Jesus Christ

Jesus was born into a world that had changed drastically from the time his people, the people of Israel, had returned from exile some five hundred years earlier. Politics, culture, language, and the religious practices in Israel had all undergone great shifts. The time was ripe for God to send his Son into the world to be the Messiah, Savior, and King. But he wouldn’t come in the way that everyone expected.

Israel had been waiting for their Messiah, and there were many expectations about what he would do for them and how it would look. He was supposed to be a mighty leader who would reestablish Israel’s hold on the land God had given to their ancestor Abraham, expelling the Romans and recalling the glory of the age of David and Solomon. The Messiah was expected to be the climax of Israel’s story, the ultimate fulfillment of all God’s promises to his people. Nobody expected the Messiah to come as the baby of a humble peasant girl from a small, unimportant town in Galilee. Nobody expected him to gather a small group of disciples and walk around the country telling stories and challenging the religious authorities.

But Jesus is the climax of God’s story! He is the ultimate fulfillment of all God’s promises to his people! The four Gospels tell the story of how this man from the margins of Israel’s society displayed God’s power through mighty miracles and through teaching with authority. They tell the story of how this unlikely Messiah gave the world far more than any military or political or religious leader ever could have. They tell the story of God with us, the eternal Son of God made flesh to live among his people and offer them salvation and eternal life—far more than the meager earthly kingdom they were hoping for.

In order to understand the story of Jesus the Messiah, we need to get the lay of the land. Who were the key people and social structures in Israel at this time? Where did Jesus spend his time? Who were the people who flocked to see him? Who were the ones threatened by his popularity?

**Greek Influence.** A few centuries earlier, the Greek Empire had conquered most of the known world, and along with their rule they brought their culture and language to the Jewish people. Jesus was born into a world that was still heavily influenced by Greek thought, and virtually everyone would have known the Greek language in addition to their local language (in Jesus’ case, likely Aramaic).

**Roman Rule.** The Roman Empire was in control of the entire world of the Gospels, and had been for nearly a century. There were several levels of Roman government, as can be seen in the Herod family, Pontius Pilate as governor of Judea, and Caesar Augustus as first Emperor of the Roman Empire.

...
Only to worship in the Temple for special life events and religious festivals.

- **John the Baptist**: John didn’t really fit into any of the major Jewish groups of his day. He was a herald of the coming Kingdom of God, calling everyone to repentance and preparing the way for Jesus and his ministry. Many people traveled into the wilderness to hear his message and be baptized, including a number of people who would eventually follow Jesus.

- **Jesus and the Disciples**: Jesus was born into an ordinary family and grew up in an ordinary town, but his life was far from ordinary. He chose a very diverse and likely group of disciples—some followers of John the Baptist, and other groups such as the Zealots and the Essenes who were radicals—though in very different ways. Zealots wanted to take political power by force, while Essenes separated themselves from the world in an effort to live pure lives marked by ritual holiness. Ordinary Jewish people were able to worship regularly in local synagogues, led by the mainstream religious leaders in their community. They would journey to Jerusalem and other groups such as the Zealots and the Essenes separated themselves from the world in an effort to live pure lives marked by ritual holiness.

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MAP

Bethlehem Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a village just a few miles south of Jerusalem in Judah (Luke 2:1-38; Matt 2:1-22).

Nazareth Jesus grew up in Nazareth (Matt 2:23), which was at Israel’s northern border. This was the center of religious and political power in the region, as it was home to the Jewish Temple and the Roman governor of Syria. Nazareth was home to some of the most important events in Jesus’ life happened in and around Jerusalem, including his crucifixion and resurrection. His last week was all spent in this area, with some time spent in Bethany, Bethphage, and the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives.

Samaria Instead of journeying this region, as most Jews at this time did, Jesus chose to travel through Samaria and minister to the people he met there (John 4:4-42). Many people in Sychar believed in him as a result of his ministry. The people of Samaria were half Jewish, the result of intentional mixing of peoples when they were exiled centuries earlier, and their worship practices were different from the Jews even though they were also based on the Pentateuch (Genesis—Deuteronomy).

Galilee Jesus spent most of his time during his ministry traveling throughout the region of Galilee. He spent a lot of time preaching in towns around the Sea of Galilee, including Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Korazin. He performed many miracles in Galilee, including the calming of the storm (Mark 8:23-27; Matt 14:34-41; Luke 5:1-10 and raising a widow’s son from the dead (Luke 7:11-17). He also delivered the Sermon on the Mount in Galilee (Matt 5:1-7:29). While there were synagogues in every town and a large Jewish population, there were also many Gentiles and Roman military personnel in this region, which was at Israel’s northern border.

Beyond Israel Jesus didn’t limit his ministry to the borders of Israel. He ventured out into Perea, visiting Tyre and Sidon (Mark 7:24-30) and into the Decapolis region west of Galilee, where he fed 4,000 people (Matt 15:32-39; Mark 8:1-10).

Spreading the Gospel Jesus went all over the land of Israel spreading the message of the Kingdom of God, but even that wasn’t enough. Several times Jesus went beyond the borders of his nation to share the Good News with all people, and eternal life is offered to all who will believe in the Son and the Father who sent him. What part can you play in spreading this Good News to all people?

Resurrection The story of Jesus’ life doesn’t end with his death—in many ways it only begins there. His resurrection shouts loudly about the power of God and the Good News that our sins have been forgiven, and death has been defeated. Allow the truth of the Resurrection to penetrate your life, and see what God will do in and through you as you follow Jesus.

MEGA THEMES

Jesus Christ: King, Messiah, Servant, Savior, Son of God. In each of the four Gospels, Jesus Christ is the central focus, but each Gospel highlights a slightly different aspect of his significance. Matthew presents Jesus as the King of kings and the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. Mark presents Jesus as the Servant of God. Luke presents Jesus as the Saviour of the entire world, and John presents Jesus as the unique Son of God who reveals the Father to us. All of these portraits of Jesus are important (and true), and the differences between the Gospel accounts can be attributed to the different elements of Jesus’ character and ministry that they are highlighting.

Jesus’ Teachings. In addition to learning about who Jesus is, the four Gospels give us direct access to what Jesus taught throughout his ministry. Jesus spoke often about the Kingdom of God (or Kingdom of Heaven), and how it differs from the kingdom of this world. He often taught using parables, giving profound truths through ordinary stories. He taught his disciples about the Holy Spirit, who would come to indwell and empower them after his death and resurrection. His teachings form an important foundation for the things his followers would write in the rest of the New Testament. The teachings of Jesus are alternately challenging and comforting; make sure that you allow all of what he taught to penetrate your heart and life.

Jesus’ Miracles. Jesus demonstrated power over sickness, nature, demons, and even death many times in his ministry. But this wasn’t just a way to show everyone how powerful he was, or a flashy way to gain more followers—Jesus’ miracles show his profound love and compassion for people. Certainly his miracles are proof that he is the Son of God, but they also prove that he sees the needs of his people and has both the power and the will to help them. This is no less true today—become a person of prayer and watch God transform you and the world around you through his power.

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250 EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF CHRIST

A Harmony of the Gospels

All four books in the Bible that tell the story of Jesus Christ—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—stand alone, emphasizing a unique aspect of Jesus' life. When these are blended into one complete account, as we have done in the Chronological Life Application Study Bible, we can see how these different accounts relate to one another and notice similarities and differences between how the four Gospel writers have told Jesus' story.

The Chronological Life Application Study Bible combines the four Gospels into a single chronological account of Christ's life on earth. It includes every chapter and verse of each Gospel, leaving nothing out. The Gospel accounts are divided into 250 events. The title of each event is identical to the title found in the Bible text. You can use this chart to quickly see which accounts appear in all four Gospels, and which might only be told through only one of the Gospels. Look for patterns, such as the kind of stories John tells that other Gospels don't, and you can gain fresh insight into the special emphasis of the individual Gospels—and learn more about Jesus in the process.

You can also get a feel for which stories take up a lot of space, and which are shorter, by glancing at the dots next to the references. These dots can give you a quick handle on when one Gospel is spending more space on a particular story than others. There are three sizes of dots, representing sections that are one to five verses, those between six and twelve verses, and the largest dots for sections that cover thirteen or more verses.

This harmony will help you to get a quick, at-a-glance overview of the story of Jesus' life. It will help you to better visualize the travels of Jesus, study the four Gospels comparatively, and appreciate the unity of their message.

A. THE BIRTH AND PREPARATION OF JESUS CHRIST

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MATTHEW | MARK | LUKE | JOHN
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Jesus speaks with the religious teachers.

Luke 2:41-42

When Jesus was twelve years old, he went up to Jerusalem with his parents for the Passover festival. As Jesus was going through the temple courts, he began to ask the religious teachers questions. The temple teachers were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus and the Kingdom of Heaven.

Matthew 3:1-12

In those days John the Baptist came to the Judean countryside and began preaching. His message was, “Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is near!” The prophet Isaiah was speaking about John when he said, “He is a voice shouting in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord’s coming!’”

Israel with Jesus and his mother. But when he learned that the new ruler of Judea was Herod, he was afraid to go there. Then, after being warned in a dream, he left for the region of Galilee.

Jesus’ childhood in Nazareth.

Matthew 2:23

So the family went and lived in a town called Nazareth. This fulfilled what the prophets had said: “He will be called a Nazarene.”

Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and all the people.

Luke 2:40-52

This is the first mention of Jesus’ awareness that he was God’s Son. But even though he knew his real Father, Jesus did not act like a spoiled child. Even though he knew his heavenly Father, Jesus never made a display of his relationship with God. Although Mary and Joseph knew how special Jesus was, the Son of God, they did not show it to others. Jesus grew up in the Temple and learned that the new ruler of Judea was Herod.

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Luke 2:46-47

There the child grew up healthy and strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God’s favor was on him.

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Luke 2:48

The Bible does not record any events of the next 18 years of Jesus’ life, but Jesus undoubtedly was learning and maturing. As the oldest in a large family, he might have been learning how much more he could do than his family already knew—how much more should we honor our family members! Don’t use commitment to God’s work to justify neglecting your family.

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Jesus replied, “What does the law of Moses say about this?”

The man answered, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.” And, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Jesus said, “Do this and you will live.”

The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

Jesus replied with a story: “A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road.

“By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by.”

“A Temple assistant” walked by and did the same. Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him.

“Going over to him, the Samaritan dressed wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn where he took care of him. The next day he handed the innkeeper some silver coins, telling him, ‘Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I’ll pay you the next time I’m here.’

“Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?”

The man asked, “The one who showed him mercy.”

Then Jesus said, “Yes, now go and do the same.”

A COLLECTION OF ATTITUDES ABOUT OTHERS’ NEEDS

Contrasting the needs of others brings out various attitudes in us. Jesus used the story of the good Samaritan to make clear what attitude was acceptable to him. If we are honest, we often will find ourselves in the place of the expert in religious law, intending to learn again who our neighbor is. Note these different attitudes toward the wounded man.

To the expert in religious law: The wounded man was a subject to discuss.

To the Temple assistant: The wounded man was someone to use and exploit.

To the Samaritan: The wounded man was a customer to serve for a fee.

To the Samaritan: The wounded man was a human being worth being cared for as another.

To Jesus: All of them and all of us were worth dying for.

Luke 10:27-17: The legal expert asked Jesus another question. He was asking the wrong question but he wanted to find out how to be a better person. To the Temple assistant, he was an object to exploit. When the Samaritan saw the man, he did not feel the need to justify or explain his actions. His attitude was toward the man as a fellow human.

Luke 17:22-33: A legal expert asked Jesus why he had not been identified as a fellow human. But for Jesus, the neighbor in this story was a Samaritan, a hated enemy of the Israelites.

People who make choices we disagree with. People don’t look or act like us. People don’t say the things we hear people say. Sometimes we are so busy doing things for Jesus that we’re not interested in what someone else will think. Our service becomes so selfish. Jesus asked us to be a Model of Christ and to show even people who have wronged you. Have you forgiven them? How will God deal with you if he treats you as you treat others?

Mathai

Mathai is yet another story about attitudes about others’ needs. Mathai is a symbol of the unyielding attachment of many of us to our relationship with God. We are often so preoccupied with our personal relationship with God that we cannot understand the problems and needs of others. Biblical characters and people who have wronged us are rarely included in our minds. Jesus teaches us to pray, “Forgive us our sins for we also forgive those who have wronged us.”

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knocked over the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those selling doves. He said to them, “The Scriptures declare, ‘My Temple will be a house of prayer; but you have turned it into a den of thieves.’”

The blind and the lame came to him in the Temple, and he healed them.

“The leading priests and the teachers of religious law saw these wonderful miracles and heard even the children in the Temple shouting, ‘Praise God for the Son of David.’

But the leaders were indignant. “They asked Jesus, ‘Do you hear what these children are saying?’

“Yes,” Jesus replied. ‘Haven’t you ever read the Scriptures? For they say, ‘You have taught children and infants to give you praise.’” Then he returned to Bethany, where he stayed overnight.

When they arrived back in Jerusalem, Jesus entered the Temple and began to drive out the people buying and selling animals for sacrifices. He knocked over the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those selling doves, “and he stopped everyone from using the Temple as a marketplace.” He said to them, “The Scriptures declare, ‘My Temple will be a house of prayer,’ but you have turned it into a den of thieves.”

After that, he taught daily in the Temple, but the leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the other leaders of the people began planning how to kill him. “But they could think of nothing, because all the people hung on every word he said.

Jesus Explains Why He Must Die

John 12:28-36

Some Greeks who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration asked Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, “Sir, we want to meet Jesus.” Philip told Andrew about it, and they went together to ask Jesus.

Jesus replied, “Now that the time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory.”

See Jerusalem in the Time of Nehemiah, p. 1239

Jesus Explains Why He Must Die

Mark 11:15-19

Mark 11:15-19: Jesus became angry, but he did not sin. There is a place to righteous indignation. Children are right to be upset about any oppression that is against them. However, Jesus corrected himself against them. Unfortunately, religious leaders often misuse this issue and instead get angry over personal insults and petty violations. Make sure your anger is directed toward the right issues.

Mark 11:15-19: Money changes and merchants did big business during Passover. The Temple was surrounded by the city of the Gentiles, making it impossible for non-Jews to spend any time in worship (Isa 56:6-7). Jerusalem became angry because God’s house became a place of extortion and a barrier to Gentiles who wanted to worship.

Luke 19:47: Why were the "other leaders of the Temple" angry? This group probably included wealthy leaders in politics, commerce, and business. They had several reasons for wanting to get rid of Jesus. He had stirred up opposition among the religious leaders. He was preaching against religious rituals, and his lawlessness often alarmed the Jews (as the religious leaders would see it). Furthermore, his great popularity was in danger of attracting Roman attention and the leaders of Israel must act quickly to eliminate this potential rival.

John 12:20-21: These Greeks probably were connected to the Jewish elite. They may have gone to Philip because, though he was a Jew, he had Greek friends.

John 12:22-23: This is a beautiful picture of the necessary sacrifice of Jesus. Unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil, it will not become a stalk of wheat producing many ears of wheat. The same is true for Jesus. He had to die to pay the penalty for our sin, but also to show his power over death. His resurrection proves Jesus is the Messiah and justifies his death. Moreover, Jesus showed that all who believe in him will also be raised.

John 12:22: We must be so committed to living for Christ that we don’t “owe anything” for our boss. In addition, this doesn’t mean that we long to do or that we are careless or destructive with the life God has given, but that we are willing to do so in a way that will glorify Christ. We must obey the managerial rules of our own self-contained businesses. We should be responsible, secure, and pleasant. We can serve God, though, and do so with joy and love and turning others to Christ bringing eternal life to the world.

History of the Temple in Jerusalem

The Temple in Jerusalem has a significant history. The first Temple was erected in the time of Solomon (950 B.C.). The Babylonian army had just grown in Jerusalem in 586 B.C., completely destroying the city. The Temple and Solomon’s palace were burnt down, the Temple treasures were completely plundered, the city walls were demolished, and the cities were deserted in large numbers. Jeremiah had predicted Jerusalem’s doom and 70-year captivity (Jer 25:11–29:10). The second Temple in Jerusalem was built in the time of Zerubbabel (526 B.C.). In 465 B.C., with the aid of the Persians, Antiochus agreed to rebuild Jerusalem, forcing them to accept. He pursued by Rome, where the Greeks appointed him king of the Jews. "Anathematised" with this new authority and two Roman legions, Herod the Great was appointed king of the Jews, and the Temple was completed. Herod’s reconstruction of the Temple began in 20 B.C., and it was not completed until around A.D. 66. He died 4 years later, the Roman general Titus led siege to Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. Jesus had predicted this 40 years earlier (Acts 1:20).

Jerusalem in the First Century A.D.
Paul had heard of the church at Rome, but he had not yet been there, nor had any of the other apostles. Evidently the church had been started by Jews who had come to faith during Pentecost. They had spread the gospel when they returned to Rome, and the church had grown. Paul deeply wanted to visit this church, and to go from Rome to minister in Spain and beyond, pushing the Good News to the ends of the earth. The book of Romans is somewhat of a letter of introduction. Paul was intelligent, articulate, and committed to his calling. He presented the case for the gospel clearly and forthrightly in his letter to the believers in Rome, hoping that they would be his partners in sending the Good News to Spain and beyond.

1. WHAT TO BELIEVE

Paul begins his message to the Romans by vividly portraying the sinfulness of all people, explaining how forgiveness is available through faith in Christ, and showing what believers experience in life through their new faith. In this section, we learn of the centrality of faith to becoming a Christian and to living the Christian life. Apart from faith, we have no hope in life.

1.1. The Fall and God’s Good News

Romans 1:1-7

Rom 1:1-4

God promised this Good News long ago through his prophets in the holy Scriptures. The Good News is about his Son, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was shown to be *the Son of God when he was raised* from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. *He is in Jesus Christ our Lord.* Through Christ, God has given us the privilege* and authority as apostles to tell Gentiles everywhere what God has done for them, so that they will believe and obey him, bringing glory to his name.

*And you are included among those Gentiles who have been called to belong to Jesus Christ.* I am writ-ten to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people.

Rom 1:5

Rom 1:6-7

Rom 1:8-17

Paul humbly calls himself a slave of Christ Jesus, chosen by God to be an apostle and sent to preach the Good News. *God promised this Good News long ago through his prophets in the holy Scriptures.* *The Good News is about his Son, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was shown to be the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit.* He is in Jesus Christ our Lord. Through Christ, God has given us the privilege* and authority as apostles to tell Gentiles everywhere what God has done for them, so that they will believe and obey him, bringing glory to his name.

The Good News about Jesus Christ, who (1) came as a human by natural descent, (2) was part of the Jewish royal line through David, and (3) was part of the Jewish race through Abraham, is 1. PAUL VISITS ATHENS AND CORINTH

After writing the difficult letter to Corinth, Paul traveled down through Greece, stopping in Athens, and then stayed in Corinth to be with the believers there in person for a while.

ACTS 20:2b-3a

Then he traveled down to Greece, where he stayed for three months.

L. Paul’s Letter to the Romans

Paul wrote his letter to the church in Rome. He did not yet visit the church, but he had taken the message of the Gospel throughout the world. He wrote his message to the church in Rome to encourage the believers and to express his desire to visit them someday (within three years he would). This letter may also have been written to answer some of the prophecies predicting the Good News regarding Jesus Christ are found in Genesis 12:3; Psalms 16:10; 40:6-10; 118:22; Isaiah 11:11; Zechariah 9:1-7; 12:10; Malachi 4:1-6.

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Rev 22:1-2
The water of life is a symbol of eternal life. Jesus used this same image with the Samaritan woman (John 4:7-14). It pictures the fullness of life with God and the eternal blessings that come when we believe in him and allow him to satisfy our spiritual thirst (see Rev 22:17).

Rev 22:2
Why would the nations need to be healed if all evil is gone? John is quoting from Ezekiel 47:12, where water flowing from the Temple produces trees ... will be illness in the new earth; he is emphasizing that the water of life produces health and strength wherever it goes.

Rev 22:3
by anything” means that nothing accursed will be in God’s presence. This fulfills Zechariah’s prophecy (see Zech 14:11).

Rev 22:8-9
The first of the Ten Commandments is “You must not have any other god but me” (Exod 20:3). Jesus said that the greatest command of Moses’ laws was “You must love the Lord your heart, all your soul, and all your mind” (Matt 22:37). Here, at the end of the Bible, this truth is reiterated. The angel instructs John to worship God, and we must do the same. Worship is a spiritual sacrifice. The Tree of Life is to live a lie.

Rev 22:16-17
This warning is given to those who might purposefully distort the message in this book. Moses gave a similar warning in Deuteronomy 4:2-3. The angel warns, “Whoever adds to what is written here, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book. And if anyone removes any of the words from this book of prophecy, God will remove that person’s share in the tree of life and in the holy city that are described in this book. No one who adds anything to what is written here, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book.

Rev 22:18-19
The church of Philadelphia is called a lampstand because it shines with great purity even though it is small. It has been purified in the fire of persecution.

Rev 22:20
We don’t know the day or the hour, but Jesus is coming soon and unexpectedly. This is good news to those who trust him, but a terrible message to those who refuse to obey God’s commandments. We must be ready for his return, always prepared for his return. Would Jesus’ sudden appearance catch you off guard?

Rev 22:21
It flowed down the center of the main street. On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit,* with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations. And I solemnly declare to everyone who hears the words of prophecy written in this book: If anyone adds anything to what is written here, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book.

On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations.

Revision 22:2

*16 Some manuscripts read eat as well as all who obey what is written in this book.

*17 Greek arxaios.