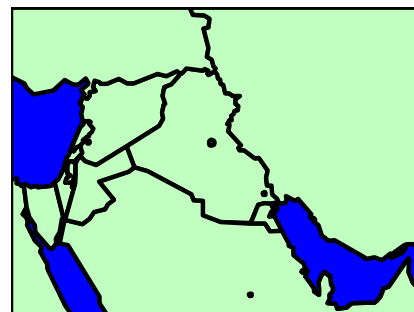


Let the
ROCKS
CRY OUT

SPIRITUAL
LESSONS FROM
ISRAEL'S
GEOGRAPHY &
CULTURE



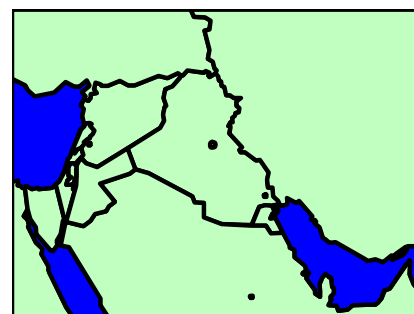
By **Jerry Schmoyer** Copyright © 1998
252 W. State Street, Doylestown, PA 18901 2215-348-8086
jschmoye@ptd.net - <http://www.voicenet.com/~mbbs/jschmoyer>

LIFE OF JESUS

1. GEOGRAPHY JESUS KNEW
2. JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT
3. LIFE OF JESUS - AN OVERVIEW
4. MT, MK, LK & JN: COMPARED & CONTRASTED
5. JESUS IS BORN
6. JESUS GOES PUBLIC
7. "BEHOLD, THE LAMB OF GOD!"
8. A SUMMER OF FIRSTS
9. WELL, WELL, WELL
10. SO FAR, SO GOOD
11. THE TURNING POINT
12. BY THE SEA, BY THE SEA, BY THE BEAUTIFUL SEA
13. THE BEGINNING OF THE END
14. JESUS' SECOND MOST STRESSFUL DAY
15. SIX MONTHS TO LIVE
16. WRAPPING UP THE FINAL DETAILS
17. JESUS' LAST WEEK ON EARTH
18. CRUCIFIXION OF THE KING
19. RESURRECTION!

Let the ROCKS CRY OUT

SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1998

1. GEOGRAPHY JESUS KNEW

"Where are you from?" This common inquiry gives us lots of information about a person. The east coast, deep south, northwest -- each place has its own life style and cultural patterns. Often they are shaped by the geography of the area. When we are away from home and find someone from our area there is an immediate rapport. When a person moves into a new area one of the first things he does is to learn his way around -- know the geography. For

understanding an event in history one must know the geography of the event. All this is true of learning about the geography of Palestine. In order to understand Bible history and view Jesus from the viewpoint of those who lived in His time, knowing the geography of the area is very important. Palestine then was divided into three main areas.



GALILEE was located in northern Palestine, between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee. It was about 40 miles wide by 70 miles north to south. It didn't have any large towns, but had about 240 small villages. Thus it was a very rural area. It was mostly hill country: rich, beautiful and fertile. The temperature averaged 45 to 80 degrees.

Joshua conquered the area from the Canaanites, and the tribes of Asher, Naphtali, Zebulun and Issachar first settled the area. It was part of Israel after the split.

Half the inhabitants of Galilee were Gentiles and half were Jews. They were farmers, shepherds, fishermen and craftsmen. As rural people often are, they were warmhearted, generous, patriotic, practical and hardworking. They were sincere people who were open to God, but not nearly as legalistic as the Jews in Judea. This area was home to Jesus and all the disciples but Judas. It was in this area that Jesus' message found its

most fertile ground, and where most of His followers came from. They then left this area to spread the word throughout the world.

JUDEA was located in the southern part of Palestine, between the Mediterranean Sea and the Dead Sea. It was named for Judah, the tribe that settled in this area. A ridge of tall

mountains went north and south through the middle. On the west was a coastal plain and the east the Dead Sea Valley. The land was dry, barren, with temperatures 55 to 88 degrees. The rough, rugged hills were used for pasture in the north but in the south the land was too desolate to be used for anything.

Few farmers lived in Judea. Mostly businessmen and craftsmen lived in the few large cities that comprised Judea. They were more materialistic and legalistic than those in Galilee. They had a reputation for being prideful, cold and driven. They were perfectionist in all areas of life, strict on themselves and others. This applied to their religion, too. Perhaps this explains why so few from this region followed Jesus. Its main claim to fame is Jerusalem, God's special city then and His earthly capital, the only city on earth which He said was His and which He graced by His presence.

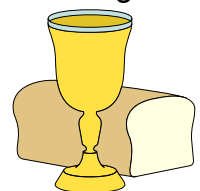
SAMARIA was the region in between Galilee and Judea. It was named after the main town of the area, Samaria. When Joshua conquered it from the Canaanites it was settled by Manasseh, Ephraim and Gad. The town of Samaria became the capital for the north (Israel) when the nation split. When the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom, they took the best Jews away and moved Gentiles in instead. This created a mixed breed of people, 'Samaritans.' The pure-blooded Jews to the north and south hated and rejected them because of their mixed blood. They would have nothing to do with them or their land.

The land of Samaria was a mix of Galilee and Judea. It was similar to Galilee but a bit rougher and less developed. They were semi-Jews in their religion. They believed the Pentateuch (Gen - Deut) but made Samaria the seat of their worship instead of Jerusalem. Without the priesthood or temple, they substituted their own rituals and beliefs. For this, too, the Jews hated them. When Jesus used a Samaritan as an example of one who showed love to his neighbor, proper Jews were shocked (parable of the Good Samaritan - Luke 10:29-37). The good Samaritan was kinder to the hurt Jew than the good and proper Jews who passed by on the other side. The Samaritans benevolence is all the more meaningful in light of how he, a s a Samaritan, was viewed and treated by the Jews.

Jesus had a real love for the people of Samaria. They were quick to respond to Him. He went there specifically to offer eternal life to an immoral woman (John 4). Jews never talked to Samaritans, nor even set foot on their land. A man would never talk to a woman in public, especially if the man was a rabbi, and even more so if the woman was immoral. In light of all this Jesus' reaching out to the woman at the well was all the more remarkable, as was her response. Many others believed in Jesus, and without any miracles done. This is in strong contrast to the Jews who had much proof in the way of miracles but didn't show the faith the Samaritans did! And that isn't the end of the story. When Philip returned to Samaria after the resurrection a great revival broke out (Acts 8), greater than in Galilee or Judea.

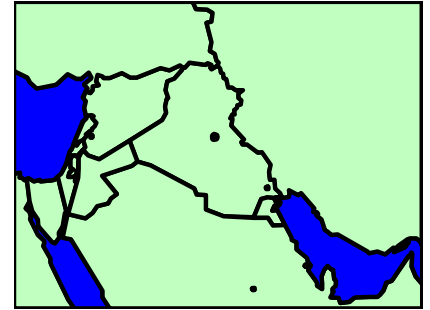
Note the pattern: rich, educated, cultured urban Judea almost totally rejected Jesus; rural Galilee was more responsive, but rejected Samaria responded more than either of them. That shouldn't surprise us. The same is true to day. "Not many rich" the Bible says (I Cor 1:26-27). God blesses the humble, but rejects the proud and self-sufficient. "He gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'" (James 4:6; I Pt 5:5; Job 30:12; Prov 3:34).

If you lived in Palestine in Jesus' day, where would you fit in?



Let the ROCKS CRY OUT

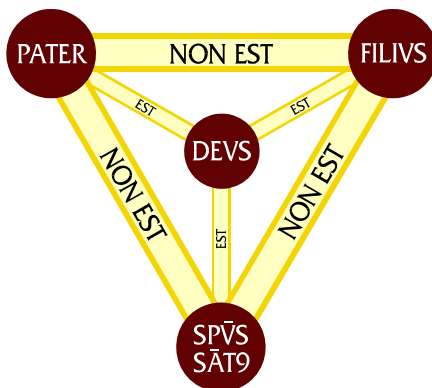
SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1998

2. JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

If you were a Jew living during the time Jesus was born, what would you know about the coming Messiah? What would you have understood about God coming to earth? These are interesting and thought-provoking questions. Understanding what Jews then knew about God who would visit earth as Jesus is very important to understanding the life of Jesus.

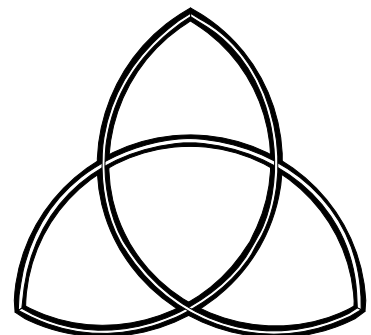


THE TRINITY The early church councils decreed “there is only one God, but in the unity of the Godhead there are 3 eternal and coequal persons, the same in substance but distinct in personality.” God the Father (Jn 6:27; Eph 4:6), God the Son (Heb 1:18) and God the Spirit (Acts 5:3-4) are one God (Mt 28:19; II Cor 13:14) in three persons. The Bible says no man has seen God the Father at any time (John 1:18; I Jn 4:12). The Spirit’s role is not to manifest Himself but to focus on the Son. Therefore it is always God the Son who is visible God in the Bible, both the Old and New Testament.

THEOPHANIES, occurrences of God appearing to man, are recorded in the Old Testament. Usually written “Angel of the LORD,” it always refers to God the Son (Jesus before His birth). Cf Gen 16:13; 22:15-18; 24:17; 32:24-32; Hos 12:4. Therefore Jews who knew their Bible in Jesus’ time would have known that God had appeared to man in the past, and would again. There is more information, though, than just appearances of God to man.

TYPES There is more in the Old Testament about God the Son than just what is actually said about Him (Luke 24:27). There are pictures of Him as well. These pictures, called types, are like shadows in reverse. You see the shadow first (Old Test.) and then the real thing (New Test.). For example, David is a type (picture) of Jesus in that there are many parallels between them, things in David’s life which show more about Jesus. Jesus Himself used the serpent on the pole as a picture of Himself (Jn 3:14) and He used Jonah the same way (Mt 12:40). Much information about God the Son can be gleaned from studying the pictures of Jesus contained in things like the Tabernacle, priesthood, offering system, holy days, etc.

PROPHECIES The rabbi’s list 456 Messianic passages in the Old Testament. These give more precise information about God the Son and His coming to earth, than types. For example, the Bible said He would come from

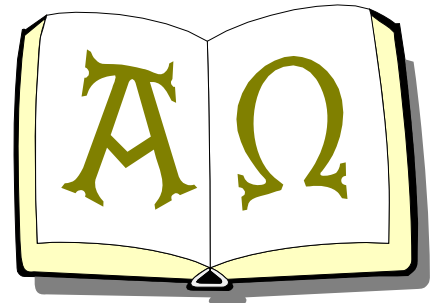


a woman's seed (Gen 3:15); born of a virgin (Isa 7:14), from the line of Abraham (Gen 12:3,7; 17:7), from the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:10), the house of David (Ps 132:11; II Sam 7:12-13; Jer 23:5), and the seed of Isaac (Gen 21:12). He was prophesied to be born at Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), called Immanuel (Isa 7:14), called out of Egypt (Hos 11:1) and preceded by John the Baptist (Mal 3:1; Isa 40:3). Many, many other prophecies about His life, person, ministry, message, works, death and resurrection also abound. The odds are astronomical that even just a few of these could have been coincidentally fulfilled. Only God could have foretold all these.

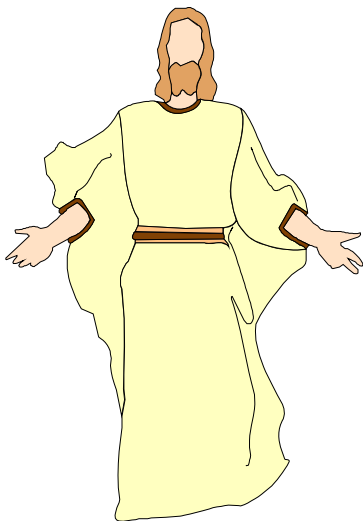
Thus Jews living in the time Jesus came had more information about the Son of God coming back to earth than we might expect. They knew God Himself was coming to earth to sit on David's throne forever (II Sam 7:13-14).

THE SON OF GOD AS HUMAN He had a human body (Gal 4:4; Lk 2:52; I Jn 1:1; Mt 26:12) but was sinless (Heb 4:15). He also had a human soul and spirit (Mt 26:38; Lk 23:46). As a man He got hungry (Mt 4:2), thirsty (Jn 19:28), tired (Jn 4:6), sad (Jn 11:35) and tempted (Heb 4:5). He had human names (Mt 1:21) and died a human death.

THE SON OF GOD AS DEITY He was called God (Heb 1:8; Mt 16:16; 26:61-64). He was omnipotent (Mt 28:18), omniscient (Jn 1:48), omnipresent (Mt 18:20) and unchangeable (Heb 13:8). He was life (Jn 1:4) and truth (Jn 14:6). He did the works of God: create (Jn 1:3), sustain nature (Col 1:17), forgives sin (Lk 7:48), raises the dead (Jn 5:25), judges sin (Jn 5:27) and sends the Holy Spirit (Jn 15:26). He accepted worship by men (Mt 14:33) and angels (Heb 1:6). He claimed equality with the Father (Jn 14:23; 10:30). Over and over He claimed to be sent from God (Jn 4:34; 5:37; 7:16; 7:28-29; 8:16; 8:26; 9:4; 11:42; 14:24; 16:28; 17:18; 17:23).



CONTRASTS IN THE PERSON OF CHRIST Jesus was both God and man. He was hungry (Mt 4:12) yet He fed multitudes (Jn 6:1-14). He was thirsty (Jn 19:28-29) yet gives the water of life (Jn 4:10-14; 7:37). He was tired (Jn 4:26) yet gives rest (Mt 11:28). He prayed (Mt 14:23) yet answers prayer (Jn 14:3,14). He was sold for 30 pieces of silver (Mt 26:14-15) yet redeems the world (I Pt 1:18-19; I Jn 2:2). He had no where to lay His head (Mt 8:20) yet He created all things (Jn 1:3). He died yet He gives life (Jn 6:51,44). He was killed (Heb 2:14) yet destroys death (I Cor 15:26, 54). He lay down His life, then He took it up again (Jn 10:17-18).

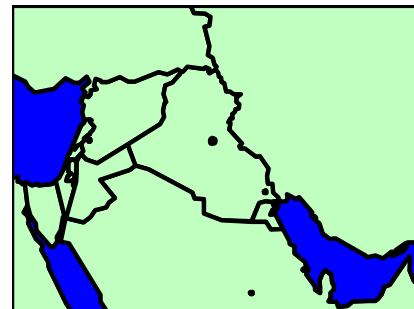


If you had been alive when Jesus was born you'd have to decide: Did you believe the accounts of God Himself coming to earth? Would He come again as the prophecies said? Would you bow down and make Him lord and God of your life? Would you recognize Him as God and man in one - the God-man Messiah? Most of the people living then rejected the truth and turned from Him. Most still do. What about you? The facts are in. They haven't changed.

If He is God, that means He has everything in the universe under His control -- including your life and mine. HE is the king of the universe, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Rev 19). He is God and He is king. Make sure He is your king.

Let the ROCKS CRY OUT

SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1998

3. LIFE OF JESUS - AN OVERVIEW

History tells us that early in the nineteenth century the whole world was watching with bated breath the campaigns of Napoleon. There was talk everywhere of marches, invasions, battles, and bloodshed as the French dictator pushed his way through Europe. Babies were born during that time. But who had time to think about babies or to care about cradles and nurseries when the international scene was as tumultuous as it was? Nevertheless, between Trafalgar and Waterloo there stole into this world a veritable host of heroes whose lives were destined to shape all of humanity. But again I ask, who had time to think about babies while Napoleon was on the move?

Well, someone should have.

Let's take the year 1809. Internationally, everyone was looking at Austria, because that was where blood was flowing freely. In one campaign after another that year, Napoleon was sweeping through Austria. Nobody cared about babies in 1809. But when you check the record, you realize the world was overlooking some terribly significant births.

Take, for example, William Gladstone. Gladstone was destined to become one of the finest statesmen that England ever produced. In that same year Alfred Tennyson was born to an obscure minister and his wife. Tennyson would one day greatly affect the literary world in a marked manner. Oliver Wendell Holmes was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1809. And not far away in Boston, Edgar Allen Poe began his eventful, albeit tragic, life. It was also in that same year -- 1809 -- that a physician named Darwin and his wife named their child Charles Robert. And it was that same year that the cries of a newborn infant could be heard from a rugged log cabin in Hardin County, Kentucky. The baby's name? Abraham Lincoln.

If there had been news broadcasts at that time, I'm certain these words would have been heard: "The destiny of the world is being shaped on an Austrian battlefield today." Or was it?

Funny, only a handful of history buffs today could name even two or three of the Austrian campaigns. Looking back, you and I realize that history was actually being shaped in the cradles of England and America as young mothers held in their arms the shakers and the movers of the future. No one could deny that 1809 was, in fact, the genesis of an era.

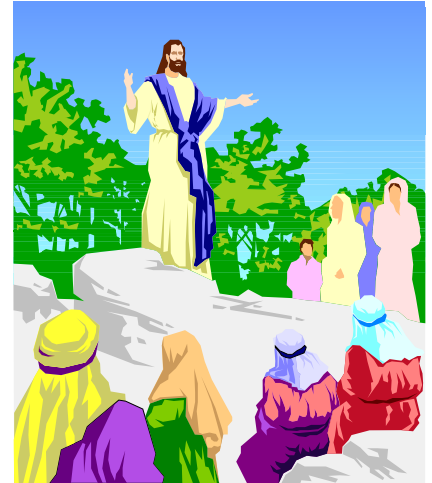
The same could be said of the time when Jesus of Nazareth was born. No one in the entire Roman Empire could have cared less about the birth of that Jewish infant in Bethlehem. Rome ruled the world. That's where history was being made! Or was it?



Dr. Luke was as careful with his study of history as he was with his practice of medicine. In the Gospel that bears his name, he provides for us several dependable, helpful facts. We can look up these facts and realize that if never before, at least at that time, God chose things that seemed to be terribly insignificant to put to shame the things that seemed highly important. (Growing Deep in the Christian Life, by Charles Swindoll)

Jesus' ministry started in obscurity. The first year only a handful knew about Him and followed Him. Gradually His reputation spread. He was more interested in quality than quantity, though. Still, everyone needed to have and did have a fair chance to decide on their own if they would accept or reject Him.

After the first year His popularity hit its high point. He traveled throughout Galilee with the disciples and did miracles to prove He was the Messiah. Most would have followed Him if He would have continued to provide free food for them. Instead He challenged them to give everything up and follow Him. The masses would have cheered a military leader who would raise an army to throw off the yoke of Roman bondage. Jesus set high standards for those who would follow Him: put Him 100% first in everything and all the time, before everyone and anything else in life. It is a high requirement, and even today not many are willing to meet it. As a result Jesus' popularity started declining.



As it declined opposition increased. The religious leaders had been against Him from the very start. He pointed out their sin from the beginning when He cleansed the temple for the first time. Gradually they were able to turn more and more people against Jesus. People were willing to accept Jesus as Messiah. Where they got hung up was with admitting their sin and accountability before God. Pride still keeps man from God.

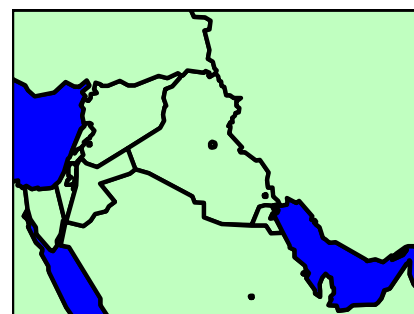
As public opinion shifted, so did Jesus' message and methods. Instead of going to the people offering them His message of the coming kingdom, He spent His time training and discipling His disciples. He did less and less miracles, for the people had enough proof and didn't need more. He wasn't going to force anyone to believe. He started teaching with parables to reveal truth to His followers while also hiding it from those who wouldn't accept. Instead of going to anyone everywhere, He specialized in training the disciples to take on when He was gone.

After the end of the third year the die was cast. Opposition increased daily. The religious leaders were committed to having Him put to death to stop Him and His message. Little did they know that that was just what was needed to assure its continuing forever.

They had their chance to decide. Now is our turn. Will you accept or reject? Are you just following for the 'free food' -- what He can do for you? Are you willing to obey up His challenge of taking up your cross to follow Him? It will mean rejection and opposition to those who follow Him, too. No servant is greater than His master. Still, it's the best way to life life to the fullest, to make this one life count for eternity. Don't make the mistake they did. Give up all to follow Him.

Let the
ROCKS
CRY OUT

SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1998

4. MT., MK., LK., JN. = COMPARED & CONTRASTED

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Their names are very familiar to us. They fit together in our minds, in that precise order. We are so familiar with them that we take them for granted. But why wasn't it Philip, Peter and Paul? Or just Andrew? Why four gospels? Why these four? Why a New Testament at all? It's important to know the answer to these questions to be able to correctly interpret the Gospels. The answers are quite interesting.

WHY A NEW TESTAMENT? From God's viewpoint the New Testament was to complete the incomplete revelation of the Old (Heb 1:1-2; Jer 31:31-34; Mal 3:1), to show the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies (Lk 4:21; Jn 13:18; 17:12; Acts 1:16), to fully present the way of salvation (Jn 20:31) and to give all needed information for God's people to live for Him (Jn 4:25; 17:8; 16:12-13; Mt 16:18; Eph 5:23-32). From man's viewpoint it was written to have a clear and accurate record of Jesus' life on earth. The eye-witnesses were dying off and heresies were growing and spreading false teachings. Plus, Christianity was spreading and expanding, and the best way to carry the truth to faraway places was in written form.



WHY THE GOSPELS FIRST? The Old Testament shows the promises and prophecies of a coming Redeemer and why He is needed. The Gospels show that Jesus fulfilled those prophecies and met man's need. Acts shows the results of the Messiah's coming. The Epistles add further teaching about the Messiah's work and its results as well as how that applies to our daily lives.

The book of Revelation shows the final culmination of all things, when all prophecies are totally and completely fulfilled with God Himself on David's throne.

WHY MORE THAN ONE GOSPEL? Various men viewed Jesus from different perspectives. They wrote to vastly differing audiences. Several writers help to confirm what the others say, and shed light on each other's accounts.

WHY FOUR GOSPELS? The Law required the testimony of 2 witnesses (Dt 19:15; Mt 18:16). For something this important twice the number of witnesses is given. Also, the number four in the Bible and to the Jews stands for earthly completeness: four season's directions on a compass, walls in a building, phases of the moon, etc. Together Matthew, Mark, Luke and John show the completeness of Jesus' life on earth.

WHY THESE FOUR GOSPELS? Actually several other gospels were written to help spread the message of Jesus, but aren't included in the New Testament. The four that are included were the ones God Himself chose. He inspired them and kept them perfect for us.

WHICH GOSPEL WAS WRITTEN FIRST? Most scholars agree that Mark wrote first, recording Peter's message in tract form. About 10 years later, in the 60's, Matthew and Luke wrote. They had Mark's gospel and elaborated on much of what he wrote. Then, 20 years later, John supplemented what they wrote by adding much new material focusing on the deity of Jesus.

WHO DO MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE AND JOHN COMPARE? Matthew, Mark and Luke are called 'synoptic' gospels because so much in them is 'synonymous' (similar) material. They all cover virtually the same events. John, however, includes almost all (92%) new material which they didn't cover. The synoptic focus on Jesus' outer life, giving facts about Him as a person. John goes deeper inside and focuses on showing Jesus as God. Matthew's focus in Jesus as the prophesied, mighty King. Mark shows Him as the obedient, lowly Servant. Luke pictures Him as the perfect, ideal Man. Matthew wrote to convince the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah (1:1; 23:37-39), Mark to spread the gospel among Gentiles (10:45), Luke to give an accurate history of His earthly life (10:10) and John to help believers to grow by trusting in Jesus' power as God (3:16).

WHY DOES MATTHEW COME FIRST? Since Mark was written first, why is Matthew put first? Thematically Matthew links the Old Testament with the New Testament by showing that Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled the prophecies and is, indeed, the promised Messiah. Mark moves away from Judaism, but not completely. Luke presents Christ as the Savior of the Gentiles. John then concludes with a strong, clear declaration that Jesus is in essence God, the Savior of all mankind.



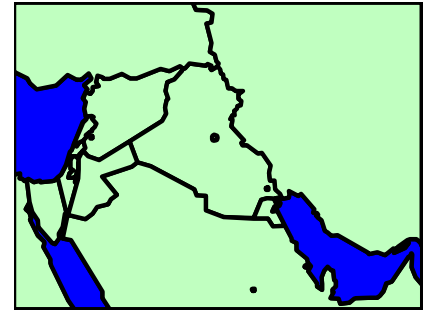
SPECIFICALLY HOW DOES THIS APPLY? The Triumphal Entry is one of the very few events in the life of Jesus that is included in all four Gospels. It was so important and so pivotal that each had to include it. We can use it as an example of their various perspectives and purposes. This shows why understanding the differences in the gospels is so important.

Matthew gives it 15 verses (21:1-11, 14-17), Mark 11 verses (11:1-11), Luke 16 verses (19:29-44) and John 8 verses (12:12-19). Mark wrote first, a short account showing Jesus as a humble servant who makes Himself available but doesn't shove Himself on Israel. Matthew, who adds more details to Mark's story, structures his account around three prophecies which Christ then fulfilled (Zech 9:9; Ps 118:26; 8:2), quoting them and showing his Jewish readers how this further proves Jesus is the Messiah. Luke also builds on Mark's account. Doctor Luke focuses on Jesus as a man, a human being like us, but a man who was also God. He records that Jesus wept (41) as a man but also prophesied the future (43) as God. Only Luke records the religious rulers challenging Jesus the man to stop His disciples (39) as well as Jesus' response that if they are silent the stones will cry out (40) because they are proclaiming Him Messiah - God and man in one. John, writing last, doesn't repeat the details that the others have already recorded but, in accordance with his theme, shows Jesus is God. He refers to His resurrection (16) and miraculous signs He had been doing (18).

Thus it is important to understand the history of the writing of the four gospels to accurately interpret them. It is true that ALL Scripture is inspired and important for us (II Tim 3:16). God's Word is so special, so important, so precise, so wonderful and so life-giving that we must immerse ourselves in it all we can. Spend some time in the Bible today.



SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1998

5. JESUS IS BORN

Suppose you found an old, old letter in your attic and read it. Suppose it had no date, no signature and no geographical locations. You would only be able to understand it in the most general way. The same is true of the letters (books) in the Bible. Understanding the historical time and cultural context in which they were written is key to fully interpreting them. This is especially true about Jesus. It is not my purpose to give all the details and information available about Jesus' birth. That has been well done by many others. I want to focus on historical and cultural information that impacts the story but is often overlooked.

GABRIEL COMES TO ZACHARIAS (Luke 1:5-25) Because of the large number of priests, they took turns serving in Jerusalem several weeks a year. The rest of the time they ministered in their own home areas: teaching, judging, encouraging and helping in any way they could. When in Jerusalem they served in the temple, helping with the sacrifices, worship and ritual duties to the thousands who came to the temple each day. The highlight of the day was in the morning and late afternoon, when a priest went into the Holy Place to trim the wicks on the lampstand and put fresh incense on the golden altar (a picture of prayers as a sweet savor ascending to God). The late afternoon was the most important of the two. Because of the special nature of these duties, priests to perform the duties were chosen by lot. Fortunate, indeed, was the priest who would be chosen once in his lifetime. Zechariah had served many years and had never been chosen before this day.

Entering God's house was a privilege but also a responsibility, for God could strike dead any who entered without His blessing. It was rumored that the angel of death would appear them and they would die. You can imagine why Zechariah was so fearful when he saw Gabriel.

When he was told he'd have a son and disbelieved, Zechariah was letting out some of the hurt and even bitterness of all the years of going childless. Children were considered blessings from God, and to not have a child was a curse from God. It was an awful, terrible stigma, especially for one trying to serve God as a priest! Why would God bless many who didn't love Him with children when he and Elizabeth remained childless?

GABRIEL APPEARS TO MARY (Luke 1:26-38) It must have surprised Mary greatly for a strange man to enter her presence and speak to her. Such things were never done in her world.

MARY GOES TO SEE ELIZABETH (Luke 1:39-56) While Mary undoubtedly had the trust and understanding of her parents, she knew what the local gossip about her would be. To talk to someone also having a supernatural pregnancy would be very helpful. Perhaps someone in her family accompanied her to Elizabeth's, or she went with a caravan of local friends who were heading south. It would have taken several days, walking and camping at night, to get there.



JOHN IS BORN (Luke 1:57-80) It was the custom for a child to be named after a family member, the first son being named after the father. Refusal to do so was often interpreted as claiming the son was not his. When Zecharias didn't name his son after himself everyone was very startled! Surely Elizabeth hadn't been unfaithful? Actually God Himself was claiming this son as His in a special way by naming him. He would raise and train him, and He did.

GABRIEL APPEARS TO JOSEPH (Matthew 1:18-25) I admire Joseph greatly. Mary had a daytime appearance of Gabriel as well as several months of talking with Elizabeth. She knew she was still a virgin. All Joseph had was one dream to go by, and he staked everything on it. He wanted to marry her despite her pregnancy, but the law forbid it and, following and obeying God, he wouldn't go against His law. While stoning for adultery wasn't practiced much any more, it was still a possibility. Other options were open to Joseph. He could have had her publicly disgraced in the synagogue as an example to other young women, keeping his reputation in tact and getting his dowry back. This would have been the legal way to get revenge, hurting back someone who has hurt you. The final option is the one Joseph had chosen: a quiet divorce where he would bear the brunt of the disgrace and reproach instead of Mary. He would lose his reputation and dowry, but Mary would be protected. Despite feeling so deeply betrayed by Mary, Joseph still chose to sacrifice himself to protect her. No wonder God chose such a man to be the earthly father to His son!

JESUS IS BORN (Luke 2:1-20) While Hallmark cards show Jesus being born in a barn, historians and scholars agree it was more like a cave. Caves dotted the limestone hills at Bethlehem, and were used by local homes as a place to keep animals. Wood was very scarce and wasn't used to build houses, much less barns or sheds. Also, some towns had 'inns,' which were really places for traveling herdsmen to keep their flocks while they spent the night before traveling on. Only the large towns would hire someone to oversee their operation and sell feed to the traveling herdsmen. Bethlehem was not nearly large enough for an 'inn keeper.' Being born in a humble cave, though, was appropriate for Jesus' first coming. In both His birth and death He was wrapped in linen strips after having the blood wiped from His body by a man named Joseph. He was laid in the dark on a cold stone shelf in a cave, unknown and rejected by most. His entrance into life was a foretaste of His exit from this world.

Choosing shepherds to be the ones to come worship was something only God would do for shepherds were the bottom of society, rejected and looked down on by all. They would have best understood the loss of innocent animals killed, for perhaps some of the sheep they raised were destined for temple sacrifices. David had been a shepherd on these very hills.

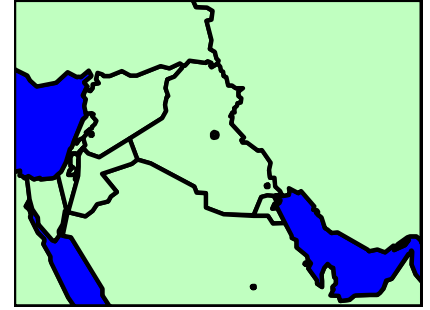
JESUS IS PRESENTED IN THE TEMPLE (Luke 2:21-38) It wasn't mandatory for boys to be dedicated in the temple, but Mary and Joseph did it to show their respect for Who Jesus was. Mary's ritual cleansing from childbirth came first. Simeon was probably the officiating priest. That they only had pigeons for offerings showed how poor they were.

THE MAGI ARRIVE (Matthew 2:1-18) Here's another place where our Christmas cards influence our theology. The Magi were really king-makers from Persia. Hundreds would have come, with calvary, all on white horses (and some camels to carry tents and supplies). It would have taken months to get ready and make the trip. In fact, the Greek word for Jesus is no longer 'infant' but 'young child.' Also, Mary and Joseph had moved to a house by this time. They had long since moved out of their house. They wanted to stay in Bethlehem, near Zacharias, instead of going back to Nazareth and the gossip about Mary's early pregnancy.





SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1998

6. JESUS GOES PUBLIC

There comes a defining time in everyone's lives, a time when they have to make a touch choice about which path to take. These watershed decisions often aren't fully realized until years later. Sometimes we know we are 'crossing the Rubicon' and sometimes not. Jesus fully realized this time in His life. He had spent about 30 years working with His father, Joseph, building from stone and wood. Then God's Spirit started to stir in His spirit, drawing Him to where His relative John had been baptizing. He was well aware of where this path would lead.

It is important to understand all the historical and cultural implications of what was happening in those days to fully interpret these passages in the life of Jesus. Our purpose isn't to be exhaustive in all aspects, but to point out cultural and geographical facts that help us better understand John's ministry as well as Jesus' baptism and temptation.

THE BAPTIZER (Matthew 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 3:1-18)

John had grown up in the wilderness when his older parents died, living off the land. His lifestyle was similar to the Essenes and those in Qumran (who hid the Dead Sea scrolls), but he wasn't part of any group. As a Nazirite (Numbers 6) he didn't touch anything dead (including, some say, eating meat), cut his hair, or drink any fruit of the grape (wine or juice).

Unlike modern evangelists, John required the people to come find him. It often took several days travel. Then what they heard was a message of repentance. Why would people go? God's Spirit drew them. Some say it was a Sabbatical year, when there would be time for as well as interest in Sabbatical things. It seems like John came in the fall of the year AD 29, near Rosh Hashanah which focused on repentance.

John calls himself a 'herald.' When a king was coming into an area he would send a 'herald' ahead so the people could prepare for his visit. They would repair the roads and clean up the area to make the trip safe and easy for the king.

Baptism was familiar to the Jews. All their synagogues were built with pools or near water sources for water was used for ritual cleansing (see Acts 16:13). Washing in water was done in a mikveh and was a picture of cleansing. Thus the Jews were familiar with what John was doing. That, too, is why he didn't think he should baptize Jesus.

THE BAPTIZED (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:19-23)

It would have been very unusual for someone not to marry but to live at home into their thirties. It must have been hard to put down His tools and say good-bye to His mother and father as He followed His heavenly father. How much was Jesus aware of what lay ahead? Did He know details or just vague generalities? Remember, He had voluntarily lay aside all the divine attributes which would have

made life as a man easier (Philippians 2:6-8). He was still holy and righteous and eternal, keeping His attributes of Being. He voluntarily decide to not use anything in His deity that would have given Him any advantage over any of us, for He went through all things we go through (Heb 2:18; 4:14-15). Thus His omniscience was set aside, too. That's why He spent so much time in prayer with His Father. He got His direction by the Spirit, the same as is available to all of us today. He faced temptation and Satan the same way we do, too.

THE DEVIL (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13) God's Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, which is a semi-desert area between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. It is a very dry, arid, barren place -- terrible to live in but great for solitude and privacy. Jesus went to have time connecting with His heavenly Father and preparing Himself for service. He was so intense in His prayer and communion with God that He didn't eat for the whole time, although it seems He did drink water when He found some.

Satan didn't hit Him until the 40th day of His fast. Up to that time the body lives off stored fat, but about that time the fat is all gone and the body starts digesting its own organs to feed itself. This is starvation and soon ends in death. After the first couple days of a fast hunger pangs are gone -- until about the 40th day when it hits VERY hard! Thus Satan's temptation to turn a stone into bread to eat was very real. There wasn't anything wrong with getting bread and eating it. Jesus Himself made bread for the 3,000 and the 5,000 by the Sea of Galilee. What was wrong was that it wasn't God's timing. Often we aren't tempted to do a thing that is wrong in itself, but the timing of it is wrong (marriage, sex, job change, move, purchase, etc.). Patiently awaiting God's leading is the key to it all.

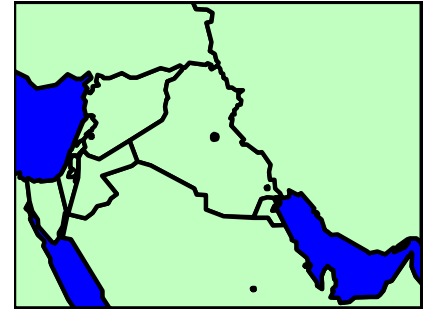
Then Satan took Him (physically or mentally -- we don't know and it doesn't really matter for the opportunity was real) to highest point of the temple and challenged Him to jump down, knowing the angels would catch Him. The Jews had a belief that the Messiah would come from the highest point of the temple, and to see a man jump from there and be caught by angels would certainly impress everyone so much that they were sure to make Him Messiah then and there. Again, there was nothing wrong with being recognized as Messiah -- this was why He came. However the means doesn't justify end. It would have meant bypassing the cross. Getting the crown with going through the cross must have been very tempting, but also very wrong. Remember that when you are tempted to take the easy way out.

Finally Satan used his ace card, the one he didn't think he would have to use but was prepared to in order to win. He had used it on the first sinless man, offering him a chance at being like God, and man quickly fell. Then Satan had won rulership of all the earthly kingdoms from Adam. Now he was willing to use that to bait his trap and offer Jesus instant access to ruling like God, right then, over all the earth. The problem was that it would again mean missing the cross. Also, getting his authority from Satan would mean He was under Satan -- the very one He came to dethrone.

These temptations were very subtle. They came at an extremely vulnerable time. They were all for Jesus to meet legitimate needs, but to meet them in His way and time, not in God's. They were self-focused and now-focused, not looking for what was better for others and for the long run. Satan did the same basic thing with Adam and Eve (Gen 3), and still works that way today (I John 2:16). Watch out!



SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1998

7. “BEHOLD, THE LAMB OF GOD”

Have you ever had to introduce some of your friends to each other? That can be a very enjoyable experience. You usually find yourself choosing your words very carefully, for each word is important. John the Baptizer found himself in a similar situation when he needed to introduce the Messiah to his followers. The right words were very important, and it seems John spent some time thinking about them. Listen to what he chose.

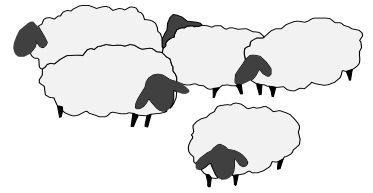
INTRODUCTION 1: JOHN TO ALL LISTENERS (John 1:19-34) “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” Why not “The Messiah”? Because their concept of a Messiah was a military leader who would come and lead them in a revolt against Rome, bringing in political freedom. Why not “Jesus”? That was just His earthly name, which some of them already knew, and didn’t really say anything about Who He was. Why not “God”? That would have taken too much explanation and have brought too much doubt. It would take time before they could come to that conclusion on their own. “Son of Man,” which Jesus started calling Himself, would have just confused them at this time. “Son of God” alone would have left out His humanity. No, John chose well. His listeners would have immediately thought of the Passover lamb and other lamb sacrifices -- innocent blood shed to cover sin. This started with the first Passover when the Jews were in Egypt and the firstborn of all those without innocent lamb blood died (Exodus 12). The very reason they were responding to God’s message was because they saw the need for repentance from sin and cleansing by God. They called on Him to provide mercy and cleansing, and that was exactly why Jesus had come!

Since it was pretty obvious to all that the Messiah would be coming soon (Daniel 9:24-26), dozens of others were claiming to be the Messiah. The religious leaders checked into each claimant for they, too, awaited the Messiah. A delegation went to John and asked him if he was the Messiah and he clearly told them he wasn’t. He said he was just there pointing out the Messiah to others, and the one he pointed out as the “Lamb of God” was the one they were looking for!

INTRODUCTION 2: JOHN TO SPECIAL FOLLOWERS (John 1:35-51) The day after this happened John again pointed out Jesus in this fashion. Andrew and John called Jesus “Rabbi”, a respectful term for a teacher. The next day they returned with their brothers: Peter and Andrew. When they left they also took Philip and Nathanael with them, traveling to Cana. They all knew each other closely as relatives, business partners or friends. John the Baptizer was a relative, too, although he probably didn’t see much of them in previous years.

INTRODUCTION 3: JESUS OF HIMSELF (John 2:1-12)

The wedding feast at Cana was Jesus' 'coming out' as it were. It was a gathering of extended family and friends. Mary, Jesus' mother was there, helping with the kitchen work. Joseph was probably still at home in Nazareth. Salome, Mary's sister was there with her husband Zebedee and their sons, James and John. Their friends and fishing partners, Andrew and Peter, were there, too. They had all walked there with Jesus from John's baptizing. Philip was a friend to them all, as was Nathaniel who lived in Cana. Others who also became disciples may well have been there as well. Alphaeus (Clopas) and wife may well have traveled there with Mary. Their sons, James the less and Judas Thaddaeus, were also fishermen. Some feel that Thomas and Levi (Matthew), the twins, were also there children. Thus the circle of early followers and disciples was also a family circle composed of people who knew each other and Jesus. Their children would have been mostly grown and married, leaving them free to travel with Jesus. Later Jesus' own half-brothers, James and Jude, would also be part of the group. They must have heard some stories about Jesus' miraculous birth. They had met Him at family gatherings such as holy days, weddings and even funerals. It wasn't always possible to get together for funerals, though, because they were held the same day as death and those a distance away couldn't find out and come in time. In a hot climate a dead body needed to be buried as soon as possible.



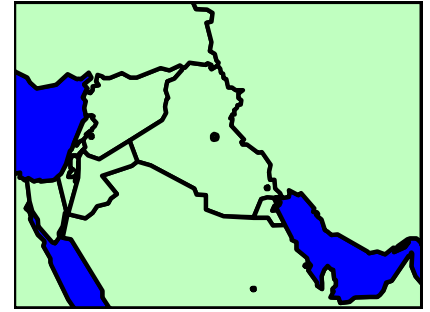
Anyway, when everyone arrived in Cana there must have been much talk and speculation about what happened when Jesus was baptized and what John had told them. Mary must have heard and, like any mother, was anxious to show off her son to everyone. This would finally and totally repair her reputation of being pregnant before marriage. No wonder she was anxious for Jesus to show Who He really was. But wasn't this the same temptation as Satan had used earlier -- show off your powers so people will accept you? Jesus again resisted, politely but firmly telling His mother no.

Since weddings usually lasted several days, and as today several days of drinking fermented drink and wine would cause drunkenness, the best wine was served first while tastes were more sensitive and alert. Here, though, Jesus made wine better than the best they had bought. This was proof of His deity, and word spread, even though He did the miracle in secrecy and privacy. He did help the people out, but not in a show-off way.

Of note is the fact that this is called His first "miraculous sign." All Jesus' miracles were 'signs.' A sign is made to point to something else, to focus attention elsewhere, to give information needed. Jesus didn't do miracles for their own sake, He did them as a sign that He was God. Anyone could claim to be God, but only one who could do things only God could do was really God. Miracles were a means to an end, Jesus' eternal calling card. They were not an end in themselves. That's why not everyone was healed. That's why miracles appear groups in the Bible: time of Moses and Joshua, time of Elijah and Elisha and time of Jesus and apostles. The next grouping of miracles will be in the tribulation, again to show that those who do them have God's power. This is the only way they will be seen as superior to Satan's counterfeits and substitutes. Miracles proved that Jesus was God. We don't need miracles today, for God's Spirit is at work showing us inside that Jesus is God. Do you listen to His voice? Are you believing His message? He has eternal life available for all who will ask -- that's the greatest miracle there is!



SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1998

8. A SUMMER OF FIRSTS

There's a first time for everything. For Jesus, the summer of 30 AD brought several firsts as He traveled to Jerusalem for His first Passover since coming forth as Messiah-God. It was His first cleansing of the temple, His first clash with the religious leaders, His first public ministry in Jerusalem and His first travels through Judea preaching and healing.

FIRST PASSOVER (John 2:13) While Jesus undoubtedly had gone to Jerusalem every Passover since His birth, we know only of His bar mitzvah trip when He was 12 (Luke 2:40-52). He continued to go every year as a participant. Now that He has come forward as Messiah He has an entirely different function to fill at the Passover in Jerusalem.

FIRST TEMPLE CLEANSING (John 2:14-22) It must have really bothered Jesus year after year to go to Jerusalem and see God's house of prayer and worship made into a commercial circus. Outrageous rates were charged to trade regular money for temple coins. Then the priests inside wouldn't accept any sacrifices which were brought in, forcing people to buy their animals -- again at very inflated prices. Vendors and merchants were everywhere, calling out their prices and shouting their sales. The whole atmosphere was one of a carnival at fever pitch. The religious rulers were getting rich off of 'Annas Bazaar,' as it was named after the high priest who was behind it all. Passover especially was important, for that time, like December in our culture, were when merchants made their greatest profits. As Jesus traveled to Jerusalem that early summer of AD 30 He must have known what He had to do when He got there.

The disciples had no idea what He was thinking. They were looking forward to Him revealing to the religious rulers and Jerusalem itself, the center of their religion, His claims as to being the Messiah. They knew He would need the solid support of the religious rulers if He were to have any chance of being crowned the rightful heir of David's throne. Had they even suspected the means Jesus would use to show His Messiahship they would have been shocked!

FIRST CLASH WITH RELIGIOUS RULERS Indeed they were shocked when Jesus started throwing over tables and upsetting the business of the religious rulers, turning them against Him once and for all. His righteous indignation was such, and God's power so present through Him, that no one even tried to stop Him. Soldiers, Levite guards, Roman officials, Jewish religious rulers, and the masses of people, all let Him do His work unopposed. I imagine many angels holding back anyone or anything that would have dared oppose Him. Not only was Jesus cleansing sin, He was fulfilling prophecy, showing that He was the Messiah for He was doing the Messiah's works (Psalm 69:9).

Why did Jesus pick this prophecy to fulfill first? I think it was because sin must be removed before a relationship with God can develop. That was John the Baptizer's message. That is true for salvation, and God Himself dealt with that sin on the cross. That is true for those

who are God's children -- I John 1:9 says we must confess our sins. That was the picture of the laver in the tabernacle, and Jesus' teaching about one who had a bath not needing another bath but certainly needing his hands and feet cleansed (John 13:10).

When challenged as to show proof He really was the Messiah, Jesus said His death and resurrection would be their proof. This they rejected, in fact using it against Him as proof that He was blaspheming so they could crucify Him. They refused to be open to see their sin.

But what about Jesus' anger? We, too, are commanded be angry but not sin (Eph. 4:26). Anger is a proper motivator to do something positive, like fear, guilt, jealousy, etc. Also can be. However, we often use them in sin instead of God's way. When anger is expressed to cover up for pain, hurt, not getting our own way, etc., it is sinful and wrong. Jesus was enough in charge of His emotions to weave a whip out of cords first. Do you show that control before expressing your anger?

FIRST CONTACT WITH NICODEMUS (John 2:23 - 3:21) Jesus did other miracles to show He had God's power, but was careful to not put too much faith in the response of those who were just impressed with something sensational. A Pharisee named Nicodemus was one such case. To find out more he came to Jesus at night when neither was busy, and avoid being seen with Jesus, too. As was the custom, that sat on the roof where it was cooler and quieter. The account in John 3 is a summary of all that happened that evening as they talked.

Of particular note is Jesus' teaching style. He always used illustrations and analogies to make His truths better understood by His listeners. Physical birth is used to teach about spiritual birth, the wind is a picture of the Spirit, looking to the bronze serpent in the wilderness to be healed is how one is to look to Jesus on the cross, and light and darkness picture the spiritual battles going on between God and Satan. We, too, should use word pictures and examples to illustrate abstract truth in a solid way.

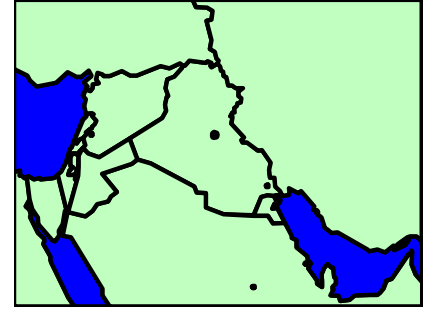
FIRST JUDEAN MINISTRY OF JESUS (John 3:22 - 4:4) Because it was summer, the dry season, John and Jesus gravitated to sections of the Jordan where there was still enough water to immerse a person. Jesus preached repentance, as did John. It was the same message He was showing when He cleansed the temple. Jesus Himself didn't do any of the baptizing, perhaps so no one later would consider their baptism superior to anyone else's.

John knew his ministry was drawing to a close, and was willing to let Jesus take over. He was a very humble servant, thinking about God's work above his own recognition or popularity. He will willing to take on a secondary role and didn't feel he has to be on top. The world never has enough servants like John the Baptizer, truly one of the great men in God's Word.

JOHN IMPRISONED (Matthew 4:12; Mark 1:14; Luke 3:19-20) It was right about that time that John was arrested because of his pointing out sin. In effect this was the equivalent of Jesus' actions in the temple, for John angered the one who had power and authority over him. Thus Herod the tetrarch had him arrested because John was telling everyone how wrong it was that Herod divorced his wife to steal and marry his brother's wife, who was also his niece! Taking a stand against sin has consequences. Jesus and John both were rejected by the powerful because of that. When Jesus starts pointing out the sin of the common people, then they, too, will begin rejecting Him. What about you? What is your response when the finger of God points to a sin in your heart? Do you, too, try to silence the voice, or do you repent and cleanse yourself from the sin? Make sure you use I John 1:9 as often as needed.



SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1999

9. WELL, WELL, WELL

Everything went “well” for Jesus during the fall of 30 AD. First He met the woman at the well, then He returned to Galilee where He was well received, and finally He made a nobleman’s son well. Indeed, things were going very well at this point. John was the only Gospel writer to record these events.

WOMAN AT THE WELL (John 4:5-42) Prompted by the Holy Spirit, Jesus chose to return home to Galilee by going through the region of Samaria to the city of Samaria. He was still ministering in relative obscurity, just beginning to make Himself known to the nation Israel. As important and pressing as this work was, individual souls were even more important. God always puts people before programs.

Left alone at the well, Jesus met and spoke with a woman who came in the hottest part of the day to get water. She probably did this to be alone, for other women wouldn’t think much of someone with 5 husbands, and now living with a man she isn’t married to. While seeking for love, she ended up settling for lust -- a common substitute even today. Jesus knew this and sought her out to meet that need with His unconditional love.

She was shocked that a Jew, especially a man, especially a rabbi would seek her out and actually initiate a conversation with her! That just wasn’t done! What’s more, He asked to drink from her water bucket. Jews just didn’t touch non-Jews, nor anything they touched -- He would be ceremonially unclean if He drank her water!

While He asked her for water, it was really He who wanted to give her -- spiritual water to refresh and satisfy her for her whole life. She was confused and unsure, but certainly interested! When she finally understood just what He was offering -- eternal life -- she jumped at the chance to have it. Having ascertained to her satisfaction that He was the Messiah, God Himself come to earth, she went back to town and told everyone about His miraculous offer.

Jesus ended up staying there for several days to meet the needs of those who were interested in His free gift of salvation. It must have been really encouraging to Jesus to have this wholehearted response, especially after the opposition He was already receiving from the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem.

Many believed and started following Jesus. This set the foundation for a great revival in that area under the leadership of Philip and other disciples after the resurrection. Truly everything went very well in this encounter by a well!

WELL RECEIVED IN GALILEE (John 4:43-45) By the time Jesus eventually got back to Galilee, word about what had happened in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast had been spreading there. Interest in someone who would drive out moneychangers from the temple was spreading fast! They also had heard about His miracles and were quite interested. Was this the Messiah? What was this all about?

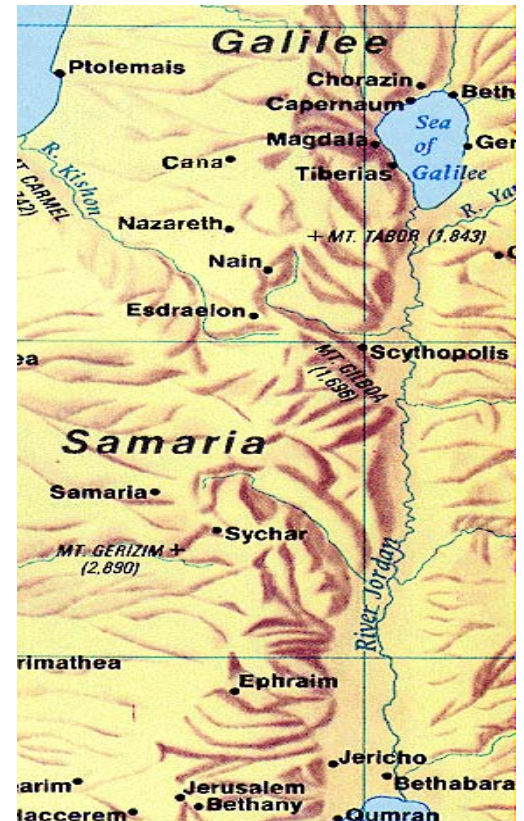
In a time when there was no news coverage, no telephones, not even mail, word spread only by mouth. Still, that was quite effective. Since there was virtually nothing in the way of entertainment or excitement for the people. News about someone driving out the powerful religious rulers, who most people secretly resented, brought much attention and talk. Without much else to do, people wanted to find out all they could. Seeing the Man who had done this, as well as the miracles He reputedly did, was well worth the time and effort. Curiosity was strong, probably stronger than spiritual commitment.

NOBLEMAN'S SON MADE WELL (John 4:46-54) When Jesus got into Galilee coming from the south through Samaria, Cana was one of the first places He would reach. A royal official with a sick son, who it seemed would soon die, came to Jesus asking for help. Jesus healed his son, without even going to him. It was the first of several long-distance healings.

When the father got home and found his son had been healed at the exact time Jesus said He would be healed, the man and all his household believed. The reason Jesus did miracles was to show His message was from God.

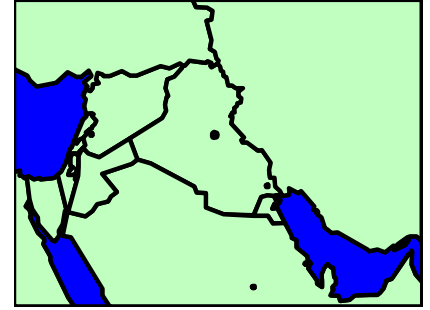
Don't misunderstand, it's not that Jesus didn't care about people and want to see them well, for He really did. However if that was His only, or even His main reason for healing, what about all He didn't heal? Didn't He care for them? Miracles were Jesus' 'calling card,' to show that He had God's stamp of approval on all He said. Miracles were only a means to an end, not an end in themselves. They were to show people Jesus was worth listening to, to gain Him a hearing, so He could tell them about the gift of salvation He was offering. Physical healing would last for a few years, then the person would die. Spiritual healing affected not only this life, but all eternity as well. That is what Jesus was mostly concerned about. That's why, in a little over a year, He will virtually stop doing public miracles -- people only want the physical benefits He could give (healing, free food, etc.) but weren't interested in listening to His message. Unfortunately there are many today, too, who come to Jesus only for what they can get from Him, not what they can give to Him. Jesus wants us to follow Him because we love Him and are willing to do whatever He wants no matter what. If you follow Him because He can give you peace and joy, remove your guilt, help you in times of trouble, etc., you are following Him for what you can get out of it. These are fine side benefits, but shouldn't be our main reason for serving Him. That is self centered, not Jesus centered.

For now, though, everyone was interested in every word Jesus had to say (Lk 4:14-15). He told them to repent of their sins and follow Him, believing His good news of salvation (Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15). That is His message to us today, too -- don't miss it!



Let the
ROCKS
CRY OUT

SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1999

10. SO FAR, SO GOOD

The spring of 31 AD was a very active time in Jesus' ministry. Word about His claims of being the Messiah were spreading. Interest was high. People were starting to have to decide about Jesus' claims. Some believed, others didn't. It was a crucial time, which way would the momentum go? Would the nation accept Him as the Messiah or would they reject Him?

REJECTION IN NAZARETH (Luke 4:16-30) As Jesus tells us (Acts 1:8) we are to go to our family and friends first with His message. As Jesus found, though, they won't always be open. When Jesus went back to His hometown, Nazareth, where had lived from approximately age 4 to 30, He was rejected. They were proud to think the Messiah came from THEIR town, but when it came time to submit to Him and follow Him in obedience, they wouldn't do that. It was too much to accept. Like today, it's easier to believe an 'expert' from another state. It's much harder to believe someone you knew from a child, someone you watched grow up, someone whose 'diaper you changed,' so to speak. We run into that today, and so did Jesus. In fact, it got so bad for in Nazareth that they tried to actually kill Jesus, but He was supernaturally delivered because it wasn't the time, place or way for Him to die.

As a result, however, He moved to Capernaum to live (Matthew 4:13-16), for that is where much of His extended family lived. Many of His new followers and disciples were from there, and a good number were part of this extended family. They were accepting of Him.

CATCHING FISH (Luke 5:1-10) A faith-test for His followers there came one day not too long after Jesus moved there. Peter and others had been fishing all night, as was the custom, and came home tired and empty. They spent much time repairing and cleaning their nets and were looking forward to getting to bed when Jesus told them to go back out and drop their nets in deep water. This was the wrong place and the wrong time to fish, plus they'd have to clean their nets again. Also, they were very tired as well as discouraged. Many times the things Jesus wants us to do don't seem to make sense to us. We have our faith tests today, too.

As you know, though, they made a tremendous catch of fish! This greatly increased their faith in Jesus. Soon after He asked Peter, Andrew, James and John to leave their fishing to spend all their time with Him, so He could teach them how to catch men as fish (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:10-11). They had enough faith and commitment to leave their successful business to serve Him. When He calls us to leave what seems satisfying and successful in our world to follow Him, we must not hesitate or hold back either.

DEMONIZED MAN IN SYNAGOGUE HEALED (Mark 1:21-28; Luke 4:31-37) Another event after His moving to Capernaum was the healing of a demonized man in the synagogue. Jesus wouldn't let the demons speak but cast them out. Everyone who saw the event became more aware of Jesus' power and authority, even over Satan himself.

PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW HEALED (Matthew 8:14-17; Mark 1:29-34; Luke 4:38-41) After a synagogue service, perhaps the same one in which the demonized man was delivered, Peter invited the disciples home for a meal. The problem was that his mother-in-law was sick and therefore his wife was busy taking care of her. Peter often acted impulsively, without a lot of forethought or planning. Jesus bailed him out this time by healing the mother-in-law so quickly and completely that, not only was her fever gone, but her strength and energy returned immediately so she could help Peter's wife feed the surprise visitors. Jesus cares about our daily needs, our inter-personal dealings, and the burden of our daily work load.

GALILEAN TOUR WITH 4 DISCIPLES (Matthew 4:23-25; Mark 1:35-39; Luke 4:42-44) Before long it was time to take His message to surrounding communities again, so Jesus took the 4 ex-fishermen He had called to be with Him along as a teaching and training time for them as well. It seems too many were coming to Him in Capernaum just for healing -- what they could get out of it. They weren't interested in Him as much as themselves. Thus it was time to go to other people who haven't heard. He went to local synagogues and spoke there, healing and delivering the demonized. Large crowds came from all over to hear and see Him.

One of the people Jesus healed was a leper (Matthew 8:2-4; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-16). After healing him Jesus told him to go straight to Jerusalem as proof to the priests there that Jesus was the Messiah. Instead he started telling everyone what had happened to him. Unfortunately many came to Jesus just for healing -- for what they could get from Jesus. As a result Jesus withdrew. He always called His followers to build His kingdom, He never submitted to follow their desires to have Him build their own little kingdoms.

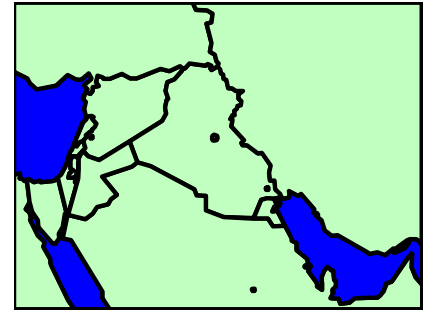
PARALYTIC HEALED (Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26) When He got back to Capernaum Jesus continued teaching and supporting His verbal claims by miraculous acts. One such was healing a paralyzed man who was led down through the roof because there was no other way to get to Jesus. The clear connection between Jesus' physical and spiritual healing is seen in this event for Jesus said He healed him physically as outer proof that He could and did heal him spiritually (forgive his sins and remove his guilt). The religious rulers were indignant, but the common people were amazed and impressed.

CALL OF MATTHEW (Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32) A despised tax collector named Matthew worked the Capernaum roads, collecting as much as he wanted and turning a portion of it over to Rome. Despite being hated by the Jews, Jesus knew his heart was empty and, when He called Matthew to leave that work and be a full-time follower of His, Matthew quickly accepted. Proof of his complete change was that he didn't even want to be treasurer of the disciples, leaving Judas handle that job. Jesus used Matthew as an example of the kind of people He came for: those who are needy and know it. Unless we know our need and take it to Jesus it will never be completely filled. Satan's substitutes don't satisfy.

FEASTING AND FASTING (Matthew 9:14-17; Mark 2:18-22; Luke 5:33-39) A delegation of John the baptizer's followers came and asked Jesus why He didn't fast as they did. He explained that there will be a time for that, but now that the Messiah was here it was a time of rejoicing. And a time of rejoicing it was. Except for His rejection by those in Nazareth and the religious rulers (pride of both), Jesus is being well accepted everywhere He goes. So far.



SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1999

11. THE TURNING POINT

The summer of 31 AD marked the middle of the 3+ years of Jesus earthly public ministry. So far, so good. There has been rejection in Nazareth and by the religious rulers, both from pride and jealousy), but the majority of the people are open and interested, coming for healing and listening to His Messianic claims. Soon that is about to change, however. Now that people know His claims, they will start hearing His demands. He didn't come just to make their life easier and more pleasurable. He came to call them to give all that up to follow and serve Him. That isn't nearly as popular. Still, in honesty Jesus must tell them. He didn't change or sugar-coat His call to lifelong discipleship just to have more come follow Him. The summer of 31 AD was a time of challenging those who were following Him and forcing them to make some hard choices, choices we all must make.

IMPOTENT MAN HEALED AT A POOL ON THE SABBATH (John 5:1-47) Jesus attended the 3 main feasts in Jerusalem each year which men were supposed to attend: Declaration (December), Passover (April) and Tabernacles (September). When there for the feast of Passover, exactly 2 years before He would be killed there and one year after His talk with Nicodemus, He healed a crippled man. He used this as a time to teach the people about Who He was and why He came.

SABBATH CONTROVERSIES

Disciples pluck grain on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5) On the way back from Jerusalem, while walking through Galilee, the Jesus and the disciples plucked grain from the edges of the fields (an act allowed, even encouraged, by God's Law). They rubbed the shell off and ate the raw grain as they walked. The religious leaders used this to accuse them of breaking the law, for they did this on the Sabbath. Jesus broke their man-made laws, but not God's law. Jesus used the opportunity to try and show them that God was more concerned about heart attitudes than outer actions. We need to watch that ourselves.

Man with withered hand healed on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11) When Jesus entered the Capernaum synagogue there was a man with a crippled hand there. Could He heal him on the Sabbath? Of course, Jesus said -- it's always lawful to do good and help others. Jesus then healed him. For the first time, now, though, the religious leaders start plotting how they can kill Jesus to get rid of Him. There is no other way to stop Him, and considering His claims to be true is unthinkable to them. He must be removed.

JESUS WITHDRAWS INTO THE HILL COUNTRY

He heals (Matthew 12:15-21; Mark 3:7-12) Knowing of their desire to kill Him, and that the time, place and means aren't right, Jesus moved out into the Galilean countryside. As He traveled He preached, supporting His message with miracles of healing and deliverance.

He calls disciples (Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16) Arriving at the Horns of Hattin in northern Galilee, Jesus spends the night in prayer seeking God's will. In the morning He chosen 12 men from the ones who follow to be with Him 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This was the typical way a rabbi chose and trained disciples. As Jesus senses the multitudes turning from Him and the nation rejecting Him, plan "B" comes into play. He will start training those who will carry on the work after He is gone. A subtle shift begins from preaching and doing miracles for the multitudes to teaching and training a small group of disciples.

He preaches (Matthew 5:1 - 8:1; Luke 6:17-49) As a rabbi calling followers, Jesus tells them and all who are listening just what He demands of His followers. Instead of telling them what He will do for them, as a good politician wanting supporters would do, He tells them what He wants them to do for Him. Of course they will ultimately be the main benefactors of this, but often this message strikes against man's basic selfishness and pride. Thus the Sermon on the Mount called followers to forsake all else and follow Him completely, no matter the cost. This is the challenge He still gives to those who would follow Him today. It isn't easy, but the benefits are 'out of this world!'

TRAVELING, TEACHING AND HEALING

Centurion's servant healed (Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10) When Jesus went back to Capernaum He healed a servant of a Gentile officer in the Roman army, commending him for his great faith. Sometimes it is surprising who will believe in Jesus and who won't.

Widow's son raised (Luke 7:11-17) Jesus was always on the go these months. As he approached Nain he brought a widow's son back to life. Bringing back the dead should be proof positive that He has power over life and death. Jesus is making sure no one is without opportunity to know and believe in Him. This miracle just couldn't be explained away!

John has some questions... (Matthew 11:2-19; Luke 7:18-35) John, who is in prison, starts wondering if Jesus really is the Messiah. He, too, expected everyone to be following Him by now, but many, including the influential religious leaders, are totally against Him and His claims. He is confused. Jesus explains to him that just because everyone isn't accepting Him doesn't mean He isn't the Messiah. It is the hardness of their hearts and their self-centeredness that keep them from humbly seeking forgiveness and living their lives for Him.

Galilee cities reject Jesus (Matthew 11:20-30) Jesus warned the places that had seen many great miracles yet rejected Him that they were under judgment and very accountable.

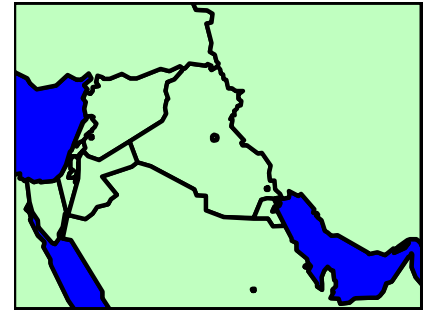
First anointing of Jesus' feet (Luke 7:36-50) Admits all this gloom and rejection, there are still bright rays of hope and changed lives. While at a religious rulers home, being treated in a barely civil manner, an immoral woman comes and pours out her life savings along with her heart at Jesus' feet. She receives Jesus' love and forgiveness,

Second Galilee tour with the 12 (Luke 8:1-3) Jesus took the 12 this time when he went from city to city. He healed a demon-possessed blind and dumb man (Matthew 12:22-37; Mark 3:20-30). He told those who rejected Him that the only additional 'sign' they would receive, having rejected His miracles, would be the sign of Jonah (His resurrection)(Matthew 12:38-45). Even his family and friends started turning against Him, saying He is crazy to claim to be God (Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21).

Truly the summer of 31 AD was a turning point, and not for the better. Each must decide about Jesus' claims. What have you decided? Where do you stand?

Let the ROCKS CRY OUT

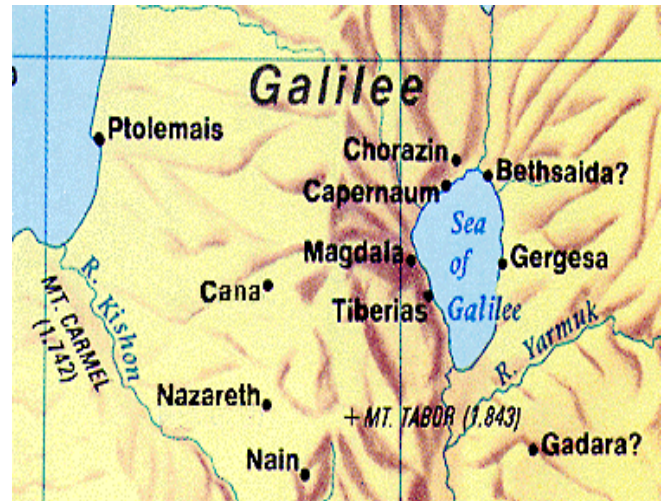
SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1999

12. BY THE SEA, BY THE SEA, BY THE BEAUTIFUL SEA

The main events during the fall of 31 AD revolved around the Sea of Galilee. Jesus was staying a little closer to home. He probably went to Jerusalem in early fall for the Feast of Tabernacles, but nothing is recorded about that visit. A subtle but distinct change has taken place in Jesus' ministry. No longer is He trying to reach the masses with His message and doing miracles in front of all to validate His words. Now He is training His disciples, preparing them to take over for Him (although they don't realize that yet). Miracles for the masses are replaced by parables for His followers. He begins using a common teaching device of all times: short stories that help explain and illustrate truth. This makes His meaning clearer to his followers. But it also hides His special truths from those would reject and mock it.



KINGDOM OF HEAVEN PARABLES (Matthew 13:1-53; Mark 4:1-34; Luke 8:4-18) One day by the sea of Galilee Jesus told His disciples a series of parables which would explain what was happening and what would happen. He was being rejected, not because anything was lacking in Him, but because many hardened their hearts or put themselves first (parable of the sower). Still, some would accept and grow in Him, but they would be a small minority.

Even among that minority, though, the enemy would sow weeds to harm the crop. Satan will plant false disciples among the true to mislead and confuse them. Ultimately God would prevail, but it would often be hard to tell true from false followers.

The parables of the mustard seed and yeast show that the growth of the kingdom will start slow (a handful at the crucifixion), but ultimately grow to include the whole earth (during the Millennium). For those who find Him, though, Jesus says it's like finding a treasure hidden in a field or a merchant discovering fine pearls. They will give up anything and everything to have this relationship with Him. For those who find Him, that will be the best thing that ever happened to them, or to us!

JESUS STILLS THE SEA (Matthew 8:8, 23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25) Later that day Jesus got in a boat with His disciples and headed to the other side of the lake. Being tired

(Jesus was every bit as human as we are and therefore knows what we go through) He fell asleep. Even a terrible storm didn't wake Him up, so the disciples did. He rebuked the storm and immediately, instantly the storm stopped. Even the rough water settled down. His disciples were amazed! They had seen hundreds of miracles that He performed, so that didn't surprise them. However it's different when it's your neck in the noose!

GADARENES DEMONIZED MEN DELIVERED (Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39) It may have been that Satan was trying to keep Jesus from His destination because he knew Jesus was invading his territory. Two men who were deeply demonized and ran naked in the graveyard, cutting themselves and breaking chains that were to hold them. They were indwelt by so many demons that they called themselves 'Legion.' Jesus immediately cast them out of the men, who returned to their right mind and put their faith in Jesus. The local people wanted Jesus to leave, though, because He allowed the demons to go into a herd of pigs (unclean animals and forbidden to the Jews) who drowned themselves. The men became witnesses to him in their home area, though. They set the foundation for later work by the apostles.

JARIUS' DAUGHTER BROUGHT BACK TO LIFE (Matthew 9:18-19, 23-26; Mark 5:21-24, 35-43; Luke 8:40-42, 49-56) Having accomplished what He crossed the lake to do, Jesus then went back to Capernaum when a Jewish leader named Jairus came and asked Jesus to heal his daughter who was dying. On the way to his house Jesus was interrupted by a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years (Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48). She reached out in faith and touched Him, and He healed her. This distraction, though, slowed up Jesus' progress and before He could reach Jairus' daughter word came that she had died so there was no more reason for Him to come. Jesus went there anyway and brought the girl back to life! This was the second time He had done this (the widow of Nain's son was first; Lazarus will be the third and last). What Jesus did was resuscitate the girl so she could go on living in her earthly body until she again died. What would happen to Jesus' body was resurrection, a new body not limited to the dimensions of this earth. That's what we will get, too!

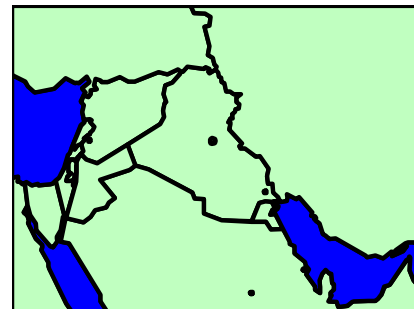
BLIND MEN HEALED (Matthew 9:27-31) Jesus healed two blind men who came to Him in faith, but told them not to tell anyone what had happened. He didn't want crowds coming just to have Him perform miracles for them. That time had passed.

DEMONIZED DUMB MAN HEALED (Matthew 9:32-34) Right after healing the two blind men a demon-possessed man who couldn't talk was brought to Jesus. Jesus drove the demon out and the man could speak, praising Jesus. The people, too, praised Jesus. However the religious rulers wouldn't believe. They couldn't deny the miracle, so they changed the source of it. They said that He had authority over demons from Satan, thus saying He was working by Satan's power, not God's. This rejection of these was so strong that they would never be open to Him. They were jealous of His popularity. They were angry when He didn't bow down to them and their laws and regulations.

Thus the shift that started a few months ago is continuing, even growing. While individuals can still come to Jesus for salvation, it seems the nation itself has rejected Him. The religious leaders have, and the majority are either against Him because they don't want to submit to Him or are too apathetic to care one way or the other. Where do you stand?

Let the ROCKS CRY OUT

SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1999

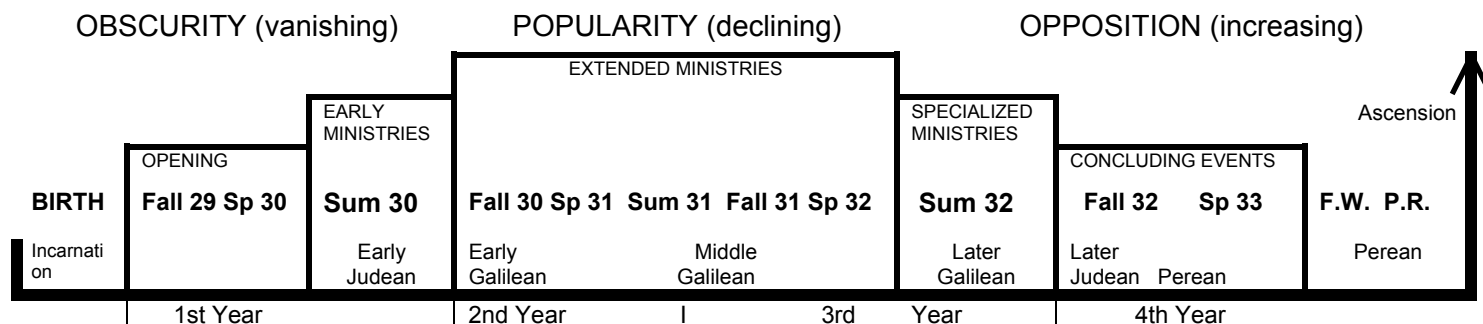
13. THE BEGINNING OF THE END

By the spring of 32 AD the die was cast. Jesus was not going to be accepted as the Messiah. The religious rulers and the nation as a whole were not going to submit themselves to His rulership in their lives. The only ones who didn't see the handwriting on the wall were the disciples. They still were under the delusion that sometime soon they would be among the top leaders in Jerusalem, next to Jesus when He sat on David's throne. Jesus knew better.

SECOND REJECTION AT NAZARETH (Matthew 13:54-58; Mark 6:1-6) It was time for Jesus to return to Nazareth, His home town, to give them another chance to follow Him. Maybe His first time there they were caught by surprise. Maybe now that they've had time to think and listen. Maybe... But nothing doing! When He again spoke in the synagogue, as rabbis were allowed to do, the people were quicker and stronger in their rejection. That was their last chance, their final vote. Jesus won't go back to their synagogue again, and nothing about any kind of visit to Nazareth is recorded.

TWELVE SENT OUT

Leaving Nazareth, **Jesus sent out His twelve disciples two by two** (Matthew 9:35 - 10:15; Mark 6:7-11; Luke 9:1-5). This was not only part of their hands-on training for when He would be gone, it was also a way of reaching as many people as possible with His message. Everyone had heard one way or another, but Jesus wanted to have each one have as much opportunity as possible to believe. It's the same thing He had just done with Nazareth.



Before sending them out, Jesus went into detail telling them **what to expect** (Matthew 10:16-23). Most of His words had to do with handling rejection. He was warning and preparing

them so they wouldn't be surprised. We, too, shouldn't be surprised when people reject our message. Still Jesus sends us anyway, to make sure everyone has as clear an opportunity as possible.

Then Jesus talked to them about **discipleship** (Matthew 10:24-42). After all, how were they to feel about being sent out to be rejected? Why should they even bother going? Well, a disciple shouldn't be surprised when he goes through what his Master has to go through. A disciple gives up all his own desires and goals to serve his Master. Discipleship isn't easy. It is very costly. It costs all of us. But then Jesus is giving all of Himself for His disciples. What better use of a life is there than to give it in service of God and His kingdom?

The **results** were that the disciples spread God's word with power (Matthew 11:1; Mark 6:12-13; Luke 9:6).

JOHN DIES (Matthew 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-29; Luke 9:7-9) Lest there be any doubt about what awaited Jesus, John is now killed. His message was rejected and he was killed to silence his words. What happens to the forerunner is what will happen to the One who sent him to prepare the way. Jesus knows this. It is obviously the beginning of the end. Now it's just a matter of time until Jesus Himself is also killed. Jesus has one year of life on earth left.

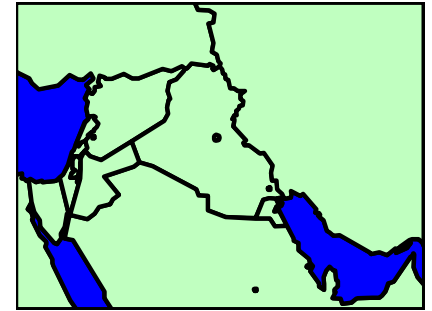
Why was Jesus rejected? Why didn't the Jews accept Him as their Messiah and King? If He would have just given without calling for anything from them they would have followed Him in a moment. Free food, healing of illness -- these everyone wants. But when He called on them then (and us now) to admit our sin and helplessness and come to Him for forgiveness and restoration, it is often more than a person in their pride will admit. Then to those who will accept His free gift of salvation, Jesus challenges them (and us) to lay down our own life and desires in order to daily serve Him and do His will instead of our own. To a self-centered person, who isn't sure about the existence of God to begin with, such a life seems utterly ridiculous! Their whole world view is entirely different, far different.

The same is true today. The following chart shows the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian world view. When we challenge people to accept Jesus as their Savior, we are really asking them to change their whole viewpoint of life and death. Everything must change. This takes time, of course. It's important to understand what we are asking for when we share Jesus, and why for some it is so hard. It's important, too, to see this for it is often the root of the battles that go on in our own life. Study the following chart. Make sure all you think as well as do is from the Christian world view!

CHRISTIAN WORLD VIEW	NON-CHRISTIAN WORLD VIEW
One world view	Various different ones but similar
MAN: sinful, fallen, can't save self	MAN: OK, getting better, independent
Satan, sin, evil exist	no such thing as sin, evil - outgrow it
GOD: transcendent, sovereign, involved	GOD: no supernatural power involved
Creation - sovereign loving God	Evolution - chance
TRUTH: absolutes, revealed by God in Bible	TRUTH: relative, individual
SUFFERING: purpose for man, God	SUFFERING: no purpose, luck
PURPOSE OF LIFE: serve God, do His will see this life in light of eternity	PURPOSE OF LIFE: pleasure now this life all there is, focus on it only

Let the ROCKS CRY OUT

SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1999

14. JESUS' SECOND MOST STRESSFUL DAY

Talk about a stressful day! It was Jesus' second most stressful day in His life. Only the crucifixion tops it! It's so important it's recorded in all four gospels (Matthew 14:13-36; Mark 6:30-56; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-21). Being recorded by all four writers is VERY rare and shows how special this day was. It happened early in the summer of 32 AD.

A DAY IN THE SUMMER OF 32 AD It all began with the disciples gone on their preaching tour through Galilee. Jesus had just heard about John the Baptizer being killed. He knows that if His forerunner is rejected and killed, the same thing will happen to Him. Herod has even made some implied threats in this direction. Suddenly the disciples return and in great excitement try to tell Jesus everything that has happened. People have been healed, demons cast out, and God's power visibly shown. No one seems to care much about Jesus and how He is doing. Everyone is more interested in talking than listening. Jesus understands this so He puts His own needs on hold and listens to them.

However before they get very far a crowd starts gathering as word spreads the disciples are back. Some came from outlying areas, following the disciples into town. As word of their success spreads more and more people gather. In order to have the necessary time with His disciples, Jesus has them get into a boat and sail across the Sea of Galilee. Jesus was anticipating some rest together, time to debrief and also a discussion of John's death and its implications for them. A nice restful time on a distant beach was what everyone needed!



That was not to be, for when Jesus got there a large crowd, which had been following them on the shore, was already collecting. By the time everyone arrived it contained 5,000 men – who knows how large the whole crowd was. Jesus not put His own needs on hold, but also those of the disciples and had compassion on the people. He taught them and healed the sick among them. By the time the day was over everyone was hungry, but there was no food source nearby. The disciples weren't able to help, despite the miracles that had just recently been performed through them, so Jesus Himself fed everyone with 5 small loaves

and 2 fish – and there were 12 basketsfull of leftovers! Well this convinced the crowd they wanted Jesus as king: free food and free medical care, probably even freedom from Rome and its heavy taxes, what could be better? To avoid their carrying Him off as king Jesus hid. He sent the disciples back across the lake in their boat and headed into the hills for His own quiet time with God – finally! No doubt John's death as well as the selfish reaction of the people lay heavy on His heart.

Meanwhile, however, the disciples were having their own problems. A storm had blown as soon as they started across the lake, which was about sunset. Every second their lives were in jeopardy for the boat could capsize and drown them all any moment. Jesus had sent them into this storm, and He wasn't coming to rescue them. Why? Was it because they were impatient with the people's needs, only wanting Jesus for themselves? Was it because they were jealous of the little boy with the lunch who had

more faith than they did? Was it because they needed to be taught to trust Jesus no matter what? There was no time to think, every ounce of energy went to staying afloat.

Finally, about 3 in the morning, Jesus (who had been looking down on them in the storm all night) went to rescue them. He would have walked right past them if they hadn't called to Him. Peter actually walked on the water a little but sank. As soon as Jesus got in the boat and rebuked the storm it instantly stopped. What's more, the sea was still. Now it usually took several hours for the boiling water to settle down, but not when Jesus told it to be still. Well, those disciples were really impressed! They bowed down and worshipped Him as God. Why did this impress them more than the hundreds of others they had seen? It was because this time it was their neck in the noose! If God sends you into a storm, then seems to not come to your rescue, it's so you'll appreciate it all the more when He does deliver you. Stand firm in your faith until He does arrive. He's never late!

What a day that was for Jesus! He had it all: stress, bad news, demands constantly made on His time, interruptions, failure of those who were to help them, everyone self-centered and thinking only of themselves, no time to eat, rest or pray and one thing going wrong after another. You can take your bad days to Him – believe me, He understands!

SUMMER, 32 AD That day was typical of what happened during the summer of 32. People were following Jesus for what they could get out of it, and when their self-centered demands weren't met they dropped Him. It really hurt and disappointed Him.

Soon after the stressful day we talked about He talked to the people in Capernaum, telling them He was the bread of life, the only one to really meet their needs (John 6:22-65). As more and more people left Him, He asked the disciples if they were going to go, too. Peter affirmed their faith in Jesus and really encouraged Him (John 6:66-7:1). Still, legalistic religious rulers took advantage of every chance they could find to criticize His failure to obey their man-made rituals (Mt 15:1-20; Mk 7:1-13).

Then Jesus spent several weeks traveling throughout Galilee (John 7:1). He found faith among Gentiles, healing the daughter of a woman who had more faith than He found among the Jews (Mt 15:21-28; Mk 7:24-30). He healed a deaf mute (Mk 15:29-31; Mk 7:31-37) and again fed a crowd, this one of 4,000 men (Mt 15:32-38; Mk 8:1-9). Still the people demanded proof He was the Messiah (Mt 15:39 - 16:4; Mk 8:9-12). That proof would be the sign of Jonah, alive after being dead for 3 days.

Jesus warned His followers of the subtle growth of the sin of unbelief, like leaven (Mt 16:5-12; Mk 8:13-21). Traveling on Jesus healed a blind man (Mk 8:22-26).

Upon reaching Mt Hermon Jesus stopped and talked to His disciples. He asked them if they knew Who He was. When they did, He was most encouraged at their faith (Mt 16:13-20; Mk 8:27-30; Lk 9:18-21). Then He warned them that, instead of setting up a throne, He would be crucified but would come back to life (Mt 16:21-23; Mk 8:31-33; Lk 9:22). He went on to teach them about discipleship (Mt 16:24-28; Mk 8:34-9:1 Lk 9:23-27) and the commitment it would take from them to follow Him in the coming difficult times.

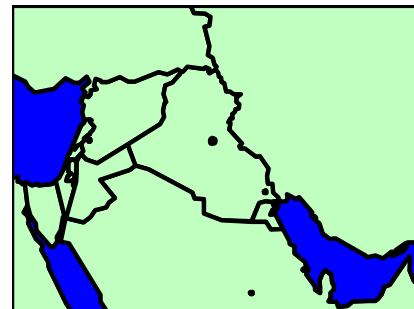
He then went further up Mt Hermon with Peter, James and John where He was transfigured and they saw His eternal glory (Mt 17:1-8; Mk 9:2-8; Lk 9:28-36). This led to a discussion about John fulfilling the prophecy of 'Elijah' coming before the Messiah (Mt 17:9-13; Mk 9:9-13). When they went back to the other disciples they found demons indwelling a boy and the disciples not able to drive them out. Jesus rebuked them and they left immediately (Mt 17:14-21; Mk 9:14-29; Lk 9:37-43). Again He told them about His coming death and resurrection (Mt 17:22-23; Mk 9:30-32; Lk 9:43-45) so they would be prepared and not lose faith when it happened.

Upon arriving back in Capernaum Jesus got a fish with a coin in its mouth to pay His and Peter's tax (Mt 17:24-27). He warned the disciples about being proud (Mt 18:1-14; Lk 9:33-50; Lk 9:46-50). They were tempted to be as narrow and self-centered as the rest of the people. Jesus also taught them about the importance of forgiveness (Mt 18:15-35).

Thus the summer of 32 was a time of lots of action and activity as Jesus traveled and taught. People liked Him, but for what He could do for them, not what they could do for Him. How painful and discouraging that must have been for Him. It was often true even of His own disciples. What about you? Do you follow Him for what He can do for you or for what you can do for Him (because of what He already has done for you)?



SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1999

15. SIX MONTHS TO LIVE

SUPPOSE you found out you have just six months to live? What difference would that make? How would you spend your remaining time? As terrible as that sounds, it still happens quite often. God doesn't tell us ahead of time when and how we will die. Suppose He did? Would you like to know just when and how you would die? I wouldn't. Life is better not knowing. Even knowing as much as that we probably won't live more than six more months can be hard. Can you imagine what it was like for Jesus? He knew He'd be dead in six months, and He knew how He'd die. What a hard thing to live with.

Now let's take that a step further. Suppose you knew that in six months you'd die – but you didn't have to. Suppose you were going to die in someone else's place in 6 months. Suppose it was arranged that you could take the place of a condemned criminal and the authorities would let you die in his place, so he wouldn't have to. Now suppose that during those 6 months this man treated you in an awful way: mocking you, ignoring you, only coming to you when he wanted something, and not showing any appreciation for what you were going to do for him. How would that affect you? How would that influence your last 6 months and what you did (or didn't do).

One more element must be added. Suppose no one but you knew what you were going to do in six months. Even the person you were dying for didn't know. Oh, you tried to tell him, but he didn't want to listen. You could see it coming: you'd give your life for him but he wouldn't accept your payment and would end up dying anyway! Sure, you tried to tell some close friends, but they were so wrapped up in their own lives it never sunk in. You are committed to die for someone who doesn't care and probably won't accept your payment, someone who is nasty to you, and you have no one to talk to about all this.

Sound like a tough situation? Of course you know my analogy. I'm talking about Jesus in the **FALL OF 32 AD**. Jesus knew He'd die because the nation as a whole, as well as the vast majority of the people, were rejecting Him. He told His followers a couple times, but they didn't think about it until after the resurrection. Seeing Jesus' activities during the fall of 32 AD in light of this takes on new light. How would He respond? What would He do? Let's see.

Despite a fresh round of rejection by His own brothers (Jn 7:2-10) and people in Samaria (Matthew 8:19-22; Lk 9:51-62), Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles (Jn 7:11-52). While there He rescued a woman caught in adultery (Jn 7:53 - 8:11). He tried to tell the people to watch out for the darkness but follow His light (Jn 8:12-20), for in doing so they would be following God, not Satan (Jn 8:21-59). To show that He could remove spiritual darkness and blindness, He healed a man of physical darkness/blindness. His attitude was still that of a servant. Instead of thinking about Himself and His needs, what was fair and what wasn't, He continued to reach out to others, to minister to their needs and to try and bring them to

salvation. He said He was the good Shepherd Who was going to lay down His life for His sheep (Jn 10:1-21). Even in His last months of life, Jesus put others and their needs first. He continued to give of Himself, committed to following God's plan and purpose for His life no matter what.

After the Feast of Tabernacles, instead of going home to Capernaum in Galilee, where the majority of His followers lived, where He could have found some solace and support, Jesus stayed in Judea. Since the end was near He wanted to make sure everyone had a fair chance to hear and respond. Despite the facts that their hearts were harder and there was little response from the Judeans, Jesus did all He could to reach them. Only one of His 12 disciples were from Judea, and that one was Judas. To cover more ground and reach more people, and also to continue their training, Jesus sent out 70 of His followers two by two, warning them they wouldn't always be accepted (Luke 10:1-24).

To teach His values Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). He spent time with His good friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus (Lk 10:25-37) and gave them a lesson in servanthood, too. Serving others was His theme (Lk 11:1-13). Even after healing a dumb man (Lk 11:14-28) the people demanded He prove to them He was God (Lk 11:29-36). Jesus said the only proof they'd have any more would be the resurrection (the "sing of Jonah").

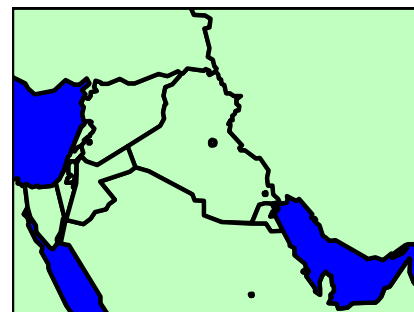
Jesus condemned hypocrisy (Lk 12:1-12) and warned them against greed (Lk 12:13-34). He encouraged them to be alert and watchful (Lk 12:35-41) as well as faithful (Lk 12:42-48). He taught them what He expected (Lk 12:49-53) and told them to watch the signs of the times (Lk 12:54-59). He called them to repentance and faith in Him (Lk 13:1-9). He did some healing, like when He healed a crippled woman (Lk 13:10-17), but the times of large numbers of healings before large groups was long past. He taught about the coming Kingdom, what it would start slow and gradually grow (Lk 13:18-21). It certainly was starting slowly.

Then, when it was time for the Feast of Dedication, Jesus again went to Jerusalem (Jn 10:22-39). His death was now just a few months away. He has spent the last months reaching out to those in need.

You see, Jesus' sacrifice of Himself didn't just begin on the cross. It started long before that. Actually it started before the world was created, when the Second Person of the Trinity volunteered to come to earth as a man and die for our sins (Rev. 13:8). His whole existence on earth was one of self-giving and sacrifice, for His enemies as well as for His friends (John 13). Knowing His time was short didn't change His life, it just intensified His focus. That should be the way it is with us, too. As He "washes our feet," so we are to "wash one another's feet" (John 13:14). We, too, are to live lives of sacrificial service for others, putting them and their needs before our own. We are to be like our Master, laying down our lives in daily sacrifice of service to others. That doesn't mean we don't have legitimate needs of our own, nor does it mean we are to let people use us, take advantage of us and walk all over us. We are to be innocent as doves but wise as serpents (Matthew 10:16). It's not easy, in fact humanly speaking it is impossible, but with His help all things are possible. Living for self is empty and means losing everything. Living for God and others is the only way to have meaning and purpose in life, now and for eternity (Matthew 10:39). The choice is yours. Choose wisely.

Let the ROCKS CRY OUT

SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



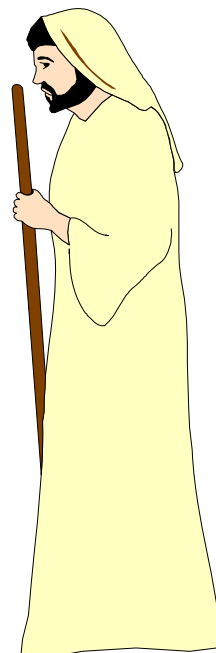
By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1999

16. WRAPPING UP THE FINAL DETAILS

The end is inevitable. Jesus has been rejected and will die. Nothing will change that, for God won't do anything to force man's free will choice. However the rest of the script needs to be read, the final events played out. Now it's a matter of waiting for the right time. The Lamb must die on Passover day, and that is still 3 months away. The waiting is always the hardest. One's mind can run to one extreme or the other. Staying focused during such a time is very hard, but that's what Jesus did during the **SPRING of 33 AD**.

Galilee had been thoroughly evangelized. Everyone had heard about Jesus. Each had opportunity to find out more interested. Minds were made up. Hearts were set. Their verdict: Jesus is a nice person, the free food is great, and if He would overthrow the Romans that would be great – but to give up all and follow Him as God and Savior, that's asking too much!

Knowing this Jesus went to Perea (John 10:40-42), an area east of the Jordan. Not only was He safer there (He knew it wasn't time for Him to be killed yet), but He was able to give those who hadn't heard a chance to follow Him. He did the same teaching there that He had done in Galilee and Judea. Only Luke records Jesus' teachings there. He spoke about salvation (13:22-30) and warned them about Herod (13:31-35). He performed a healing in a Pharisee's home (14:1-6) and told parables about an ambitious guest (14:7-14) and the great supper (14:15-24). After explaining about the importance of discipleship (14:25-35) He gave parables about a lost sheep, coin and son (15:1-32) and an unjust steward (16:1-13). These were spoken to show them the importance of following Jesus completely and of the judgment and loss that awaited those who didn't. He warned against covetousness (16:14-17) and answered questions about divorce (16:18). One of His best-known teachings was that of Lazarus and the rich man (16:19-31), another warning against putting faith in position and possessions. He concluded His time there teaching about forgiveness (17:1-6) and the importance of being a servant (17:7-10).

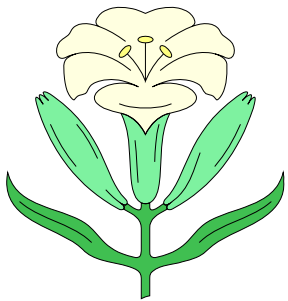


Then came a very pivotal event. In looking at Jesus' life one can see several times when it seems He went out of His way to force the Jews to have to decide if they would accept or reject Him. The first was when He chased out the sellers and money changers the first time He came to the temple after His baptism. This hit the religious leaders where it hurt – in their wallet! They were forced to notice Him and take a stand one way or the other. Now He is going to do

the same thing – do something so extreme they must notice and act one way or the other. He'll do that by bringing Lazarus back to life right under their noses, and then a few weeks later by riding a donkey into town proclaiming Himself the Messiah and King. These events couldn't be ignored.

The raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-44) was so obviously a supernatural miracle that none could deny it or explain it away. It was so close to Jerusalem that many people there knew Lazarus (evidently a well-to-do and influential man) and came to talk to him about what had happened to Him. When the religious rulers checked it out they couldn't find any way to explain it away. They decided Jesus and Lazarus both would have to die to stop this strange movement that was gaining so much support. They were jealous. While most people didn't accept Jesus as Messiah and Savior, the majority did take His side in His conflict with the proud and controlling religious rulers. Having set in motion the events that would soon end in His death, Jesus then withdrew to Ephraim where it was safer (John 11:45-54) for it still wasn't time to die for sin.

Jesus made His last trip through Galilee and Samaria and healed 10 lepers (Lk 17:11-19). He taught about the coming kingdom (Lk 19:20-27), the importance of persistence in prayer (Lk 18:1-8) and having the proper attitude (Luke 18:9-14). Jesus visited His home area for the last time, setting His face to Jerusalem. Only He knew what was coming as He left Galilee and headed south.



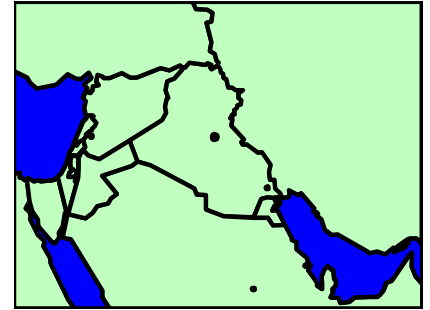
Jesus then swung through Perea again, completing the work He had started there. He again taught about divorce (Mt 19:1-12) and how man is to become like a little child to enter the kingdom (Mk 19:13-15). A rich young ruler came to Him and asked about eternal life, but Jesus knew He'd have to deal with His love of money before He could truly follow Jesus (Mk 19:16-22). With time getting shorter every day, Jesus focused on talking about eternal life by teaching (Mt 19:23-30) and by use of parables (Mt 20:1-16). He told those who would listen that He would be crucified and rise again (Mt 20:20-28) but no one wanted to think of that, so they didn't let it really register. Pride and self-centeredness seemed to be the norm, as when Jesus rebuked James and John for this (Mk 20:20-28).

Leaving Perea, Jesus headed toward Jerusalem for His fourth Passover since His baptism and temptation. On the way through Jericho He healed some blind men, one of which (Bartimaeus) became a follower of His (Lk 18:35-43). Zacchaeus was another resident of Jericho that responded to Jesus' love and forgiveness and gave up all to follow Him (Lk 19:1-10). Jesus again warned His followers that the kingdom would be delayed (Lk 19:11-29), but people tend to hear what they wanted to hear. The followers of Jesus only wanted to hear about Jesus' coming rulership of Israel, and their exalted positions with Him. Thus He in effect walked alone as He turned His face toward Jerusalem for the final events of His life on earth.

As Jesus walked toward Bethany and His final week on earth, what thoughts must have gone through His mind? Soon the waiting would be over, and the agony would begin: the rejection and suffering and pain. Jesus had faithfully carried out His life's mission on earth, even these last few months when the final choice was certain. His attitude was still one of love and patience for the people. He didn't panic, fear or flee. He persevered faithful to the very end. What a perfect example He sets for us of faithfulness during those hard times of waiting. With His help we, too, can keep a good attitude and faithfully persevere no matter what is to come.

Let the
ROCKS
CRY OUT

SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1999

17. JESUS' LAST WEEK ON EARTH



As the time winds down in a football game, every snap & handoff takes on extra importance. As time starts to run out in a basketball game, each pass and shoot takes on special significance. There is no room for error. Little mistakes get magnified into major disasters. Every movement and every action counts. So it was with Jesus during His final days on earth. His clock was moving closer and closer to 0. No one realized that but Jesus (and perhaps Mary who anointed him at Lazarus' home). Jesus knew that each word, each activity was magnified in importance. Now, especially, there was no room for error. That which was planned before the world was even created was almost near. It was a crucial time to carry out the 'game plan' God had created. Thus the final days in Jesus' life take on special meaning. And just as the final series of plays at the end of the Superbowl which bring victory are minutely analyzed and even memorized, so the final days of Jesus deserve even more careful notice than the previous activities in His life.

It all began **Friday, March 27, 33 AD** when Jesus arrived in Bethany (Jn 12:1; Lk 19:28). To the others it was just another (the fourth) Passover trip to Jerusalem since John baptized Jesus. To Jesus, however, the events had much greater significance. The religious rulers had already decided they would have to kill Jesus to stop His influence from spreading (John 11:55-57). The recent resuscitation of Lazarus, in the very outskirts of Jerusalem, was something with which the religious rulers just couldn't compete. Jesus and His disciples probably went to synagogue services with Mary, Martha and Lazarus as well as other friends in Bethany. It would be His last opportunity to do this for the next Friday He would be in the tomb.

Saturday, March 28, 33 AD was the Sabbath, so not much travel could take place. Mary, sensing what was about to happen, anointed Jesus with valuable perfume as her way of showing her love (Mt 26:6-13; Mk 14:3-9; Jn 12:2-8). It was also her way of saying good bye. When greedy Judas complained about this 'waste' of money, Jesus rebuked him. This seemed to be a turning point for Judas, who started to make plans in his heart to betray Jesus.

The next day, **Sunday, March 29, 33 AD** was when the religious rulers planned to kill Lazarus, too (Jn 12:9-11). His testimony was influencing too many for Jesus.

Then came the final major turning point, when Jesus literally forced everyone to take a decide if they would accept or reject Him. It happened on **Monday, March 30, 33 AD**. It was like when Jim Bowie took his knife and drew a line in the dirt in the Alamo, challenging each man to stay where he was or cross the line. Jesus drew the line by clearly and publicly claiming to be the Messiah-King. By coming into the Eastern gate from the Mt of Olives, riding an unriden donkey, and allowing the people to say “Hosannah” while waving palm branches, He was using symbols and following precedents that clearly claimed Him Messiah (Mt 21:1-9; Mk 11:1-10; Lk 19:29-44; Jn 12:12-19). Everyone understood this. His followers shouted their praises and support, and the religious rulers told Him to make them stop. Up to this point Jesus had told people to not tell others who He was, but now He is putting everyone in a position where they must join in His parade or turn away. Only a minority responded positively. Jesus, knowing what this meant for the Jews as well as Himself, started crying loud and long as He approached the city. The people melted away and those in town reacted with surprise and doubt (Mt 21:10-11; Mk 11:11). Oh, a few responded, like the boys choir in the temple (Mt 21:14-16), but the leaders and majority of the people rejected this claim to Messiahship. At least Jesus gave them one more clear, fair chance to accept Him. No one could say they didn’t know His claim. None could say they were ignorant. Jesus again spent the night in Bethany (Mk 21:17; Mk 11:11).



Jesus had three days left to minister before His death, and He made the most of them. On **Tuesday, March 31, 33 AD** He cursed a fig tree on the way down the Mt of Olives into town (Mt 21:18-19; Mk 11:12-14). While appearing to be lush and healthy, closer inspection saw it wasn’t bearing fruit. This was the purpose for its existence. It was a fake, a hypocrite. The tree, of course, was a picture of the nation Israel. When He entered the temple He drove out the money changers once again (Mt 21:12-13; Mk 11:15-18), closing His ministry in the same way He started it. He did much teaching that day (Jn 12:20-36) to those who would listen, then went to spend the night on the Mt of Olives (Mk 11:19). This gave Him more privacy to think and pray and it drew danger away from Mary, Martha and Lazarus.

Jesus and His disciples passed the fig tree He had cursed the day before on their way into Jerusalem on **Wednesday, April 1, 33 AD**. It was dead and withered, as if it had been dead for many months (Mt 21:21-22; Mk 11:20-25). Upon entering the temple courts, Jesus immediately got into a long and bitter dialogue with the religious rulers which took up most of the morning (Mt 21:23 - 23:39; Mk 1:27 - 12:40; Lk 20:1-47). They kept looking for ways to publicly discredit Jesus but He parried each thrust and drove home point after point of His which unveiled their hypocrisy and self-centeredness. When that was finally over Jesus, exhausted and saddened by their hardness, drifted into the Court of Women for some quiet reflection. There He saw something that really encouraged and excited Him. A poor woman gave all she had to God in love and devotion (Mk 12:41-44; Lk 21:1-4). There were some who did love God and put Him first.

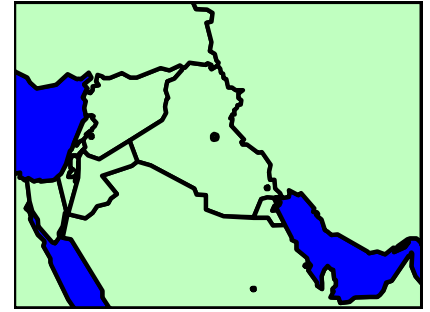
As they left the temple area Jesus foretold its destruction and answered the disciple’s questions about when it would happen and what it would be like (Mt 24:1-25:46; Mk 13:1-37; Lk 21:5-36). He gave the clearest explanation up to that point about when He would return.

Later, in the temple again, Jesus continued to preach and teach (John 21:37-38). He again predicted His crucifixion (Jn 22:1). Meanwhile the religious leaders were planning Jesus arrest (Mt 26:3-5; Mk 14:1-2; Lk 22:20 and taking Judas up on his offer of betrayal (Mt 26:14-16; Mk 14:10-11; Lk 22:3-6).

The next day, **Thursday, April 2, 33 AD**, time would expire and it would be all over.

Let the ROCKS CRY OUT

SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1999

18. CRUCIFIXION OF THE KING

This was it: the moment all history had pointed to. This was the focal point of all time: past present and future. This was the key incident, the most important occurrence ever, the event which changed everything for everyone forever. Nothing ever happened, or ever will happen, that was as important as this. This was it. This was IT.



Thursday, April 2, 33 AD dawned like every other day. Disbelief hung over the city like a blanket (Jn 12:37-43). Jesus entered the temple for a final time of preaching (Jn 12:44-50). Meanwhile Jesus had sent some of the disciples to prepare for the Passover which those from Galilee would be observing that evening (Mt 26:17-19; Mk 14:12-16; Lk 22:7-13). The majority of the people, everyone else, would be observing it the following day. As a firstborn male, Jesus (and other of the disciples) had been fasting all day in preparation for the Passover.

That **evening** after sunset the disciples gathered in the upper room, probably John Mark's home. Jesus entered the room wanting and needing their support and help as He approached the cross with all its horror and suffering. Instead all He got was immature self-centered arguing and complaining. No one wanted to serve another, and the stink of it all hung throughout the room. Jesus had to wash their hearts as well as their feet, and He warned them of what was to come (Mt 26:20-35; Mk 14:17-31; Lk 22:14-38; Jn 13:1-38). No one, not even Peter, took His warnings seriously, though. Instead of heeding His rebuke, they just became fearful at the prospect of His leaving them. Instead of getting comfort from them, Jesus needed to then comfort them (Jn 14:1-31). He gave a final warning to Judas, and while reassuring him of His love (giving him the sop) offered Judas a way of escape from what he planned. Judas turned it down and left.

As this important evening unfolded, Jesus changed the meaning of the Passover Lamb's body given and blood shed to Himself: His body that was to be given and blood that was about to be shed (Mt 26:26-30; Mk 14:22-26; Lk 22:17-20; I Cor 11:23-32).

It was **late night** when the meal ended with a song (Mt 26:30; Mk 14:26; Lk 22:39). As they walked through the dark, deserted streets of Jerusalem Jesus gave His parting words to them: be like a branch attached to the vine in order to prosper (Jn 14:31-16:33). He also prayed for Himself, them and us today (Jn 17:1-26).

Despite being so tired, then they entered Gethsemane Jesus prayed. It was probably **early Friday, April 3, 33 AD**. Again He needed the disciples' support but they again failed (Mt 26:36-46; Mk 14:32-42; Lk 22:40-46; Jn 18:1). Before long Judas led the arresting party to Jesus, who had gone to the exact place He knew Judas would come to looking for Him. He could have escaped arrest by His power when He said "I Am" or when Peter tried to lead an attack. Jesus knew that was not the way and resisted the temptation to take the easy way out.

At about **3 AM** He was taken to Annas for His first religious trial (Jn 18:12-23), then to Caiaphas at about **4 AM** (Mt 26:57-72; Mk 14:53-70; Lk 22:54-58; Jn 18:18, 24-25). They were frantically scrambling to find some charge against Him that would stick. They knew they were breaking about every rule in their book for a fair trial. They were forced to act sooner than they wanted when Judas informed them Jesus knew about their plot and this would be the last chance he had to help them. At about **5 AM** select members of the Sanhedrin who would support Annas no matter what he proposed gathered to condemn Jesus without the required waiting period, proof, fair trial, legal defense, etc. (Mt 26:73 - 27:1; Mk 14:70 - 15:1; Lk 22:59-71; Jn 18:26-27). Hate and jealousy drove them.

It was during this time that Satan withdrew his influence from Judas and trashed him. When the guilt and removes accompanying the reality of what he had done hit Judas, he saw taking his own life as the only escape (Mt 27:3-10; Acts 1:18-20).

It was now about **6 AM**. Jesus was taken to Pilate for approval to carry out the death sentence, for the Jews could not do that without Rome's OK. Pilate proved difficult for awhile (Mt 27:2-14; Mk 15:1-5; Lk 23:1-5; Jn 18:28-38). He even sent Jesus to Herod about **7 AM** (Lk 23:6-12) but by **8 AM** He was back before Pilate who eventually caved in to pressure and approved their death plot (Mt 27:15-26; Mk 15:6-15; Lk 23:13-25; Jn 18:39-19:16). Every time the Jews complained to Caesar, Pilate's job became less stable. Pilate had Jesus beaten nearly to death in hopes they would consider this sufficient punishment, then he offered them Jesus or Barabbas as the holiday release, but neither of these caused the Annas-paid mob to change their mind. At **8:45 AM** Jesus was on His way to Golgotha, paraded through the streets as a detriment to others (Mt 27:31-32; Mk 15:20-21; Lk 23:26-31; Jn 19:16-17). By **9 AM** He was on the cross (Mt 27:33-37; Mk 15:22-26; Lk 23:33-38; Jn 19:17-22).

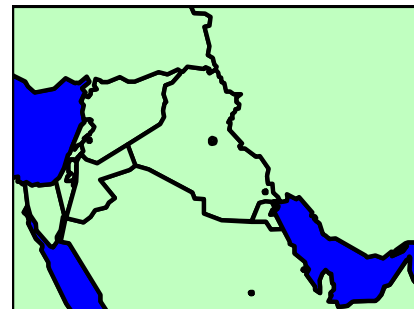
Crucifixion was the cruelest death man had been able to devise. It combined the maximum amount of pain for the maximum time. Relief by fainting or death was denied while awful pain continued for hours and days. Jesus had been spit on, mocked, punched numerous times by soldiers and had a crown of long sharp thorns forced down on His head. For two days He had no sleep and only one meal. His back was whipped raw, to where the bone and nerves were exposed. It had been covered with salt and a robe, which was violently pulled off for the crucifixion. From loss of body fluids Jesus was dehydrating. He was wracked with gangrene. Spikes through the great nerve centers in His wrists and ankles caused excruciating agony. Then there was the public shame of nudity before everyone, including own Mother as well as mockery and taunts. Crucifixion caused near asphyxiation for a person would have to pull themselves up by the nails, rubbing their exposed back against the rough wood, every time they inhaled. No wonder Jesus didn't have much to say (Mt 27:35-50; Mk 15:24-37; Lk 23:34-46; Jn 19:23-39). The worst of it all, though, was God withdrawing His presence and forsaking Jesus as He poured out the consequences for every sin ever committed. All every person would experience in an eternity in hell was poured on Jesus during that time! As Satan and his demons cheered and tormented Jesus, God and His angels watched helplessly. The battle for the souls of men was on. Our eternal destiny hung in the balance. Would Jesus endure? Would He even try (He could have just called some angels to rescue Him and been relieved of His agony). For six long hours the battle raged. Finally, at **3 PM** the eternal penalty for every sin ever committed was paid. God's justice was satisfied. Jesus was the victory. His work on earth was over, accomplished 100%. "It is finished," He declared and voluntarily returned to heaven. At that very instant the Passover lamb was killed on the altar, and the veil in the temple was torn showing that the price was paid and every man was now invited to enter God's presence any time they wanted. All this and more was a testimony to Jesus' deity (Mt 27:51-54; Mk 15:38-39; Lk 23:45, 47). His body was put in a grave (Mt 27:55-66; Mk 15:40-47; Lk 23:48-56; Jn 19:31-42), but He Himself was alive in heaven forever, just where He told the thief He would be ("Today you will be with Me in Paradise").

He did it! He really pulled it off! The greatest victory in the history of the universe was won. One Man, fighting for all mankind, had defeated sin, Satan and death. Indeed, "It is finished!"



Let the
ROCKS
CRY OUT

SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1999

19. RESURRECTION!



Everyone likes a story with a happy ending. Unfortunately many of life's stories don't have happy endings. This one does. Does it ever! It's been called the greatest story ever told. It certainly has the greatest ending ever told. It's great for us, for our perspective in time, for we can see the end as clearly as the start. Jesus' friends and disciples in Jerusalem on **Sunday, April 5, 33 AD** didn't know the ending.

When Jesus died and was buried they thought that was the end of all their hopes and dreams. The only ones who remembered Jesus promise to rise again were the religious rulers, who sealed the tomb and posted a guard of Roman soldiers outside.

Everything was quiet Friday from 3 to sunset (day 1) and from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday (day 2) for that was the Sabbath. Movement and activity were severely limited. After sunset Saturday (day 3) the women could go back to the tomb to finish covering Jesus' body with ointment (to cover the stench from decay). Travel at night was dangerous. Still, the women left before daylight to get to the tomb as soon as possible (Mt 28:1; Mk 16:1; Lk 24:1; Jn 1). They weren't even aware of the seal and the guards. I don't know how they expected to move the large stone!

God knew their needs even before they did. During the night He sent an angel to scare away the soldiers (Mt 28:11-15) and move the stone – not to let Jesus out but to let the women in! As they walked the High Priest was waving the Barley Sheaf in front of the torn veil in celebration of Firstfruits. It was the first harvest, in promise of more to come. This is exactly what Jesus' resurrection was for us.

Anyway, when the women arrived at the tomb they found the stone gone. Two angels were inside and one outside. They were startled, scared, confused. "Don't be afraid, He's not here, He's risen just as He said!" was their gentle rebuke and reminder. He wasn't resuscitated, whereas He'd grow old and then die again. He was resurrected – He had a glorified new body.

Confused, the women returned to the upper room and told Peter and John that someone stole Jesus' body! Things had gone from bad to worse! John outran Peter for he was younger and arrived first. He stopped outside and looked around. When Peter arrived he rushed right in but was confused and didn't know what to think, either. Then John went inside and saw Jesus' linen covering like a cocoon, just lying there as if the person inside simply evaporated. The head covering was neatly folded and set to the side. While John still didn't remember Jesus' prophecies about resurrection, he did start realizing that the signs were pointing to the fact that Jesus was alive (Mt 28:2-7; Mk 16:2-8; Lk 24:2-8; Jn 20:1). Wondering about this, they headed back to the upper room.

Meanwhile **Mary Magdalene**, the unmarried leader of the women, from whom seven demons had been cast out, had started back to the tomb following John and Peter. She traveled much slower and was uncontrollably weeping. She must have taken a different route, for she didn't pass the men as they returned. When she got to the tomb she just wanted to be where Jesus had last been, her way of connecting every so slightly with the One she loved so much! One of the angels asked her why she was crying. Then Jesus Himself asked her the same thing. She, thinking He was the gardener who had taken Jesus' body, asked where it was so she could go get it. "Mary" Jesus said and she immediately knew who He was. She fell on her knees and hugged Him, intending to never let Him out of her sight again! Jesus had to tell her that things had changed and she couldn't cling to Him physically as she had done before (Mk 16:9; Lk 24:12; Jn 20:2-18).

Other women, concerned about Mary Magdalene in her grief, started following her to the tomb. When they arrived they saw the same thing (Mt 28:8-10; Mk 16:10-11; Lk 24:9-11). They returned to tell the men what had happened but the men were very skeptical.

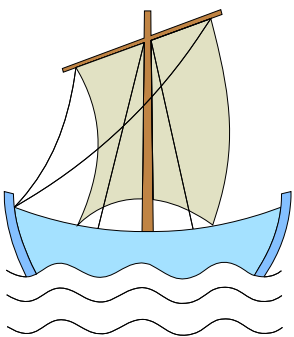
Sometime later **Peter** must have gone out on his own, for Jesus appeared to him personally (I Cor 15:5). It must have been a wonderful time of reconciliation for Him. After all, the last time he had seen Jesus, he had denied he ever knew Him! Nothing is recorded of this meeting, for it was a private time between Jesus and Peter.

Later that same day, though, Jesus spoke to **Cleopas** (Joseph's brother) and **Mary** (cousin of Mary, mother of Jesus). James the Less and Joseph, two followers of Jesus, were their sons. He overtook them on the road to Emmaus and ended up explaining the Old Testament pictures and prophecies about the Messiah dying and rising again (Mk 16:12; Lk 24:13-32). They rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the others they had talked to Jesus, then Jesus miraculously appeared in the locked room to the **10 disciples** and whoever else was there (Mk 16:4; Lk 24:36-49; John 20:19-25). Thomas and Judas were missing.

A week later Jesus again appeared, this time to the **11 disciples**. Thomas had come back (Jn 20:26-29). Jesus did many miracles to prove He was God (Jn 20:30-31).

The disciples saw Jesus next in Galilee when **7 disciples** were fishing and Jesus made breakfast for them (John 21:1-24). He put Peter on the spot after he had bragged he was better than the other disciples and wouldn't deny Jesus, having him humble himself before them and take back his bragging. That was necessary for him to keep on leading them.

Jesus also appeared to **many others**, but only those who believed in Him. He commissioned them to take His word to everyone else (Mt 28:16-20; Mk 16:15-18). One time He even appeared to a group of over **500** at one time (I Cor 15:6). His brother **James**, who became a believer after His crucifixion, also saw Him (I Cor 15:7) and did **many others** (John 21:25).



Then everyone ended up back in Jerusalem where Jesus **ascended** from the Mt of Olives (Mk 16:19-20; Lk 24:50-53; Acts 1:3-14). The disciples were joyful and spread the word everywhere. It truly was a story with a happy ending. In fact, the happy ending continues on and on. It's still going on today. Despite what is going on in your life now, it, too, will have a happy ending if you believe in Jesus as your Savior. Because Jesus conquered sin, Satan and death, so will those who accept His free gift of salvation. Eternity in heaven is God's free gift to us. What could possibly be happier than that?