparently taking place on the day that He was raised from the grave? This is not likely; for the chronology of John’s Gospel suggests that the disciples going fishing was an event that occurred after Thomas saw Jesus eight days after His resurrection. John’s Gospel doesn’t suggest that Peter and the others went fishing prior to Thomas seeing Jesus, but sometime afterwards.

Although scholars have been quick to dismiss chapter 21 as a late addition to John's Gospel, and to even dismiss the Gospel as spurious because of how late in the century it appears—these scholars are unwilling to believe that John could live as long as would be required for him to write both the Gospel of John and Revelation in the last decade of the century—these scholars have not appreciated that Peter, James, and John symbolically function as the young bull and two goats the high priest of Israel offers on Yom Kipporim as an atonement for first himself and his family (the bull), then for the temple and Israel (one goat), and finally for the sins of Israel (the Azazel goat). Christ Jesus is the high priest that is after the order of Melchizedek (Heb 7:11 at al). The blood of His stripes equates to the blood of the young bull. His death at Calvary equates to the life of the goat slain on the altar. His resurrection from death (His crossing the precipice between life and death) represents the Azazel goat: as Israel's glorified high priest, He bears the sins of Israel as the Azazel goat has the sins of Israel read over its head. So in His earthly body, Jesus fulfills the symbolism of Yom Kipporim. However, His earthly body is the shadow and type of His spiritual Body, which must also fulfill the symbolism of the Yom Kipporim.

Peter appears in Scripture as a young bull, quick to speak about not denying Jesus, quick to strike off the ear of the high priest's servant, quick to speak to the rulers and elders of Judaism. James and John are the two sons of thunder. They are as the two male goats selected as Israel's sin offering. And during the days of Unleavened Bread, Herod has James killed (Acts 12:1–3) ... James was the first of the apostles to be killed, and John, his brother, lived far longer than anyone would have expected. John, now, can be likened to the Azazel goat that is led by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness. There is no reason to doubt that John doesn't live as long as claimed; i.e., to about 100 CE.

Assuming then that what John wrote is correct, that Jesus reveals Himself the third time to Peter and the others when they are fishing in the Sea of Galilee, and assuming that the first disciples stayed in Jerusalem as they were told, then the reasonable assumption is that Peter and the others go fishing sometime after Pentecost, and that Jesus reveals Himself to them after He has ascended into heaven as He apparently reveals Himself to Paul when the Lord stood by Paul and said, "Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome" (Acts 23:11).

How many times Jesus reveals Himself to Paul as opposed to how many times He appears to Paul in a vision is not determinable.

The assumption that the first disciples remained in Jerusalem as they were told may be false; for if Peter and those with him went fishing either during the week between when Jesus breathes on them and gives them the Holy Spirit and when Thomas believes, or sometime immediately after Thomas believes, a different scenario emerges. What is then seen is disobedience that can be likened to Paul's fleshly members doing the things that he hates (Rom 7:15). By going fishing, Peter would be doing the very thing that Jesus didn't want him to do.

Not enough information is given by either John or Luke in their gospels to date with

certainly when Peter and the six with him go fishing. The glorified Jesus' return to heaven doesn't preclude Him from again appearing to His disciples, as He apparently appears to Paul, with at least one appearance not being in vision. So focus now must be returned to "Galilee" as concept and location.

The prophet Isaiah writes, "But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations" (9:1[1] emphasis added) ... "Galilee of the nations" can also be read as "Galilee of the Gentiles."

King Solomon gave to Hiram, king of Tyre, twenty cities in the land of Galilee, but these cities did not please Hiram, who called them "Cabul" or "Kavul," meaning a peat bog, or the muddy soil found in swamps, soil made from the buildup of decaying plants ... the Galilee has greater rainfall and is more temperate than its surrounding regions. It has greater vegetative growth although today it is far from being a peat bog, but it is also a land identified with Gentiles because Solomon gave an inheritance of Israel to Hiram. So for Jesus to tell His disciples that when resurrected He would go before them to Galilee, He tells them that He will go before them to the nations, a fertile land able to sustain great growth. This fertile land, though, is an inheritance of Israel.

The inheritance of Israel is salvation; so when salvation is offered to the Gentiles, Jesus does what Solomon did physically. And the nations (Gentiles) haven't been pleased with what has been given them.

If Jesus gives to Gentiles who did not pursue it the righteousness that was offered to Israel, that is a righteousness by faith (Rom 9:30), then faith coming from Christ precedes His disciples arriving in this land of the Gentiles to teach faithful converts the principles of the oracles of God—

Pause for a moment and allow yourself time to digest the previous sentence, especially in light of Peter and the six going fishing:

- Salvation comes via obedience by faith.
- Faith precedes knowledge.
- Faith precedes obedience.
- Righteousness by faith precedes the convert's first encounter with a disciple.
- Salvation now follows righteousness, or becoming a disciple.

Other than for Judas Iscariot, again the son of destruction called by the Father to fulfill

Scripture (John 17:12), all of Jesus' first disciples were from Galilee, or from the land of the nations. Temple leaders saw Jesus as a Galilean or as a person from the nations. But Jesus' earthly ancestry was of the tribe of David, and His first disciples were of the tribes of Israel even though they were perceived as ones from the nations.

When Jesus stood up to speak halfway through Sukkot (John 7:14), a dispute among the people arose about whether He was the Christ. Officers were sent to arrest Jesus, but He said, “I will be with you a little while longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come” (vv. 33–34). And they didn’t arrest Him, for on the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus said, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, “Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water”” (vv. 37–38). The Jews were now divided among themselves as to what to believe. Some said that Jesus was the Prophet. Others said He was the Christ. But still others asked, “Is the Christ to come from Galilee” (v. 41). And it is this question that pertains to endtime disciples: is Christ to come from the nations? Is the Body of Christ to come from Gentiles?

When the officers sent to arrest Jesus returned without Him, the chief priests and Pharisees wanted to know why they had returned empty-handed. Nicodemus interceded on Jesus’ behalf, and the Pharisees said to him, “Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee” (John 7:52).

To be from Galilee was to be barely above a Samaritan dog as far as the Pharisees were concerned—and the hostility displayed by the officials of Judaism toward Galileans closely matches the hostility displayed against the Uncircumcised in general.

When moving from physical to spiritual, geographical landscape becomes mental typography. Galilee ceases to be the region north of Jerusalem and becomes the mindset typified by this region, a portion of which was given to Hiram before the entire region was sacked by both Assyrians and Chaldeans when the house of Israel and the house of Judah, respectively, were taken captive. Nazareth lies near the geographical center or at the heart of Galilee; thus to be a “Nazarene” could convey the connotation of being from the heart of the land of “the nations.” And in Judah and in the Galilee, Judeo-Christians were known as Nazarenes.

The Christian Church in Judea looked like and was treated like a sect of Judaism for its first decades, but as rebellion fervor built among mid-1st Century Jews who were looking for the coming of the Messiah, these Nazarenes, tradition holds, began to migrate to Pella, with its predominantly Greek population and pro-Roman alliances—and as uncircumcised converts entered into Christendom, social pressure as well as political pressure would have fueled a steady migration. Although tradition has the Jerusalem Church fleeing en masse to Pella, this tradition coming from late readings of Eusebius who wrote 250 years after the fact, the conditions present in Judea at the time, conditions described by Josephus, suggest a gradual migration beginning a couple of years before the First Jewish Rebellion. The word used by Eusebius for this exodus to Pella is metokismenon, meaning “migrated.” So the idea

that the Jerusalem Church “fled” to Pella is probably a misreading of Eusebius. And the significance of this is that the Church was never centered in geographical Galilee. Rather, there was an assembly of disciples at Pella which might have been the largest congregation in Judea during the Rebellion. But it wasn’t this congregation to which Jesus referred when He said, I will go before you to Galilee, and it wasn’t to Peter’s fishing expedition that Jesus referred. It was Him going to the Gentiles.

Disciples would not go to the Gentiles (to the nations) before Jesus went there, preparing the way—and if Galilee is the model for the nations, then Gentile converts are to live as Jews, to live as Jesus did, to live as Peter, James, John did. And this is what both Paul and John understood.

The person who is not a spiritual Nazarene will be denied when judgments are revealed, for it is to this model of Judaism that all must come, native born Israelite and spiritually born Israelite. The person whose voice does not sound like Jesus of Nazareth, whose voice doesn’t sound like a Galilean will be denied by Jesus, whereas the person whose voice sounds like a Galilean but who doesn’t walk as Jesus walked denies Him who has salvation.

Returning to the beginning: will every disciple deny Jesus three times as Peter denied Jesus? Sadly, yes, many will, for Paul’s law of sin and death continues to dwell in the fleshly members of every disciple.

When Jesus cited what the prophet Zechariah wrote about striking the Shepherd and the sheep will scatter, the passage in Zechariah continues: “I [the Lord of Hosts] will turn my hand against the little ones. / In the whole land, declares the Lord, / two thirds [parts] shall be cut off and perish, / and one third [part] shall be left alive” (13:7–8). Because the law of sin and death continues to reside in the fleshly members of every disciple, with every disciple being a fleshly member of the Body of Christ, the flesh must die—and the fleshly member who remains committed to the flesh must die. Both will be cut off from the Lord. They will be as a Greek or a Phoenician in Galilee.

Zechariah continues his prophecy: “And I [the Lord of Hosts] will put this third part into the fire, / and refine them as one refines silver, / and test them as gold is tested. / They will call upon my name, / and I will answer them. / I will say, “They are my people”; / and they will say, “The Lord is my God”” (13:9).

The Galilean who walks as Jesus walked will have been refined and tested—and this third part of humankind will walk or not walk as Jesus walked in the last 1260 days of the seven endtime years, making the third time that Jesus reveals Himself the shadow and type of an endtime occurrence. Peter and the six with him who went fishing would seem to foreshadow the seven endtime churches to which letters were sent. And the 153 large fish are what these seven churches catch.

Speculation exists as to what the 153 large fish represent. They are certainly the product of the Sea of Galilee; they are certainly spiritual Galileans, caught at dawn. It might be that the

fish of the fifth spiritual day descend from them—they might be those who physically begin the Millennium as the kings and priests [spiritual Levities].

When Israel was numbered in the census of the second year (Num chap 1), the tribe of Levi was exempted from the census; for the tribe of Levi would serve before the Lord in lieu of the firstborns of every tribe serving. But there were not enough Levites to “cover” every firstborn male of the other tribes:

And the Lord said to Moses, “List all the firstborn males of the people of Israel, from a month old and upward, taking the number of their names. And you shall take the Levites for me—I am the Lord—instead of all the firstborn among the people of Israel, and the cattle of the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the cattle of the people of Israel.” So Moses listed all the firstborn among the people of Israel, as the Lord commanded him. And all the firstborn males, according to the number of names, from a month old and upward as listed were 22,273. (Num 3:40–43)

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the people of Israel, and the cattle of the Levites instead of their cattle. The Levites shall be mine: I am the Lord. And as the redemption price for the 273 of the firstborn of the people of Israel, over and above the number of the male Levites, you shall take five shekels per head; you shall take them according to the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel of twenty gerahs), and give the money to Aaron and his sons as the redemption price for those who are over.” So Moses took the redemption money from those who were over and above those redeemed by the Levites. From the firstborn of the people of Israel he took the money, 1,365 shekels, by the shekel of the sanctuary. And Moses gave the redemption money to Aaron and his sons, according to the word of the Lord, as the Lord commanded Moses. (vv. 44–51)

Specific numbers appear in Scripture for specific reasons, even if these reasons are not readily understood. All of Scripture is the shadow of the Book of Life kept in heaven. Thus, the undercount of 273 Levites is not without reason. It is, though, a number that doesn’t have a logic seen elsewhere in Scripture.

The number 273 pertains to a shortfall of Levites: disciples today are a royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:9). Disciples are also the temple of God. Thus, by extension, the new creature, born of spirit as a son of God, can be likened to a Levite serving in the physical temple; this new creature is a spiritual Levite.

Before that Pentecost following Calvary, when the disciples came together to choose who would fulfill the position Judas Iscariot lost, there were in all about 120 persons (Acts 1:15). About 120? Did someone not actually count how many were there? Or is it the number “120” that is of importance regardless of the actual number in the room? And this latter speculation seems correct.

If there were a number of disciples in the room, with this number represented by “120”

regardless of the actual count, then the Church when baptized by spirit and by fire as a type of the world being baptized by spirit and by fire will need 153 additional disciples added to the number to complete the fullness of the Levitical priesthood, with these 153 coming from Galilee as the first disciples came from Galilee.

It now seems reasonable for the 153 large fish that Peter and the six with him caught to represent the shortfall of 153 disciples that will be “caught” by Jesus’ first disciples when Jesus appears for a third time. And the argument made here is this third time will be the Second Advent, for Jesus will “appear” a second time when He stands on the split Mount of Olives halfway through the seven endtime years of tribulation.

As the so-called Church age began with 12 who became 120 before being baptized by spirit and by fire, the millennial reign of Christ will begin with 153 who have been baptized by spirit. Although this actual number seems extremely small and probably equates with the “12” who became the “120,” the prophet Isaiah writes, “Behold, the Lord will empty the earth and make it desolate . . . The earth shall be utterly empty and utterly plundered” (24:1, 3). So the Millennium will not begin with an overpopulated earth, but with an emptied earth. For the earth will have been harvested by God. All who endured to the end were saved, were glorified. All others were slain. And this leaves a truly emptied earth; so 153 might not be an unrealistic number.

The 120 and the 153, together, make up the shortfall of Levites needed to redeem all of the firstborn of Israel. The 120 have lived and now await glorification in the grave. Who the 153 are awaits determination. But regardless of their names, they will be Galileans.

The person denies Jesus when the person refuses to walk as Jesus walked; i.e., to walk as a Nazarene, to walk as a Galilean. Every person comes short of the glory of God, but after the third time Peter denied Jesus, Peter turned away in shame. He never again denied Jesus.

Will we as disciples turn away in shame when we realize that we have denied Jesus by not walking as He walked, by swearing that we are not Nazarenes? When we do not keep the Sabbath, do not keep the high days, do not keep the commandments, do not show love for our brothers and our neighbors, we deny Jesus. We don’t walk as Galileans, people from the nations who live as Jews. And that is what’s required of each of us, regardless of our spiritual ancestry.

[1] Isaiah 9:1 in the English Standard Version is Isaiah 8:23 in the Hebrew text.

* * *

"Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved."