

The Life of JESUS I.

From Birth to Resurrection

By Jerry Schmoyer

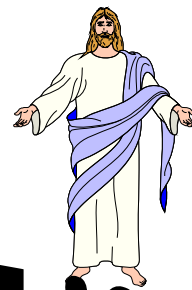
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1. GOD'S TIMING

Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980), the movie director, told a parable in *Guideposts* (1959) about the unknown. There once was a king who was granted two wishes. His first was to see the future. But when he saw all that lay ahead -- the beauty and the pain -- he immediately asked for his second wish; that the future be hidden. "I thank Heaven," the master of suspense proclaimed, "that tomorrow does not belong to any man. It belongs to God."

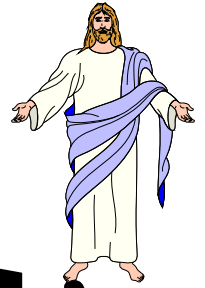
HISTORY = HIS STORY In fact, ALL history belongs to God: past, present and future. Every single event is under His control, even to a bird coming to land on the ground (Matthew 10:29). The rising and falling of the most powerful nations of the world are also under God's control (Daniel 2:32-47; Acts 4:25). This is very comforting in a world that seems out of control.

One of the best examples of this is the coming of Jesus to earth. God says that this was in the very time He chose: *Gal 4:4 But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law.* God didn't sit around waiting for the right time, He actively controlled history so that all the conditions necessary were present when He came to earth. Just what made this particular time so special?

There were three main groups of people God used to prepare the world for Jesus' first coming. These affected all areas of life at that time. Everything was perfectly prepared in the area of politics (Rome), philosophy (Greece) and the people (Israel).

GREECE (PHILOSOPHY) Greece took over control of Palestine from Persia in 334 BC when Alexander was conquering the whole area. When he died in 323 the Ptolemies ruled there until the Seleucids took over in 219 BC. During this time the area was totally saturated with Greek culture, thought and philosophy (a kind of humanism not much different from New Age thought today). Many Jews bought into this, led by a group of very liberal-thinking Jews called the Sadducees. God used this Greek thought to prepare people for the coming Messiah and the spread of the early church because Greek thought was looking for answers but, despite all the attempts to find them, didn't really produce anything to fill people's hearts. There were Epicureans, Stoics, Academics, Orphism, Pythagoreans, Cynics, Sceptics and many more. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle were influencing the people. God was just an intellectual abstraction. There were no strong gods or goddesses demanding the loyalty and attention of the common people. Questions were asked but not answered.

Of great impact on the world, and the Bible, was the spread of Greek as the universal language. Now people could speak to each other in a common language -- very essential to the quick spread of the early church. Not only was Greek a universal language, but it was a very precise language. It was just what was needed to convey all the theological nuances and flavors of the New Testament. God obviously prepared Greece for His Word.



The Life of JESUS



**ALEXANDER
THE GREAT**

ISRAEL (PEOPLE) While the Greeks greatly influenced the land of Palestine, they never conquered the hearts of the people. Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the temple in the most awful ways and killed any Jews who practiced their religion in any way. Even quoting a Bible verse was punishable by death. The Maccabean revolt, led by the Hasmonean family, won back Jewish independence and culminated with the rededication of the temple on December 25, 164 BC. Unfortunately the Hasmonean rulership soon became almost as oppressive as the Seleucids had been before them. A movement of conservative Jews who wanted to have the nation turn back to God and His Word arose. Called the Pharisees, they led the people in civil war which just made everything worse. This so weakened the nation that the Romans, having defeated the Greeks, were easily able to annex Palestine in 63 BC.

During all this, though, Jews were moving into virtually every nation of the world. This dispersion was very foundational to the spread of the early church. The Jews brought their message of one God revealed in the Bible Who wanted His people to live a holy life to every nation, setting the groundwork for the spread of the early church. Their synagogues became perfect places to first preach the Good News of Jesus the Messiah. The church became patterned after the synagogue.

Also during this time period the Septuagint (LXX) was translated. For the first time the Jews, and also anyone who could read Greek, could read the Bible for themselves. This opened the way for the spread of the Gospel, too. God was working to bring all this about.

ROME (POLITICS) While the Greeks influenced the minds of men, Rome controlled their bodies. Rome's take-over of that whole part of the world also was important in setting the groundwork for what was to come. For the first time there was world peace, and it lasted for several hundred years. That meant it was safe to travel anywhere. Rome built marvelous roads for travel. Travel by ship



was safe, too. Pirates and robbers were kept under control. Because of peace as well as advances in technology, it was no longer for everyone to spend the vast majority of their time growing their own food. Many people moved into cities and pursued other crafts. This made it possible for Paul and the other early missionaries to go into the cities where people were already gathered and preach. This was MUCH more efficient than going from farm to farm!

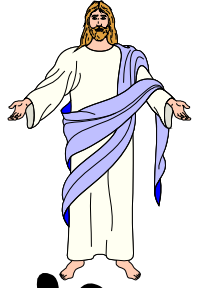
Then, too, Rome allowed religious freedom. They did not dictate who or what was to be worshipped. People could decide for themselves. The old gods and idols their ancestors worshipped no longer held much interest and often didn't apply to their new lives in the cities. City life brought its share of new problems, too. Sin was

rampant. Alcoholism, immorality, homosexuality, prostitution, crime, murder, extortion and political corruption were rampant. Something was needed to give meaning, peace and satisfaction in life. The stage was set for the message of Jesus

Gal 4:4 But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law. God IS in control of history, of ALL history. He has everything set up just the way He wanted it to be for Jesus' first coming. He's doing the same right now, getting ready for Jesus' return. It's His world. He is sovereign Lord over all that happens. Praise His name!

2. GLORY BE!

By Gabriel



The Life of JESUS

“Don’t be afraid!” That’s how I start my conversations with humans. Whenever I appear in angel form people fall in fear, so terrified they can hardly speak. They assume I am coming in judgment. Don’t they realize that angels only appear to those who have accepted Jesus as their Savior? Don’t they remember that those who have done this will NEVER have to fear judgment from God (Romans 8:1)?

MY NAME IS GABRIEL. I come from the very presence of the Lord. When we manifest ourselves among human beings we take on the form of a human being ourselves so as to be able to work in privacy (Hebrews 13:2; Genesis 18:2-10; 19:1ff). By the way, I’ve seen some of the pictures you make of us -- babies, feminine, weak and sissy! We are might, powerful soldiers who belong to the army of God!

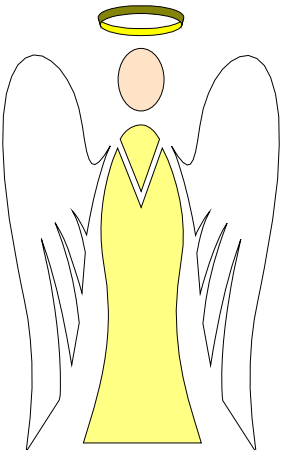
We are messengers - that’s what the Greek word ‘angel’ really means. We come to earth to help and protect God’s people, especially from Satan’s demons and their attacks. We are always around, watching you -- but you can’t see us! Our purpose is to bring glory to God, not to ourselves. Any attention we get without God getting more is wrong. After all, who would glorify their mailman for delivering a million dollar gift while not acknowledging the one who gave the gift? God gets all the glory, we are just serving Him, as are you.

God created us first, then we watched Him create the universe in 6 days -- since then we haven’t been able to stop praising and worshipping Him for Who He is and what He has done (as well as continues to do).

God created millions and millions of us (Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 5:1). We are NOT people who have died. We are like humans in that we have a mind, will and emotions. We can only be one place at a time and don’t have all knowledge or power, only what we get from God. Unlike you, though, we are not limited to a physical body, we are all male and don’t reproduce, and we only had a one-time chance to exercise our free will. That was when Lucifer (now called Satan), the greatest angel God created, rebelled against submitting to God and in his pride and rebellion challenged God’s power (Isaiah 14; Ezekiel 28). He was immediately cast out of heaven and about 1/3 of the angels followed him. Now they are called demons -- fallen angels. They counterfeit us and try to act as angels of light to mislead mankind, and are quite successful! They oppose God’s kingdom and, like their leader Satan, seek to have people follow and worship

them. Since earth is their kingdom (Adam gave it to Satan when he sinned) they are very successful. When someone is born into God’s family he finds himself living in enemy territory, a source of light among Satan’s darkness. That is why we are needed to help you and protect you from this unseen enemy who would torture and kill you if God would allow it.

Of course you know there is no question about who will ultimately rule this earth and the whole universe. Since God Himself came to earth (called Jesus) as a man and took on Satan and all his forces, defeating them on the cross by paying for sin and overcoming all the demons could throw at Him, their ultimate defeat has been certain. There is no question of Who really is the great ruler of the universe.



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God is still delaying the final mop-up action, though, until all those who would accept His free gift of salvation do so. Then all hell will break loose!

IN THE MEANTIME our missions are typically restraining actions related to this ongoing rescue program. We move into an area and secure a perimeter of operations from enemy interference. I can't tell you much about our secret operations for enemy soldiers listen to all we say, but I can give you an example. One time Dothan, home of Elisha, was surrounded by the Syrian army. Michael's unit was deployed to ensure the safety of Elisha. The Commander notified Elisha we were there but his servant didn't know that and was alarmed. Elisha sent up a special request for us to unveil, so we executed a partial decloaking and the servant was very impressed! (II Kings 6)

When not fighting on earth we are in heaven at the throne worshipping and praising God (Psalm 103:20-22; 148:1-14; Revelation 5:11-13; 7:11-12). Yes, I guess you could say we are the policemen of the universe, carrying out and executing God's orders and making sure all fallen angels must obey them, too. The only time we were unable to do that was at the crucifixion when we were held back in the darkness so Satan and his forces could do their best to get Jesus to crack. They knew their ultimate victory or defeat lay in defeating him -- and we couldn't help! That was a nightmare! Glory to God, though, He was victorious. Because of that victory He has the final say and uses that power to protect you.

We, as messengers, carry out God's orders (Daniel 10). We bring answers to prayer, prevent accidents, protect believers and children from injury (unless God allows it for a plan and purpose known only to Him). We help you find things when you lose them. We go ahead of you and prepare the path for your daily activities. We watch you to see God's grace at work, and that amazes us! To be quite honest, we angels aren't very impressed with people and their selfish sinfulness. We don't understand why God loves you so much, but you can be glad He does or you'd be nothing! We are therefore very impressed with God and His mercy. Since we no longer have a free will we can't and don't experience His mercy, so seeing it in your lives is a most impressive! I hope you realize what a good deal you have, how much you owe to God's love and mercy! I know you will realize it when you see it all from our perspective. Until then....

Well, anyway -- back to my story. My name is Gabriel, as I said. My name means "God is Great." Michael and I are God's two highest-ranking angels. God has us all divided as an army with generals, colonels, majors, etc., on down to privates. We are called thrones, dominions (Cherubim and Seraphim), principalities and powers.

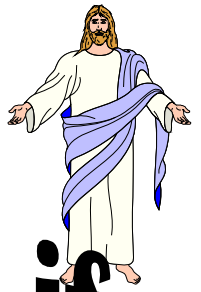
I HAD THE PRIVILEGE of making many special announcements to people. I interpreted God's revelation to Daniel (8:16; 9:21). I appeared to Zechariah in the temple (Luke 1:11-19). I had good news -- he would have a son in his old age and that boy would be the forerunner of the coming Messiah. That contact didn't go so well, though. Six months later I appeared to a young woman named Mary to tell her she would have a son, the Messiah, while still a virgin (Luke 1:26-29). Shortly afterwards I went to her husband (before they had started living together or consummated the marriage) with the same news (Matthew 1:20-21).

There is one more scheduled appearance of mine on earth, and it's one I look forward to as much as you do. I'll announce it with my trumpet. You call it the rapture. We call it our day of vengeance and justice. After centuries of watching enemy forces harass and cause all kinds of evil, we'll finally be able to take them. With God's power there is no doubt who'll win! Then we'll reign together for all eternity. You will have a much higher position than us and will actually rule over us (I Cor 6:3; Heb 5:2). After all, you are the Bride of Christ and we are but servants, messengers. Still, we'll all praise and worship God for all eternity. We'll proclaim His glory day and night. Why not get started doing that now? Glorify Him for all He has done, is doing and will do for you! He deserves all your praise and much more. See that He gets it!



3. DUMB ZACHARIAS

By Zacharias



The Life of JESUS

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"See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty. "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse." (Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6)

With these words the Old Testament closed. For 400 years there was nothing but silence. Many thought God had forgotten His promises to Israel, but not everyone. My parents still believed. They named me "God remembers." My wife, Elizabeth, was named "God's promise." Her parents believed, too. They passed their faith on to us. We needed all the faith we could get, for it wasn't easy to trust God when we were childless. To everyone that was proof of God's displeasure with us. How was I to minister to them as a priest and rabbi if I had God's stamp of rejection? Oh, sure, we prayed and prayed for years but nothing changed. At least it seemed that way for many years. Then the most incredible thing happened (Luke 1:5-10).

THE GROUP OF PRIESTS which I was part of served in Jerusalem during the 8th month of the year. The rest of the year we served in our local communities. The high point of the day was when one priest was chosen to go into the Holy Place to trim the wicks on the lampstand and sprinkle incense on the golden altar. One of us was chosen by lot to go in at dawn and another in midafternoon, which was the more special of the two. Being chosen was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Many priests never ever got the chance. I had never been privileged to do it in all my years of service.

Then one day the lot fell to me! I was ecstatic with pleasure. I was sobered, too, as I remembered that if it weren't for God's grace and mercy, I could be struck dead for approaching His presence. All went well at first, but then as I was offering up the prayers of the nation at the altar of incense all of a sudden there was this great, marvelous being standing there talking to me! I was terrified, thinking this meant my death. It turns out it was Gabriel (Luke 1:11-17).

"Your prayer has been heard" I was told. At first I didn't realize what he was talking about. Then it hit me: the baby! I had stopped praying for that 20 years ago when Elizabeth went through menopause. I don't think she stopped praying for a child until just a few years ago, though.

Now I was hearing that we were to have a child, a son none the less. Here I thought God's answer to my many prayers was "No" but it turns out it was really just "Wait." What's more, this son was to be the one who went before the Messiah, telling everyone to get ready for His coming. Yet, despite all this good news, there was a lot of unresolved bitterness and self-pity inside because of how long God had delayed in answering our prayers. NOW God is going to do this marvelous thing, when we are old. Why not earlier? If He couldn't give us a son when we were younger, how could He do it now that our bodies were too old to have children? Because of my doubt I was told I would be dumb until this son was born (so I better believe it really would happen) (Luke 1:18-20).

BY THE TIME this exchange was over and I went back outside, people were wondering what was happening (Luke 1:21-22). I couldn't even speak the blessing to dismiss them. I just had to wave them away. When my time of service in Jerusalem was over I went back home (Luke 1:23).

I was full of emotion when I went back home: emotion and excitement, but also guilt and remorse. Elizabeth only felt joy (Lk 1:24-25).

I spent the next several months sitting and thinking. I couldn't talk, I couldn't minister, I couldn't even tell when had happened to me in the temple. I wrote it out for Elizabeth and she told everyone. I had plenty of time to think about God's promises to be faithful, such as Isaiah 49:14-15: "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!"

THE FIRST MONTHS weren't so bad. Then Mary came to visit and Elizabeth had someone to talk with. Toward the end, though, it got long! Jewish women were secluded in the home for the last five months of a pregnancy, so everyone had to come here to see her. Women were constantly in and out: talking and giggling. I heard a thousand birth stories, each one more grisly than the one before it. Every ache and pain was analyzed. All they talked about were swollen ankles, upset stomach, can't bend down -- you'd think it was the first time a woman ever got pregnant! Worse of all, I couldn't do anything but sit there and take it all in! Elizabeth got to tell everyone what God said. I did find lots to do in the garden that year -- in fact it was the best kept garden I ever had.

Inside, though, I was really thrilled, for her and for myself. Just to think -- I would really have a son!!! I thought often of Abraham who, despite his own doubts, had a special son from God in his old age. I realized God answers our prayers but in His own time, not ours. Delay is not denial. I learned God answers in His own way. We are to pray the problem, not the solution. I learned He answers in His own power: that's the only way He gets the glory. I could only talk to God, and I did plenty of that!

THEN CAME THE DAY my son was born (Luke 1:57-58). I never saw a bunch of women so excited! I think I was even more excited than them, though. John's birth was the only birth recorded in the New Testament besides Jesus. The whole first week after his birth was constant celebration. Every movement, every cough, every coo, every filled diaper was a big thing!

Then came the 8th day after John's birth, the day of a boy's circumcision. Contrary to all traditions, I didn't name the baby Zacharias after myself. It was almost like I was disclaiming to be his father. It wasn't that, it's just that he had a Father far above me, One who had already chosen his name (Luke 1:59-66). "His name is John" I wrote. 'John' means 'The Lord is gracious,' and indeed He is! Immediately upon that act of obedience God removed my dumbness and I could talk. My first words were those of praise to God, expressing what has been building in my heart for the last nine months (Luke 1:68-79). I was awed and humbled by the privilege and responsibility of raising the one who would be herald of the Messiah. What a blessing!

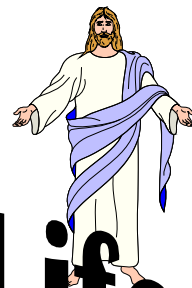
That little baby was the center of attention and the main topic of conversation in our home as well as our whole village for some time to come. I don't think there ever was a baby more loved! What a joy it was. We felt like teenagers again! We knew we wouldn't have many years with him because of our age, but God blessed and used every minute we had. God kept us alive long enough to see him grow in faith and love for God, and that is what was most important for us (Luke 1:80).

AS FOR ME, I didn't doubt God again. I knew He knew what He was doing. God used my small faith and helped it grow. I trusted His promises to help raise him despite my age. You, too, can trust God's promises in your own life. You can trust Him for strength (Deut 33:25; Isa 40:29), rest (Mt 11:28), victory over sin (I Cor 10:13), forgiveness of sin (Rom 8:1; I John 1:9) and peace (Ps 118:6; Psalm 23:4; Isa 41:10). God can be trusted. God is worthy to be trusted. Try Him and see!



4. “I’M YOURS, LORD”

By Mary



The Life of JESUS

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My name is Mary (‘Miryam’). It means bitterness. It was the most common girls name in my time because many parents wanted their daughters to grow up to be godly women like Miriam. There was nothing special about me or my family. The only special thing was that God chose to use me. I’ll never forget how it all began.

My father was in the field working and mother had gone to the market. I was home alone, mending clothes, and daydreaming about Joseph, the man I was to marry. I didn’t know him very well, but we had grown up together. We were each in our teens. I did know Joseph was kind and godly. He was also handsome!

Suddenly I was startled! You know how sometimes you can sense someone standing nearby but haven’t seen them? There stood a stranger in the doorway. I assumed he was looking for my father. There was something very different about him, though. He just walked in uninvited! It was a bit scary for men didn’t approach women that way. It got even stranger when he spoke. “Hail woman, richly blessed, The Lord is with you.”

“Who is this?” I thought. “What does he want? Am I in danger. He doesn’t seem threatening but...” He certainly had my full attention!

Like every godly Jewish girl, when I was young I would dream I would be the fortunate woman to give birth to the Messiah. Those days most adults had forgotten about the Messiah and just saw it as foolish girls’ fantasies. Our nation had wandered far from God, way into sin. It was especially bad in Nazareth where I lived. It was a corrupt army town with more Gentiles than Jews.

I had all but forgotten those girlish daydreams as I grew older. I didn’t catch the man’s meaning right away. It seemed impossible to be happening. It seemed like he knew exactly what I was thinking.

“Don’t be afraid,” he told me. “You have found favor with God.” I knew everything I had was by God’s grace, that I had done nothing to earn it or deserve it. Why was he reminding me of this?

Then he said it: “You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus.” ‘Jesus’ was a common name, the Greek equivalent to our Hebrew name ‘Joshua.’ They meant “the Lord is our deliverer.”

When what the angel was saying sunk in it made me wonder when this was going to happen. Isn’t that the first thing women wonder when they hear they are pregnant? Did he mean I would be pregnant BEFORE being married? Again he seemed to read my mind and answered before I asked. It was almost as if he purposely left this out so I’d wonder and he could emphasize it more.

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.”

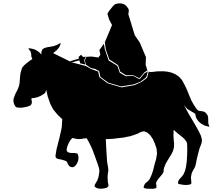
Nothing is impossible for God. Even having a baby without a human father.

You know, some see me as a celebrity and even worship me. Really all I was was a servant. A servant is the property of his master to use as he decides. It requires an attitude of submission and humility. You might think it was easy to say I was God’s servant because of the great blessing He was bestowing on me.

All the implications of the blessing weren’t clear to me then, though. What was



obvious was the potential cost involved: loss of my reputation and Joseph, criticism and rejection by most people, the discomforts of pregnancy, and a family without a father. I put God before myself and immediately knew I had to obey. It had to be total obedience, no bargaining or hesitating.



I had always been willing to do whatever God wanted, always committed to following Him entirely. "I am the Lord's servant," I replied. "May it be to me as you have said." Now you think of a servant as someone who works agreed-upon hours for agreed-upon wages, then goes home to do what he wants. That's not how it was then. A servant was a slave. He had no time which belonged to him, not a free minute ever. He had no wagers, no home, no opinions -- nothing. That's what I was agreeing to be to God -- His servant to use however He chose. I wasn't a naturally submissive person, but I knew this is what God wanted and what I must do. God chose me and I yielded to Him.

It's hard to explain how the pregnancy happened. It was the most gentle, painless, loving thing that ever happened to me. This soft yet brilliant light just sort of came around me. I felt so warm and secure, just full of total peace. It faded and was gone as quickly as it came. The whole thing was so delicate and gracious.

Still, it wasn't all easy. I needed someone to talk to about this. Joseph was away building houses. Our contact was very limited anyway by Jewish tradition. My parents believed and supported me, but it was hard for them to understand. One day I went to the market. I left home with great feelings of love in my heart. I was grateful for all God had done for me, a poor peasant girl. It overwhelmed me. But in the marketplace my joy turned to sorrow and shame as the glances and whispers rubbed rawness into my soul. I wasn't even able to complete my shopping. I hurried home with my basket still half empty. I had to get away. Who would really understand? Elizabeth!

My parents sent me along with some from our synagogue who were going down to Jerusalem and I made the 4-day trip with them. I was really looking forward to talking to Elizabeth. It was as if the messenger put this idea in my mind when he told me about her miraculous pregnancy, too.

As I got closer, though, I got more and more apprehensive. What if she didn't believe me or mocked me? She was much older, the wife of a godly and respected priest. What would she think of an unmarried pregnant teenager? Would anyone ever believe my story?

She was home cooking when I arrived. She answered my knock with "Who's there?" "Mary of Nazareth, Heli's daughter," I called inside. Immediate revelation was given to her about what had happened to me. Her baby jumped for joy and kicked her. Her joy and acceptance of me was total and unconditional. She praised God for His marvelous works. I was greatly relieved! I didn't have to use the 'speech' I had been working on in my mind as I got closer to their home.

We had a wonderful time together. God provided just what I needed. Soon, however, it was time for me to head home. Her baby was about to be born and I had to return. Traveling back toward home brought reality back to my mind. What about Joseph? He must have heard I was pregnant by now. He would have no way of knowing this was God's baby. What would he think of me? I had to leave all that to God. But how would I support the baby? Everything was new and happening so fast. I was scared and excited at the same time. Feeling the baby move within me was absolutely thrilling! Nevertheless I wondered at times if I could be as good a mother as He needed. Would I be able to

meet His needs? What about my needs -- I'd have to keep trusting God to meet them. What would my son be like? What all would life have for Him? Somehow I could sense that there would be pain as well as joy, sorrow as well as pleasure. Time would reveal it all.

For now, I was willing to be God's servant, to have Him use me however He chose. What greater privilege could a person have? What better way was there to spend this short life on earth?



5. “CONGRATULATIONS, JOSEPH, IT’S A GOD”

By Joseph

My name is Joseph (Yosef). Those who knew me called me Yosi. Some have said I am the most forgotten character in the Bible. In Christmas pageants even the inn keeper gets a bigger part than me (and there really wasn't an inn keeper). I'm often just a moving prop, following Mary around. That's a tough role for a man, very humbling. Still, it isn't really true. I did have an important part in the story of Jesus' birth. I'd like to tell you about it if you have a minute. My story revolves around my hands. Look at my hands. They tell you that I work with wood and stone. You can see the history of my work in them: scars, calluses and cuts. You can tell a lot about a man by his hands. Farmers have different hands than fishermen. Hands are important to a man. You men understand. We create and produce with our hands. Where would we be without them?

I used my hands to build homes and buildings. Mainly we used stone, but also wood for windows, doors and roof timbers. I worked with my father, first learning from him and then, after my bar mitzvah at age 12, as his partner. We weren't any big 'success' as the world would call it. But family and friends were more important to my father than long hours and lots of money. I'm glad he was that way. I agreed with him. A man must find his fulfillment in his wife and family, not in his job.

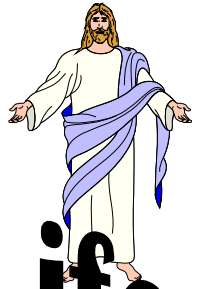
You can see why my hands are so important to me. I used them to provide for my family, to love and raise my children. The best thing these hands did, though, was to hold the Messiah, God Himself come to earth as a baby. These were the first hands to ever touch Him. I brought Him into the world with these very hands! You know it does something to a man to see a baby born. Being there when the woman he loves goes through all that brings up emotions and feelings we men usually avoid. I wasn't entirely comfortable with them, but there were good, healthy emotions. There's nothing like holding a newborn baby in your hands to get everything in live in proper perspective! Just think, God used these very hands to raise His son! I never would have thought it would be this way when growing up.

Nazareth was a very ungodly, pagan town. It was a small town full of Gentiles and Roman soldiers. It wasn't a place for a devout Jewish family, but that's where God had put my family. My father was a good role model of a man of God. I, too, committed myself to living for God. I obeyed His law and believed in His promises of a coming Messiah to pay for my sins. It wasn't easy living or God in my time and in Nazareth. There weren't many of us who loved God, even among the Jews.



I did have one friend growing up who loved God as I did. Her name was Miriam. You call her Mary. Our parents were friends and we saw each other each time we went to synagogue. Somehow it became understood that we would one day marry. We got along so well we each looked forward to being together. We shared so much in common. As we became teenagers our friendship developed into a deep love for each other. We weren't allowed much private time together, but we just naturally had a deep bonding of our spirits. It was like we knew what the other was thinking, so we didn't have to always be talking. We each thanked God for His wonderful provision and anxiously awaited the time we could start our own family together.

We were legally married, called the eyrusin. That means the dowry (the mohar) was paid and vows said. All was legally binding. A contract, the ketubah, was signed. We were legally married, called husband and wife, but wouldn't live together until later. There was a 9 - 12 month waiting



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period to make sure she wasn't pregnant and to give me time to build a room onto our family insula for us to use. It was during this time that my world fell apart!

You know how gossip is. I heard in the worst possible way about Mary being pregnant. The more I checked into it the more I found it to be true. What was I to do? I was forbidden by God's command to marry her. The law said she should be stoned, but that wasn't enforced much any more. I could have her publicly proved wrong and embarrassed so I could get my dowry back and have my reputation cleared. This is what everyone said I should do. There was another way, though. I could privately and quietly divorce her, lose my dowry and reputation, but protect her from ridicule and criticism. This is what I had decided to do when Gabriel appeared to me in a dream and said it would be all right to go ahead and marry Mary anyway. She really hadn't broken the law for she was still a virgin. The baby was God's! Was I glad! I didn't think anyone would believe me, but I didn't care. Imagine the other construction workers when I told them Mary was still a virgin, it was God's miracle-baby in her! That would be hard on a male's ego.

All I had was one dream to go on. What if I had imagined it, or had wanted it so badly I only thought it happened? I prayed, talked to my parent's and Mary's parents, and decided to go ahead and marry her as I had wanted to do all along.

We went ahead and had the final wedding ceremony, the nissuin. There was a special solemnness and seriousness to it under the circumstances, though. It was nice having Mary as my wife and being able to be in our room to talk and pray together. It was frustrating not being able to be close physically, but we both agreed this was best so there could never be any doubt that Jesus was God's baby and not mine. God can give a man control of his sexual urges, I found. Later we had 4 sons and 2 daughters of our own, but for now it was time to wait. Two of those sons, James and Jude, were leaders in the early church and wrote books that are in the Bible.

It wasn't long, though, before we heard I had to go to Bethlehem for a census and taxation. Only the man was required to go, but Mary insisted on coming to get away from the gossip and stay with me. It took a week to make the 90 mile trip. We slept in tents. Finally we arrived in Bethlehem only to find it full up with others already arrived for the census. A man was kind enough to let us use the cave under his home, where he stabled his animals, for shelter. A man wants the best for his wife, and felt very bad that I couldn't provide any better than that. We were content, though.

We found a midwife to help with the delivery, which came soon after we arrived. Maybe the long trip brought the baby on sooner, but it was a safe delivery and both mother and son were fine. I got to deliver the baby and hold Him first -- with these very hands!

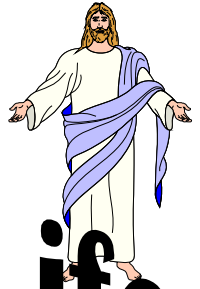
I cleaned out a shelf carved into the wall where food was kept up off the damp, dirty floor and we used that as a bed for the baby. It was amazing how similar His entrance into the world and exit from the world were. There was terrible pain and darkness, His bloody body wrapped in cloths, anointed with perfume, and laid on a stone shelf inside a cave -- both by a man named Joseph! It was my hands that did it the first time, but those of Joseph of Arimathea who did it when Jesus died for I was no longer alive. Anyway, it like He was under the shadow of the cross from the very start!

For thirty years we were best friends, together at home, work and synagogue. We bounced thoughts off each other and were as close as any two human beings can be. I knew Him better than anyone else. My hands touched and worked with His hands for 30 years. I never really understood how He could be both man and God, but I know He was. He was my friend, my son, my Savior. Is He your Savior, too? There's none other. I ought to know.



6. THE LAST SHALL BE FIRST

By the Shepherds



The Life of JESUS

"Oh, excuse me. I didn't see you approach our fire. Come on over, come closer. It's a cold night, come share our fire. We don't get many visitors here. No one bothers with us. Shepherds aren't very popular, you know.

"I hope the smell doesn't bother you too much. We don't notice it any more ourselves. We don't have many opportunities to wash -- and neither do the sheep! Oh, well, at least we're in the open air!

"I love these dark, crisp nights, don't you? The stars seem so close you can reach out and touch them. You know, this reminds me of another night similar to this one: dark, cool and peaceful. We had surprise visitors then, too. Only they were angels. Say, you aren't angels, are you? No, I didn't think so!

"Anyway, back to my story. Where was I? Oh, yes. I was going to tell you about that special night. You know, whenever anything important is to be known, God makes it known to us. We wouldn't have known that night was special if God hadn't told us. No one else would have!

"Because we were shepherds we had no civil rights. We couldn't be a witness in court, judges thought we were untrustworthy. We couldn't sell wool or milk from our flocks, people would assume we stole it. The Mishnah, our book of laws and rules, said, 'No one should feel obligated to rescue a shepherd who has fallen into a pit.'

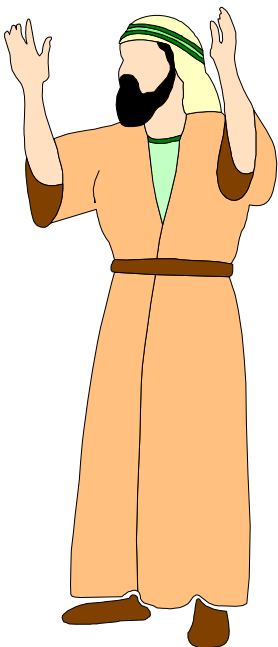
"Fortunately God didn't feel that way about us, or we would never have known what happened that night. As it turns out, we were the ONLY ones to find out. Why did God choose shepherds to give this wonderful news? Could it be that we are humble and open, close to nature and God? Perhaps it was because David himself was a shepherd here in these same hills. That's where he wrote many of his psalms of praise to God.

"Anyway, we kept sheep for several people. Many of our sheep were for the temple sacrifices. Possibly the next Passover lamb was in our flock. We shepherds knew about sacrifice and shedding innocent blood. The sacrifices hurt us much more than the priests who had no connection to the sheep. We knew them by name, raised them by hand from birth, and were closely attached to each one.

"The night I was telling you about was a cool night, in the 40's. We had a fire to keep warm. After it was over we talked about how it must have all come about. Probably the angels silently drifted downwards toward earth, hovering and taking up assigned positions, until Gabriel moved to the front and gave the command. Instantly they were all totally visible, like a flash! The light was God's glory shining on earth. It was the brightest I've ever seen, but it didn't hurt my eyes. It was a relaxing, peaceful light. The sheep weren't even scared by it.

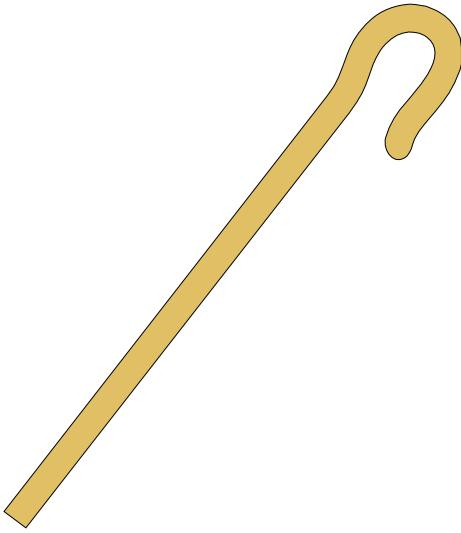
"Then there was Gabriel. I'm telling you the guy was huge! He told us to not be afraid, but that he brought us good news of great joy for everyone. 'Today in the town of David a Savior has been born you; He is Christ the Lord,' he said. 'This will be a sign to you. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'

"All the angels joined in shouting, 'glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.'



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"Our response was to just fall on our knees in praise and worship. It just came naturally, without really thinking about it. We praised God for His truth, keeping His promises to send the Messiah. We praised God for His power in coming as a baby. We praised God for His grace, mercy and love in sending the Messiah. We joined the angels in praising God for this wonderful news. We had often talked and speculated about the promised Messiah: would He come in our lifetime? Would we even know it if He did come? Would the nation receive Him, for most didn't care about God's promises any more? We didn't have time to think about all of that -- things were just happening too quickly!

"We naturally were very interested in seeing this Messiah baby. It sounded impossible, though, that the Messiah would be found in a feed trough in a cave! Why not the fanciest palace in Jerusalem? We didn't ask, we just went to town.

"We left one man to watch the sheep. They were safe in the enclosure as long as one man sat in the entrance. The rest of us went to see the Messiah. To find Jesus you must be willing to leave all you have: occupation, possessions, even your own sleep and ease.

"There He was, in a manger all right! We were the only ones who were told, it seems. What a privilege! I was struck by how small and helpless He seemed. Why didn't He come as a full-grown man, like Adam did? We were told about his miraculous conception, but his birth was as natural and normal as every one else's. To be honest, it was hard to picture Him as God, sitting on David's throne forever, worshipped by all creation.

"We had an excellent time with Mary and Joseph, talking and praising God. It was encouraging for them to have someone to share their joy. It was confirming to them to hear us repeat what the angels told us. It was motivating for us to meet and know them. We wanted to serve God as completely as they were. In the months to come we spent many hours with them. We had a special bonding between us that lasted long after they moved.

"This whole evening is one we would never forget. We left there, continually telling others what we had seen. We never tired of telling the story. It wasn't until many years later that we realized the culmination of the whole story and just how important this baby would be.

"I thank you for listening to my story and sharing our fire. Before you leave, though, there's one more thing I'd like to say. This isn't just a history lesson. This is to show you the importance of worshipping and praising Jesus. We are created to glorify God.

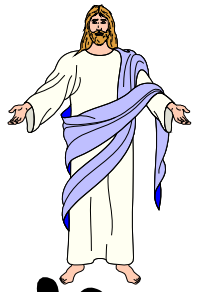
"We bring glory to God when we receive His free gift of salvation. Each time we admit sin and confess it, we are recognizing sin is our fault. When we make excuses we are, in effect, blaming God for our sin. Taking the blame for our own sin glorifies God. When we live with an attitude of bringing glory to God in all we say and do instead of putting ourselves first we are glorifying and worshipping God. Witnessing to others, of course, does the same. Trusting God no matter what is a way of showing our love and faith. It complements Him by recognizing His sovereignty. Prayer, likewise, glorifies God by showing our need for Him. All these are ways of worshipping God.

"There's no greater joy in life than comes when one is worshipping God. There's no better way to spend your time. God is certainly worthy of it and deserving of it. We'll be doing it for all eternity, so why not start now. Get a little taste of heaven on earth -- worship and praise God!"



7. FINALLY!

By Simeon



The Life of JESUS

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Hello. My name is Simeon, or Simon. It's the same name, just written differently. It's a common name: Simon Peter, Simon the Pharisee (Lk 7:36-50), Simon the Leper from Bethany, Simon the father of Judas, and me. I had a common, everyday name, and lived a common, everyday life. I had no great social status, no office, no standing. I was a priest and considered that a great privilege, although most of the other priests considered it a nuisance and a burden. There were a small group of us who stayed faithful to Jehovah, loved His word, and awaited the promised coming Messiah. The others, however, just went through the motions of acting religious.

Unlike most priests, like Zacharias, who lived in various parts of Palestine and took turns in the temple, I lived in Jerusalem all year round. I counted this a great privilege and loved to serve God in any way I could. I often thought of the promised delivered God would send, and often looked at the babies I dedicated in the temple, wondering if one might be Him.

I was especially alert when I saw what happened to Zacharias after he came from the Holy Place and couldn't talk. Word spread that an angel had talked to him inside. I knew it was a foreshadowing of great things to come. I felt God assuring me through His Spirit communicating to my spirit that the Messiah would come during my lifetime, and I would actually get to see Him! How I would recognize Him I had no idea, I just left that to God.

One day it actually happened. It started like every other day. I performing my duties in the temple: receiving sacrifices, singing with the priestly choir in the morning and afternoon, dedicating babies who were brought in, accepting offerings of cleansing, and serving in any way I could. One young couple, no different than anyone else, came in looking lost and confused. I immediately went to them to see if I could help. They came for the mother's purification from childbirth and the baby's dedication. As I spoke to them a strong impression came over me that this was the Messiah! At first I was confused: this common family and baby were no different than thousands I had seen come through here. The feeling was so strong, though, that I couldn't deny it's truth. I recognized immediately that this was the way God revealed truth to my spirit, and I rejoiced in what was happening. My senses became sharper and I became more intense in what was happening.

Despite the press of the crowds, the sounds of trumpets, singing, people shouting and animals moving about it was like we four were alone. I received the offering for the mother's purification. This was standard procedure. Childbirth and its accompanying pain was a constant reminder to women of the sin and uncleanness that came from Eve to all people. The innocent blood offering was a picture of God's coming Messiah shedding His innocent blood to pay for all sin. They were poor and could only offer the minimum sacrifice for the mother and son as well.

It was optional, but some Jewish couples chose to have their firstborn sons dedicated to the Lord when they reached 40 days old. This was recognizing that the firstborn belonged to God since He didn't take their lives in Egypt.

As I held the baby the reality of it all just washed over me. "Sovereign Lord," I said as I dedicated Him, "as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the

Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel (Luke 2)." Tremendous peace and joy flooded my soul, such as I never had before or since.

I noticed the parents were aware that this was a very special time for me. I explained to them what God has been showing me. They told me their story about the baby's conception and birth. I was especially interested in the message to the shepherds. I knew many of the shepherds from the Bethlehem area, just 5 miles down the road, were part of the godly remnant, those few still loving God and awaiting the coming of His Messiah. Others were wanting the Messiah to come, but they looked for a military leader to lead a revolt and throw off the yoke of Roman bondage. We knew better. What a blessed time we had talking there, in a world all of our own. I would think of that conversation many times in the years following it.

It was obvious God put us together on purpose. Not only was He keeping His promise and blessing me in a very special way, but He was providing friendship and encouragement for this young couple who felt so out of place in such a massive place of noise and turmoil. I could tell they immediately relaxed and a close bond was formed between us.

As the intensity of our conversation wore down I started to become more aware of the swirl of activity around. I was no longer totally wrapped up in myself but started thinking of others who also were awaiting this Messiah. I couldn't wait to tell them He was here!

Then out of the corner of my eye I noticed Anna, a woman of over 100 years of age who had been a widow for 84 years. She was an educated, talented woman who had a deep love for God. She was in the temple every moment the gates were open, worshipping God continually. She seldom even left to eat, preferring to fast often as she prayed and praised He Maker and Creator. We had often talked of God's promises and shared together our hope in the soon coming of the Son of David.

Evidently she had noticed me first, and seeing the focus of my attention started making her way through the crowd to us. God's Spirit had already firmly placed the thought in her mind that this was the Messiah, so I hardly had to say anything in the way of introduction or explanation. Her years of dedication and commitment to God gave her a special closeness, an insight few had into His workings. We listened in fascination to her words of praise and encouragement to the baby's parents. What a special woman she was! It was extra special to share my joy with someone as dear to all God's people as Anna.

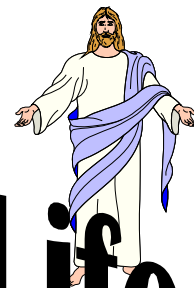
Before long, though, I had to get back to my duties. Anna spent the rest of the day with them, showing them around the temple and rejoicing in God's work with them.

I never saw them again, but I never forgot the special time we shared together. I thought of it several times a day for the rest of my life. I talked to others about it, and so did Anna. Some of the younger priests were very interested, and I tried to encourage them to keep their faith in God and not fall into the patterns of hypocrisy and empty ritual that were so common everywhere. Men like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were especially interested, and I prayed often that the words we spoke to them would germinate and take root in their hearts. Who knew what the future would hold? I knew I wouldn't be alive when this baby grew to manhood, nor would Anna, but perhaps some we told these things to would be able to recognize and follow Him when He made His mission known. What a blessed privilege they would have. I envied them, but was ever so grateful for the opportunity God gave me that day.



8. THE FIRST SHALL BE LAST

By Herod



The Life of JESUS

From Birth to Resurrection

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“Who are you? What do you want here? How did you get past the guards? Why are you people always pestering me for something?”

“All right, if you won’t go away, tell me what it is you want. Let’s hear your complaints! Everyone wants something from me. Most would steal my very kingdom if they could!”

“I tried to be a good ruler, but they just took advantage of that. When I was harsh, they complained to the emperor. There’s just no pleasing you Jews, is there?”

“So who are you anyway? You aren’t going to say, are you? And it looks like you won’t go away. Well, if you insist on staying you’ll have to hear me out. There are two sides to every story, you know. Maybe if you saw my side you’d cease your continual rebelling. I doubt it, but there’s always a chance, so I’ll tell you my story. One thing I ask -- listen with an open mind. Forget anything you may have heard about me. All right? OK.”

“My story begins when the Romans won control of Palestine from the descendants of the Macabeans. My father, Antipater II, was made ruler of this area. However he was killed in civil war and I took over. I had decided that I wanted to be rich and powerful. I thought that would give me peace and security. For 33 years I ruled over Israel, and had untold wealth and power -- but I never found the peace and meaning I was searching for. My life was filled with turmoil, within and without.

“It seems I was always fighting for my kingdom. When Pompey, Crassus and Julius Caesar were fighting for control of Rome I threw my lot with Pompey and gave him my army. When he was killed by the Egyptians I lost my fortune and kingdom. Before long, though, Julius was surrounded by the Egyptians and I was able to rescue him. Therefore I was made king of Palestine again. Cleopatra became a very bitter enemy for I was given much of her land to rule. I was just 26, reputed to be the best hunter and horseman in the world. I was a great wrestler, tall, charming, athletic, strong and handsome.

“During these years Mark Antony, the Calvary officer, and I were friends. When he and Octavius fought Cassius and Brutus I backed them instead. When they lost I, too, lost my riches and kingdom. I went to them, offered them my loyalty, was forgiven and made king again.

“When I returned to Israel the Hasmoneans led the Jews in a revolt and I almost lost my kingdom again. To make peace I married the last Hasmonean, Mairamne. It was a disastrous mistake. I loved her better than all my other wives, but she never loved me.

“Meanwhile Antony fell in love with Cleopatra and gave much of my kingdom to her. I had to go to him and argue to have my land back. Then Antony divorced his wife, Octavius’ twin sister, to marry Cleopatra. Octavius fought him and I helped Antony, but Antony lost and so did I. I went to Octavius and told him I was just loyally supporting my friends and now would support him, too. He made me king again.

“Five times I honestly raised a fortune, and each time I lost it. I was naturally gifted in raising money, but it never brought the satisfaction I thought it should. I developed the largest kingdom in the Roman empire, almost as big as when Solomon was king. Jerusalem became one of the greatest Roman cities. I built the hippodrome, theater, and many grand public buildings. I developed a complex water system and a fine defense. I built forts throughout the kingdom. I freed Galilee from bandits. I also rebuilt Caesarea, Decapolis, Athens and other cities. I was considered the greatest non-Roman in the Roman Empire (I was half Jew and half Arab). Even at 65 I was considered the best archer in the empire. I was fair, generous and tried to give the people I ruled a good life.

“When famine hit Palestine I gave up my fortune again to buy food so they wouldn’t starve. Do you know what they did when the famine ended? They raised an army and revolted against me! I tell you, those Jews were the hardest people in the empire to rule. They were stubborn, self-centered, deceitful, dishonest and totally uncooperative. There was no reasoning with them. They never liked me, despite all I did for them. I never found what I was looking for in popularity, either. The power I held over those who feared or respected me was empty, too.

“Fear of death started to torment me. Fear of losing my kingdom and fortune again were ever present. Why was I alive anyway? What good was life -- we all ended up dead anyway! All this started affecting my mind. I began to build ‘walls’ around myself. Why try to be kind and fair? If I couldn’t get love, I would rule by force. I was told there was a better way, that God revealed promised to His chosen people, the Jews, that a Messiah would come to pay for sin and bring peace to all. If He chose the Jews for special privileges I certainly couldn’t respect Him! I did respect some of those who claimed to believe in His promises and live for Him, though. There was an honest advisor I had who was Jewish, a general whom I respected and trusted who became a ‘godfearer,’ a proselyte to Judaism, and an old housekeeper who had a deep faith in God. I noticed they had something others didn’t, something I was looking for. Because of my pride I kept putting off pursuing it, though. I thought about it a lot, but didn’t want to admit the Jews had anything I needed.

“The last 10 - 15 years of my life were pure torture. I developed Arterio Sclerosis, Psychosis, and ulcers. The pressures of the 30 years I spent fighting for my kingdom were taking their toll. I suffered from rapid mood changes and delusions of persecution. My heart and kidneys weren’t functioning properly and I started poisoning myself. I had constant pain and diarrhea the last several years of life. My lower bowels were gangrenous and filled with maggots. It got so bad I attempted suicide to find relief but failed.

“I became a wild man, eliminating anyone in my way. I set up my man as high priest in Jerusalem to keep the peace, but when he became too popular I invited him to my palace, got him drunk and drown him in my swimming pool. I even killed Mariamne, the wife I loved, for plotting against me. My insane jealousy and fear of losing her drove me to it. My conscience then tormented me so much I almost was driven insane.

“I killed my favorite 2 sons for trying to kill me. They were twins, sons of Mariamne, and I strangled them with my own hands. I murdered Antipater I, the next in line for my throne, five days before I died. I killed thousands, many of them relatives, in my paranoia and fear.

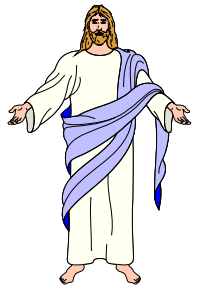
“One minor incident during this time was the killing of a couple dozen baby boys near Bethlehem. The Jews totally missed that one, but my spies didn’t. They brought me word about the birth of this supposed ‘king.’ I wasn’t going to take any chances, so I had all the boys there killed.

“By this time I’d given up trying to find peace. There was no such thing. My power and riches didn’t provide it, but I wasn’t about to give them up. They were all I had!

“On my deathbed I ordered all the noblemen herded into the hippodrome to be killed by the army when I died. I knew no one would mourn me, but this way I knew there would be mourning in Jerusalem when I died. Unfortunately they didn’t carry it out. My soul entered eternity without God or salvation in 4 BC when I was 69 years old, after ruling for 33 years.

“My descendants ruled awhile after me, but never found what I was looking for, either. What about you? Are you looking to riches, power, popularity and grand accomplishments to meet the emptiness within? It won’t happen! That is a dead-end street. I know, I followed it to its end. There must be a way, but that isn’t it! Thanks for listening to my story. I hope it turns out better for you than it did for me!





9. KING-MAKERS FIND **THEIR KING**

By Magi

In the final years BC there was a strange kind of expectation for a coming King. Most countries and thinkers were aware of this premonition. They thought He would come through Judah. This affected the whole 'mood of nations everywhere. The west (Rome) and east (Persia) both felt it. I want to tell you about what it was like to see this King of the universe face to face when He came! What a privilege that was!

Isaiah describes Him this way: "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory' (6:1-3)."

John also saw Him and tells us about it: "At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. ... From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. (4:2-11)." I'm here to tell you that that King left heaven to come to earth, to be born in a cave to a young couple far from home. I know. I saw them! I am a Magi.

Magi is a Greek word that roughly translates to "wise men who are king-makers." "We three kings of orient are" is all wrong. We were not three but hundreds, we were not kings but king-makers, and weren't from the orient but near east.

"Magi" is the name of the priestly tribe of the Medes, like Levi among the Jews. We were skilled, capable, respectable and highly educated men. We held knowledge others had no access to, thus your word 'magic' comes from our name. We were so respected even bandits wouldn't rob us. We ruled as a body. We chose and trained the kings of the east.

We were very religious, having worshipped Zoroaster exclusively until Daniel came and became the top magi during his time in Babylon. He taught us about Yahweh (Daniel 2:10,27,48; 4:7,9; 5:11; 6:4) and a godly minority among us have followed Him from Daniel's time until my day, 600 years later. We knew it was about time for this king of the universe we awaited to be born. Daniel's prophecy that He would be cut off 483 years after the Jews were allowed to return to Israel was the key (9:24-27). We knew He'd have to be born soon to grow up and fulfill that prophecy. We were watching the skies for a star to announce His coming. Balaam had prophesied a star out of Jacob (Num 24:17) and that's what we looked for.

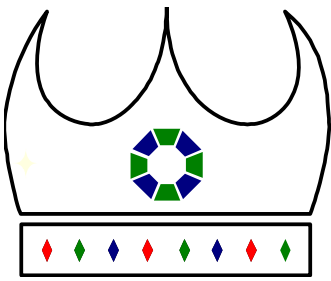
When it appeared we knew it was no natural event such as a conjunction of planets, a nova or a comet. It wasn't really a 'star' but was literally 'something that shines, blazes in an incredible way.' That's why the Bible doesn't use the normal word for 'star' to describe it (Luke 2). It was really God's Shekinah glory coming to earth once again. What made it certain for us was that this new shining appeared in Coma, near Virgo. Virgo, the virgin bringing forth the branch and the seed (stars in her hands) was a picture of Israel in general and Mary in particular. Coma elaborated on this, showing this King was to come to this virgin as a baby. Some stars are even named 'Jesus' in it!

As astronomers we were very interested in this, as believers we wanted to meet this King ourselves. We knew He was coming to Israel so we went to its capital, Jerusalem. That was a 5 month trip of 1,000 miles. It took months to get supplies corrected and business taken care of so we could take this year-long trip. Dozens of us went, protected by a thousand of the best Calvary in the world, servants, luggage, etc. We all rode splendid horses, we were the best horsemen in the world at that time. Thousands of camels carried our baggage.

The Life of JESUS

From Birth to Resurrection

By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1998



When we got to Jerusalem we assumed He would be the talk of the town. Imagine our surprise when no one knew and no one cared! People were more concerned about our visit than the birth of their King! Herod was particularly disturbed, and no one knew what he'd do.

You see, our country, Persia, was large and powerful while Rome was weak at this time. Jerusalem was almost defenseless with most of its soldiers gone to fight in Armenia. Thirty years before cavalry had come from Persia and chased Herod to Rome where he needed a large army to recapture his kingdom. We had come to fight Rome here in Palestine in 63, 55 and 40 BC. To make it worse, the Jews would have supported us in a revolt if we started one. As it was, we had more than enough soldiers to take over the area. Everyone knew we were looking for a new king for Persia, and old Herod was so mentally off he'd destroy anything that even seemed like a threat. The Jews were more upset about what he'd do to them than about us or the birth of their King.

Oh, they knew the prophecies about His being born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) and when we got that information from them we moved on to Bethlehem. Funny, none of them bothered making the 5 mile trip to see their King. That was hard for us to understand when we had come so far at such great expense to see THEIR King!

We knew the general direction of Bethlehem, but not where the boy would be. God's Shekinah glory appeared to move before us and lead us to His home in Bethlehem, the same as the Shekinah glory had gone before the Jews when they left Egypt on their way to their promised land.

Mary and Joseph had stayed in Bethlehem with friends like Zachariah and Elizabeth nearby. Back home in Nazareth they would face gossip and rejection. Here they found peace and acceptance. They had long ago moved into a local home as Jesus turned from a baby to a toddler. They had been there almost a year when we arrived.

It was so wonderful seeing this One Whom we knew to be the King of the Universe, God Himself in human form. We bowed and worshipped Him and had a great time talking and sharing with His parents. It seemed to be very meaningful and encouraging to them to have us come so far. I guess the local ignorance of their Son and even the rejection they were facing was wearing on them. They were quite young, it was surprising to see as much maturity in them as we did.

When you love someone you want to give them gifts. We gave gifts to our God then and there. In our land we were more separated from Him, now we could make it up. We gave kingly gifts: gold (crowns were made of it), frankincense (pure incense, used in worship to our pure God) and myrrh (ointment for dead bodies, recognizing that this God was also a man). We gave these gifts for these reasons. We could have given silver, diamonds or money but we felt these better expressed the praise and worship in our heart. We had no idea how poor they were, or that they would need these riches that very night to finance their sudden flight to Egypt and sojourn there for several years. God knew, and provided through us before they could even know their need and ask for His provisions.

What an impact our arrival had on the neighbors! All too suddenly, though, God told us to leave and go home a different way. As honest men, we assumed Herod was honorable in his desire to find out more about this Child. God knew his heart, though, and enabled us to somehow slip through his chain of forts, bypass his patrol, and lose his spies as we left. That was truly a miracle of God. We would have stayed longer, but we were glad for the time we did have to worship our King.

When the neighbors saw us gone in the morning, and the family with the King gone, too, they assumed we had taken them back to Persia to make Him king there. I wish we could have done that, but it wasn't God's plan. When Herod tried to kill Him God had already rescued Him. God has His plan and nothing would thwart it. It was too bad those 2 dozen or so boys had to die. They were the first casualties in this phase of the warfare between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. I'm very glad I was on the side of the King!

Years later we heard that He had presented Himself as King (Matthew 21:5, etc.) but that He was rejected. Only a crown of thorns was given Him. One day, though, He will return as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Rev 19) and then all will be forced to bow in recognition of Him. I'm glad we could voluntarily bow out of love and devotion, no matter how much it cost us. What about you? Is He your king? His kingdom now is in the hearts and lives of His people. Does He rule and reign as King of your heart and life? We were king-makers, but so are you. Only you can make Him King of your life!



DEED TO MY HEART

Awarded to
**The LORD JESUS CHRIST,
The KING of KINGS
And LORD of LORDS**

This transfers ownership of my life to my Lord Jesus Christ, with no strings attached, now & forever more.



(Signed)

(Date)

(Comments)

10. OVERVIEW

by Jerry Schmoyer

Each article will have a chart like shown below. Think of it as a college course. There are fall, spring and summer sessions. Jesus' ministry started in the fall of 29 AD and lasted until late spring of 33 - exactly as long as it would take to get a 4-year degree in college. The three main Jewish feasts, when all men were required to come to Jerusalem, serve as convenient time points. The words in each box are keys to the events in that time period. For example, **BBD** stands for **B**aptizer (Jesus), **B**aptized (Jesus) and **D**evil (temptation of Jesus).

SEE C stands for "See your sin" (John to the Jews), "See your Savior" (John about Jesus) and "See your sovereign" (John to disciples). **C** is for Cana (Water to wine) and Capernaum (Jesus' new home). **FFNJJ** refers to **F**irst **P**assover. **F**irst temple cleansing, **N**icodemus, **J**udean ministry of Jesus & John, and **J**esus leaves Judea

when John imprisoned. **WELL** refers to the woman at the well, Jesus' Galilean tour well received, and Nobleman's son made well. **BLDG.-** also lists main events in that time period. In addition the events in this period centered around buildings. **MAN** focuses on special events focusing on men, **FOOD** on events using food (feeding of 4,000 and 5,000, etc.).

	SPRING	SUMMER	FALL
29 AD	BABIES		BBD
30 AD	SEE C	FFNJJ	WELL
31 AD	BLDG.-	MAN	SEA
32 AD	212.	FOOD	SERVING
33 AD	TRAVEL	F.W.	P.R.
	Dedication (Dec)	Passover (April)	Tabernacles (Sept)

The Life of JESUS

From Birth to Resurrection

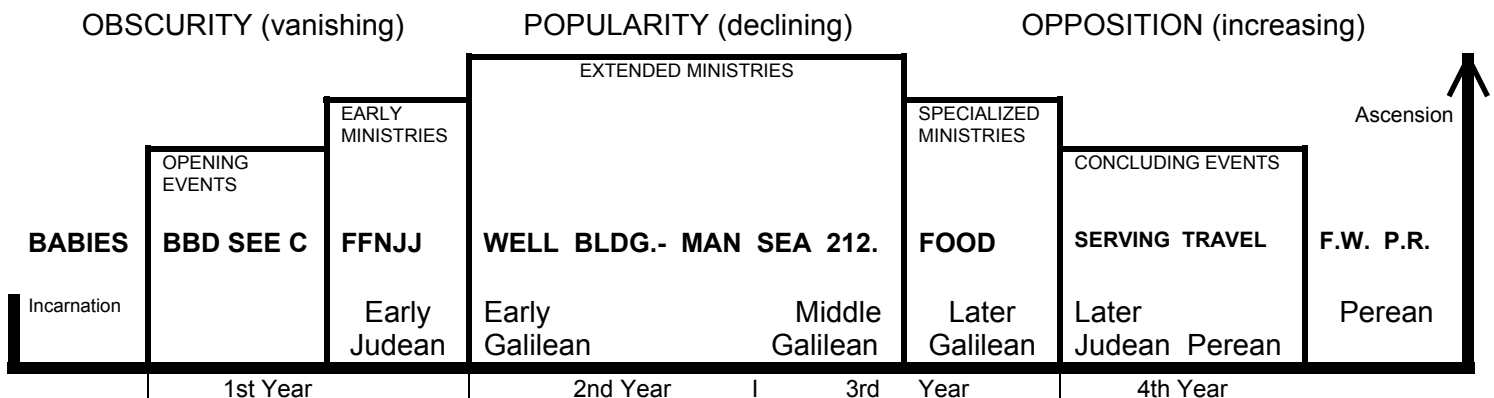
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BBD Fall 29

EVENT	MT	MK	LK	JN	PLACE
Baptizer	3:1-12	1:1-8	3:1-18		Jordan
Baptized	3:13-17	1:9-11	3:21-23		Jordan
Devil	4:1-11	1:12-13	4:1-13		Wilderness

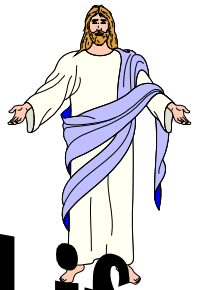
You will also have a chart showing each event in that particular time period. It also shows where the event is found in each of the Gospels as well as the geographical location of the event. On the right is a map with the main locations circled. Get familiar with the map in the back of your Bible. It will

be a better way of finding where the events happened. Being able to locate the main events chronologically as well as geographically is very important to a good understanding of Jesus' life.



11. LOSING YOUR HEAD FOR JESUS

By John the Baptizer



The Life of JESUS

From Birth to Resurrection

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You know, every time I think about earth I get this strange pain in my neck! I'm getting it right now. I wonder what causes that? Maybe it has to do with the last thing that happened when I was on earth. Let's see, what can I remember? I remember being in a dark, damp, cold and filthy dungeon for over a year. I remember trying to keep my faith in God despite the miserable conditions I found myself in. I was confused about the rejection of the Messiah I came to proclaim.

Then bright sunlight entered my cell as the door was thrust open. After weeks of darkness the light blinded me. Before I could see what was happening I was dragged outside, beaten, hit, spit on, and then forced to kneel with my head over a cutting block. I remember thinking, "I going to die!" I didn't have any fear, just peace. I did have some unanswered questions: If Jesus was the Messiah, why were people rejecting Him? Why did He let them turn against Him -- and me? Did I do something wrong? Then instantly I was in His presence and everything was bright and warm and beautiful. Those questions no longer meant anything. It was all behind me and eternity with Jesus lay ahead. There was no more looking back. I guess you could say I was the first to lose my head for Jesus!

MY NAME IS YOKHANAN (or Yehohanan). You call me John, the one who baptized. I was a PK that turned out right. I won't tell you a lot about my birth, for I'm sure you know the story about Gabriel coming to my father (Luke 1). I had wonderful, godly parents. However I didn't have them long enough. They were quite old when I was born, and when they died I was on my own. I grew up in the wilderness wearing animal skins and eating locust and honey. I had taken a Nazarite vow, which meant I never cut my hair, ate grape products or touched a dead person or animal. I never married.

I could have been a priest, but knew that wasn't what God wanted. God was preparing me to be an evangelist for Him, but unlike your evangelists today. People had to make a 2-day trip to come see me. When there I pointed out their sins as clearly as possible (Mark 1:1-6). God was using me to be a 'herald' - one who went before a king telling people to get the roads fixed and country safe for his welcome. I did this by calling the people to be baptized as an outward sign of their inner repentance (Mt 3:1-12; Mk 1:1-8; Lk 3:1-18).

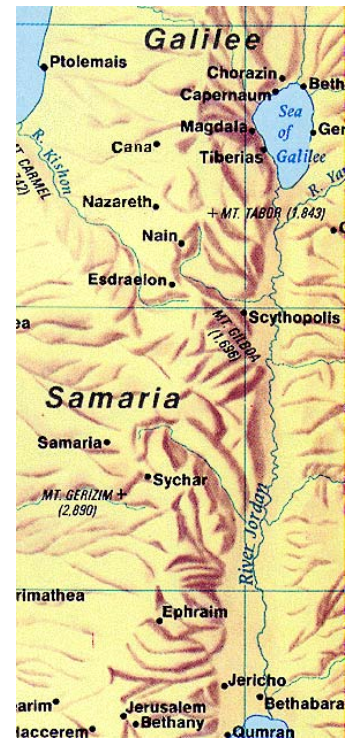
I started in the fall of AD 29, near the time of Rosh Hashanah which focused on repentance. Since it was the start of a Sabbatical year when all planting and unnecessary work ceased for a year, many were free to come hear me preach. This turned the people's hearts to things of God. I knew this was a start, something God would use in a very big way.

I knew I was getting the people ready for the Messiah and was to point everyone to Him. I had an idea who it was from stories I heard from my mother and father when young. They told me about my cousin Jesus and His miraculous conception and birth. I spent many hours studying the prophecies of the Messiah, and as far as I could tell He had fulfilled every one so far.

Still, when He came and asked me to baptize Him I wasn't sure. We spent several evenings talking about this, our parents, and the work God was starting through us. I felt HE should be baptizing ME! Still, I submitted to His will and baptized Him so He could identify with my message and the people's needs (Mt 3:13-17; Mk 1:9-11; Lk 3:21-23). What a privilege that was -- the highlight of my life! Immediately He left for 40 days to seek God's will and spend time with God (Mt 4:1-11; Mk 1:12-13; Lk 4:1-13).

By the time Jesus had returned fall had turned to spring (we had no winter in our climate). It was the year AD 30. I was still baptizing in the Jordan, moving up the Jordan valley and living off the land. I later found out that the day Jesus was tempted by Satan was the same day I was tempted in the same way (John 1:19-34). The religious leaders came and thought I was the Messiah. I, too, was tempted to be proud and take God's glory as my own. With God's help I didn't though. I told them I was just a voice, a spokesman for God. I wasn't the electricity, just the material that conducted it.

When Jesus returned the next day, Friday, I told everyone he was the Lamb of God, come to take away the sins of the world (John 1:35-51). Some of my followers understood, but most were looking for a king to defeat the Roman armies. Saturday I sent John and Andrew to Jesus and they invited James and Peter, their brothers. All of us were related in one way or another and had known each other to some extent before this time. On Sunday, when Jews could again travel, They took Philip and Nathanael and the whole gang went to Cana to a family wedding. There Jesus would do His first miracle (John 2).



LET ME FINISH UP MY STORY, though. I continued to point my followers to Jesus, but less than a year later I was arrested for pointing out Herod's sin of adultery. After another year in prison I was beheaded (Mark 6:17-29). I was willing to give my life for Jesus, the One who would give His life for me. I counted it a real privilege. It turned out I was just the first of many to do so.

Matthew suffered martyrdom by being slain with a sword at a distant city of Ethiopia. Mark expired at Alexandria, after having been cruelly dragged through the streets of that city. Luke was hanged upon an olive tree in the classic land of Greece. John was put into a caldron of boiling oil, but escaped death in a miraculous manner, and was afterwards banished to Patmos. Peter was crucified at Rome with his head downward. James the Greater was beheaded at Jerusalem. James the Less was thrown from a lofty pinnacle of the temple, and then beaten to death with a fuller's club. Philip was hanged up against a pillar at Heiropolis in Phrygia. Bartholomew was flayed alive. Andrew was bound to a cross, where he preached to his persecutors until he died. Thomas was run through the body with a lance at Coromandel in the East Indies. Jude was shot to death with arrows. Matthias was first stoned, and then beheaded. Barnabas of the Gentiles was stoned to death by the Jews at Salonica. Paul after various tortures and persecutions, was at length beheaded at Rome by the Emperor Nero.

It hasn't stopped there. Believers have been persecuted and killed for their faith throughout the centuries. In the past year it's been estimated that 160,000 have died for their faith. More have died for Jesus during the last century than in all previous centuries combined. As the end gets near, Satan steps up his attack against God and his people. Don't be surprised. Jesus told you "In this world you will have trouble," but then He adds: "But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) I was just a friend of the Bridegroom, YOU are the bride (John 3:27-30). You have a much greater position and privilege in the kingdom. Love Him. Live for Him. And if necessary die for Him. He's worth all that and more!

12. DEATH MISSION **VOLUNTEER**

By John the Baptizer

One of the most exciting moments in American history was when Colonel Travis drew a line in the dust at the Alamo and Jim Bowie, Davey Crockett and 130 others crossed the line to volunteer to die for the freedom of others. It's a recurring theme in history. There is the lone Calvary soldier who stays behind to hold up the Indians for a few minutes so the rest of the troop can escape to freedom. Or there is the doughboy in World War I who goes behind enemy lines to destroy a machine gun nest so his buddies can safely advance, knowing he won't make it back. Then there is the World War II pilot who doesn't bail out of his plane when hit but stays with it to make sure it crashes safely and not where others will be killed. Or it may be the marine in Viet Nam who dives on a live grenade to take the impact in his own body and save the others in his patrol. Many examples could be given, but the greatest one happened 2000 years ago in a place called Palestine. I was the one to draw the line in the dust for my cousin Jesus to cross over. He is the one who took the stand, who was willing to die for us all.

IT HAPPENED THIS WAY. God had called me to be the herald of the Messiah, the one announcing the way and telling everyone that He was coming (Mark 1:1-6). I had been preaching and baptizing at the Jordan River. My message was one of repentance from sin and turning to God for cleansing, as pictured in baptism (Mt 3:1-12; Mk 1:1-8; Lk 3:1-18). The Jordan River was only about 10' wide and 3-10' deep. Many traveled for several days to come hear me. Most who came responded, but others came to mock and spy for the religious leaders. It was the fall, near Rosh Hashanah when the focus is on repentance, of AD 29. Since the Sabbatical year was just starting people were thinking more of spiritual things and they had more time to come to hear me.

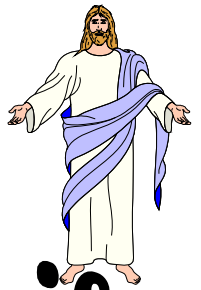
It was about this time that Jesus lay down his tools for the last time, took a slow breath, gave his father Joseph a long hug, and walked out of the carpenter shop for the last time. He went home, got a few things, hugged Mary, and headed south. They had anticipated this day for a long time and often talked about it. They were all excited about what was to come, but it was still a very solemn, serious time.

During the 60 mile walk to be find me Jesus had plenty of time to think. He could have turned back at any time and know one would have known. But He didn't.

WHEN JESUS ARRIVED where I was baptizing he spent several days on the fringes of the crowd, watching and thinking, awaiting God's perfect timing. One evening when I was alone He approached me. We talked through most of the night. We had heard about each other often from our parents. The last time we were together we were too young to remember. We talked about family, for we were relatives. There was an instant rapport between us, for we each knew our lives were intertwined in God's will. We were the only two who realized what was about to happen, and even our understanding was very foggy and incomplete. Still, we really appreciated the support we received from each other.

We disagreed, though, about who should baptize whom! I realized I was to obey and serve Him, so I baptized Him. Although He was sinless it was His way of identifying with my message as well as the people he came to save. What an event that baptismal was! I'll never forget it. The heavens opened and God's Spirit came down. God Himself voiced His approval of this step of obedience Jesus was taking (Mt 3:13-17; 1:9-11; 3:21-23). What made it such a big deal was that it was a public commitment to be the Messiah, a stepping across the line in front of everyone. The line was crossed. His mission had begun. However someone else was watching and by this public stand knew He was the Messiah. That was Satan.

IMMEDIATELY HE WENT INTO THE WILDERNESS to get alone with God to pray, commune, ask for guidance and direction, and have time to think. God's Spirit drew Him



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(Mt 4:1-11; Mk 1:12-13; Lk 4:1-13). For 40 days Jesus prayed, worshipped and strengthened His commitment to whatever God had for Him.

Now Jesus had often been tempted in His life. He faced all the normal temptations children, adolescents, young adults and then single adults face. He even felt them more keenly because that contrasted so sharply with His innocence and perfection. But none of those temptations was anything like what He was hit with in the wilderness. He had been tempted to draw back and not be baptized, to not even leave the carpentry shop. Now the temptations took a new turn.

For one thing, they came at a time when He was very open and vulnerable. After fasting for 40 days hunger hits big time! He was totally drained physically, emotionally and spiritually. He was at a high point in being anxious and ready to be the Messiah of the world. That's when Satan hit Him, offering Him easy ways to be the Messiah. He wanted to have the end justify the means.

Some may wonder if Jesus could really be tempted? He certainly could. Could He sin? Yes and no. When He became man He set aside the use of divine attributes which would have made His life as a man easier, things such as omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence (Phil. 2:6-8). He was still God in that He was perfect, holy, righteous, just, etc. As a man He could certainly have sinned, but as God He couldn't. If He would have sinned in His humanity, His deity would have stopped it. However He resisted sin in His humanity and therefore never had to have sin stopped by His deity. This would have disqualified Him to be our substitute on the cross. It's like a car with a governor that won't let it go over 65 MPH, but the driver never goes that fast so it never needs to kick in. Jesus was God. He could have sinned but He didn't. He was certainly tempted to, though!

He was tempted PERSONALLY, to reactivate His omnipotence and make stones into bread so He could eat. It would have meant impatience at God's timing and providing for Himself instead. He was then tempted NATIONALLY, to throw Himself down from the temple where everyone would be impressed as angels caught Him. They surely would have seen Him as God and crowned Him Messiah then and there, but He knew the cross had to come before the crown. Finally He was tempted UNIVERSALLY. Satan offered Him rulership over the whole world. He was offering Him the authority he got from Adam when Adam sinner. This temptation worked with the first perfect man, so Satan was sure it would work with the second, but it didn't. Again, Jesus knew He had to obey God's timing only, and He could not shortcut the cross. The end never justifies the means.

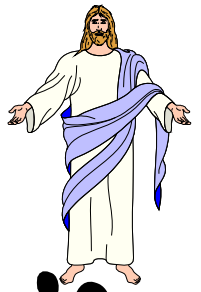
At His baptism Jesus was proclaimed Messiah. At His temptation He was proven Messiah by defeating His number one challenger. There would be more battles, that was sure. But for now the issue was decided. Angels came and ministered to Jesus, feeding and encouraging Him.

How does this apply to us? If Jesus took such a stand for us, we must also take a stand for Him. Jesus is worth dying for, but Jesus is also worth living for! We, too, can have victory over sin and temptation, but only in God's strength, never in our own.

This story illustrates the point nicely. A modern jet on the runway was a beauty. It was equipped with the latest technology and weaponry. The jet could fly at supersonic speeds, and quickly race to great heights. If an enemy plane were in the vicinity, the jet's pilot could destroy that plane miles away, before the plane's pilot could even see him. An Air Force pilot climbed into the jet and off he flew, leaving the earth far behind as he soared above the clouds. Although no one was looking, the pilot straightened himself in his seat. He was naturally proud of his jet, and of himself for qualifying to fly such a sophisticated mode of transportation. After he reached cruising altitude, the pilot heard a strange noise. He took off his helmet, and recognized the noise--it sounded like someone gnawing on rubber or plastic. Peering down below the instrument panel, to his horror the pilot saw a rat, out of his reach and gnawing on the main electrical wire between the jet's controls and its engine. If the rat were to cut through that line, the jet would careen out of control, and crash immediately. The pilot's first instinct was to descend--an emergency landing. But he had flown so far that there was not enough time to land. So he decided to ascend--maybe the rat couldn't survive at a higher altitude. The pilot put on his oxygen mask, boosted power to the jet's engine, and quickly climbed as high as he could go. Soon the gnawing sound ended. When the pilot landed safely, he found the rat--dead. The only way we can have victory over sin, the only way we can stand for Jesus, is to live above this world and move as close to Him as possible. If that isn't where you are, you're in danger!

13. JESUS GOES PUBLIC

By Nathanael



The Life of JESUS

From Birth to Resurrection

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Have you ever wondered what happened to the 56 men who signed the Declaration of Independence? Five signers were captured by the British as traitors, and tortured before they died. Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned. Two lost their sons in the Revolutionary Army, another had two sons captured. Nine of the 56 fought and died from wounds or the hardships of the Revolutionary War. What kind of men were they? Here are some examples. Carter Braxton of Virginia, a wealthy planter and trader, saw his ships swept from the seas by the British navy. He sold his home and properties to pay his debts, and died in rags. Thomas McKean was so hounded by the British that he was forced to move his family almost constantly. He served in the Congress without pay, and his family was kept in hiding. His possessions were taken from him, and poverty was his reward. At the Battle of Yorktown, Thomas Nelson, Jr., noted that the British General Cornwallis, had taken over the Nelson home for his headquarters. The owner urged General George Washington to open fire. His home was destroyed, and Nelson died bankrupt. John Hart was driven from his wife's bedside as she was dying. Their 13 children fled for their lives. His fields and his grist mill were laid waste. For more than a year he lived in forests and caves, returning home to find his wife dead and his children vanished. A few weeks later he died from exhaustion and a broken heart.

TAKING A STAND for what you believe means there'll be a price to pay. Freedom is never free. It always costs someone something. Our spiritual freedom is free for us, but it cost Jesus everything. It cost Him His very life. He wouldn't have had to die. He could have become King of Israel and avoided the cross if He'd have done things my way. Now I'm glad He didn't, but at the time I couldn't understand it.

MY STORY STARTS in the Spring of AD 30. I was with Philip at the Jordan River listening to John preach (John 1:19-51). The religious rulers had been challenging John but he handled it quite well. The next day, Friday, John pointed out Jesus as the "Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world." John, Andrew, James and Peter spent Saturday, the Sabbath, talking with Him. On Sunday, when we could travel, they headed up to Cana and invited Philip and my to go along. We were all invited to the same wedding for we were all related in one way or another. It was my first time with Jesus, but I was immediately convinced He was the Messiah for He knew what I was doing as well as thinking before I even met Him!

It took a couple days to walk up to Cana and we talked the whole way there: first about family and relatives we had in common, then about Israel, and finally about the prophecies of the coming Messiah. Since it was a Sabbatical year we had more time and interest than usual in such things. We arrived in time for the wedding, which was on Wednesday (as was traditional).

Since **CANA WAS MY HOMETOWN**, several extra people stayed at my home. We told our families about what had happened at the Jordan and especially about Jesus being the Messiah. We wondered if He would say anything about that here. What He did was more impressive than anything He could have said (John 2:1-11). He turned normal drinking water into the best-tasting wine we ever had! Only He did it privately, secretly. Word got out He had done it, but if He'd have done it in front of everyone, and continued to do miracles for the people, they surely would have made Him king right then and there. But then He wouldn't have gone to the cross...

I learned later that Jesus didn't do miracles just to impress people. They were His 'calling card,' His proof that He was God. They were a means to an end (to get people to listen to and believe His message) and not an end in themselves.

Anyway, after the wedding we all went to Capernaum (John 2:12) because that is where most of our group lived. Soon it was time to go to Jerusalem for the Passover (John 2:13). We all made the 100 mile trip together.

WHAT A CELEBRATION it was! Our excitement about the Messiah coming, and us coming with Him, made it extra special. Most of the others weren't as sure as I was that He was the Messiah, but we all believed to one extent or another.

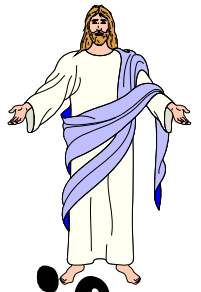
Unfortunately our hopes were dashed soon after we got to Jerusalem, for Jesus did about the worst thing He could have possibly done! He totally offended the religious leaders and turned them against Him for good (John 2:14-22). Oh, sure, I know they cheated the people by charging high rates to exchange regular money for temple money, then charged inflated prices for sacrifices since there was no competition. I know they were using the temple as a money-making place, renting space to any merchant who could pay. I know they were hiding robbers and thieves who were bribing them. It made all of us angry. But when Jesus upset the whole system and drove them out, putting them out of business during the most profitable time of the year, I knew there would be trouble. There was. Still, Jesus knew that doing what was right was more important than doing what was popular. I admired Him for that. I knew it was prophesied that the Messiah would do this (Malachi 3 and Psalm 69:9). I guess that's part of the price that has to be paid for doing what's right. Taking a stand is always costly. What's nice to know is that God always uses our courageous actions for His honor and glory! He did then and He still does today.

THIS IS A TRUE STORY of something that happened just a few years ago at USC. There was a professor of philosophy there who was a deeply committed atheist. His primary goal for one required class was to spend the entire semester attempting to prove that God couldn't exist. His students were always afraid to argue with him because of his impeccable logic. For twenty years he had taught this class and no one had ever had the courage to go against him. Sure, some had argued in class at times, but no one had ever "really gone against him" (you'll see what I mean later). Nobody would go against him because he had a reputation. At the end of every semester, on the last day, he would say to the class of 300 students, "If there is anyone here who still believes in God, stand up!" In twenty years, nobody had ever stood up. They knew what he was going to do next. He would say, "Because anyone who believes in God is a fool. If God existed, He could stop this piece of chalk from hitting the ground and breaking. Such a simple task to prove He is God, and He can't do it." And every year he would drop the chalk onto the tile floor of the classroom and it would shatter into a hundred pieces. All of the students could do nothing but stop and stare. Most of the students were convinced that God couldn't exist. Certainly, a number of Christians had slipped through, but for twenty years they had been too afraid to stand up. Well, a few years ago there was a freshman who happened to get enrolled in the class. He was a Christian, and had heard the stories about this professor. He had to take the class because it was one of the required classes for his major. And he was afraid. But for three months that semester, he prayed every morning that he would have the courage to stand up no matter what the professor said or what the class thought. Nothing they said or did could ever shatter his faith, he hoped. Finally, the day came. The professor said, "If there is anyone here who still believes in God, stand up!" The professor, and the class of 300 people looked at him, shocked, as he stood up at the back of the room. The professor shouted, "YOU FOOL! If nothing I have said all semester has convinced you that God doesn't exist, then you are a fool! If God existed, He could keep this piece of chalk from breaking when it hit the ground!" He proceeded to drop the chalk, but as he did, it slipped out of his fingers, off his shirt cuff, onto the pleats of his pants, down his leg, and off his shoe. And as it hit the ground, it simply rolled away, unbroken. The professor's jaw dropped as he stared at the chalk. He looked up at the young man and then ran out of the lecture hall. The young man who had stood up proceeded to walk to the front of the room and share his faith in Jesus for the next half hour. 300 students stayed and listened as he told of God's love for them and of His power through Jesus.

Never hesitate to take a stand for Jesus, even if it costs you something. He didn't hesitate in taking a stand for you and look what it cost Him! Don't take the easy way. Remember Paul's words: "Be on your guard, stand firm in the faith; be men of courage, be strong" (1 Corinthians 16:13).

14. THE ORIGINAL ST. NICK

By Nicodemus



The Life of JESUS

From Birth to Resurrection

By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1998

Well, its finished. We just buried Him. I don't think I'll ever get used to seeing a body after its been crucified. It hardly looks human anymore! This time is the worst of all. A million emotions flooded my heart: grief, sorrow, but especially guilt and remorse. It's funny how you see things differently AFTER an event than before. Too often fear rules and dominates. Then afterwards one is left with only regrets. I've had more than my share, but none worse than my fear of letting others know I was a follower of Jesus. I lived with that mistake, but maybe my story can help you not do the same thing. I hope so, for regret is a miserable emotion to live with.

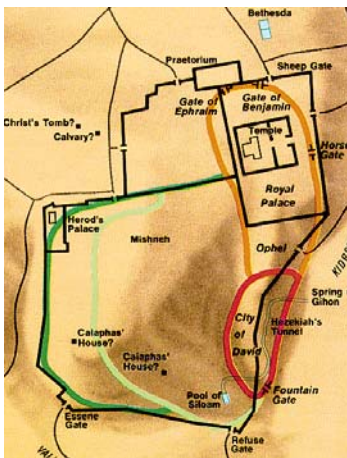
MY NAME IS NICODEMUS. I was a top religious ruler in Israel. I held a high, powerful position. I was very rich and influential. I was extremely well educated and one of the top scholars of my day. You could say I had it all -- outwardly that is. I guess I had too much, because I didn't want to jeopardize it for what REALLY mattered.

My story starts in the summer of AD 30. It was the time of the Passover. Jesus was in Jerusalem with some of His followers and had just cleansed the temple (John 2:13-22). I could understand why He did it, but I knew it wouldn't be a popular move! In one way I wanted to learn more about Him, for what I had heard and seen appealed to the emptiness inside me. But I didn't want to risk losing my hard-won position and prestige. I never liked to be criticized. So I came to Jesus as night (John 2:23 - 3:21).

It was more convenient then for we were both busy during the day, but I must admit that the privacy was important to me, too. What I heard that night changed my life forever! It's like Jesus knew the inner emptiness and longing of my heart, like He understood it better than I did. He showed me the solution wasn't in external religious observance, but in an inner new birth. I needed a personal relationship with Him, not the admiration of my peers, to meet my need. My pride and fear kept me spiritually blinded to what he was saying. In the weeks and months that followed, however, I couldn't forget them. As I investigated more and more into His claims I came to believe that He was God, the Messiah come to earth. I put my faith in Him and considered myself a supporter and follower of His, but I never let anyone know. I was afraid.

Some years ago Premier Khrushchev was speaking before the Supreme Soviet and was severely critical of the late Premier Stalin. While he was speaking someone from the audience sent up a note: "What were you doing when Stalin committed all these atrocities?" Khrushchev shouted, "Who sent up that note?" Not a person stirred. "I'll give him one minute to stand up!" The seconds ticked off. Still no one moved. "All right, I'll tell you what I was doing. I was doing exactly what the writer of this note was doing--exactly nothing! I was afraid to be counted!"

THAT WAS ME. I remember one time, about 2 years after I spoke with Jesus, when the Sanhedrin was talking about Jesus and how to get rid of Him. It was obvious they were jealous of Him and His popularity with some of the people. I couldn't stand it any longer so spoke up, but what I said was very weak. "Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?" (John 7:51). It was better than silence, but not much better. My fear controlled me. You know, usually the fear itself is worse than the thing we fear! So it was with



me. I can see how Satan was using my fear to keep me silent. His lie was that I can take my stand soon, but not quite yet.

There is an ancient story about three demons who were arguing over the best way to destroy the Christian mission in the world. The first demon says, "Let's tell all the Christians there is no heaven. Take away the reward incentive and the mission will collapse." The second demon says, "Let's tell all the Christians there is no hell. Take away the fear of punishment and the mission will collapse." The third demon says, "There is one better way. Let's tell all the Christians that there is no hurry" and all three immediately say, "That's it! All we have to do is tell them there's no hurry and the whole Christian enterprise will collapse."

I CONTINUED TO PUT OFF taking a public stand for Him. Five months later it was too late. "One of these days" is none of these days. I missed my opportunity. Caiaphas had his way. Judas played right into their hands. Jesus was dead. I never had taken a public stand for him. Funny, I should have then felt safe from disclosure. I knew I wasn't going to be exposed, for no one knew of my faith but me! Instead of feeling safe I just felt miserable. Fear does that to a person.

When I heard that Joseph of Arimathea was asking Pilate for Jesus' body I went right to him. I didn't know he was a follower? Who else among our number were? None of us spoke out. What if I would have spoken out, might several others have then found the courage to follow my lead? I'll never know. We all took the easy way.

Anyway, I made it known publicly where I stood by helping bury Him (John 19:39). That night I couldn't help remembering the earlier night 2 1/2 years ago, when I listened to His words. If only I'd have chosen differently. If only I'd have taken a stand for Him like He took for me! Instead I had the shame, guilt and regret of letting my fear rule my decisions.

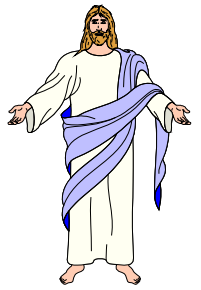
BUT GOD WAS GRACIOUS. He forgave me and used me anyway. Sure, I ended up losing all I had among the Jews, as I feared would happen. You know, though, when it did happen it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be! I had something so much more important to me now, something that REALLY met my inner needs. I had Jesus.

I went ahead and was baptized by Peter and John. I had to leave Jerusalem and eventually was killed for my faith. It was all worth it, though! Jesus was always with me helping me through it all. He will help you, too, if you stand up for Him. Don't be like me and live with regrets. Don't wait until it is too late, like I did! Don't put Jesus off. He won't let you down!

I recall a story about a man who had to cross a wide river on the ice. He was afraid it might be too thin, so he began to crawl on his hand and knees in great terror. He thought he might fall through at any moment. Just as he neared the opposite shore, all exhausted, another man glided past him nonchalantly sitting on a sled loaded with pig iron. How like some Christians! Headed for Heaven, they tremble at every step lest the divine promises break under their feet. They need only to look at the context of Isaiah 12:2 to realize that God is their salvation and the Lord is their strength and song. By resting completely upon Him and taking His promises at face value, we can drive out the paralyzing fear that hinders our effectiveness in serving Christ. The biblical antidote always works: "I will trust, and not be afraid."

15. JESUS' GREATEST REVIVAL

By Nicodemus



The Life of JESUS

From Birth to Resurrection

By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1998

What a change Jesus made in my life! Where would I have been if He hadn't gone out of His way to speak to me (John 3)? Next He headed north and spoke to a woman at a well in Samaria (John 4). He approached us differently, but gave the same message to each of us. I've often thought about those encounters. Using Jesus as my example, not only of how to live but also of how to witness, has always helped me. I'd like to pass some of these lessons on to you.

1. Use every opportunity to tell about Jesus. Jesus was not too tired to talk to me even though it had been a long day for Him. He could have thought I already knew since I was a Bible scholar. But he took time to talk to me. He talked to people of all ages and backgrounds, from children to old people.

2. Witnessing is dialogue, not monologue. Jesus didn't lecture me, he listened to my responses. He took my confusion and concerns seriously.

3. Patiently repeat, explain and illustrate. Theology can be abstract and hard to understand. Illustrations, examples and stories help a lot. Jesus used physical birth as an analogy of spiritual birth with me. I didn't understand it right away, but before long the parallel sunk in. He also used the wind as a picture of the Holy Spirit and the serpent on a pole in the wilderness as a picture of Himself on the cross. Witnessing is like serving a meal. It takes more than good nutrition, it must be tastefully and artfully presented to make the eater desire to partake.

4. Don't get bogged down at any one point. Don't get into an argument or meaningless theological discussion when witnessing. Jesus kept our conversation moving, but He kept it on point. When the woman at the well wanted to talk about which religion was right He gently brought the topic back to her need and His provision of salvation.

5. Use questions. Jesus asked questions to find out what I knew and where I was at spiritually. They got me involved and thinking. He also used them to make important points.

6. Lead people to trust you and your experience. Jesus wasn't afraid to call others to trust and believe in Him. I learned to share my own testimony with others. It was something they could understand and identify with, they couldn't debate the truth of it, it proves that what Jesus offers is practical and works, and it doesn't put them on the spot.

7. Warn about God's judgment on unbelievers. Jesus clearly told me that those who didn't accept His free gift of salvation were under judgment and destined for hell. No one likes to talk about hell, but Jesus said that is to be part of our message (Mark 16:15-16).

8. Go to people, don't wait for them to come to you. Jesus WENT to Samaria, where no 'good' Jew would ever go! He never told unbelievers to go to Christians, but Christians to go to unbelievers (Mark 16:15). He said we are all missionaries, and our mission field is the next person we meet who hasn't accepted Jesus as His Savior.

9. One to one is the best way to witness. When Jesus got to the well near Sychar He sent His disciples into town for food so He could talk to the woman alone. One on one, personal, is still the best way to communicate anything. It was especially meaningful to the woman in Samaria for she was used to being ostracized and ignored by everyone, that's why she came to well in the hottest time of the day. She knew no one would be there and didn't want criticism for her life style.

10. Be real, human and vulnerable. Jesus accepted her right away, asking her for a drink of water. It was a point of contact, a human need both shared. He opened Himself up to her, asking for a favor, before expecting her to open herself up and ask Him for anything.

11. Put people before prejudice and public opinion. Jesus cared more about her as a person than He cared about prejudice and social customs. It was very improper for a Jew to talk to a Samaritan, for a man to initiate conversation with a woman, and especially for a rabbi to reach out to an immoral woman. Drinking from her vessel would make Him ceremonially 'unclean.'

12. Go to those in need. Jesus reached out to her because of her need. He spent most of His time with 'sinners.' I was as needy as her, but I didn't realize it! Her obvious need made her more open to accept His gift. She knew her sin and emptiness, there was nothing to cover it. She had nothing to lose but her pain! It took me 2 1/2 years to take a stand for Jesus, she did it the same day!

13. We must call sin 'sin.' While it wasn't easy for me to admit my need, the woman at the well tried to cover over hers, too. I guess that's natural with everyone. When Jesus brought up her immoral lifestyle she tried to change the subject, but Jesus' point was made. He didn't keep focusing on her sin, but He didn't ignore it, either.

14. Avoid arguments about 'religions.' When she wanted to talk about which religion was right Jesus steered the conversation back to the need for a personal relationship with Him. NO religion can provide that! Religion is doing something to connect with God. That can't be done (Eph. 2:8-9).

15. Challenge the person to make a personal commitment to Jesus. I wasn't ready, but the woman was. When He told her HE was the Messiah she believed and accepted Him as her Savior. She gave her heart to Jesus then and there.

16. Remember that it is every believer's responsibility to witness. Immediately the woman went to her village and challenged the people there to come meet the Messiah for themselves. They did, and the result was the greatest response Jesus ever had to His ministry on earth. She didn't argue with them, she just told them what she had discovered. A witness isn't someone who argues God's case, that's a lawyer. We are called to be witnesses. A witness simply tells what he knows, what he has experienced. We are to be salt and light (Matthew 5). God does the rest.

17. Some sow while others reap. While many responded to Jesus during his short stay at that time, it wasn't until years later when Philip came that the full harvest came (Acts 8). Philip reaped what the woman and those who also accepted Jesus years earlier had been sowing.

Did you know that only about 5% of those who are Christians have ever introduced anyone else to Jesus? There's enough Bread of Life to supply the whole world, but there aren't enough volunteers to distribute it. What about you? You may not feel you can do a good job, but no matter how badly you feel you witness, it's still thousands of times better than not witnessing at all! As the slogan today says, "Just do it!"

16. CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

By Hevel

TO: Jesus, Son of Joseph
Woodcrafters Carpenter Shop, Nazareth
FROM: Jordan Management Consultants, Jerusalem
RE: Staff Team Evaluation:

Thank you for submitting the resumes of the twelve men you have picked for management positions in your new organization. All of them have now taken our battery of tests; and we have not only run the results through our computer, but also arranged personal interviews for each of them with our psychologist and vocational aptitude consultant. It is the staff opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background, education, and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew has no qualities of leadership. The two brothers, James and John, sons of Zebedee, place personal interests above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale. We feel it our duty to tell you that Matthew has been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau. James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus definitely have radical leanings, and they both registered a high score on the manic-depressive scale. One of the candidates, however, shows great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness, meets people well, has a keen business mind and has contacts in high places. He is highly motivated, ambitious and responsible. We recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and right-hand man. All of the other profiles are self explanatory. We wish you every success in your new venture.

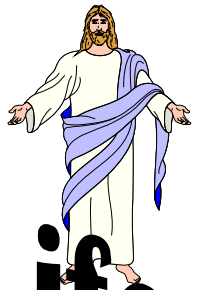
Sometimes we look back at the disciples as special, spiritual giants. Nothing could be further from the truth. If you would have been making the choices of disciples, you wouldn't have picked the ones Jesus did. Why did He choose traitors, fishermen, uneducated workers and rejects from society? He chose them because they were available. He doesn't look at our ability. He can give or take that as He wants. He looks for **AVAILABILITY**. That's all we can give Him, that's all He wants. Nothing else matters.

'Twas battered and scarred, and the auctioneer Though it scarcely worth his while
To waste much time on the old violin, But held it up with a smile.
"What am I bid, good folk?" he cried. "Who'll start the bidding for men?"

A dollar, a dollar -- now two, only two -- tow dollars, and who'll make it three?"
"Three dollars once, three dollars twice, Going for three" -- but no!
From the room far back a gray-haired man Came forward and picked up the bow;
Then wiping the dust from the old violin, And tightening up all the strings,
He played a melody pure and sweet, As sweet as an angel sings.

The music ceased, and the auctioneer, With a voice that was quiet and low,
Said: "What am I bid for the old violin?" And he held it up with the bow.
"A thousand dollars -- and who'll make it two? Two thousand -- and who'll make it three?
Three thousand once and three thousand twice -- And going and gone!" said he.
The people cheered, but some of them cried, "We do not quite understand.
What changed its worth?" The man replied: The touch of the master's hand.

And many a man with life out of tune, And battered and torn with sin,
Is auctioned cheap to a thoughtless crowd, Much like the old violin.
A "mess of pottage," a glass of wine, A game -- and he travels on,
He's going once, and going twice, He's going - and almost gone!
But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd Never can quite understand
The worth of a soul and the change that's wrought By the touch of the Master's hand.



The Life of JESUS

From Birth to Resurrection

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THE 12 DISCIPLES

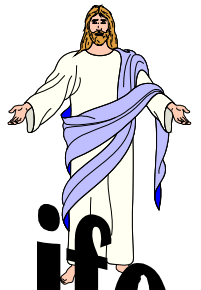
NAME	RELATION	HOME	OCCUPATION BEFORE JESUS	MINISTRY	DEATH
ANDREW	Son of Jonas & Joanna Brother of Peter	Bethsaida Capernaum	Fisherman Follower of John	Jerusalem (Acts 5:18-19; 8:1; 11:1,18); then ministered in Ephesus, Russia, Scythia Greece	Tied on an "X" cross in Scythia, preached 2 days until dead 11-30-69
NATHANAEL (Bartholomew)	Unknown	Cana	Fisherman Follower of John	Jerusalem (Acts 5:18-19; 8:1; 11:1,18); ministered with Philip in Asia Minor, Armenia	Flayed alive, beheaded, cast into sea by barbarian king Astyages
JAMES (son of Thunder)	Son of Zebedee**	Bethsaida Capernaum	Fisherman Follower of John	Jerusalem (Acts 5:18-19; 8:1; 11:1,18)	Beheaded by Herod Antipas, 44 AD Acts 12:1-2
JAMES the Less	Son of Cleopas *	Capernaum	Fisherman	Jerusalem (Acts 5:18-19; 8:1; 11:1,18); Palestine & Egypt	Crucified in Egypt
JOHN	Son of Zebedee**	Bethsaida Capernaum	Fisherman Follower of John	Jerusalem (Acts 3; 5:18-19; 8:1; 11:1,18); Wrote John, I, II, III Jn, Rev, Ephesus (with Mary), Patmos	Natural death (very old) - attempts to martyr him failed
JUDAS (Jude, Thaddaeus)	Son of Cleopas *	Capernaum	Fisherman	Jerusalem (Acts 5:18-19; 8:1; 11:1,18); Assyria & Persia	Beaten to death in Persia/Syria with a large club
JUDAS (Iscaiot)	Unknown	Judea (only one not from Galilee)	Treasurer	None	Suicide
MATTHEW (Levi)	Son of Cleopas *	Capernaum	Tax Collector very well educated	Jerusalem (Acts 5:18-19; 8:1; 11:1,18); Wrote Matthew, Ethiopia & Persia	Head split open with an ax in Egypt
PETER (Simon)	Son of Jonas & Joanna Brother of Andrew	Bethsaida Capernaum	Fisherman Follower of John	Jerusalem, leader of early church (Acts 2 - 11, 15); Wrote I, II Pt; Mark written about him, Asia Minor, Britain (?), Rome w/ wife	Crucified upside down in Rome by Nero after wife martyred
PHILIP	Unknown Greek name	Bethsaida	Unknown	Jerusalem (Acts 5:18-19; 8:1; 11:1,18); Ministered in Phrygia, Galatia, France (?), , Asia Minor	Hung against a pillar at Hieropolis (near Colossae)
SIMEON (Zealot)	Unknown	Galilee	Zealot under-ground freedom fighter	Jerusalem (Acts 5:18-19; 8:1; 11:1,18); Ministered various places	Crucified
THOMAS	Son of Cleopas *	Capernaum	Fisherman	Jerusalem (Acts 5:18-19; 8:1; 11:1,18); Parthia, Persia & India	Body run through with spear in East India

* Cleopas also called Alphaeus, probably Joseph's brother; Mary his wife was with Jesus throughout His ministry; children seem to have been Matthew & Thomas (twins?), James the Less and Judas Thaddaeus, therefore all were probably cousins of Jesus

** Zebedee's wife was Salome, the sister of Mary, children were James and John, they were cousins of Jesus

17. FISHING FOR MEN

By Matthew



The Life of JESUS

From Birth to Resurrection

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Day after day I say in my booth by the road Via Maris. Business was good. I could do anything I wanted, as long as I turned some of it over to Rome. It was an easy way to get rich fast. Of course I wasn't very popular, especially not with the Jews. They rejected me, saw me as a traitor. I wasn't even allowed in their synagogues, but who needs them! I was rich and secure. Still, I must admit that my money meant less and less to me as I got more and more of it. It just wasn't bringing the happiness and peace I thought it would.

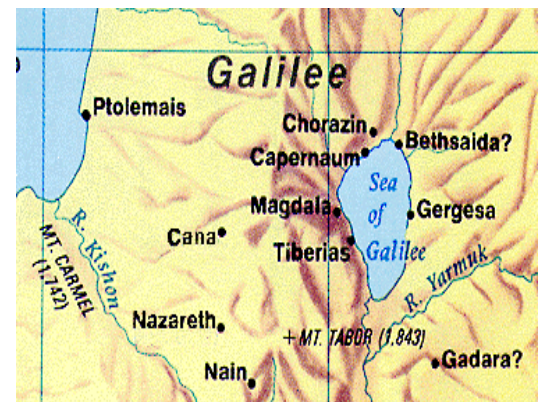
Then I saw Him coming down the road. He regularly paid taxes to me. I had heard of His teachings and miracles, of His talks about forgiveness and the coming Kingdom of God. Whenever He came I always avoided eye contact with Him, for it made me feel guilty and dirty. Still, He was always nice to me. In fact, several times He talked to me about a better life, about giving up all this to follow Him. A few years earlier I would have laughed at the idea. He didn't have any money, not even a home -- He had nothing! How could being a penniless traveler be better than being rich and feared? Lately, though, I found myself thinking about Him quite often. I felt strangely drawn to Him, even wondering what it would be like to give it all up and follow Him. I never thought about it long, for I never thought He'd have me! Still, I envied those who could be with Him. I figured I could help His cause best by staying away from Him.

This time He stopped at my table and I was surprised. I knew He'd moved here, to Capernaum, from Nazareth (Mt 4:13-16). It had something to do with being rejected in His home town (Luke 4:16-30) -- boy, did I know what that was like! But why had He come to my booth? He didn't owe any taxes, what did He want?

"FOLLOW ME" He invited (Mt 9:9-13; Mk 2:13-17; Lk 5:27-32). I was stunned! He not only spoke to me, but He wanted me to travel with Him. He wanted me to identify myself with Him. He was even willing to identify Himself with me. All of a sudden it seemed like a great idea! Why not? I thought -- life is empty this way. This money thing isn't all I thought it would be. There was just something about Him that attracted me. I realized I had really made the decision inside long ago, I just never thought it would be possible! I closed up my books, shut the booth and left. I followed Him from then on. I sold the booth and business and returned as much dishonest gain as I could. I used the rest of my money to help support Jesus and His followers. People were shocked that I'd want Him, but I think they were even more shocked that He'd want me! It was the best move I've ever made!

One of the first hurdles I faced was getting along with my new fellow followers of Jesus. We had been enemies for years, and it took a bit of work on both sides to see each other as friends and comrades. The fishermen were the hardest, for they were the most outspoken in all areas.

CAPERNAUM, despite being a good agricultural area, was mainly a fishing town. Capernaum was right on the Sea of Galilee. The lake was 8 miles wide by 12 miles deep top to bottom. It was shaped like a pear. Jesus did most of His miracles and teaching on the banks of this lake. Jews loved fish much more than red meat, and were willing to pay dearly for it. Commercial fishing flourished. It was done by nets which had floats on one edge and weights on the other. A second boat, or a fisherman in the water, would pull the net together, trapping fish inside. It was hard, tiring, often frustrating work. When not fishing the men spent many long hours cleaning and repairing their nets, for they were constantly tearing or decaying. Musht, biny and sardines were the main fish that were caught.



I remember one day, about a month before Jesus called me from my booth, that I was watching Peter, Andrew, James and John come in from a long night of fishing. They didn't catch anything. They had just cleaned the nets and were ready to go to bed when Jesus told them to go out into deep water and try again (Luke 5:1-10). Everyone knew it was the wrong time of day and wrong place to fish, plus the nets would need to be cleaned and dried all over again! I was surprised to see them obey, but even more surprised to see the great number of fish they caught! It really hit Peter hard, for that's when he realized that Jesus truly was God. Jesus' response to them all was, "Don't be afraid, from now on you will catch men!"

Soon after He repeated His call, "Come, follow Me and I will make you fishers of men." (Mt 4:18-22; Mk 1:16-20). Actually 8 of Jesus' 12 disciples were fishermen. Little did I know that Jesus would very soon come and call me to leave my work and follow Him, too. "Fishers of men." The phrase stuck with me and I thought of it as I began following Jesus. There obviously was a real similarity between fishing for fish and bringing others to Jesus.

For one thing, we need to **FISH actively**. We can't sit back and wait for the fish catch themselves! We are to be fishers of men, not keepers of the aquarium. We can't be fearful of rejection, as Nicodemus was. Also, fishermen must fish **offensively**. They must go to where the fish are. Sometimes it is inconvenient and costly, but it must be done. Fishing must be done **seriously**, too. It is not just a fun pastime for God's children. Fishermen in Galilee had to catch fish or starve. Fishing for men is more serious, for what happens to the fish that aren't caught? They end up in hell forever.

Because of this we must fish **determinedly**. The purpose of fishing is to catch fish! Fishermen weren't showing off equipment or working on their tan. They were determined to catch fish. In order to do this they must fish **tactfully**. Different fish are caught by different bait. Some are caught best in groups, others alone. It takes study and skill, experience and work to get good at it. Jesus 'fished' differently for the woman at the well than he did for Nicodemus. Thus fishermen must fish **continually**. They aren't going to catch any fish if they don't have their net or bait in the water. When not fishing, they are getting ready for the next time they fish: repairing and cleaning nets, etc. We, too, must be continually fishing or getting ready to fish. Time spent in prayer and Bible study is essential to successful fishing.

Most fishermen fish **lovingly** -- they enjoy what they do. That is to be our sacrificial motive for telling others about Jesus. RA Torrey, a great evangelist of years ago, once said: "I would rather win souls than be the greatest king or emperor on earth; I would rather win souls than be the greatest general that ever commanded an army; I would rather win souls than be the greatest poet or novelist, or literary man who ever walked the earth. My ONE ambition in life is to win as many as possible. Oh, it's the only thing worth doing -- to win souls." For this to happen we must fish **patiently**. Fishing is hard, difficult work that takes lots of patience. Perhaps that's why there are less fishermen today. All animals that are successful fishermen are patient. Finally fishermen on the Sea of Galilee had to fish **cooperatively**. They are more effective when they work together. Jesus sent out His disciples two by two.

"COME," He said, "and I will make you fishers of men." If we do the COMING then He will do the MAKING. We can't make ourselves fishers of men, but we can offer ourselves as available for Him to make fishermen of us.

Following this Jesus went out with His new disciples so they could learn to fish for men following His example. He taught, healed and delivered (Mt 4:23-25; Mk 1:21 - 2:12; Luke 4:31 - 5:26). Following this is when He came to me and asked me to follow Him and fish for men (Mt 9:9-13; Mk 2:13-17; Lk 5:27-32). I immediately started doing so. I invited all my friends to my house to meet Jesus for themselves (Mt. 9:14-17; Mk 2:18-22; Lk 5:33-39). I wanted them to find what I had found, and many of them did.

I spent the next 3 years with Jesus, and after He died I stayed in Judea for a dozen years, preaching and witnessing. Then I went to Ethiopia and Persia. Since I was well educated I was able to speak to kings about my Savior. I wrote the Gospel of Matthew, too. I had good response there, reaping what the wise men (Magi) had sown a generation before. I died in Egypt having my head split open with an ax. I was a tax collector, I was a disciple, but mainly I was a fisher of men. Are you?

18. LOSE YOUR LIFE TO FIND IT

By Matthew

A certain man wanted to sell his house for \$2,000, a poor man wanted to buy it but only had \$1,000. After much bargaining the owner agreed to sell with just one stipulation: he would retain ownership of one small nail protruding from just over the door. After a few years original owner wanted house back. He found carcass of a dead dog and hung it from the single nail he still owned. soon the house became unlivable and family had to move.

If we leave even one small peg in our life, Satan will hang all his rotten garbage on it and make us unfit for Christ's habitation.

THAT'S WHAT JESUS was trying to teach us when He called us to be disciples of His. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Matt 11:28-29). Most men looking for volunteers paint a rosy picture for their followers: benefits and blessings. Jesus warned us to count the cost, to make sure we knew what we were getting into. That's very honest of Him!

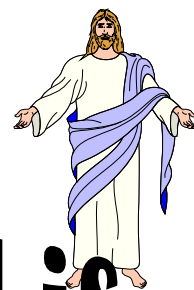
He made sure we understood that salvation was a simple matter: realizing that each one of us was guilty before God and that He, because He was holy and just, had to punish sin. Jesus came to die in our place to take that punishment so we could be forgiven and go to heaven. Discipleship is a different matter. It means taking another step with Jesus after salvation, that of submission to God's will and doing His work. Salvation concerns sins being forgiven so man can live with God in eternity. Discipleship is for those who would live their lives on this earth as Christ lived His. But it isn't easy! Jesus said we had to "take up our cross daily" to follow Him. That means dying to self and living for Him.

"In every Christian's heart there is a cross and a throne, and the Christian is on the throne till he puts himself on the cross; if he refuses the cross, he remains on the throne. Perhaps this is at the bottom of the backsliding and worldliness among gospel believers today. We want to be saved, but we insist that Christ do all the dying. No cross for us, no dethronement, no dying. We remain king within the little kingdom of Mansoul and wear our tinsel crown with all the pride of a Caesar; but we doom ourselves to shadows and weakness and spiritual sterility." (A. W. Tozer, 1897-1963)

German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed by the Nazis because of his testimony, made this statement: "When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die." To follow Jesus no matter what the cost -- that's the way of the cross.

PAUL puts it this way in Romans 12:1-2 "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Jesus gave up everything for us, He needs us to give up everything for Him. One day Mother Teresa heard vows from 11 new members of her growing order, the Society of the



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Missionaries of Charity. About 700 people crowded Mission Dolores for the profession of vows by sisters who have completed their novitiate. "Love, to be real, must cost," said the frail and stooped Mother Teresa, 75, whose big voice belies her stature, "It must hurt. It must empty us of self."

JESUS DOESN'T JUST REQUIRE THIS FOR HIS SAKE BUT FOR OURS. He doesn't really need us, for He is omnipotent and omniscient. He uses us when we are available. He doesn't need us, but we need Him. He knows we are the ones who benefit from this commitment to Him. Since He created us He knows what is best for us. He knows what we really need, we only know what we want. He sees the big picture, we only see the moment. He knows the way to real life is through death -- death to self. He knows we can't run our own lives as good as He can run them for us. He knows that we only find our fulfillment in submission to Him, our Maker and our Redeemer.

This can only be done, however, in His strength and power. He makes that available to us but doesn't force it on us. When we see all He has done for us it's only natural for us to want to respond with love and submission to Him.

I LOOKED AT THE MOUNTAIN.

"It's too hard, Lord," I said, "I cannot climb."

"Take My hand," He whispered, "I will be your strength."

I saw the road.

"It is too long, Lord," I said, "So rough and long."

"Take My love," He answered, "I will guard your feet."

I looked at the sky.

"The sun is gone," I said. "already it grows dark."

"Take the lantern of My Word," He whispered, "That will be light enough."

We climbed.

The road was narrow and steep, but the way was bright.

When thorns reached out, they found His hand before they touched mine.

And when my path grew rough, I knew it was His love that kept my feet from stumbling.

Then I grew very tired.

"I can go no farther, Lord," I said,

He answered, "Night is gone. Look up my child.

I looked, and it was dawn. Green valleys stretched below

"I can go on alone now!" I said.

...and then I saw the marks...

"Lord, You are wounded.

Your hands are bleeding.

Your feet are bruised! Was it for me?"

He whispered, "I did it gladly."

Then I fell at His feet.

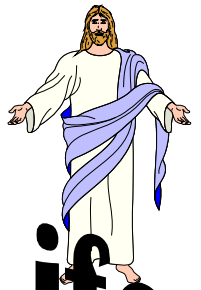
"Lord, lead me on," I cried,

"No road too long, no valley too deep if you are with me."



19. HOW TO HANDLE PEER PRESSURE

By James (Brother of Jesus)



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Did you grow up with an older brother or sister? Did you always get along with them? Did it ever bother you that they seemed to know more or be able to do more than you? How did (do) you handle jealousy? Did you ever try to get them into trouble? All this is typical of a second born child.

GROWING UP WITH JESUS I should know. It happened to me, too. I had an older brother who never got into trouble, who never did anything wrong! We looked a lot alike, but were natured very differently.

Our parents tried to be fair and impartial, but I knew that my older brother was special. All I had to do was compare the stories of his birth with the stories of my birth! I remember when He was lost at the temple when He was 12 – what a strange event that was! He never married like the rest of us did. Then when He hit His 30's I heard He had gone to be baptized by our cousin John. Stories of a temptation in the wilderness started trickling in. I was with the rest of the family at the wedding in Cana when He turned the water to wine, but I didn't believe it. It couldn't be possible that He, of all people, was the Messiah!

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MY BROTHER, THE MESSIAH? He claimed to be the Messiah, and several of our cousins and their friends started traveling with Him. They said He was a great teacher, but it was His miracles that convinced them. From time to time James or John, or even one of the others, would talk to me about Him. Being related, I knew them my whole life. I trusted them. What they said fit with the stories I had heard of His birth, but I was too proud to humble myself and submit to Him. I had been competing with Him my whole life. No matter what, He got the attention and not me. In my self-centeredness and jealousy I actually worked against Him. One time, when my father Joseph was away working on a building, I convinced my mother, Mary, and my brothers Joses, Simon and Judas as well as my sisters that Jesus had become insane and we needed to take Him away for His own good. Looking back on it, I really persecuted Him. I did it because I didn't want to submit to Him. I criticized and mocked His followers, too. I guess that's still going on today.

But three years later I had changed 180 degrees! Then I was being rejected and persecuted for His sake. Others were doing to me what I had done to Him and His followers. I know what rejection and persecution is like. I've been on both sides of it.

JESUS' TURNING POINT I remember about two years after all the Messiah-talk began, in the Summer of 31 AD, Jesus' ministry and message changed. I know now they didn't really 'change,' but it seemed that way to me then. He had some strong controversies with the religious leaders about healing a paralytic, plucking grain, and healing a man with a shriveled hand – all done on the Sabbath. Since they felt this was breaking the Sabbath, they felt justified in their persecution of Him. Many followed them, for people are very prone to follow the herd. Peer pressure affects those of any age. It's hard to go against it. Any fish can float downstream, but it takes a live fish to swim against the current.

After that Jesus seemed to withdraw from the crowds. All of a sudden the stories about His teaching multitudes and doing miracles stopped reaching my door. Some aunts and uncles who had heard from their sons who were with Jesus passed on word that He had chosen 12 of His followers for special, close travel and training. Simon and Andrew were long-time family friends. Their fishing partners, James and John, were sons of my mother's sister, Salome. James (the shorter one), Jude and Matthew and Thomas (the twins) were sons of my father's brother Alphaeus. There was also Nathanael, Philip, Simeon the Zealot and Judas. He was the only one that we didn't know growing up. I was glad I wasn't chosen – I knew I wasn't even in the running. I would have turned it down in a moment. Still, down inside I was a little disappointed.

After all, we were brothers! He obviously needed close friends to help through the persecution, like trees will intertwine their roots in the ground so they all can stand against storms that come. Jesus then preached the best-known sermon of His ministry. He traveled, training His inner group of followers. I heard of some miracles He did: healing a Centurion's servant and bringing a widow's son back to life. These weren't done for the multitudes like before, just for a few close to Him.

REJECTION & PERSECUTION EVERYWHERE I got some perverse satisfaction when I heard the our cousin John was wondering if He was really the Messiah since anyone could read the handwriting on the wall: the nation wasn't going to make Him the long-awaited Messiah-King. They just weren't buying that. And it wasn't just the religious leaders in far-away Jerusalem. Why, in Capernaum, where Jesus was staying, it got so bad He didn't do any more teaching or miracles there. He was getting pressure from every side. Now some would have conformed to be more popular, but I heard He had said "woe unto you when all men think well of you."

The places He did find acceptance were strange. An immoral woman who anointed his feet while He was eating in a Pharisee's home was one such woman. The Pharisees and Sadducees themselves, though, rejected Him, demanding He prove to them who He was. He didn't do it, though. It was at this point when things go so bad for me that I got everyone together and we tried to take Jesus home to seclude Him from His delusions before what He was saying got worse.

THE REST OF MY STORY That was the low point in my life. I remember the weeks and months after that event as being a time of confusion and emptiness. It's like I was opposing God Himself, but was too blinded and proud to allow myself to see it. It was the crucifixion that shook me out of that. No matter how much I thought I hated Him, when I saw Him on the cross something changed inside of me. Then He appeared to me in His resurrection body, the very first day (I Cor. 15:7). His forgiveness and love for me totally broke my heart and won me over. I confessed my sin, humbled myself, and was restored to my Brother.

I joined with the disciples and was with them when Matthias was chosen and when the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost. I found myself in a position of leadership in the very group I had wanted to see destroyed. Four years later I met Paul when he came to Jerusalem. Seven years after that I was the leader of the church in Jerusalem. Me – who tried to destroy it! I led the Jerusalem Council and made the decision that Gentiles could have salvation without becoming Jews first. I wrote the epistle that bears my name, and my younger brother, Jude, wrote one that is named after him, too. Thirty years after the resurrection I was thrown off the temple and killed by the governor of Jerusalem, Ananus, because his wife, Piopsata, had responded to my preaching. They silenced my words but not their message, for others took up the cause.

PERSECUTION THROUGHOUT THE AGES If you study church history you'll see those who follow Jesus have always been persecuted by Satan and his world system. Today is no exception. In fact, there have been more martyrs produced in the 20th century than in all the other centuries combined. It's a sign of the last days (Matthew 24:8-10) and shouldn't surprise us (I John 3:13; I Peter 4:12-14). If you live for Jesus you will be persecuted (II Tim 3:12; Phil 1:29; John 15:20; Matthew 5:11; 10:23).

HOW TO HANDLE PERSECUTION Since I've been on both the giving and getting side of persecution, maybe I can give you some suggestions to help you handle it when it comes to you. First, remember that God uses it for His glory and the growth of the church. Persecution will not destroy you or the church, it actually brings a closeness to God and spiritual growth. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. It's like pouring gasoline on a fire to put it out or manure on a plant to kill it. We grow because of it because it causes us to come closer to Jesus. Trials mature us (John 15) in this life and bring blessing in the next (Matthew 5:10-12; Rev 2:10). So trust in God and lean on His strength one day at a time (Matthew 6:34; Deut 33:25; Lev 3:23). Remember that God's grace is sufficient for whatever you will face (II Cor 12:9). God will give you the power you need as the trial comes (Prov 14:26; 28:1; Eph 3:12; Heb 13:6).

Don't think God has deserted you, but see the persecution as a privilege of suffering with Jesus, for His glory. Trust Him through it and remember you'll have all eternity to enjoy His presence.

20. THE GREATEST SERMON EVER GIVEN

By James (Brother of Jesus)

I once had a Gentile friend who raised pigs. Made good money doing it. His wife once took a fancy to a certain baby pig and made it a pet. She brought it into the house to raise, sat it at the table to eat with them, dressed it in baby clothing, even taught it tricks. It could follow simple commands and obeyed better than most children. It was truly amazing!

ME, TOO! Then one day when she was out for a walk with the pig they went by a garbage dump. Immediately the pig broke away and ran toward the pit. She called but it wouldn't listen. That pig just jumped right in the garbage and started wallowing around, having a great time. Despite all the outer changes, it's real nature was just hidden and quickly came out.

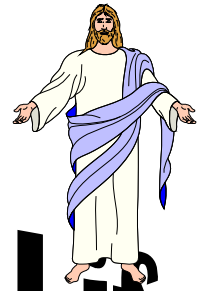
You know, the same thing that happened to that pig also happened to me! I tried to clean up myself and act contrary to my nature. I obeyed all of our Jewish laws. I went to the synagogue services every week. I tried to treat people kindly and help those in need. I gave of my time and money to God's service. I was always careful in how I looked and acted. But I still had my old nature inside, just like that pig. When I saw a pretty woman walk past, or could snub someone who had hurt me, or when my wife forgot something I needed or my kids really got on my nerves after a busy day, or if I had a chance to put down my boss after he criticized me or a rich, stuck-up merchant gave me too much change, then the old 'pig' inside threw me right into the sin pit. I just couldn't stop it!

I couldn't stop being jealous of my popular older brother, or being greedy for all my sister's husband had, or being prideful for not being as sinful' as the Gentiles who lived across the street. I kept judging those who were different than me, ignoring those who kept needing things from me or holding it against those who had taken advantage of me. Those who knew me saw only the part I let them see. My family knew a little more of the real me, but no one knew how alive and strong the pig was in me. No one but me.

And it bothered me. I wasn't raised by hypocrites. My father and mother were as genuine as anyone I ever met. My older brother was even more true and pure. I guess that's what bothered me. It's like He could look into my heart. I could never fool him, even when I fooled our parents. But instead of listening to Him and taking His advice, I blamed Him for it all.

You know how you get angry at someone who points out a fault or failure? That's easier than facing it and admitting it in myself.. I started believing that if Jesus wasn't around I'd be OK.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT Funny, when He did leave I didn't feel any better – just worse. I tried to silence him. Now I'm glad I failed! The problem was me, no Him. He had the answers I needed all along. He gave them clearly in what you call the Sermon on the Mount. It's recorded in your Bible in Matthew 5-7). To us it was just typical of what He said. I heard Him the first time He delivered it. I was just there to check Him out, looking for excuses to not follow Him but secretly hoping He could somehow help me. I rally wanted to live for God and I knew I wasn't. I was a better hypocrite than most everyone I knew. Still, I knew that old 'pig' was alive inside!



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Basically what He said in that sermon was that our attempts at being righteous totally fail in God's sight. We can only be righteous as we stop trying to be holy (or pretend to be holy) by our own efforts and then allow God to produce His righteousness in/through us by God Himself. He compared and contrasted self righteousness and God's righteousness. He said that my good works could not wipe away any of my sin – a real blow to us proud Jews.

INNER ATTITUDES, NOT JUST OUTER ACTIONS, BRING GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS (5:3-16) Jesus started by showing that God looks at our inner attitudes (5:3-12). He wants us to be humble, meek, hungry, merciful, pure and peace-loving. When we have these traits He said we will influence others around us like salt (5:13) and light (5:14-16).

FOLLOWING JESUS' WORDS, NOT LAWS, BRINGS RIGHTEOUSNESS (5:17 - 6:18) Then Jesus showed how to have these proper inner attitudes. He said the law wasn't given to bring salvation (5:17-20). The law only dealt with externals, He was concerned with the issues of the heart. Hatred is as bad as murder (5:21-22). Lust is as bad as adultery (5:27-30). He gave several other examples as well. Changing the outside doesn't change the inside. Cleaning up a pig doesn't change his pig nature.

INNER ATTITUDES AND OUTER ACTIONS WILL LINE UP WHEN YOU HAVE GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS (6:19 - 7:29) We are to put God before things (6:19-34). We aren't to judge others for that is done on external things (7:1-6). Instead we are to seek God completely (7:7-11), sincerely (7:12), obediently (7:13-14), truthfully (7:15-20), totally (7:21-23) and wisely (7:24-27).

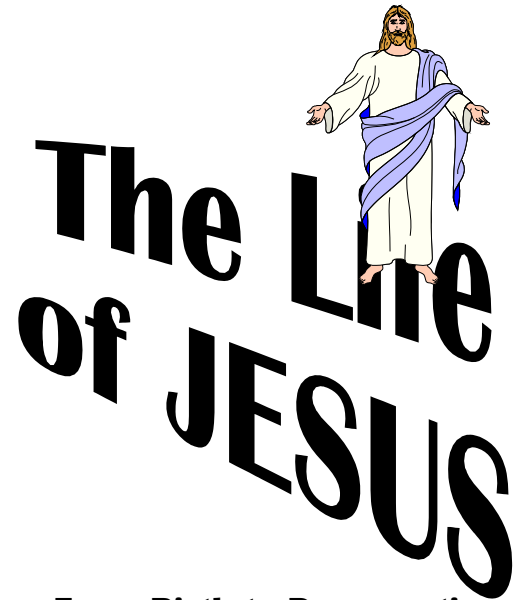
I knew He was saying that there isn't anything we can do to impress God, but that was such a new concept for me it was hard to grasp. All the other rabbis and leaders said being a good Jew was what got us into heaven. When I look back on it all I wonder how I could have been so deceived, but that's what pride does. Watch out that it doesn't blind you, too!

You can't impress God by attending church, giving money, joining a church, acting 'nice' to others, or any other good works (Ephesians 2:8-9). Reading your Bible, helping at church, being a godly wife or husband, treating your neighbors kindly, even telling others about Jesus – these are good things but don't impress God. The only thing that ever impressed God was what Jesus did on the cross. There's nothing we can add to that. Don't misunderstand, there is nothing wrong with doing the things I just mentioned. Just don't get the cart before the horse. Do them **BECAUSE** you have salvation, not to **GAIN** salvation. Do them because salvation is a free gift for us to receive, don't do them to contribute to your salvation.

Early one morning fire broke out in a house on a narrow street. The alarm was sounded by a policeman on duty. Before the fire engines could get to the scene, however, flames were leaping high into the air. Suddenly a young man appeared at an upper window in his pajamas. Firemen quickly placed a ladder against the burning building. But to the consternation of all, he refused to come down, shouting back that he had to get dressed first. The man had waited too long and was buried beneath the ruins. Many reject God's provision of salvation and safety in Christ because they want to get dressed up in the clothes of self-righteousness or religion. Their delay could cost them their souls. What are **YOU** trusting in for salvation – your good works or the blood of Jesus? The only way is by the blood of Jesus. I learned that the hard way, I hope you already know it!

21. MIRACLE MAKER

By Jeshua



A number of years ago a man who picked up a beautiful rock from a nearby stream bed and used it as his cabin doorstep. Years later an expert in rocks and minerals who was traveling in the area stopped at the cabin and noticed the doorstep, which he immediately recognized as a huge lump of gold. In fact, it proved to be one of the largest gold nuggets ever found. Like the man who failed to recognize gold when he held it in his hands, the disciples failed to recognize the true nature of the Lord -- even after more than three years with Him. They were without excuse for He did all He could to tell and show them.

LORD, LUNATIC OR LIAR I remember a couple days during September of 31 AD when this was particularly true. Work was slow and I wanted to get some first-hand information about this Man, so followed Him around for two days. The first day started with His family, led by His own brother James, trying to have Him put away for being insane. As strange as it sounds, I guess I can understand where they were coming from. I mean, He was clearly and continually claiming to be God! Now what do you do with claims like that? The religious rulers said He was a **liar** but it was easy to tell He firmly believed all He was saying. Therefore some, including His family, came to the conclusion He was crazy - a **lunatic**. The only other choice was to believe His amazing claims -- that He truly was the **Lord**. Those still are the only options. He wasn't just a good man, a fine teacher, for no ordinary man over and over claims to be God!

Anyway, this rejection by His family brought up lots of questions about why, if He really was God, it seemed almost everyone was rejecting Him as their Messiah. I remember He told a series of parables sitting by the sea to explain this (Matthew 13). Basically what He said was that His kingdom would start small and slowly grow until one day it took over the whole world. Well, He was certainly right about the slow, small start part!

ACROSS THE SEA OF GALILEE That same evening -- remember this is still that same day I was telling you about, Jesus boated across the lake to Gergara. It was like all this talk about a slow start and Satan's hindering and working against His Kingdom reminded Him of something He needed to do.

All of a sudden Jesus told us that we were going to the area of the Decapolis. Well, naturally we wondered why we'd go to that God-forsaken land. Jesus said it was to spread the message of the kingdom throughout that whole area. It seemed the job would take months at least -- how long were we going to stay? "Just a few hours, half a day at most" Jesus said. We asked how that could be done and Jesus told us he had a man picked out there whom we'd meet. He'd spread the word. We figured he must be some guy: highly trained, skilled, well-educated, great contacts and so forth. "Actually," Jesus told us, "he hasn't any of that. He's just been hanging around the cemetery lately." The cemetery? What was he, a funeral director, a grave digger? What does he do at the cemetery? "Well, mainly he runs around naked, breaking chains, cutting himself, banging his head on stone markers and terrorizing anyone he meets." We had heart reports of such a man.



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Frankly, we were too stunned to reply. It just didn't make sense. We had no idea what He was talking about.

SATAN ATTACKS Unfortunately the only one to figure it out was Satan, that's why he tried so hard to keep it from happening. Since boating is the quickest way across, that's how Jesus chose to go. However a sudden terrible storm came that would have killed us had Jesus not intervened. Why had He led us into a storm? Why does He lead you into financial, relational, job, family or health storms? I guess it was to show how He can deliver when things are hopeless.

It was a real miracle – the first one I saw personally. Oh I had heard of many others, and talked to people who had been miraculously healed. But to see one, to be saved by one, was something I'll never forget!

WHAT IS A MIRACLE? A miracle is not a coincidence of natural happenings. It's not magic. It is overriding natural laws by a higher law. Jesus called them 'signs.' We realized they were done for a purpose – proof that Jesus was God. The focus was not to be the miracle itself but what it taught about Jesus. If He had power over physical ills, He could also heal spiritual ills. If He could deliver from demons, He could deliver from sin. If He could give physical sight He could give spiritual sight. If He could feed with physical bread, He could feed with spiritual manna. If He could bring the physically dead back to life, He could do the same with the spiritually dead. If He can stop a storm on an ocean, He can stop Satan's attacks against us. When we are helpless, He can deliver.

There was no single pattern: some asked to be healed, others didn't. Some had faith, others didn't even know who Jesus was. Whatever the illness, whatever the need - Jesus met it. He had total control over nature: calming the sea, cursing a fig tree, turning water to wine, catching many fish when there weren't any there a moment before – all these are done by Jesus with just a word. Miracles were a means to an end, not an end in themselves. That's why not every sick person in Palestine was healed.

Satan can do miracles, too. He can counterfeit God's power with shows of his own (Matthew 7:22-23). His power is limited by God, however. He can't stop Jesus' power. Jannes and Jambrees counterfeited and challenged Moses but lost to God's power.

Anyway, we safely pulled up on the beach, slept the night, and ate breakfast. Then came one of the greatest miracles I had ever seen. I'll tell you more about it in the next article. In short, Jesus cast demons from these crazy, naked, almost inhuman beings and made them whole again. He was the one to take the message to that whole area. We got right in the boat and went back across the sea, calm this trip, to Capernaum.

MORE MIRACLES When we got back word of our return had preceded us. Crowds were everywhere. Everyone wanted a touch, a miracle in their life. Jarius, the local synagogue ruler and a very fine man, had a daughter who was deathly sick. On the way to seeing her, Jesus was interrupted by a woman who had been constantly bleeding from a tumor in her uterus for 12 years. Upon touching Jesus she was immediately healed – another miracle! Jesus stopped and talked with her. The interruption made Him late to Jarius' home, and by the time He arrived she was already dead. What did He do? He held her hand and said, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!" Immediately she got up and was fine – the greatest miracle so far! I really had picked a couple of good days to spend with Jesus!

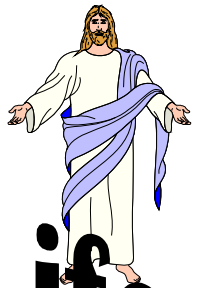
The day wasn't over, though. I watched Him heal 2 blind men and a man who was demonized, blind and dumb. In fact, many times when Jesus cast demons out, people were instantly healed of their illnesses and ailments. Jesus obviously had power over Satan.

Jesus still has that same power today. Look what He's done in your life – that is nothing short of a miracle! The greatest miracle of all is spending eternity in heaven with Him!

22. CHRIST VERSUS

SATAN

By Jeshua



The Life of JESUS

From Birth to Resurrection

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Last time I told you about how I took a couple days off from work and was with Jesus when He went to Gergara. The way He calmed the storm that would have surely drowned all of us was most impressive! It was like we were going into something bigger than us, like we were part of some larger battle. I was soon to find out how true this was!

We had heard stories about the men in the graveyard there: dumb, blind and deformed (Mark 5). They were wild with rage and strength, running around naked, terrorizing anyone who came near the place, and breaking chains when tied down. No one went there. It was obviously Satan's territory. No wonder it felt like we were heading for war – we were!

THE GOOD GUYS versus THE BAD GUYS God was our commander, and angels were His messengers and warriors. On the other side was Satan and his fallen angels, now called demons. "Demon" means "destroyer." They are also called evil or unclean spirits, referring to the fact they don't have a physical body. They spread their sin and uncleanness any way they can. They are spiritual terrorists, trying to destroy the work of God's kingdom. As with human terrorists, no one is safe from them, they are deadly serious and have no softness or mercy. They serve Satan, who is their commander, and carry out his orders. They receive the worship given to idols or anything other than God (I Corinthians 10:20).

Satan organizes his demons in the same manner God has angels organized - in a military-like structure. These are similar to generals, colonels, majors, lieutenants, sergeants, corporals, privates, etc. (Ephesians 6:12). Usually a "strong man" (or ruler) is assigned to a task, and he has lesser demons under his command to help in the work (Matthew 12:25-29; Daniel 10:2-6, 12-14). The names of these demons usually refer to their work ("Fear," "Anger," "Lust," "Pride," "Deception," etc.). It must always be kept in mind, however, that God is in sovereign control. They can do nothing without God's permission (Job 1:6-12). This really was made clear to me. I've seen numerous people who were demonized, but none more drastic than these men.

DEMONIZING "Demonizing" means to be heavily impacted by demons, spiritually hypnotized from within. The term is used 15 times in the New Testament. The Bible doesn't distinguish between demon possession or oppression. The symptoms are the same, so is the cure. Basically what happens is that thoughts are placed into a person's mind (Mark 4:15; I Chronicles 21:1ff; II Samuel 24:1ff; Acts 5:3; I Samuel 16:14-23). That's why Paul commands you to bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (II Cor. 10:4-5). They are very deceptive and deceitful, always careful to hide their true identity. In your day they are seen as spirit guides, inner voices, etc. New Age it's called, but it's Satan's same old lie. Demons torment, Jesus liberates.

DELIVERANCE! Anyway, when we got to the shore we made a camp and slept for the night. The next morning these men found us on the beach, maybe they smelled our breakfast cooking, I don't know. They were terrible to look at! Some part of their free will drew them to

Jesus as their only hope, though, for they ran to Jesus and fell on their knees. “Come out!” Jesus commanded the demons. There must have been 5,000 to 6,000 demons in each one! The demons begged Jesus to have mercy on them – imagine! What mercy did they have on these two men? There was no fear for us, because it was totally clear that Jesus was in charge and they had no power over Him. It was amazing to watch, though.

They begged again not to be sent to the Abyss but be allowed to go into a herd of pigs nearby. It wasn’t a matter of if they had to obey, but where they were to go. Obviously they wanted to indwell something, and animals were better than nothing. Jesus allowed them to go into the pigs, which were unclean animals and to their liking. No sooner did the demons enter them than they charged over a cliff, into the ocean, and drowned. Was that ever dramatic! It showed again the destructive power of Satan’s forces.

We were so taken with the pigs that we didn’t immediately notice the men. What a change came over them! They were calm and in their right mind. They had self-control and immediately wanted to put on some clothing. It was like they hadn’t realized how awful they had been feeling until Jesus healed them and they felt good again! Light had replaced darkness.

The men wanted to leave with us, but Jesus sent them home to tell what had happened. Later when the word of the Lord came to the area it was ripe for harvest because of the groundwork these men had been doing. There’s nothing like telling others what Jesus has done for you in your own life!

CONTINUING BATTLES That wasn’t the first time Jesus and Satan had met in battle, nor was it the last. There were many match-ups: some head-to-head power encounters, others seemingly ‘minor’ scrimmages. I don’t know how many there were, but I do know that Jesus won them all! The greatest battle, for ‘all the marbles,’ was on the cross. While it seemed Satan was winning, Jesus came out the victor. Because of that victory we are free from Satan’s power over us. Since Jesus isn’t on earth any more, Satan now attacks His children. That’s his way of opposing God. If you are one of God’s children, you’ll know that he attacks you.

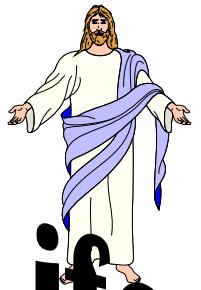
VICTORY IN SPIRITUAL BATTLES Sometimes I wonder why, if God is sovereign, we need to fight. Why not just remove Satan and his demons now? Well, if God is sovereign, why do we need to witness, to pray, to believe, to work for an income, to lock our doors, to go to a doctor, etc. God wants us to use our God-given abilities and trust Him to work in us and through us. It’s one way He reveals Himself, as He did with Job.

The power Jesus has over Satan’s forces is ours, too. I saw Him send out His followers two by two and give them authority over Satan’s forces. In Jesus we have both **power** (δυναμις *dunamis* - Luke 9:1; 24:49; Acts 1:8; 4:33; 6:8; Ephesians 1:18-23; Hebrews 2:14-15) and **authority** (ἐξουσία *exousia* - Luke 10:1,17-20; Matthew 10:1,8; Mark 3:15; 6:7; 1 John 4:4). Power comes from the Holy Spirit within (Acts 1:8), authority comes from our relationship as a child of Jesus (John 1:12). Jesus is our example in casting out demons. At the start of His ministry He cast out many demons (Matthew 4:23-24; Mark 1:39,34). In the Gadarenes He cast demons out of two men (Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-17; Luke 8:20). He cast demons out of the daughter of a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21; Mark 7:20), and cured a demonized man (Mark 1:21-28; Luke 4:31-36). He healed a boy with seizures and demons (Matthew 17:14-20). He cast seven demons out of Mary Magdalene as well as out of other women followers (Luke 8:2; Mark 16:9). Whatever you, or someone you know, may be facing – remember that God’s power is greater than Satan’s power. Humbly come to Him asking for His help and it will be yours.

For more detailed information on this subject see my “Spiritual Warfare Mini-Handbook.”

23. JESUS KNOWS HOW YOU FELL

By Abiel



The Life of JESUS

It started out like any other day, but what a day it ended up being! It was undoubtedly the most stressful day Jesus had (except for the day He died). I was just sitting talking with Zebedee when word came that his relative, John, had just been beheaded. He had been telling everyone that Jesus was the Messiah, and that we needed to turn from sin to follow Jesus. Herod arrested him for condemning his sin – taking his brothers wife for himself. Evidently John was permanently silenced. We wondered how Jesus was taking the news.

DISTRACTIONS AND STRESS WILL COME Since John was Jesus' cousin and they shared a similar ministry, it must have brought great **sorrow** to Jesus. Imagine losing the person who knows you better than anyone to a sudden, violent death?

From Birth to Resurrection

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As we talked about this we realized that this meant great **danger** to Jesus, for word also came that Herod was now looking for Jesus. It was if Jesus was next in line. If I were Jesus I'd want to get far away for awhile, for safety and to think and pray.

All of a sudden, though, some men hurrying past us shouted out that the disciples were back. Jesus had sent them out two by two obviously they had been successful. We joined the crowd and could hear Peter describing a lame man God had healed. John was telling about a crowd he taught while Andrew was reporting the deliverance of an epileptic. **Excitement** was everywhere. I saw Jesus standing to the side: proud and pleased yet distracted by the recent news of John. Conflicting emotions, both sorrow and joy, were evident.

Then before Jesus could have time debriefing them or tell them about John's death, another interruption occurred. Great numbers of people started descending on the area. It was packed, **bedlam** reigned! Have you ever had several people demanding your attention at once? I attack, trying to control it all. Jesus withdrew. He knew His priorities, and He retreated with His disciples. Their needs, those of His immediate 'family,' came before outsiders.

I thought it was a good time to minister to all those people, but there was so much **confusion** He didn't even try. He asked us if He could use our fishing boats to get away for awhile. We were glad to help Him and immediately launched one of our boats with Him and His disciples in it. We headed across the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus seemed to relax on the boat, but when Tiberias, a city built by Herod, came into view His eyes filled with tears. I knew He was thinking of John. "Oh, well," I thought, "He'll have time to unload and unwind around a quite campfire tonight. He needs it. He deserves it." But when we landed we were surprised to see hundreds of people everywhere! They had made the 6-mile walk through the swamps around the shore to get there. They really must have rushed! They already were making **demands** of Jesus. Clearly there would be no peace and quiet for awhile!

JESUS KNOWS WHAT WE GO THROUGH As I watched this whole scene play itself out I got to thinking about Jesus. Obviously He knows what we all go through: hurt, loss, danger, threats, too many demands on our time and not enough peace and quiet. He knows what life is

like. He knows because He's gone through it! That really makes a difference, that He knows what I go through. I carefully watched how He handled it, for I knew how I responded on days like that!

It was like He had a goal and He kept His eyes on that goal – doing God's will and bringing glory to God. That was how He lived. That was behind all He did. Now me, I work at building my kingdom. But obviously Jesus was only interested in building God's Kingdom. If something was part of that, it was good. If it wasn't then it was dropped. He stayed focused. What is your goal in life? Do you stay focused on it? Our goal is to be like Jesus, to bring glory to Him. We must trust Him and serve in all we do. Watching Him was great for me. On the other hand, watching the disciples handle this all was also very educational.

DISCIPLES' REACTION I could tell they were getting more and more impatient. "You've taught them, you've healed them. You've accommodated them. If you don't send them away you'll be stuck with them all night!" Jesus was testing them. "Feed them," He told the disciples. "You've just gotten back from seeing many miracles done through you. It's time for another one."

They checked their own resources and came up far short. They felt unable to meet the needs of the people. In fact, they didn't much care about the needs of the people. Obviously they just saw them as a problem, an interruption to what they wanted. Jesus had love for the people – and it made all the difference. He saw them as a sheep without a shepherd and He cared for them. He put other's needs before His own. I know He was still hurting about John and still anxious to talk to the disciples alone about their recent mission. But He put others first. He put His disciples before His own needs. He even put the disciples before the needs of others, that's why He left on the boat. Now, however, He knows He must spend some time meeting the needs of others, so He miraculously feeds them.

It's not that they deserved it. God's goodness is spurred on by His nature, not by our worthiness. The disciples wanted to send the people away. That's how I respond to needy people when I don't feel like meeting their needs. How about you? Who are you guilty of sending away?

"BE OUR KING!" Well, the people loved the miracle of the free food – so much so that they wanted to make Him their King right then and there! Imagine, 30,000 people ready to follow Him, to raise an army to avenge John's death, to get rid of the Romans right then and there. Even the disciples thought it was a great idea. They had all they needed: Jesus would heal anyone that was hurt, would provide all their food and clothing. They wouldn't have to work or do anything anymore. It was right about this time that Jesus sent the disciples back in the boat, dismissed the people and headed to the hills for His long-awaited time alone with God.

I figured He needed to pray about these things. Perhaps the offer was tempting Him. Perhaps the disappointment with the motives of the people and the disciples really disappointed Him. Whatever the needs, I couldn't blame Him for wanting to be alone.

STORMS We obeyed Jesus and got into the boat, but we had no sooner started than a terrible storm hit. We thought we'd go down any second. Hour after hour we battled. Where was Jesus? Didn't He care? He sent us out into this storm, surely He knew it was coming?

Finally, 12 hours later, when we were totally exhausted and knew we'd be at the bottom of the sea any minute, Jesus came walking on the water to rescue us. We almost missed Him! Immediately, I mean instantly, the storm was over and we were at our destination. Just like that! Boy, did we ever worship Him then! I mean, seeing Him do miracles for others was neat, but when it was our neck in the noose it really meant something! I figure He wanted us to see our need of Him. Even though we let Him down, He never let us down!

So no matter what you go through, remember He knows and understands – He's gone through it Himself. Also remember He's always there ready to come to your aid. Just call on Him.

24. TRANSFIGURED!

By James (Brother of John)

Have you ever had a prayer answered so strong and clear you almost wanted to say “Enough already!”? I did. The prayer was about Jesus – if He was God or not. I think I always knew, but I wanted to be really sure. Know what I mean?

You know, hearing that your cousin is God is really something. Believing it takes lots of faith. Committing your life to live for Him and serve Him is, well, you want to make sure!

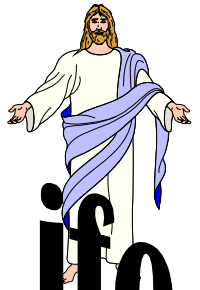
JESUS THE MAN Did Jesus really live? There’s no doubt about that. History proves Him. Historians of His day wrote about Him. Was He really a man who was born, lived and died? No doubt. But was He also really God?

JESUS THE GOD I feel I can answer this as good as anyone. I knew Him His whole life. I was His cousin, a disciple, one of the inner 3 disciples. My mother and His mother, Mary, were sisters. I followed Him from the beginning, knowing He was the greatest Rabbi ever. It was in the summer of 32, though, that any doubt about His deity was totally removed. Jesus had been ministering for 3 years by then. I didn’t know it at the time, but by that time next year He’d be dead.

Jesus had just been through a terrible day. He heard that John died and His life was in danger. The disciples just returned from a successful campaign and were all excited. People crowded around Him everywhere. He didn’t handle that like any man I ever knew. When crowds followed Him around the lake He taught, healed and fed them. Then He had to help His disciples keep from drowning on the way back. Who can walk on water? Who can stop a storm with a word? Who can feed 30,000 people with a few small loaves and fish? Only God can do that!

JESUS CLAIMED TO BE GOD I watched Him closely as we traveled. People were healed by a word or a touch. He said He was the Bread of Life sent from God (John 6:46-51). Many times He claimed to be God (John 8:58; 10:30; 17:5; etc.). He performed miracles, accepted worship, and forgave sin (Mark 2:5). He clearly claimed to be equal with God (Matt. 28:19; John 5:17-18; 12:45; 13:20; 14:1, 9) and one with God (Matt 4:7; Luke 4:12; 8:39; John 10:30, 36-38; 17:11, 21-22; 20:28). We all knew He said He was from heaven (John 6:33, 35, 51) and was sent by God (John 4:34; 5:37; 7:16, 28-29; 8:16; 9:4; 11:42; 14:24; 16:28; 17:18, 23). Over and over He identified Himself as the Son of God (Matt 16:17; 22:42-45; Mark 12:35-37; 14:61-62; Luke 20:41; John 9:35-37; 22:69-70). You didn’t have to be around Him very much before you understood His claims to have always existed (John 8:58; 17:5), have omniscience (Matt 11:21-22; Luke 10:13), omnipresence (Matt 18:20; 28:20) and omnipotence (Mark 14:61-63; Luke 22:69-70; John 2:19, 10:18; 11:25-27). The more time we watched Him the more clear it became that He was not just a man like the rest of us.

It was about this time that Peter had opportunity to put all of our feelings into words when Jesus asked him if we disciples were going to leave Him as so many other followers had. “Lord,” Peter said. “To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.” It was clear enough. His actions backed up His words: power over nature, illness, even Satan and his forces. It was mainly the religious rulers who denied His deity, mainly because of their pride and jealousy. They looked for every excuse they could to discredit Him. One of their main reasons was because He did not keep all their manmade laws, like ritual hand washing before eating. Jesus said it was what was the inside, not the outside that mattered.



The Life of JESUS

From Birth to Resurrection

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IF GOD BECAME MAN Jesus kept healing. He healed a demonized little girl of a Phoenician. In fact, He did all you would expect God to do. I had often thought about it, and I knew if God ever came to earth He would have an unusual entrance. What is more unusual than being born of a virgin? In addition, He had to be without sin. Jesus was. I knew Him my whole life, and lived with Him day and night for 3 years. If God became man, you would expect Him to do the supernatural (miracles), speak the greatest words ever spoken, and have a lasting and universal influence. Furthermore you would expect Him to satisfy the spiritual hunger in man and to exercise power over death. Jesus did all of these. As if to underline these truths He then healed a deaf mute, fed another group with 4,000 men in it, and then healed a blind man at Bethsaida. Then one day Jesus gave us a test.

RESURRECTION PROVES DEITY We were walking on a long, lonely road near Caesarea Philippi. Jesus asked us "Who do the people say I am?" After telling Him He asked us who we thought He was. Peter said it for all of us: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." This really pleased Jesus. He had been making it clear since we met Him. Then He started talking about His death and resurrection. That didn't mean He wasn't God, it really just proved He was. Who but God could come back from the grave?

TRANSFIGURATION PROVES DEITY It wasn't long after that happened that we got to see Jesus in His Godly glory. No one could see that and doubt. We were on a mountain and He was transfigured. There He was in all His glory, talking with Moses and Elijah about His coming death and resurrection. Just think – we saw the Shekinah Glory and lived! God Himself spoke, saying Jesus was His Son.

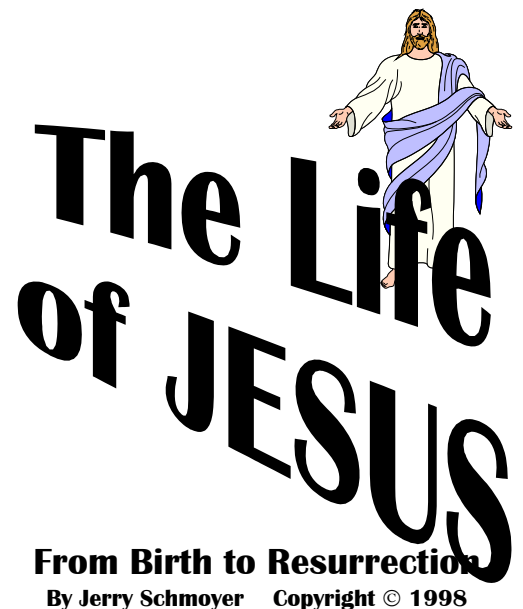
FULFILLED PROPHECIES PROVE DEITY Seeing Moses and Elijah with Him brought to mind all the prophecies of the Prophet to come who would be like Moses, and one like Elijah who would precede Him. In fact, hundreds of prophecies about the Messiah were being fulfilled in Jesus. Matthew was keeping a list of them. It was said He would be born of the seed of a woman (Gen 3:15; Gal 4:4; Mt 1:20), of a virgin (Isa 7:14; Mt 1:18,24-25; Lk 1:26-35), and would be called the Son of God (Ps 2:7). He would be a descendant of Abraham (Gen 22:18), Isaac (Gen 21:12) and Jacob (Num 24:17), of the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:10) and the family of Jesse (Isa 11:1,10; Jer 23:5). The probability of these coming true would be 1 in 10 with 16 zeroes. That means if each chance were a silver dollar there would be enough to lay them down side by side and cover the whole state of Texas two feet deep! Of all those silver dollars only one would be marked. The odds in parachuting into Texas blindfolded and picking up the marked one are the same as those prophecies of the Messiah just happening to come true. And there were hundreds of other prophecies of the Messiah which Jesus filled! What more proof would one want that He is God? If He didn't fulfill those prophecies then no one ever will for all the records to prove what tribe and family they come from were destroyed when Jerusalem fell in 70 AD.

WHAT ABOUT YOU? Do you believe He really is God? If so, that will change your life! Check out the facts. The more closely you look, the more obvious it becomes. Two infidels once sat on a railroad train, discussing the life of Christ. One of them said, "I think an interesting romance could be written about him." The other replied, "and you are just the man to write it. Tear down the prevailing sentiment about His divinity, and paint Him as a man - a man among men."

The suggestion was acted upon and the romance written. The man who made the suggestion was Colonel Ingersoll, the noted atheist. The writer was General Lew Wallace, and the book was called "Ben Hur." In the process of constructing the life of Christ, Gen. Wallace found himself facing the greatest life ever lived on earth. The more he studied, the more he was convinced Christ was more than man. Until one day, he was forced to cry, "Verily, this was the Son of God!"

25. WOMEN & GRACE

By The Widow of Nain and the Widow with 2 Mites



Well ... I never thought it would happen to me... But it did! My greatest fear was being left alone. All alone: no family, no father, no husband, no son.

You see, where I come from, without my father, husband or son to support me I would starve. I wouldn't have a place to live for shelter or clothing, not to mention my need for companionship.

Well, here's my story. I lived in a beautiful village. It's not very big. It's located about 2 miles south of Mt. Tabor. On the outside of the village is a hillside where there are many caves. We use them to bury the dead. Unfortunately I have visited them all too frequently. First my father and mother, then my husband.

My husband was a wonderful man, a hard worker, kind and loving, my closest friend. A few years ago my son and I buried Him. He had died so suddenly. I never planned on being a widow. I guess no one does. I felt I couldn't go on without him, but at least I had my son. My beautiful son was a fine young man. His father was very proud of him. Every time I look at my son I remember my husband, and while a part of me was buried, at least I had my son – until the day he died.

Again, my life so suddenly changed. But then I was without hope. My joy, my happiness, my only reason ... well ... here I was again, in the funeral procession, only this time I didn't have my son's strong shoulders to lean on, to hold me up, to carry me slowly along the road. The heat of the day pounded on my body. My entire world had collapsed, and I felt I would as well.

The air was filled with the sound of wailing cries and somber songs as we moved to the mountain caves for the burial. I wasn't able to hire many mourners, so those in the crowd cried along with me. I had no desire to go on.

My baby, my son, whom I held in my arms and nursed from my breast. He was not supposed to die before me. I didn't even have my husband to comfort me. I was all alone!

Then it happened! While I was walking I noticed a very large crowd from the direction of Capernaum. One man, a Rabbi, was walking directly through the crowd towards me. I could hardly make out His face through my tears. I didn't know Him, but He said to me, "Woman, do not weep." I thought to myself, "How could He say such a thing? Didn't He realize that this was my only son?"

But before I could clear my eyes, this man laid His hand on the stretcher carrying my son. The funeral procession had stopped and it was silent. Softly and firmly He spoke. "Young man, I say to you, get up!"

That very instant my son sat up! He helped my son to his feet. The men carrying the stretcher fell back in amazement as did the rest of the crowd. I almost fainted and the women rushed to help me while the men quickly and nervously began removing the grave clothes from my son. I thought, "Could this be real? Was this all just a dream?"

My son stood! Alive! Not Dead! My heart pounded out of my chest and I was gasping for air. "My son is alive!" I thought. Alive!

I held out my arms to him and as he came to me I recalled the moment I held him on the day he was born, and how I felt this way once again. Now my tears were tears of joy.

I took my son's face in my hands and praised God! the crowd began praising God. They kept saying, "A great prophet has appeared among us!" "God has come to help His people."

While holding my son, in all the commotion, I caught Jesus' eyes. He looked at me with such a compassionate smile, and I knew, at that moment, God had come to help His people.

It's been many years since that miraculous day, and I tell you – God has come to help His people!
-The Widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17)

I, too, was a widow, a very old widow. In my day widows had no government help, no way of getting any income. Begging and prostitution were our only options – not very good career choices! I was able to live with my parents until they died, then with a younger brother and his family. I tried to stay out of their way. They were good to me, but they didn't have much themselves. I mended clothing and made garments to earn some money to help them out, but as I got older my eyesight failed and my fingers lost their nimbleness.



Recently they had to move out of Jerusalem to farm in the country. It was the only way they could earn a living. It cost too much to live in Jerusalem. Unfortunately they didn't have enough room in their new home for me. They insisted I come anyway but it was time for me to stop being a burden to them and trust God on my own.

I still didn't have a place to live. Friends would invite me home from time to time, but mainly I slept wherever I could find some warmth and comfort: an empty roof, a secluded corner or an abandoned building. Oh, people would have taken me in had I asked, but knowing the extreme hardship it would have put them through I felt it was better this way. Maybe when the weather turned colder I would be forced to impose somewhere. I'd have to wait until then to see.

Anyway, I finally ended up finding two small copper coins in my possession, payment for watching several children while the parents visited relatives in Galilee. Their worth was only a fraction of a penny, but for me it was real riches. What to do with this money? I could save it for an emergency. Although it wouldn't go far it could bet me a small portion of bread if I hadn't eaten for a few days. I could put it toward a new garment for mine was getting ragged and unusable. Or I could give it back to God for His wonderful goodness to me.

What did I have to thank Him for? My oh my, just everything. Maybe things weren't so great on the outside, but the peace and joy He gave me within more than made up for the way I had to live. Every day I saw rich people living in luxury. But without the real presence of God in their lives they were filled with fear and worry – things I didn't have since I started trusting in God. No, I was much richer than them in the things that really counted – much, much richer.

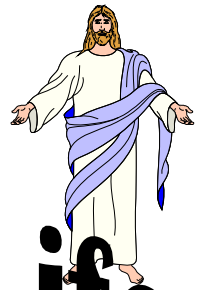
OK, I decided, I'll give this money to God as a show of my love and appreciation for Him. But that presented a problem. That meant I would have to give it in the temple. Don't get me wrong, I loved going into the temple. I went every day. I loved it there. But I would have to get in line with the rich who made such a show of their giving. They had trumpet players to get everyone's attention. Then their servants slowly poured bag after bag of money into the metal containers in such a way that the sound reverberated throughout the whole courtyard. One after another they came, each one trying to outdo the other. Oh, well, at least no one would notice me. I wish I had more to give to my God Who has graciously given me so much, but I don't.

Eventually it was my turn. I quickly dropped my coins in and rushed away. You know how sometimes you can feel someone looking at you when your back is turned? I got that feeling and turned. There was a man, a rabbi, looking at me and talking to a group of His pupils, obviously about me and what I had done. But instead of feeling embarrassed I could sense, even at a distance, that He was approving of what I had done. I found out later His name was Jesus. Somehow I knew that what I had done had been acceptable to God, even special to Him. I sensed that I would be all right, taken care of. Live or die, I had nothing to worry about.

- The Widow who gave the two mites Mark 12:41-44

26. WOMEN & FORGIVENESS

By Two Immoral Women



The Life of JESUS

From Birth to Resurrection

By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1998

I learned early in life, “When among men, keep silent.” Silence lulls them into thinking that you’re not even there, or somehow not able to hear, and they speak boldly among themselves. What they don’t understand is that what you lose in speech you gain 10 times over in hearing. Silently, in the background – that’s how I managed to get along in my life.

It’s my greatest survival skill. But now, I can’t keep quiet. The most amazing thing has happened. Words and joys can’t stay shut in, not for an instant. It’s as if my heart has been awakened from a long sleep and is beating faster to catch up with all those lost years. And there were so many lost years, years where the only love I knew was empty love, pretend love. It was love that came with an insincere smile, a few denarii, a love with no time for promises, lasting only a few minutes. I survived those years by keeping my heart silent as well. It was much easier getting through my days if I didn’t let myself feel anything: no love, no hope, no pain. “Close your eyes and your heart against what you know cannot be,” I told myself. But one longing would not die. My one secret longing, or craving really, was for someone to gather me into their arms and rock me until their crying stopped.

I’ve seen women rock their babies when they are crying inconsolably – back and forth, back and forth. Even though it broke my heart to look at them, I couldn’t take my eyes off of them. What would it be like to be held by someone bigger than me, to comfort me and console me, to say to me, “Hush now, little one. Everything will be all right, everything will be all right.”

But dreams can’t fill your hungry belly. I had to do what I could to scrape by. I’m not saying you have to like me. God knows I didn’t! But you tell me. What choice was there? There was no man to protect me, no relatives to take me in. I had to do what I could to scrape by.

The only thing I did have was from my mother, a small bottle full of precious perfumed oil. It was my most treasured possession in the world. It was my treasure, my insurance policy. I knew if I had to, if things came down to life or death, I could sell it and buy some peace of mind. But how much is hope worth? Somehow that little bottle dangling on the chain around my neck gave me the courage to get up in the morning, to face another day. Each morning I would hold it in my hands and pray to a God I didn’t really believe in. Oh, I’ll be the first to confess, my prayers were faithless prayers. God had been silent for so long that if He did exist, if He did see me at all, He would be thoroughly disgusted with the mess I’d made of my life. Because if He even had an ounce of compassion, just enough to fit into my little perfume bottle, my life wouldn’t have been so lost.

Still, like getting dressed and brushing my hair, my little prayer was some kind of liturgy, even if God was deaf to my pleas. “This day, this day please let me find my way!”

But today, today my faithless prayers have been answered today. It began this morning. The town was swarming with energy and people. The prophet Jesus was here! Yesterday I heard a rumor that He raised a little girl from the dead. And not just any little girl but the daughter of a synagogue leader. Well, my natural conclusion was that Jesus healed the righteous ones, the religious ones. But then I heard other things. I heard that He had lunch with a tax collector and that He had healed a poor blind man. Some even were beginning to accuse Him of being friends of sinners!

I usually try to avoid midday crowds, but today my curiosity got the better of me. I simply had to see who this man was! I put on my only proper clothes. I covered my face and my hair and, along with the crowds, I followed Him most of the day, listening to His teachings. Some of what I said I couldn't quite hear and other I don't remember. There was so much! But I do remember one encounter He did have.

Jesus was teaching us from the law of Moses. A crowd was around Him. Suddenly He was interrupted, midsentence. A woman, sobbing and hovering, trying to hide her face and her hair, was suddenly thrown down before Him by several angry men. "Teacher," one of her accusers scowled. "This woman has been caught in the act of adultery. The law of Moses tells us to stone one like her. What do you say?"

I looked at that poor, pathetic woman who could hide her face but not her shame. I understood her guilt and her shame. I cried with her.

"What do you say, Teacher?" They already had the stones in their hands, they were so sure of themselves.

But with a few short words Jesus turned their stones of judgment on them. "Let the one among you who is without sin throw the first stone." There was this long pause, as if no one heard them. Then slowly older men began to drop their stones to the ground and, heads down, they walked away. Soon all the other men followed until Jesus was left alone with the woman.

I tried to find a building to hide behind, far enough to not be seen but close enough to hear. Jesus went over to the woman. He bent down. He slowly lifted her chin in His hand. He said, "Woman, where are you accusers? Has no one condemned you?" With tears in her eyes she answered, "No one, Lord." Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and sin no more!"

It was then that I began to have wild ideas and crazy thoughts. If Jesus at lunch with tax collectors, if He healed poor blind men, if He spoke that way to a woman like me, would He even welcome me? Could it be?

Have you ever done something that makes no sense, almost as if you are standing outside yourself, not believing what you are seeing yourself doing? It happened this evening!

Jesus was having dinner at the home of a well-known Pharisee and there was a huge crowd lounging around the room on pillows. The sense of spiced lamb and incense filled the air, festive and loud. I watched myself, head down but with steady feet, come slowly to His feet. I watched as the woman who was me took her bottle of precious perfume that held all her hopes. She took that bottle and broke it. The smell filled the air, making everyone's head swim for a moment, as only expensive perfume can. the music stopped. I watched as she poured it slowly and purposefully onto the feet of Jesus. My breath stopped.

Does anyone know what just happened? Does anyone know what she just gave away? The tear of her lost years followed with the perfume, mixing with the day's dust and grime. The tears of her years of rejection, from her deep well of sorrow, finally broke free and fell, there in the Pharisees home, onto the feet of Jesus.

"Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you. God in peace." He said.

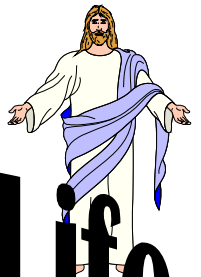
I heard each word. His eyes held me and saw me, all of me. Before He said anything my heart heard Him say, "Hush now, little one. Everything will be all right, everything will be all right."

The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. Ps. 103:8-14



27. MARTHA: A MODERN SLAVE

By Lazarus



The Life of JESUS

From Birth to Resurrection
By Jerry Schmoyer
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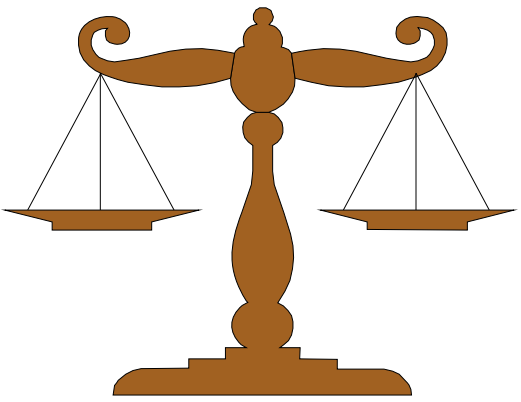
A while back I was listening to a rabbi talk to a group of his students. To make a point he used this illustration. Then he pulled out a one-gallon, wide-mouthed jar and set it on a table in front of him. Then he produced about a dozen fist-sized rocks and carefully placed them, one at a time, into the jar. When the jar was filled to the top and no more rocks would fit inside, he asked, "Is this jar full?" Everyone in the class said, "Yes." Then he said, "Really?" He reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel. Then he dumped some gravel in and shook the jar causing pieces of gravel to work themselves down into the spaces between the big rocks. Then he smiled and asked the group once more, "Is the jar full?" By this time the class was onto him. "Probably not," one of them answered. "Good!" he replied. And he reached under the table and brought out a bucket of sand. He started dumping the sand in and it went into all the spaces left between the rocks and the gravel. Once more he asked the question, "Is this jar full?" "No!" the class shouted. Once again he said, "Good!" Then he grabbed a pitcher of water and began to pour it in until the jar was filled to the brim. Then he looked up at the class and asked, "What is the point of this illustration?" One eager beaver raised his hand and said, "The point is, no matter how full your schedule is, if you try really hard, you can always fit some more things into it!" "No," the Rabbi replied, "that's not the point. The truth this illustration teaches us is: If you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all." Then he went on to talk about the BIG ROCKS of life, the important things to each of us. Each one has different BIG ROCKS in life: relationship with God and family, friends, health, home and church.

That's what I want to tell you about. My name is Lazarus. I was from Bethany, near Jerusalem. Mary and Martha were my sisters. They were widows, and actually took care of me because I had been sickly my whole life. We all were followers of Jesus. That was our first priority in life. God blessed us with enough money, a fine house, and an influential role in our community. Still, He came first. We had to make sure we didn't let other responsibilities, obligations and opportunities crowd out what was most important to us – the spiritual side of our natures. There is a great temptation in life to let the urgent crowd out the important.

Because of my health I couldn't follow Jesus and travel with Him. Mary or Martha turn turns traveling with the women who followed Him. The other stayed home to take care of me. Then Jesus left Galilee and spent much time in Judea and surrounding areas. It was like He wanted to make sure everyone had an opportunity to hear Him before it was too late. It seemed everyone was turning against Him, even His own family. Then He came to our home (Luke 10:38-42).

Did you ever get unexpected company? Your husband brings home his boss and a dozen friends without hardly any notice. It's easy to sympathize with Martha. But what if the wife wanted to have them over and understood there wouldn't be much notice. What if she had been reassured they didn't want anything fancy, just a jar of peanut butter, another of jelly, and a loaf of bread. "Well make our own lunch. We just want to spend some time with YOU." Then if the wife felt she had to make a major feast with all the trimmings, well, it's her choice.

Remember, our home was the closest thing to a real home that Jesus had. We replaced His brothers and sisters. He spent much time with us. Our home was always open to Him. So when He came this time Mary, who had been helping Martha all morning and felt they had more than enough food ready, wanted to spend the time with Jesus. Well, if you knew Martha, you'd know she loved Jesus as much as Mary did, but she had this perfectionistic streak, this drive to



keep doing more and more. She couldn't say "No" to important things so she could say "Yes" to more important things. That was Martha.

Unfortunately she got so bothered by Mary's departure that she interrupted the discussion to imply Jesus didn't care about her because He didn't send Mary back into the kitchen. It was an embarrassing moment. Mary felt awful – she wasn't trying to hurt Martha. Kind Martha was obviously out of line.

Jesus gently corrected Martha, telling her not to be so worried and upset. He didn't want to take sides, but He said that she shouldn't be telling Mary what to do. Mary didn't try to force Martha to adopt her priorities, and Martha shouldn't be trying to force hers on Mary. After all, feeding one's heart came before feeding one's stomach! We all learned something that day, even Martha. Spiritual needs must come before physical. Relationships with people come before chores. That's the only way to really live a 'successful' life.

I heard a story about a Roman traveling in a fancy wagon who stopped to do business one evening. While doing business some local boys, to play a trick on him, switched his wheels. Those particular wagons had little wheels in front to turn easier and big ones in back for stability. Axles arranged high or low for each. They put little wheels in back & big in front! After business went to the local inn for the night. Next morning when got up went outside to look at the hill he climbed in the dark last night -- never saw a hill like it! But couldn't find any hill - all flat to where did business! Inn keeper saw him looking around and asked him what doing, when told said they better check the wagon. Did and saw trick! Inn keeper said Then the preacher said: "You know, there's a lesson to be learned in this. Whenever in life we get the big wheels where the little ones ought to be and the little ones where the big ones ought to be, life is a hard pull." Jesus told us *"Seek first the kingdom of God & His righteousness, & all these things will be added to you as well"*

CHECK YOUR PRIORITIES Are you climbing "hills" God never meant for you to climb? Are your big wheels and your little wheels in the right places? Don't be like Martha. Who really is the Lord of your life?

What can we do? First of all, let's make sure that we keep our own priorities straight. Let's admit that we cannot do it all. There are others whom God has placed in the Body who are better qualified to do some of the things we have taken on. They are waiting for someone to say to them, "We need you." Let them do what God has gifted them to do.

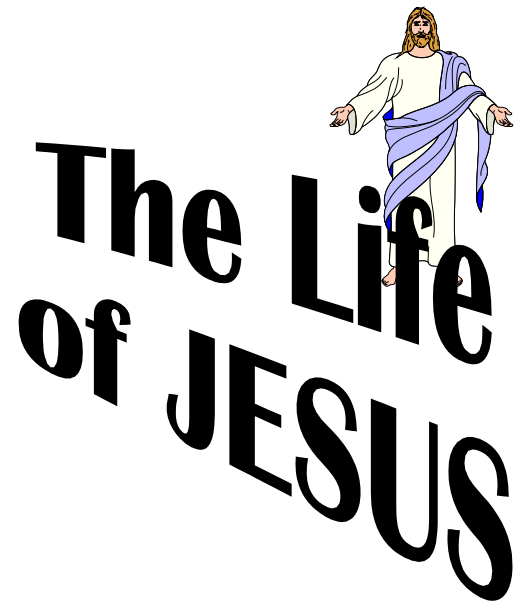
Second, we need to learn how to say "no," at least every once in a while. Sometimes we have to say "no" to something so that we can more adequately say "yes" to something much more meaningful. JESUS often said no, didn't let URGENT crowd our IMPORTANT.

Third, we need to remember that God comes first, then our families. They should never get the "leftovers" of our time and energy. We should make a determination in our hearts to be true to what God has called us to do, and not allow other things to crowd out our own times alone with God. It is in the secret places that we best can maintain some sense of balance and priority. Spend some extended time in quiet, reflective, uninterrupted solitude, just listening to whatever God chooses to tell you.

"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God." Psalm 42:1-2 "Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added to you as well."

28. THE MAN WHO CHEATED DEATH

By Lazarus



From Birth to Resurrection

By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1998

Have you ever died and come back to life? I'll tell you, there's nothing like it! I love to hear stories about the 'other side.' Some of them you can't trust, but the ones in the bible are the most dependable ones. Have you heard them. There is the boy God brought back to life through Elijah (I Kings 17:21-22). There is the son of the Shunammite mother in the time of Elisha (II Kings 4:33-36). Then there was the man who came back to life when he was buried in Elijah's cave (II Kings 13). God worked through Peter to bring Dorcas back to life (Acts 9:40) and through Paul to for Eutychus (Acts 20:9-12). Jesus Himself raised a son of a Nain widow (Luke 7:14-15), Jarius' daughter (Luke 8) and Lazarus -- that's me!

Actually I was one of two Lazarus' in the Bible. Jesus used both of our deaths as a testimony to Himself.

LAZARUS & THE RICH MAN (Luke 16:19-31). The other Lazarus was a poor, sickly beggar in a true story Jesus told He was crippled, dumped by a road where he was at the mercy of people to throw their scraps where he could reach them. Of course, he had to fight off wolf-like wild dogs for the food. Well, he died but, being a believer, his spirit went to heaven while his body went to the always-burning garbage dump, Gehenna.

For a believer death means being immediately in God's presence in heaven (Luke 23:43). It isn't loss, it's gain! Two little birds had a nest in the bushes in the back part of the garden. Julia found the nest. It had four speckled eggs in it. One day, after she had been away some time, she ran into the garden to take a peep at the speckled eggs. Instead of the beautiful eggs, there were only broken, empty shells. "Oh!" she said, picking out the pieces, "the beautiful eggs are all spoiled and broken!" "No, Julia," said her brother; "they are not spoiled: the best part of them has taken wings, and flown away." So it is in death: the body left behind is only an empty shell; while its soul, the better part, has taken wings, and flown away.

On the other hand, the rich man outside whose mansion Lazarus had been dumped, also died. He went to hell because he didn't have faith in God, just in himself. His body went into a fine tomb, but His soul to hell. What contrast! In this life Lazarus had torment, but in eternity treasure. For the rich man it was the opposite. Who was better off? Remember that everyone will one day die. No one escapes death. It is final, there is no chance for salvation after death.

LAZARUS, MARY & MARTHA (John 11:1-44) That brings me to my story. God used my death for His glory, too -- but in a different way. He brought me back to life! I wasn't the focus of the story, though. He just chose me for His glory -- what a privilege that was!

I was always sickly, my whole life. In mid-February, 33 AD, though, I was so sick everyone thought I'd die. Mary and Martha sent to Jesus to come heal me. We'd seen Him heal so many others. But He didn't come. He sent the messenger back saying that my sickness wouldn't end in death. However by the time the messenger got back I had died! That just added to everyone's grief. Where was He? Why didn't He come? How could He be so wrong?

Eventually He did show up, after I was in the grave 4 days. They tell me He never did offer a word of explanation about why He hadn't arrived earlier. He talked with Martha, a theological discussion to stretch her faith. He comforted Mary, an emotional time of crying with her.

Then Jesus went to the tomb. He asked them to move the stone. Martha, thinking He just wanted to view my body one final time, reminded Him that I had been dead four days – the stench from decay would be awful. Jesus persisted. No one knew what He was going to do. You know, Jesus never preached a funeral sermon. Every funeral He attended He ended by bringing the dead person back to life. That's what He did with me, too!

"Lazarus, come out!" He called. If He wouldn't have said "Lazarus," everyone who was buried there would have come back to life!

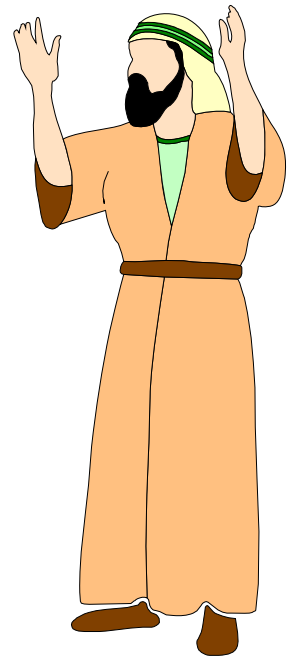
Funny, I knew I had been in heaven and had to leave, but the memory was so fleeting, so quickly gone, that I didn't have time to complain. I would have really resented being back on earth if I had remembered what the previous 4 days were like. I guess that's God's mercy. I did have a vague memory of great peace, love and joy.

What happened to me, and the others who came back to life, is called resuscitation, not resurrection. I had the same body, which got older and eventually died of old age. I did not have a new, eternal body like the other Lazarus received when he went to heaven. I got mine when I died for good many years later. One thing was different with this body, though – I wasn't sick any more. For the first time in my life I was healthy, really healthy. I stayed that way, too.

You see, I was able to conquer death because Jesus was greater than death. He proved that on the cross, a few weeks later. What death did to Jesus is nothing compared to what Jesus did to death (I Cor. 15:51-57). When death stung Jesus Christ, it stung itself to death (Hosea 13:14; Isa 25:8). At first it seemed like death conquered Him on the cross, but the resurrection proved otherwise.

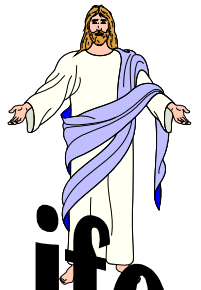
An event more in your time helps explain what happened. It was June 18, 1815, the Battle of Waterloo. The French under the command of Napoleon were fighting the Allies (British, Dutch, and Germans) under the command of Wellington. The people of England depended on a system of signals to find out how the battle was going. One of these signal stations was on the tower of Winchester Cathedral. Late in the day it flashed the signal: "W-E-L-L-I-N-G-T-O-N- - D-E-F-E-A-T-E-D- -." Just at that moment one of those sudden English fog-clouds made it impossible to read the message. The news of defeat quickly spread throughout the city. The whole countryside was sad and gloomy when they heard the news that their country had lost the war. Suddenly the fog lifted, and the remainder of the message could be read. The message had four words, not two. The complete message was: "W-E-L-L-I-N-G-T-O-N- - D-E-F-E-A-T-E-D- - T-H-E- - E-N-E-M-Y!" It took only a few minutes for the good news to spread. Sorrow was turned into joy, defeat was turned into victory! So it was when Jesus died but then came back to life. *Rev 1:18 I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever & ever! And I hold the keys of death & Hades*

I was never afraid of death after that. In fact, I kind of looked forward to it. One day I was sitting by a main road in Jerusalem. A Roman chariot came charging down the street and right past me, the shadow passing over me. I thought how different it was being run over by a shadow than by the chariot. I thought about Jesus' promises of victory over death, & the 23rd Psalm about death being a shadow. Only the shadow of death can touch us. *Ps 23:4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.* Do you have that assurance? If you put your faith in Jesus you can!



29. THE TEARFUL ENTRY

By Joses



The Life of JESUS

From Birth to Resurrection

By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1998

Every once in awhile a decision has to be made which affects the whole course of history: Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit, Moses' decision to leave Egypt for Israel or Columbus' decision to search for a new world. Two thousand years ago the nation Israel found itself at just such a turning point decision. It was the biggest turning point in history since Eden, so important it is recorded in all four gospels (Jesus' birth is only recorded in two). The date was Monday, March 30, 33 AD.

THE BACKGROUND Jesus had been preaching for almost 4 years, but the majority of the people, and especially the religious rulers, had rejected His claims to be God come to earth as the Messiah. Now it was time for the Passover, when the town grew from 100,000 to one to 2 million people. Jesus came to Bethany, over the Mt of Olives from Jerusalem, on **Friday**, March 27. On **Saturday** Mary anointed Jesus feet for burial. Judas opposed the action as wasteful, but Jesus defended her, saying she was doing the right thing.

On **Sunday** many Jews went from Jerusalem to Bethany to see Lazarus. Many believed because of his testimony. The religious rulers planned to kill him as well as Jesus.

THE CHALLENGE Monday morning Jesus sent two disciples to get an unriden donkey (Matthew 21:1-7). Every other day he walked into town, but this day He was making a statement. He was coming to town as the Prince of Peace and people would be forced to respond one way or the other. He is going to put them on the spot. He could have come on a span of beautiful horses, or carried by angels, but he came the way a new king would enter Jerusalem. Before He had always told His followers to not tell anyone who He was, now He is publicly proclaiming His kingship. It is the day of commitment, one way or the others.

Of course, Jesus knew how the vote would go. Daniel 9:24-27 prophesied that on this very day the Messiah would be "cut off." This was fulfilled to the exact day, as God had told Daniel.

Jesus' intention was obvious to everyone present, for Peter started leading the procession and everyone picked up on it (Mark 11:7-10). The people put their coats down for Him, as they would have put costly rugs before a king entering Jerusalem. They waved branches and palms, symbols of victory. It was the belief that the Messiah would come to town on a donkey, from the Mt of Olives, with palm branches being waved. This is what Jesus did. People thought the enemy He was coming to conquer was Rome, but it was really sin and death.

Excitement grew among the emotional out-of-town Jews who came looking for a thrill, a break from the boredom. True believers in Jesus as Messiah soon picked up the emotion, and everyone started shouting "Hosanna" ("save us now") and "Hallelujah" ("Praise the Lord"). They were quoting Psalm 118:25-26.

Meanwhile when word spread to Jerusalem about what was happening, many residents and visitors to Jerusalem went out to check things out (John 12:12-19). The religious rulers trailed along to keep their eye on things (Luke 19:39-44). Nothing escaped the notice of their spy system. They told Jesus to silence His disciples, tell them they were out of line. Jesus instead said they were right in what they said, and it had to be proclaimed that day, if not by the people then the very rocks would cry out!

THE CHANGE The strangest thing happened, though, when Jesus reached the crest of the Mt of Olives and looked down on Jerusalem. With all the excitement and praising going on around Him He started crying. It wasn't just a quiet sob, it was a loud, long, uncontrolled heart-break of a cry. Why? Jesus knew the nation as a whole was rejecting Him. He foresaw the terrible destruction that would soon come upon Jerusalem as a result of this. And it broke His heart. The 'Triumphal Entry' really was a TEARFUL entry. He had been anointed for burial by Mary, and here He was, going to His death in Jerusalem. By showing up He was, in effect, voluntarily turning Himself in to die for the sins of the world.

Naturally this quickly quenched the emotional display of the ones with Him. They were confused, most slipped away so they wouldn't be caught with Jesus and get into trouble with the religious rulers.

Just like that it was over! It seemed it had hardly started and it was finished – and what a strange end. It was like there was some unspoken agreement among everyone to act like nothing had happened. Just get back to business and forget this whole thing. Pretend Someone didn't just proclaim Himself Messiah-King after three years of teaching and miracles.

THE CHARGE Large crowds were gathered in the temple when Jesus entered, for that was the common meeting place for those in town. Things were really humming the week before Passover. Everyone was curious about Jesus coming to town, for they had heard about His display on the Mt of Olives. Also they were away of the religious rulers' threat to arrest Jesus if He came to town again. The last time in town they had tried to stone Him and Jesus only survived because of a miraculous escape. While glad to see Him because of the break in the boring daily routine, they weren't in any way ready to accept Him as Messiah. "Who is this?" they asked – who does He think He is? "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth" others answered. He's just a man, not the Messiah-King. The people had been forced to decide one way or another, and they rejected.

Ironically, at this very time, a few feet away, the priests were selecting and setting aside the Passover lamb which was doomed to die for the nation at 3 PM on Friday, April 3, 33 AD (the very same time Jesus died). Just as the lamb was doomed for death from this day on, set aside to die for the sins of the people, so was the Lamb of God set apart and doomed to die for the sins of the world.

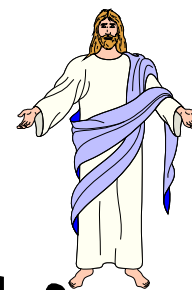
Only one group supported and praised Him in the temple – the boys choir sang "Hosanna to the son of David." This made the religious rulers furious, but because of public opinion they weren't able to arrest Jesus. He went back to Bethany that night, over the Mt of Olives. It was like when the Shekinah glory of God left the Temple for the Mt of Olives in Ezekiel's day. The die was cast. The nation as a whole had decided, and their answer was a clear 'no.' Individuals could be saved, but the clock was ticking down for the nation.

THE REST OF THE WEEK The next day, **Tuesday**, Jesus cursed a fig tree on the way into town. Like the nation Israel, it was a hypocrite. In town Jesus cleansed the temple, then foretold His death and resurrection. **Wednesday** morning was filled with verbal challenges from the religious rulers and Jesus admiring the widow who gave her last ½ penny. He then gave His disciples the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25) and spent the afternoon teaching in the temple. The religious rulers planned Jesus' arrest and made arrangements with Judas to provide a time and place to arrest Jesus when He wasn't among the crowds.

Thursday Jesus walked through town and the temple, using His last free hours on earth to reach out to any thirsty, open soul. In the afternoon the preparations for the Passover began. Those from Galilee celebrated Thursday evening while the other Jews celebrated on Friday. It was the beginning of the end. The people had decided, and they would suffer the consequences of their decision. So will we. What have you decided about Jesus?

30. WHAT WILL WASH AWAY MY SINS? NOTHING BUT THE BLOOD OF JESUS

By John



The Life of JESUS

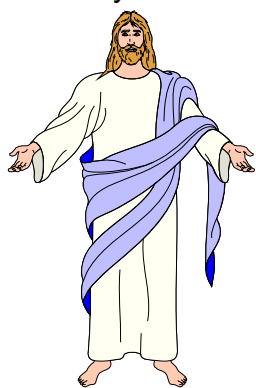
From Birth to Resurrection

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Passover is the oldest continually observed religious custom, with the exception of the Jewish Sabbath. It continues today as Passover among the Jews and the Lord's Supper among Christians. Understanding its roots and significance is extremely important to understand Jesus' final meal on earth. Let's look at what happened in the upper room that night of Thursday, Nisan 13, 33 AD.

There were actually two celebrations of the Passover that were allowed by the priests. Those from Galilee celebrated the Passover Thursday evening while the others celebrated Friday evening. This was because of the difference in reckoning days in a solar compared to a lunar calendar, one starting at sunset and the other being like our calendar today. This was allowed because of the large number of people celebrating in Jerusalem. It made it so rooms could be used twice and so the priests had more time to kill and distribute the ¼ million lambs needed each year. Jerusalem's population swelled from 100,000 to as many as 2 ½ million for Passover.

1. PREPARATION Earlier in the day Jesus had sent Peter and John into the city to make preparations for their Last Supper with Jesus. The house used had to be totally clean, which meant no food with leaven was allowed to remain anywhere in the house. A special set of pans and dishes was used for Passover to make sure no leaven was stuck in the cracks anywhere. A search would be made for any leaven crumbs anywhere. They would be gathered and burned as a picture of sin being removed (I Cor 5:7). Before the search the father would pray "Blessed are you, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who has sanctified us with your commandments and have told us to remove the leaven." And then after the search "Whatever leaven remains in my possession which I cannot see, behold, it is null and accounted as the dust of the earth." This reminds us that we are to not have any sin (any 'leaven') in our lives when we partake of the Lord's Supper, as Paul so sternly told the Corinthians (I Corinthians 11:28).



Firstborn men fasted this whole day, as a reminder of his redemption in Egypt when the Egyptian first-born died because they hadn't put the Passover lamb's blood over the door.

2. TABLE ARRANGEMENT Everyone wore their best garments to Passover. That's why Jesus had on His best seamless robe, which the soldiers didn't want to tear. While in Egypt they ate dressed and standing, ready to go, now they reclined for they were freed from Egypt and at rest (Matthew 11:28).

The table was low, with rugs or mats on 3 sides on which to recline. The table was just high enough to keep the food off the dirty floor. Jesus and His 12 disciples gathered around the table. No women were present.

3. ON THE TABLE They did not use individual place settings, there was only a serving dish when the time came to eat. Usually one large dish was brought out at a time. They had no knives, forks, spoons (a more recent invention used by Western civilization). Food was eaten by the fingers, or a piece of bread used as a spoon/scoop. Eating stood for fellowship, and those who shared the same bowl established a close bond of friendship forever, even on to their children. All shared common drinking glass/cup.

Pitcher of grape juice was put on the table. Jews didn't use fermented grape juice at Passover. Used boiled grape juice and mixed it so it was 2/3 water. The 'blood of the grape' had symbolically replaced the lamb's blood being applied to the door posts. Jews in wilderness had no door posts, so they substituted drinking grape juice for putting blood of lamb on the door posts. Juice poured stood for the blood shed, and juice drunk stood for the blood applied.

Four times cups filled and juice drunk, from 4 "I wills" in Ex. 6"6-7: This formed the structure, the framework for the whole evening. 1. CUP OF SANCTIFICATION (start of service) "I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians"; 2. CUP OF JUDGMENT (before meal) "I will rid you out of their bondage"; 3. CUP OF REDEMPTION (after meal) "I will redeem you with an outstretched arm"; 4. CUP OF PRAISE (end) "I will take you to me for a people."

The evening started at sunset, when the first 3 stars could be seen in the sky. A priest on the corner of the temple would blow the shofar and the Passover would begin.

4. CANDLES LIT ("Brechat Haner") The first event was lighting the candles, because it was getting dark. This was asking for God's light to fill their lives (Psalm 27:1). The lady of the house would light the candles because the Messiah, who would bring the real light, would come from the seed of the woman. The head of family says: "As we kindle the festival lights, we pray for the illumination of the Spirit of God to bring great personal meaning to this, our Passover celebration." As she lights the candles she says: "Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us by the commandments and has commanded us to kindle the Festival-light. Blessed are You O Lord our God, King of the universe, who has kept us in life, and has preserved us, and has enabled us to reach this season."

5. CUP #1 - SANCTIFICATION (Kadeysh 'Ka-DAYsh' or 'KID-ish' כִּדֵּשׁ) meaning 'sanctification')) "I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians." (Ex 6:6) Drinking this cup sanctifies the meal, it sets it apart from other, common meals. Jesus looked forward to sharing this meal and all it held with His disciples: "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God." (Luke 22:14-16). He was eager because needed their fellowship and support at that time, and He some special truths to teach them before leaving them. He knew it would be His last time with them "Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." (Luke 22:17-18)



6. HAND WASHING #1 (Urchatz 'Er-HATZ' אֶרְחָצׁ) "Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart..." (Psalm 24:3-4) The host washed his own hands and then took bowl of water and towel around to all to symbolically act out their purification, too. This was not the ceremonial hand washing the Pharisees made so much of, for Jesus rejected that. This was symbolic of cleansing, but also provided physical cleansing for sanitary reasons.

It was at this time, though, that a dispute among the disciples about who was the greatest came to a head (Luke 22:24). On the outside their feet were dirty from the road, for streets were used for sewage drainage. It was the lowest slave's disgusting job to wash the feet of those who entered a house. None of the disciples would do this for they all felt they were too good to wash each other's feet. Thus the room was not only filled with the stench of sewage on their feet, but

with the jealousy and pride of their hearts. This is when Jesus stepped in and washed their feet for them (Luke 22:24-30; John 13:1-17).

The disciples must have been horrified to see Jesus Himself doing this. If He could do it, they could have done it! Peter at first resisted, then when Jesus said he needed washing Peter asked Jesus to give him a whole bath. Jesus explained he didn't need a bath (Greek 'luo') just to have his feet washed (Greek 'nipto'). In those days a person would go to a place for a total bath ('luo') and then walk home, but the trip home would dirty his hands and feet so he'd need to rinse them off ('nipto'). Jesus' analogy is that we only need the once-for-bath of salvation one time in life but need to come for cleansing (confession, I John 1:9), continually after that. It was like the priest in the Old Testament only went to the altar once to have a sacrifice offered for his sin when he entered the priesthood, but he would have to go to the laver for cleansing over and over each day every day from then on. Peter had salvation, and he didn't need that again, but he did need to be cleansed from his sin of pride in not wanting to wash anyone else's feed.

Thus Jesus was setting an example in humility as well as teaching a theological truth. If we want to be like Jesus we are to serve each other, not expect others to serve us. Having taken care of this sin issue, the meal could progress.

7. SEDER PLATE BROUGHT OUT A plate with bitter herbs, salt water and horseradish as well as matzo was brought out for this began the symbolic teaching of the meal.

8. BITTER HERBS (Karpas 'CAR-pas' sprk) "the Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God." (Exodus 2:23) The bitter Herbs (lettuce or parsley) reminded them of the bitterness of slavery in Egypt. They were sweet to the taste at first, then becomes bitter, as Egypt at first gave the Jews the best part of the land, then put them into slavery. Lettuce or parsley is a picture of hyssop used to smear blood on door posts. Saltwater is a picture of the tears shed in Egypt.

A blessing was spoken first, "Blessed are You, O Eternal, our God, King of the Universe, Creator of the fruits of the earth." Then the bitter herb was eaten. Thus the fast of the firstborn was broken. Why with something bitter? To remember all the bitterness God has saved us from. Where would you be now if God hadn't reached into your life to touch and change you?

9. MAIN COURSE BROUGHT OUT One dish at a time, the main course would be brought out. Mainly this would have consisted of the lamb meat (a reminder of the Passover lamb who died for them in Egypt), unleavened bread (since they didn't have time to let the bread rise they ate unleavened bread for 7 days). And charoseth, a picture of the clay used to make bricks.

10. MIDDLE MATZO BROKEN (Yachutz xj MATZAH = hxm) The next activity centered on the matzo. Matzo is bread without leaven in it. Leaven is a microscopic bacteria which is placed in 'yeast.' When exposed to water and warmth the bacteria rapidly grows. It causes a fermentation which produces a gas. This process will continue until the dough is sour and ruined unless the bacteria is killed by baking. Thus leaven is a picture of sin (I Cor 5:7). It starts small, hidden, unseen, but unless it is killed it will grow and destroy everything.

Therefore the matzo became a picture of Jesus Himself – without any sin. It was round, without beginning or end. It was pierced in the shape of a cross. This helped dissipate the heat in the baking process, but also speaks of Jesus. The same word is used of Jesus being pierced for our sins (Zech 12:10; Isa 53:5).

On the Sabbath the Jews would eat 2 matzo's, double the normal portion,. For this was a special day. On Passover they would eat 3. Three in the Bible stands for God - the Trinity. The



Jews today take these 3 matzo and make what is called a 'unity' with them. No one is sure when or why this practice began, but it is a beautiful picture of Jesus.

The three matzo are placed on a pile, with a napkin between each and on the top and bottom. These stand for God the father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The middle matzo (picturing God the Son) is removed from the other two, as when God left heaven and came to earth as Jesus (the Incarnation). Then this middle matzo is broken in two, a picture of Christ's body, pierced and broken for our sin. The first half is put back between the other two matzo picturing Jesus' spirit going immediately to heaven at death. The other half is wrapped in a linen napkin and hidden in a dark place until the third cup. A child (or the youngest person) at the table takes this and hides it until later. This pictures Jesus' body wrapped in linen and buried until the third day. The rest of the significance of this will be explained when we get to that place. Isn't this a beautiful picture of Jesus? We don't know if Jesus did this or the practice started later, but what a wonderful way it is of teaching about Jesus.

11. STORY OF THE EXODUS (Maggid 'Ma-GEED' d g m) The story of the Exodus is told, often in response to the four questions asked about why this night is different.

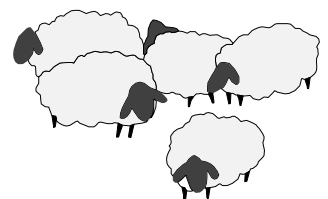
12. THE FOUR QUESTIONS (Ma Nishtanah 'Ma Nish-TA-nah') The youngest at the table here asks why this night is different from other nights. "When your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them..." (Ex 12:26). John was the youngest at Jesus' table, and would have been the one to initiate this phase of teaching.

"Why is this night different from all other nights? On all other nights we eat either leavened or unleavened bread; why on this night do we only eat matzo which is unleavened bread? On all other nights we eat vegetables and herbs of all kinds; why on this night do we eat only bitter herbs? On all other nights we never think of dipping herbs in water or in anything else; why on this night do we dip the lettuce in salt water and the bitter herbs in charoseth? On all other nights we eat either sitting upright or reclining, why on this night do we all recline?"

The leader replies: "I am glad you asked these questions. This night is different from all other nights because on this night we celebrate the going forth of the Jewish people from slavery into freedom. Why do we eat only matzo tonight? When Pharaoh let our forefathers go from Egypt they were forced to flee in great haste. They had no time to bake their bread and could not wait for the yeast to rise. The sun which beat down on the dough as they carried it along baked it into unleavened bread called matzo. Why do we eat bitter herbs tonight? Because our forefathers were slaves in Egypt and their lives were made very bitter. Why do we dip the herbs twice tonight? We dip lettuce in salt water because it reminds us of the green of springtime. We dip the herbs in sweet charoseth to remind us that our forefathers were able to withstand bitter slavery, because it was sweetened by the hope of freedom. Why do we recline at table? Because reclining was a sign of a free man long ago, and since our forefathers were freed on this night, we recline at the table."

I don't know how much detail Jesus went into here, or what else He taught, but certainly the centrality of the lamb must be brought out. The very first name/title attributed to Jesus when He first presented Himself for public ministry was 'Lamb.' "Behold the **Lamb of God**, Who takes away the sins of the world" John the Baptizer had said. Philip (Acts 8:32-35), Paul (I Cor 5:7) and Peter (I Peter 1:19) also referred to Jesus as the Passover lamb.

This would have had great significance to his listeners, since sheep were an important part of their daily lives. They were valuable animals, used for food (meat, milk, cheese) and material (wool, skins). They were used for sacrifice, too.



After the first sin in Eden, God (God the Son, always the Person of the Trinity Who appears to man) **shed innocent blood to cover sin**. From then on Adam, Able, Noah, Job, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and all God's people did this. It was God's way of teaching them that innocent blood must be shed to cover sin. When Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac, God provided a ram substitute (Genesis 22), showing that innocent animal's blood is a substitute for the blood of the one who sinned. This is even more clearly taught in the story of the Passover lamb (Exodus 12:1-13).

First, the **lamb was chosen** on the 10th of Nisan. Sheep are gentle, innocent, meek, dependent, defenseless animals. This pictures how Jesus was when taken to die for our sins. The lamb had to be unblemished, in perfect condition, speaking of Jesus' sinlessness. It had to be a male in the prime of life (one year), also peaking of Jesus. It was set aside 4 days, Nisan 10 to 14, to make sure it was sinless. Jesus ministered publicly almost 4 years, showing all He was sinless and perfect.



Then the **lamb was killed** on Nisan 14, It didn't do them any good alive. It had to die. Jesus' perfect life doesn't do anything to get us salvation, it only condemns us by showing us that a perfect life could be lived. The substitute for sin must die to pay for sin. "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins." The owner would place his hands on the sheep, signifying transfer of the sin of the man to the animal. Because it was not guilty of sin, it had to die. "The souls that sins must die." It was to be killed on Nisan 14, 3 PM – the exact day and time that Jesus died upon the cross!

After being killed, the **blood was applied** to the sides and tops of the door post. It was the blood that caused the angel of death to 'Pass Over' the house. It wasn't the good works of those inside, nor their jewels, their gold, their skills or talents. It was only the blood, Man's good works are like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6), like dung heap rubbish (Phil 3:8). Only the blood saves. The blood was applied where all could see, it was a public testimony. The lamb was killed on the doorstep, where the blood was collected. Then it was applied to the top and sides of the door. Connect these and you have a picture of a cross, with the blood where Jesus died: crown of thorns on head, nails through wrists and feet. It was this blood that protected against deserved judgment. After being applied the people would enter 'through the blood' and stay inside all night. Any who applied the blood were safe, Jew or Egyptian, any who did not suffered the death of all firstborn males and cattle. The Jews were as deserving of death as the Egyptians, even more so because they were much more accountable. All this is a picture of how we are safe because of Jesus' blood (Eph 1:7; I John 1:7; Heb 9:12; Rev 1:5; Rom 5:8-9).

The blood of these animals didn't remove sin, it just covered it until Jesus' blood came along to wash it away. The animals blood was like putting a throw rug over a stain in a rug until the right rug cleaner (the blood of Jesus) can be found to take the stain out.

Finally, after being killed and the blood applied, the **lamb was eaten**. It wasn't killed to be looked at, but to personally identify with. It provided the nourishment and sustenance they would need for the journey which was before them. We need to feed on Jesus too, eat his flesh and drink His blood as He commands (John 6:53-57) to be strengthened and nourished for our spiritual journey. The Jews had to do that the same night, they couldn't wait. The lamb had to be roasted, not boiled in water – it had to not only die but face the fires of hell, as Jesus did for us.



Then for the next 7 days the Jews were to eat nothing but **unleavened bread** (Exodus 13). God was telling them that the first lesson they had to learn after salvation (Passover lamb) was the importance of avoiding sin, of living holy lives for Him.

Why is this night different from all others? Because it teaches about the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world – Jesus the Messiah.

13. CUP #2 - JUDGMENT Cup 2 stands for God's judgment on the sin of the Egyptians. "I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go." (Exodus 3:19-20) This culminated with the death of the firstborn. "On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn -- both men and animals -- and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt; I am the Lord." (Ex 12:12) When the Egyptians filled up their cup of iniquity the judgment of God fell on them and drowned them in the Red Sea, and this is the cup of Judgments.



The Jews thank God for this deliverance by giving tribute to His marvelous acts. This is called the DAYENU ("We would Have Been Satisfied") ('die-AYE-new'). The leader says the first statement and the others then respond with 'dayenu' ('we would have been satisfied').

"If He had merely rescued us from Egypt, but had not punished the Egyptians - DAYENU

"If He had merely punished the Egyptians, but had not destroyed their gods - DAYENU

"If He had merely destroyed their gods, but had not slain their first-born -DAYENU

"If He had merely slain their first-born, but had not given us their property -DAYENU

"If He had merely given us their property but had not brought us through on dry ground - DAYENU

"If He had merely brought us through on dry ground, but had not drowned our oppressors -DAYENU

"If He had merely drowned our oppressors, but had not supplied us in the desert for forty years - DAYENU

"If He had merely supplied us in the desert for forty years, but had not fed us with manna - DAYENU

"If He had merely fed us with manna, but had not given us the Sabbath - DAYENU

"If He had merely given us the Sabbath, but had not brought us to Mount Sinai - DAYENU

"If He had merely brought us to Mount Sinai, but had not given us the Torah - DAYENU

"If He had merely given us the Torah, but had not brought us to the land of Israel - DAYENU

"If He had merely brought us to the land of Israel, but had not built us the Temple - DAYENU.

Then the leader picks up and blessed the cup: "Blessed are You, Lord, our God, ruler of the Universe, creator of the fruit of the vine!" All drink the cup and pass it around



14. HALLEL (PSALM 113-114) (Hallel aḥ) "Hallel" is the name given to psalms of praise starting with "Hallelujah" (which means "Praise God."). Here Psalm 113 and 114 are recited responsively. Some of these verses must have had tremendous significance for Jesus. "Praise, O servants of the Lord, praise the name of the Lord. Let the name of the Lord be praised, both now and forevermore .From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets ,the name of the Lord is to be praised. The Lord is exalted over all the nations, His glory above the heavens. Who is like the Lord our God the One who sits enthroned on high, Who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth? He raises the poor from the dust & lifts the needy from the ash heap, he seats them with princes, with princes of their people. He settles the barren woman in her home as a happy mother of children. Praise the Lord."

15. HAND WASHING #2 (Rachatz רַחֲצָה) Hands are now washed to be clean to eat the meal. This blessing is given by the leader: "Blessed are You, O Lord our God, Ruler of the world, who made us holy by His commandments and commanded us concerning the washing of hands."

16. MATZO IS EATEN (Matzo מַצּוֹ) The matzo unity (the 3 standing for the Trinity) is brought out. The blessing is said: "Blessed are You, O Lord our God, Ruler of the world, King of the Universe, Who brings forth bread from the earth." The leader breaks olive-sized pieces off the middle (and upper if necessary) gives them to everyone. They say another blessing: "Blessed Are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us concerning the eating of unleavened bread." They all eat together

17. BITTER HERBS (HORSERADISH) (Maror 'MA-roar' מָרּוֹר) Horseradish stands for the bitterness of Egyptian bondage, persecution and suffering. "So the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly. They made their bitter with hard labor in brick and mortar and all kinds of work in the fields." (Ex 1:12) Everyone got another olive-sized piece of matzo from the bottom matzo. Blessing said by leader: "Blessed are You, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe, Who sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us concerning the eating of bitter herbs." Everyone then dipped piece of matzo into the horseradish and ate.

18. CHAROSETH (Kharoset 'Ha-RO-seth' חָרוֹסֶת) *like clearing throat (chhh) Leader takes 2 olive-size pieces of matzo from the bottom and picks up charoseth between them, like a sandwich. Charoseth: reddish-brown mixture of chopped apples, nuts, spices, etc. representing the clay from which the slaves made their bricks. In Jesus' day they also mixed in figs, nuts, dates, pomegranates, almonds, and cinnamon bark or tube (to remind them of the straw they mixed with the clay bricks). The sweet taste reminds them of servitude as prelude to sweetness of redemption. Even the most bitter of circumstances can be sweetened by the hope we have in God. It is always darkest before the dawn! The matzo given out by leader, then dish of charoseth passed around.

Jesus made a special gesture of honor and love to Judas for He dipped and handed this to him (called the "sop"). This is where the account of Judas's betrayal and Peter's denials being predicted fit in (Mt. 26:15-21; 31-35; Mk. 14:18-21, 17-31; Lk. 22:21-23,31-38; Jn. 13:18-38). Heavy on His heart was the coming crucifixion and all it meant: separation and rejection from God the Father. First, though was the coming rejection by those He loved: Judas, Peter and all His disciples.



"One of you will deliver me up" Jesus said. They all started asking "Is it I?" They felt guilty over their rebuke for pride and ambition and ashamed that He had to wash their feet. They didn't trust themselves. Even Judas asked, "Master, is it I?" Jesus told Him it would be the one to whom He gave the special matzo and charoseth. When Jesus gave this to Judas, Judas immediately left, knowing Jesus knew what he was planning. Peter missed what was said, though, since everyone was talking at once, and continued to deny that he would ever deny Jesus (Luke 22:31-33). Jesus tried to warn him so he would be prepared, telling Peter that he would deny Jesus 3 times before the rooster crowed (Luke 22:34). Peter just wouldn't believe Jesus, some things have to be learned the hard way.

Now that Judas is gone, though, Jesus can get into His deep teachings about crucifixion and resurrection. He wouldn't 'cast His pearls before swine' by going over these things with Judas present. He knows that the clock leading up to His arrest has started ticking when Judas left and His time is limited, for Judas was going to the authorities at that very time.

19. MEAL IS EATEN (Shulchan Orech 'sho-CANE o-RECH' שולחן / עֶרֶךְ / שֶׁחֵחַ) Jews today eat a full course gourmet meal; appetizer, soup, chicken/turkey/kid/lamb, etc. If lamb, it is partly boiled and partly roasted so it doesn't resemble the sacrificed lamb as they can no longer sacrifice. What they are thus eating, in effect, is the Feast of Unleavened Bread; for since AD 70 it stopped being the Passover. Today they use an egg (roasted) which they cut and dip in salt water to lament the fact they have no place to offer sacrifices for sin. Thus what the Jews today observe is a Seder, not the Passover. There can be no real Passover without a sacrificial lamb, and God stopped the sacrificial system when the temple was destroyed in 70 AD.

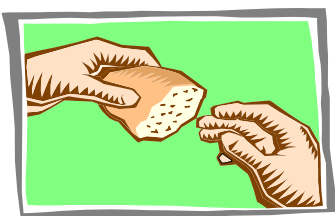
Mealtime is a good time for conversation, and Jesus used this time to comfort His disciples. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going." ... Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" ... Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever -- the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.. ... All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.... These things I have spoken to you, that you may have peace in me. In the world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.!" John 14:1-6, 15-18, 25-27, 16:33

20. AFIKOMEN EATEN (Tzaphun 'Tsa-FOON' / צַפּוּן - name of the ceremony) ('ah-fee-KO-men') This is the final food of the Passover meal, so this will be the last taste left in the mouth (very significant to the Jews). The hidden (buried) Afikomen (1/2 of the middle of the 3 matzos) is found and ransomed (redeemed) - (price paid to whoever finds it, like Jesus ransomed us with His blood. The youngest person at the table, who hid it, is paid to find it and bring it back. This 'redeeming,' 'buying back,' is the word used to buy back one's slave if they ran away. It pictures man running away from His Creator into sin, being bought back by the price paid by Jesus on the cross.



Finding and unwrapping this afikomen pictures Jesus, the true Bread of Life and Manna of God, coming back to light/life on the third day (here the third cup). Jesus Himself made this analogy. With this Jesus instituted the bread of the Lord's Supper: "This is my body."

Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and broke it and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat: **This is my body**." (Mt 26:26) He voluntarily "took it," No one forced Him. "Jesus made Himself of no reputation and took on the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of man." (Phil 2:7). He said "this is my body." It represents His body, it doesn't become His literal body, that was obvious to those with Him in the upper room that night.



Then He "blessed it." He sanctified it, set it apart for a specific purpose, as He Himself was set apart for the purpose of redemption since He was born.

Then He "broke it" – He did it Himself, it wasn't done by the Romans or the Jews or anyone else. "No man takes my life from Me, but I lay it down of Myself." (Jn 10:18) He Himself was the ultimate provision for man, the fulfillment of all the animal substitutes like the Ram for Isaac (Genesis 22). Abraham

didn't have to kill his son, God stopped his arm, because, on that same mountain, God killed His own son. There was no more possibility of a replacement, Jesus was the replacement – for each one of us.

After breaking it Jesus “gave it” to each one who would receive it. “He gave his Life a ransom for many.” (Mt 20:28) It was a free, unconditional gift. All they had to do was not reject it, just receive what Jesus offered. They put their hand out and He filled it. The same is true of salvation. Just put your heart out and let Him fill it. Have you received this free gift of Salvation He so generously wants to give to you?

21. CUP # 3 - REDEMPTION (Boraych ירֵב) The cup is filled again.

This is the cup of redemption. Pouring a picture of Jesus' blood poured out, shed for us. Number 3 stands for deity. This is where Jesus instituted the cup of the Lord's Supper for He said “This is My blood.” This act ended the Old Testament, and the rule of the law. This act started the New Testament, and the rule of grace. Up to now the Passover stood for physical deliverance from Egypt, from now on it was replaced by the Lord's Supper which stands for spiritual deliverance from sin.

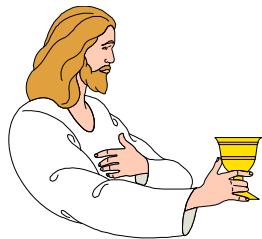


“Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. **This is My blood** of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.”

First He “took it” voluntarily. Imagine what went through Jesus' heart/mind as freely picked this up.... Last time He dealt with this same cup He asked God to take it from Him. He will ask once again in Gethsemane “O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.” On the cross He'll say “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” He could have rejected it, poured it out or turned from it, for it represented all of our sins – but He didn't.

Then He said “This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” The juice was the blood of the grape, a picture of blood. It was crushed from the grape by an olive press, which in Greek is “Gethsemane.” Jesus next stop that night would be in a place called Gethsemane because it was used as a place to crush the juice from grapes and olives. What happened figuratively there would literally happen to Him as the pressure began. It caused blood to come out with His sweat, so great was the pressure. “The Lord was pleased to CRUSH Him, to put Him to GRIEF.” (Isa 53:10) “...bruised...crushed...poured out” (Isaiah 53) “The life of the flesh is in the blood” (Lev 17:11) “without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. (Heb 9:22)

He then did a strange thing, He “gave thanks” for this! How could He give thanks for that which represented his death, for God's wrath poured out on Him? For one thing, this was God's will, done for God's glory, and He was committed to that (John 4:34; 12:27-28). Then, too, He looked ahead to the future joy He would receive after the cross (Heb 12:2; Psalm 16:9-10) instead of focusing in on the present price to be paid (a good principle for us to follow as well). Mainly, though, He did it for us. “For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” (Mt 26:28)



It was this shed blood that paid for the new “covenant” which He was making, one based on grace instead of law. The issue at stake was eternal salvation. The terms were that God would provide all that was necessary for eternal life with God, all man had to do was accept it. there were no conditions, it was unconditional and can never be rescinded or made null. The length of effectiveness of this covenant is forever.

Blood was the price paid to make the covenant good, the price paid. Blood is a sign of life. Physically blood cleanses the body as it flows through it, and spiritually it cleanses us of sin, too.

Next Jesus “gave it to them” free and unconditionally, for them to just receive it.

He told them to “drink all of it.” They were to drink deeply, fully, totally. It would quench their spiritual thirst and meet all their needs and desires. It sustains spiritually, just as fluids sustain the body physically. It refreshes, as blood does when we are weak. It renews, we need a constant flow of Jesus as well as our own physical blood. It cleanses, physically flushing our system and removing impurities. It revives and brings strength. There is no substitute for blood - ours or Jesus’.

The disciple’s response to all of this was that they drank it.” They personally accepted what He offered them so freely. It pictured their salvation – freely accepting His work for them. What a meaningful, moving time that was for them. From now on the Passover would be different. Instead of referring to the number one Old Testament event, their physical deliverance from Egypt, now it would refer to the number one Bible event, our spiritual deliverance from sin and Satan. Truly this was a profound moment.



22. ELIJAH'S PLACE The Jews believe that when the Messiah comes He will come during the Feast of Passover, and he will be preceded by Elijah (Malachi 4:5). This prophecy was fulfilled by John the Baptizer. Throughout the Passover meal today a place at one end of the table is vacant, and the front door slightly open. The best cup is set by this place. At the end of the service someone is sent to the door and the sad report comes back, "I don't see him tonight, He's not coming. Perhaps he will come next year." There is no mention of this at Jesus' last supper. Christ may have occupied the place the disciples set for Elijah and drunk that cup, further showing He IS the longed-for Messiah!

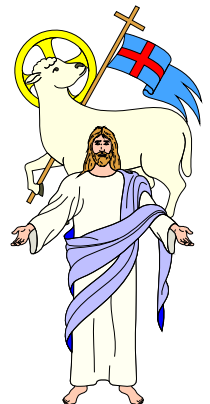
23. CUP # 4 - PRAISE This cup stands for when Jesus returns to regather Israel. It was NOT drunk by Christ that evening, for it won't be fulfilled until He returns the second time, as a Lion instead of a Lamb (Revelation 19).



24. HALLEL (Psalm 115-118) (Hallel 'Ha-LAY-el' lllh) "They sang a song as they left" - only reference to Jesus singing (did other times, though)

Then they sung all or part of **Psalm 115-118** (especially 118), which would have been very meaningful to Christ at this time. “Open for me the gates of righteousness; I will enter and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter. I will give you thanks, for you answered me; You have become my salvation. The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.; The Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

25. CONCLUSION Jews today say "Next Year In Jerusalem" as promise, hope of future with Messiah. Jesus didn't say this, He knew what the future would bring. What He wants us to say is “Even so Lord Jesus, come.” We look forward to soon being in the New Jerusalem! Will you be there? Have you accepted this free gift?



31. THE DAY THEY ARRESTED GOD

By Bartholomew

**The Life
of JESUS**
From Birth to Resurrection
By Jerry Schroyer Copyright © 1999

When Jesus forced Judas' hand at the Passover meal and told him He knew he was going to betray Him it threw the religious leader's plans way off. They wanted to wait until AFTER the Passover to act against Jesus for then all the out of town visitors would be gone. However when they discovered they had lost their only inside man, and they had already paid for his services, their hate pushed them to act instead of waiting.

Realizing He wasn't in the Upper Room, Judas led the mob to Gethsemane where Jesus had been spending the nights lately. It was as if Jesus purposely went there to be discovered. My name is Bartholomew, a disciple of Jesus. I was with them that night and I'd like to tell you about it. I'll never forget it, neither should you!

THE WALK TO GETHSEMANE When our Passover was over, Jesus said something strange about the "evil prince of this world approaching" (John 14:30). We didn't understand it at the time, but later it all fit together.

As we left and walked through the streets of town we sang Passover Psalms (113-118). Presently Jesus started teaching the disciples about our need of Him as the vine (John 15-16). He talked about difficult times that would be coming but said the Holy Spirit would be with us. We asked questions and He answered them.

Then we were about to cross the Kidron, normally dry but a bubbling creek in the spring. Jesus paused and watched the water. It did look different, somehow darker. Then we remembered. The slaughter of the ¼ million Passover lambs had begun in the temple and the blood drained through a channel cut in the rock to the Kidron. Seeing the innocent blood of those lambs really hit Jesus hard. I remembered John the Baptizer pointing Him out as the "lamb of God" and He Himself saying He was the Good Shepherd who lay down His life for the sheep.

Jesus must have been thinking the same thing, for He soon started praying as we walked (John 17). He prayed for Himself, that He would do God's will. He prayed that we disciples would be faithful, and He prayed for disciples in future ages to be safe and protected. It was a serious, moving time.

GETHSEMANE By the time we arrived at Gethsemane, however, we were all very tired. It had been a long day. Those of us who were first-born had fasted, then we had a big meal in a stuffy room, now we were relaxed and very tired. Gethsemane was a good place to sleep. It was a place where olives and grapes were crushed between large stones in the fall, extracting the juice from them. The rest of the year it was a rich man's retreat from the heat of Jerusalem. The owner of this particular plot had given Jesus the key so He could use it at will. He had been sleeping in the cave the last several nights instead of going back to Bethany. It gave Him privacy and more time to pray.

THE LONELY BATTLE It soon became evident, though, that Jesus wasn't going to be doing any sleeping that night. He didn't want us to sleep, either, but to pray so we wouldn't fall into temptation. Even in such trying times for Himself, His love for us caused Him to think of us and our needs first.

We watched Him go apart and pray, and it was obvious He was in agony. He was overwhelmed with grief, swept with unrest. Obviously a great battle was going on. He fell to the ground and cried a loud, long and deeply (Heb 5:7). He lay face down, then got up and staggered a bit, only to fall down in prayer again. I felt like I was intruding on His privacy by watching, but couldn't tear my eyes away. "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as You will" He kept crying over and over.

Angels appeared. Some drove back the demons who were tormenting Him, others comforted and ministered to Him. Then they were gone and the battle resumed, but He seemed to have more strength to battle. It was a cold night but He was profusely sweating. The sweat was darker than water. I realized there was blood mixed with it! He was under so much pressure that the tiny capillaries in His skin were

breaking. I looked at the olive press nearby – it was the same thing. The anticipation of bearing our sins was starting to crush the life blood out of Him.

Do you understand what the struggle was all about? Jesus was perfect, He had never experienced sin, guilt or separation from God, things we live with every day. He naturally drew back from identification with our sins, but He did it out of love for us. That was the only reason I could think of for Him going through with this – for me.

JUDAS ARRIVES I couldn't stay awake any longer but fell asleep. Before I knew it He was shaking me awake. Surely it wasn't morning already? It was still dark, but the sounds and lights from a large group of men coming from Jerusalem were visible in the distance. They were headed this way. What was happening? Jesus just stayed and watched them come. My first impulse was to flee, and I'm sure that thought crossed His mind, too, but He didn't do it.

It seemed strange to have so many religious rulers and soldiers coming with Judas. It was also unusual for him to give Jesus such a familiar, long kiss. What happened to his respect for our Master? Jesus seemed to know things weren't right, but still reached out to Judas in love instead of rejecting him.

Obviously the kiss was a signal of some sort, but Jesus took control before the rest of the mob reached Him. "Who do you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they said. No charges were read, no warrant presented. When Jesus readily admitted "I Am He" everyone stepped backwards, fell to the ground, and was pinned there. Even Satan-indwelt Judas was stuck to his back. Just the force of His eternal name Yahweh, which was embedded in the "I Am" He spoke, had more power than they could resist. He was showing them Who He really was so they wouldn't make a mistake that would have eternal consequences for them. He released the power and they stood up. When He asked them again who they wanted it was as if they hadn't experienced this awesome power. How could they not learn anything from it?

By saying they just wanted Him, Jesus was covering for us, so we wouldn't be arrested as well. He knew we couldn't have withstood the test. His love for us again put our needs before His own. I wonder how many other times He had done that, too, but I hadn't noticed.

Peter rushed past with a table knife from the Passover, trying to attack the Romans and set Jesus free. Later we realized this was Satan's way of starting a riot so we would all be killed right away. Then He couldn't have gone to cross and paid for our sins before dying! Or at least Jesus could have slipped away during the confusion and been safe, but again He wouldn't have paid for our sins on the cross on Passover day. Jesus saw through it, though, and quieted the whole disturbance. He even healed the man's ear where Peter had attacked him. He told us if He wanted to escape He'd could call hundreds of thousands of angels.

DISCIPLES FLEE All this was too much. We turned and fled back into the trees. I completely forgot my promise never to desert Him. I looked back for one last glimpse before ducking behind a tree. They had thrown Jesus to the ground and were tying His hands and feet with ropes and chains.

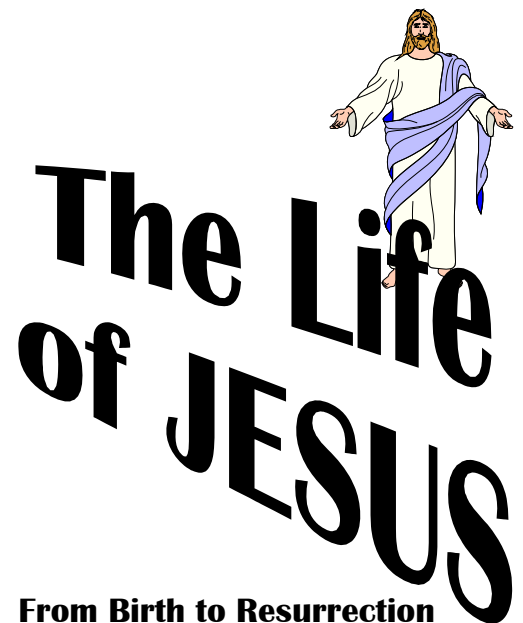
Tears fell as I fled. Why did this happen? Why did He allow it? Couldn't He have escaped? Of course He could! In the first place, He could have not come to the one place Judas would look. He could have walked away while we slept. He could have left His enemies pinned to the ground, or even slipped away in Peter's riot. He could have called angels to deliver Him. Why didn't He?

The only reason is that He loved us. He loved me. He loved you. He did it for our sakes. It wasn't the nails that held Him to the cross, it was His love for us. What a great, unconditional, wonderful love that is! If He loved us that much before we became children of His, how much must He love us now?

Do you experience His love for you? Do you allow Him to show you that love? Are you aware of the many things He does for you because He loves you? Do you respond to that love by loving Him back? Do you love Him more than anything or anyone else? Even family? Even self? His love is available to all who come to Him for it.

32. BROKENNESS

By Peter



From Birth to Resurrection

By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1998

My story is similar to that of a seed (John 12:23-24). Before planting it is hard and unproductive. When it is buried in the ground a process begins that leads to eventual fruit. Darkness and dampness cause the harness to begin to soften. I, too, had to go through trials and difficulties to soften. I was hard and unproductive for I was in control of my own life. I had to die to myself to be useful to Jesus. It took pain and suffering to do it.

After time is spent in darkness and dampness, a seek begins to enlarge. It gets beyond its own limits. Then a chemical change takes place. Starch changes into sugar. I had to bet beyond my own limits, too. That which was coarse and unappealing (starch) had to be changed to sugar in me, too.

As a seed enlarges it eventually breaks open. God broke me out of my mold and habits. That's when growth starts. First a root grows. This anchors the seed and provides stability and a source of nourishment. It wasn't until I died to myself that I could put my roots in Jesus and His Word.

Up to now everything that happens to a seed happens underground, out of sight, inside. Then it becomes evident to all. A little shoot appears. There is evidence of life. Eventually it grows and fruit is produced (Galatians 5:22-23). When you read about me in the book of Acts you'll find a new, a different person. God had to break me before He could use me. I always depended on myself to do what needed doing. God had to break me to teach me to depend on Him, knowing that only then would I be useful.

THE PROBLEM At the Last Supper I told Jesus He was wrong, that I would NOT deny Him. I knew I wouldn't. I thought I could do whatever I wanted but that wasn't true. I was acting in my own strength, and that always got me into trouble. When I attacked the crowd in Gethsemane to set Jesus free I was acting in my own strength again. Actually, I found out later, I was playing right into Satan's hands for such an uprising would have gotten Jesus killed then and there. We would have been killed, too, and Jesus wouldn't have purchased our salvation on the cross!

When Jesus reprimanded and corrected me, I saw I had failed him. As was my way, I ran away from my mistakes. I completely forgot my promise to not desert him and fled into the trees with the other disciples. I ran and hid with John. Later I found out what happened and pieced together what we heard.

THE TRIAL 1 Jesus was roughly tied and dragged across the Kidron, red with blood from the Passover lambs which were being slaughtered in the Temple. In through the sheep gate He went, to His own slaughtering. First He was taken to Annas where he was to be tried, found guilty, and executed. However the only 'witness' they had, Judas, had deserted them. The trial was a mockery of justice. It was illegal to charge a criminal at night or on the eve of a festival. Prior notice had to be given of a trial, and there was no quorum of judges.

The high priest was to be the accused's defender, not accuser. It wasn't a trial, just a murder plot! They questioned Jesus, looking for a trap to destroy Him. When He politely refused they struck Him in the face with a stick.

Denial 1 Meanwhile I was outside. I couldn't stay away. I drug John along to find out what was going on, but I was doing it all on my own strength – no prayer or anything. That's why, when the girl who let people in, thought I was one of Jesus' disciples, I denied without even thinking. You see, it caught me off guard. I wasn't expecting it then, there. I realized as soon as I said the words, though, that all my heroic promises were gone. My confidence in my self was shaken. I was just an arrogant coward!

Later, when I looked back, I could see that it wasn't really that event that caused my sin. My problem had started long before. That was just the culmination of it. It really started at the meal when, in my pride and self-confidence, wouldn't let Jesus wash my feet and insisted He was wrong about my coming denial. Then in Gethsemane, instead of taking His advice and praying, I slept. The attack on Malchus should have alerted me to the fact that I was not depending on His strength, but just doing what I thought

was right in my own power. Then, I never should have been hanging around the courtyard with Jesus' enemies. That denial shook me, but didn't break me.

TRIAL 2 Meanwhile, Jesus was taken to another part of the same home where Caiaphas held another court session. Caiaphas was Annas' son-in-law, the figure-head High priest, whom Annas controlled. He was a sly manipulator and self-centered opportunist. Some of the chief priests and teachers of the law were there, but no witnesses. How could they get Rome's approval for execution if there were no witnesses, and no real charges. False witnesses were paid to come forward and tell whatever they could, but even then no two could be found to agree about anything. Witnesses were needed to prove any charge as well as to throw the first stone. Finally they remembered when He said, "I am able to destroy this temple and in three days will build another." He was referring to His body but they twisted it to mean a threat to destroy their temple. When Jesus didn't deny He was God their had their pretense: They condemned Him to death for claiming to be God.

He was physically abused. They spit in His face, slapped Him, smashed His face with their fists and blindfolded Him before hitting Him. Then they mockingly challenged Him to 'prophecy who hit you.'

Denial 2 I could hear the uproar start where I was in the courtyard. People at the windows watched and yelled. I was at the fire warming my hands with the same ones I had attacked in Gethsemane. The servant girl, who was now off duty at the gate, walked by and angrily accused me of being with Jesus. I don't think she was bothered that I was a disciple, but that I had called her a liar. Again I denied her accusations. It was obvious everyone believed her and not me. Eventually the conversation turned to other things, though, and I felt relieved. Then it happened.

Denial 3 The group nearby kept talking louder and louder, looking and pointing at me. they were loud enough for everyone to hear. They recognized me as a Galilean by my dress and accent (I just couldn't keep my mouth shut!). I could tell the servant girl was there, egging them on. And then I saw a relative of Malchus there, and knew he recognized me! Cold sweat broke out on my skin, despite the chill of the night. Have you ever noticed how your sins come back to haunt you? I cursed and swore to convince them I wasn't a follower of Jesus.

But then I hear a rooster crow, and I remembered. Just as the scales fell off my eyes and an awful awareness of what I had done arose in me heart, I noticed some movement out of the corner of my eye. Someone was being led through the courtyard to another room. His face was black and blue and covered with spit. His eyes were swollen shut and blood dripped from His face and scalp. He looked awful! Then I recognized Him, something about the way He carried Himself when He walked. I knew Him. It was Jesus. He glanced over at me and time stood still. Our eyes locked for an instant, and I read deep pain there. I knew it wasn't from the physical beating but from my words. Those closest to you can hurt you more by their rejection than any stranger can ever hurt your body!

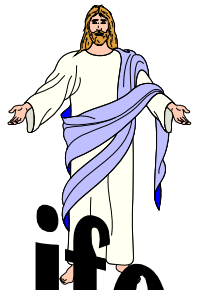
The reality of it all hit home like a ton of bricks! What I'd bragged, what I'd done – I could see it all clearly for the first time. Me – the bragger and failure. Immediately He was shoved on, and those by the fire left to follow to the new trial site. I ran out the gate weeping.

I wept profusely, loud, long and bitterly that night. Long after I was out of tears I kept crying. I couldn't stop. I had failed at my strong point. The guilt and failure of it all was too real. Instead of protecting Him I hurt Him. He was right! I was broken.

TRAIL 3 Later I found out that the third religious trial, by the Sanhedrin, was just to rubber stamp the decision that had already been made. Details were taken care of to present their weak case to Pilate.

During all this time I roamed the streets. I looked awful and felt worse! Always before I could blame someone else, let Jesus bail me out, and convince myself I would do better next time. None of that happened this time. I hit bottom. I was broken. If I couldn't depend on myself, who could I depend on? Then it hit me! That was exactly what He was trying to teach me. I had to stop depending on myself and depend totally and only on Him!

A couple days later I heard He was alive, and He sought me out and reassured me that He still loved me. Can you believe that? Despite my failure He still loved me! Who can understand that kind of love? Not me! That whole experience was the worst thing that ever happened to me. But you know what, it was also the best. Has it happened to you? Has your self will been broken so you totally depend on and live in His strength? Like a wild horse, you won't serve your master until you are broken.



33. “I JUST FLOGGED A GOD!”

By Pilate

The Life of JESUS

From Birth to Resurrection

By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1998

Those Jews had to be the worst people on the face of the earth to rule! They were arrogant, self-righteous, stubborn, manipulative, sneaky and deceitful. They would take but not give. Hey wouldn't face you man to man like us Romans. We hated them as much as they hated us, maybe even more!

We took away their freedoms and privileges, taxed them heavily, and didn't allow them to execute anyone without permission. That's why they got me involved in their miserable murder plot! Oh how I hate them! It was the worst thing I ever did! It was the biggest mistake of my life and changed everything, on this earth and for all eternity! I am Pilate. This is my story.

TRIAL 4 I was a successful career soldier who was rewarded by being made governor of Judea. However I was better at leading soldiers into battle than in politics and governing others.

The day I was talking about started like any other day, but it didn't stay that way long. I'll never forget it. It was Friday, April 3, 33 AD. The 6 AM night report from the duty officer spoke of an arrest in Gethsemane. Then I was informed of the arrival of the religious leaders and a mob of people. They had a bloody, beaten-up man with them. Why would they come to me on this, the day of their Passover, when they knew being in my presence would make them unclean and unable to partake? It must be very important to them. When they wouldn't come in, I made my first mistake by going out to talk to them. From then on they had the upper hand. That first compromise set the pattern for the whole day. One little compromise leads to awful results!

You must remember that my past conflicts with the Jews didn't turn out too well. Twice I had riots on my hands, and each time they tattled to Rome about my treatment of them. Rome told me to keep things quiet or I was out! That mean that if they complained again Rome would replace me. Truly that gave them leverage to get their own way, and they knew it and used it!

Anyway, back to this man they brought in. Imagine the audacity of them – they didn't have any real charges against Him! They just wanted me to sign a blank check so they could do whatever they wished! I gave approval for a Jewish trial – but it turns out they had already had their trial! What they wanted was approval for execution.

They came up with some charges about Him being anti-government and anti-taxes – but they were all guilty of that themselves. Then they said He claimed to be a king, which made Him a threat to Caesar. I couldn't believe that. He seemed incapable of harm, but the charges were too serious to ignore if there was some truth to them.

I should have ended it all right there but I didn't. My pride kept me from giving in to them, but my fear kept me from turning them away. When I asked the prisoner if He was a king, He said He was! Knowing I had to investigate further I brought Him inside. He said He was a king, but not any threat to Rome. He had some other kind of Kingdom He was king of. What a confusing mess! I'd much rather be leading troops into battle than doing this!

When I told the Jews I found no reason to have Him executed I should have turned my back on it all. Instead I listened to their yelling and threats. Looking for a way out without I decided to turn the matter over to Herod, since I heard them say He was from Galilee. I know that was wrong and Herod had no authority, but perhaps it could get me off the hook.

TRAIL 5 At first Herod was fearful He was John come back to life to torment him for having him beheaded, but when he realized that wasn't the case he and his soldiers mocked and abused the prisoner and sent him back to me. Herod found no guilt of any crime in him.

TRIAL 6 I was really disappointed when I was informed Herod had returned Him to me. Herod was so impressed by my offer, though, that the rift between us was mended. I didn't care.

While He was going I had conferred with my intelligence officers and found out the man's name was Jeshua (Jesus). He supposedly did miracles and claimed to be God's Messiah. The people had rejected Him on Lamb Selection Day when He rode into town on a donkey with some waving palm branches and acclaiming Him Messiah and God.

Don't misunderstand me, I'm was no religious person, but like all Romans I was very superstitious and I wasn't going to mess with any 'god.' So I asked the religious rulers to just let Him go since Herod didn't find any guilt in Him, either. I wasn't surprised when they wouldn't.

By this time I was getting frustrated and impatient. The rulers were obviously in a big hurry to get this done and I wasn't moving fast enough. They had paid a large number of people to gather and pressure me. That's when I realized another compromise I might make.

I tried to have them take Him for the prisoner that was released on this day. I thought I was giving them no choice when I offered Barabbas as the other choice. He was an insurrectionist, a murderer, public enemy number 1 and hated by everyone. At first it seemed my plan was working, but when I was interrupted to read a note from my wife, warning me to not harm this prisoner, the religious rulers turned the crowd their way. I was forced to release Barabbas.

When, in frustration, I asked them what they wanted me to do with Jesus, they yelled "Crucify Him!" They had lost their minds with a lust for blood and death. Instead of just wanting me to allow them to stone Him, now they were pushing for me to do their dirty work for them! My pride kept me from giving them what they wanted, but my fear kept me from doing what was right.

Then I thought of still another compromise. If the crowd wouldn't listen to reason, maybe I could appeal to their sympathy. I had the prisoner hung from the ceiling and whipped. I mean this was an awful whipping! It was called the 'half death' because one was more dead than alive, and often wished they were dead. Thirty nine lashes were made on His back with leather tipped with bone and steel. The skin was stripped off and the raw tendons and nerve endings exposed to the air. Immediately the victim went into shock from the loss of body fluids. Salt was rubbed into the back to revive the victim, and a robe plastered to it to stop the bleeding.

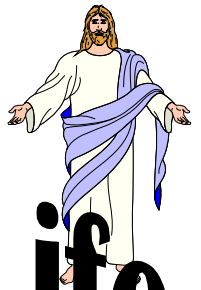
My soldiers then took Him into another room, tore that robe off (which started the bleeding again) and put a purple robe on Him in mockery. They made a crown of thorns and beat it into His scalp with sticks. Then they gave Him an old scepter and pretended to worship Him. They spit on Him, beat Him, and had a contest to see who could hit Him hardest and knock Him furthest. They pulled out handfuls of hair and beard. I couldn't believe what had gotten into them. It was like some evil, demonic forces was driving them. They were like wild animals, going way beyond what I gave permission for.

When He came before the crowd again I was sure they would feel He had been punished enough. He could barely stand and had to be dragged out. The same maniacal wildness was in them that was in my soldiers. What was going on? All I could do was wash my hands of the whole thing, reminding them that this was all their fault and not my doing.

I saved my neck that day, but lost my soul. Three years later I was removed and forced to take my own life to preserve honor. When I stood before God I knew that He was indeed the King of the universe. Everyone on the other side of the grave knew. If only I had believed earlier...

34. THE DAY DEATH DIED

By Barabbas



The Life of JESUS

Hello! My name is Barabbas. Really it is Bar-Abba. Bar means son of and Abba means father. I was “son of the father” because my father was a well known rabbi. My first name was very common – Jesus, the same as Joshua in the Old Testament. Thus I was Jesus Bar-abba (Jesus, son of the father) and I was fighting for the physical deliverance of Israel. My life crossed paths with another Jesus, Bar-Joseph, Who was working for the spiritual deliverance of Israel. What a way our paths crossed!

BACKGROUND I was an insurrectionist. I was a leader in the underground. We wanted rebellion against Rome and would murder soldiers whenever we could. Today you would call us terrorists. We called ourselves Zealots.

I was full of hate and bitterness for anyone and everyone. If anyone wasn't for us he was our enemy. That included this other Jesus. I first heard of Him from Simon the Zealot, who left us to be one of His disciples. When he tried to tell me about this better way of love and peace I spit on him and walked away. I was too disgusted to talk.

I never met that Jesus in person. He was in the same prison I was in but in a different place. There were no prison terms then. Prison was just a temporary holding place until trial, then one was flogged, executed or released. It was April 13, 33 AD and I was awaiting execution. I had been arrested and found guilty and was to die that morning. It was to be a public, horrible death as an example to others.

RELEASE From the Maccabean times it was the custom to release a prisoner at Passover, symbolizing the release of the Jews from Egyptian bondage. Rome carried on this practice. Evidently Pilate used this as a way to have the other Jesus released. I could hear the crowds from my cell, but not Pilate. I heard the crowds start chanting “Barabbas,” then after a pause “Crucify! Crucify! Crucify!” I assumed I was doom. A cold chill shook me as the reality of crucifixion settled over me. I was as hard and cold as anyone, but I was still human! When soldiers then burst through my cell door and dragged me out I assumed that was it. When they opened a side door and threw me out into the street I couldn't believe it! I quickly scampered away, but not too far. My two buddies were still there, about to be killed this day. I felt like I was deserting them, although I wasn't about to go back inside. I was very curious about why I was released. Was it the prisoner exchange? If so, who was taking my place?

When I saw it was this other Jesus I didn't care. I hated Him. he was weak. He could have turned the crowds into an army and fought the Romans but didn't. I had no respect for cowardice like that. Still, something started changing inside me. For the first time since I was a child I felt pity, sorrow for another human being. I guess it's cause I could identify with Him. He was taking my place on my cross.

TO GOLGOTHA Then I saw Him for the first time, carrying my cross toward Golgotha. It was the whole cross, 200 pounds. A awful curse from God went with it (Deut. 21:23). Of course they made Him and my two friends go the long way, weaving up and down streets, before exiting the city. This was so more could see them. Their crimes were written on boards which were carried in front, then nailed to their cross. Funny, all His said was that He was the “King of the Jews.”

From Birth to Resurrection

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Going outside the city pictured exclusion, rejection by God. That's where the 'scapegoat' was sent. I wondered how someone who claimed to be God would handle that. Before He got there, though, it all was too much for Him physically so Simon of Cyrene was pressed into service.

EXECUTION Golgotha was an awful place! It meant 'skull,' and that's what the place looked like. It had the smell and feel of death everywhere. Some mercy was shown, though, by offering a narcotic (gall or myrrh). Surprisingly Jesus rejected it. That made me curious.

I watch as He was stripped naked and thrown backward on to the wood. I involuntarily flinched myself as His raw, bloody back hit the rough wood. I turned away as His arms were spread and nailed, and then His feet. That was my cross. That should have been me.....

The cross was lifted and dropped into its hole with a jarring thud. There He was. His arms and knees were flexed a bit so He could pull Himself up to allow air into His lungs. Perhaps I'd better quote what a medical doctor in your day says about crucifixion:

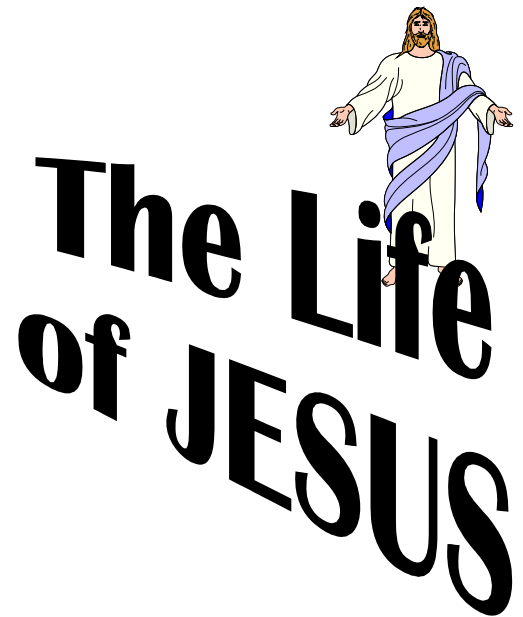
"The cross is placed on the ground and the exhausted man is quickly thrown backwards with his shoulders against the wood. The legionnaire feels for the depression at the front of the wrist. He drives a heavy, square wrought-iron nail through the wrist deep into the wood. Quickly he moves to the other side and repeats the action, being careful not to pull the arms too tightly, but to allow some flex and movement. The cross is then lifted into place. The left foot is pressed backward against the right foot, and with both feet extended, toes down, a nail is driven through the arch of each, leaving the knees flexed. The victim is now crucified. As he slowly sags down with more weight on the nails in the wrists, excruciating fiery pain shoots along the fingers and up the arms to explode in the brain-the nails in the wrists are putting pressure on the median nerves. As he pushes himself upward to avoid this stretching torment, he places the full weight on the nail through his feet. Again he feels the searing agony of the nail tearing through the nerves between the bones of his feet. As the arms fatigue, cramps sweep through his muscles, knotting them deep relentless, throbbing pain. With these cramps comes the inability to push himself upward to breathe. Air can be drawn into the lungs but not exhaled. He fights to raise himself in order to get even one small breath. Finally, carbon dioxide builds up in the lungs and in the blood stream, and the cramps partially subsided. Spasmodically, he is able to push himself upward to exhale and bring in life-giving oxygen. Hours of limitless pain, cycles of twisting, joint-rentng cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, searing pain as tissue is torn from his lacerated back as he moves up and down against rough timber. Then another agony begins: a deep, crushing pain deep in the chest as the pericardium slowly fills with cerium and begins to compress the heart. It is now almost over-the loss of tissue fluids has reached a critical level -- the compressed heart is struggling to pump heavy, thick, sluggish blood into the tissues -- the tortured lungs are making frantic effort to gasp in small gulps of air. He can feel the chill of death creeping through his tissues... Finally, he can allow his body to die... "

That's why He didn't talk much, and what He did was for others: forgiveness for those doing the crucifixion and for one of my friends there with Him and assistance for His mother.

THE END COMES Then it got dark, like midnight. Even I could feel an evil chill in the air. Even though I didn't believe in them, I couldn't help thinking that Satan and his demons were everywhere, attacking Him as He hung there in my place. He cried out, really yelled, that God had deserted Him. I found out later that during that time He was literally taking my place in hell. Then, after 3 hours of dark torture, He seemed to have peace. He said His work was done and it looked like He voluntarily died. Then the sun shone again, but a earthquake hit at that very moment. What a time! I mean, it really touched me. He took my place, know what I mean?

35. “PEACE BE WITH YOU”

By Thomas



Have you ever seen a crucifixion? No, I guess you haven't. You aren't missing anything. I mean, it's AWFUL! The pressure and toll it takes on a body is inhuman, and if a person has been flogged previous to it, it's hard to recognize it as a human body. I wasn't around to see Jesus' body, but I heard about it later. None of us disciples, who bragged so grandly about never deserting Him, were there. It ended up being two members of our arch-enemies group, the Sanhedrin, who took His body for burial. It's good they did, or He'd have been thrown into the garbage pit and incinerated.

DAY 1 We count our days by parts of days, and the first day Jesus was in the tomb was Friday. He was put in a little after 3 PM and there until the day ended at sunset, which is when Saturday, the Sabbath, the second day began. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea got permission to get the body, used their own funds for spices, and donated a tomb. Praise God for them!

From Birth to Resurrection

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DAY 2 The Sabbath went from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. We all stayed hidden, gradually gathering back in the upper room but locking the doors out of fear. No work or travel was allowed on the Sabbath. We never ever gave a thought to His prophesied resurrection. It seems the religious rulers did, though, for they even make preparations to prevent it. They sealed the tomb and stationed a Roman guard there to protect it.

DAY 3 Before dawn some of the women started out to get to the tomb at first light so they could properly dress His body with spices. It was the only way left to show Him our love and devotion. Sometime that night, though, angels came and moved the stone to show that the tomb had been vacated. They also chased the soldiers away, making it all safe for the women. They weren't aware of the guards, nor did they have a plan for moving the stone, which took many strong men to move.

At the tomb they noticed the stone was gone, and so was the body! Confused, they thought His body was stolen. First He is killed, now they don't even have His body!

Meanwhile, at the temple at this same sunrise, the High Priest was waving a barley sheaf in front of the torn veil which had been pinned back in place. Firstfruits was being celebrated, a promise of more to come. Only later did we realize how beautifully this spoke of Jesus' resurrection and all of ours to follow.

The women missed all this, only grieving the loss of the body. Eyes downcast, they didn't notice the 2 angels inside and 1 outside the tomb. They were startled when the angels spoke, reminding them He had said He would come back to life and He had! Their emotions were so strong that their rational thinking was impaired, so the women didn't grasp what the angels were saying. Grief overcame faith. They returned to the upper room and told that the body was stolen.

FIRST APPEARANCE John and Peter ran to the tomb. Being younger, John got there first and stood at the door, staring in. Peter rushed by and entered, confused and grieved. John then entered and saw the linens that had wrapped Jesus. The head piece was neatly folded and set in place, the other still formed like an empty cocoon. John didn't remember Jesus' words, but the

evidence made him think perhaps Jesus was alive. He didn't say anything, though. They then started back to the upper room with their news.

Meanwhile Mary Magdalene, the leader of the women, who had been wonderfully saved and delivered by Jesus, had left following Peter and John, but at a slower pace. Somehow they missed each other coming and going, probably taking different routes. When Mary got to the tomb she was emotionally drained from 3 days of grief and crying. Seeing the angels, she assumed they were gardeners and wanted to know where they had put the body.

Then someone said, "Mary," and she recognized the voice. Immediately falling on her knees she hugged Him. Jesus told her to go tell the others that He was alive.

After she left some other women came and they, too, saw Jesus. However the disciples wouldn't believe the woman no matter what they said.

APPEARANCE TO OTHERS Somewhere in this time Jesus appeared in private to Peter to make things right between them. In the afternoon Mary (mother of James the Less and a cousin of Mary) and her husband Cleopas (brother of Joseph) were walking back home to Emmaus. They were confused and hurt, and it had been a long, tiring walk.

A stranger joined them and they started talking about what had happened. They invited Him to eat with them, and that's when He revealed who He was. Immediately He disappeared.

Well, they had to rush back to Jerusalem, to the upper room, to give this good news to everyone there. He appeared there, just materializing despite the doors being locked. He ate with them and told them how His resurrection had been prophesied throughout the whole Old Testament. It was a glorious time, or so I was told.

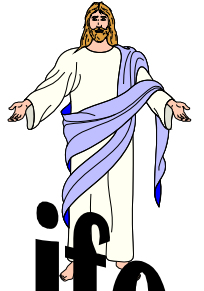
APPEARANCE TO THOMAS As you may have heard, I was not present when all this happened. I was away from the others, hiding in fear. To be perfectly honest, I was really feeling sorry for myself over this all. I was having a good pity-party!. Oh I had heard the supposed accounts of the resurrection, but wouldn't believe them. I didn't want to get my hopes up again. I wouldn't believe the others even after they all claimed to have seen Him. I mean it's not that I thought they were all lying or making it up or something, it's just that I wasn't ready to let go of my pity and depression, so I hung onto it. It took a week for me to climb out of that pit and be where I should have been in the first place, with God's people. You know, you miss a blessing when you aren't with God's people when they gather, for He is there in their midst.

A week later, also on a Sunday, Jesus appeared to all the disciples and followers again, and this time I was present. He told me I could come touch and feel Him if I needed more proof, but I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that it was Jesus! I fell on my knees before Him, saying, "My Lord and My God." He said I was blessed for seeing and believing, but those later who would believe without even seeing were even more blessed. I guess that means you who are reading this.

THE STORY GOES ON That wasn't the last time we saw Him. Actually we saw Him about a dozen times over the next 40 days. Sometimes He appeared to individuals, other times to several people at the same time. Once He even appeared to a group of over 500 people. Mainly we saw Him back home, in Galilee. He never did appear to any of His enemies, the religious rulers. Many of them came to accept Him as their Savior and Lord, and then some saw Him. But those who didn't people never did see Him. I guess He figured they had enough proof what with the soldiers who were guarding the tomb telling them about the resurrection and all. They obviously knew it was true or they wouldn't have paid them over a million dollars.

29. THE TEARFUL ENTRY

By Joses



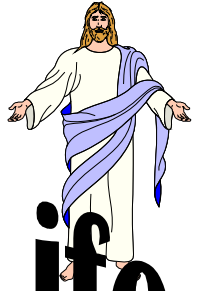
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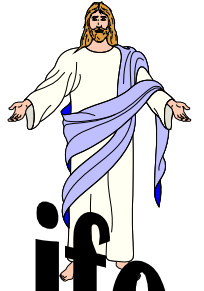
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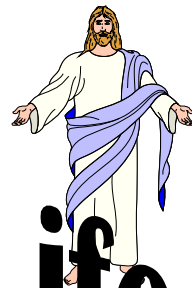
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