

JOURNEYS  
WITH THE  
MESSIAH

GUIDE BOOK

*Sample Chapter*



**Lighten the Load | MichaelBelk.com**  
*Companion Study Guide to the Film Series*

# Lighten the Load

Help for Whatever is Weighing You Down



**WHO AMONG US IS WITHOUT BURDENS?** Perhaps a delayed flight or a late mortgage payment, a term paper due on Friday or a member of your family is seriously ill. All of us have burdens and they can cause us to be anxious and discouraged as we travel along our way. Sometimes it feels like we have more baggage than we can bear.

The term *baggage* is a part of today's culture. We hear statements like, "He has a lot of baggage" or "she comes with a lot of baggage." The Urban Dictionary defines baggage as *an issue regarding a person's past that can affect their current disposition*. Past baggage can definitely affect your future!

As defined here, baggage comes in many shapes and sizes, both physical and emotional. Like the baggage fees charged by today's commercial airlines, there is a price we pay for the baggage we carry in our lives—the more baggage, the higher the cost.

## LIGHTEN THE LOAD

If you have lived for any amount of time, you have collected some baggage or issues that can affect your future. The longer you have lived, the more baggage you have accumulated, often through no specific fault of your own. Let's face it, everyone has difficulties to overcome. It is just an inevitable part of life.

### Baggage is not spoken of as a positive thing.

In many cases, it doesn't amount to much, it's just part of life; just part of being human. Some people can process the events of their lives and move on. For others, their difficulties can linger and turn into emotional baggage they carry around forever. People are seldom aware of how much baggage they actually have or how it affects them.

Too much baggage weighs us down, and certain types of baggage weigh us down more than others. Not only does our baggage cause emotional and physical struggle, it often affects the people around us. Some people allow their baggage to get so heavy they become hostages to it. They can't enjoy the present, much less look forward to the future.

Most of us have met people who like to get their baggage out every time someone's around and then talk about it for hours. I have known people who don't appear to have any baggage or, at least, cannot define the bags they have. Yet, for some reason, they need to act like they have a lot of baggage when asked, "How are you?" In more extreme cases, people allow their baggage to become a part of their lives. They hold onto it as if they would not know who they are without it.

### So what do we do when the baggage and burdens of life—real or imaginary—weigh us down to the point we are overwhelmed and exhausted?

Jesus offers a simple answer to our dilemma, "Come to Me all who labor and are heavily laden, and I will give you rest...For My yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light" (Matthew 11:28). Jesus is saying that anyone who is weighted down by the baggage of their life can come to Him and He will provide them with rest.

The concept for these Journeys with the Messiah photographs was to have Jesus in settings and locations that appeared to be from the first century when Jesus lived. Then I would add contemporary people and elements to each setting to visually connect Jesus' time in history

with ours. I wanted the images to make the point that Jesus' messages and teachings—spoken over 2000 years ago—were also meant for the present and for those who will live in times beyond ours.

So Jesus invites us to come to Him if we are weighed down by the baggage of our lives and He will give us rest from our burdens. Then He explains, *“For My yoke is easy and the burden I give you is light”* (Matthew 11:28).

### The significance of a yoke

It would be easier for us to understand Jesus' comment, “His yoke is easy,” if we lived in biblical times or in a country where oxen are still used to pull carts with heavy loads. The yoke is a device, usually made of wood, that goes over the necks of a pair of animals, keeping them together so they can pull in unison. Its basic design has not changed for thousands of years.



A stronger and well-trained ox is often paired with a weaker, untrained ox. The stronger ox forces the untrained ox to follow the master's commands. The stronger ox also shoulders more weight, making the load lighter for the weaker ox. In this instance, the yoke's burden is considered light for the stronger ox compared to the weaker ox, and the amount of effort required by the weaker ox is less.

The Gospel writers had no idea that their words would be read thousands of years later when few of us would know anything about oxen and yokes!

### Jesus' statement about the yoke makes two points:

First, He says that we are to come to Him when we need rest from the weight of the burdens we are carrying. Why? Because it is easy for Him to carry them which also makes the burden lighter to us.

Second, being yoked to Him keeps us on course while we grow spiritually stronger as we learn from Him.

Who wouldn't want a lighter load in life? Who would not want someone else to take the weight of their burdens? As noted, burdens, like baggage, come in all shapes and sizes. Some of our issues are heavier than others. Although we may have collected some baggage through no fault of our own, each of us carries or has carried baggage that could have been avoided.

### **Burdens of our own making**

As an example, let's say you have a car. It's not the newest model, but it is not old. Outside of the model year, it looks like it's new. It runs perfectly and, even more, it's paid off! You own it! No car payment!

Then you hear that the luxury car dealers are having big sales and offering exceptional value for trade-ins. Oh, the status and joy of driving a new luxury car; plus, they are offering excellent financing, too! You can only imagine the feeling you will get owning one, especially when you hand the keys to the valet and he says, "Nice car!" The temptation is just too great! "Where do I sign?"

Six months later, you realize that your new car does the same thing as your previous car — it delivers you safely from point A to point B (though it is fun to have a new car). However, when you get right down to it, the most significant difference between this new model and the older one is that you now have a whopping monthly payment you didn't have before. There is also a rumor that your company is downsizing and your job is not secure!

The purchase of the new car you wanted, but really didn't need, has changed from "Oh, what a feeling!" to feelings of anxiety. You have created unnecessary baggage you now have to carry when it could have been avoided! Your muscles are beginning to grow weary!

### **Let's not break his back!**

Although Jesus will graciously offer rest when we are heavily laden by the weight of our burdens, let's not break His back by adding additional baggage through personal desires, unaffordable lifestyles and lack of discipline. In following Christ, we cannot follow our own inclinations and the world's way at the same time.

### Here's the lesson...

Instead of coming to Jesus only at those times when our baggage gets too heavy—*when I am heavy laden*—Jesus desires that we stay yoked to Him for all time, allowing Him to do the heavy lifting as needed. At the same time, yoked to Him, He keeps us moving forward on the path that God wants us to follow.

Yoked with Jesus, we will experience peace and contentment that comes as we live without unnecessary baggage. Plus, we will be free to enjoy the scenery along the way.

*“Come to Me all who labor and are heavily laden, and I will give you rest.”*

Accept this invitation and He will surely lighten the load.

---

*Consider My Thoughts to Ponder on the Next Page*

These are questions and ideas I have pondered and researched during the many years of this project. They are not a test, just ideas for consideration.

Take time to think about them as you ponder this message.

Get your Guide Book at  
[michaelbelk.com/product/journeys-the-guide-book/](http://michaelbelk.com/product/journeys-the-guide-book/)

Enjoy a 20% discount on five (5) or more.

# Thoughts to Ponder

View film at [michaelbelk.com](http://michaelbelk.com)

- The Urban Dictionary defines baggage as an issue regarding a person's past that can affect their current disposition. Consider baggage that may be interfering with your life or the lives of those around you. (Examples might include low self-esteem, lack of motivation, or willingness to go into debt and stay in it.) What remedy does Jesus offer?
- Are you able to work through difficulties and move on or do you allow them to linger, becoming emotional baggage that keeps you from enjoying the present moment? What remedy does Jesus offer?
- Recall if or when you have created unnecessary burdens through poor decisions and lack of discipline. The example provided was a new luxury car that was "wanted" but not actually "needed." What remedy does Jesus offer?
- "Come to Me all who labor and are heavily laden, and I will give you rest...For My yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light" (Matthew 11:28). This verse states Jesus' offer of His supernatural remedy for "the heavy baggage of life's burdens that weigh you down... past, present and future? What remedy does Jesus offer?"
- Imagine your life "yoked" to Jesus, whereby He lightens the load of life's burdens by bearing most of them or all of them when necessary. What remedy does Jesus offer? It is ours for the asking!

Get your Guide Book at  
[michaelbelk.com/product/journeys-the-guide-book/](http://michaelbelk.com/product/journeys-the-guide-book/)

Enjoy a 20% discount on five (5) or more.