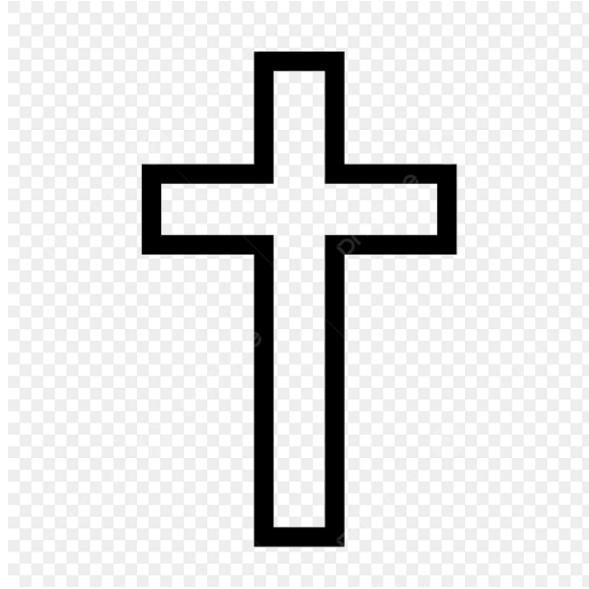


JESUS' LIFE

An Overview of the Greatest Life Ever Lived



In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1,14)

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INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK

This book is an overview of the life of Jesus – the greatest life ever lived. It focuses on His earthly life. He was alive in heaven from eternity past, lives in heaven now and will for all eternity. But for about 33 years He visited earth as one of us: 100% man and 100% God. He came to provide salvation on the cross, but there is more to the story than that. He could have come to earth as a mature man the day before crucifixion then return the day after. Salvation would have been provided. But He spent about 33 years living on earth as one of us. He was born as a baby, grew up as we do and faced all the things in life we face. His life is a picture of God Himself living our life as a human being. We see how He related, resisted and faced the same things we face. There is much to learn from His earthly life – that's why God included four separate books in the Bible about Him.

The purpose of this book is to help you better understand Jesus and His time on earth. It is an overview, an outline, a skeleton to flesh out as you read and learn about Him. May you better appreciate and love our Savior as you read about Him.

Rev. Dr. Jerry Schmoyer

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Rev. Dr. Jerry Schmoyer is a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary where he received his ThM in 1975 and DMin in 2006. He served as a church pastor in the USA for 35 years until 2016. He is founder of Christian Training Organization where he leads marriage, family, and youth conferences, and is active in counseling and mentoring pastors. He has ministered to pastors in India since 2006.

He has been married to Nancy, a nurse, since 1979. They enjoy their very large family and many grandchildren.

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JESUS' LIFE

An Overview of the Greatest Life Ever Lived

INTRODUCTION

I. ON AVERVIEW OF THE 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!

II. JESUS BY THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

1. GOD'S TIMING
2. GLORY BE! - By Gabriel
3. DUMB ZACHARIAS! - By Zacharias
4. "I'M YOURS, LORD" - By Mary
5. "CONGRATULATIONS, JOSEPH, IT'S A GOD" - By Joseph
6. THE LAST SHALL BE FIRST - By Shepherds
7. FINALLY! - By Simeon
8. THE FIRST SHALL BE LAST - By Herod
9. KING-MAKERS FIND THEIR KING - By The Magi
10. OVERVIEW - By Jerry Schmoyer
11. LOSING YOUR HEAD FOR JESUS - By John The Baptizer
12. DEATH MISSION VOLUNTEER - By John The Baptizer
13. JESUS GOES PUBLIC - By Nathanael
14. THE ORIGINAL ST. NICK - By Nicodemus
15. JESUS' GREATEST REVIVAL - By Nicodemus
16. CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP - By Hevel
17. FISHING FOR MEN - By Matthew
18. LOSE YOUR LIFE TO FIND IT - By Matthew
19. HOW TO HANDLE PEER PRESSURE - By James (Brother Of Jesus)
20. THE GREATEST SERMON EVER GIVEN - By James (Brother of Jesus)
21. MIRACLE MAKER - By Jeshua

22. CHRIST VERSUS SATAN - By Jeshua
23. JESUS KNOWS HOW YOU FEEL - By Abiel
24. TRANSFIGURED! - By James (Brother of John)
25. WOMEN & GRACE - By 2 Widows
26. WOMEN & FORGIVENESS - By 2 Immoral Women
27. MARTHA: A MODERN SLAVE - By Lazarus
28. THE MAN WHO CHEATED DEATH - By Lazarus
29. THE TEARFUL ENTRY - By Joses
30. WHAT WILL WASH AWAY MY SIN? NOTHING BUT THE BLOOD OF JESUS - By John
31. THE DAY THEY ARRESTED GOD - By Bartholomew
32. BROKENNESS! - By Peter
33. "I JUST FLOGGED A GOD!" - By Pilate
34. THE DAY DEATH DIED - By Barabbas
35. "PEACE BE WITH YOU" - By Thomas

Jesus' Life

I. OVERVIEW OF JESUS' LIFE

By Rev. Dr. Jerry Schmoyer

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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!

Jesus' Life – I. OVERVIEW

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.

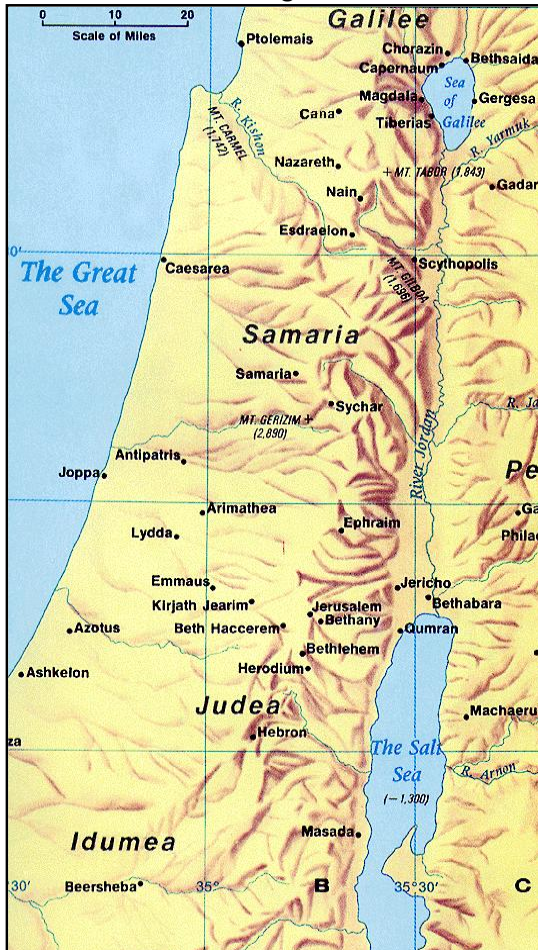
Joshua conquered the area from the Canaanites, and the tribes of Asher, Naphtali, Zebulun and Issachar first settled the area. It was part of Israel after the split.

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 (Genesis - Deuteronomy) 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, as 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.

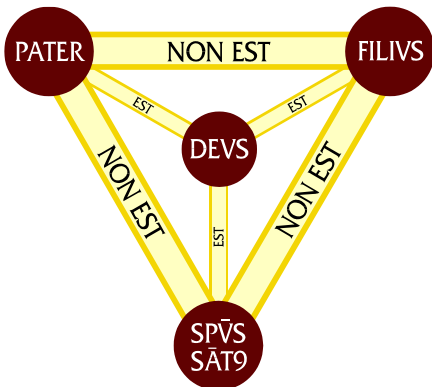
Note the pattern: rich, educated, cultured urban Judea almost totally rejected Jesus; rural Galilee was more responsive, but rejected Samaria responded more than either of them. That shouldn't surprise us. The same is true today. "Not many rich" the Bible says (1 Corinthians 1:26-27). God blesses the 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; 1 Peter 5:5; Job 30:12; Proverbs 3:34).

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

Jesus' Life – I. OVERVIEW

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 (John 6:27; Ephesians 4:6), God the Son (Hebrews 1:18) and God the Spirit (Acts 5:3-4) are one God (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14) in three persons. The Bible says no man has seen God the Father at any time (John 1:18; 1 John 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 Genesis 16:13; 22:15-18; 24:17; 32:24-32; Hosea 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 Testament). 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 (John 3:14) and He used Jonah the same way (Matthew 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 (Genesis 3:15); born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), from the line of Abraham (Genesis 12:3,7; 17:7), from the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10), the house of David (Ps 132:11; 2 Samuel 7:12-13; Jeremiah 23:5), and the seed of Isaac (Genesis 21:12). He was prophesied to be born at Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), called Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14), called out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1) and preceded by John the Baptist (Malachi 3:1; Isaiah 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 (2 Samuel 7:13-14).

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

THE SON OF GOD AS DEITY He was called God (Hebrews 1:8; Matthew 16:16; 26:61-64). He was omnipotent (Matthew 28:18), omniscient (John 1:48), omnipresent (Matthew 18:20) and unchangeable (Hebrews 13:8). He was life (John 1:4) and truth (John 14:6). He did the works of God: create (John 1:3), sustain nature (Col 1:17), forgives sin (Luke 7:48), raises the dead (John 5:25), judges sin (John 5:27) and sends the Holy Spirit (John 15:26). He accepted worship by men (Matthew 14:33) and angels (Hebrews 1:6). He claimed equality with the Father (John 14:23; 10:30). Over and over, He claimed to be sent from God (John 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 (Matthew 4:12) yet He fed multitudes (John 6:1-14). He was thirsty (John 19:28-29) yet gives the water of life (John 4:10-14; 7:37). He was tired (John 4:26) yet gives rest (Matthew 11:28). He prayed (Matthew 14:23) yet answers prayer (John 14:3,14). He was sold for 30 pieces of silver (Matthew 26:14-15) yet redeems the world (1 Peter 1:18-19; 1 John 2:2). He had nowhere to lay His head (Matthew 8:20) yet He created all things (John 1:3). He died yet He gives life (John 6:51,44). He was killed (Hebrews 2:14) yet destroys death (1 Corinthians 15:26, 54). He lay down His life, then He took it up again (John 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 (Revelation 19). He is God and He is king. Make sure He is your king.

Jesus' Life – I. OVERVIEW

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 live 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.

Jesus' Life – I. OVERVIEW

4. MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE & JOHN = 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 (Hebrews 1:1-2; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Malachi 3:1), to show the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies (Luke 4:21; John 13:18; 17:12; Acts 1:16), to fully present the way of salvation (John 20:31) and to give all needed information for God's people to live for Him (John 4:25; 17:8; 16:12-13; Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 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 (Deuteronomy 19:15; Matthew 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.

Jesus' Life – I. OVERVIEW

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 forbids it and, following and obeying God, he wouldn't go against His law. While stoning for adultery wasn't practiced much anymore, 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 intact 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 camels, 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.

Jesus' Life – I. OVERVIEW

6. JESUS GOES PUBLIC

There comes a defining time in everyone's lives, a time when they have to make a tough 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 Nazarite (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 decided 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 (Hebrews 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 (Genesis 3), and still works that way today (I John 2:16). Watch out!

Jesus' Life – I. OVERVIEW

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 their 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!

Jesus' Life – I. OVERVIEW

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 (Ephesians. 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 was 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.

Jesus' Life – I. OVERVIEW

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.

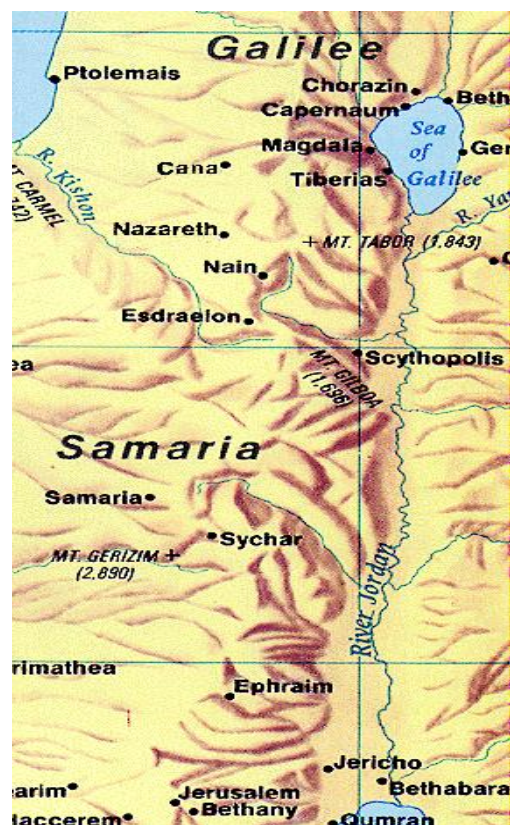
She was shocked that a Jew, especially a man, especially a rabbi would seek her out and actually initiate a conversation with her! That just wasn't done! What's more, He asked to drink from her water bucket. Jews just didn't touch non-Jews, nor anything they touched -- He would be ceremonially unclean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

Jesus' Life – I. OVERVIEW

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 4:44) 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.

Jesus' Life – I. OVERVIEW

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 ruler's 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,

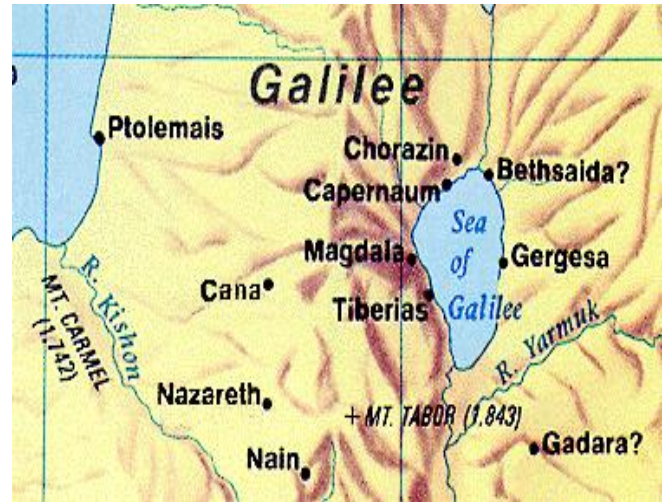
Second Galilee tour with the 12 (Luke 8:1-3) Jesus took the 12 this time when he went from city to city. He healed a demon-possessed blind and dumb man (Matthew 12:22-37; Mark 3:20-30). He told those who rejected Him that the only additional 'sign' they would receive, having rejected His miracles, would 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?

Jesus' Life – I. OVERVIEW

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?

Jesus' Life – I. OVERVIEW

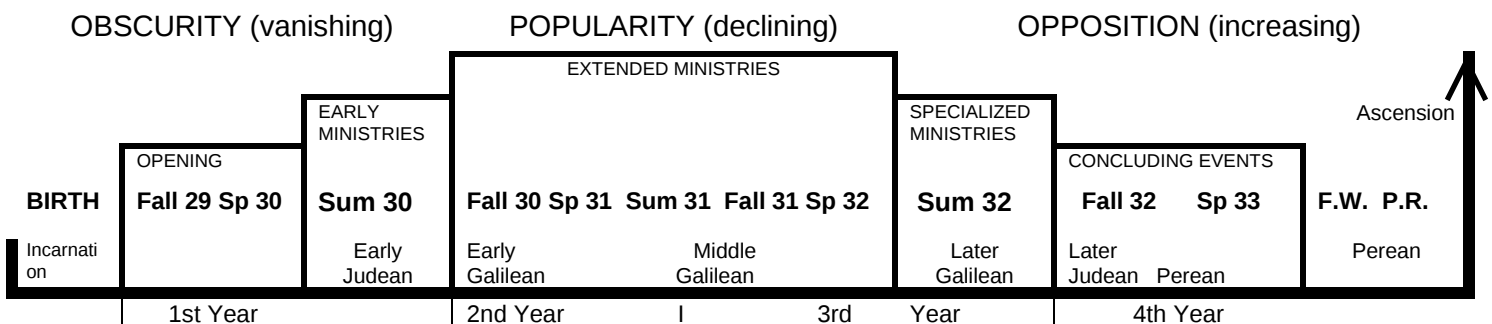
13. THE BEGINNING OF THE END

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 has 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

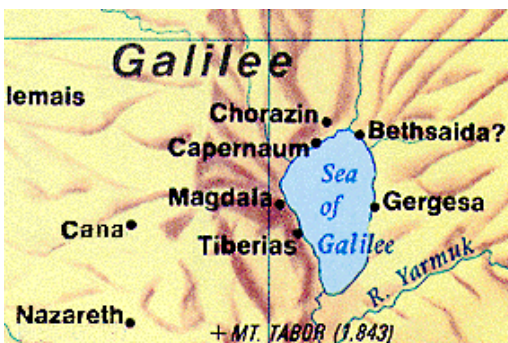
Jesus' Life – I. OVERVIEW

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 basketsful 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 (Matthew 15:1-20; Mark 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 (Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30). He healed a deaf mute (Mark 15:29-31; Mark 7:31-37) and again fed a crowd, this one of 4,000 men (Matthew 15:32-38; Mark 8:1-9). Still the people demanded proof He was the Messiah (Matthew 15:39 - 16:4; Mark 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 (Matthew 16:5-12; Mark 8:13-21). Traveling on Jesus healed a blind man (Mark 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 (Matthew 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-21). Then He warned them that, instead of setting up a throne, He would be crucified but would come back to life (Matthew 16:21-23; Mark 8:31-33; Luke 9:22). He went on to teach them about discipleship (Matthew 16:24-28; Mark 8:34-9:1 Luke 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 (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36). This led to a discussion about John fulfilling the prophecy of 'Elijah' coming before the Messiah (Matthew 17:9-13; Mark 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 (Matthew 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43). Again, He told them about His coming death and resurrection (Matthew 17:22-23; Mark 9:30-32; Luke 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 (Matthew 17:24-27). He warned the disciples about being proud (Matthew 18:1-14; Luke 9:33-50; Luke 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 (Matthew 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)?

Jesus' Life – I. OVERVIEW

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 (John 7:2-10) and people in Samaria (Matthew 8:19-22; Luke 9:51-62), Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:11-52). While there He rescued a woman caught in adultery (John 7:53 - 8:11). He tried to tell the people to watch out for the darkness but follow His light (John 8:12-20), for in doing so they would be following God, not Satan (John 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 (John 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 (Luke 10:25-37). He spent time with His good friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus (Luke 10:25-37) and gave them a lesson in servanthood, too. Serving others was His theme (Luke 11:1-13). Even after healing a dumb man (Luke 11:14-28) the people demanded He prove to them He was God (Luke 11:29-36). Jesus said the only proof they'd have any more would be the resurrection (the "sing of Jonah").

Jesus condemned hypocrisy (Luke 12:1-12) and warned them against greed (Luke 12:13-34). He encouraged them to be alert and watchful (Luke 12:35-41) as well as faithful (Luke 12:42-48). He taught them what He expected (Luke 12:49-53) and told them to watch the signs of the times (Luke 12:54-59). He called them to repentance and faith in Him (Luke 13:1-9). He did some healing, like when He healed a crippled woman (Luke 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 (Luke 13:18-21). It certainly was starting slowly.

Then, when it was time for the Feast of Dedication, Jesus again went to Jerusalem (John 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 (Revelation 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.

Jesus' Life – I. OVERVIEW

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 Pharisees 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 (Luke 17:11-19). He taught about the coming kingdom (Luke 19:20-27), the importance of persistence in prayer (Luke

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 (Matthew 19:1-12) and how man is to become like a little child to enter the kingdom (Mark 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 (Mark 19:16-22). With time getting shorter every day, Jesus focused on talking about eternal life by teaching (Matthew 19:23-30) and by use of parables (Matthew 20:1-16). He told those who would listen that He would be crucified and rise again (Matthew 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 (Mark 10:35-45).

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 (Luke 18:35-43). Zacchaeus was another resident of Jericho that responded to Jesus' love and forgiveness and gave up all to follow Him (Luke 19:1-10). Jesus again warned His followers that the kingdom would be delayed (Luke 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.

Jesus' Life – I. OVERVIEW

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 (John 12:1; Luke 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 (Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 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 (John 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 decision 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 (Matthew 21:1-9; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:29-44; John 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 (Matthew 21:10-11; Mark 11:11). Oh, a few responded, like the boys' choir in the temple (Matthew 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 (Mark 21:17; Mark 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 (Matthew 21:18-19; Mark 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 (Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-18), closing His ministry in the same way He started it. He did much teaching that day (John 12:20-36) to those who would listen, then went to spend the night on the Mt of Olives (Mark 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 (Matthew 21:21-22; Mark 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 (Matthew 21:23 - 23:39; Mark 11:27 - 12:40; Luke 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 (Mark 12:41-44; Luke 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 (Matthew 24:1-25:46; Mark 13:1-37; Luke 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 (John 22:1). Meanwhile the religious leaders were planning Jesus' arrest (Matthew 26:3-5; Mark 14:1-2; Luke 22:20) and taking Judas up on his offer of betrayal (Matthew 26:14-16; Mark 14:10-11; Luke 22:3-6).

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

Jesus' Life – I. OVERVIEW

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 (John 12:37-43). Jesus entered the temple for a final time of preaching (John 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 (Matthew 26:17-19; Mark 14:12-16; Luke 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 (Matthew 26:20-35; Mark 14:17-31; Luke 22:14-38; John 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 (John 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 (Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:17-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-32).

It was **late night** when the meal ended with a song (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26; Luke 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 (John 14:31-16:33). He also prayed for Himself, them and us today (John 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 (Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:40-46; John 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 (John 18:12-23), then to Caiaphas at about **4 AM** (Matthew 26:57-72; Mark 14:53-70; Luke 22:54-58; John 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. (Matthew 26:73 - 27:1; Mark 14:70 - 15:1; Luke 22:59-71; John 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 (Matthew 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 a while (Matthew 27:2-14; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-5; John 18:28-38). He even sent Jesus to Herod about **7 AM** (Luke 23:6-12) but by **8 AM** He was back before Pilate who eventually caved in to pressure and approved their death plot (Matthew 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:13-25; John 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 (Matthew 27:31-32; Mark 15:20-21; Luke 23:26-31; John 19:16-17). By **9 AM** He was on the cross (Matthew 27:33-37; Mark 15:22-26; Luke 23:33-38; John 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 (Matthew 27:35-50; Mark 15:24-37; Luke 23:34-46; John 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 (Matthew 27:51-54; Mark 15:38-39; Luke 23:45, 47). His body was put in a grave (Matthew 27:55-66; Mark 15:40-47; Luke 23:48-56; John 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!"

Jesus' Life – I. OVERVIEW

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 (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1; John 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 (Matthew 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 (Matthew 28:2-7; Mark 16:2-8; Luke 24:2-8; John 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 ever 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 (Mark 16:9; Luke 24:12; John 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 (Matthew 28:8-10; Mark 16:10-11; Luke 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 (1 Corinthians 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 (Mark 16:12; Luke 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 (Mark 16:4; Luke 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 (John 20:26-29). Jesus did many miracles to prove He was God (John 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 (Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:15-18). One time He even appeared to a group of over **500** at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6). His brother **James**, who became a believer after His crucifixion, also saw Him (1 Corinthians 15:7) and did **many others** (John 21:25).

Then everyone ended up back in Jerusalem where Jesus **ascended** from the Mt of Olives (Mark 16:19-20; Luke 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?

Jesus' Life

II. JESUS BY THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

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1. GOD'S TIMING
2. GLORY BE! By Gabriel
3. DUMB ZACHARIAS! By Zacharias
4. "I'M YOURS, LORD" By Mary
5. "CONGRATULATIONS, JOSEPH, IT'S A GOD" By Joseph
6. THE LAST SHALL BE FIRST By Shepherds
7. FINALLY! By Simeon
8. THE FIRST SHALL BE LAST By Herod
9. KING-MAKERS FIND THEIR KING By The Magi
10. JESUS GROWS UP From Mary's Diary
11. OVERVIEW By Jerry Schmoyer
12. LOSING YOUR HEAD FOR JESUS By John The Baptizer
13. DEATH MISSION VOLUNTEER By John The Baptizer
14. JESUS GOES PUBLIC By Nathanael
15. CLEANSING THE TEMPLE By Eleazar, Levite Temple Guard
16. THE ORIGINAL ST. NICK By Nicodemus
17. JESUS' GREATEST REVIVAL By Nicodemus
18. CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP By Hevel
19. FISHING FOR MEN By Matthew
20. LOSE YOUR LIFE TO FIND IT By Matthew
21. HOW TO HANDLE PEER PRESSURE By James (Brother Of Jesus)
22. THE GREATEST SERMON EVER GIVEN By James (Brother of Jesus)
23. MIRACLE MAKER By Jeshua
24. FEEDING THE 5,000 By The Boy Who Gave His Lunch
25. CHRIST VERSUS SATAN By Jeshua
26. JESUS KNOWS HOW YOU FEEL By Abiel
27. TRANSFIGURED! By James (Brother of John)
28. WOMEN & GRACE By 2 Widows
29. WOMEN & FORGIVENESS By 2 Immoral Women
30. MARTHA: A MODERN SLAVE By Lazarus
31. THE MAN WHO CHEATED DEATH By Lazarus
32. BARTIMAES & ZACCHAEUS By James "The Less"
33. THE TEARFUL ENTRY By Joses
34. WHAT WILL WASH AWAY MY SIN? NOTHING BUT THE BLOOD OF JESUS By John
35. THE DAY THEY ARRESTED GOD By Bartholomew
36. BROKENNESS! By Peter
37. "I JUST FLOGGED A GOD!" By Pilate
38. THE DAY DEATH DIED By Barabbas
39. "PEACE BE WITH YOU" By Thomas
40. ASCENSION By Judas Thaddaeus

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

1. GOD'S TIMING

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

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

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

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

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

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

ISRAEL (PEOPLE) While the Greeks greatly influenced the land of Palestine, they never conquered the hearts of the people. Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the temple in the most awful ways and killed any Jews who practiced their religion in any way. Even quoting a Bible verse was punishable by death. The Maccabeans revolt, led by the Hasmonean family, won back Jewish independence and culminated with the rededication of the temple on December 25, 164 BC. Unfortunately, the Hasmonean rulership soon became almost as oppressive as the Seleucids had been before them. A movement of conservative Jews who wanted to have the nation turn back to God and His Word arose. Called the

Pharisees, they led the people in civil war which just made everything worse. This so weakened the nation that the Romans, having defeated the Greeks, were easily able to annex Palestine in 63 BC.

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

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

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



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

Then, too, Rome allowed religious freedom. They did not dictate who or what was to be worshipped. People could decide for themselves. The old gods and idols their ancestors worshipped no longer held much interest and often didn't apply to their new lives in the cities. City life brought its share of new problems, too. Sin was rampant. Alcoholism, immorality, homosexuality, prostitution, crime, murder, extortion and political corruption were rampant. Something was needed to give meaning, peace and satisfaction in life. The stage was set for the message of Jesus

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

2. GLORY BE!

By Gabriel

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

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

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

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

God created millions and millions of us (Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 5:1). We are NOT people who have died. We are like humans in that we have a mind, will and emotions. We can only be one place at a time and don’t have all knowledge or power, only what we get from God. Unlike you, though, we are not limited to a physical body, we are all male and don’t reproduce, and we only had a one-time chance to exercise our free will. That was when Lucifer (now called Satan), the greatest angel God created, rebelled against submitting to God and in his pride and rebellion challenged God’s power (Isaiah 14; Ezekiel 28). He was immediately cast out of heaven and about 1/3 of the angels followed him. Now they are called demons -- fallen angels. They counterfeit us and try to act as angels of light to mislead mankind, and are quite successful! They oppose God’s kingdom and, like their leader Satan, seek to have people follow and worship them. Since earth is their kingdom (Adam gave it to Satan when he sinned) they are very successful. When someone is born into God’s family he finds himself living in enemy territory, a source of light among Satan’s darkness. That is why we are needed to help you and protect you from this unseen enemy who would torture and kill you if God would allow it.

Of course, you know there is no question about who will ultimately rule this earth and the whole universe. Since God Himself came to earth (called Jesus) as a man and took on Satan and all his forces, defeating them on the cross by paying for sin and overcoming all the demons could throw at Him, their ultimate defeat has been certain. There is no question of Who really is the great ruler of the universe. God is still delaying the final mop-up action, though, until all those who would accept His free gift of salvation do so. Then all hell will break loose!

IN THE MEANTIME, our missions are typically restraining actions related to this ongoing rescue program. We move into an area and secure a perimeter of operations from enemy interference. I can’t tell you much about our secret operations for enemy soldiers listen to all we say, but I can give you an

example. One time Dothan, home of Elisha, was surrounded by the Syrian army. Michael's unit was deployed to ensure the safety of Elisha. The Commander notified Elisha we were there but his servant didn't know that and was alarmed. Elisha sent up a special request for us to unveil, so we executed a partial decloaking and the servant was very impressed! (II Kings 6)

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

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

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

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

There is one more scheduled appearance of mine on earth, and it's one I look forward to as much as you do. I'll announce it with my trumpet. You call it the rapture. We call it our day of vengeance and justice. After centuries of watching enemy forces harasses and cause all kinds of evil, we'll finally be able to take them. With God's power there is no doubt who'll win! Then we'll reign together for all eternity. You will have a much higher position than us and will actually rule over us (1 Corinthians 6:3; Hebrews 5:2). After all, you are the Bride of Christ and we are but servants, messengers. Still, we'll all praise and worship God for all eternity. We'll proclaim His glory day and night. Why not get started doing that now? Glorify Him for all He has done, is doing and will do for you! He deserves all your praise and much more. See that He gets it!

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

3. DUMB ZACHARIAS

By Zacharias

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I spent the next several months sitting and thinking. I couldn't talk, I couldn't minister, I couldn't even tell when had happened to me in the temple. I wrote it out for Elizabeth and she told everyone. I

had plenty of time to think about God's promises to be faithful, such as Isaiah 49:14-15: "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

4. “I’M YOURS, LORD”

By Mary

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Don't be afraid," he told me. "You have found favor with God." I knew everything I had was by God's grace, that I had done nothing to earn it or deserve it. Why was he reminding me of this? Then he said it: "You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus." 'Jesus' was a common name, the Greek equivalent to our Hebrew name 'Joshua.' They meant "the Lord is our deliverer."

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

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God." Nothing is impossible for God. Even having a baby without a human father.

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

All the implications of the blessing weren't clear to me then, though. What was obvious was the potential cost involved: loss of my reputation and Joseph, criticism and rejection by most people, the discomforts of pregnancy, and a family without a father. I put God before myself and immediately knew I had to obey. It had to be total obedience, no bargaining or hesitating.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

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

By Joseph

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

6. THE LAST SHALL BE FIRST

By the Shepherds

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

7. FINALLY!

By Simeon

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

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

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

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

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

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

As I held the baby the reality of it all just washed over me. "Sovereign Lord," I said as I dedicated Him, "as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel (Luke 2)." Tremendous peace and joy flooded my soul, such as I never had before or since.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

8. THE FIRST SHALL BE LAST

By Herod

“Who are you? What do you want here? How did you get past the guards? Why are you people always pestering me for something? All right, if you won't go away, tell me what it is you want. Let's hear your complaints! Everyone wants something from me. Most would steal my very kingdom if they could! I tried to be a good ruler, but they just took advantage of that. When I was harsh, they complained to the emperor. There's just no pleasing you Jews, is there?

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Five times I honestly raised a fortune, and each time I lost it. I was naturally gifted in raising money, but it never brought the satisfaction I thought it should. I developed the largest kingdom in the Roman empire, almost as big as when Solomon was king. Jerusalem became one of the greatest Roman cities. I built the hippodrome, theater, and many grand public buildings. I developed a complex water system and a fine defense. I built forts throughout the kingdom. I freed Galilee from bandits. I also rebuilt Caesarea, Decapolis, Athens and other cities. I was considering the greatest non-Roman

in the Roman Empire (I was half Jew and half Arab). Even at 65 I was considered the best archer in the empire. I was fair, generous and tried to give the people I ruled a good life.

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

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

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

“I became a wild man, eliminating anyone in my way. I set up my man as high priest in Jerusalem to keep the peace, but when he became too popular I invited him to my palace, got him drunk and drown him in my swimming pool. I even killed Mariamne, the wife I loved, for plotting against me. My insane jealousy and fear of losing her drove me to it. My conscience then tormented me so much I almost was driven insane. I killed my favorite 2 sons for trying to kill me. They were twins, sons of Mariamne, and I strangled them with my own hands. I murdered Antipater I, the next in line for my throne, five days before I died. I killed thousands, many of them relatives, in my paranoia and fear.

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

“By this time, I’d given up trying to find peace. There was no such thing. My power and riches didn’t provide it, but I wasn’t about to give them up. They were all I had! On my deathbed I ordered all the noblemen herded into the hippodrome to be killed by the army when I died. I knew no one would mourn me, but this way I knew there would be mourning in Jerusalem when I died. Unfortunately, they didn’t carry it out. My soul entered eternity without God or salvation in 4 BC when I was 69 years old, after ruling for 33 years.

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

9. KING-MAKERS FIND THEIR KING

By Magi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



DEED TO MY HEART

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

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

(Signed)

(Date)

(Comments)

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

10. JESUS GROWS UP

Taken from Mary's Diary

If Mary would have kept, some of the things she wrote may have been something like this:

5 BC (in a stable in Bethlehem) My precious baby, Jesus, was born last night. What a time we had finding a room. We ended up in a stable, but God was with us. Angels told shepherds and they came to share our joy with us. Joseph is so proud, even though he knows he isn't the father. We both consider it a privilege and honor to raise God's own Son!

5 BC (in a home in Bethlehem) (Later) Well, we moved into a house in Bethlehem. We don't want to go back to Nazareth where there is so much gossip and criticism. People say I got pregnant by a Roman soldier and won't believe this is God's miracle baby! It's nice having time alone with Joseph after the busy start our marriage got off to. Being near Zacharias and Elizabeth is special, as well. Here, in the town of our ancestor David, we feel extra close to God. We are near enough to Jerusalem to visit the temple as well. We've enjoyed getting to know Ana and Simeon better after that first meeting when we dedicated Jesus. How nice it is to have a small support group of believers who can support us and encourage us! Everyone needs fellowship and we thank God for providing these people for us! I don't know what the future holds, but I know for now we are content and happily enjoying our new son Jesus.

2 BC (in Egypt) Here we are in Egypt. I never thought we'd move here, but the decision was made for us. We had a surprise visit by the magi, king-makers from the East. When they left God sent an angel to warn us that Herod wanted to kill our baby so we fled that very night! We know God wanted us to leave and so we obeyed Him. It was very hard to leave our comfortable little home. Leaving our friends and relatives was even harder. We weren't even able to tell them where we were going – we just disappeared! I know it had to be that way to protect us, but it must have been very hard on them. Hearing about the baby boys who were killed was very hard as well. We sent word to Zacharias and Elizabeth as soon as we could and they told our other friends.

Fortunately, God had sent the magi to give us many valuable gifts so we have been able to finance our trip and time here in Egypt. God thinks of everything! We are living in a colony of Jews. There have been Jews in Egypt since Joseph came here. Not all of them left when Moses led the people out. Then many other Jews moved here for safety when Babylon was attacking our country. While we missed our friends, we met others who became close to us. It is a hard time, though. Obeying God isn't always easy – but it is always right! Joseph and I have gotten much closer and our marriage has grown stronger. This has stretched our trust in God and made our faith stronger as well.

Jesus is growing up before our eyes. He walks now and talks. He is so cute, yet very obedient. Little James was just born so now Jesus will have a little brother to play with. He seems to love James already and wants to help take care of him. James does seem to have a stubborn streak in him, however!

1 BC (To Nazareth) When Herod died God told Joseph we were to return to Israel. Of course, we obeyed. We wanted to go back to Bethlehem where we had privacy, friends and good memories, but God showed through another angel dream that Archelaus, who now ruled in Judea, made that

area unsafe for us and our son, Jesus. God wanted us to return to Nazareth and, although that isn't where we wanted to be, we were committed to doing God's will before our own. Nazareth was a quiet country time in Galilee, far from Jerusalem and Judea. Gentiles and roman soldiers outnumbered Jews there and, while it wouldn't have been our choice, it was God's choice for us. Because of that Jesus grew up in Nazareth and was a 'Nazarene' as prophesied.

4 AD (In Nazareth) Jesus is now 8 years old. My how fast He is growing! He loves playing with His younger brothers James and Jude, and well as His sisters. I'm expecting again, too. Jesus is such a great help with all the work to do here! I love Him so much and He loves us as well.

Jesus has finished His schooling at home and started working with His earthly father, Joseph. They build houses from stones and wood. Sometimes they make furniture as well. He also is going to the synagogue school for boys where He is memorizing much of the Old Testament while learning to obey God. He is also learning Hebrew, which we use when we worship. He is very fluent in Aramaic, which we speak at home and Greek, which the Gentiles around us speak. He is learning Latin as well for that is the language used for business. It's good to see Him spending so much time with His father. They have grown very close. I can see why God chose such a fine, godly man like Joseph to raise His Son. They are closer than any father and son I know.

While Jesus has heard stories about His birth and how He is different from His brothers and sisters in that God impregnated me with Him, He is humble and giving. He is always willing to serve anyone in need and has a great appetite to learn Scripture and about God. He has a deep love for God and is learning to obey God as well as us.

8 AD (In Jerusalem) What a time we had in Jerusalem last week! Jesus is 12 and so we took Him to the temple for the first time for His bar mitzvah – recognition that He has become a man. All males who can do so are required to go to the temple for the 3 main feasts: Dedication (in December), Passover (in April) and Tabernacles (in September). We had a great time there with family and friends who also made the trip. Jesus was enthralled by the temple and wanted to learn all He could.

However, on the way home we realized Jesus wasn't with our group. We assumed He had left with another family or friends that left town a little after us, but when we all gathered that evening we realized He wasn't with us! We really panicked! We felt like such awful parents! The next day we rushed back to Jerusalem and there He was, still in the temple, asking questions of the religious leaders and learning all He could. They were very impressed with His insight and spiritual perception. Since He was now a 'man' He took seriously His responsibility to learn about God so He could better obey His heavenly Father as He has always obeyed us.

28 AD (In Nazareth) Jesus is now 32 years old. What a fine man He has become. As a mother I am so very proud of Him! I keep remembering His birth and the words from God about how He would be different, how He would be God's very own Son. While I am thrilled about that I am also concerned for Him for He is so loving and sensitive. I hate to see Him go through anything painful, but who am I to interfere with God's plan. James, Jude and the others have long since married and have children of their own. The oldest are approaching their teens. Meanwhile Joseph still lives at home with us. I'm glad to have Him here and He and Joseph are the very best of friends, but I know others see Him as strange and different for never marrying. I believe that has to do with God's plan for Him as the Messiah – God Himself among us. I sometimes wonder how much He knows about this: is He aware of His uniqueness and mission? Sometimes I feel He suspects, other times I'm not sure. He certainly has lived a normal life like all the rest of us and faced the same things we all face. He still learns to obey God in all He does. I know that is a lesson He will need to learn as God unfolds His plan for Him and for us through Him. I thank God for choosing us to raise His Son and I'm so glad I obeyed God when He revealed His plan to me. If only all His children would obey Him, how much better everything would be!

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

11. OVERVIEW

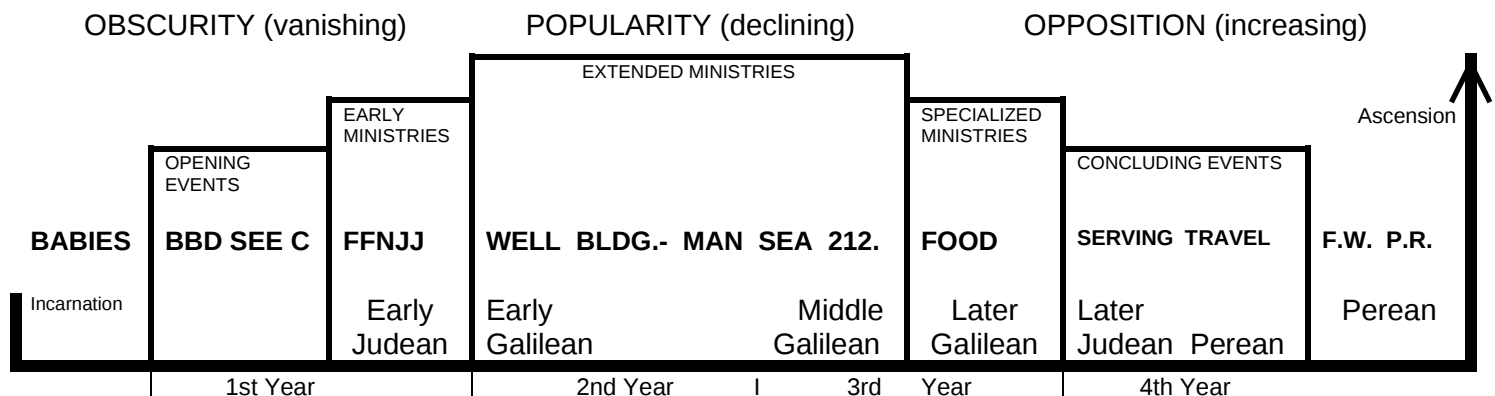
by Jerry Schmoyer

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

SEE C stands for "See your sin" (John to the Jews), "See your Savior" (John about Jesus) and "See your sovereign" (John to disciples). **C** is for Cana (Water to wine) and Capernaum (Jesus' new home). **FFNJJ** refers to **F**irst **P**assover. **F**irst temple cleansing, **N**icodemus, **J**udean ministry of Jesus & John, and **J**esus leaves Judea when John imprisoned. **WELL**, refers to the woman at the well, Jesus' Galilean tour well received, and Nobleman's son made well. **BLDG.-** also lists main events in that time period. In addition, the events in this period centered around buildings. **MAN** focuses on special events focusing on men, **FOOD** on events using food (feeding of 4,000 and 5,000, etc.).

					SPRING		SUMMER	FALL
					BABIES			BBD
29 AD					SEE C		FFNJJ	WELL
30 AD					BLDG.-		MAN	SEA
31 AD					212.		FOOD	SERVING
32 AD					JN 33 AD PLAC TRAVEL		F.W.	P.R.
BBD Fall 29					JORDAN DEDICATION (Dec)		Passover (April)	Tabernacles (Sept)
EVENT	MT	MK	LK	JN 33 AD	JORDAN DEDICATION (Dec)		Passover (April)	Tabernacles (Sept)
Baptizer	3:1-12	1:1-8	3:1-18		Jordan			
Baptized	3:13-17	1:9-11	3:21-23		Jordan			
Devil	4:1-11	1:12-13	4:1-13		Wilderness			

You will also have a chart showing each event in that particular time period. It also shows where the event is found in each of the Gospels as well as the geographical location of the event. On the right is a map with the main locations circled. Get familiar with the map in the back of your Bible. It will be a better way of finding where the events happened. Being able to locate the main events chronologically as well as geographically is very important to a good understanding of Jesus' life.



Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

12. LOSING YOUR HEAD FOR JESUS

By John the Baptizer

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

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

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

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

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

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

Still, when He came and asked me to baptize Him I wasn't sure. We spent several evenings talking about this, our parents, and the work God was starting through us. I felt HE should be baptizing ME! Still, I submitted to His will and baptized Him so He could identify with my message and the people's needs (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-23). What a privilege that was -

- the highlight of my life! Immediately He left for 40 days to seek God's will and spend time with God (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13).

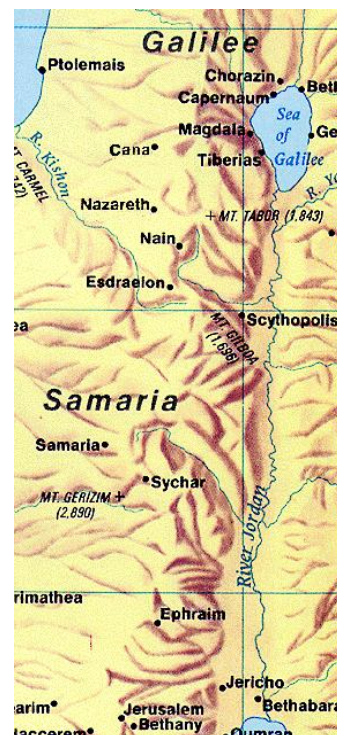
By the time Jesus had returned fall had turned to spring (we had no winter in our climate). It was the year AD 30. I was still baptizing in the Jordan, moving up the Jordan valley and living off the land. I later found out that the day Jesus was tempted by Satan was the same day I was tempted in the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

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

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

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

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



Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

13. DEATH MISSION VOLUNTEER

By John the Baptizer

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

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

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

During the 60 mile walk to find me Jesus had plenty of time to think. He could have turned back at any time and no one would have known. But He didn't.

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

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

IMMEDIATELY HE WENT INTO THE WILDERNESS to get alone with God to pray, commune, ask for guidance and direction, and have time to think. God's Spirit drew Him (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13). For 40 days Jesus prayed, worshipped and strengthened His commitment to whatever God had for Him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

14. JESUS GOES PUBLIC

By Nathanael

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

15. CLEANSING of the TEMPLE

By Eleazar, A Levite who was a guard at the temple

The strangest thing happened today! Somebody came into the temple and disrupted the whole operation. I know lots of people wanted to do such a thing, and I really can't blame them, but I never thought anyone would dare try much less be able to bring it about. Maybe I better go back to the beginning so you understand.

The temple in Jerusalem is the location of God's throne among His people. It is the religious, social, civil and spiritual center of Judaism and is very sacred to all Jews everywhere. However, many of the Jews had turned God's house into a place to make money, and not always legally. You see, a large market had grown in the outer court where Jews and Gentiles could both go. Called 'Anna's Bazaar' after the High Priest responsible for it, it was hated by all because it cheated us in the name of religion. First of all, we weren't allowed to use Roman money because it had Caesar's picture on it and that was considered a 'graven image' and forbidden. Therefore, we had to exchange it for temple money when entering the temple. Since the money changers had a monopoly on this service they charged rates as high as 50%. The average worker earned a penny a day. It would take 10 work days or two weeks to earn 10 cents. The money changers would take our 10 cents and give us back 6 cents in temple money.

That isn't the end of it, though. We needed the money to buy sacrifices for that is the way God required us to worship and thank Him as well as confess our sins. Sacrifices had to be approved by the priests to be offered, for no 'unclean' animals could be sacrificed. The priests never approved animals we brought with us, forcing us to buy animals there to use. Then they charged high prices for them. A pigeon that could be bought for half a penny outside the temple would cost 5 or 6 cents in the temple. Therefore, a workman would have to work 10 days and save all of it just to buy a half-penny pigeon for a sacrifice!

Not only were sacrifices sold in the temple, anything and everything was sold. It became the central shopping district in Jerusalem with men yelling the praises of their wares, people loudly dickering over prices, animals making noises and complete bedlam everywhere. That totally interrupted any spirit of worship those who came to the temple sought.

Crowds were everywhere! The temple became a shortcut for those going from one side of Jerusalem to another. It was a little-hidden fact that Annas and the priests hid robbers and criminals in the caverns under the temple – for a price of course.

No wonder everyone hated this place! We were cheated and we couldn't worship. It was NOT what God had in mind when He designed it. There was nothing we could do about it. In fact, I was assigned to keep the peace and protect those who were taking advantage of their fellow Jews. What a job! But what could I do? Nothing!

The other guards felt the same way. Perhaps that's one of the reasons we didn't do anything to stop the man when He started overturning tables and chasing the cheats out of the temple. I got the feeling, though, that even I had tried to stop Him I wouldn't be able to move. It was like some strange force were holding me and the others back. Could it have been angels doing this? Perhaps God really was behind Him and His work?

Who was this man? I was told His name was Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee. My friend Isaac, another guard, said He has seen the man calmly braiding a whip out of cords used to tie animals. Obviously He wasn't out of control in a rage but was rationally doing something He must have long ago decided needed doing. As a Jewish male, He would have come to the temple three times a year since He was 12, so this must have been building from some time. Why explode now? I was also told He was just baptized by a man named John the Baptizer and those present were claiming He was the Messiah, God Himself among us! This, His first act with that title, was something it was prophesied that the Messiah would do. What a way to make a statement!

The friends that came with Him, as disciples following their rabbi (teacher), seems surprised and shocked by the whole scene as well. Obviously they weren't consulted as to the wisdom of such an action. They were as taken back as the rest of us and clearly didn't know to do or how to react. Following such a Man would be anything but boring!

While His actions must have pleased the common people, it was the worst possible beginning He could have had with the religious rulers. To be accepted as the Messiah, wouldn't He want and need their support? Putting them out of business at the busiest time of the year was no way to gain their approval, but certainly He must have known that!

It was obvious He was taking a stand about some of the abuses that had cropped up in Judaism. This action made Him known in Jerusalem, and each of us had to decide what we thought. The rulers were totally against Him. The poor were in support of Him. Most of the rest of us weren't too sure one way or the other but were reserving our decision until we knew more about Him. I heard that Nicodemus slipped out to talk to Him this evening. I guess he wanted more information as well.

You know, I've been thinking about this all day. I guess there is a time when we should be angry and things we should be angry at. When others are taken advantage of or harmed, especially in the name of God, the righteous indignation we feel should motivate us to take action to right the wrong. There are times I should get angry and things I should get angry at. I can't use anger to cover over my own hurts or to gain control of a situation, but it should cause me to take positive action when a wrong needs to be corrected. I need to think about this more and understand it better. I think I'll ask God for wisdom to know when and how I should express anger as well and when I shouldn't. That Man has certainly given me a lot to think about as well.

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

16. THE ORIGINAL ST. NICK

By Nicodemus

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

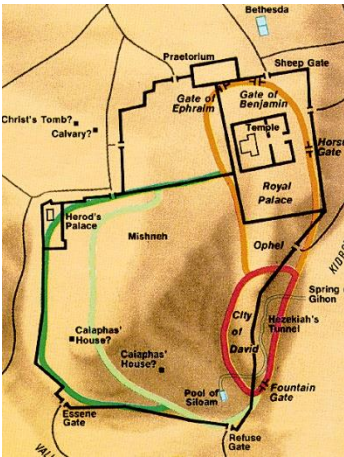
MY NAME IS NICODEMUS. I was a top religious ruler in Israel. I held a high, powerful position. I was very rich and influential. I was extremely well educated and one of the top scholars of my day. You could say I had it all -- outwardly that is. I guess I had too much, because I didn't want to jeopardize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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

17. JESUS' GREATEST REVIVAL

By Nicodemus

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

9. One to one is the best way to witness. When Jesus got to the well near Sychar He sent His disciples into town for food so He could talk to the woman alone. One on one, personal, is still the best way to communicate anything. It was especially meaningful to the woman in Samaria for she

was used to being ostracized and ignored by everyone, that's why she came to well in the hottest time of the day. She knew no one would be there and didn't want criticism for her life style.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

18. CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

By Hevel

TO: Jesus, Son of Joseph - Woodcrafters Carpenter Shop, Nazareth

FROM: Jordan Management Consultants, Jerusalem

RE: Staff Team Evaluation:

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE 12 DISCIPLES

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

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

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

19. FISHING FOR MEN

By Matthew

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

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

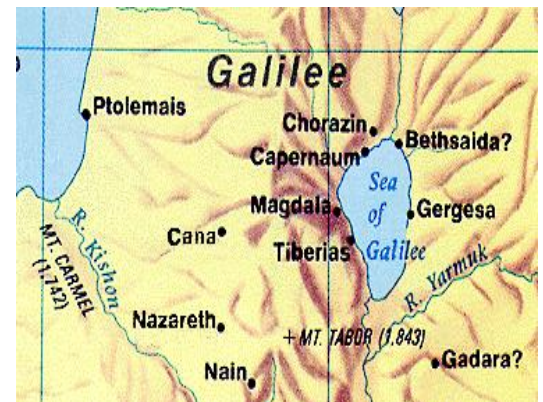
This time He stopped at my table and I was surprised. I knew He'd moved here, to Capernaum, from Nazareth (Matthew 4:13-16). It had something to do with being rejected in His home town (Luke 4:16-30) -- boy, did I know what that was like! But why had He come to my booth? He didn't owe any taxes, what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

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

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

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

I remember one day, about a month before Jesus called me from my booth, that I was watching Peter, Andrew, James and John come in from a long night of fishing. They didn't catch anything. They had just



cleaned the nets and were ready to go to bed when Jesus told them to go out into deep water and try again (Luke 5:1-10). Everyone knew it was the wrong time of day and wrong place to fish, plus the nets would need to be cleaned and dried all over again! I was surprised to see them obey, but even more surprised to see the great number of fish they caught! It really hit Peter hard, for that's when he realized that Jesus truly was God. Jesus' response to them all was, "Don't be afraid, from now on you will catch men!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

20. LOSE YOUR LIFE TO FIND IT

By Matthew

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus gave up everything for us, He needs us to give up everything for Him. One day Mother Teresa heard vows from 11 new members of her growing order, the Society of the Missionaries of Charity. About 700 people crowded Mission Dolores for the profession of vows by sisters who have completed their novitiate. "Love, to be real, must cost," said the frail and stooped Mother Teresa, 75, whose big voice belies her stature, "It must hurt. It must empty us of self."

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

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

I LOOKED AT THE MOUNTAIN.

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

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

I saw the road.

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

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

I looked at the sky.

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

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

We climbed.

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

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

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

Then I grew very tired.

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

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

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

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

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

"Lord, You are wounded.

Your hands are bleeding.

Your feet are bruised! Was it for me?"

He whispered, "I did it gladly."

Then I fell at His feet.

"Lord, lead me on," I cried,

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

21. HOW TO HANDLE PEER PRESSURE

By James (Brother of Jesus)

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

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

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

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

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

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

After that Jesus seemed to withdraw from the crowds. All of a sudden the stories about His teaching multitudes and doing miracles stopped reaching my door. Some aunts and uncles who had heard from their sons who were with Jesus passed on word that He had chosen 12 of His followers for special, close travel and training. Simon and Andrew were long-time family friends. Their fishing partners, James and John, were sons of my mother's sister, Salome. James (the shorter one), Jude and Matthew and Thomas (the twins) were sons of my father's brother Alphaeus. There was also Nathanael, Philip, Simeon the Zealot and Judas. He was the only one that we didn't know growing up. I was glad I wasn't chosen – I knew I wasn't even in the running. I would have turned it down in a moment. Still, down inside I was a little disappointed. After all, we were brothers! He obviously needed close friends to help through the persecution, like trees will intertwine their roots in the ground so they all can stand against storms that come. Jesus then preached the best-known sermon of His ministry. He traveled, training His inner group of followers. I heard of some miracles He did: healing a Centurion's servant and bringing a widow's son back to life. These weren't done for the multitudes like before, just for a few close to Him.

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

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

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

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

PERSECUTION THROUGHOUT THE AGES If you study church history you'll see those who follow Jesus have always been persecuted by Satan and his world system. Today is no exception. In fact, there have been more martyrs produced in the 20th century than in all the other centuries combined. It's a sign of the last days (Matthew 24:8-10) and shouldn't surprise us (1 John 3:13; 1 Peter 4:12-14). If you live for Jesus you will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12; Philip[ians] 1:29; John 15:20; Matthew 5:11; 10:23).

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

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

22. THE GREATEST SERMON EVER GIVEN

By James (Brother of Jesus)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

23. MIRACLE MAKER

By Jeshua

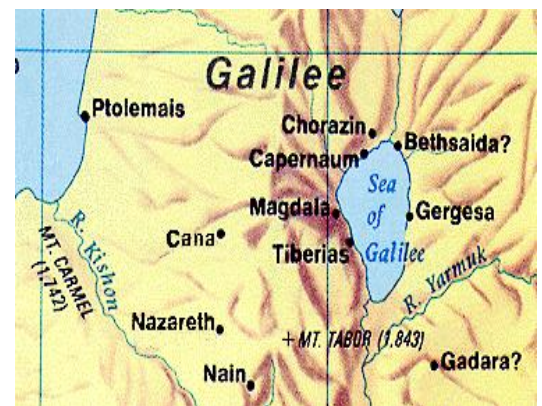
A number of years ago a man who picked up a beautiful rock from a nearby stream bed and used it as his cabin doorstep. Years later an expert in rocks and minerals who was traveling in the area stopped at the cabin and noticed the doorstep, which he immediately recognized as a huge lump of gold. In fact,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

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

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

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

All of a sudden Jesus told us that we were going to the area of the Decapolis. Well, naturally we wondered why we'd go to that God-forsaken land. Jesus said it was to spread the message of the kingdom throughout that whole area. It seemed the job would take months at least – how long were we going to stay? “Just a few hours, half a day at most” Jesus said. We asked how that could be done and Jesus told us he had a man picked out there whom we'd meet. He'd spread the word. We figured he must be some guy: highly trained, skilled, well-educated, great contacts and so forth. “Actually,” Jesus told us, “he hasn't any of that. He's just been hanging around the cemetery lately.” The cemetery? What was he, a funeral director, a grave digger? What does he do at the cemetery? “Well, mainly he runs around naked, breaking chains, cutting himself, banging his head on stone markers and terrorizing anyone he meets.” We had heart reports of such a man. Frankly, we were too stunned to reply. It just didn't make sense. We had no idea what He was talking about.



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

24. FEEDING THE 5,000

By the boy who gave his lunch to Jesus

The days started like any other typical day in Capernaum. We woke up and started going about our daily business of working or shopping. I was learning how to repair nets for the fishing boats on the Sea of Galilee so I could one day be a fisherman. James, John, Peter and Andrew were out of town so only one boat would go out today. We were expecting them back soon, any day now. Jesus had sent them out by twos to teach and heal.

Jesus Himself was seated nearby, looking out over the water as if something was bothering Him. Later I was told He just found out that His cousin, good friend and partner in ministry, John the Baptizer, had just been killed by having his head cut off! Perhaps Jesus was mourning him and wondering if what happened to the herald would happen the one who followed.

It wasn't long until people discovered Jesus and started demanding he heal the sick they brought. Weren't they sensitive to His needs? Didn't they respect His privacy? No wonder He had to slip away at night to be alone to pray.

As the sun worked its way up the sky and I completed my task, my attention was caught but a large, loud group moving quickly to where Jesus was patiently teaching and healing. There was Peter in the front, with John, James and Andrew with them. I knew it was too late to go fishing since that usually was done in the cooler evening or early morning hours, so they probably wouldn't be coming for their boat. Instead, I went over to where they were approaching Jesus.

They were all excited, everyone shouting to be heard over everyone all, all with great stories of the success they had enjoyed as they taught, healed and cast out demons in Jesus' name. The bedlam was so great Jesus couldn't hear them, so He motioned for them to get into the remaining fishing boat and push out. I didn't know if Jesus was going to teach from the boat again, but they kept on going. Obviously Jesus wanted time alone to listen to them and share their excitement while also sharing His ominous news about their mutual friend, John, and its implications for them.

The people who had gathered weren't to be put off so easily, though. Some started running along the shore to cut across to where they thought the boat might land so they could continue their demands for Jesus' attention. I followed along, grabbing up the lunch my mother had packed for my noon meal as I passed by the newly-mended nets.

The boat didn't put ashore but kept traveling, so we kept following. They would have to land somewhere, so we kept following. More and more people caught up to us and others from the town we passed through as we follow the shoreline northeastward also joined in. Soon there was a large group making its way around the lake on foot.

Eventually we arrived at the spot where the boat was landing and swarmed around Jesus and the disciples. I knew Peter and James well, and it was obvious they and the others were quite put out at Jesus because they wanted all His attention just to themselves. Jesus, though, had compassion and patience for the people.

The day was already well advanced and it was past time for our noon meal. I had my lunch but soon realized no one else had brought food. There was no place to buy enough food for such a large crowd for a quick estimate revealed there were at least 5,000 men. Add to that children and

women and we numbered over 20,000. It would cost a fortune to buy enough food for all of us, even if it had been available. I was hesitant to eat my lunch in front of everyone, knowing that wouldn't be polite. But I surely was getting hungry!

Jesus was sensitive to all our needs and realize we were getting quite hungry. He asked His disciples, who had just seen God do many miracles through them, to handle the situation but it seems they forgot their newly-learned lessons and didn't know how to feed us. Andrew had been talking to me and noticed my lunch so he told Jesus about it, thinking that at least Jesus would have something to eat even if the rest of us didn't. When he asked me for it I was hesitant to give it up, for mother know I was a growing boy and quite hungry and given my 5 small loaves of bread and 2 fish. Reluctantly I gave it up, knowing mother would be proud of my manners under the circumstances. After all, sharing with Jesus was a real privilege.

Now we had been watching Jesus do miracles all day, but this one was special because it benefited all of us and not just someone else. A miracle is really what it was, for when Jesus took my food, prayed for it, and broke it to eat it, instead of eating it He passed it to the disciples. Only He kept breaking and breaking and breaking and giving, giving, giving. Yet that same small loaf was still in His hands – it never got smaller! In fact, the food just multiplied. It increased so fast that there was enough for each of us to eat our fill and even have 12 fell baskets left over.

I used to think that I was too young to do anything for God. After all, I was just a child. Then I started thinking of other children God had used. David was a young boy when he killed a lion, bear and Goliath. Samuel started serving God in the temple when he was about 4 years old. Josiah was 8 when he became he became king and let the people back to God. Then there was the Jewish servant girl who sent Naaman to Elisha to be healed. I remembered that Jesus had told the disciples to let children come to Him when they tried to keep us away. I even heard Him once say that adults needed to have faith as us children had. That made me feel good. I guess God can use a child. He often has in the past.

I was thrilled to think that Jesus did all that with my little lunch! It made me think, if He can use something small as my lunch, perhaps He could use someone as small as me. If I gave Him my life, would He use and multiply it, too, for His glory, like the fish? Somehow I think so. I'll find out, I guess, for I've given Him my heart to use for His honor and glory as well. Have you?

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

25. CHRIST VERSUS SATAN

By Jeshua

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

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

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

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

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

DELIVERANCE! Anyway, when we got to the shore we made a camp and slept for the night. The next morning these men found us on the beach, maybe they smelled our breakfast cooking, I don't know. They were terrible to look at! Some part of their free will drew them to Jesus as their only hope, though, for they ran to Jesus and fell on their knees. "Come out!" Jesus commanded the demons. There must have been 5,000 to 6,000 demons in each one! The demons begged Jesus to have mercy on them – imagine! What mercy did they have on these two men? There was no

fear for us, because it was totally clear that Jesus was in charge and they had no power over Him. It was amazing to watch, though.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

26. JESUS KNOWS HOW YOU FELL

By Abiel

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JESUS KNOWS WHAT WE GO THROUGH As I watched this whole scene play itself out I got to thinking about Jesus. Obviously He knows what we all go through: hurt, loss, danger, threats, too many demands on our time and not enough peace and quiet. He knows what life is like. He knows because He's gone through it! That really makes a difference, that He knows what I go through. I carefully watched how He handled it, for I knew how I responded on days like that!

It was like He had a goal and He kept His eyes on that goal – doing God's will and bringing glory to God. That was how He lived. That was behind all He did. Now me, I work at building my

kingdom. But obviously Jesus was only interested in building God's Kingdom. If something was part of that, it was good. If it wasn't then it was dropped. He stayed focused. What is your goal in life? Do you stay focused on it? Our goal is to be like Jesus, to bring glory to Him. We must trust Him and serve in all we do. Watching Him was great for me. On the other hand, watching the disciples handle this all was also very educational.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

27. TRANSFIGURED!

By James (Brother of John)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHAT ABOUT YOU? Do you believe He really is God? If so, that will change your life! Check out the facts. The more closely you look, the more obvious it becomes. Two infidels once sat on a railroad train, discussing the life of Christ. One of them said, "I think an interesting romance could be written about him." The other replied, "and you are just the man to write it. Tear down the prevailing sentiment about His divinity, and paint Him as a man - a man among men." The suggestion was acted upon and the romance written. The man who made the suggestion was Colonel Ingersoll, the noted atheist. The writer was General Lew Wallace, and the book was called "Ben Hur." In the process of constructing the life of Christ, Gen. Wallace found himself facing the greatest life ever lived on earth. The more he studied, the more he was convinced Christ was more than man. Until one day, he was forced to cry, "Verily, this was the Son of God!"

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

28. WOMEN & GRACE

By The Widow of Nain and the Widow with 2 Mites

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

29. WOMEN & FORGIVENESS

By Two Immoral Women

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I usually try to avoid midday crowds, but today my curiosity got the better of me. I simply had to see who this man was! I put on my only proper clothes. I covered my face and my hair and, along with the crowds, I followed Him most of the day, listening to His teachings. Some of what I said I

couldn't quite hear and other I don't remember. There was so much! But I do remember one encounter He did have.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

30. MARTHA: A MODERN SLAVE

By Lazarus

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

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

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

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

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

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

Unfortunately, she got so bothered by Mary's departure that she interrupted the discussion to imply Jesus didn't care about her because He didn't send Mary back into the kitchen. It was an embarrassing moment. Mary felt awful – she wasn't trying to hurt Martha. Kind Martha was obviously out of line. Jesus gently corrected Martha, telling her not to be so worried and upset. He didn't want to take sides, but He said that she shouldn't be telling Mary what to do. Mary didn't try to force Martha to adopt her priorities, and Martha shouldn't be trying to force hers on Mary. After all, feeding one's heart came before feeding one's stomach! We all learned something that day, even Martha. Spiritual needs must come before physical. Relationships with people come before chores. That's the only way to really live a 'successful' life.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

31. THE MAN WHO CHEATED DEATH

By Lazarus

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then Jesus went to the tomb. He asked them to move the stone. Martha, thinking He just wanted to view my body one final time, reminded Him that I had been dead four days – the stench

from decay would be awful. Jesus persisted. No one knew what He was going to do. You know, Jesus never preached a funeral sermon. Every funeral He attended He ended by bringing the dead person back to life. That's what He did with me, too!

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

32. BARTIMAEUS & ZACCHAEUS

By James “The Less”

Hello! My name is James, son of Alphaeus. My mother was Mary's sister and Matthew (sometimes called Levi) was my brother. That made us cousins of Jesus and His brother James. I'm called “the less” to tell me apart from the other James, John's brother and son of Zebedee. I was younger and shorter than him, so “the less” pretty well summed me up. There was nothing little or less in Jesus' love for me and mine in return for Him, however! His mercy to me was awesome!

For 3 years I've been following Him, having started to believe in Him at the family wedding in Cana when He turned the water to wine. That was His first public miracle. Little did I know I'd be with Him at His last public miracle as well. It happened on our way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Passover as we always did. Only in hindsight was I able to realize that this was Jesus' last trip to Jerusalem. In fact, as I think of it now, it was like He was going there to turn Himself in to die for our sins. He was to commit the ultimate act of mercy for us – to provide the free gift of salvation by paying for our sins on the cross. Before that happened, though, He had 3 more people to show mercy to.

As we walked down the road approaching Jericho, while still outside the city, we heard some men shouting to us from the side of the road. This wasn't uncommon, and Jesus went to see what they wanted, as he always did. This could make our progress maddeningly slow, especially when we were in a hurry, but Jesus never passed up an opportunity to show mercy to someone in need.

One of the men calling to us was named ‘Bartimaeus.’ Now in Hebrew ‘bar’ means ‘son of.’ Thus, this man was ‘Son of Timaeus.’ I never did catch the other man's name.

Anyway, they were calling Jesus “Son of David” despite others telling them to be quiet and leave Jesus alone. Obviously they thought He was the Messiah. What they knew or how they found out about Him remains a mystery to me, but obviously it was God's plan for them to be there at that time on that day. They wanted Jesus to show them mercy – do something good for them instead of the consequences for sin which we all deserve.

Jesus did something stranger, something I hardly ever remember Him doing. He asked them, “What do you want?” It had to be obvious what blind men would want! Perhaps Jesus just wanted them to put their request into words. It's the same in prayer. Often we have not because we ask not. God is willing to show mercy, but He wants us to ask.

Their answer didn't surprise anyone: they said they wanted to see. Jesus felt compassion for them and, in His mercy, healed them. Immediately they could see! It was almost amusing to see them jumping around, running here and there while looking at things they had never seen before.

As we continued on our way they traveled with us, wanting to be near Jesus and telling everyone what had happened. Eventually they cut down a side street and headed for home so they could share their good news with their family – and so they could see their loved ones for the first time ever!

By this time, we were walking through Jericho. More and more people were following us and the sides of the road were getting fuller and fuller as well. Many were talking about what had just

happened with Bartimaeus and his friend. The air was full of anticipation. What would Jesus do next? As was so often the case, they were quite surprised by His next actions, as were we all.

Jesus suddenly went to the side of the road and stood under a sycamore tree and looked up into the tree. What was happening now? Then He called into the tree, “Zacchaeus! Come down! I want to go to your house for dinner!” We were shocked and amazed. Who was this Zacchaeus and how did Jesus know his name? Even more, why would He want to go to this man’s house?

When the man scrambled down out of the tree it was obvious he was short. Please understand, I have nothing against short people, being short myself. He must have gone up into the tree so he could see Jesus because he couldn’t see above the heads of the taller people in front of him. But upon seeing him we also recognized the unmistakable signs of a tax collector! Later we found out he was the head tax collector for that whole district. Everyone knew tax collectors were hated and despised because they were traitors to Israel and worked for the Romans. They were rejected by society because they were greedy and could charge as much as they wanted for tax, only turning a portion of it over to Rome. Thus, they were very rich.

Why would Jesus want to be identified with this short, hated, rich traitor? Just when the people here were starting to respond to Jesus He goes and does something like this! I wasn’t surprised, though, for this seemed to be a pattern of His. Often when He showed mercy to someone in need others didn’t understand and just condemned Him for even associating with such needy people. It didn’t seem Jesus cared what people thought. He clearly cared much more for showing mercy to someone in need. I guess that’s why I loved Him so much – and why He loved me as well!

Being the recipient of this mercy brought out mercy in Zacchaeus’ heart as well. He promised to give half of his possessions to the poor and pay back four times as much if he had cheated anyone. He showed mercy because he had been shown mercy. I could understand that. It happened to me as well!

Later, in looking back on this time, I couldn’t help but marveling at how quick Jesus was to show mercy to these men even though He was going to a merciless and painful death. I continue to thank Him for His mercy to me! And the more I experience His mercy the more I want to show mercy to others. Even if they don’t show me mercy, I still desire to show mercy. I guess that’s part of becoming more and more like Jesus. You know what – I like it! I’m glad to be that way! I’ll never be able to show more mercy than I receive, and it seems the more I do give the more I get in return! Do you need mercy? Try showing mercy to others and see what happens to you!

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

33. THE TEARFUL ENTRY

By Joses

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

34. WHAT WILL WASH AWAY MY SINS?

NOTHING BUT THE BLOOD OF JESUS

By John

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

There were actually two celebrations of the Passover that were allowed by the priests. Those from Galilee celebrated the Passover Thursday evening while the others celebrated Friday evening. This was because of the difference in reckoning days in a solar compared to a lunar calendar, one starting at sunset and the other being like our calendar today. This was allowed because of the large number of people celebrating in Jerusalem. It made it so rooms could be used twice and so the priests had more time to kill and distribute the $\frac{1}{4}$ million lambs needed each year. Jerusalem's population swelled from 100,000 to as many as 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ million for Passover.

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

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

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

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

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

bowl established a close bond of friendship forever, even on to their children. All shared common drinking glass/cup.

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

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

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

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

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



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

It was at this time, though, that a dispute among the disciples about who was the greatest came to a head (Luke 22:24). On the outside their feet were dirty from the road, for streets were used for sewage drainage. It was the lowest slave's disgusting job to wash the feet of those who entered a house. None of the disciples would do this for they all felt they were too good to wash each other's feet. Thus, the room was not only filled with the stench of sewage on their feet, but with the jealousy and pride of their hearts. This is when Jesus stepped in and washed their feet for them (Luke 22:24-30; John 13:1-17).

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

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

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

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

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

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

10. MIDDLE MATZO BROKEN (Yachutz MATZAH) The next activity centered on the matzo. Matzo is bread without leaven in it. Leaven is a microscopic bacteria which is placed in 'yeast.' When exposed to water and warmth the bacteria rapidly grows. It causes a fermentation which produces a gas. This process will continue until the dough is sour and ruined unless the bacteria is killed by baking. Thus, leaven is a picture of sin (1 Corinthians 5:7). It starts small, hidden, unseen, but unless it is killed it will grow and destroy everything.

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

On the Sabbath the Jews would eat 2 matzo's, double the normal portion. For this was a special day. On Passover they would eat 3. Three in the Bible stands for God - the Trinity. The Jews today take these 3 matzo and make what is called a 'unity' with them. No one is sure when or why this practice began, but it is a beautiful picture of Jesus.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

After the first sin in Eden, God (God the Son, always the Person of the Trinity Who appears to man) **shed innocent blood to cover sin**. From then on Adam, Able, Noah, Job, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and all God's people did this. It was God's way of teaching them that innocent blood must be shed to cover sin. When Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac, God provided a ram substitute

(Genesis 22), showing that innocent animal's blood is a substitute for the blood of the one who sinned. This is even more clearly taught in the story of the Passover lamb (Exodus 12:1-13).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

13. CUP #2 - JUDGMENT Cup 2 stands for God's judgment on the sin of the Egyptians. "I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. So, I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go." (Exodus 3:19-20) This culminated with the death of the firstborn. "On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn -- both men and animals -- and I will bring judgment



on all the gods of Egypt; I am the Lord." (Exodus 12:12) When the Egyptians filled up their cup of iniquity the judgment of God fell on them and drowned them in the Red Sea, and this is the cup of Judgments.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mealtime is a good time for conversation, and Jesus used this time to comfort His disciples. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going." ... Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we

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

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

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

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

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

Then He "broke it" – He did it Himself, it wasn't done by the Romans or the Jews or anyone else. "No man takes my life from Me, but I lay it down of Myself." (John 10:18) He Himself was the ultimate provision for man, the fulfillment of all the animal substitutes like the Ram for Isaac (Genesis 22). Abraham didn't have to kill his son, God stopped his arm, because, on that same mountain, God killed His own son. There was no more possibility of a replacement, Jesus was the replacement – for each one of us.

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

22. ELIJAH'S PLACE The Jews believe that when the Messiah comes He will come during the Feast of Passover, and he will be preceded by Elijah (Malachi 4:5). This prophecy was fulfilled by John the Baptizer. Throughout the Passover meal today a place at one end of the table is vacant, and the front door slightly open. The best cup is set by this place. At the end of the service someone

is sent to the door and the sad report comes back, "I don't see him tonight, He's not coming. Perhaps he will come next year." There is no mention of this at Jesus' last supper. Christ may have occupied the place the disciples set for Elijah and drunk that cup, further showing He IS the longed-for Messiah!

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



24. HALLEL (Psalm 115-118) (Hallel 'Ha-LAY-el') "They sang a song as they left" - only reference to Jesus singing (did other times, though). Then they sung all or part of **Psalm 115-118** (especially 118), which would have been very meaningful to Christ at this time. "Open for me the gates of righteousness; I will enter and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter. I will give you thanks, for you answered me; You have become my salvation. The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.; The Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

35. THE DAY THEY ARRESTED GOD

By Bartholomew

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Do you understand what the struggle was all about? Jesus was perfect, He had never experienced sin, guilt or separation from God, things we live with every day. He naturally drew back from identification without sins, but He did it out of love for us. That was the only reason I could think of for Him going through with this – for me.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

36. BROKENNESS

By Peter

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

37. "I JUST FLOGGED A GOD!"

By Pilate

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

38. THE DAY DEATH DIED

By Barabbas

Hello! My name is Barabbas. Really it is Bar-Abba. Bar means son of and Abba means father. I was “son of the father” because my father was a well-known rabbi. My first name was very common – Jesus, the same as Joshua in the Old Testament.

Thus, I was Jesus Bar-abba (Jesus, son of the father) and I was fighting for the physical deliverance of Israel. My life crossed paths with another Jesus, Bar-Joseph, Who was working for the spiritual deliverance of Israel. What a way our paths crossed!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

39. “PEACE BE WITH YOU”

By Thomas

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FIRST APPEARANCE John and Peter ran to the tomb. Being younger, John got there first and stood at the door, staring in. Peter rushed by and entered, confused and grieved. John then entered and saw the linens that had wrapped Jesus. The head piece was neatly folded and set in place, the other still formed like an empty cocoon. John didn't remember Jesus' words, but the evidence made him think perhaps Jesus was alive. He didn't say anything, though. He then started back to the upper room with their news.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' Life – II. THOSE WHO KNEW HIM

40. ASCENSION

By Judas Thaddaeus

I was one of Jesus' disciples. My name is Judas Thaddaeus, but after the other Judas betrayed Jesus I sort of dropped that name and just went by Thaddaeus. Wouldn't you have done the same? Judas, after the tribe of Judah, was a fine name until Judas Iscariot forever but a black cloud over it. It's very sobering to realize I could have done the same thing the other Judas had done if it weren't for God's grace in my life. What a difference that decision of Judas' made. He will spend all eternity separated from God while I will spend eternity in God's presence in heaven. How do I know I'll be with Jesus? An angel told me! If that sounds strange to you I can assure you it seemed strange to me as well – but then there were lots of strange things happening in those days!

Jesus, the Messiah, had been cruelly crucified by the Romans. Stranger yet, He came back to life on the third day! For forty days He walked with us and appeared to us. Yet we knew that couldn't last. The way it all ended was equally strange.

We had all gathered in Jerusalem one last time and walked out of the city to Bethany on the Mount of Olives. We had been there many times and memories, both good and bad, flooded our minds as we walked. We knew this was the spot where God's Shekinah Glory (His literal Presence) ascended into heaven when He left the temple during Ezekiel's time. We also knew that Jesus said He would one day come to earth again, and this would be the very spot where His foot would touch ground! We knew He would soon be leaving, but how would we manage without Him? We needed Him so very much. We couldn't carry on without Him. On our own, we realized, we were nothing! How would we ever manage?

As had so often happened over the years, Jesus answered our question before we even asked it. It was uncanny how He could read our thoughts – but then He was God, wasn't He? He quickly reminded us that the Holy Spirit, Whom He had often talked about (especially at the last supper the night before He was crucified) would indwell us and do what He done for us – and do even more! He told us to wait in Jerusalem for the Spirit to come. Then the Spirit would show us what to do next. With His presence in us we would be able to manage nicely.

As He was saying these things, He started ascending into heaven. He just started going up and instantly we all knew that this was good-bye. This wasn't like the other times when He temporarily left. This was the end of one chapter and the beginning of another.

Again, our questions were anticipated and answered – this time by 2 angels who said that Jesus would certainly return, and it would be in exactly this same way as He went. Later, when the Holy Spirit did come and indwell us, He helped us remember these things and put them together as Jesus had said He would.

We remembered other words He spoke to us that time we ate together for the last time in the Upper Room. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going." (John 14:1-4) Knowing He was going to prepare a place for us to come be with Him gave us a lot of comfort. It was further

assurance I will spend eternity with Him! Knowing that will come can really help me face whatever the future may have for me!

A few years later Paul added more details to this doctrine. He said that the next event on God's prophetic program is the Rapture – the trumpet will sound, Jesus will appear in the sky, and every person from the cross to the present who has accepted Jesus as Savior will be taken to heaven. If they have already died their bodies will be taken to heaven to join their soul/spirit which went there immediately at death. Jesus told the thief on the cross beside Him, "TODAY you will be with me in paradise." His body stayed on the cross where his legs were broken but He was in heaven with Jesus!

Read Paul's exact words about this: "Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so, we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words." (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

Paul also explained to the Corinthians that we will have a new body, one not limited like this earthly body is. It will be like Jesus' resurrection body. "But someone may ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor. So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body." (1 Corinthians 15:35-44)

So, while we lost Jesus' presence at the ascension, we gained much more than we lost. Instead of living among us, He then lived in us by the Holy Spirit. And it wasn't just the 11 of us that had this benefit – every believer from that time on has the same great privilege. I see now that Jesus had to go to heaven to assume headship over the church (Hebrews 10:12,13; Ephesians 4:8,10; Ps 68:1) as well as sending the Holy Spirit (John 16:7,14; Acts 2:33; John 14:16-19). Now that He is in heaven He is our mediator and defender, He intercedes for us at the right hand of God (Rom 8:34; Hebrews 6:20). So, we have His inside us now and when we die we will get to be with Him forever! That's a good deal no matter how you look at it!