

A Survey of the Bible

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" Psalm 119:105

Lesson 7

Jesus, the Christ: His Birth and Ministry

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John

Jesus is the single most important figure in earth's history. He was God in the flesh and came to earth to bring forgiveness of sin and the hope of eternal life. The Old Testament looked forward to Jesus' coming and his earthly life is recorded in four documents called gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These are the first four 'books' of the New Testament. In this lesson we will study some highlights of Jesus' life on earth. In the lesson to follow we will continue this study and continue with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

Preparing the World for Jesus.

When Adam and Eve sinned the first promise of Jesus' coming was given. From that point forward the Old Testament anticipated the coming of the Son of God. Six months before the announcement of Jesus' birth to Mary the final preparer for Jesus' ministry was appointed.

Zacharias was a priest of God. His wife's name was Elizabeth. While Zacharias was in the temple doing service to God an angel appeared to him and promised that his wife would bring forth a son. This announcement was unusual in several respects, two of which include the advanced age of Elizabeth and the specific work assigned to the promise child. The child would be named John.

John was an unusual man. This rugged looking individual sharply reprovved the Jews for their sins. He told them to repent and be baptized. John preached "a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Mk 1:4). He was looking forward to the one who would baptize in the Holy Spirit and in fire (Lk 3:16). In the first chapter of the gospel of John [the apostle] the testimony of

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" "And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God." (John 1:29,34)
John the Baptist

John the baptist is given. He acknowledged that he was not the Christ and identified Jesus as being the Christ, the anointed one from God. John turned all people to Jesus. He faithfully prepared Israel for the coming of Jesus.

As Jesus began his earthly ministry he soon began to increase and John began to decrease. John rejoiced in this fact (Jn 3:30). John's life was a success - he fulfilled his God given mission.

The Birth of Jesus

Seven hundred years before Jesus' birth God told king Ahaz, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel" (Is 7:14 NKJ). Luke recorded the angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary of her selection as the mother of Jesus. She was told that she would conceive and that her child would inherit the throne of David. She was perplexed. Mary had never known a man, she was a virgin. God caused her to miraculously conceive - the virgin would bear a son. When her husband-to-be found that she was pregnant he made plans to end the engagement because of her pregnancy. It was shameful for an unmarried woman to be pregnant! But, Gabriel appeared to Joseph and instructed him to take Mary as his wife. He told Joseph that Mary was to give birth to the Messiah in fulfillment of the word of Isaiah - "the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel."

As the time for Jesus' birth neared a decree was issued for all to return to their city for a census. This Roman census was ordered by Caesar Augustus and occurred when Quirinius was governor of Syria. These facts emphasize the historical truthfulness of these accounts. This census caused Joseph and Mary to travel to Bethlehem, the city of David, to be counted. While in Bethlehem Mary gave birth to Jesus, just as Micah had prophesied (Mic. 5:2). This unique birth of Jesus was further emphasized by the

angelic announcement to the shepherds in the field and the coming of the ‘wise men’ from the east to worship him (Lk 2:8-20; Mt. 2:1-12).

Because Jesus was born as king of the Jews (Mt. 2:2) Herod sought to kill him. He waited for word from the wise men to identify Jesus, but when he realized they were not returning he had all the boys in Bethlehem two years old and younger killed to insure that he had killed the one born to be king. God, however, warned Joseph beforehand and told him to take Jesus to Egypt. After the king died Joseph moved his family back to Palestine, returning to Nazareth as the Lord instructed him.

The Youth of Jesus

From their move to Nazareth to the 30th year of Jesus’ life nothing is known except an event when he was twelve. The absence of material during these years is evidence of the inspiration of the Bible. Which modern writer would ignore the childhood of such an influential person? It was God’s decision to give us the material we have, and to keep the early life of Jesus a secret. Was his early life important? Certainly. Is it required for us to know Jesus’ early life? Certainly not. If it were, God would have included it in the gospels [Consider Jn 20:30,31].

At age twelve Jesus went with his parents to Jerusalem for the Passover. After the Passover his parents left for Nazareth. After a day on the road they discovered that Jesus was not in the company with which they were traveling. They returned to Jerusalem looking for Jesus. After three days they found him in the temple conversing with the priests, amazing them with his understanding and answers. When questioned about this he asked, *“Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?”* (Lk 2:49). At the age of twelve Jesus knew that God was his Father.

Jesus is the perfect pattern for youth. *“Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”*
Lk 2:51-52

Jesus’ Ministry

Jesus began his ministry when he was about thirty years of age (Lk 3:23). Up to this time he had been a

carpenter, likely assisting Joseph whom all thought was Jesus’ father (Mk 6:3).

As he began his ministry Jesus was baptized of John in the Jordan River. John knew who Jesus was and thought it more proper for Jesus to baptize him. Jesus told John to baptize him *“to fulfill all righteousness”* (Mt 3:15). As Jesus came out of the water the Holy Spirit descended in the likeness of a dove and the Father spoke from heaven, *“You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased”* (Lk 3:22). John’s confidence in Jesus’ identity was strengthened with these events. He said that God told him beforehand that these events would prove Jesus’ identity as the Christ (Jn 1:29-34).

After his baptism Jesus went into the wilderness, deserted places. He fasted for forty days and was tempted during that time. As those days were finished he was tempted three more times. Satan tempted him to turn stones into bread to satisfy his hunger, to cast himself off the pinnacle of the temple in order to prove an Old Testament prophecy of divine protection, and to bow down and worship him [Satan] in order to receive all the kingdoms of the world. In each case Jesus resisted the temptation. In each case Jesus used Scripture to refuse Satan. Jesus again gave man an example for life. The word of God is powerful and helps us resist Satan (see 1 Pt. 5:8,9).

These events began the earthly ministry of Jesus. For more than three years Jesus walked this earth. He demonstrated to man the nature and identity of God. He was the light of the world (Jn 8:12). In Jesus man beheld, and beholds, the glory of the only begotten of the Father (Jn 1:14). Jesus said, *“He who has seen Me has seen the Father”* (Jn 14:9). These truths are verified through the life of Jesus. Although not all men received, or receive, the truths Jesus taught and lived, the four gospels give the proof that Jesus was God in the flesh, God incarnate.

A Survey of Jesus’ Life

Allen Robertson, in his four volume series *“Exploring the Life of Christ,”* has divided the gospel accounts into ten sections. These sections are repeated here, with permission, to provide a brief overview of the life of Jesus.

The Prologue: Predictions and preliminaries.

Period of Preparation: Thirty years, from the

birth of Christ to His baptism.

Period of Inauguration: Fifteen months, from the baptism to the rejection at Nazareth.

Period of Early Galilean Ministry: Four months, from the rejection at Nazareth to the Sermon on the Mount.

Period of Later Galilean Ministry: Ten months, from the Sermon on the Mount to the feeding of the five thousand.

Period of Retirement: Six months, from the feeding of the five thousand to the Feast of the Tabernacles.

Period of Judean Ministry: Three months, from the Feast of the Tabernacles to the Feast of Dedication.

Period of Peraean Ministry: Four months, from the Feast of Dedication to the anointing at Bethany.

Period of the Passion: Eight days, from the anointing at Bethany to the resurrection.

Period of the Resurrection: Forty days, from the resurrection to the ascension.

Allen Robertson's workbooks provide a valuable guide for a more detailed study of the life of Christ.

The Miracles of Jesus

The gospels record many miracles done by Jesus. These miracles were done for a purpose: to prove that Jesus was the Christ. When John the baptizer sent men to ask if Jesus was the Christ, Jesus responded by pointing to the miracles he did and the gospel he preached. His actions proved his identity. John recorded the signs in his gospel, "*that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name*" (Jn 20:30-31). Miracles were given to prove Jesus' identity, not just to relieve man's affliction. The blessings to the recipients of the miracles were tremendous but the faith established in those who witnessed the miracles was more beneficial and longer lasting.

Jesus' first miracle was to turn water into 'wine'. Who do you know who has the power to change water into juice? This miracle was known only by a few but was written for the benefit of all. Do note that the wine made from that water was not the same type of wine available in the liquor department of your local

store. The original word for 'wine' in this text [Jn 2] refers to either fermented or non-fermented juice. In this case it had to be non-fermented juice or Jesus would be responsible for causing many to become drunk, which is sin. But Jesus did no sin (Hb. 4:15). This miracle was consistent with godliness: water into juice.

Another miracle of Jesus was to cause a man born blind to see. The blind man was known by all those around (Jn 9:8). Who today can make a blind man see? We are blessed with tremendous advances in the field of medicine, but we still have the blind. The healing of the blind man could not be denied. It proved that Jesus was different. It was another evidence that he was (is) the Christ, the Messiah.

Another undeniable miracle of Jesus was the healing of a withered hand (Mk 3). This miracle was done in the synagogue on the Sabbath. All were watching to see what Jesus would do. Jesus restored the man's hand. All saw it and there was no explanation for the healing except that God had intervened in nature - it was a miracle.

Another miracle involved Jesus' friend Lazarus. While Jesus was on the east side of the Jordan River he was told that Lazarus was sick. Jesus waited a couple of days before going to Bethany. He went to Bethany to demonstrate yet again who he was. He knew Lazarus had died. He was going to 'wake' him, to bring him back to life. When Jesus arrived in Bethany he met with Martha and then Mary. They went to the tomb of Lazarus and in the presence of all Jesus called Lazarus out of the tomb. Lazarus had been dead four days, but at Jesus' word he came forth from the tomb. Who among men can bring a dead man back to life? No one! This and every other miracle proved that Jesus was who he claimed to be - the Son of God.

Conclusion

After spending time with his apostles Jesus asked his apostles who others said he was. He then asked, "*But who do you say that I am?*" Peter answered, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" (Mt 16:15-16).

Peter's faith in Jesus was based upon the testimony of John the baptizer and the things he saw and heard in his walk with Jesus. His faith in Jesus motivated him to follow Jesus more closely, to preach the gospel of Christ to the Jews and the Gentiles, and

to finally give his life for the cause of Christ. He understood that in Jesus Christ the promise of the king was being fulfilled. Peter acted upon his faith. He was not always perfect in his words and actions (Remember his denial of Jesus three times?) but he to be a faithful servant of the resurrected Lord.

Read the four gospels. Pause and reflect upon the evidences of Jesus' identity. Consider the signs [miracles] given by the Son of God. You, too, can have faith that Jesus is the Son of God and now sits at the right hand of God. Jump ahead for just a moment. Read Peter's sermon in Acts 2. Consider the instructions given on that day. Have you become a Christian? If not, why delay a moment longer?

Review Exercises

Identify the Following.

Adam.

Noah.

Abram.

Moses.

David.

Daniel.

For Further Study

J.W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton, Fourfold Gospel (Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth, nd).

Homer Hailey, That You May Believe: Studies in the Gospel of John (Las Vegas, NV: Nevada Publications, 1973).

R.C. Foster, Studies in the Life of Christ (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker,).

"A Survey of the Bible" is written by Greg Weston
Go to www.tftw.org for Chinese and Spanish studies.

Give the Beginning and Ending event for each of the following time periods.

United Kingdom _____

Divided Kingdom _____

Judah Alone _____

Babylonian Exile _____

Restoration _____

Who is Jesus? Find the scriptures references and write the identity of Jesus as stated in that scripture.

Lk 1:31-33

Mt. 16:16

Jn 1:29

Jn 4:25,26

Jn 5:17,18

Jn 14:6

Jn 14:9

Lk 24:44-49

Miracles. Note two miracles of Jesus and how they proved that he was the Son of God.