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The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke

While all four Gospels record various aspects and events of the earthly life and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Matthew, Mark, and Luke—called the Synoptic Gospels—present very similar narratives. In our attempt to learn more about our Savior and Lord, we find it helpful to study the Synoptics together because of the strong similarities in these authors' structure and approach.

In this course we present background material that must come before an in-depth study of the Gospels. We discuss the date of writing, authorship, and purpose of each Synoptic Gospel. We also highlight the similarities as well as the unique achievements of the writers. Then we survey the development of the various empires—Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome—that provided the historical background for the birth of Christ. Another major factor in the preparation for Christ was the Jewish religious system. Who were the Pharisees, Sadducees, and teachers of the Law? What purposes did the synagogue and the Sanhedrin serve? These are some of the questions we address.

Next we present an event-oriented description of Christ's life. Thus, you will become familiar with the events of the annunciation of Christ and of John the Baptist before Him, of Christ's birth, and of His preparation for ministry. Then you will study a detailed account of Christ's public ministry, including the greater Galilean and the later Judean-Perean periods. In addition, you will examine the key events of the Passion Week, Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, and later His ascension into heaven.

Finally, we focus on the content of Christ's ministry. Why is Christ known as the model teacher? What method did He use? What were His topics? You will consider Christ's primary focus on the kingdom of God, His parables, and the miracles He performed. This should help you determine to what degree He achieved the goals of His teaching ministry.

Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course, you should be able to

1. Explain the term *Synoptic Gospels*, when it came into focus, and the nature of the so-called "Synoptic problem."
2. Discuss the historical background of Palestine and the Jewish religious development that prepared the way for Christ's coming.
3. Identify key events in the early life of Christ, His public ministry, and His final days on earth.
4. Distinguish between Christ's early ministry, greater Galilean ministry, later Judean/Perean ministry, and Passion Week.
5. Summarize Christ's teachings on the kingdom of God as they relate to the church and the world.
6. Explain Christ's purpose in using parables and miracles and discuss His teaching method.
7. Analyze and participate in God's plan to redeem through the life, death, resurrection, and commission of Christ.

Unit 1 The World

When we as individuals evaluate our own personal knowledge bank of Christ's life, we may feel that even though we have been learning about Him for years (in some cases since childhood Sunday school classes), what we know is comprised of bits and pieces of miracles, teachings, events, and stories. There is a lack of cohesion, a lack of awareness of how these bits and pieces fit together. Many of us desire to have and retain a more cohesive, in-depth knowledge of our Lord's life on earth, which will impact both our knowledge of Christ, and our effectiveness in service. Accomplishing that is our goal for this course; we will get there by delving into the historical background, details of authorship, and content of the Synoptic Gospels themselves. In this first unit, we will do foundational work with the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke, learning about the writers' lives and the people to whom they wrote. Then we will study the conditions of the world when Christ was born; this will reveal how the Lord masterfully orchestrated the social, political, cultural, and religious aspects of the world before sending His son to us at the optimum time.

Chapter 1 The Synoptic Background and John Mark

- 1.1 Synoptic Defined
- 1.2 Gospel Sources

- 1.3 An Overview of Mark
- 1.4 Mark's Relation to the Gospel

Chapter 2 The Backgrounds of Matthew and Luke

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Chapter 1: The Synoptic Background and John Mark

To study the life of Christ, it is necessary to study the Synoptic Gospels. This does not mean starting at Matthew 1:1 and continuing through to Luke 23:53. Rather, to learn the material more efficiently, we will gather and organize the similar topics of Jesus' life from the Synoptic Gospels, examining the material by categories or characteristics.

After you have learned the meaning of *Synoptic Gospels* and understood its significance, you move past the introduction and begin a rich and satisfying study of the life of Christ. While Chapter 1 gives the general background for this study, you should not view this focus as just something "to get out of the way" so you may proceed to the main study. We believe you will be challenged by the content and prepared more fully for the studies that follow. Remember: Frequently, one fails to benefit fully from an entire study by not taking time to lay the proper foundation with background materials. So take time to master these materials and enrich your study of *Christ in the Synoptic Gospels*.

As you begin, ask the Lord to help you absorb and appreciate this important foundational material. Be assured that it will enrich your own spiritual life and help you to communicate the things you learn more effectively to others.

Lesson 1.1 Synoptic Defined

Objective

- 1.1.1 *Identify the meaning of the term Synoptic Gospels and tell why we refer to them as such.*

Lesson 1.2 Gospel Sources

Objectives

- 1.2.1 *Point out why the priority of Mark has gained popular acceptance and identify correctly the sources of the Synoptic question.*
- 1.2.2 *State the true source of the Gospel accounts.*

Lesson 1.3 An Overview of Mark

Objective

- 1.3.1 *Identify facts the Scriptures record regarding Mark's personal life as well as his relationship to the early church and apostles, and briefly summarize his life and ministry.*

Lesson 1.4 Mark's Relation to the Gospel

Objectives

- 1.4.1 *Identify early church historians who attributed authorship of the Gospel of Mark to John Mark and note the significance of their testimony, and select statements that correctly give clues indicating the date when Mark was written.*
- 1.4.2 *Select statements that give the evidence on which we identify Mark's purpose in writing his Gospel.*

Lesson 1.1 Synoptic Defined

Identify the meaning of the term Synoptic Gospels and tell why we refer to them as such.

When we use the term *Gospels*, many beginning students of the Bible know just what the term means. They associate it with the four New Testament books that give us our knowledge of the ministry of Jesus Christ: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. However, these same students most likely do not know how the word *synoptic* limits or qualifies *Gospels*. They may wonder whether it means the same thing as the four Gospel accounts or whether it means something different. If so, what specifically does it refer to? We will look at the origin of the word and how it relates to the Gospels.

Its Origin

Like many words we use in connection with religious studies, *synoptic* comes from the Greek language. In this case *synoptic* comes from a Greek word that means “seeing with or seeing together,” while *gospel* comes from a Greek word that means “good news.” Thus, the two terms together give us the thought of “seeing the good news alike or in the same way.”

The term *Synoptic Gospels* refers to what?

Its Relationship to the Gospels

In view of our discussion, then, are all four Gospel accounts synoptic? No! While all of the accounts deal with some aspect of the life of Christ, only three—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—meet the **criterion** of “seeing the good news in the same way.” This means that the narrative as it appears in these three accounts is alike. So the focus of this course will be on these three Gospel accounts.

What do Matthew, Mark, and Luke have in common? What relationship exists among them that allows us to refer to them as the *Synoptic Gospels*? Did the early writers plan this similarity? Or did later Bible scholars merely adopt the term *synoptic* as they attempted to interpret the material?

As we prayerfully consider these questions, remember that our purpose in the study of the Synoptic Gospels is not to develop a scholarly critique. Bible scholars have written a vast amount of material not only on the Gospel accounts themselves but also on the historical and literary development of the texts. So we include very little of this type of material in our study. Our basic desire is to help you develop your knowledge of the background, details of authorship, and content of the Synoptics themselves.

Bible scholars first used the term *synoptic*, as it is used in relation to the Gospel accounts, in the late eighteenth century. They looked for ways to compare and contrast the three accounts that included many strong similarities but also intriguing differences.

As you read the separate Gospel accounts, you will probably notice the close similarity of events in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Then as you study the three texts more closely, you will begin to see certain traits that are unique to each. Yet they combine to produce a message that is one. With this in mind, we now pause briefly to examine one feature of Mark's Gospel that has led many people to accept what scholars call the *priority of Mark*.

Lesson 1.2 Gospel Sources

The Priority of Mark

Point out why the priority of Mark has gained popular acceptance and identify correctly the sources of the Synoptic question.

The term *priority of Mark* has gained wide acceptance among Bible scholars because it may help to explain how the Gospels, in their present form, were written.

A comparative study of Matthew, Mark, and Luke reveals that Matthew and Luke included almost all of the book of Mark in their accounts. In fact, Mark uses very few verses that the other two Synoptic writers do not use. As we look more closely, we see that Matthew weaves unique material into his narrative, and Luke likewise uses material we cannot find in either Mark or Matthew. To carry this one step further, both Matthew and Luke include content that is common to them which Mark does not use in his version. This leads to a natural question: What in this pattern gives Mark priority? Indeed, what do we mean by *priority* as it is used here? We will consider how Bible scholars answer this question.

Many Bible scholars feel that since Matthew and Luke seem to have incorporated Mark's account almost totally into theirs, Mark was the first Gospel to be written. They believe both Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source for their own writings. Then Matthew and Luke added their own material, as they felt led, to give completeness to the Gospel narrative. We may define the *priority of Mark*, then, as "priority in the sense that it was the first account written of the life of Christ, but it was not necessarily the most important or the most complete." Remember: It is probably wrong to refer

to any of the three Gospels as “the most important.” Each one serves a special purpose, just as the Holy Spirit intended.

Why has the term *priority of Mark* gained popular acceptance?

Other Sources

While it appears Matthew and Luke could have used Mark quite easily as the major source for their writings, it is apparent they also must have had other sources. For his part, Matthew observed events in the public ministry of Christ as an eyewitness and could have drawn on his own memories and experience; however, Luke could not. Still it seems that, to a certain extent, Matthew and Luke agree. How do we explain this question of sources? Bible scholars have suggested that perhaps another major source was available when Matthew and Luke wrote their accounts. This document has been called *Q* from the German word *quelle*, which means “a source.” This source, *Q*, represents the material that is common to Matthew and Luke but not found in Mark.

We neither know what the *Q* document was, if indeed there was such a document, nor who may have written it. Some scholars who deny divine inspiration of the Bible lean on this theory to explain how the Gospels came together. In any case, as we seek to keep all of these different sources separate, we can use a simple memory device. We will call the material we find only in Matthew *M*. Then we can use the letter *L* for writings we find only in Luke. To illustrate what we have just said, we can diagram these bits of evidence as follows:

List reasons supporting the theory that Matthew and Luke used sources other than Mark.

MARK	+	Q	+	“M”	=	MATTHEW
MARK	+	Q	+	“L”	=	MATTHEW

The discussion and study of the source the Synoptic writers used has been popularly called the *Synoptic problem*. Since we do not intend to discuss this aspect of the Synoptic Gospels in depth, we will leave it here.

The True Source

State the true source of the Gospel accounts.

As we move to the true source of the Gospel accounts, we should remember several things. First, whatever theories scholars advance about how the written texts developed, they remain *just theories*. Second, we must never fear honest inquiry into the sources, for this study can increase our appreciation of the Gospel records. Third, if we concentrate too much on source questions, we allow their focus to detract from the content—what God says in and through His Son. These things simply indicate that we should strive to maintain balance in our approach.

As serious students of God's Word, we should remember another important principle: God reveals His mind and purpose through human personality. The Bible in its entirety is His inspired Word, which He has disclosed to us through the revelation of the Holy Spirit so we may honor His purposes for us.

Of the revelation process, Peter says, "Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). While men were the means God used to record His Word, the Holy Spirit so influenced these human authors that they wrote just what God wanted to reveal. Furthermore, the inspiration, genuineness, and usefulness of the Gospel accounts, which the Holy Spirit has revealed to us, guarantee they are indeed the Word of God.

Complete the following statement: The true source of the Gospel accounts was ...

Did Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the men whose names appear at the beginning of the Synoptic Gospels, really write these books? Or are they the works of others? When and for what purposes were they written? Many people ask questions such as these. Lest we be unprepared for such encounters, we should develop an adequate knowledge of basic background studies of the New Testament.

With the foregoing issues in our minds, we will examine each book separately and discuss the various conclusions people within the **evangelical** community accept as standard. We will also develop a biographical sketch of each Gospel writer as we explore the biblical text and **traditional** accounts. This will bring us closer to the men themselves and make them more real to us. Since we have assumed the priority of Mark, we will consider it first in our background studies.

Lesson 1.3 An Overview of Mark

His Scriptural Record

Identify facts the Scriptures record regarding Mark's personal life as well as his relationship to the early church and apostles, and briefly summarize his life and ministry.

Greek **culture** made a lasting impact on the Roman Empire. As a result, many **Hellenistic Jews** in the **contemporary** Roman world had two names: One was their Jewish name, and the other was their Greek or Roman name. This was the case with John Mark, the writer of the Gospel of Mark. *John* was his Jewish name, and *Mark* was his Roman name. The Scriptures refer to Mark in three different ways: sometimes as John Mark, other times as John, and lastly as Mark.

Of the three Synoptic writers, Mark is the one most often referred to in the Bible. The references that appear at crucial points throughout Acts and various New Testament Epistles help us to construct a reasonably good character sketch.

As we shall see, certain facts about Mark in the Scriptures are quite clear and not difficult to interpret. Yet some other biblical passages do not give us a clear picture; instead, they raise a few questions. The following Scripture references form the record we have of Mark:

How do we explain the fact Mark had two different names?

Acts 12:12—For the first time in Scripture, Luke, the author of Acts, mentions *John Mark*, using both names.

Acts 12:25—*John Mark* returned from Jerusalem with Saul and Barnabas to Antioch. Here again Luke uses both names.

Acts 13:5—On this occasion Luke refers to Mark simply as *John* and notes that he accompanied Barnabas and Saul on their first missionary journey.

Acts 13:13—Once again Luke mentions Mark simply as *John*, observing that *John* left Paul and Barnabas at Perga for unexplained reasons and returned to Jerusalem.

Acts 15:37—Luke notes that *John Mark* (here he uses both names) became a point of contention between Paul and Barnabas at the start of their second missionary journey.

Acts 15:39—As a result of the disagreement, Barnabas took *Mark* as his companion, while Paul chose Silas to accompany him. Each group set out on a separate missionary journey. Barnabas and Mark went to Cyprus while Paul and Silas departed for Syria. At this point Luke refers to Mark simply as *Mark*.

From now on, the Scriptures refer to him only by his Roman name, *Mark*.

Colossians 4:10—Here Paul identifies him as “Mark, the cousin of Barnabas.”

2 Timothy 4:11—Paul requests Mark’s presence because of his usefulness to the apostle.

Philemon 24—Paul notes that Mark is in Rome with him, and the apostle counts him as a fellow worker.

1 Peter 5:13—Peter indicates the bond that exists between Mark and him by referring to Mark as his spiritual son.

In addition to the preceding ten Scripture passages related to Mark, one other passage could possibly refer to him; however, we will deal with it a bit later. For the present, we can summarize what we have examined about Mark to this point. Then as we proceed, we will take the evidence cited and attempt to draw a character sketch of Mark.

How complete is our picture of Mark, and what is the source of this information?

From the account in Acts 12, we can note several things. Mary (not the mother of Jesus) is the mother of Mark, and she seems to be a widow and a woman of wealth. We draw this conclusion from the fact that Luke refers to the house as *Mary’s house*, which indicates the absence of her husband. The house was large enough to require at least one servant, an outer gate, and ample space to serve a large gathering of believers.

Read Acts 12:12-13 and then list four facts Luke records here about the meeting at Mary’s house.

Biblical evidence suggests several things that may help to explain why Barnabas and Saul invited Mark to accompany them on their first missionary journey. Barnabas may have included him as part of the team simply because Mark was his cousin, or perhaps as an expression of appreciation for Mark’s mother’s practical usefulness and labor in behalf of the fledgling church. In any case, Scripture states simply that Mark played the role of helper, but it gives no clues to show what this ministry might have included.

While we do not know what Mark's duties were, we do know he left the team. Luke notes the progress and spiritual conquests of the group as it moved across Cyprus. With this experience behind him, Mark embarked from Cyprus with the others into the oppressive coastal heat and unhealthy climate of Perga. Ahead lay the dangerous Taurus Mountains, barbarous robbers, suspicious pagans, and Jews who were prejudiced against the gospel message. So at Perga, for unknown reasons, Mark decided to return to Jerusalem, leaving Paul and Barnabas to continue their journey alone.

Mark's decision to leave the team rose to haunt him sometime later. We can only wonder what he did after he left the team during that crucial, first missionary journey. Whatever that may have been, we meet him next in the biblical record just before the beginning of the second missionary journey. While Mark may have matured somewhat by this time, Paul felt strongly that he should not be given another chance at this time to assist in the ministry. After all, Mark had deserted the team. However, Barnabas was strongly committed to giving him another chance. Since they disagreed so sharply, Barnabas and Paul parted company, each going his own way. Barnabas took Mark with him to Cyprus, while Paul chose Silas as his missionary companion and traveled through Syria and Cilicia.

As Barnabas and Mark sail away, they fade forever from Luke's historical narrative. It seems strange in their movements—on occasion in the same general area—that the paths of the two teams never cross. At any rate, years pass before we hear of Mark again. Then suddenly he reappears as Paul, writing from prison, refers to him in his letter to the church at Colosse. Here, for the first time, we learn that Mark is the cousin of Barnabas. We see also that somehow Paul and Mark's relationship has been repaired. Paul recommends Mark to the Colossian church and indicates that, among others, Mark has been a source of comfort to him. In addition, Paul notes in Philemon 24 that Mark is still in Rome with him. At this point, however, Paul no longer regards Mark as a "helper" but as a fellow worker.

Read Acts 15:37-39 and 2 Timothy 4:11. Describe briefly the problem that led Barnabas and Paul to separate. Also describe Paul's attitude change in his letter to Timothy.

Near the end of his ministry, Paul mentions Mark for the last time (2 Timothy 4:11). Here he requests that Mark be sent to him and admits that Mark is useful to him in his ministry. This indicates clearly that they had completely resolved whatever problem arose at Perga years before. In the final analysis, then, Paul realizes Mark's true potential.

List facts about Mark's personal life and relationships with the apostles that are detailed in these verses: Acts 12:24-25, Acts 13:5, Acts 15:37-39, Colossians 4:10, 2 Timothy 4:11, Philemon 24, 1 Peter 5:13.

Peter gives us the last scriptural reference to Mark in his first Epistle (5:13). Here the apostle refers to Mark as his "son"; yet we should take this word in a spiritual rather than a natural sense. It appears the relationship between the two men had always been close. In fact, according to early tradition and history, the church placed much emphasis on this relationship.

The Traditional Record

Since we have listed the Scripture passages that clearly speak of Mark, we will examine one more in the Synoptic Gospels that may possibly refer to him.

Some scholars have suggested that Jesus and His disciples used the home of Mary, Mark's mother, for the Last Supper. If this were true, it is entirely possible that as a boy Mark may have witnessed the events of the last week of Christ's life. It has also been suggested that the young man who was seized in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of the Passover and then escaped was Mark himself (Mark 14:51-52). Although we do not need to discuss these suggestions in depth at this point, we offer them to provoke thought, since we have no way of either proving or disproving them.

Lesson 1.4 Mark's Relation to the Gospel

Authorship

Identify early church historians who attributed authorship of the Gospel of Mark to John Mark and note the significance of their testimony, and select statements that correctly give clues indicating the date when Mark was written.

With this brief biographical sketch of Mark in mind, we come now to the question of his authorship of the second Gospel. How can we determine whether John Mark indeed wrote the Gospel that bears his name?

Since nothing in the Bible (internal evidence) links Mark to the second Gospel, we must examine sources outside of Scripture (external evidence) for testimony concerning the matter of authorship. Fortunately, a considerable body of external evidence exists that points to Mark's authorship. While it is helpful, this testimony does not prove who wrote the second Gospel. It simply leads us to this conclusion: One cannot prove Mark is the author of the second Gospel on the basis of available evidence.

Even so, we have good reason to believe Mark was the author. To justify this view, however, we must turn to the early church historians (or fathers). Here we are indebted to two men in particular:

1. *Papias (AD 60-150)*. Papias was a bishop of Hierapolis, a city in Asia Minor (now present-day Turkey). He was reputed to be a disciple of John the apostle.
2. *Eusebius of Caesarea (AD 260-340)*. Eusebius, an early church historian, produced *The Ecclesiastical History*, from which we draw much of our knowledge of the early church world.

In *The Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius cites the testimony of Papias as proof that Mark was the author of the Gospel that bears his name. We can review the entire portion:

John the Presbyter also said this, Mark being the interpreter of Peter, whatsoever he recorded he wrote with great accuracy but not however, in the order in which it was spoken or done by our Lord, for he neither heard nor followed our Lord, but as before said, he was in company with Peter, who gave him such instruction as was necessary, but not to give a history of our Lord's **discourses** wherefore Mark has not erred in any thing, by writing some things as he recorded them; for he was carefully attentive to one thing, not to pass by anything that he heard, or to state anything falsely in these accounts. (1989, 127)

Several other well-known early church fathers, among them Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Clement of Alexandria, acknowledged the relationship between Peter and Mark in their writings. They indicate that Mark, as Peter's interpreter (perhaps secretary or assistant instructor), recorded the teachings of Peter about Christ as he remembered them. Thus, one contemporary of Mark is cited who endorses Markan authorship; other **venerable** church fathers accepted this testimony as well and passed it on.

While this external evidence is uniformly positive, it does not absolutely prove Mark is the author of the second Gospel. Nevertheless, we can safely assume that the church fathers accepted this view for good reasons. In any case, we should not feel

that the traditional position is a weak one in the absence of more positive written proof.

What evidence exists from early church fathers and historians that Mark wrote the second Gospel?

Date

We do not know precisely when the Gospel of Mark was written. Scholars vary in their dating estimates. However, evidence exists that suggests a general time frame within which Mark wrote his Gospel and his record circulated. Since the date is not crucial for our study, we should select a date range that agrees with the historical facts and move on to other matters.

Since Mark obtained most of his material from Peter, we can assume Mark composed his Gospel during the final years of Peter's ministry. Perhaps with Peter's age and impending death, Mark felt constrained to record all he remembered of the apostle's teaching. Since Peter would no longer be available for public ministry, Mark wanted to have a record of the apostle's teaching in written form. If this was his reason for writing, he made a wise decision, because according to early tradition, Peter died around AD 64. At about this same time, history records that the Emperor Nero launched a fierce persecution against Christians in Rome. In turn, tradition says this led to the deaths of Peter and Paul, as well as many other loyal Christians. Mark could have completed his Gospel sometime before, or shortly after the death of Peter. For our study we will accept a range of AD 58-65 for the writing of the Gospel of Mark.

Purpose

Select statements that give the evidence on which we identify Mark's purpose in writing his Gospel.

Why did Mark write his Gospel? Did he say the same things as the other writers? Did he address the same audience as Matthew and Luke? We turn now to these questions in this section of the lesson.

Mark's Gospel is the shortest of the Synoptics, but it is the Gospel with the most action. As we begin reading the second Gospel, we see that Mark offers neither an

apologetic nor states a clear purpose for writing. So we must draw our own conclusions about his purpose from the material itself and our knowledge of the historical setting of the book.

Tradition, as we have seen, indicates that Peter died in Rome. If Mark was with Peter at the time, then, it is reasonable to assume Mark wrote his Gospel account in Rome. Furthermore, if Peter and Mark were ministering to the Gentile population at Rome, then Mark could easily have written his Gospel account for the Gentiles in general and Romans in particular. As we carefully evaluate Mark's style of writing, this probability seems to suggest itself. Why this is so?

Unlike the accounts of both Matthew and Luke, Mark begins his Gospel with Christ as a full-grown man. For some reason he does not seem to be concerned with the details of our Lord's birth and childhood. Then he either omits or comments very briefly about matters we would expect him to include in the text if he had been writing to a Jewish audience. For example, Mark does not give the genealogy of Christ that both Matthew and Luke include, but he does interpret Aramaic phrases for the benefit of his readers. While he uses Latin words to a greater extent than the other Synoptic writers, he relies less on Old Testament quotations than either Matthew or Luke.

The foregoing are just a few examples of some of the differences between Mark's Gospel and the other two Synoptic accounts. Yet they indicate a style that will help us to identify Mark's intended audience. Some important facts will help us answer the questions we raised at the beginning of this section:

1. The historical setting for the writing of Mark's Gospel seems to be Rome, where people were mostly Roman Gentiles.
2. The writing style does not appeal to strong Jewish interests. This is indicated by the relative absence of material on the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy. It is also suggested by the lack of a genealogy that links Christ with the promised Messiah, such as we find in both Matthew and Luke.
3. Mark seems to be more concerned than the other Synoptic writers to emphasize what Christ *did* more than what He said.
4. Mark's liberal use of the terms *at once*, *as soon as*, *quickly*, and *immediately* indicates his preference for action.
5. Mark, then, is a Gospel of action. This style would appeal to the Roman mind.
6. Against these background factors, Mark portrays Christ as the servant of God, a doer, a worker of miracles.

Have we answered the questions we raised earlier? It would appear so. Mark has a Roman Gentile audience in mind. He wants to win converts to Christ by convincing them that He is the Son of God. Not only is Christ the Son of God, but He was a Christ

of power and action. The coming Messiah was a Jewish ideal and concept. The Gentiles needed other convincing evidence, so Mark wrote to meet this need. This is good news, the good news Mark emphasizes at the very beginning of his Gospel.

From all the evidence cited, what can we conclude about Mark's purpose for writing the second Gospel?¹

¹ Mike McClaflin, [*Christ in the Synoptic Gospels: An Independent-Study Textbook*](#), 1st Edition. (Springfield, MO: Global University, 2011), 3–22.

Chapter 2: The Backgrounds of Matthew and Luke

In the opening chapter our focus centered on the term *synoptic* as it relates to the first three Gospels. It included the priority of the Gospel of Mark, its writer and his background, and the date when it was written. This focus also provided a wealth of information about Mark. Now you will study the background of the other two Synoptic Gospels, Matthew and Luke, and the men involved in writing them.

You will approach Matthew and Luke in the same way you did Mark. First, you will see what evidence the Bible gives about each of these writers. Then you will evaluate the facts that come to us through the early church fathers and church tradition. As you look at Matthew, you will see quite readily that our picture of him is not as complete as that of Mark. In fact, only seven Scripture passages in the New Testament refer to Matthew, and they do not give much information about him.

Following the treatment of Matthew, you will have a brief overview of Luke that obviously does not present an exhaustive summary of his life. Still, it will relate enough facts to help you in your study and enable you to see that the biblical record yields little concerning him. However, early church history gives us a more complete picture of the man that truly complements the biblical record.

As you study, may the Lord give you an enlarged appreciation for these men and the roles they played in giving us a better understanding of our Lord's life and ministry. May this chapter also increase your knowledge of the Word and help you to share it more adequately in your Christian life and service.

Lesson 2.1 Matthew: An Overview

Objectives

- 2.1.1 *Identify facts about Matthew based on biblical and historical evidence.*
- 2.1.2 *State facts about the authorship of the Gospel of Matthew and the date when it was written.*
- 2.1.3 *Identify important facts about Matthew's characteristics and purpose, and explain how this purpose is related to the arrangement of his Gospel in the New Testament canon.*

Lesson 2.2 Luke: An Overview

Objectives

- 2.2.1 *Identify facts about Luke based on the biblical and historical data.*
- 2.2.2 *State facts about the authorship of the Gospel of Luke and the approximate date of writing.*
- 2.2.3 *Recognize evidence that supports Luke's purpose for writing and characteristics of his Gospel account.*

Lesson 2.1 Matthew: An Overview

Identity of the Writer

Identify facts about Matthew based on biblical and historical evidence.

Many Bible scholars believe the writers of the Gospels refer to Matthew by two names: Matthew and Levi. In the Gospels' seven references to Matthew, they use the name *Levi* twice and the name *Matthew* five times. It is interesting to note that Mark and Luke use the name *Levi* when they record Matthew's call to follow Jesus. Luke adds that following his call, Levi (Matthew) invited Jesus to his house for "a great banquet" (5:27–29), while Matthew notes that Jesus "was having dinner at Matthew's house" (9:10) and Mark says Jesus "was having dinner at Levi's house" (2:15). Then, in his account, Luke uses the name *Matthew* when listing the twelve chosen apostles (6:15).

In Chapter 1 we noted that many Jews of Christ's day had two names: one Hebrew and the other Greek or Roman. In a variation of this practice, Matthew had two names, but both were Hebrew. Although Bible scholars offer a number of explanations to account for this **paradox**, we will examine the two that seem to be the most realistic.

It is possible that Jesus gave Levi the name of *Matthew*, which means "gift of God," just as He gave Simon the name of *Peter*. It is also possible that Matthew's father may have had the surname Levi. If this were true, Matthew's complete name would have been "Matthew ben (son of) Levi." Although we cannot be completely sure, one thing is clear: The Levi who was called to be Christ's disciple was later known as Matthew.

Since just seven passages in the Gospels give evidence for Matthew's identity, we can summarize this information. Then we will evaluate it carefully and see what scriptural evidence gives us.

Matthew 9:9–10—Jesus called Matthew, the tax collector, to follow Him. Then Jesus and His disciples had dinner at Matthew's house.

Matthew 10:3—This Scripture verse refers to “Matthew the tax collector” as one of the Twelve.

Mark 2:14–15—Jesus called Matthew, whom Mark referred to as “Levi son of Alphaeus,” from the tax collector’s booth to follow Him. Mark also mentions that Jesus and His disciples had dinner at Levi’s house.

Mark 3:13–18—Mark lists Matthew as part of the Twelve Jesus called and designated as apostles to be with Him, to preach, and to drive out demons.

Luke 5:27–29—Luke observes that Jesus saw the tax collector named Levi (Matthew) sitting at his tax booth and called him to service. As a result, Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house.

Luke 6:15—Luke, having just referred to the call of Levi (Matthew), now lists Matthew as a disciple.

Acts 1:13—Luke, the writer of Acts, includes Matthew in this final list of Jesus’ disciples.

Since we have read the Scripture verses that refer to Matthew, we can summarize what we have learned about him. In passages from the three Synoptic Gospels, each writer tells us that Matthew (Levi) is a tax collector (Matthew 9:9–10; Mark 2:14–15; Luke 5:27–29). As we compare these three accounts of Matthew’s call, we learn that Matthew and Levi are the same person. Still, we do not know why Matthew had two Hebrew names and where or when he received them. If his father’s surname was Levi, as was suggested, Matthew may have been a Levite. Finally, *Matthew* may have been the name Jesus gave him.

While other theories exist that attempt to explain Matthew’s names, we do not want to spend more time on what are, at best, theories. The two we have mentioned are both plausible and well known, and they are widely accepted. That is why we have included them here.

After we read of Matthew in Acts 1:13, he disappears from the biblical record. Scripture does not record where he went and what he did in his active ministry. Yet early church tradition gives some sketchy details regarding his ministry. Irenaeus says Matthew preached the gospel among the Hebrews but neglects to say whether this ministry was in Palestine* or abroad. Perhaps it included both. Clement of Alexandria says Matthew spent fifteen years in this ministry. He also claims Matthew went to the Ethiopians, the Greeks of Macedonia, the Syrians, and the Persians. Based on the biblical record, our knowledge of the contemporary world, and early church tradition, it will be helpful to reconstruct a picture of Matthew.

Matthew, also known as Levi, was the son of Alphaeus (Mark 2:14) and the brother of James the Less (Mark 3:18). Alphaeus was probably a good man and an orthodox Jew. Although Matthew was given the priestly name of Levi, he appears to have drifted from the strict religious values of his father. Evidence suggests that a Jew had to be very ambitious and greedy to align himself with the House of Herod and to work as a tax collector for the despised representatives of Imperial Rome.

What does the biblical evidence reveal about Matthew’s name?

The term *tax collector* in the New Testament setting does not have a positive sense. Instead, a tax collector held a position in which bribery and corruption were both possible and likely to occur. Tax collectors were doubly unpopular; they were not only collaborators with Rome but also part of a corrupt tax-gathering system.

It may well have been that the other son of Alphaeus, James, was a **Zealot**, who was just the opposite of his brother Matthew, the collaborator with Rome. If so, Jesus reconciled the two, for both were eventually fully committed to Him as His disciples.

Authorship and Date of the Book

State facts about the authorship of the Gospel of Matthew and the date when it was written.

In Chapter 1 we discussed the records the early church fathers left and the weight of evidence they gave about apostolic and **postapostolic** history. These early scholars are generally dependable sources. We now look to them for their testimony concerning the Gospel of Matthew.

Papias (AD 60–150) stated that the **canonical** Gospel of Matthew was a translation of an earlier document written in Hebrew (Aramaic) by the apostle Matthew (1989, 127). Irenaeus (writing somewhere around AD 175) recounts the tradition that Matthew was engaged in writing the original document while Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome (approximately AD 62–64). Eusebius (AD 260–340) added that before going to preach in other nations, Matthew committed to writing the gospel he preached as he (Matthew) had proclaimed it. Jerome (AD 340–420) verified this tradition and indicated it was not clear who had translated the Hebrew or Aramaic into Greek at a later time. The Greek translation that was circulated and recognized as one of the four Gospels likely took place during the late 60s of the first century.

The foregoing evidence indicates the positive and uniform support the early church gave to Matthew's authorship of the Gospel that bears his name. We will therefore accept him as the author of this Gospel.

Finally, in Chapter 1 we explained our reasons for accepting the priority of Mark, acknowledging AD 58–65 as the approximate date range for his written account. To this evidence we add the word of Irenaeus that Matthew was writing the original Hebrew copy of his Gospel while Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome. Although the final Greek translation would have come later than a possible Hebrew original, we are undoubtedly safe in assigning Matthew a date between AD 60 and 69, before Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70. Scholars differ on some aspects of the dating of Matthew, and it is simply not possible to give an exact date of composition. So for this study, we will conclude that Matthew wrote his Gospel sometime between AD 60 and AD 69.

On what basis do we assign authorship of the Gospel of Matthew to Matthew?

Finally, in Chapter 1 we explained our reasons for accepting the priority of Mark, acknowledging AD 65 as the approximate date when he wrote his account. To this evidence we add the word of Irenaeus that Matthew was writing the original Hebrew copy of his Gospel while Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome. Although the final Greek translation came later, we are undoubtedly safe in assigning Matthew a date between AD 65 and 69, before Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70. For this study we will conclude that Matthew wrote his Gospel after AD 65 but before AD 70.

What date may we assign for the writing of Matthew's Gospel?

Characteristics and Purpose

Identify important facts about Matthew's characteristics and purpose, and explain how this purpose is related to the arrangement of his Gospel in the New Testament canon.

As we turn our attention to the characteristics and purpose of Matthew, we must address several important questions. To whom did Matthew write? Why did he write his Gospel? Does his account include things that are unique in the gospel record—things that cannot be found elsewhere? Why does Matthew's Gospel appear first in the order of New Testament books? We can find answers by examining each of these questions through the evidence our sources give us concerning them.

Matthew wrote his Gospel primarily for Jews. They were his target audience, and we must keep this principle in mind if we are to glean the most from his record. While anyone can benefit from the study of this Gospel account, we can see quite readily that Matthew focused on the Jewish reader. He stresses the relationship of Jesus to the Jewish faith, and he organizes evidence to show that Jesus fulfilled many Old Testament prophecies. In so doing, he challenges Jews to see Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah, the Son of David. In summary, then, Matthew addresses his fellow countrymen to convince them that Jesus is their promised Messiah.

The Jewish people had been taught to look for the Messiah. Many prophecies spoke of His glory and the blessings that would ultimately result from His kingdom. Many Jews, tired of political and economic oppression and weary of the spiritual evil that plagued their nation, yearned for the Messiah. Consequently, they envisioned a Messiah who would bring Israel independence, national greatness, and a new religious identity. Ever since the days of the prophets, Jews had longed for the promised Messiah. As a result, Matthew's emphasis touched a matter of deep concern for all Jews. We will look into a few of the many prophecies that related to the Messiah's coming.

By the time of Jesus, the average Jew must have doubted that the Messiah would come. Over four hundred years had passed since the last prophet, Malachi, had spoken. At this point even the most devout Jew wondered whether God had somehow changed His plan because of Israel's sin of rejecting Him. However, with the rise of John the Baptist and Jesus, the nation was stirred. Something momentous seemed to be happening as spiritual renewal, like a breath of fresh air, swept over the nation.

Political leaders were unable to interpret these signs, so they did not know how to cope effectively with the situation. Although some were immediately jealous, others were only casually interested; still, none could ignore the events that were so important to this generation. While the crowds gathered to hear the ministry of John and Jesus, the political leaders stayed away, preferring to get their information secondhand. Meanwhile, the faithful were wondering, "Where is the great King? Where is the conqueror who will lead His people from the bondage of pagan nations?"

Jesus did not come in the way Jews were expecting Him. They expected a powerful political leader. Their concept of a Messiah was that of a warrior-king who would throw off the shackles of Rome. Their expectations blinded them to the clear portrait of the Messiah the prophets gave. So if we can understand this predicament of the Jew, we can grasp precisely Matthew's purpose for writing.

Based on our discussion and the prophecy in Isaiah 53, tell how Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy and why the Jews were so blind to the evidence.

We have noted that Matthew's Gospel is strongly Jewish in tone. If this is so, how does Matthew's writing reveal this? To answer this question we will list some traits from his Gospel account that illustrate what we mean by its "Jewish tone":

1. More than any other Synoptic writer, Matthew quotes from the Old Testament prophets.
2. Matthew frequently uses such phrases as *the holy city*, *the holy place*, and *Son of David*. These terms would appeal to the Jewish mind.
3. Matthew refers often to the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.
4. Matthew does not explain comments he makes in reference to Jewish religious acts and practices. This implies that his recipients had prior knowledge of these things.
5. Matthew emphasizes that Jesus did not come to destroy but to fulfill the Law. This too would appeal to the Jewish mind.
6. Matthew repeatedly condemns Jewish religious leaders for their evil ways. Gentiles would not be interested in such an emphasis.
7. Throughout his Gospel account, Matthew answers the questions Jews were prone to ask.

The Gospel of Matthew, more than any other Gospel, emphasizes Jesus' teaching discourses. Therefore, we would not be wrong to call Matthew's Gospel the "Teaching Gospel,"

because he gives systematic accounts of Jesus' teaching for the church's internal life and evangelistic mission. Accordingly, Matthew groups Jesus' discourses together in various places throughout his Gospel account as we have indicated:

List at least three things which show that Matthew's Gospel has a strongly Jewish tone.

1. The Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5–7)
2. The Charge of the Twelve (chapter 10)
3. The Parables of the Kingdom (chapter 13)
4. The Discourse on Greatness and Forgiveness (chapter 18)
5. The Prophetic Discourses (chapters 24–25)

We will consider each of these discourses more closely later in the course. Our aim here is to give you a brief overview of the general structure and purpose of the Gospel of Matthew.

In Chapter 1 we accepted the priority of Mark for the purpose of our study. We did so because we believe the chronological order of Mark is the most accurate. As you study, you will no doubt see that Matthew did not arrange his material in the same order as Mark; however, you should not consider this a problem. You will find that Mark tends to place Jesus' miracles and teachings in chronological order throughout his Gospel. By contrast, Matthew tends to group Jesus' miracles together in certain places and His teachings in other places, as we noted in the matter of the discourses.

We mention this here so you will realize that each writer had his own method of arranging his material. Indeed, each had his particular focus, emphasis, and tone. Each reported faithfully the events he observed or researched. Since the Gospel of Mark is oriented more toward chronology, we will base the chronological order of Jesus' ministry on his narrative.

The Gospel of Matthew is a natural bridge between the Old and the New Testaments. Matthew easily ties the two testaments together. Why do we say this? The reason is actually simple. The Old Testament is a record of God's relationship with His people Israel, whom He used as a vehicle to bring His Son, Jesus, into the world. Thus the purpose of the Holy Spirit in Matthew should be clear. The Jew must be made to see that Jesus was indeed the Messiah and that He was a descendant of the house of David. Without verifying the Hebrew identity of Jesus, Jews would not accept Him as the promised Deliverer. Matthew, then, spared no effort to establish the truth that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah.

However, before we leave Matthew's Gospel, we should give a further word of explanation. When Matthew wrote his Gospel account, he had no idea it would someday be included in what we now call the Bible; yet the Holy Spirit knew. As Matthew's account was circulated and used in the believing community, the early church fathers recognized its strong Jewish emphasis. Perhaps these church fathers themselves recognized that Matthew's Gospel was a natural link between the Old and New Testaments.

Here we have the complete picture. Matthew was led by the Holy Spirit to present scriptural evidence to prove to his Jewish brethren that Jesus was the Messiah.

One may ask the question, “Is that all we need to do—just prove that Jesus fulfilled the messianic prophecies?” No. That is just the first step. Now we must show Jews the real reason for the advent of Christ—why He came. Because the Jewish people were unwilling to accept God’s redemptive provision, they stumbled and fell. Nevertheless, they will yet return to God and accept Jesus as their Messiah.

What is the purpose of the Gospel of Matthew as related to its arrangement in the New Testament canon?

Lesson 2.2: Luke: An Overview

Identify facts about Luke based on the biblical and historical data.

We now come to Luke, the third of the Synoptic Gospels. At this point you should have a basic working knowledge of background facts about Matthew and Mark. Each of these writers had his own special way of writing about the ministry of Jesus. Luke likewise has a unique style. One of the exciting things we observe about the three Gospel accounts is that each pictures different aspects and emphases of Jesus’ life and ministry, and each writer brings us a different view of our Lord. Thus we are able to see a more complete portrait of the man Christ Jesus.

How is Luke different from other Gospel writers? What is different about his Gospel? What moved him to write? We now turn our attention to these questions.

Identity of the Writer

Unlike Matthew and Mark, Luke does not have two recorded names. In the biblical text he is known simply as *Luke*. Although Luke is mentioned only three times in the entire New Testament, other passages of Scripture may give further evidence about him. Here are passages of Scripture that refer specifically to him:

- Colossians 4:10–14. Luke is one of six men Paul names in his final greetings to the church at Colosse. He is identified as “our dear friend Luke, the doctor.”
- 2 Timothy 4:11. Luke is in Rome with Paul. In fact, at this stage of his imprisonment, Paul says that only Luke is with him.
- Philemon 24. On this occasion Paul refers to Luke as one of his “fellow workers.”

These verses shed some interesting light on Luke. Each one indicates he is with Paul, who is in prison. They declare that Luke is a professional man, a doctor. In addition, these Scripture references show that Luke was both Paul’s faithful companion during his imprisonment and his fellow worker in the ministry.

These key bits of evidence give us some idea of the abilities, temperament, and dedication of the man who wrote the third Gospel. Even so, we have only a general character sketch of Luke at this point. To fill in the details of this portrait, we will need to study the information the early church fathers recorded. As you will see, this evidence makes a significant contribution to our study.

Tradition uniformly supports Luke as the author of the third Gospel. Irenaeus (around AD 175) was the first to refer clearly to Luke and to name him as the author of the third Gospel. The Muratorian Canon (around AD 180) confirms this tradition. Marcion, a fanatical supporter of Paul's theology who lived in the mid-second century, wholeheartedly supported Luke's Gospel account. A Prologue to the Gospel of Luke (around AD 160), similar to those written by Marcion, states that Luke (1) was a native of Antioch, (2) was a Gentile, (3) was a doctor, (4) wrote his Gospel from Achaia, and (5) died at the age of 84, never having married. Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Jerome confirm this testimony. Tradition thus speaks of Luke and adds to the scriptural account helpful information about his home country, profession, travels, and family status.

Authorship

State facts about the authorship of the Gospel of Luke and the approximate date of writing.

On the basis of the Scriptures we have considered, it would be difficult to prove that Luke was the writer of the third Gospel. However, the biblical record arms us with other details that, together with early church tradition, support Luke's authorship of the Gospel which bears his name. This added information also gives us a more complete profile of the man Luke.

1. If one compares the preface of the Gospel of Luke with the preface to the book of Acts, he or she will see that the same person apparently wrote both books (Luke 1:1–4; Acts 1:1).
2. The writer dedicated both books to a person called *Theophilus*, who may have been a Gentile of higher social rank and patron of the books.
3. The writer of the two volumes wrote Luke first (Acts 1:1).
4. The book of Acts contains the so-called *we sections* (Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–28:16).
5. The author wrote these sections in the first person when he traveled on these occasions as a companion of the apostle Paul.
6. If the author of Acts was Luke, then the traveling companion in the *we sections* was Luke.

To these additional bits of information from Scripture, we will add the evidence the early church fathers give. Tradition that is traced back to Irenaeus (around AD 175) states that Luke

was the author of the third Gospel. Justin Martyr (around AD 150) knew Luke as the author of this book also. The Muratorian Canon lists Luke as the author of Luke and Acts (around AD 195). Eusebius (AD 260–340) wrote in *The Ecclesiastical History* that Luke was by race an Antiochan, a doctor by profession, and a long-time traveling companion of Paul; had careful conversations with other apostles; and left us two books that provide “medicine for souls” (1989, 85). The Prologue to the Gospel of Luke (between AD 160–180) adds that Luke composed his Gospel account in Achaia. While this external evidence does not have the weight of Scripture, there is no reason why we should not accept it as true. For the most part, it simply gives us independent verification of the biblical facts. So on the basis of the preceding evidence, we accept Luke as the author of both Luke and Acts.

What can we conclude, based on the traditional evidence, concerning the authorship of the Gospel of Luke?

Justify the statement, “Based upon biblical evidence, it can be accepted that Luke is the author of the third Gospel.”

Date of Writing

There is little agreement among biblical scholars on the dating of Luke’s Gospel. Yet the date of this account is tied directly to the date of the book of Acts, since the Gospel of Luke is the first segment of this two-part work. We believe that a date between AD 60 and 69 is reasonable for several reasons. First, Luke appears to depend on Mark, which we have dated at about AD 58–65. Second, in Acts 11:28 Luke mentions the fulfillment of Agabus’ prophecy. If he were writing after AD 70, he would doubtless have mentioned the fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy in Luke 21 that Jerusalem would be destroyed. Third, these dates would have given sufficient time for a number of Gospel accounts to be circulated (Luke 1:1–4). More than thirty-five years would have elapsed since Jesus concluded His acts and teaching. While the other narratives were doubtless helpful and informative, Luke felt led, after thorough research, to write a fully documented, systematic account of Jesus’ life and ministry. On the basis of these facts, we will accept the time frame of AD 60–69 as the date of writing.

State briefly the basis for the date of writing for the Gospel of Luke.

Characteristics and Purpose of Writing

Recognize evidence that supports Luke's purpose for writing and characteristics of his Gospel account.

We have seen that Luke was a traveler, a doctor, and a writer. He appears to have been a well-educated native of Syrian Antioch. Luke was also a professional man who had many varied experiences in spreading the gospel. So, again, we must ask several questions. First, what was his purpose in writing? What special traits, if any, set his writings apart from those of other Gospel writers? Finally, are there other facts about Luke that tend to influence his point of view? We will turn now to these matters as we conclude our study of Luke.

Apparently, Luke was a Gentile. Paul hints at this in Colossians 4:10–14 when he makes a distinction between those of the circumcision and Luke. If this was so, then Luke may have been the only Gentile writer of the sacred Scriptures.

If we assume Luke was a Gentile, does he appear to write for the benefit of the Jew or of the Gentile? In our view he seems to give more emphasis to the Gentile reader. As time passed, the Gentile sector of the church made up an increasingly larger part of the body of Christ. So a Gentile point of view and emphasis appear more appropriate.

We can note that while Mark wrote to the Gentile in general and to the Roman in particular, Luke writes to the Gentile in general and to the Greek in particular. In addition, we see other traits that set Luke's Gospel apart from those of Matthew and Mark. While the Gospel of Matthew is the bridge between the Old and New Testaments, the Gospel of Luke bridges the events between Christ and the establishment of the church. Then we note that the third Gospel is the longest book in the New Testament. In it Luke presents Christ as a man more completely than any other writer of the Gospels. Also, this Gospel account is the most complete or comprehensive of all the Gospels. The following examples bear this out:

1. Luke states that he has "carefully investigated everything from the beginning" (1:3).
2. Luke gives us more details on the birth and childhood of both John the Baptist and Jesus than either of the other Synoptic writers.
3. Luke alone of the Gospel writers includes information on the parents of John the Baptist in his narrative.
4. Luke gives more historical details than any other Gospel writer.
5. Luke's Gospel spans the longest period of time in the life of Christ. It begins about fifteen months before His birth and continues through His ascension.
6. Luke shows greater interest for the individual person than either Matthew or Mark.
7. Luke, more than any other Gospel writer, emphasizes that salvation includes all people.
8. Luke's account has been called the Gospel of Prayer. Luke shows Christ at prayer far more than the other Gospel writers.

Reading this list gives you some idea of the contents of the Gospel of Luke, which we will examine in depth in later chapters. Our purpose here is to give you a brief glimpse of Luke the writer and his Gospel account.

This now concludes our brief discussion on the writers of the three Synoptic Gospels. Before we begin a more detailed look at the Gospels themselves, we will travel back to the time of Christ. This journey back to the world in which He lived should not only interest us but also help us to understand better the Man and His message.

Based on the preceding discussion, explain briefly Luke's audience and his purpose in writing.¹

Chapter 3 The Historical Background

If you were able to travel back to the time of Christ, you would find yourself in one of the most exciting and important periods of history. In the last two chapters, you have studied about the writers of the Gospels and the people to whom they wrote. In this chapter, you will carefully examine the historical world in which Christ lived and the nations that formed the background for the world in which He preached. Then you will consider the various people who lived in Palestine during the time of Christ: Judeans, Galileans, and Samaritans.

Focus, as you move through this chapter, on the geography of the Mediterranean world in general and of Palestine in particular. This will help familiarize you with the places where Christ walked and talked. Sufficient maps and charts have been provided to help you accomplish this. Be sure to use them to find where each nation was located and when it reached the height of its power.

As you address this material, keep in mind how fully God prepared the world and its people for Christ's coming "in the fullness of time." Everything from good communications to Roman peace enabled the gospel to have maximum effectiveness.

Lesson 3.1 Historical Empires That Impacted Palestine

Objectives

- 3.1.1 *Explain Israel's relationship to Assyria, the Samaritans, and Babylon.*
- 3.1.2 *Identify important events that affected Israel during the Persian period.*

Lesson 3.2 The Influence of Greece and Rome

Objectives

- 3.2.1 *Describe the impact of the Grecian culture on Palestine.*
- 3.2.2 *Identify ways in which the Roman Empire influenced the world of Christ's day and characteristics of the intertestamental period.*

Lesson 3.3 Politics of Palestine

Objectives

- 3.3.1 *Recognize facts about the history and establishment of the Herodian family, and match the sons of Herod the Great with the regions they ruled.*
- 3.3.2 *Describe the location of the districts and regions directly related to the ministry of Christ.*

Lesson 3.4 Jewish Cultural Differences

Objective

- 3.4.1 *Identify at least four comparative differences between Galileans and Judeans.*

Lesson 3.1 Historical Empires That Impacted Palestine

Assyria

Explain Israel's relationship to Assyria, the Samaritans, and Babylon.

We begin our study of the historical world in which Christ lived by focusing on Assyria. While the Assyrian Empire rose and fell long before He came to earth, certain aspects of Assyrian policy had a long-term impact on Palestine and its people. How did the first of these things that affect Israel?

The Vehicle of God's Judgment

You may recall from your Old Testament studies that after a period of prosperity and power under the kings Saul, David, and Solomon, Israel divided into two kingdoms (around 922 BC). The ten northern tribes were called the *Northern Kingdom* or *Israel*, and the two southern tribes, the *Southern Kingdom* or *Judah*. Neither kingdom had wholly followed the commandments of God, and in the end both forsook the law of Moses. Of the two, the people of the Northern Kingdom offended God more consistently during this time, so they were first to bring His wrath and judgment on themselves.

Since His people had sinned until there was no other remedy, God used the nation of Assyria as an instrument to bring judgment on His people. Assyria, a nation located slightly to the northeast of Palestine, had been growing in strength for many years. By the ninth century

before Christ, it was one of the most powerful nations in the ancient world. Thus, late in the eighth century (around 725–722 BC), God moved Assyria to invade the Northern Kingdom. He did so because His wayward people in this morally and spiritually corrupt kingdom of Israel had forsaken the Law and rejected Him.

State how God used Assyria in relation to Israel.

The Rise of the Samaritans

To ensure that the defeated Israelites would not attempt to rebel against their conquerors, the Assyrian king deported large numbers of them to other parts of the Assyrian Empire. He also brought non-Jews into the territory of the late Northern Kingdom to live among the Jews whom he had allowed to stay. The obvious thing then happened.

In the years that followed, the Jews who remained began to intermarry with the non-Jewish people who had been brought in. Consequently, this produced a mixed people who came to be known as *Samaritan*. The name *Samaritan* comes from *Samaria*, the name of the Northern Kingdom's capital city.

The Samaritans attempted to worship God and, at the same time, to reverence the gods of the new people the Assyrians had brought in. Since one cannot worship God and serve idols at the same time, the Samaritans were neither good Jews nor good Gentiles. You may recall that a Gentile is anyone who is not a Jew. Jews viewed all Gentiles as pagans and strictly avoided them. Because of this pagan influence, orthodox Jews viewed Samaritans as an idolatrous people. We will learn more about the Samaritans later in our study.

Briefly summarize this study's explanation of the origin and characteristics of the Samaritans.

Babylon

A little more than one hundred years had passed after Assyria conquered Israel when a new power, Babylon, arose and in turn conquered Assyria. This nation, whose name came from its capital city, lay directly to the east of Palestine. During this period, Judah, the Southern Kingdom, continued to fail God more and more. Finally, God brought judgment on Judah just as He had on Israel, but this time He used Babylon as His instrument of judgment. So Babylon invaded Judah, conquered the nation, sacked the temple at Jerusalem, and took the temple treasures and many of the Jewish people back to Babylon. Then for the next seventy years, these conquered Jews were exiled in Babylon. While this period of exile was limited, it had a powerful effect on the future behavior of the people of Judah, as we shall soon see.

Describe briefly the nature of Babylon's relationship to Judah.

Persia

Identify important events that affected Israel during the Persian period.

The new empire of Babylon remained in power less than one hundred years. Then Persia, a new and more powerful empire, arose to defeat Babylon and take its place. Persia, like Assyria and Babylon before it, emerged from the people who occupied the large mass of land lying to the east of the Mediterranean Sea. While you may have glanced at the maps we have provided, look once again to notice that these three nations shared a common area.

Two important things occurred during the period in which Persia ruled Palestine. First, at the beginning of this period, the Persian king decreed that the Jews of the Southern Kingdom were free to leave Babylon and return to Jerusalem. Second, the last of the Old Testament prophets spoke during this period.

You should remember that God sent judgment on His people because they could never completely obey Him. They had not only failed to obey Him but had also increasingly given themselves over to idolatry. In any event, the exile cured this problem, and the Jews never again practiced idolatry. They had learned their lesson.

After they returned from exile, the Jewish people sincerely wanted to follow the Law, and this desire helped to restore them to a right relationship with God. Yet as the years passed, problems began to develop as they misused the Law greatly. As a result, when Christ came into His public ministry, some of the greatest trials He faced were the result of this misuse. While we will explain this problem more fully in the next chapter, you should know now that this problem began while Persia ruled Palestine.

How did the Persian period benefit the Jewish exiles?

Lesson 3.2 The Influence of Greece and Rome

Greece

Describe the impact of the Grecian culture on Palestine.

The period of Greek dominance in the ancient Mediterranean and Middle Eastern world came about rather suddenly. Greece owed its rise to the brilliance of a famous man of history: Alexander the Great. The Persians ruled a mighty empire, which included Palestine, for about 200 years before they were conquered by Alexander's armies. You should note that this conquest came about 330 years before the birth of Christ.

Probably more than any other people, the Greeks exercised a long-lasting influence on the Jews. As we shall see, this influence extended into the time of Christ, and the culture of Greece was the reason for it. Alexander believed Greek culture was the greatest on earth, so wherever he conquered, he left skilled leaders to establish Grecian culture. In time, this cultural influence became an accepted part of practically every country within the Greek and later the Roman Empire. One of its most potent expressions was the Greek language, which became the common trade and diplomatic language of Alexander's vast empire. Greek culture and the Greek language thus tied the people of the empire together, making the spread of ideas and values much easier.

We use the word **Hellenism** quite commonly to describe everything that was connected with ancient Greek culture. Since it is an important word, you should remember it. When you hear or read the expression *Hellenism* or *Hellenistic*, you will know that it refers either to Greek culture or its influence. Because Greeks were convinced that their culture was everything, they believed Greece should do everything possible to increase its influence everywhere in the civilized world. In other words, they wanted to "Hellenize" their subjects.

How did Grecian culture influence Palestine at the time of Jesus Christ?

Hellenism, as you will see in a later chapter, became a great enemy of Judaism. The important thing for you to know right now, however, is when all of this began.

Unfortunately for the Grecian Empire, Alexander lived only a short while; at the age of thirty-three, he died. Soon his successors divided the empire he had established into four areas. For our study we need to be concerned only with two of these areas: Egypt and Syria. For nearly 150 years, these two countries battled each other for possession of Palestine. During the first part of this period, Egypt and its rulers (the Ptolemies) controlled Palestine; yet in the last part just before a brief period of independence, the Jewish people fell under the control of Syria and its leaders (the Seleucids). While we will focus on this period later in the chapter; we will now consider the last great empire that affected this part of the world at the time of Christ.

What happened to Alexander's empire following his death?

Describe briefly the impact of the Grecian Empire on Palestine.

Rome

*Identify ways in which the Roman Empire influenced the world of Christ's day and characteristics of the **intertestamental period**.*

We can safely say the Roman Empire was the most powerful empire in history, and it covered the greatest area for the longest period of time. The city of Rome itself was begun a short time before Assyria conquered the Northern Kingdom (Israel). During the next few centuries, while the empires of Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece were rising and then declining, Rome grew and gained power. In turn, two hundred years after its great conquests, the remnants of the Grecian Empire also fell victim to the mighty power of Rome. And this power was to endure, without serious challenge, for nearly six hundred years.

The Roman Empire exerted a great influence on the ancient world into which Christ came. Three contributions in particular affected Palestine during His public ministry.

1. More than any other empire, Rome established peace throughout the far-flung empire that was to last for centuries.
2. Rather than destroy the culture of Greece, Rome incorporated much of what was good and continued to promote it. Hellenism, then, continued to be a force for many years.
3. The legal and political system Rome established was a model that many nations would use for centuries.

The peace Rome established made travel and communication everywhere in the empire easier than at any other time in history. You should notice from your map that the Roman Empire covered most of the western world at that time. So it is easy to see that God chose the ideal time to send Christ into the world. The gospel message that would immediately follow His life on earth could be spread more easily during this time than at any other in history.

In what ways did the Roman Empire influence the world in Christ's day?

Rome, then, is the last empire we will discuss that had a special relationship with Palestine and God's people. Each of the empires we discussed played the part God determined in preparing Israel for the coming of Christ.

Finally, the period of time between the Persian rule and the beginning of the gospel accounts is called the ***intertestamental period***. It represents a span of about four hundred years between the last prophet's voice in the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament record.

This was an important time for the nation of Israel. The political boundaries of the country were being established and the Jewish people themselves were absorbing the influence of different cultures. During this period the religious system developed that Christ confronted in His ministry. Moreover, a leader and his family arose at this time who were to have great influence on Palestine during the ministry of Christ. We will examine their history briefly in the next section.

State briefly why it is important to know about the intertestamental period.

Lesson 3.3 Politics of Palestine

Herod

Recognize facts about the history and establishment of the Herodian family, and match the sons of Herod the Great with the regions they ruled.

Although they were ruled by several different empires, the Jews more or less controlled their own affairs after their exile. As long as they were allowed to worship God and not violate His law, they were content with foreign rulership. However, when any ruler attempted to introduce idols and foreign religions, the Jews rebelled. As we shall now see, this is exactly what happened under Syrian rule.

In the last half of the intertestamental period, a priestly family named the Maccabees, or, as they were later known, the Hasmoneans, rose to power. This family led the Jewish people in rebellion against the Syrian rulers who were trying to force their religion on the Jews. While we do not have sufficient space here to discuss this family in detail, we can note that the rebellion succeeded. As a result, the Hasmoneans led the Jewish people to a brief period of independence just before the time of Roman dominance (164–63 BC).

Toward the end of this period, Antipater, the father of Herod the Great, emerged. While you may have heard of Herod many times, you may not have understood clearly who he was.

We will consider this important man (and the scheming family of which he was a part) that played such a vital role in the background and ministry of Christ.

Antipater was an Idumean. (The Idumeans were descendants of the Edomites.) You may remember that Idumea, a territory just south of Palestine, was originally the home of the Edomites, whose lineage can be traced back to Jacob's brother Esau. Orthodox Jews never liked the Idumeans and viewed them as pagans.

The first references to Antipater show that he appeared about sixty-five years before the birth of Christ. At this point the Hasmonean family was struggling for control of Palestine, and in the confusion it was not clear who was running the country. In any case, Antipater used this confusion to work his way into a position of influence in Palestine. Gradually he extended his influence through a series of events until he gained control of the Jewish nation (46 BC). While Antipater was poisoned and died soon after this, his son Herod (the Great) convinced the Romans in power to make him ruler of Palestine. The Romans agreed; so Herod the Great ruled from 37–4 BC. He was the one who murdered the baby boys in Bethlehem in an attempt to kill Jesus.

THE HERODIAN FAMILY GENEALOGY

After the death of Herod the Great, Rome appointed three of his sons as rulers over his kingdom. Herod Antipas ruled Galilee and Perea; Herod Archelaus controlled Judea, Samaria, and Idumea; and Herod Philip governed the large area north of the Sea of Galilee and east of the Jordan River.

Since Archelaus proved to be such a cruel king, Rome removed him in AD 6 and replaced him with a Roman governor. Incidentally, he was the Herod about whom Joseph heard as he returned from Egypt. As a result, Joseph was afraid to go to Judea, choosing rather to settle in Nazareth of Galilee (Matthew 2:22–23).

Write one or two identifying statements for each of these individuals: a) Herod the Great b) Herod Antipas c) Herod Archelaus d) Herod Philip

The Herod we read most about during Christ's ministry, though, was Antipas. He ruled in Galilee until after the death of Christ. We should note that the Herods were never considered true Jews, and for this reason the orthodox Jews of Palestine never really accepted them. In fact, Jews strongly resented them and made no attempt to hide their feelings. Needless to say, they had no choice in the matter; Rome decided who would rule, and the Romans decided on the Herods.

The Political Boundaries of Palestine

Describe the location of the districts and regions directly related to the ministry of Christ.

In Old Testament times the land of Palestine was divided according to the tribes of Israel. Later on, it was divided into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. After the exile and during the intertestamental period, the Palestine Jesus knew emerged in its final form. This is the Palestine we will discuss here.

Perhaps it would be best at this point for us to define what we mean by *region*. Palestine was divided into different political units or regions, each of which could be ruled independently. Three of the most familiar of these were Galilee, Samaria, and Judea. Each region had its own political boundaries, and each, in most cases, was ruled as a separate entity. Roman rulers employed this type of political division because they believed it was the best way to control their vast empire. Furthermore, they decided who would govern each of these political regions. The leader they chose might rule just one region or several, depending on the imperial leaders' desires. What Rome did in Palestine gives us a perfect example of her overall governing principle. The Herods, whom we have just discussed, can illustrate this principle.

Herod the Great ruled all of Palestine as a king. His realms included Galilee, Samaria, Judea, Perea, and the land north of the Sea of Galilee and east of the Jordan River. After he died, however, Rome appointed each of his three sons to rule part of their father's kingdom. Later on, Rome deprived Archelaus of his share because of his cruel and heartless reign. Rome thus exercised a uniform and highly effective administrative system and controlled the destinies of the countries she ruled, as well as the regions and districts within them.

Explain the principle of government at work in Palestine.

Below is a bulleted list of all the regions and districts in and around Palestine that we encounter in the Gospels. You will need to consult a map showing Palestine in New Testament times in the back of your Bible or online. In this way, you should be able to fix each region firmly in your mind.

- Syria was the province that lay to the north-northeast of Palestine. It included Phoenicia, which was a coastal region and the area from which the Syro-Phoenician woman came (Mark 7:26).
- Palestine was the name given to the whole area that was traditionally the land of Israel. Palestine was further divided into districts or regions, which we will list.
- Galilee was the northern region of Palestine that lay west of the Jordan River.
- Samaria was the region that lay between Galilee in the north and Judea in the south. Although orthodox Jews ignored Samaritans, Samaria was still considered part of Palestine.

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- Judea was the southernmost region of Palestine. You will probably find that most maps include Idumea in this region.
 - Perea, although not mentioned by this name in the New Testament, is the land on “the other side of the Jordan” (Matthew 19:1). It was inhabited by Jews and ruled by Herod Antipas. Perea may also be considered as a region of Palestine.
 - Decapolis was a self-governing territory lying mostly east of Jordan. Its name came from a league of ten cities that made up the territory. Although Decapolis bordered the regions of Palestine, it is not usually considered part of Palestine.
 - The lands north and east of Galilee included the districts governed by Herod Philip the Tetrarch, such as Iturea, Gaulanitis, Trachonitis, Batanea, and Auranitis. While this territory bordered Palestine, scholars generally consider it to be more a part of Syria than Palestine.

Lesson 3.4 Jewish Cultural Differences

Identify at least four comparative differences between Galileans and Judeans.

Having reviewed the political divisions of Palestine and the surrounding territories, a discussion of the cultural differences within Palestine itself is in order. The two regions in which Christ spent most of His time were Galilee and Judea. So we will look at the differences between the people in these two places.

The Galilean

Christ was a Galilean. You may not understand that this is significant; however, in comparing the nature of the Galilean with that of the Judean, you will see it did make a difference.

One Jewish proverb says, “Go north if you want riches; go south if you want wisdom.” This proverb more or less reflects the difference between Galilee and Judea. Galilee was a fertile land with many fields and gardens. Vineyards and olive groves abounded throughout the country. Galilee was also blessed with a multitude of busy, densely populated towns. Far more Gentiles lived in Galilee than in Judea. This in itself gave Galilee an international flavor, and it tended to make the Galilean a more friendly, warmhearted, and fervent kind of individual than his or her Judean counterpart. Jesus grew up in this open, friendly context, and He spent the greatest part of His public ministry in this area.

The Judean

In contrast to Galilee, Judea was a dry, infertile region full of rocks and limestone. Many of its ancient cities were in ruins. There was a difference in the attitude of the people too. Generally, the Judean was proud, haughty, and reserved. He believed he was more “pure Jewish” than the Galilean. Since fewer Gentiles lived in this region, the Judean had fewer occasions to observe and value other cultures. Moreover, he felt that he alone obeyed all the law of Moses. The fact that the temple, the focal point of the Jewish religion, was located in Jerusalem also made a difference.

As you can see, obvious differences between the typical Galilean and the typical Judean existed. On the whole, the people’s reaction to the ministry of Jesus further illustrates this.

A Brief Summary

Consider the following list that summarizes some of the important details of this chapter:

1. Each ancient empire of the Middle East and Mediterranean area, beginning with Assyria, had a profound effect on the Jews, the Old Testament people of God. This was especially true of the empires that arose nearer the time of Christ
2. During the intertestamental period, many political developments that affected the Jews occurred in this part of the world.
3. God shaped the Middle Eastern peoples and nations that related to and affected the Jewish people in preparation for the coming of Christ.
4. Three major forces arose that were prominent at the time of Christ and during the early spread of Christianity:
 - a. Hellenism, which represented a strong cultural force
 - b. Judaism, which constituted the strong religious force that provided an appropriate base for the gospel
 - c. Roman **imperialism**, which provided the strong legal and political force that gave peace, unity, and excellent communications and transportation within the empire
5. Discussion of the political divisions or regions in and around Palestine helped locate the setting of the places in which Christ labored and the conditions under which He worked.
6. The beginnings of the family from which Herod and his infamous sons came were traced, as well as their effect on the Jewish people.
7. Finally, a few of the cultural differences within the Jewish community itself were explored.

We have focused on the general historical and geographical background factors in this chapter. In Chapter 4, we will examine the Jewish religious system and its impact on the life and times of Christ. First, however, take the Test Yourself to reinforce what you have learned in this chapter.

Chapter 4 The Jewish Religious System

In the first two chapters, we looked at the writers and their message. This gave us a better understanding of who they were, the purpose of their writings, and the type of audience to whom they wrote. Then we traced the historical development of the empires in the ancient world in Chapter 3 and discussed the impact that each made on the nation of Israel. Now we will focus more closely on the Jewish religious system Christ knew.

Since Jesus was a historical figure who lived during a certain period of history, He lived according to the rules and customs of His times. Indeed, He moved under full knowledge of the prevailing religious and political constraints. You will see this again and again as you move through the Synoptic Gospels. So we appeal to you to fix this background material firmly in your mind, for it will give you a lasting, invaluable source of information for your ministry.

As you move through this chapter, you should understand more clearly the Jewish religious system that shaped the values and actions of people at the time of Christ. Above all, you should remember that “religion” for the Jews was the only thing that counted. It was their culture and politics. This may explain why you should be interested in having a deeper knowledge of the people who made the religious system work. Such knowledge should help you communicate the gospel message more effectively.

Lesson 4.1 Synagogues, Pharisees, and Sadducees

Objectives

- 4.1.1 *Identify facts about the synagogue, its origin, and its relationship to the temple.*
- 4.1.2 *Choose statements that explain who the Pharisees were and when they came into being.*
- 4.1.3 *Identify the typical Pharisee and what he contributed to Jewish life.*
- 4.1.4 *Outline at least five major differences between the Pharisees and the Sadducees.*

Lesson 4.2 Essenes, Zealots, and Scribes

Objectives

- 4.2.1 *Compare the Essenes with the Pharisees.*
- 4.2.2 *Distinguish the Zealots from the other religious groups.*
- 4.2.3 *Identify who the scribes were, when they came into being, and what their purpose was.*

Lesson 4.3 The Sanhedrin

Objective

- 4.3.1 *Explain what the Sanhedrin was, its purpose, and its two levels.*

Lesson 4.1 Synagogues, Pharisees, and Sadducees

The Synagogues

Identify facts about the synagogue, its origin, and its relationship to the temple.

One major result of the period of exile was the institution of the **synagogue**. You may recall that when Babylon invaded Judah, the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. So the temple, which had been the central place of Jewish worship for centuries, was gone. There would not be another one until the returned exiles built one early in the Persian period. Meanwhile, where could God's people study the Scriptures and teach His law? It was a difficult problem because now Jews had no place to meet—neither in the land of their captors nor in their ravaged homeland. The answer was a *synagogue* or “meeting place,” where people could meet together to pray and strengthen each other in their devotion to the religion of their fathers.

So it was determined that wherever ten or more adult Jewish men lived, a synagogue could be established. We might compare a synagogue to one of our churches today. Here the Law was studied and taught. The synagogue, more than any other institution, in fact, was responsible for the study of the Law and its continued importance in the hearts of the Jews. Later, when the second temple was built in Jerusalem, ceremonial sacrifices were again offered. But by the time of Christ, the synagogue had become the most important means of maintaining the Jewish religious system. Thus, apart from the religious feasts that drew Jews to Jerusalem three times each year, the focus of day-to-day religious activity shifted to the synagogue. What is more, the rabbis or teachers of the Law who served in them were more visible than the priests who served at the temple.

Briefly summarize the factors that motivated the development of synagogues.

In short, the synagogue served as a substitute for the temple and became the center of Jewish religious, **civil**, and educational activity. Furthermore, with the rise of the synagogue, the Jewish religion freed itself from bondage to a special place; in effect, people accepted that God was available to them wherever they lived. Since Jesus found synagogues wherever He went in Palestine and used them to communicate His message, we see that this institution was a vital part of Jewish life at this time.

How might we compare the priority of the temple to that of the synagogue?

The Pharisees

Choose statements that explain who the Pharisees were and when they came into being.

The Pharisees were just one part of the Jewish religious system. There were also Sadducees, scribes, Zealots, and the Sanhedrin. Then, in addition to these, there were the Essenes, who were not a part of the gospel record. Taken together, these groups exercised an influence on society out of all proportion to their numbers. Since the Pharisees were the most important and influential religious party Christ encountered, we look first at them. Who were they? Where did they live? When did they begin? What was their purpose? Answering these questions will help us in our study of Christ in the Synoptic Gospels.

Who the Pharisees Were

The word *Pharisees* means “separated ones.” You will see why this is a suitable meaning as we study the Gospels. Since the Pharisees had such a strong zeal for the Law, their greatest concern was that every part of the law of Moses, as well as the Prophets and the Writings, be obeyed. This zeal for strictly keeping the Law emerged originally because of the captivity in Babylon. The Jews had learned their lesson. Henceforth, they purposed to obey every precept of the Law to the very letter.

However, Hellenism began to spread rapidly across the empire and force its cultural values on conquered peoples. As it did, many concerned Jews in Palestine feared their brethren would once again forget God’s law. So they joined together to resist this **intrusion**. They also determined to do everything possible to ensure that Jewish people would not defile themselves with foreign cultures and religion, which was **paganism**. You may recall that to the Jewish people the purity of their religion was everything. Thus, they would tolerate nothing that might come between them and God’s law.

Since we understand the importance of the Law, it is easy for us to see why a group like the Pharisees arose and how this would be a good thing. Sadly, though, the Pharisees changed. They became so concerned with obeying every detail of the Law that they forgot God’s original intention for it. Unfortunately, they became proud men as they placed too much emphasis on outward show and ceremony. In essence, they lost sight of the importance of the inner person; this became secondary. The Pharisees’ great effort to maintain this outward holiness became a major emphasis in their obedience to the Law. What is worse, perhaps, is they condemned others who did not follow their example. Instead of being separated from sin, they became separated from people.

When did the Pharisees begin? Although the Old Testament does not mention the Pharisees, the Gospels name them many times. The reason for this is simple: the Pharisees actually began during the intertestamental period. While it is not clear to us just when they

began, the first written record of them is dated between 134–104 BC. What were the events that led to their rise and development?

Briefly state the catalyst that promoted the rise of the Pharisees.

In the late fourth century BC, as Hellenism began to creep into Palestine, a number of Jews responded to its influence. Quite naturally, the righteous, orthodox Jews were horrified. They felt that they could not allow pagan Hellenism to invade their culture and destroy their spiritual heritage. So a group of them known as the *Hasidim* or “pious ones” was formed to fight against the intrusion of Hellenism. Their goal was to ensure that the purity of the law of God was maintained. Although we cannot know for certain, it is possible that the Pharisees, as we know them in the New Testament, came from this group of men.

The Pharisees were originally members of the *Hasidim*, a Hebrew word that means what?

The members of the *Hasidim* in the beginning were no doubt men with good intentions. If they could band together and rigidly uphold the Law, perhaps they could reclaim their Jewish brethren from their pagan Hellenistic ways. In any case, their initial purpose was clear, and their motives were pure.

If indeed we may identify the *Hasidim* as the forerunners of the Pharisees, the process by which they became the Pharisees of Christ’s day is not important. What is important is that over the years they changed, but not in a good way. Besides the change in attitude, another development occurred that was to have a great effect on the Pharisees’ relation to their fellow Jews. This was the emphasis on oral tradition.

What do we mean by oral tradition in this context? Oral tradition refers to a practice, truth, or law that is passed verbally from one generation to another. Since times as well as humanity’s needs changed, the Law had to be interpreted to meet these changing conditions. Thus, over the years a whole body of oral tradition developed. By the time of Christ, the Pharisees felt that oral tradition, which amounted to their interpretation of the Law, was as important as the written Law. In fact, they believed one must have a thorough knowledge of oral tradition if he was to interpret the written Law properly. Christ referred to the problem oral tradition had become when He told the Pharisees that instead of teaching true **doctrine** they were teaching the commandments (traditions) of men (Matthew 15:9).

The Typical Pharisee

Identify the typical Pharisee and what he contributed to Jewish life.

What type of person became a Pharisee? Although a few Pharisees may have been priests, as a general rule they were not. Are you surprised? You may have thought that Pharisees and priests were one and the same, but this was not so. Most Pharisees were laymen. They came from the Jewish middle class and were usually businessmen or tradesmen. A man was not a Pharisee because his father was one. If he wanted to join the party, he must first be judged worthy because he adhered closely to the Law and the traditions. Then he had to undergo a period of trial in which Pharisees of his area carefully observed his manner of life. Their aim was to ensure that he measured up to the strict ceremonial requirements of the Law.

The Pharisees always sought converts. Since their party was highly respected, one was considered privileged if the Pharisees recruited him for membership. Because the Pharisees came from a middle-class Jewish background, theirs was the most popular group with the average Jew. This continued to be true even though the typical Pharisee developed an arrogant attitude toward non-Pharisees. While the Pharisee's attitude did not incline one toward him, we must remember that his virtuous lifestyle became the mainstay of Judaism.

Since the Pharisee was not a priest, he did not use the temple as his place of religious duty. Instead, he spent most of his time in the synagogue. And because synagogues were scattered throughout Palestine in Christ's day, Jesus encountered many Pharisees in His travels. In fact, Pharisees lived throughout Palestine and were involved in all aspects of Jewish religious life.

This, then, was the Pharisee. We will have a chance to speak more of him in later chapters, but for now we will look at other religious groups in New Testament Palestine.

Briefly describe the typical Pharisee.

The Sadducees

Outline at least five major differences between the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

Another religious party you will encounter in the Gospels is the Sadducees. Although Sadducees made up the priestly group, it appears that they were more political than religious.

The Sadducees, like the Pharisees, had their origin in the intertestamental period, though we have no written record of it. Nor do we have any real clue about the meaning of their name. In fact, the New Testament gives us most of what we know of them. Beyond this, we rely on the writings of the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, who wrote during the latter part of the first century AD.

The Sadducees came from the wealthy, aristocratic class of Jews. In most cases, this was also the priestly class. The high priest and chief priests were almost always Sadducees. They felt that Hellenistic culture and Roman authority were necessary for the good of the people. The fact that they accepted this outside influence indicates they valued politics more than religion.

Since the Sadducees were of the priestly class, their activities were centered mainly around the temple in Jerusalem. Thus, one did not see them in the synagogues. The Sadducees accepted only the written books of the Law but rejected the books of the Prophets and the Writings. They also rejected the oral tradition of the Pharisees, as well as teachings on angels and the doctrine of bodily resurrection.

The Sadducees and the Pharisees constituted the two largest religious parties in Christ's day. Of the two groups, the Sadducees were the smaller but by far the wealthier. Moreover, the Sadducees took their members from the powerful, aristocratic, and high priestly families of Israel, and they were, to all intents and purposes, a closed society. In contrast with the Pharisees, they did not recruit members for their party. Rather, membership in this group was usually hereditary.

Since the Sadducees accepted the intrusion of Hellenism into the Jewish community, they were not concerned about maintaining the purity of Jewish law and tradition. You may think this is strange since the Sadducees were the priestly body, but this indeed was the case. Concern for wealth and position was more important to the Sadducees. Roman peace and stability guaranteed their privileged lifestyle, so they tended to guard the status quo. Obviously, they wanted neither a change of government nor anyone who might upset what they felt was a good arrangement.

While the Pharisees were connected with the synagogues, the Sadducees stayed in Jerusalem and directed activities associated with the temple. As for the oral traditions the Pharisees stressed, Sadducees showed little interest in outward ceremony. In short, there was very little upon which Pharisees and Sadducees agreed.

You will probably notice in the gospel record that Christ does not refer to the Sadducees as much as to the Pharisees. However, you should not take this to mean the Sadducees were not important. As we shall see, in the end it was the Sadducees who became the greatest enemies of Christ.

We should make one final comparison between these two groups. Even though the Pharisees developed an aloof and arrogant attitude toward their brethren, they were still the more popular of the two groups. The ordinary Jew felt he had more in common with the Pharisees than with the Sadducees. Furthermore, the Pharisees did care about what was closest to all Jews: their religious heritage. And nothing, absolutely nothing, could come between the Pharisees and their obedience to the Law. This was true even though they did not interpret God's real intentions for it. The Sadducees cared only about their wealth, position, and security. So they favored a stable political system even if this meant compromising the law of God.

With the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, the Sadducees died out. However, the Pharisees were the foundation of Judaism in later centuries.

Complete the adjacent chart comparing Sadducees and Pharisees.

Sadducees

Pharisees

a Main concerns

-
- b** Social class
 - c** Religious class
 - d** View of Hellenism
 - e** Center of activity
 - f** View of the Law/tradition
 - g** Recruits/converts
 - h** Popularity

Explain briefly why the Pharisees were more popular than the Sadducees.

Lesson 4.2 Essenes, Zealots, and Scribes

The Essenes

Compare the Essenes with the Pharisees.

While the Pharisees majored on externals and the Sadducees on power and greed, a third “shadow party” offered relief from the corrupting influences of society. Although Scripture does not mention the *Essenes*, the Dead Sea Scrolls reveal that members of an ascetic brotherhood lived at Qumran, some eight miles from Jericho between 165 BC and AD 68. The historians Philo, Pliny, and Josephus also speak of this group. The evidence suggests that members of the Qumran community and Essenes had almost identical values and may even have been part of the same larger fellowship. We can briefly look into what the Essenes believed and compare them with the Pharisees.

The Essenes appear to have forsaken society, choosing rather to live in the wilderness where they could prepare for the coming of the Messiah. They viewed themselves as the people of God and all others, including the Jewish religious leaders, as His foes. Moreover, the Essenes believed they were the “sons of light,” and they looked forward with great expectancy

to the coming of the Messiah. At this point, they believed God would give them victory over the “sons of darkness” as He broke in on the evil world system and restored His righteous rule.

So they lived a very simple life, providing their own food and necessities in the remote wilderness. They studied the Scriptures diligently, abstained from marriage, lived in charity toward one another, shared all their property, provided for members too old or sick to work, and refrained from business or military activity. Josephus shows that the Essenes lived throughout Palestine, and only the fully initiated members lived in separate communities. While all Essenes subscribed to a strict code of discipline, those who withdrew from society had to prove their worthiness as full members of the community by maintaining a rigid and ascetic life for several years.

According to the Essenes, how would God resolve Israel's problems?

Like the Pharisees, the Essenes may have evolved from the Hasidim. But they were far more legalistic in obeying the law of Moses than even the Pharisees were. While we do not know what impact this group had on society in general, their austere life, like that of John the Baptist, stood in stark contrast to the aloof Pharisee and the mercenary Sadducee. It may well be that they practiced the values many Jews longed for but felt they could not attain. Above all, they maintained hope in the coming Messiah.

Compare the Essenes with the Pharisees.

The Zealots

Distinguish the Zealots from the other religious groups.

The last religious group we will discuss is the Zealots. While Pharisees and Sadducees tried to adjust to Roman rule and Essenes dreamed of God's intervention to deliver them, Zealots searched for salvation more actively. They showed an even greater zeal in following the Law than the Pharisees, but their zeal, unfortunately, was directed toward fanatical nationalism.

The Zealots are first mentioned in the early years of Roman rule in Palestine. They strongly opposed the rule of Rome and refused to pay taxes to a pagan emperor. Since God was Israel's true King, they felt the Jewish nation should resist any attempt by other nations to govern them.

Resistance as it relates to the Zealots is a key word, for their main objective was the complete overthrow of the Roman government. This feeling was so strong that the Zealots were willing to resort to any means, however violent, to achieve this aim. Since they viewed themselves as agents of God's judgment and redemption, the Zealots were totally unrestrained

in punishing what they believed were acts of idolatry, apostasy, and collaboration with the enemy. Like Phinehas who was zealous in defending God's honor (Numbers 25:7–13), they felt justified in taking vengeance on those who wronged them. While Rome tried repeatedly to suppress their violent actions, the Zealots simply became more fanatical and eventually launched a full-scale rebellion against Rome. Fueled by Jewish nationalist fervor, the rebellion led to the eventual destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the Jewish nation in the Roman-Jewish war between AD 66–70. This destruction, in large measure, was brought about by the Zealots.

Name a primary difference between the Zealots and other Jewish groups.

The Zealots also originated during the intertestamental period. The only reference to them in the biblical record is in relation to one of Christ's disciples. Luke's reference to "Simon the Zealot" suggests that at some time Simon may have been a member of this religious party (Luke 6:15). In any case, we are indebted to historians for what we know about the Zealots.

What impact did the Zealots have upon Jewish life?

The Scribes

Identify who the scribes were, when they came into being, and what their purpose was.

We now look to another important group of men: the scribes. Unlike the Pharisees and Sadducees, scribes are mentioned a number of times in the Old Testament. Probably the most well-known scribe was Ezra. Yet you may notice that, from the period of King David until the time of Christ, the duties of the scribes seem to have changed. Earlier in the Old Testament, the scribes acted more as secretaries or clerks. They were usually involved in recording business transactions, keeping records, and acting as readers for important documents. But by the time of Christ, a scribe was more properly called a "lawyer" or "teacher of the Law." In this later role the scribe had three main duties: he acted as a copyist, a preserver, and an interpreter of the Law. So the scribes were neither a religious sect nor a political party; instead, they were a professional group.

Since the scribes were professional students and interpreters of the Law, they were respected members of the Jewish community, and their word on matters of the Law was final. It is easy for us to understand the respect the Jewish people gave to the scribes because we know how important the Law was to them. The greater the esteem the people had for the Law, the greater the esteem they had for the experts in the Law.

Name three main duties of the scribe in the time of Christ.

In Ezra's day a scribe frequently was also a priest. This was true of Ezra himself. However, by the time of Christ, it appears that the scribes were a separate group of men. While it was still possible for a scribe to be a priest, generally he was not. The scribes usually aligned themselves with the Pharisees, because both placed great emphasis on the written Law and oral tradition. Yet it would be wrong to assume the Sadducees did not also use scribes. They too would need the advice of experts for their own interpretation of the Law.

The scribe (or teacher), then, was an important member of the Jewish religious system because he lived in a society that was totally consumed by religious conviction and practice. Since the scribe was the leading authority in this system, his position of prominence was assured.

What status did scribes hold in the Jewish religious system?

Lesson 4.3 The Sanhedrin

Explain what the Sanhedrin was, its purpose, and its two levels.

Now that we have the background knowledge of various religious groups in Palestine during the time of Christ, we will study the institution through which the Jews governed themselves: the Sanhedrin. Except in some of the recent translations, you will not see the word *Sanhedrin* in the New Testament. In most cases the Gospel writers use the word *council* or *court*. The term *Sanhedrin* is one you will see more often in literature written on or concerning the Gospels. Just remember that the two terms *council* and *Sanhedrin* are interchangeable. Our sources of information concerning the Sanhedrin, including its identity, purpose, and structure, are the New Testament and different Jewish writings of that period.

What was the Sanhedrin? What was its purpose? The Sanhedrin was both the highest governing council and the local judicial council of the Jewish people. We do not exactly know when the Sanhedrin began, but some have suggested the concept began as early as the days of Moses. You may remember that while Moses was in the wilderness with the children of Israel, God led him to choose seventy elders from among the people (Numbers 11:16–24). The purpose of these seventy men was to help Moses in the day-to-day process of ruling the people. They would handle many of the minor decisions Moses did not have time for.

We cannot be sure if this was indeed the model on which the Sanhedrin was based, but this is of minor importance. We do know that the Sanhedrin, which functioned during the days of Christ, developed its final form during the intertestamental period.

What was the Sanhedrin, and what was its purpose?

You may have noticed that many important things related to the time of Christ came into being during the intertestamental period. This was indeed a busy and formative period for the Jewish people and the world in which they lived. We encourage you to search through other literature to increase your knowledge of this period of time.

It appears the Sanhedrin operated at two levels. The first level included the smaller councils composed of either seven members in smaller towns or twenty-three members in larger towns or cities. These smaller, local councils were attached to synagogues throughout Palestine and exercised wide powers in civil and religious matters. You should remember that the Jew saw little difference between the two.

Describe the first level of the Sanhedrin.

The second level was the great Sanhedrin or supreme court itself, which was located in Jerusalem. Its activities centered around the temple. The great Sanhedrin was a group of seventy-one men, who came mostly from influential families and represented three groups: the Sadducees, Pharisees, and scribes. The Sanhedrin also included a representation of elders. These men usually came out of the wealthy, noble class from which the Sadducees were drawn. The high priest, a Sadducee, presided as the leader or president of the council.

Describe the great Sanhedrin.

While it is true that the authority of this council was limited to Judea, its influence was felt throughout Palestine and the surrounding countries. It was the most powerful body of Jews in Palestine, and it is the one we usually think of when we hear the term *Sanhedrin*. This was also the Sanhedrin before whom Christ was brought, and it was the one that condemned Him to death.

Although we speak of the sentence of death here, we realize the Sanhedrin, under Roman rule, was not empowered to carry out the death sentence. Because the Roman government allowed the Jews much latitude in running their own affairs, the Sanhedrin had great power over the Jewish people. Yet where cases involved the death penalty, Rome reserved the right to make this decision. While the Sanhedrin could recommend the death penalty, it had to be approved by the Roman governor of the area.

Unit 2 The Man

In Unit 1 we covered enough background material to prepare for a meaningful study of the Synoptic Gospels. Our purpose was to lay a foundation to help you better understand the social, political, cultural, and religious conditions that existed in the world into which Christ came. In Unit 2, we will focus on the life of Christ from His birth to the week of His crucifixion. We will begin by studying His early years and the events that led to His preparation for public ministry.

As we address this material, keep in mind this is not an exhaustive study. Our intent here is for you to become familiar with the major events in the life of Christ, so we have tried to address them in an organized manner. Although you will not deal directly with the scriptural text, you will see several passages that raise questions. We have tried to deal with them fairly, giving interpretations that are commonly accepted

We will return to the Sanhedrin later in the course. For now, however, you know what it was, its purpose, and a bit about its structure. As we move on, simply remember that in the New Testament the term *Sanhedrin* usually refers to the “council” or “court.”

Summary

Obviously, religion was the center of Jewish life. In an earlier period of Israel’s history, the priests were the most influential men. Yet by the time of Christ, the Pharisees, who were primarily laymen, were more influential with the common people than even the priestly Sadducees. To the Pharisee, the Law and national identity were everything. Wealth and position were the primary concerns of the Sadducees, and for this reason they lost touch with the common person. The priests in many respects had turned away from the purposes for which God had raised them up.

This then was the world into which Christ entered. But the Pharisees and scribes had become so concerned with excessive details of ceremonial law and oral tradition that even they were losing touch with the common person. When we look at the leadership of the nation of Israel, we are disappointed. Christ was also disappointed, for those who should have been seeking God’s purposes were seeking their own. As a result, they were blind to God’s plan and program. Again and again in our study we will see Christ confronting this problem.

by Bible scholars. We believe you will profit by thinking through each issue carefully. There was a method to the ministry of Christ, and we want you to understand it.

It is not possible to harmonize the order of events in this unit. As you have learned, many scholars consider the Gospel of Mark to be the earliest Gospel account on the life of Christ. Therefore, we will use Mark's Gospel as a foundation. Then we will suggest ways to view the material from Matthew and Luke so we can see the larger, complete picture of Christ in the Synoptic Gospels. Our intention is not to suggest that the Synoptic Gospels can be fitted together like a puzzle. We must remember each Gospel account is its own independent source of information about the life of Christ. As you study, may you begin to realize the great love and compassion that moved Christ toward people! May it move you in the same way!

Chapter 5 The Early Narratives and Preparation for Ministry

- 5.1 The Birth Narratives of John and Christ
- 5.2 Christ's Birth and the Events After
- 5.3 The Baptism and Temptation of Christ

Chapter 6 The Early Judean and Galilean Ministry

- 6.1 The Early Judean Ministry
- 6.2 The Galilean Ministry: The Early Period
- 6.3 The Galilean Ministry: The Middle and Later Periods

Chapter 7 The Later Judean/Perean Ministry and the Passion Week

- 7.1 The Later Judean/Perean Ministry
- 7.2 The Passion Week

Chapter 8 The Arrest, Trial, Crucifixion, and Resurrection

- 8.1 The Place Called Gethsemane and the Arrest
- 8.2 The Trial
- 8.3 The Crucifixion and Burial
- 8.4 The Resurrection

The Early Narratives and Preparation for Ministry

Of the three Synoptic Gospels, only those of Matthew and Luke tell us about the birth and boyhood of Christ. By contrast, Mark begins his narrative with the baptism and temptation of Christ. While both Matthew and Luke begin their accounts with the

earliest years of Christ's life, Luke gives us a greater amount of information regarding those years than Matthew gives. Yet each complements the others, and together they give us a good picture of Christ's first years.

This chapter will review the Synoptic Gospels' record of the earliest years of Christ's life. We will examine the key events that prepared Jesus for His earthly role and also those surrounding the launch of His public ministry.

Lesson 5.1 The Birth Narratives of John and Christ

Objectives

- 5.1.1 *Identify details surrounding the annunciation and birth of John the Baptist and the annunciation of Christ to the appropriate Gospel.*
- 5.1.2 *Compare and contrast the genealogies given in Matthew and Luke.*

Lesson 5.2 Christ's Birth and the Events After

Objectives

- 5.2.1 *Identify facts Luke records surrounding the birth of Christ, His circumcision, and His presentation in the temple.*
- 5.2.2 *Explain the relation between the visit of the Magi and the flight into Egypt and the significance of Jesus' visit to the temple at the age of twelve.*

Lesson 5.3 The Baptism and Temptation of Christ

Objectives

- 5.3.1 *List the three main contributions of John the Baptist, and identify facts about his life and early ministry.*
- 5.3.2 *Explain why Christ felt the need to be baptized.*
- 5.3.3 *Recognize statements that tell correctly why the temptation was a necessary part of Christ's ministry.*

Lesson 5.1 The Birth Narratives of John and Christ

The Annunciation and Birth of John the Baptist

*Identify details surrounding the **annunciation** and birth of John the Baptist and the annunciation of Christ to the appropriate Gospel.*

Luke 1:5-25, 57-80

Have you noticed that Luke is the only Gospel that gives us details about the birth of John the Baptist? Many people assume that all the Gospels record them, but this is not true. For example, Luke alone gives the names of John's mother and father.

Luke first mentions Zechariah and Elizabeth, John's parents, in the very beginning of his narrative (1:5). Here he observes they were "well along in years." Although they were upright before God, they were too old to have children. This apparently weighed heavily on the heart of Elizabeth, for in the Jewish world it was a disgrace for a woman to be childless.

On this occasion Zechariah is in Jerusalem at the temple performing his duties as a priest. You may recall that during his reign, King David separated the priestly family of Aaron into twenty-four divisions (1 Chronicles 24:3). Each of these divisions received its name from the family head at the time of the separation; these original names then remained the same from generation to generation. Luke indicates that Zechariah was of the division of Abijah (Luke 1:5).

What information does Chronicles 23-24 provide that helps us understand the role and function of the priests related to the temple?

Each priestly division served in order in some priestly function at the temple in Jerusalem. When it was time for a division to serve, the priests within that division were selected by **lot** to carry out specific duties. It was a great honor to be chosen for the duty of serving in the temple. As a matter of fact, a priest might have this honor only once in his lifetime, and some were never chosen. Now Zechariah proceeds into the temple to offer incense before the Lord.

As Zechariah ministers before the Lord in the temple, the angel Gabriel suddenly appears by the altar of incense (1:11). He first reassures the startled priest and then tells him that his prayer has been heard (v. 13). As a result, he and his wife Elizabeth will have a son. The angel also says Zechariah is to name his son John. He continues in verses 13-17, giving details about the son's manner of life and the parents' responsibility in raising him. Then the angel sums up John's threefold purpose: He will

1. be a joy and delight to his parents.

2. turn many of the people of Israel back to the Lord.
3. prepare the people for the coming of Christ.

From Luke's narrative we learn that Gabriel's sudden and unexpected appearance, as well as the incredible announcement, left Zechariah in a state of shock. So he responded by questioning, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years" (1:18). His unbelief prompted the angel to rebuke him and tell him that he would be unable to speak until the Lord's promise was fulfilled. Thus, Zechariah was speechless until the circumcision of John, eight days after his birth (vv. 18-20, 59-64).

Finally, before he shifts the focus of the narrative from John to Jesus, Luke gives several additional details about time and location. For example, he makes it clear that in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, the angel Gabriel was sent to Mary, who was to be the mother of Jesus (1:26-27). While we do not know if the Holy Spirit came upon Mary at this exact time, we do know this was the occasion on which the angel announced Christ's coming. It is likely, then, that Christ and John were not more than about six months apart in age. Furthermore, Luke says the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth, and consequently the boyhood home of John, was a town in the hill country of Judea (1:39). From this we see that John was a Judean and Christ was a Galilean.

What personal family information does Luke's record provide about John and Jesus?

The Annunciation and Birth of Christ

Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-56; 2:1-20; 3:23-38

As you come to the annunciation and birth of Christ, you will see that Matthew and Luke begin at different points in the story. Matthew begins abruptly with an account of Christ's genealogy. Yet Luke skillfully weaves the thread of the annunciation into the fabric of the gospel story he has just begun with the annunciation of John. He does not include a genealogy until he completes the narrative and prepares to write about Christ's ministry. First you will study the annunciation of Christ and then move on to the genealogies and His birth.

Matthew and Luke are our sole sources of information on both the announcement and actual birth of Christ. And each appears as a strategic observer, recording the particular aspects of the story that stand out to him. For this reason, their accounts are **complementary**; the details each provides blend to give us a complete picture, as we shall see.

Again and again as we proceed through this study, you will see how each Gospel contributes its share to the development of the whole story. For years many of us have quoted the story of Christ's birth, but we have not known which writer wrote each part. One of our goals in this course is to help you learn the part each writer played. We want you to understand these "narrative pieces" that make up the story. We also want you to grasp each Gospel writer's contribution to the account of the life of Christ that helps you comprehend the message. Then, when we have brought the various parts into focus, we will see the clear portrait of the gospel story the Synoptic Gospels paint for us.

Luke notes that about six months after Gabriel appeared to Zechariah, he appeared to Mary, who was living in Nazareth of Galilee. In his greeting, the angel declared that she was highly favored and that the Lord was with her. He then said she would give birth to a son whom she was to name Jesus. Jesus, he said, would be great, and He would be called the Son of the Most High. Furthermore, He would receive the throne of His father David and establish an unending kingdom.

Contrast the annunciation of Christ which Matthew records with that of Luke.

Mary questioned how this could be since she was a virgin. The angel explained that the Holy Spirit would come upon her, and she would conceive supernaturally. Thus the Holy One she would bear would be called the Son of God. While Mary did not ask for a sign to confirm the message, the angel gave one anyway. He said Mary's aged relative, Elizabeth, who was said to be barren, was now expecting a child. In this way God clearly demonstrated that nothing is impossible with Him (1:37). Mary graciously, humbly, and obediently accepted the Lord's purpose for her life.

We should note here the Virgin Birth is a cornerstone in our belief that Christ is the Son of God. It demonstrates that He is more than a man; He is the Son of God. Since He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, He entered the world free from sin. In this way God provided a perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. Thus Christ's sinless condition eventually led Him to the cross where He paid the penalty for sin. No other sacrifice was acceptable for humankind in their sinful state.

In his Gospel, Luke notes that immediately after Gabriel appeared to her, Mary traveled to the hill country of Judea to be with Elizabeth. When Mary greeted Elizabeth, who was in her sixth month of pregnancy, the babe leaped in Elizabeth's womb, and she was filled with the Holy Spirit. As a result, she exulted in her spirit and blessed Mary. Then Mary responded and extolled God in a wonderful **anthem** of praise we refer to as the "Magnificat" (Luke 1:46-55).

According to Luke's account, Mary stayed with Elizabeth until just before John's birth, and then she returned home (Luke 1:56). From Matthew's account of this period, it appears that soon after Mary returned from Judea, an angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph in a dream (Matthew 1:18-25). By this time it was apparent that Mary was expecting, and Joseph could not have known why she was pregnant. Therefore, he needed to know Mary had not disgraced him or been unfaithful, as it seemed. Even as Joseph was struggling with some way to avoid disgracing her publicly, the angel assured him the child Mary was bearing was from the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18-21). As a result, Joseph did what the angel commanded and took Mary home as his wife (v. 24).

While both Matthew and Luke give us the announcement of Christ's birth, Luke gives us a greater amount of detail about this time in the life of Christ. Matthew notes that Joseph received a visit from an angel but does not give us the angel's name. However, Luke reveals that the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary. This shows how the Gospels complement each other in the events they record. That is, Matthew deals with areas of the familiar story surrounding Christ's birth that Luke does not cover. For example, Luke says nothing about the Magi and their visit to Herod and Christ. Neither does he mention Mary and Joseph's flight into Egypt and the subsequent murder of the young boys in Bethlehem. Only Matthew comments on this awful act of Herod the Great.

Yet we are indebted to Luke for a number of details that occurred during this period. Thanks to him, we have a much better picture than we would otherwise. We learn that

1. Christ's parents lived in Nazareth before His birth (1:26, 2:4).
2. Mary was a relative of Elizabeth (1:36).
3. Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months just before the birth of John the Baptist (1:39-56).
4. Caesar Augustus decreed that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world (2:1).
5. Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem, where Christ was born, to register because of Caesar's decree (2:1-7).
6. An angel announced Christ's birth to nearby shepherds, who then went to visit Him (2:8-20).
7. Christ underwent the rites of circumcision and purification (2:21-38).
8. Christ experienced normal childhood growth and development as He matured (2:40-52).

Now that we have looked at the details of the annunciation in the accounts of Matthew and Luke, we should know what part each played in producing the complete gospel narrative.

- | | |
|---|------------|
| a Gabriel visits Mary. | 1) Matthew |
| b Mary stays three months with Elizabeth. | 2) Luke |
| c Joseph is aware of Mary's pregnancy and considers divorcing her. | |
| d An angel appears to Joseph in a dream and informs him that Mary has conceived supernaturally, so he need not fear taking her as his wife. | |
| e This record reveals that Jesus is both the Son of David and the Son of the Most High, and it shows He is destined to have an everlasting kingdom. | |
| f This record gives us the "Magnificat." | |

In the adjacent chart, match each event surrounding the annunciation of Christ (left) with the appropriate Gospel (right).

The Question of Genealogies

Compare and contrast the genealogies given in Matthew and Luke.

Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38

Before we study with the birth of Christ, we will compare the genealogies of Jesus that Matthew and Luke give. This will help us to explain why they are different.

1. Matthew begins with Abraham and ends with Christ, whereas Luke begins with Christ and ends with Adam.
2. In both genealogies the names from Abraham to David are identical.
3. However, the names in the genealogies from David to Christ are almost completely different.
4. Since both genealogies list Joseph just before Christ, it appears either that Joseph had two different ancestral lines or that some other factor accounts for this difference.

While Bible scholars have discussed this question at great length and offered many possible solutions, they have not accepted any one idea as the final answer. However, many of them believe the reason for the difficulty was the Jewish tradition of not using names of women in the direct line of descendants. If this is true, then Matthew gives the genealogy of Joseph and Luke the genealogy of Mary. That is, Matthew lists Jacob as Joseph's father, and Luke lists Heli as Mary's father. Yet, because of Jewish tradition, Luke inserted Joseph's name instead of hers.

Compare and contrast the genealogies of Christ in Matthew and Luke.

Another theory suggests that Matthew gives the royal lineage of Christ (which shows He is a descendant of King David) because of his interest in Jesus' messianic kingship, whereas Luke gives the actual physical descent of Joseph. Although there are numerous other explanations, we must understand that the difference of names is not the most significant aspect of the genealogies. The principal reason for including them is to establish Christ's legal claim as the descendant of the house of David. This is particularly true in the case of Matthew. Since he is appealing to a Jewish audience, he must verify Christ's claim to the throne of David.

While there are differences between Matthew's and Luke's genealogies of Christ, what chief purpose do they serve?

Lesson 5.2 Christ's Birth and the Events After

His Birth

Identify facts Luke records surrounding the birth of Christ, His circumcision, and His presentation in the temple.

The Road to Bethlehem

Luke 2:1-20

We move now to the details of Christ's birth. At this point we have only Luke's narrative to help us. He notes that Joseph and Mary went from Nazareth to Bethlehem to register for the census, and he explains why they had to go to the southern province to do so. He also relates the crisis they faced because there was no room in the inn on the day of the Lord's birth. Then he describes the angel's announcement to the shepherds and their subsequent visit to the manger. Luke alone gives these details. Matthew, by contrast, does not pick up the story until the appearance of the Magi.

Since Luke's narrative on the birth of Christ is direct, clear, and readable, we will not present additional commentary on this event. The truth you should grasp here is that at a point in history Christ entered the world as a human being, and this occurred because He was miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit.

The Events after Christ's Birth

Circumcision and Presentation

Luke 2:21-38

Once again, only Luke deals with the next two events in the life of Christ. He notes that the child was circumcised on the eighth day after birth and given a name according to Jewish custom. He also states that Joseph and Mary named Him *Jesus* as they were instructed. Notice that Luke covers the details of this event in only one verse of Scripture (Luke 2:21).

According to Luke 2:25-38, why was the presence of Simeon and Anna at the presentation of Jesus significant?

Luke next refers to the presentation of Jesus to the Lord. The Law required that this be done in the temple after the mother's period of purification. This period for mothers of male children, according to the Law, was thirty-three days after

circumcision (Leviticus 12:2-4). The Law also required the parents to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. They could offer either a pair of doves or two young pigeons if they were poor. Luke observes that while they were in the temple Joseph and Mary had several other interesting experiences.

Apparently, as they entered the temple and prepared for the rite of presentation, Joseph and Mary met two special people: Simeon and Anna. Simeon, moved by the Holy Spirit, went to Joseph and Mary, took the child Jesus in his arms, and blessed Him. Then he gave an inspired prophecy concerning Christ's destiny. At this very moment Anna, an aged prophetess, came up and gave thanks to God for the redemption He had provided in the person of this child, and she spoke about Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem (Luke 2:25-38). Her words gave the occasion a special emphasis.

Briefly give the details of Christ's circumcision and presentation.

The Visit of the Magi and the Flight into Egypt

Explain the relation between the visit of the Magi and the flight into Egypt and the significance of Jesus' visit to the temple at the age of twelve.

Matthew 2:1-23; Luke 2:39

As you can see from the Scripture passages, our information for the events in this section comes almost entirely from Matthew. In fact, Luke adds only one verse to the story, and that concerns the family's eventual return to Nazareth (2:39). (Note carefully on the map the places where Joseph and Mary traveled after Jesus' birth.)

While most of us have seen pictures of the Magi gathered around the manger with the shepherds, this is not the way it actually happened. The Magi did not appear in Bethlehem until after the birth, circumcision, and presentation of Christ. From the information the Magi gave Herod, it may have been as long as two years after Jesus' birth (Matthew 2:16). Matthew 2:1-23 gives a fine account of the Magi's visit.

Sometime after the dedication of Christ at the temple, Magi from the East, who had seen the star that heralded Christ's birth, arrived in Jerusalem. The news of their arrival and quest soon reached Herod the Great, the father of the later Herods of the New Testament, and the news troubled him. You should note that this brief scriptural passage gives us our only reference to this infamous man.

The Magi's quest was to find the one who had been born king of the Jews. King Herod, a jealous and cruel tyrant, felt threatened by news of a possible rival king. He called the Magi in and questioned them about the time of the star's appearance. He also urged them to report back to him after they had found the child. So the Magi went to Bethlehem, where they found "the child" in "a house" (v. 11). There they bowed before Him, worshiped Him, and presented gifts to Him. Then, after God warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.

When Herod realized he had been deceived, he was furious. He had learned from an earlier meeting with the Sanhedrin that Christ was to be born in Bethlehem (vv. 4-5). While we do not know what the Magi told Herod about the time of Christ's birth, they must have indicated that quite some time had passed in the course of their travels. By the time Herod realized the Magi had outwitted him, more time had passed. Given these facts, Herod reasoned that Christ could not be more than two years of age. Therefore, he ordered his soldiers to kill all boy babies in Bethlehem and the surrounding area. In this way he could wipe out any threat to his sovereignty. Thus Bethlehem was exposed to Herod's madness and cruelty as his butchers destroyed the infants. But before this occurred, Joseph, having been warned earlier by the Lord, fled to Egypt with his family.

State the relation between the visit of the Magi and the flight into Egypt.

Shortly after this senseless massacre, Herod died. Then the angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph in a dream and told him to return to Israel. Joseph obeyed and started back. But when he heard that Archelaus, the son of Herod and a tyrant of the worst sort, was now ruler of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea, he was afraid to settle there. Since he had been warned of the danger in a dream, he decided not to return to Bethlehem of Judea where Archelaus ruled. Instead, he went to Nazareth in Galilee, which, as Matthew notes, fulfilled the prophets' prediction that Jesus would be called a *Nazarene*.

Luke verifies this move, indicating that at this point, Jesus' parents had done all that the Law required. He seems to say that everything concerning Jesus' birth and first years is complete. Now we can observe His development briefly in Nazareth

(Luke 2:39-40). Otherwise, after Joseph brings his family back from Egypt, we face a long period of silence in the life of Christ.

The Visit to the Temple

Luke 2:40-52

Luke now gives us a brief glimpse of Christ as a boy of twelve. Here Jesus accompanies His parents to Jerusalem for the annual Feast of the Passover. According to Jewish custom, when a boy reached twelve, he prepared for the ceremony the following year when he would be permitted to join the religious community as a responsible member. So this visit was especially important for Jesus. However, when the Feast was over and the large parties of pilgrims, including that of Jesus' parents, left for their homes throughout Palestine, Jesus remained in the temple. There He sat among the teachers of the Law, listening to them and asking them questions. Even though he was "just a boy," He amazed all who heard Him because of His insights and answers.

Meanwhile, His parents missed Him and returned to Jerusalem greatly concerned. After three days they found Him in the temple with the teachers. When they asked Him why He had stayed behind and caused them so much anxiety, He seemed surprised as He answered, "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49). Thus we learn that at this time, Jesus was aware of His special relationship with the Father. We also see that He submitted to Joseph and Mary and went obediently back to Nazareth with them, for this was His Father's will.

What does Jesus' temple visit show us about His personal awareness?

Luke concludes this glimpse of Jesus' early period in one verse (v. 52). Earlier he had compressed the events of Christ's life, growth, and development to His twelfth year into one verse (2:40). Now he repeats this practice and gives us a beautiful summary of Christ's next eighteen or so years until He appears in public and begins His ministry. We do not know much about the intervening years, but we do know Joseph and Mary had a fairly large family (Mark 6:3). Since Mark does not mention Joseph in this setting, it appears he had died. Jesus undoubtedly took Joseph's place as the provider for His mother and younger brothers and sisters. Thus He continued to be a carpenter until He began His public ministry. Whatever else He may have done in this period, Jesus underwent a natural and perfect physical and spiritual development.

What can we conclude about Jesus' family based on our discussion of Mark 6:3?

Luke's statement "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (v. 52) shows that Jesus grew in His human nature and character. His life and condition were always in harmony with the Father's will. Since His entire personality was perfect in every respect, He was respected and esteemed by others. He was in fact the perfect Man in spirit and body. Hence God looked on Him with favor and showed His pleasure with Him.

We have briefly related these events in the early life of Christ to give you an overview. We will now move ahead a number of years and take up our narrative at His baptism and temptation.

Lesson 5.3 The Baptism and Temptation of Christ

Luke has passed over some eighteen years between Christ's boyhood visit to Jerusalem and the next event in his account. Now he reveals the emergence of a new, dynamic voice in the desert, as John comes preaching a baptism of repentance. As a result, there is a feeling of expectancy. John's prophetic ministry seems to predict something great, and crowds turn out to hear him. At this point Christ emerges from the shroud of silence that has enveloped Him since His visit to the temple, and He prepares to begin His public ministry. However, before He is inducted fully into His public ministry, He must undergo two major experiences: His baptism and temptation. Since we can understand these experiences better after we have discussed the ministry of John the Baptist, we turn now to John.

The Ministry of John the Baptist

List the three main contributions of John the Baptist, and identify facts about his life and early ministry.

Matthew 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 1:80; 3:1-20

With the advent of John's ministry, Mark now adds his part to the biblical narrative. In his characteristic way, Luke gives us the precise details about the *time* of John's ministry (Luke 3:1-2). By contrast, Matthew and Mark give more emphasis to the

location of John's activity (Matthew 3:1; Mark 1:5). While the Synoptic writers provide a good summary of John's public life and ministry, they tell us even less about his life before his public ministry than they tell about Christ. We can build a profile of John from the Gospels.

Luke says of John, "And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel" (Luke 1:80). So John grew up in the desert with few distractions. It was an ideal training ground because life was simple, and this tends to bring some people closer to God. The desert offered John no luxuries. He ate the simplest food and wore rough clothing. It is quite obvious that he was not a refined person; rather, he was a rough man of the hills. Here he lived isolated from the dark and desperate conditions in the world and in Palestine *until* the word of the Lord came to him (Luke 3:2). So at about thirty years of age, according to Luke 3:23 (compare John's age with that of Jesus), John answered the call.

He emerged from the desert **solitude** wearing camel's hair garments and a leather belt, like his predecessor Elijah. (Compare 2 Kings 1:8 and Malachi 4:5 with Matthew 3:4 and Mark 1:6.) Mark describes this tersely: "And so John came, baptizing ... and preaching.... The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him" (Mark 1:4-5). These crowds recognized John as a prophet because of his dynamic message. He not only looked like a prophet but also had the prophet's conviction that he must proclaim God's message.

The crowds that heard John could not fail to recognize the familiar prophetic call to repentance. But John strove for an active response to his preaching: repentance and baptism in the Jordan River. While Judaism had known ceremonial cleansings and later **proselyte** baptism, John's baptism was unique. In fact, it was such a distinctive part of his ministry that people referred to him as the "baptizer."

John appealed to people to turn to God to get a clear outlook on the things that really matter. He also challenged them to get rid of wrong opinions about the expected Messiah. They had no idea of their own sinfulness and, most of all, their need for a Messiah who would bring spiritual deliverance. So John urged them to repent and get ready for the coming One. The alternatives were clear: either repent or suffer the direst consequences.

So we see that John's message was vital and necessary to prepare people for the public ministry of Christ. You should recognize three contributions of John:

List the three major contributions of John the Baptist.

1. He came forth preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. In effect, he called the people to repentance and then baptized those who

confessed their sins and indicated they wanted to change their lives and conform to God's purpose. Baptism thus became an outward sign and seal that God pardons those who sincerely repent. This in itself prepared the hearts of the people to receive the greater message of Christ.

2. He actively announced the coming of Christ, stating emphatically that the One who would follow him was more powerful and had an even greater baptism. This further prepared the hearts of the people for Christ's coming.
3. He baptized Christ, which identified Him with sinful humankind.

The Baptism of Christ

Explain why Christ felt the need to be baptized.

Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22

The baptism of Christ was one of the two major events that inducted Him into His public ministry. Since He had been in Galilee, He traveled to the Jordan Valley to be baptized. While baptism symbolized a basic cleansing of one's life, this was not what Christ intended, for He had nothing to repent of. Instead, it was a means of identifying with sinful people. Christ's baptism was obviously accepted; for as He emerged from the waters, the Holy Spirit descended on Him, and the heavenly Father said this was His beloved Son in whom He was well pleased.

So Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit and greatly empowered as He emerged from this experience and returned from the Jordan. He was now about thirty years of age, and He was about to conclude the experiences that inducted him into His ministry. His baptism also pointed to His death, burial, and resurrection—the purpose for which He had come.

Explain why Christ felt the need for baptism.

The Temptation of Christ

Recognize statements that tell correctly why the temptation was a necessary part of Christ's ministry.

Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12, 13; Luke 4:1-13

The second major experience that inducted Christ into His public ministry was His temptation. This occurred immediately after His baptism, probably somewhere in the Judean desert. According to the text, this temptation was undoubtedly ordained by God, for the writers use such phrases as *led by the Spirit* and *the Spirit sent him* to describe Christ's journey to the desert. While all the Gospels deal with Christ's temptation and baptism, Matthew and Luke give far more detail than Mark gives. In essence, the devil appears to direct his attack against Jesus' relationship as Son to His Father. The tempter tries to undermine it and raise doubts, much as he did when he tempted Eve in Genesis 3:1-5. However, this time he does not succeed.

Of the two preparatory experiences, the temptation probably has the clearer meaning. While some might question Christ's need to be baptized to identify with sinful humanity, none would deny His need to overcome temptation. It is significant that on the eve of His public ministry, Jesus exposed himself to temptation and overcame it. This one major example shows us that Christ was tempted as we are, yet He was without sin (Hebrews 4:15). Furthermore, it shows us that He knows what we go through and can help us overcome (Hebrews 2:18).

Briefly summarize conclusions about why Christ was tempted.

We have now concluded the preparatory period of Christ's ministry. The material we have reviewed in this chapter covers more than thirty years. While these early years are filled with gaps that do not tell us about the formative period of Christ's life, we must remember that the Gospels are not biographical records of the life of Christ. Rather, they are treatments of His public ministry. As we move on in our study, we will narrow our focus to Christ's public ministry and give it the greatest share of our time.

Chapter 6 The Early Judean and Galilean Ministry

We considered the birth narratives of John the Baptist and Christ at the outset of Chapter 5. Then we examined Christ's early years and the events that prepared Him for public ministry. These narratives set the stage for the next scene in the unfolding drama of Christ's life—His early Judean and Galilean ministry—to which we now turn.

As we focus on Christ's early ministry, remember that it was inaugurated by two major events: His baptism and temptation. To this point the order of events has been fairly straightforward and clear, but now a precise chronology is not apparent in the text. Since the Gospel writers may not have recorded the events of Christ's ministry in strict sequential order, it is impossible for us to recreate a chronology with any certainty. The Gospels were not meant to be put together to form a chronological study of Jesus' life and ministry. Rather, each Gospel represents an independent source on the life of Christ. Together, they simply paint a clearer portrait of who He is.

In fact, ancient historians did not value chronological precision in the same way as modern historians. Ancient writers prioritized other purposes above chronology for recording historical events. The Gospel writers were more concerned with the Man and His message (and responding to immediate questions and challenges in their contemporary world) than a precise sequence of events. We have attempted to locate biblical events in history and to suggest a possible sequence using Mark as our standard and adjusting the events in Matthew and Luke accordingly. In doing so, we do not say that Mark's record is above question; we simply accept his account as a reliable standard. Together the Synoptic accounts provide a marvelous profile of our Lord's life and ministry. May it inspire you to follow in His steps and to be like Him.

Lesson 6.1 The Early Judean Ministry

Objectives

- 6.1.1 *List three possible historical indicators that help in dating the beginning of Christ's ministry.*
- 6.1.2 *Place in hypothetical order the main events of Christ's first year of public ministry.*

Lesson 6.2 The Galilean Ministry: The Early Period

Objective

- 6.2.1 *Identify the main events of Christ's early Galilean ministry and where they occurred, based on the Synoptic accounts.*

Lesson 6.3 The Galilean Ministry: The Middle and Later Periods

Objectives

- 6.3.1 *Discuss the change in people's attitude toward Christ during the middle period of His Galilean ministry.*
- 6.3.2 *Identify significant events and activities that occurred during Christ's later Galilean ministry, as well as facts about this period.*
- 6.3.3 *Distinguish events that occurred during each period of the greater Galilean ministry.*

Lesson 6.1 The Early Judean Ministry

List three possible historical indicators that help in dating the beginning of Christ's ministry.

We noted in the introduction that following Christ's baptism and temptation, the Synoptic record becomes a bit more complex. This is true because the three sources of the narrative stream are not concerned primarily with chronology. For example, they completely omit the first period of Christ's ministry, passing over this crucial time in silence. Were it not for John's Gospel, we would know nothing of this phase of His ministry. It is unclear why the Synoptic writers omit nearly one year of Christ's ministry as they move to the next events they record, for no study of the life of Christ would be complete without an account of this period. So we will turn our attention to this time segment that many scholars believe covered between eight months and one year, during which Christ spent the majority of His time in Judea. Yet before we consider the events of this period, We will briefly review a possible chronology of His life up to this point.

The Challenge of Dating and Chronology

This section discusses observations and opinions that help develop a possible chronology of Christ's life. However, remember that this cannot be certain because the inspired Gospel writers did not give precise chronological data. Therefore we must not be **dogmatic** or argumentative about these matters. In fact, the order of events in Christ's life and ministry have no bearing on our knowledge of God, His Son, or the redemptive work through which we experience salvation. With this in mind, we turn to a discussion that includes hypothetical conclusions.

Modern Western thinking expects historical records to reflect the exact chronology in which original events occurred. This is a challenge we have to overcome to understand the nature of the Synoptic Gospels. We must allow the Gospel writers to speak for themselves in their own time and historical, first-century context. As we already pointed out, the Gospel writers were more concerned with the Man and Message than a precise sequence of events. We must learn to think like them to understand what they wrote. Just as the Holy Spirit guided the Gospel writers as they penned their accounts, we too must heed the Holy Spirit's guidance in reading and understanding.

Define *historical indicator*.

However, the Gospel writers did leave us some "footprints in the sand" to help determine when certain events took place. Occasionally, a Gospel writer will give us a historical indicator concerning an event recorded in the Gospel account. By *historical indicator* we mean "a word or combination of words or thoughts that refers to a specific happening and places an event in a recognized time frame." Some historical indicators are straightforward and result in agreement among New Testament scholars; others are not straightforward and result in disagreements. Since we cannot know for sure about the sequence of all events in the Synoptic Gospels, we cannot be dogmatic in our conclusions. There are some historical indicators to consider as we begin looking at Christ's early Judean ministry.

1. Many Bible scholars accept 4 BC as the year of Christ's birth. While there is some question about this date, it is beyond the scope of this course to research other possibilities. Since it has widespread acceptance among Bible scholars, we will use this date in our studies.
2. Luke's statement "In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar the word of God came to John" marks the beginning of John's ministry (Luke 3:1-3). The fifteenth year of Tiberius, who reigned from AD 14-37, points to a date somewhere between AD 27 and 29, depending on how one interprets this "fifteenth year."
3. Luke also states that Jesus began His ministry when He was about thirty years old (3:23). The term *about* in this context could indicate an age of one or two years on either side of thirty.

List three historical indicators that help establish the time when Christ began His public ministry.

As noted in point 1, it is difficult to determine the precise date of Christ's birth. Since this is true, it is also an involved process to reconcile His 4 BC birth date with the fifteenth year of Tiberius and Luke's statement that at this time our Lord was "about thirty years old" (3:23). Nevertheless, this difficulty can be resolved, and we can reach an adequate solution.

We may consider that Christ's ministry began in either AD 27, 28, or 29. This time frame is accurate enough to satisfy the details of Christ's birth, the fifteenth year of Tiberius, and yet not indicate that Christ was older than thirty-two (or "about" thirty years old).

We will not attempt to specify the exact year when Christ began His ministry, but we will say it was probably not earlier than AD 27 and not later than AD 29. Since we need a reference point for our study, we will accept AD 29 as the year in which Christ began His ministry.

The First Year

Place in hypothetical order the main events of Christ's first year of public ministry.

John 1:19-4:42

As we have noted, John alone records the events that occurred shortly after Christ's baptism and temptation. He writes that on two consecutive days John the Baptist saw Christ and declared publicly that He was the Lamb of God. At this point, Christ is still in the southern part of Judea, for John is said to be baptizing people "at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan" (1:28). During this time, Christ begins to select some of the men who will ultimately become the twelve disciples. John indicates that He selected five at this time.

The first two disciples Christ selected had originally been disciples of John the Baptist (1:35-40). Of these two, John indicates the first as Andrew, but he does not name the second. However, it is probably John himself, the writer of the fourth Gospel. Andrew then finds his brother, Simon Peter, and brings him to Christ, and now there are three disciples (1:41-42). On the day after He meets Peter, Jesus finds Philip and calls him to be a follower (1:43). At this point, John observes that Philip, like Andrew and Peter, is from the city of Bethsaida. At once, Philip finds his friend Nathanael and brings him to Christ. In the process, Nathanael has an unusual experience convincing him that Christ is worthy to be followed.

Since John alone of the Gospel writers mentions Nathanael and not Bartholomew, many people believe Nathanael is another name for Bartholomew. This belief is supported by the fact that Bartholomew is mentioned in all four lists that contain the names of the twelve disciples. Although not fully proved, this belief is widely accepted as a reasonable possibility.

Having decided to go into Galilee (1:43), Jesus now travels to Cana with these five disciples and performs His first miracle at a wedding feast (2:1-11). From Cana He goes to Capernaum and stays only a few days (2:12). At this point, John mentions the first Passover Feast that Jesus attends during His public ministry (2:13). [Note: In this course we will assume that four Passover Feasts are included during Christ's public ministry. John mentions three of them specifically (2:13, 6:4, and 11:55) and perhaps refers to a fourth (5:1). We will discuss the time element of the Passover Feasts more fully in later chapters.]

Thus our Lord ends this brief Galilean ministry and goes to Jerusalem to attend the Passover Feast (2:13). John records two incidents that occurred while He was there. First, he describes a scene in the temple courts in which Christ clears the premises of money changers (2:14-16). Second, he notes Christ's discussion with Nicodemus (3:1-21), which we will discuss in detail in a later chapter. At this point, however, the details of Christ's ministry become increasingly difficult to interpret. John says simply, "After this, Jesus and His disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized" (3:22). John also notes that John the Baptist was baptizing near where Jesus and His disciples were ministering (v. 23). Although the Bible does not say how long Christ was in Judea, it could easily have been several months. In any case, John the Baptist had not yet been imprisoned (v. 24).

As John and Jesus continue in their respective ministries, it appears that a spirit of competition develops between John's disciples and the Pharisees and possibly others about the ministries of Jesus and John (3:25-4:2). To avoid conflict and prevent unnecessary and undesirable exposure to His ministry at this time, Jesus then leaves Judea and returns to Galilee (4:3).

Quite possibly, John the Baptist was placed in prison at this time. If this is true, we have reached the point at which the Synoptic Gospels again enter the picture (Matthew 4:12; Mark 1:14; Luke 3:19-20, 4:14). You probably noticed that in their accounts Matthew and Mark tie John's imprisonment with Jesus' decision to return to Galilee. By contrast, Luke places John's imprisonment outside its chronological sequence. After dealing with John's public ministry in all the country around the Jordan (3:1-18), Luke adds two verses on John's confinement (3:19-20) and then deals with the earlier baptism of Christ (3:21-22).

If we can match the timing of the preceding Synoptic passages with John 4:3, we have reached the approximate conclusion of Christ's first year of public ministry. Christ now leaves Judea for an extended ministry in Galilee, and the only incident we need to mention is His talk with a Samaritan woman on the way. You should note Christ's teaching at Sychar, which we will discuss in another chapter, and the amazing results that followed (John 4:3-42).

In an effort to help you review the events of Christ's first year as John records them and fix them in your mind, we will list them in order and ask you to trace them on the accompanying map.

1. Christ is identified by John the Baptist as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29-31).
2. Christ chooses His first disciples (1:35-51).
3. Christ travels to Galilee, performs His first miracle in Cana (2:1-11), and then moves on to Capernaum with His mother, brothers, and disciples (2:12).
4. Christ returns to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast (2:13).
5. Christ drives the money changers from the temple (2:14-17) and speaks with Nicodemus (3:1-21).
6. Christ ministers in the Judean countryside (3:22), and John, simultaneously, baptizes nearby (3:23-36).
7. Christ leaves Judea after a time of ministry and travels through Samaria en route to Galilee (4:1-43).
8. Christ now begins an extended ministry in Galilee (4:45-54).

What two towns did Jesus visit during his relatively short initial ministry in Galilee?

Lesson 6.2 The Galilean Ministry: The Early Period

Identify the main events of Christ's early Galilean ministry and where they occurred, based on the Synoptic accounts.

As we turn to Christ's extended Galilean ministry, we will divide it into three shorter periods. These smaller segments of time should help us to understand better and grasp more readily what occurred in each period. Focusing on each Gospel separately should also help us grasp the events more easily. As you turn to the early period of Christ's Galilean ministry, keep in mind that it extends from His return to Galilee to the choosing of the twelve disciples.

Again, remember that the Gospel writers apparently felt it was more important to stress the message and miracles of Christ than to emphasize the day-by-day accounts of His ministry. If you keep the authors' perspective in mind, you will have a clearer understanding of why, on a number of occasions, we are not dogmatic on matters of chronology.

The Account in Mark

Mark 1:14-3:19

In Mark's narrative, we observe that he moves along rather quickly. He says succinctly, "Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God" (1:14). There, He calls four men to follow Him—Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John. This may seem confusing at first since it appears He had called Peter, Andrew, and possibly John on an earlier occasion (John 1:35-42). A possible explanation is that Christ gave an initial call to which these men responded. Then, after a brief time with Christ, they returned to their fishing occupation while Christ continued alone. While we cannot be sure, it appears that now Christ is selecting them for a more permanent relationship with Him. As a result, they will be with Him until the end of His earthly ministry.

Mark stresses the acts (miracles) of Christ primarily in the first few chapters of his Gospel. This makes sense for Mark, because His gospel is considered to be the gospel of action. Notice how many times within these chapters Mark uses the terms *once*, *as soon as*, *quickly*, and *immediately* (depending on the translation). With each stroke of his brush, Mark paints Christ as a man of action. This would appeal strongly to his Roman audience. Just in the first three chapters, Mark records Christ's rebuking an unclean spirit, healing Simon's mother-in-law, cleansing a leper, making a paralytic walk, casting out demons, and restoring a man's withered hand.

From the start, Mark places a major emphasis on the acts of Christ while giving little attention to His teaching. However, we do see Christ preaching in Galilee, calling forth Levi, and addressing questions about fasting. Perhaps one of the most significant teaching moments from the early portion of Mark occurs in the fields of grain. Here, as Christ goes through the fields on a certain Sabbath, His disciples pick some heads of grain to eat. This causes the Pharisees to question Jesus about the sanctity of the Sabbath. Jesus makes an appeal to David in the Old Testament to

illustrate the true purpose of the Sabbath. "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27-28).

Mark concludes his account of the early Galilean period with more action. Christ retreats to the lake with the crowds following. As word spreads about Christ's arrival, the people come from all over the region to listen to Him. In his typical fashion, Mark records the miracles, describing the eagerness of people pressing in to touch Him so they too will be healed. We witness the authority of Christ over unclean spirits. These spirits come out of the people when the spirits recognize Him to be the Son of God. However, Jesus gives them strict orders not to disclose His identity (3:11-12). Finally, Jesus goes up to the mountainside as He calls forth twelve men and appoints them as apostles (3:13-19). This brings us to Mark 3:19, which is the breakoff point in this account of the early period in the extended Galilean ministry.

What event in the Gospel of Mark ends the early period of Christ's extended Galilean ministry?

The Account in Matthew

Matthew 4:12-12:14

While Mark gives us a concise record of this period, Matthew gives more material and groups events **thematically**. If we compare Matthew with Mark and Luke in relation to the same events, we find the following verses in Matthew probably belong to a later period of Christ's Galilean ministry: 8:23-27, 8:28-34, 9:18-26, 9:27-34, and 11:2-30. This should not concern us, however, because we have already seen that chronology is not a major issue with the Synoptic writers. It is simply a means of helping us arrange the events of Christ's life and ministry in some semblance of order for our own ease in understanding.

The material in this section of Matthew, like that in Mark, extends from Christ's return to Galilee following the detention of John the Baptist to the selecting of the Twelve. Enumerating the main features of Matthew's record should give us a more complete understanding of this period in Christ's ministry.

1. Chapter 4:12-25 gives a general overview of Christ's ministry in Galilee and includes the calling of four disciples.
2. Chapters 5-7 include a collection of Christ's teachings that is popularly called the Sermon on the Mount. While Matthew gives the impression that Christ delivered all of these teachings at one time, this may not be so. It is possible this discourse represents a collection of many of Christ's teachings that He gave throughout His ministry.

3. Chapters 8 and 9, following the pattern of 5–7, represent a collection of Christ's miracles. These chapters record Christ's travels throughout Galilee and reveal the cost of discipleship (8:18–22), His power over nature (8:23–27), His authority over demon powers (8:16; 28–34; 9:32–34), and His ability to heal every sickness and disease (8:16; 9:35). This section also notes the calling of Matthew (9:9–13). While Matthew mentions Christ's journey to Gadara here (8:28–34), this probably occurred at a later date. (Compare with Mark 5:1–20 and Luke 8:26–39.)
4. Chapter 10 in its entirety concerns the Twelve, including their call and commission. It details the specific instructions Christ gave them before He sent them out for a short period of ministry.
5. Chapter 11 records Christ's response to the questions of John the Baptist and His defense of John's uniqueness in the Kingdom (vv. 2–19). Later in this chapter, Christ reproaches the cities of Korazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum for their unbelief (vv. 20–24). The events Matthew writes about in this section probably occurred at a slightly later time. (Compare with Luke 7:18–35.)
6. Chapter 12:1–14 concludes the events we associate with the early period of Christ's Galilean ministry. Since all three Synoptic accounts of the picking of grain on the Sabbath continue immediately with the miracle of the man healed of a withered hand, we conclude that they refer to the same event.

This enumeration brings us to the end of Matthew's record of the events of the early period. It adds still more details to our understanding of this time in Christ's ministry.

The Account in Luke

Luke 4:14–7:17; 9:1–6

Luke begins his record of Christ's early Galilean ministry at the same point as Matthew and Mark. In general, the information he gives is about the same as that given by the other Synoptic writers. Yet it is interesting to note how the three writers complement each other. While Matthew observes simply, "Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum" (Matthew 4:13), Luke records that the people of Nazareth rejected Christ and wanted to destroy Him (Luke 4:16–30), telling us exactly what happened while He was there. Mark adds that the people of Nazareth were amazed at Christ's teaching and questioned His **credentials** and that Christ, in turn, was amazed at their lack of faith (6:1–6).

Compare Luke's account of the early period in Christ's Galilean ministry to that of the other Synoptics.

Like Matthew and Mark, Luke records Christ's move to Capernaum (4:31) and the subsequent calling of the first five disciples (5:1-11; 27-32). However, more than the others, Luke describes the details surrounding their call. He also writes about a number of miracles in this period of Christ's ministry, which we will consider in a later chapter. While each of the Synoptic writers notes the place of prayer in Christ's life, Luke especially stresses it and alludes to it in this period (4:42; 5:16; 6:12).

Based on the readings for this portion of Christ's ministry, what can we conclude about the extent of His early Galilean ministry?

Luke also names the twelve disciples (6:13-16) and tells how Christ sent them forth, using a Scripture passage (9:1-6) that falls outside the early Galilean period of ministry. (We have chosen to place this particular passage here because the parallel accounts in Matthew and Mark occur at this stage of Christ's ministry.) Then in 6:17-49, he gives what appears to be a parallel account of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). One difficulty we face, though, is reconciling various aspects and incidents of these teachings. Matthew places the discourses together at the beginning of this period and indicates that Christ gave them while He sat on a mountainside (5:1). Yet Luke locates his account of the discourse further in the written record and says Christ delivered it as He "stood on a level place" (6:17).

As we stated before, as each Synoptic writer penned his account, he was not primarily concerned with chronology or with every minute detail. In noting that Christ stood at the beginning of His discourse, Luke did not see the need to state that perhaps later He sat down and taught. Nor did he indicate a change of location in Christ's teaching, although it is obvious He taught in many places. If we keep these things in mind, we will understand more clearly how the work of each writer complements rather than contradicts the work of the others.

Luke concludes his account of this period with the healing of the centurion's servant and the raising of a widow's son from the dead (7:1-17). Luke alone of the Synoptic writers mentions Christ's ministry in the town of Nain (7:11-17) and the results of this dramatic miracle throughout the land of the Jews.

Lesson 6.3 The Galilean Ministry: The Middle and Later Periods

Discuss the change in people's attitude toward Christ during the middle period of His Galilean ministry.

We now move to the middle period of Christ's greater Galilean ministry. The event that marks the transition to this period is the one in which John the Baptist sends his disciples to ask Christ if He is the Messiah (Matthew 11:2-19; Luke 7:18-35). And the event that concludes the middle period is the feeding of the five thousand. In fact, this latter miracle is the only one recorded in all four Gospels (Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13).

John the Baptist has been arrested and is waiting in a cold damp prison cell for his fate to unfold. While John is in prison, his disciples visit him with news about the commotion Jesus is causing. John sends two of his disciples on a mission to ask Jesus a question: "Are you the one who was to come or should we expect someone else?" (Matthew 11:3; Luke 7:19).

As we examine this event, both Matthew and Luke contribute key information. Matthew seems to be more concise with his account. He briefly mentions the fact that John was in prison when he heard about what Jesus was doing. Matthew's narrative does not tell us exactly how John heard this news, but it does say John sent his disciples to get more information from Jesus about His mission. We can conclude, then, that John's disciples were there visiting with him. Luke fills in the gaps and gives us more information about this event. Luke tells us that John's disciples told him about what Jesus was doing. According to Luke, John sent only two of his disciples to Jesus. Luke then records the actual encounter between Jesus and John's disciples. Both Matthew and Luke record the same wording of the question John's disciples were to ask of Jesus. This demonstrates how Matthew and Luke's Gospels are independent sources about the life of Christ but, when they come together, they both add to the larger portrait of the person and work of Jesus.

What events mark the beginning and the end of the middle period of Christ's greater Galilean ministry?

All of Christ's ministry occurs in Galilee, with the exception of one trip (and possibly more) to the east side of the Sea of Galilee. The Synoptic writers mention two places Christ visited on the east side of the Sea. Matthew refers to "the region of

the Gadarenes" (8:28), whereas Mark (5:1) and Luke (8:26) refer to "the region of the Gerasenes." However, some manuscripts of each Synoptic writer refer to "Gergesenes," which may indicate that each writer is referring to the same strip of land.

Since we will cover much of this section's material in greater detail in later chapters, our main concern here is to place events in an appropriate reading order. Thus, we will summarize only a few points that need explanation.

We are now in the second full year of Christ's ministry, which is marked by a growing controversy. While the people still marvel at His miracles, doubts and unbelief begin to arise as He explains His mission and shares the parables of the Kingdom with them. The questions of John the Baptist (Matthew 11:2-19; Luke 7:18-35) and Christ's condemnation of the Galilean cities (Matthew 11:20-24) indicate this. So we begin to see a gradual shift in attitude toward Christ and His ministry, expressing itself initially in His hometown, Nazareth (Matthew 13:54-58; Mark 6:1-6). Yet we see the clearest evidence of this change when many of Christ's followers reject His ultimate purpose (John 6:22-71). Another incident that sheds light on the change in people's outlook is the beheading of John the Baptist, which apparently occurred during this period. This act is an indirect rejection of the ministry of Christ, for John's purpose was to serve as the forerunner of Christ.

Discuss briefly the change of attitude toward Christ and His ministry that becomes apparent in this period.

Below, we list the Scripture passages from the Synoptics that probably fall within the middle period of Christ's Galilean ministry. However, as we have noted, some material contained here likely belongs to an earlier period:

Matthew 11:2-14:21

- Within this scriptural framework, 12:1-21 records incidents that probably occurred in the first period of Christ's greater Galilean ministry.
- Passages 8:18, 23-34 and 9:18-34, although recorded earlier in Matthew, probably belong to this period.

Mark 3:20-6:44

- Within this scriptural portion, the calling of the Twelve in 6:6-13 belongs to the early period of Christ's greater Galilean ministry.

Luke 7:18-9:17

- The events noted in 9:1-6, as we stated earlier, occurred during the early period of Christ's greater Galilean ministry.

While you have seen some of these verses previously, it would be good to review them again.

The Galilean Ministry: The Later Period

Identify significant events and activities that occurred during Christ's later Galilean ministry, as well as facts about this period.

The feeding of the five thousand marks both the ending of the middle and the beginning of the later period of Christ's Galilean ministry. It is possible that six months may have elapsed between this event and the beginning of our Lord's journey to Judea for ministry.

At this point, Mark and John give us key information in their Gospels. In describing this event, Mark refers to the "green grass" (6:39), while John adds that there was "plenty of grass in that place" (6:10) and that the "Jewish Passover Feast was near" (6:4). These facts are notable because the grass is green in Palestine, especially in the hot Jordan valley, only at the time of the Passover. Some scholars would say these facts point to a certain time of year when this event took place. While this might give us a helpful, general frame of time reference, we cannot be dogmatic on matters of remote dates and times.

Although the Synoptics give us no exact time frame for this period, it seems the Feast of Tabernacles of John 7:2 corresponds in time with the final events of Christ's Galilean ministry. This feast marks the end of His Galilean ministry and the beginning of His later Judean ministry.

What events mark the beginning and the end of the later period of Christ's greater Galilean ministry?

The Synoptic writers cover the later period of Christ's Galilean ministry in the following portions of Scripture:

Matthew 14:22-18:35, plus 8:18-22

Mark 6:45-9:50

Luke 9:18-62

As we examine this later period, we see Christ traveling more and more in the northern part of Galilee and even as far north as Tyre and Sidon. During this time, the Synoptics record the following notable events:

1. Christ's walking on the water (Matthew 14:24-33; Mark 6:47-52)
2. Christ's feeding the four thousand (Matthew 15:29-39; Mark 8:3-21)
3. Peter's confession (Matthew 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-21)
4. The Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36)

While the foregoing events are prominent during this period, the Synoptic writers also record a number of miracles and teachings of Christ. Perhaps the most significant feature of this period, though, is the amount of time Christ spends privately with His disciples. This seems to have been a time when the Lord was trying to pull together many of the teachings of the previous two years so His disciples could fully understand His purpose and their part.

Summary of the Greater Galilean Ministry

Distinguish events that occurred during each period of the greater Galilean ministry.

Overall, Christ's greater Galilean ministry could have lasted about twenty months. During this time, His reputation underwent several changes. At first He was gladly received and mingled much with the people. Yet as He moved through the middle and later periods of His ministry here, the criticism from religious leaders and the unbelief of the people grew. In the later period Christ also began to devote more and more private time to the Twelve. He spent almost all His time during this period in Galilee with the exception of short trips to Tyre, Sidon, Caesarea Philippi, and areas east of the Sea of Galilee. Within these twenty months, He also made at least two trips to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. While it is possible He made other trips, they are not recorded.

The portions of Scripture that record the greater Galilean ministry are fairly accurate (Matthew 4:12-18:35; Mark 1:14-9:50; Luke 4:14-9:62). The major difficulty here is with Luke, in that we are not sure where to place one rather long section (10:1-19:27). Although it seems that the first part (10:1-13:35) begins in Galilee and moves into Judea, we cannot be certain. In fact, as we move through this entire

section, we get the vague impression of a continued movement toward Jerusalem. For example, in Luke 10:38-42, Christ travels to Bethany and stays in the home of Mary and Martha, which is about two miles from Jerusalem. Later (17:11), however, He travels along the border between Galilee and Samaria on the way to Jerusalem. Even though there is this sense of movement toward Jerusalem, it is hard to be certain of the time. As a result, we have placed this entire section of Luke (10:1-19:27) in the chapter on Christ's later Judean ministry, even though parts of it may have occurred during His Galilean ministry.

In summarizing this segment of Christ's ministry, we should note the main events, as well as the activities and attitudes, that characterize it. This review should help to fix these things in our minds. We may list the following in regard to this period:

1. Christ called and confirmed the twelve disciples.
2. The disciples received most of their training.
3. Christ performed the greatest number of recorded miracles.
4. Christ's public ministry came into full view.
5. Christ began to reveal His ultimate purpose and destiny (the cross) to His disciples.
6. Christ's ministry, which began with much favor and support, eventually aroused criticism, unbelief, and rejection.
7. The disciples became fully convinced that Christ was the Son of God.
8. Christ delivered most of His parables of the Kingdom.
9. The Transfiguration occurred.
10. Christ gave the most complete explanation of the Kingdom.

This concludes our Lord's greater Galilean ministry. In the two chapters that follow, we will see Christ move relentlessly toward His destiny on the cross, which was His ultimate responsibility on earth.

Chapter 7 The Later Judean/Perean Ministry and the Passion Week

In the previous chapter, we gave our attention to reviewing Christ's early Judean and extended Galilean ministry. These phases of ministry, which began with His baptism and temptation and ended when He left Galilee for His later Judean ministry, lasted about twenty-eight to thirty months. Then He journeyed southward to face the final phase of His public ministry. We will focus now on this stage in His life, which centered in Judea and Perea. We will also study the events of His last week through the Last Supper.

The Synoptic portrait of Christ's life is nearly drawn. With bold strokes the Gospel writers have sketched the story of His mission, miracles, ministry, and method. Now we see that "Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). His purpose is irrevocable; His direction is set. He who said when He came into the world, "I have come to do your will, O God" (Hebrews 10:7) now moves with fixed purpose toward the cross. The final details of this picture add depth and perspective, as well as pathos, to the scene. Shedding tears over Jerusalem, teaching vital truths about the end of the age, and revealing the nature of true servanthood further complement this picture of our Lord.

As each detail emerges from the inspired writers, we see more of the full beauty of our matchless Lord. Each stroke arouses a heightened sense of drama, and we realize that what appears to be an inevitable human tragedy in God's hands becomes the triumph of the ages. May this portrait awaken in us a new devotion to Him and an ardent desire to serve Him better.

We are now approaching the last, dramatic days of Christ's earthly ministry. His greater Galilean ministry lay behind Him, a brief period of Judean/Perean ministry lay before Him, and the cross lay just beyond. While all three Synoptic writers cover the Passion Week fairly well, Luke gives us the greatest amount of material for Christ's final months in Judea and on the other side of the Jordan (Perea). Even so, we will need some help from the Gospel of John to shed light on these events.

With these things in mind, we will observe how the accounts of the inspired writers develop a complete portrait of Christ as each author contributes what God has quickened to him.

Lesson 7.1 The Later Judean/Perean Ministry

Objective

7.1.1 Explain how one may determine the time of Christ's later Judean/Perean ministry, and identify what each Gospel writer contributed to our knowledge of this period.

Lesson 7.2 The Passion Week

Objectives

- 7.2.1 *Distinguish the correct definition of the term Passion as it is used in connection with Christ's last week.*
- 7.2.2 *Evaluate the Synoptic accounts of day one, and identify the main events and places linked with this day.*
- 7.2.3 *List at least two events that occurred on day two, and identify other events that took place on this day.*
- 7.2.4 *State the feature of day three that is common to all three Synoptic accounts, and identify the main event of this day.*
- 7.2.5 *Identify the events of day five up through the Last Supper, and explain why some scholars believe the Last Supper and the Passover Meal are the same event on day four.*

Lesson 7.1 The Later Judean/Perean Ministry

The Account in John

Explain how one may determine the time of Christ's later Judean/Perean ministry, and identify what each Gospel writer contributed to our knowledge of this period.

John 10:1-42

While our focus is on the Synoptic records, once again we turn to the Gospel of John for help in ordering the events of the next six or seven months. In 7:1-52, John records the events related to Jesus' appearance at the Feast of Tabernacles. Also in 10:22-39 he notes what took place after this feast at the Feast of Dedication. Then, in 10:40, John gives the best evidence we have for Christ's ministry in Perea. He notes that, following His rejection during the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem, Christ went back across the Jordan for ministry to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days. Apparently, He stayed in Perea and Judea until the time of the Feast of Passover (11:55).

The Account in Mark

Mark 10:1-52

As you probably noticed in the Scripture reading for this section, Mark's account that leads up to the Passion Week is very brief. In fact, he covers this period in just one chapter without fitting events into any kind of time sequence. He notes that Christ and His disciples are on their way to Jerusalem where He will be betrayed and die. This indicates they are making the journey just before the Feast of Passover.

Discuss briefly John's contribution to our understanding of Christ's later Judean/Perean ministry.

Based on our study to this point, what do we depend on John's Gospel for?

Mark records in verse 1 that Jesus "went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan" and that He taught the crowds which gathered to hear Him. Teaching that dominates this segment of Christ's ministry includes the subject of divorce and the need for childlike faith. Mark also mentions Christ's encounter with the rich young ruler, His dealings with the ambition of James and John, and His prediction of His betrayal and death. Mark concludes this segment of Christ's public ministry with the healing of blind Bartimaeus.

Although Mark's account is brief, the material in the other Gospels complements what he gives so we have a fairly complete record of this segment of Christ's ministry. While we touched briefly on the content of Mark 10, we will cover certain aspects of this chapter in another chapter of this course. At this point, a study of Matthew's narrative of this period will be helpful.

Discuss Mark's contribution to our understanding of the later Judean/Perean ministry, including any limitations.

The Account in Matthew

Matthew 19:1-20:34

Matthew, like Mark, does not give many details of this period. However, also like Mark, he indicates Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem where He would be betrayed, condemned to die, abused, and crucified (20:17-19). For this reason, we rely on the other Gospel accounts for additional information for this period.

Discuss briefly what Matthew has contributed to our understanding of Christ's later Judean/Perean ministry.

Many scholars believe Christ's later Judean ministry began at the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:2) and continued until the Feast of Dedication of that same year. Be this as it may, we would be in error to make too great a distinction between the Judean and the Perean phases of ministry, especially in terms of specific periods of time. Christ may indeed have spent more of His time in Judea, devoting most of His time in Perea at the last Passover. Even if this is so, it is still evident from the Gospels that He traveled back and forth between these two regions throughout the whole six- or seven-month period.

The Account in Luke

Luke 9:51–19:28

Luke's account of Christ's later Judean/Perean ministry contrasts sharply with the accounts of Mark and Matthew. Whereas their focus on this period is limited, Luke concentrates on it, making it the largest single section of his narrative. Not only is this section the largest in his Gospel, it is also the most difficult in terms of chronology. While we may sense that the events Luke records do not follow a precise chronology, we get the impression that Christ is at, near, or moving toward Jerusalem. In contrast to the other Gospel writers, Luke suggests that Christ's ministry in the final months may not have been limited to Judea and Perea. Based on the other Synoptic accounts and the writings of John, we know Christ traveled extensively in Judea and Perea during this time. However, Luke records a trip on which Christ "traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee." (Compare 9:51–56 with 17:11.)

Luke indicates that Christ's later journey through Samaria (9:51–56) was not as popular as the first (John 4:4–42). He alone of the Gospel writers mentions the commissioning and sending forth of the seventy-two (10:1–17). This event may have taken place either at the end of the Galilean ministry or at the beginning of the later Judean ministry. Although we cannot be sure of this, the return of the seventy seems to have been after Christ withdrew into Judea.

Teaching is the main theme in this section of the narrative. Here Christ appears to alternate between discussions with His disciples and debates with the religious leaders of Israel. Luke records a number of Christ's parables as well as several miracles. In fact, much of the material in this section is unique to his Gospel. Here is a list of the main items Luke records that we find only in his narrative:

1. Christ's journey along the border of Samaria and Galilee on the way to Jerusalem (9:51-56 and 17:11-19)
2. The mission of the seventy-two (10:1-24)
3. The question from the expert of the Law and the Parable of the Good Samaritan (10:25-37)
4. Christ's visit with Mary and Martha in Bethany (10:38-42)
5. Christ's teaching on persistence in prayer (11:1-13)
6. The healing of the crippled woman on the Sabbath (13:10-17)
7. Christ's dinner with a Pharisee (14:1-24)

The remainder of this section of Luke includes material which is similar to that given by Matthew and Mark.

It is increasingly clear from Luke's narrative that Christ is becoming the center of growing controversy because of His claims and ministry. Luke records His debates with the religious leaders and the lessons He gives them more completely than either of the other Synoptic writers. Clearly, the Cross is coming into focus, and Christ realizes His hour of destiny is approaching (Matthew 20:17-19; Mark 10:32-34; Luke 18:31-34).

Note briefly Luke's contribution to our understanding of Christ's later Judean/Perean ministry.

This, then, is Luke's account of this short but important period of Christ's ministry. As we have already stated, Luke does not give the exact locations where many of the events took place, nor does he place events within a time frame. While we may adopt a few tentative ideas on these matters, we should not be too set in our conclusions.

Explain briefly how one may determine the time of Christ's later Judean/Perean ministry.

Summary

In summary, we may list the following general observations:

1. This period covers a possible time span of about six or seven months from the Feast of Tabernacles to Christ's last Passover Feast.
2. Christ's ministry at this time centers almost totally in Judea and Perea with perhaps an occasional trip to other areas.

3. Matthew and Mark deal quite briefly with the events of this period and give little evidence that helps us to locate the events either geographically or chronologically.
 4. Luke records a sizeable amount of material in this section that we can categorize as Christ's teachings. In fact, he writes more about Christ's teachings here than in any other part of his Gospel narrative.
 5. As Luke writes, he tends to alternate between the private teachings of Christ to His disciples and public debates with the experts of the Law and Pharisees.
 6. We are indebted to the Gospel of John for much of our information about this period.
 7. With the passage of time, Christ focuses His attention more completely on teaching His disciples in private. As His crucifixion draws nearer, the need becomes more critical for a group of well-taught followers to continue His work.
 8. Finally, from the tone of Christ's teachings and responses, we sense a rising tide of controversy to His ministry and claims. In spite of miracles and sound teaching, unbelief and criticism increase.
- **a** Indicates that Christ traveled along the border between Judea and Samaria
- 1) Matthew and Mark
 - 2) Luke
 - 3) John
 - 4) Matthew, Mark, and Luke
- **b** Mentions three feasts that serve as indicators of the time sequence involved in the later Judean/Perean ministry
- **c** Indicates that Christ's later Judean/Perean ministry was limited to these two areas
- **d** Mentions that Christ warned the disciples about His betrayal and death in Jerusalem
- **e** Tells about the mission of the seventy-two and gives the Parable of the Good Samaritan

In the adjacent chart, match the name of the writer(s) (right) with the event, parable, or healing especially associated with him or them (left).

Lesson 7.2 The Passion Week

Distinguish the correct definition of the term Passion as it is used in connection with Christ's last week.

Matthew 21:1–26:35; Mark 11:1–14:26; Luke 19:29–22:38

We now approach the time in which Christ was to fulfill the purpose for which He was sent to earth: His Passion. Perhaps you wonder why we use the word *Passion* to describe the events of His final week on earth. We derive this word from the Latin *passio*, which refers to “suffering” and “enduring.” It speaks of the endurance of a submissive victim to afflictions laid upon him. As such, *Passion* speaks forcefully to us of the sufferings of Christ. Although we use *Passion* to describe all of Christ's last week, it refers more specifically to the events of the last two days of His public ministry. These include the Last Supper; His prayer and agony in Gethsemane; and His arrest, trials, crucifixion, death, and burial.

The term *Passion* in this context was used by the Latin ecclesiastical writers as early as the second century AD. It also appeared in the earliest English **litanies** of Christ's sufferings (the 1549 Prayer Book). So when we hear the term *Passion* or *Passion Week* used, it should remind us of Christ's last week and the events that led to His death.

Define the term *Passion* as it refers to Christ's last week.

While our goal is to discuss the events of this last week as completely as possible, we also seek to make them as easy as possible to understand. For this reason, we will approach the narrative on a day-by-day basis and assess the contribution of each writer as we study the events of each day.

What events are indicated by the term *Passion Week*?

Once again, we rely on Mark for most of the specific details, for he gives a clearer account of events on a day-by-day basis than either Matthew or Luke. For example, on a few occasions several events appear to occur on the same day. However, in handling the events of this week, Mark sorts out some of the confusion and relates all of the episodes in a narrative that flows clearly and communicates easily.

We will begin by looking at the day of Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Then we will consider the events of each day and continue through the Last Supper until the time of His arrest.

Day One

Evaluate the Synoptic accounts of day one, and identify the main events and places linked with this day.

Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:29-44

There is some question about whether "the first day of the week" was Sunday or Monday. This leads to some debate when one tries to specifically identify the days and events of the last week before Christ's crucifixion. Since this issue includes various opinions, we should not be too emphatic. Therefore, we have adopted the view held by many in the larger evangelical community that Christ entered Jerusalem on Sunday of the final week. Sunday, then, represents the day of Christ's triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem, or day one. We will fit the events of the next few days into the last week on this basis.

The first day of the week was highlighted by Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He had arrived in Bethany, the town that was to be His headquarters for this last week, on the previous day. Each day, after various activities in Jerusalem, He and His disciples returned to Bethany, which was about two miles from Jerusalem, to rest and spend the night.

As you read the various Synoptic accounts of this day, you may have noted that all the writers begin at the same point. They note Jesus' approach to Jerusalem and the procession that begins at the village where the disciples obtained the donkey (probably Bethphage near Bethany). In addition, they depict the disciples' placing their cloaks on the donkey and the people of the joyous crowds along the way spreading their cloaks on the road in front of the caravan.

Luke gives the most details on the actions of Christ as He moves toward Jerusalem. An example of this is the sorrow Christ expresses for the city as He

foretells its impending destruction. However, of the three narratives, Mark's is the clearest in terms of details that help us place the movements of Christ.

According to Mark, Christ entered the city of Jerusalem in triumph and then visited the temple before He retired to Bethany. This represents clearly all He did on day one. While Matthew and Luke deal with the same general facts, they are not clear on what happened after He entered Jerusalem. If we read Matthew only, we get the impression that Christ arrived in Jerusalem, entered the temple and drove out the money changers, healed the blind and lame, and then went out to Bethany to spend the night. Yet Mark states plainly that Christ entered Jerusalem and went to the temple, looked around, and then returned to Bethany with the Twelve for the night since it was already late. So according to Mark, Christ did not drive out the money changers until the next day. It appears, then, that to reconcile Matthew's account with Mark's, verses 12-14 of Matthew 21 should follow verse 22.

Which Gospel writer provides the clearest details about day one of the Passion Week?

Evaluate briefly the various Synoptic accounts of day one.

Thus ends day one of this important week. Christ has entered Jerusalem to begin preparations for taking part in His last Passover Feast. The next few days will be filled with events, ending in an act that will change the course of history for humanity.

Day Two

List at least two events that occurred on day two, and identify other events that took place on this day.

Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:12-19; Luke 19:45-48

Christ did two things on day two that pointed to His authority as the Son of God. First, He cursed the fig tree, and second, He drove the money changers from the temple.

As you probably noted in the Scripture reading, only Matthew and Mark record the cursing of the fig tree, but all three mention His encounter with the money changers. As a matter of fact, this is the second time Christ has had to deal with

money changers in the temple. According to John 2:15, He had a similar encounter at the beginning of His ministry.

List at least two events that occurred on day two.

Within the context of day two, Matthew adds that Jesus healed the blind and lame who came to Him in the temple (21:14). In addition, Mark says Jesus amazed the crowds with His teaching (11:17-18), and Luke says Christ engaged in teaching every day (19:47). Finally, Mark and Luke make significant remarks about the opposition Christ's activities generated. Mark observes that the chief priests and teachers of the Law began looking for ways to kill Him because they feared His power over the people (11:18). Luke further indicates that the Jewish leaders were finding it difficult to kill Christ because He was accepted by the people (19:47-48).

What did Christ's two main activities on day two reveal about Him?

Day Three

State the feature of day three that is common to all three Synoptic accounts, and identify the main event of this day.

Matthew 21:18-26:5; Mark 11:20-14:2; Luke 20:1-22:2

Up to this point in the last week, the Synoptic writers have needed relatively little space to record the major events of each day. In fact, what they record for the first two days covers less than twenty verses in our Bibles, and their emphases vary a bit. However, in recording the events of day three, the feature they share in common is their emphasis on the teaching of Christ. It includes an abundance of parables as well as the most extensive record of Christ's teaching on future events.

At the beginning of day three, Christ and His disciples move once again from Bethany to Jerusalem. As they walk along, the disciples see that the fig tree Christ had cursed the previous day has withered from its roots.

State briefly the feature of day three that is common to all three Synoptic writers.

Day three begins with controversy as the chief priests, the teachers of the Law, and the elders challenge Christ's authority. Faced with their challenge, Christ engages them and in the process gives the Parable of the Tenants. He also comments on paying taxes to Caesar and responds to their question of marriage at the Resurrection. Then He confounds them with the question, "Whose son is the Christ?" Finally, as the morning ends, He condemns their hypocrisy, as Matthew notes in his rather lengthy account (Matthew 23:1-39).

Both Mark and Luke note that before He leaves the temple, Jesus sits down opposite the temple treasury and watches the people give their offerings. They also record His comments regarding the widow's offering.

In the afternoon, Christ goes out to the Mount of Olives where He delivers His well-known Olivet Discourse on future events, which all three Synoptic writers mention at length. To fully appreciate the importance of Christ's teachings on this subject, we should simply consider the amount of space the writers devote to what He said (Matthew 24:1-25:46; Mark 13:1-37; Luke 21:5-36).

Following this amazing discourse, Christ and His disciples return to Bethany for the night. Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are only two days away. Consequently, the chief priests and elders of the Jews assemble to plot His arrest and death.

Day Four

Matthew 26:6-16; Mark 14:3-11; Luke 22:3-6

Since we have accepted Sunday as the day of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Wednesday is essentially a "silent" day in terms of Christ's activities. While we will place two events on Wednesday, they could have occurred on Tuesday evening. Now we can study each of these events in light of the biblical evidence.

Matthew 26:6-13 and Mark 14:3-9 reveal that Christ has a meal in the home of Simon the Leper. Although we hear nothing more of Simon, it is likely he was one of the lepers whom Christ had healed. Here a woman (unnamed in the Synoptic writers but identified as Mary in John 12:3-8) anoints Christ with a costly perfume. Unfortunately, some of those present understand neither the significance of this act nor the devotion that prompts it, so Christ rebukes their smallness of spirit and commends the act.

Judas Iscariot, who will ultimately betray Christ, makes his first contact with the chief priests at this time. His purpose is to find a convenient time to deliver Christ into their hands. The conspiracy against Christ now moves along rapidly as the traitor awaits a time when he can betray Christ in the absence of the crowds (Matthew 26:14-16; Mark 14:10, 11; Luke 22:3-6).

If these events occurred on Wednesday, they are the only recorded events of this day. If, however, they occurred in the evening after Christ's long day of teaching on Tuesday, then Wednesday is a silent day. Perhaps Christ used this day to rest and be with His disciples. Or He may have used the time to teach His disciples privately. Be this as it may, since we have no concrete evidence, the best we can do is to suggest what He might have done.

Discuss briefly the difficulty we have in studying Christ's activities on day four.

Day Five

Identify the events of day five up through the Last Supper, and explain why some scholars believe the Last Supper and the Passover Meal are the same event on day four.

Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-39

We now arrive at the day that begins the actual Passion of Christ. Before the evening of this day is over, Christ will have had His last meal with His disciples, prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, suffered betrayal and arrest, and begun His trial. (We will discuss these last three matters in Chapter 8.) As we study the accounts of this day's events, we should note that the Synoptic writers give little detail of Christ's activities prior to the incidents that fill the evening.

As the day begins, all three Synoptic writers mention that the disciples ask Christ about preparations for the Passover. They also record His response that indicates where they should go, whom they should ask, and what they should do to secure a room to accommodate those who will share the Last Supper with Him. After these initial questions and Christ's responses, the writers record no further activity until evening and the actual supper.

Before we discuss the Last Supper and related events, we should mention that scholars debate whether the Last Supper was in fact the Passover meal. The Synoptic Gospels indicate clearly that it was, but John indicates that the Feast of the Passover was to be taken on the Friday (day six) on which Christ was crucified (John 18:28, 39; 19:14). This suggests that the Last Supper may have been a meal other than the Passover.

Many Bible scholars believe the weight of evidence favors the view presented by the Synoptic Gospels—namely, that the Last Supper was the Passover meal. This is the

viewpoint we have adopted for this course. As for John's record, we believe it can be explained in a **credible** way to support this view. We raise the issue here simply to let you know that questions of interpretation do arise at times in Scripture. When this occurs, we can find help in many good, sound texts that focus on issues of this kind.

While all three writers include details of the Last Supper, the records of Matthew and Mark are brief. Thus, of the Synoptic writers, Luke gives the most commentary on the Last Supper. In fact, he includes some things the other writers omit. For instance, during the meal a dispute arises among the disciples about which one is considered the greatest (22:24). This dispute and Christ's answer bring into focus the matter of servanthood. Examples of this kind indicate that Luke is careful in recording even seemingly small details.

All three writers record Christ's prediction that one of His disciples will betray Him, and they all write about the ordinance Christ institutes that will become a permanent part of church worship. Strangely enough, the Synoptic writers do not record the episode of Christ's washing the disciples' feet; only John mentions this additional activity in John 13:4-5.

Which Synoptic writers note that Christ institutes the ordinance of the Lord's Supper as an enduring part of His followers' worship?

Following the Passover meal, Christ and His disciples leave the upper room and go to the Mount of Olives. There He predicts Peter's denial. Then they go to Gethsemane where Christ prays earnestly for some time until His arrest. The hour is late, and the forces of darkness are moving to apprehend Him. Fortified by His communion with the Father, our Lord prepares to make the ultimate sacrifice. Thus ends day five.

Summary

As we have seen, this last week has been a busy one for our Lord. There is no doubt from the scriptural context that Christ is aware of its significance. He knows this is a difficult and traumatic time for the disciples in general and disastrous in particular for one—Judas. At the outset, He realizes that with the exception of two or three days of teaching and debate, He has said all He has to say. Of course, He will teach during His postresurrection appearances to His disciples, but then the relationship will be different.

During this time, we catch an occasional glimpse of Christ's depth of feeling. Weeping over the city of Jerusalem especially reveals His concern, for He knows the

ultimate destiny of the city and its people. In this same vein, He discloses a general outline of the course of the age in His teaching on the future. We do not know if this is the only time Christ unveiled the future. But we do know He chose this week to give some of His clearest teaching on the events at the end of this age. All three Synoptic writers note this emphasis and record His teaching on this subject in considerable detail (Matthew 24:1-25:46; Mark 13:1-37; Luke 21:5-36).

The emphasis of this week seems to be more on the teachings of Christ than His miracles. In fact, these teachings brought Him into sharp controversy with the religious leaders. We also see an increase in the activity of the Sadducees and the scribes. In the past, the Pharisees seemed to be the religious leaders who contended most with Christ. One reason for this was the Pharisees' connection with the synagogues scattered throughout the land of the Jews. The Sadducees and chief priests, on the other hand, were confined to the temple in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, when it became apparent to the chief priests that Christ's teachings conflicted with their own interests, they determined to kill Him. From the human perspective, then, it was as much the wrath of the Sadducees as the ire of the Pharisees that brought Christ to His death.

As the events of the week move toward their climax, we see Judas give in to the temptation of Satan and then make his tragic decision. Even though Christ is fully aware of this traitorous act, the presence of the powers of darkness, and all that will happen, He does not waiver from His decision that will ultimately pay the penalty for the sins of all people and provide an opportunity for them to be freed from sin's power.

Most Christians find it difficult to read the accounts of this week without feeling the mounting tension. As one attempts to imagine himself/herself in the place of Christ as He sees the events unfold so prophetically, one becomes aware of the remarkable act that is about to occur. The drama of the age is about to reach its most climactic hour.

This week that began with the triumphal entry into Jerusalem reaches to Gethsemane. In our next chapter, we will take up the narrative in Gethsemane and continue through Christ's ascension into heaven.

Chapter 8 The Arrest, Trial, Crucifixion, and Resurrection

This chapter brings us to the end of the second unit. The accounts of Christ's early years and the preparations for His disclosure to Israel represented the emphasis of Chapter 5. Next, we examined His early ministry in Galilee and later His extended activity there. Then in Chapter 7, we considered His later ministry in Judea and Perea in the period just before the Passion Week. Now we turn to the chain of events that begins with His arrest in Gethsemane and ends with His ascension.

As you consider the Scripture reading for this chapter, you should note that all the Synoptic writers document the events of this period thoroughly, especially from the point of Christ's arrest. They apparently felt led to stress the events of this period, as well as those of the Passion Week, more than some earlier periods in Christ's life. Undoubtedly, they did so because the Crucifixion and the Resurrection have special meaning and significance for all of us who name Christ as Savior. Indeed, these culminating acts in Christ's life give us the opportunity to be participants in His kingdom. So it is altogether fitting and proper for us to celebrate them in remembrance of Him.

As we address the events in this chapter, may we be inspired by our Lord's devotion to the redemption of all people so that we will be committed to follow in His steps.

Lesson 8.1 The Place Called Gethsemane and the Arrest

Objectives

- 8.1.1 Explain the significance of the events that occurred in Gethsemane.*
- 8.1.2 Identify important details of the arrest, and state in which of the Synoptic Gospels each is located.*

Lesson 8.2 The Trial

Objectives

- 8.2.1 Identify events related to the trial, including the various charges brought against Christ, and discuss the nature of the trial.*

Lesson 8.3 The Crucifixion and Burial

Objectives

- 8.3.1 Describe important details of the Crucifixion and distinguish Christ's last sayings from His other sayings.*
- 8.3.2 Identify important details about the burial of Christ and people and events related to it.*

Lesson 8.4 The Resurrection

Objectives

8.4.1 *Indicate the possible order of the resurrection appearances of Christ.*

8.4.2 *Identify facts about the postresurrection appearances of Christ recorded in the Scriptures.*

Lesson 8.1 The Place Called Gethsemane and the Arrest

At the end of Chapter 7, we noted that following the Passover meal, Christ and His disciples went to the Mount of Olives. There, Christ predicted that all of the disciples would fall away and disown Him that very night. From this particular location, the group moved to a place called Gethsemane. With these background facts in mind, we will turn our attention to the events that take place in Gethsemane and end with Christ's arrest.

The Place Called Gethsemane

Explain the significance of the events that occurred in Gethsemane.

Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46

As you have probably noticed, the Synoptic accounts of Christ's activities from the end of the Lord's Supper to the walk into Gethsemane are very brief. John gives a far more complete account of this period (John 13:31-17:26).

In reading the Scripture passages for this section, you may have found a slight difference in the Synoptic accounts. While Mark and Matthew note the transition from the Last Supper to the Mount of Olives and then to a place called Gethsemane, Luke does not mention this. Gethsemane was the name of a garden across the Kidron Valley, east of the temple area, at the foot of the Mount of Olives. Apparently it was not far from the place where Jesus "went out as usual to the Mount of Olives" (Luke 22:39) to the "place called Gethsemane" (Matthew 26:36; Mark 14:32).

Gethsemane was near what well-known landmark?

As we briefly summarize the events in the Garden just before Christ's arrest we observe that the Synoptic writers indicate that all of the disciples went with Christ to the Garden. You may be wondering whether *all* refers to all twelve of the disciples or only the remaining eleven. Although the Synoptic writers mention that Christ predicted His betrayal during the Last Supper, they do not say when Judas actually left the group to carry out his part in the conspiracy against Christ. However, John sheds some helpful light on this matter. He states that when Christ identified Judas as His betrayer, Judas left the group (John 13:24-30).

Matthew and Mark state that, after reaching Gethsemane, Christ took Peter, James, and John into the Garden, leaving the other disciples at its edge. While Luke does not mention the separation of the disciples, he does note that Christ left the disciples, "withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them," and then knelt down and prayed (Luke 22:41). It is not clear whether he means a stone's throw from the main body of the disciples or from the three. In any case, Matthew and Mark do record that after admonishing the three to stay and keep watch with Him, the Master went "a little farther" to pray. This could possibly be the stone's throw Luke mentions, although it appears that the three select disciples were a little closer to Jesus than that. Since the term *stone's throw* is indefinite, it could represent quite some distance.

We do not want to belabor a point on which the Gospels are not exact. However, students of Scripture have often wondered just how close the three were to Christ while He was praying. Being close to Him as He agonized in prayer yet sleeping indicates their apathy to Christ and His need at this critical hour.

Matthew and Mark provide a good outline of the order of Christ's prayer. According to them, He entered the Garden with the three, left them at a specific location, went a little farther, and prayed for about an hour (Matthew 26:40; Mark 14:37). Returning to the three and finding them sleeping led Him to chide them about their apparent lack of concern. We do not know if they awoke at this time and then went back to sleep. We do know that after His first session of prayer and disappointment with the sleeping disciples, Christ returned for another season of prayer with His Father. When He returned the second time to the three disciples, they were either again or still sleeping. To say the least, the disciples were speechless (Mark 14:40). Leaving them, He retired for a third period of prayer. Finally, returning to the disciples, He woke them and announced His imminent betrayal.

While Matthew and Mark give more details concerning who went into the Garden, Luke deals more specifically with Christ's agony in the Garden. He states that after Christ prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42), an angel appeared from heaven to strengthen Him. Christ's last plea was full of emotion and anguish: If it were the Father's will, He asked to be spared the awful suffering that lay ahead. The intensity of His prayer and the

anguish of His soul were so great that His sweat fell like drops of blood to the ground. What was it that Christ recoiled from? It was not from the physical suffering, although He surely did not look forward to that. While we cannot know just what He faced in this lonely hour, we can be certain the prospect that filled Him with such horror was God's judgment on our sin. The *cup* involved paying the penalty that would have been ours had not Christ paid it for us (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

Discuss the significance of the events that occurred in Gethsemane.

The Arrest

Identify important details of the arrest, and state in which of the Synoptic Gospels each is located.

Matthew 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-52; Luke 22:47-53

The Synoptic writers give a brief and forthright account of the arrest. Immediately after Christ awakens His three sleeping disciples, Judas and a crowd armed with swords and clubs arrive. When we compare the three Synoptic accounts with the one given in John 18:1-12, it appears the crowd was composed of Roman soldiers (John alone mentions the soldiers) who were probably attached to temple duty, Jewish officials who were sent by the chief priests, Judas, and possibly some curious onlookers. All the Synoptics record that Judas kissed Christ. This was a prearranged signal to identify the one to be arrested.

Each Synoptic writer, as well as John, includes something unique about the arrest. Especially note the following:

1. Matthew alone of the Synoptic writers indicates that Christ could have been rescued from the situation by calling on twelve legions of angels (Matthew 26:53).
2. Mark mentions that a young man followed Christ who wore nothing but a linen garment. He was seized by the crowd but escaped and fled naked, leaving his garment behind him. As suggested earlier in this course, this may have been Mark himself (Mark 14:51-52).
3. Luke is the only Gospel writer to mention that Christ healed the ear of the high priest's servant, which had been cut off by one of Christ's companions (Luke 22:50-51).

4. John supplements the Synoptic accounts by noting the name of the companion who cut off the servant's ear—Peter—and the name of the servant—Malchus (John 18:10).

In summary, we note that as the crowd moves to arrest Him, Christ is completely in command. There is a serene dignity about Him throughout this traumatic event. He expresses only love for the traitor. Thus, when Peter draws his sword and attacks the servant of the high priest, Christ heals the injured man. No one could have better controlled the situation. He had come to fulfill the Scriptures, and He knew it must be so. As He submitted to what had to be, His followers deserted Him. Then, turning to His captors, He said, "This is your hour—when darkness reigns" (Luke 22:53).

At this point, it is probably right at the midnight hour or perhaps a bit after. Events now move quickly to the circumstances of the trial.

... a	Notes in general that Christ	1) Matthew
	healed the ear of the high	2) Mark
	priest's servant	3) Luke
		4) John

... **b** Identifies Peter as the one who cut off the ear of the high priest's servant named Malchus

... **c** Records that Christ could have been defended by twelve legions of angels

... **d** Observes that a young man who followed Christ was seized by the crowd but escaped, leaving his garment behind

... **e** Says that part of the crowd was composed of a detachment of soldiers

In the adjacent chart, match the appropriate Gospel (right) with the information it gives about the arrest of Christ (left).

Lesson 8.2 The Trial

Identify events related to the trial, including the various charges brought against Christ, and discuss the nature of the trial.

Matthew 26:57-27:31; Mark 14:53-15:20; Luke 22:54-23:25

As we approach the various aspects of the trial, events become a bit more complex. Recognizing the importance of this time, the Gospel writers devote a considerable amount of material to the episodes from the arrest to the Crucifixion. Perhaps the best way to treat this section is to list each event in a series of short paragraphs. Enumerating the action in this way can help you understand the strategic flow of events more easily.

1. The Synoptic Gospels indicate that Christ was taken directly to the house of Caiaphas, the current high priest. However, John states more specifically that Christ was first taken to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was a former high priest (John 18:12-14). Although he was not the ruling high priest, Annas exercised considerable influence in Jewish religious affairs. Many Bible scholars feel he was the real power behind the Sadducean priesthood. Consequently, they conclude that the hearing before Annas was arranged so he could determine the direction and conclusion of the trial that followed.

2. Annas questioned Christ on two specific points: His doctrine and His disciples. Receiving what he felt were unsatisfactory answers to his questions, Annas sent Christ to Caiaphas for further examination. Some have speculated that Caiaphas' home was a large structure surrounded by a courtyard. With Annas' position as "high priest emeritus" and his considerable influence in relation to the high priest in office, he could easily have had quarters in this house in addition to a larger home elsewhere in the city. If this were the case, the hearing and subsequent examination by Caiaphas may have occurred in the same house.

3. During the examination at Caiaphas' house, the chief priests and the Sanhedrin attempted to find evidence against Christ in order to put Him to death. One method they used was to produce false witnesses to testify against Him. Unfortunately for the chief priests, their testimonies did not agree and most of the evidence was not admissible. They did manage to achieve their purpose, however, when the high priest asked Christ, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" Christ responded, "I am" (Mark 14:61-62). At this, the high priest tore his clothes, declaring,

“Why do we need any more witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?” (vv. 63–64). The members of the Sanhedrin responded by indicating that He was worthy of death.

4. Peter followed Christ when the mob led Him away to the high priest’s residence. In fact, when they took Christ inside to be examined by the high priest, Peter went right into the courtyard and sat with the guards as they warmed themselves at a fire. While he was there, some of those present questioned him three times about his involvement with Christ. First, a servant girl of the high priest accused Peter of being “with that Nazarene, Jesus” (Mark 14:67), which he denied. Later she repeated the accusation to others who were standing near the entryway, and again he denied it. Finally, those who were standing near Peter accused him of being an associate of the Lord, observing that his Galilean accent betrayed him. After Peter denied on oath that he knew Christ, a rooster crowed. Peter then remembered Christ’s prediction that this would occur, and he went out and wept bitterly (Matthew 26:34, 75).

We want to note two additional things here. First, the crowing rooster gives us an indication of the approximate time of these proceedings. Second, to paraphrase William Lane in his commentary on the Gospel of Mark, Galileans are often mentioned in the Talmud in regard to their dialect. They seem to have been unable to distinguish between several of the **guttural** sounds that are so essential in Semitic languages. Peter’s speech revealed clearly to the Judeans in the courtyard that he was a Galilean. They then deduced that he was a follower of Christ (Lane 1974, 542).

5. With the coming dawn, the whole Sanhedrin met and came to a decision. They would recommend that the Roman governor put Christ to death for blasphemy.

6. By this time, Judas, seeing that Christ would be condemned, was seized with remorse. In his anguish, he attempted to return the thirty pieces of silver he had received for betraying Christ to the chief priests. But they were unimpressed by his confession of sin and made it clear they were not interested in Christ’s innocence, Judas’ stricken conscience, or the money. Judas threw the money into the temple, went out, and hanged himself.

7. Since Roman officials were the only ones authorized to approve the death penalty, the chief priests and elders took Christ to Pilate, the Roman governor. They hoped he would give his permission to put Christ to death. In their efforts to influence the governor, they accused Christ of a variety of crimes. But after questioning Jesus about the charge concerning His claim to be the king of the Jews, Pilate found no basis for executing Him. The religious leaders would not accept this decision, declaring, “He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here” (Luke 23:5). When he learned that Jesus was a

Galilean who was legally under the **jurisdiction** of Herod, Pilate sent Him to Herod for judgment, because Herod was in Jerusalem at the time.

8. Although Herod wanted to meet Christ, he apparently had no desire to make a final judgment on this case. So he questioned Him closely, ridiculed and mocked Him, and then sent Him back to Pilate.

9. Pilate now found himself in a difficult situation. Having found no basis for a charge against Christ, he wanted merely to punish Him and then release Him. Yet the Jewish leaders refused to consider this possibility. Knowing the mentality of a mob, they stirred up the passions of the people, inciting them to demand the death of Jesus. Seeing that his arguments regarding Christ's innocence were ineffective, Pilate began to fear the consequences of not agreeing with the religious leaders. He knew from painful experience the fanatical zeal of many Jews toward their religion, and he did not want to provoke any incident that might bring about another bloody confrontation.

10. The charge of blasphemy was not what finally caused Pilate to agree with the wishes of the Sanhedrin members. Seeing that religious matters were of no concern to Pilate, they accused Christ of claiming to be a king and in conflict with the rule of Rome. This charge was treason and therefore represented a political threat Pilate could not ignore.

11. At this point, the people asked Pilate to do what he usually did for them at the time of the Passover (Mark 15:8): grant **amnesty** to a prisoner. By agreeing to this custom, Pilate permitted the crowd to choose freedom for Barabbas, a freedom fighter and murderer, and crucifixion for Christ.

12. Following this decision, Pilate had Christ flogged, then led to the Roman Praetorium (palace), and handed over to a company of soldiers. Here they prepared a crown of thorns and set it on Him, dressed Him in a purple robe, mocked and beat Him, and finally led Him away to be crucified.

We have seen in the preceding paragraphs that the Synoptic writers indicate that Christ was led from the Garden to the house of Caiaphas for examination. There the chief priests and elders tried to find evidence that would enable them to secure the death penalty. When their witnesses failed to agree on any charge, they accused Christ of blasphemy, because He claimed to be the Son of God, and sentenced Him to die. Early in the morning, the Sanhedrin ratified this sentence. While blasphemy carried a death penalty under Jewish law, under Roman rule Jews were not empowered to carry out the death penalty. So these leaders took Christ to the Roman governor, Pilate, to secure His conviction. However, they found that Pilate was not interested in offenses against Jewish religious law. Since Christ was under Herod's jurisdiction, Pilate sent Him to Herod, who likewise found Him innocent of any capital offense and sent Him back to Pilate. To be sure Pilate would ratify the sentence, the

religious leaders now accused Christ of treason. Rather than risk an unfavorable report reaching the emperor, Pilate condemned Christ to death.

List the phases of the trial in probable order and indicate whether they represented Roman or Jewish phases.

What was the accusers' reaction when Pilate rejected the charges based on Jewish religious law?

In analyzing the trial, we see that it was highly irregular. It was conducted at night, and there were no defense witnesses. The witnesses for the prosecution did not agree, and treason was not in their preliminary charge against Christ. Furthermore, the death sentence should not have been pronounced until the day following the trial. As a result, a convicted murderer was freed, and Christ was flogged, sentenced, and led away to die.

John's account is helpful in our study of the trial. The details he gives suggest he was close to the events. For example, he notes that the night was cold and that the officials stood around the fire to warm themselves (18:18). He also tells of the official's striking Jesus when He responded to the high priest (18:22) and mentions the Jews' religious convictions that prevented them from entering the house of the Roman governor at this time (18:28). Finally, John gives us a record of Pilate's exchanges with Jesus (18:33-37; 19:9-11), the governor's exchanges with the Jews (18:38-40; 19:4-7, 12-16) and the incredible apostasy of the Jews revealed in their statement, "We have no king but Caesar" (19:15). Now the Passover Lamb was ready to be offered, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18).

Lesson 8.3 The Crucifixion and Burial

The Crucifixion

Describe important details of the Crucifixion and distinguish Christ's last sayings from His other sayings.

Matthew 27:32-56; Mark 15:21-41; Luke 23:26-49

As we reflect on the process of the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus, we see that it was accomplished in a relatively short time. At about midnight He was arrested, and by 9:00 in the morning, He was crucified. Compared with the events of His entire life, the time lapse for this critical period was very short indeed.

In the previous section, we listed the events of the trial to show the development. Our intent was not to present a commentary on goodness, evil, or moral values. That subject is for another study. In the same way, we will study the Crucifixion by enumerating the events associated with it rather than reflecting on the moral issues involved.

It has been estimated that the road to Golgotha, the "place of the skull," was about one kilometer or one-half a mile from the Praetorium. For reasons not stated in the Gospels, a certain man named Simon from Cyrene was forced to carry the cross on which Christ was crucified. Many people believe Christ was far too weak after His beatings to carry His own cross this distance. Two other men also walked along this road to be crucified with Him. While they were charged as *robbers*, the word from which this term is translated also referred to political rebels. According to custom, someone carried a written charge before each criminal on his way to execution, stating the offense on which he had been convicted. Thus, the two were charged as robbers or political revolutionaries, and Jesus was charged as the "King of the Jews."

To those of us for whom the death of Christ means so much, endless pages could be written on the significance of the Crucifixion. At this time, however, we want to isolate a few facts of which you should be aware during our Lord's short period of agony.

About six hours passed between Christ's crucifixion and His death. The Gospel writers have divided this time segment into two periods. The first period extended from the third to the sixth hour (9:00 a.m.-12:00 noon), during which the soldiers cast lots for Christ's garments. Then, in the second period, darkness came over the whole land from the sixth to the ninth hour (12:00-3:00 p.m.), at the end of which Christ died.

Describe the crucifixion of Christ, including the time involved in this ordeal.

During the approximate six hours Christ hung on the cross, He uttered seven sayings that have become well known to Christians through the years. We list them and their writers here as they appear in the *New International Version* of the Bible.

1. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).
2. "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

3. "Dear woman, here is your son, ... Here is your mother" (John 19:26-27).
4. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34).
5. "I am thirsty" (John 19:28).
6. "It is finished" (John 19:30).
7. "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

When He had uttered these last words, Christ died, and with His death at least three phenomena occurred. First, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. Second, Matthew notes that "the earth shook and the rocks split" (Matthew 27:51) and links it with the third phenomenon. Third, the tombs of some who believed in Christ but had died before His death were opened, and their bodies were raised to life. Matthew says that after Christ's resurrection these resurrected believers appeared to many in Jerusalem.

State the three phenomena that occurred when Christ died.

The Burial

Identify important details about the burial of Christ and people and events related to it.

Matthew 27:57-66; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56

Christ was crucified on Preparation Day, the day before the Sabbath. For this reason, the religious leaders wanted to avoid defiling the area with dead bodies. Moreover, the Law said that the bodies of those who were killed because of capital offenses must not be left unburied overnight (Deuteronomy 21:23). So they urged Pilate to hasten the death of the victims and have the bodies removed before sunset. To hasten death, usually the legs of the condemned were forcibly broken. The soldiers carried out Pilate's order, breaking the legs of the two robbers who were crucified with Jesus. Yet when the soldiers approached Christ, they found He was already dead. While they did not break His legs, they did pierce His side with a spear to ensure He was dead, bringing forth a sudden flow of blood and water (John 19:31-35). John adds an appropriate commentary: "These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: 'Not one of his bones will be broken,' and, as another scripture says, 'They will look on the one they have pierced' " (vv. 36-37).

Here again we see John's careful attention to detail. Not only does he mention the spear wound in Christ's side, but he also apparently implies more than our Lord's death. He saw special significance in the flow of blood and water. As a Jew, to John the blood represented sacrifice and the water cleansing. The blood atones for a person's sins, and the water gives that person a fresh, new beginning. Christ's death therefore brings forgiveness and new life to people.

Two men played an important role in Jesus' burial: Joseph of Arimathea, a secret disciple of Jesus, and the Pharisee, Nicodemus (John 19:38-42), the latter whom John alone mentions. The amazing thing about these men is that both were members of the Jewish Council (Sanhedrin). While this Council in general opposed Christ and His teachings and actively participated in His death, some members believed in His genuineness. Joseph, in particular, went to Pilate and asked for permission to bury Christ's body, and Nicodemus went with him. Pilate gave his consent, and the two men prepared and buried the body of Christ in a tomb Joseph had purchased near the place of the Crucifixion. They completed this task before sunset on Friday. Both Matthew and Mark record that Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where Jesus was buried.

What two Jewish leaders publicly revealed sympathy toward Jesus following the Crucifixion?
What does this indicate about the Sanhedrin's condemnation of Jesus?

We conclude this section on Christ's burial by noting that the chief priests and Pharisees on the next day, that is, after the Crucifixion (the Sabbath), asked Pilate to make the tomb secure. He granted their wish by putting a seal on the stone and posting a guard.

Lesson 8.4 The Resurrection

Indicate the possible order of the resurrection appearances of Christ.

Identify facts about the postresurrection appearances of Christ recorded in the Scriptures.

In all probability Christ was buried before sunset on Friday afternoon, lay in the tomb through all of Saturday, and rose from the tomb before sunrise on Sunday. If this is the case, how do we interpret the numerous passages of Scripture that indicate Christ would die and rise again on the third day (Matthew 16:21; 17:23; Mark 9:31; Luke 9:22; 18:33)? The question is essentially this: Do these passages refer to three whole days or parts of days? Although this question has been discussed at length, the generally accepted view is that they refer to parts of days as well as whole days. The Jews, Greeks, and Romans, particularly in those days, counted a part of a day as a whole day. Therefore, they considered part of Friday, all of Saturday, and part of Sunday to be three days. Thus, as Christ anticipated being crucified on Friday and rising on Sunday, it was correct for Him to say, "I will rise on the third day."

Each Synoptic writer devotes the last chapter of his narrative to the resurrection appearances of Christ. Matthew and Mark give a rather brief treatment of this subject (twenty verses each), whereas Luke gives it an extended treatment (fifty-three verses). Although John's account is more detailed and extensive than any of the Synoptics are (two chapters and a total of fifty-six verses), we will focus on the three Synoptic records since this is a Synoptic study. We will draw from John when we need to clarify our understanding of the whole picture.

It has always been a bit difficult to harmonize the Synoptic accounts of events that occurred during the final period of Christ's life on earth. At a glance, one would think that each of the writers had a different story to tell. Yet a closer look at what they are saying will show that the problem is not one of contradiction; rather, it is one of emphasis or the lack thereof. For instance, if two writers report on the same event, and each emphasizes certain aspects and deletes details of others, this does not necessarily mean that one is contradicting the other. To illustrate what we mean, we will look at each Synoptic account to see how it compares with the others and where any difficulties lie. After that we will attempt to harmonize the accounts to show how all fit together to give us the most complete portrait possible.

Tell briefly how Christ fulfilled His promise to rise from the dead on the third day.

According to Matthew

Matthew 28:1-20

Matthew notes that after the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, two women, Mary Magdalene and another Mary, come to the tomb. There they meet an

angel seated on the stone in front of the tomb. He tells them Christ is risen and urges them to go tell His disciples that He has gone before them into Galilee. The women then leave to tell this news to the disciples and meet Jesus on the way. He greets them, tells them not to be afraid, and instructs them to tell His brethren to leave for Galilee, where they will see Him. Matthew then records an incident relating to the guards at the tomb and the story they give to the chief priests and elders (28:11-15). After this, Matthew records only one other postresurrection appearance of Christ, when He appears to the Eleven in Galilee.

According to Mark

Mark 16:1-20

Mark says three women went to the tomb early on Sunday morning: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. According to him, they saw an angel and received the same news Matthew records (Mark 16:1-8).

Beginning with verse 9, Mark gives further details on the appearances of Christ. First, he indicates that Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene. Then she went to tell His disciples the good news, but unfortunately they did not believe her. Second, Jesus appeared to two men while they were walking in the country. When these two became aware of the reality of the risen Christ, they returned to tell the disciples, but the disciples did not believe them either. Finally, Jesus appeared to the Eleven while they were eating and rebuked them for refusing to believe in His resurrection. This scene concludes Mark's account of the resurrection appearances of Christ.

According to Luke

Luke 24:1-53

We have seen that both Matthew and Mark give fairly simple, straightforward accounts of Christ's postresurrection appearances. As you probably noted, Luke's account differs somewhat in the details of these events. He begins by saying, "The women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb" (v. 1). Later he tells us that the group included "Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them" (v. 10), implying that many went to the tomb together. Furthermore, while they were at the tomb, he asserts that they saw not one but two angels who gave them news of the resurrection (vv. 4-8).

Now Luke writes about the disciples' reaction to the Resurrection, adding some facts that neither of the other Synoptic writers mentions. He indicates that after the women report what they have seen to the Eleven, Peter runs to the tomb to see for himself what has happened (vv. 9-12). Luke then tells about Christ's experience with

the two on the road to Emmaus. At this point, Luke's story differs from that of Matthew. Luke says that when the two from Emmaus recognized Jesus, they returned immediately to Jerusalem to tell the Eleven. While they were speaking to the Eleven about this matter, Christ appeared to them all (vv. 13-36). However, Matthew moves immediately from Christ's appearance to the women running from the tomb (Matthew 28:5-11) to His appearance to the Eleven in Galilee (vv. 16-20). How do we reconcile what appear to be conflicting accounts?

In our efforts to find a solution for this problem, we need to include references from the Gospel of John, which gives the most detailed account of the events after the Resurrection. For ease of understanding, we can list a possible sequence of events as we attempt to harmonize the various Gospel accounts in what appears to be a disagreement:

1. At dawn there is an earthquake, and the stone is rolled away. The terrified soldiers, paralyzed for a moment, return to the city to report to the religious leaders.
2. Mary Magdalene and other women coming to the tomb find it empty and see one or two angels. Mary, leaving the other women at the tomb, runs to tell the disciples. The remaining women enter the tomb, see both angels, and are informed of the Resurrection.
3. Peter and John arrive ahead of Mary, find the tomb empty, and leave.
4. Mary, possibly arriving after Peter and John leave, stays at the tomb weeping. At this time Jesus appears to her (Mark 16:9-11; John 20:11-18).
5. Jesus then appears to the other women (Matthew 28:9-10).
6. At about this time, Christ also appears to Peter (Luke 24:33-35; 1 Corinthians 15:5).
7. In roughly the same time period, He appears to the two men on the road to Emmaus (Mark 16:12-13; Luke 24:13-32).
8. Next He appears to the disciples in a home (Mark 16:14; Luke 24:33-43; John 20:19-23). Whether this home was in Galilee or Jerusalem seems unclear; yet it appears to be Jerusalem, because all of these appearances seem to occur on Resurrection Sunday.
9. A week later He appears once again to the disciples (John 20:26-31).
10. From then until His ascension, Christ appeared on numerous occasions to various people and groups of people.

While you should not consider the foregoing list absolute, it is an attempt to resolve some of the confusion that has arisen over the various accounts of the Resurrection. We should remember that as different writers explain any given event, they tend to emphasize some details and exclude others. This does not mean the

emphasis of one writer makes the emphasis of another incorrect. It is easy for a writer to jump from one high point of a narrative to another high point and leave out many details that would otherwise make the whole episode much clearer. This quite possibly is what occurred, not only in the resurrection narrative, but also in other areas of the gospel story that are unclear.

Briefly contrast Luke's and Matthew's resurrection accounts.

The Ascension

The Synoptic commentary on Christ's ascension is extremely brief. While Matthew does not mention it at all, Mark and Luke give it only one verse each (Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51). Nor does John discuss this event in his account. Were it not for the book of Acts, we would have very little information on Jesus' final act on earth.

Of the two accounts of Christ's ascension, Luke supplies a bit more information than Mark. He indicates that Christ ascended from the vicinity of Bethany. While he does not say much about this event in his Gospel, Luke does indicate in Acts that the time between the Resurrection and the Ascension was forty days (Acts 1:3). He notes that Christ spent the greatest amount of this time teaching His select disciples, just as He had done in the days immediately before the Passion Week.

The Ascension brought to a close Christ's earthly ministry. It also brings us to the end of our narrative of the Synoptic Gospels. Our last unit of study will center on ways to tie the events of Christ's life into a message that has significance for all people of all ages.

Unit 3 The Message

The last unit of this course begins with a shift from emphasizing the historical events of the life of Christ to emphasizing the various aspects of His public ministry. These aspects include His teachings, His treatment of the kingdom of God, His parables, and His miracles. Studying what the Synoptic Gospels reveal of His life from

the time of His birth until His ascension gave us helpful insights into the Man and His activities. As a result, we are better prepared to study His message.

Chapter 9 The Teachings of Christ

- 9.1 Christ the Teacher
- 9.2 Christ's Teaching Methods
- 9.3 Christ's Goal in Teaching
- 9.4 Christ's Major Teaching Themes

Chapter 10 The Kingdom of God

- 10.1 Terms Associated with the Kingdom
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Chapter 11 The Parables of Jesus

- 11.1 Defining and Interpreting Parables
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Chapter 12 The Miracles of Jesus

- 12.1 The Nature of Miracles
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Chapter 13 Conclusions

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Chapter 3 The Teachings of Christ

With our new emphasis on Christ's teachings in view, we need to ask certain questions. For example, what was the primary focus of His teachings? What methods did He use that made Him such an effective teacher? What did He mean when He spoke about the kingdom of God? Did His miracles and the parables fulfill a special purpose? If so, what was it? We will introduce these and other questions in this unit.

As we turn to the teachings of Christ in this chapter, we want to consider not only what each Synoptic writer records about them but also Christ's method, goals, and example. Our goal is not to merely learn *about* our Lord; rather, we should pray that we may know Him better so others may see His likeness in us. May we embrace His vision, His total commitment, and His passion for people. This is a worthy goal.

Lesson 9.1 Christ the Teacher

Objective

9.1.1 *Explain how Christ used teaching as His primary means of instruction, and identify the qualities of the Master Teacher.*

Lesson 9.2 Christ's Teaching Methods

Objectives

9.2.1 *Describe the teaching methods Christ used in the Synoptic Gospels.*

9.2.2 *Compare and contrast the methods each Synoptic writer used to present Christ's teachings.*

Lesson 9.3 Christ's Goal in Teaching

Objective

9.3.1 *Discuss the relationship between Christ's teachings and His ultimate redemptive purpose.*

Lesson 9.4 Christ's Major Teaching Themes

Objective

9.4.1 *Identify major points from selected themes on which Christ taught.*

Lesson 9.1 Christ the Teacher

Explain how Christ used teaching as His primary means of instruction, and identify the qualities of the Master Teacher.

People often say that Christ was a *Master Teacher*. Why is this true? Quite simply, He demonstrated the qualities of a good teacher more than any other person. His teachings were superior to those of anyone else, and the methods He used and the results He achieved in changing people's lives excelled those of any other teacher.

In communicating the good news to people, Christ used various means. For example, Matthew says He moved through Galilee teaching, preaching, and healing (Matthew 4:23). While preaching was one means, it was not the primary means He used. The word translated as *preaching* comes from the Greek word **kerusso**, which means "to announce, to make known by a herald publicly." While teaching is related, it refers less to public proclamation and more to "imparting instruction" (Greek, **didaskalia**). A careful study of the Gospels indicates that Christ used teaching more than any other means to convey His message to the world.

Christ had a special relationship with His followers. While it is true that He spoke to the multitudes on occasion, He gave most of His time to a chosen few. They became *disciples* or learners and entered a special relationship with Him. Within this small, intimate group, He communicated truth by teaching. In fact, small group discussions more often than not lend themselves to teaching as an effective means of communication. Thus the disciples interacted with Him on an informal basis, learned from Him, and came to share His attitudes, actions, and values. They were devoted to Him and wanted to be like Him. He served as the living and acting model they wanted to imitate.

Reading about Christ's teaching in the Gospels reveals certain characteristics of Christ the Teacher. First, we learn that He loved those whom He taught. He was moved by their needs and had compassion on them (Matthew 9:36; Mark 6:34), so He taught them many things. Second, He knew His students because He knew human nature (John 2:24-25), and He spent time with them. Third, He knew His subject, enabling Him to speak with authority. At the age of twelve, He amazed the teachers with His knowledge (Luke 2:46-47). Later, in His public ministry, His hearers were amazed at His knowledge (John 7:15-17) and the authority with which He taught (Matthew 7:28-29; Mark 1:21-28).

Explain briefly how Christ used teaching as His primary means of communicating truth to His disciples.

Fourth, as a master teacher, Christ demonstrated that He knew how to teach. Our Lord knew how to use different methods to impart knowledge. He knew that effective teaching involves guiding students' learning activities. For example, on some occasions when He used parables or illustrations, He paused to explain or clarify what

He was saying (Matthew 19:22-26; Mark 4:2-20) or did so soon afterward. He guided learners' thoughts from the known to the unknown, from the common events of everyday life to truths in the spiritual realm. He used questions to guide them in their search for truth (Matthew 16:13-20).

Knowing how to teach also meant Christ shared His knowledge of God and of spiritual truth through His words, actions, and attitudes. He was always in control and able to adapt to each situation so He could maximize the effect of His teaching (Matthew 13:1-2). Even when His enemies tried to disrupt His teaching, He dealt with their questions and used the disruption to teach important spiritual truth (compare Matthew 22:1-14 with 15-22, 23-33, and 34-46). The fact that He always used the right approach shows that He planned carefully. Above all, He cared for people, and they sensed this clearly.

Fifth, Christ the Master Teacher lived what He taught. All that He did and said flowed out of His being. He stated that His purpose was to do what pleased the Father (John 8:29), and this provided an example of the life that pleases God. Unlike some who say, "Do as I say but not as I do," He said, "I am the way" (John 14:6). Everyone who ever came in contact with Him could say as Pilate said, "I find no fault in him" (John 19:4, KJV). We might say a teacher's life gives expression to his or her thoughts, motives, and character and reveals what he or she truly is. This is what a teacher communicates to students.

All the foregoing characteristics of Christ's teaching indicate why He was a master teacher. They also reveal why He chose to communicate through the medium of teaching. While we have discussed Christ's primary means of conveying truth and the characteristics of the Master Teacher, we have not focused on the methods He used with such effectiveness. We will discuss them in the next section.

Briefly name the characteristics of Christ as Master Teacher.

Lesson 9.2 Christ's Teaching Methods

Describe the teaching methods Christ used in the Synoptic Gospels.

We could write much on the subject of Christ's teaching methods. But since this is not a course on teaching methodology, we will simply make some observations about His approach and then consider some of the methods He used so effectively. We will also provide illustrations of these methods and discuss them briefly.

Although we may correctly refer to Jesus' approach to teaching as a teaching-learning environment, we agree that it was not the usual classroom situation. This is especially true in relation to His training of the Twelve. Typical one-hour periods would not have been adequate for the in-depth lessons He had in mind, so they lived with one another and shared life's experiences. This allowed them to interact on the lessons Jesus taught and to react constantly to life situations that required them to apply their knowledge skills.

On occasion Christ taught and His followers listened as He introduced and explained truth. Then they asked questions to learn what He meant, and He gladly responded (Matthew 15:10-20). They also observed how He handled distractions and challenges to His authority with logic and firmness as well as courage and grace (Matthew 12:22-37). Furthermore, they saw how sensitive He was to the questions of those who followed other leaders and how He graciously responded, putting their concerns into proper perspective (Matthew 9:14-17). In all of His teaching, it is fair to say He used sound instructional methods and techniques. It is also apparent that each of His methods was appropriate for His purpose of making disciples and nurturing them to spiritual wholeness.

Sometimes the Teacher's method resembled classroom teaching. For example, if we examine the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), we might classify it as a well-illustrated lecture.

In other instances, He used a rhetorical question—that is, a question to which He did not expect an answer. Thus when John's disciples left Jesus and He said to the crowd, "What did you go out into the desert to see?" (Matthew 11:7-19), He was not expecting a response. He simply asked a question to provoke introspection and to introduce other ideas for His hearers to consider.

Storytelling is another method of teaching Jesus used with great effect to get His message across. Luke notes in 10:25 that a lawyer asked Jesus a question to test Him. As he talked with Jesus, the lawyer attempted to justify his own lack of love for some people by asking, "And who is my neighbor?" (10:29). Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan to answer the question. Not only was this story a masterpiece, it was also highly effective. After all, the lawyer could not argue with a real-life story.

Jesus used questions and answers to help His followers grow intellectually by dealing with problems and expressing their thoughts. Luke records questions they asked of Him that required a response, including these: stewardship (12:41-48), who would be saved (13:23-30), the coming of the kingdom of God (17:20-37), the

requirements for eternal life (18:18–30), and future events (21:5–36). This question-and-answer method helped them to grow socially as they interacted with Him and each other in discussing problems of mutual interest. The questions He asked them not only stimulated discussion but also required them to state their convictions (Matthew 16:13–17). In addition, Christ revealed that answering a question by asking another (Luke 20:1–8) is an effective way of handling distractions.

Finally, He favored a method that we call “learning by doing.” Since students learn more by doing than by listening, Jesus sent the disciples out to apply what they had learned (Luke 10:1–24). The results clearly affirm the method and demonstrate its effectiveness.

Give a brief analysis of Christ’s teaching methods.

- | | |
|---|------------------------|
| a The Sermon on the Mount
(Matthew 5–7) | 1) Question and answer |
| b The Parable of the Good Samaritan | 2) Rhetorical question |
| c “What did you go out into the desert to see?” (Luke 7:24) | 3) Storytelling |
| d “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” (Matthew 16:13) | 4) Learning by doing |
| e The sending out of the seventy or seventy-two to the towns and places where Christ would go | 5) Lecture |
| f “Who are my mother and my brothers?... Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mark 3:33–35) | |

In the adjacent chart, match each example (left) with the educational method it illustrates (right).

Christ's Teachings in the Synoptic Gospels

Compare and contrast the methods each Synoptic writer used to present Christ's teachings.

Perhaps the simplest way to consider Christ's teachings in the Synoptic Gospels is to summarize briefly how each writer includes these teachings in his account. We will use this approach and begin with Matthew.

Matthew

You probably remember that the Gospel of Matthew has a Jewish orientation. It appears that Matthew had his fellow Jews in mind when he wrote his account. Because of its Jewish flavor, Matthew serves as the bridge between the Old and New Testaments. Since teachers and teaching were of great importance to the Jews, the teachings in Matthew represent an important part of this account. How, then, does Matthew deal with the teachings of Christ?

Scholars often point out that of all the Gospels, Matthew gives us the most systematic account of Christ's teachings. They also refer to Matthew as the teaching Gospel. A quick overview of its content shows that Matthew seems to emphasize the teachings of Christ more than the other Synoptic writers. In addition, he arranges or groups them in his own distinctive way. Unlike Mark, who generally gives us what appears to be an accurate chronological account of Christ's life and teachings, Matthew places the miracles and teachings of Christ in groupings.

Most interpreters of Matthew list his groups of teachings in six major discourses (teachings), along with the chapters in which they appear, as follows:

1. The Sermon on the Mount (5-7)
2. The charge or address to the Twelve (10)
3. The parables of the Kingdom (13)
4. The discourse on true greatness and forgiveness (18)
5. The denouncing of the scribes and Pharisees (23)
6. The Olivet Discourse concerning future events (24-25)

Most scholars believe Matthew grouped Christ's discourses by topic rather than time. As you read the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, you may get the impression

that Christ gave all these teachings at one sitting. Yet Luke scatters much of this same content throughout his narrative, giving the impression that Christ gave it over a longer period of time. This leads us to conclude that Matthew apparently arranged Christ's teachings by topic to clarify them and to emphasize their importance.

By concluding this, we do not imply that one Gospel is more correct than another. We simply suggest that Christ may have given the substance of the Sermon on the Mount, which Matthew records in chapters 5-7, at different times. If He did, perhaps the other writers recorded what He gave on these occasions. Matthew's style of writing leads us to believe that the grouping explanation is credible. This observation is an important illustration of why we must not be too concerned with trying to merge the Gospels into a **harmonious** sequence of chronological events. The Gospel writers did not have that in mind as a priority when they wrote.

More than the other Synoptic writers, Matthew stresses what Christ said rather than what He did. He also records more of Christ's teachings on the kingdom of heaven (or of God) than they do, as we shall see in another chapter. Moreover, he identifies the "separateness" of Christ's teachings in his account by using a summarizing formula: "When Jesus had finished saying all these things" (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). Subject grouping and summing-up statements seem to be Matthew's way of drawing the reader's attention to the importance of his subject.

Explain how Matthew deals with Jesus' teachings.

In concluding this focus, we believe Matthew gives us the most complete version of the total teachings of Christ. Therefore, after reading this Gospel, one should have greater insight into the mind of Christ than after reading the other Synoptic accounts.

Mark

Although none of the Gospels lacks the teachings of Christ, some include more than others. For instance, both Matthew and Luke record more material on this subject than Mark does. Whereas Matthew gives the most complete account, Mark records the least. We may find the reason for this difference in the emphasis of Mark's style of writing.

Mark, you should remember, focuses more on what Jesus did than what He said. This leads us to draw a distinction between *talking* and *teaching*. While in a sense these two words can present a similar idea, we want to distinguish between the two terms for the sake of definition. For our purposes, the passages which either state specifically that Christ taught or imply teaching (such as when He directed His

remarks toward a specific concept or principle) represent His teachings (Mark 4:1; 6:2, 34; 10:1, 13-31; 12:1). Knowing that his largely Gentile audience (Roman in particular) would be more impressed with Christ's actions than His words, Mark stressed Christ's works as he penned his account.

Still, we must not conclude that Mark shows no interest in Christ as a teacher. As a matter of fact, he often uses the title *Teacher* or *Rabbi* when referring to Christ (4:38; 9:5, 17, 38; 10:17, 20, 35, 51; 11:21; 13:1; 14:14, 45). He also notes that the Pharisees and Sadducees used this title as they addressed Him (Mark 12:14, 19, 32). In a sense, what we see in Mark is the portrayal of a teacher actively teaching. Even so, what He taught appears to be less important than the fact that He taught.

Describe briefly how Mark treats the teachings of Christ.

Although Mark does not stress the teachings of Christ as much as the other writers, we will list the teachings he does include. The Olivet Discourse (Mark 13), which concerns future events, is probably the only teaching in Mark that is called a discourse. We list it and other passages that present various aspects of Christ's teachings as follows:

Name the only teaching section in Mark that can be classified as a discourse.

1. Although parables are sometimes not specifically classified as teachings, we include them under the broad heading of Christ's Teachings (4:1-34)
2. Defilement and ceremonial washings (7:1-23)
3. The bearing of the cross (8:34-9:1)
4. Humility, proper tolerance, and certain offenses (9:33-50)
5. Teachings concerning divorce, little children, riches, rewards, and worldly ambition (10:1-31)
6. Faith and prayer (11:23-26)
7. Numerous short teachings as a result of questions asked by the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees (12:13-44)
8. Discourse on future events (13:1-37)

Because of Mark's style, we get the impression that Christ's teachings arise out of His works. In other words, His actions and deeds raise questions, and the teachings Mark records address these questions.

Luke

When we examine the third Gospel closely, we note that Luke does not define the teachings of Christ clearly. Nor does he focus on them as much as Matthew, although he includes more about them than Mark, partly because of his audience. You should recall that each Synoptic writer directed his narrative to a specific audience. Knowing the nature of the people to whom he was writing, each presented the aspect of Jesus' ministry that would appeal most to them. Since Matthew wrote to Jews who revered teaching, he stressed Christ's teachings. Yet Mark emphasized the deeds of Christ because the people in his Gentile Roman audience preferred action over philosophy.

While Luke also wrote primarily to Gentiles, he did not write exclusively to this audience. In fact, his account has a more universal appeal than that of Mark. It appeals to Jews as well as Gentiles, and it speaks to people in all stations of life: men and women, believers and nonbelievers. In short, Luke takes the middle ground regarding Christ's teachings. That is, the teachings of Christ in Luke's Gospel present an even balance between Matthew and Mark.

According to the broad guidelines under which we classify teaching, parables are an authentic teaching method. Luke uses this form to express most of the teachings of Christ. Since we will devote an entire chapter to Christ's parables, we will not consider how Luke uses them now. Rather, we will focus on the discourses and individual instruction he records.

While Matthew groups the teachings of Christ conveniently, Luke moves from one event to another, weaving them skillfully into his narrative. With the exception of two large segments of material that are unique to his Gospel (6:20-8:3; 9:51-18:14), Luke scatters Christ's teachings throughout his account. In Luke 21, he also includes the one discourse on future events that is common to all three Synoptic accounts.

List at least three characteristics of Luke's treatment of the teachings of Christ.

Probably the greatest connected series of Christ's teaching (including the parables) occurs between Luke 9:51 and 18:14. The following represents a partial list of the topics Christ dealt with and indicates the style of teaching Luke records:

1. Questions about eternal life (10:25-37)
2. Instructions in prayer (11:1-13)
3. Pharisaic ritualism (11:37-54)
4. Hypocrisy and blasphemy (12:1-12)
5. Covetousness (12:13-34)
6. Watchfulness (12:35-40)
7. Faithfulness (12:41-48)
8. Results of His coming and signs of the times (12:49-59)

9. Repentance (13:1-9)
10. Sabbath healing (13:10-17)
11. Thoughts on entrance into the Kingdom (13:22-35)
12. Instruction in a Pharisee's home (14:1-24)
13. Discipleship (14:25-35)
14. Wealth (16:1-31)
15. Forgiveness, service, thankfulness, His coming (17:1-37)
16. Prayer (18:1-14)

Compare and contrast the treatment that Mark and Luke give to Christ's teachings.

In summary, Luke accents Christ's teaching less than Matthew but more than Mark. While he, like Mark, mainly focuses on a Gentile audience, he does not focus on it exclusively. Instead, he makes a universal appeal that includes Jews and Gentiles, men and women, believers and nonbelievers. Luke also presents much of Christ's teaching in the form of parables, scattering this material throughout his narrative. While scholars can claim that Matthew gives the most systematic and complete presentation of Christ's teachings, Luke's account is the most far-ranging.

State briefly what distinguishes Matthew's record of Christ's teachings from the others.

Lesson 9.3 Christ's Goal in Teaching

Discuss the relationship between Christ's teachings and His ultimate redemptive purpose.

In a very real sense, Christ's teaching ministry was related to His ultimate purpose for coming to earth. That He came to offer himself as a once-forever sacrifice for humankind's salvation was central to His presence here. However, for people to recognize and accept His sacrifice, they must first be able to accept His person. In other words, He had to be made credible in the eyes of those for whom His sacrifice

was intended. His teaching goal reflects His realization that acceptance had both a present and future aspect.

We might ask, "How does one demonstrate that he is an acceptable person? What evidence could one give that he is a credible sacrifice?" The answer to the first question is that the person would have to demonstrate his character on a daily basis under all possible circumstances. He would have to communicate not only through his life but also through his words. In answer to the second, he would have to give evidence that he met the criteria of an acceptable sacrifice. Thus Christ spent much time with the multitudes, which included the common people and the religious leaders. Both His works and His words were intended to show the validity of His character and purpose, and for a while this seemed to work. But in the strictest sense, while Christ was at times accepted, He was never completely understood. His works gave Him a measure of popularity and acceptance, but His words did not fall on fertile ground among the multitudes.

"But how did Christ meet the criteria required of an acceptable sacrifice?" you may ask. The Scriptures illustrate this through the figure of the **kinsman redeemer** (a close relative who would intervene to buy back land lost to indebtedness or purchase out of slavery an indentured kinsman). To act in this capacity, one had to be *willing, able, and near of kin* (Leviticus 25:25-55; Ruth 3:9-4:12). While perhaps no one truly evaluated Christ's qualifications and His right to be humanity's Kinsman Redeemer before His Passion and resurrection, we see that He met all the requirements. He was willing, having come to do the Father's will (Hebrews 10:5-9). He was able to pay the price—make the ultimate sacrifice to satisfy the righteousness of God and atone for the sins of humankind (Isaiah 53: 1-12; Hebrews 12:9-14, 28; 10:14). Finally, He was near of kin through the Incarnation, having taken on human form in order to redeem us (Hebrews 2:14-18).

Although people marveled at Christ's works, they were not truly committed to Him. We see their indifference primarily in their lack of spiritual discernment in relation to His teaching (John 6:60-66). As the tide of popular opinion began to surge away from Him and people rejected His words and works, Christ turned increasingly to the discipling of a few, secluding himself more and more with His chosen disciples. Even though He did not completely exclude the multitudes, He shifted His main focus to those who would carry on His work. He knew they were convinced of His person and purpose. As a result, He spent many hours with His disciples, instructing them in private. He knew their faith would at times be sorely tested, but He also knew that in the end they would stand firm.

As you read the Synoptic accounts, you will see Christ shift back and forth between the large crowds and the few disciples. However, you will also notice a gradual shift in emphasis away from the busy places and multitudes to the quiet areas

and the few. Much of what Christ taught is not recorded, as John notes (John 21:24-25), since there would not have been sufficient space. Yet the writers of the Gospels provide what the Holy Spirit moved them to record, and it is sufficient for our needs. As we shall see in the next section, they summarize briefly but effectively what Christ said concerning some vital topics.

In brief, Christ's teaching ministry was directly related to His ultimate redemptive purpose. His character, sinless life, words, and mighty works demonstrated convincingly that He was worthy of recognition and acceptance. Furthermore, He met all the conditions God required of a sacrifice. He gave indisputable evidence of His sonship and equality with the Father, not only through the works He performed but also through His resurrection from the dead. Finally, although few recognized His significance as a Savior at the time, multitudes later came to this realization and embraced the salvation He provided.

Discuss briefly how Christ's teaching ministry was related to His ultimate purpose for coming to earth.

What is your purpose in ministry, both today and in the future? Write a short essay describing how all you do and say will relate directly to your purpose for ministry.

Lesson 9.4 Christ's Major Teaching Themes

In considering some of the major themes of Christ's teaching, we find that probably the most complex theme pertains to the kingdom of God. Since it is complex and requires detailed analysis, we will reserve this subject for the next chapter. Here we will focus briefly on the following subjects: Christ's view of the Scriptures, the Trinity, the person of Christ, salvation, angels, humanity, the Holy Spirit, the church, and future things.

Christ's View of the Scriptures

Identify major points from selected themes on which Christ taught.

When Christ on occasion mentioned Scripture, He was referring to the Old Testament writings, for the New Testament was not written until some years after His death (Mark 12:10; Luke 4:21). This practice indicates not only that He used the Scriptures but also that He believed them. In this way He established their genuineness. The implication is that it is impossible for us to have a high view of Christ and a critical view of the Old Testament.

A review of Christ's sayings shows that when He referred to Old Testament events and characters, He regarded them as real. For example, He compared Jonah's time in the belly of a huge fish to the time He would spend in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12:40). Additionally, He compared conditions that existed in the days of Noah, Sodom, and Lot to those that will exist when He is revealed (Luke 17:26, 29, 32).

Christ also held a high view of Old Testament prophecy. He regarded it as authoritative and quoted many of the prophecies that referred directly to His mission. The following represent some typical examples:

1. The fulfillment of His ministry (Luke 24:44)
2. Opposition to His ministry (Mark 7:6-7)
3. His rejection and resulting triumph (Mark 12:10-11; Luke 20:17-18)
4. John the Baptist's ministry (Matthew 11:10)

Believing and using the Scriptures demonstrated quite clearly the confidence Christ had in the accuracy and genuineness of the divine revelation. He never expressed a concern about the truth or trustworthiness of the scriptural text. We can speak with the same confidence, knowing the Holy Spirit inspired all Scripture (2 Peter 1:20-21).

What is Christ's view of the Old Testament Scriptures?

The Trinity

Since God is infinite and humanity is finite, we cannot fully grasp the nature of His being, that He is one in essence yet exists in three Persons. While the Old Testament writings spoke of God, the Angel of Jehovah, and the Spirit of God, His majestic being was shrouded in mystery until Jesus came to reveal Him. Jesus revealed that God is one (Mark 12:29) and that He is spirit (John 4:24). At Jesus' baptism, the Trinity came into focus: the Son was baptized, the Spirit of God descended like a dove on Him, and the Father spoke from heaven (Matthew 3:16-17). Jesus himself affirmed the tri-unity of God when He commanded His disciples to baptize "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). He also affirmed their

essential unity (John 10:30). In brief, each of the three Persons has the basic characteristics of personality: intellect, feeling, and will. Each manifests the attributes of deity (**omnipotence**, **omniscience**, **omnipresence**, and **immutability**) as well as the moral qualities (holiness, righteousness, goodness, and truth).

What indication about the Trinity occurred at Christ's baptism?

In revealing the Father and the nature of the Godhead, Christ indicated that He is the way to God: "No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). He also revealed that when He left this world, the Father would send the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, to take His place (John 14:15-18, 26). Here we get a definite sense of distinct Personalities and yet a common unity.

The Person of Christ

As we become more familiar with Christ's teachings, we notice the importance He places on His Person. He speaks about who He is and His relationship with the Father throughout His ministry (Luke 22:69-70; John 14:7-10). Repeatedly, He comments on His present redemptive mission and His future coming in glory (Matthew 20:28; Mark 8:38; Luke 19:10). The way He refers to His condition or status as God-man and His purpose leaves no question about His identity and mission. He came to establish a kingdom of which He is the King. He has the power and right to judge (Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:27-30) and to intercede in His position between humankind and God the Father (Luke 22:32; John 17:9).

Christ projects both His divine and human attributes. As a normal human being, He hungered (Matthew 4:1-2); thirsted (John 19:28); tired (John 4:6); and expressed emotion or feeling such as compassion, love, and anger (Matthew 9:36; John 11:35-36; Mark 3:5). As a divine Person, He exercised unlimited power (omnipotence) in calming storms (Luke 8:22-25), healing all sicknesses and diseases (Luke 4:40), walking on water (Mark 6:48), and raising the dead to life (Luke 7:14-15). Knowing the thoughts of people revealed His unlimited knowledge (omniscience), as did His knowledge of humanity in general (John 4:16-19; 2:24-25). Anticipating His future exalted state, Jesus said, "I will be with you always" (Matthew 28:20), revealing that His presence is everywhere (omnipresence).

What did Christ teach regarding His person?

Salvation

Christ's teaching on salvation was full, complete, and simple. Obviously, if people were to obtain it, they must understand both the gift and the Giver. So Christ made it clear that He came to seek and save lost people (Luke 19:10) and to pour out His life's blood for their sins (Matthew 26:28)—even though they did not comprehend it fully at the time.

A comparison of the Synoptic Gospels with the Gospel of John reveals that John treats Christ's teaching on salvation more completely than the Synoptic writers do. Not surprisingly, he deals more with the need for repentance and faith in obtaining salvation than they do. While they do not deny the need for repentance and faith, they appear to stress the works of salvation. For example, reading the story of the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-31) or the woman who washed Christ's feet (Luke 7:44-47) could give the impression that works equal salvation. Yet the Synoptic writers do not ignore repentance and faith. On occasion they note that repentance is absolutely necessary for salvation (Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 13:3, 5). What we should probably conclude on the basis of all Christ's teaching on salvation is that works are an evidence of salvation by faith rather than the basis of salvation. Even Christ's concluding statement to the woman who washed His feet was, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (Luke 7:50).

The focus on works in the Synoptic record of Christ's teaching on salvation supplements John's emphasis on repentance and faith. Both approaches are necessary to give us a complete picture of the requirements for salvation.

State how the Synoptic accounts of Christ's teaching on salvation and the account in John's Gospel fit together

Angels

Although the inspired writers of the Old Testament note the occasional appearance of angels, they do not give a unified body of information about the origin, nature, work, limitations, and destiny of these spirit beings. While Christ does not give us a detailed study of angels, what He does say adds greatly to our knowledge of them.

As we have seen, angels played a significant role as messengers in the birth narratives of Jesus and John the Baptist. A great company of them attended Christ's birth and praised God (Luke 2:8-15). They also ministered to Christ after He was tempted in the desert (Matthew 4:11). Angels serve in the presence of God and

rejoice in the salvation of people (Luke 15:10), and they appear to guard or protect people (Matthew 18:10). Activities such as these represent the work of angels. Jesus' response to the Sadducees regarding the future state shows that angels are without gender (Matthew 22:30), so they do not reproduce. Since Jesus said He could have more than twelve legions of angels at His disposal (Matthew 26:53), we conclude that their number is great. The fact that God sent an angel named Gabriel to speak with Mary indicates that angels are intelligent, responsible, personal beings. Their ability to move from heaven to earth indicates powers and attributes that far exceed those of humans. The foregoing facts give us a greatly expanded knowledge of angels.

We have discussed briefly the activity of angels who serve God and His people, but Jesus states that the devil also has angels who serve in his realm (Matthew 25:41). Like their leader they will suffer the punishment of eternal fire. The devil tempted Jesus in the desert (Matthew 4:1-11), and apparently his angels are the evil spirits who tempt, oppress, and bind people (Matthew 12:43-45; Mark 1:23-28; 5:1-20; Luke 4:33-36). While Jesus does not identify them as evil spirits, the Scriptures seem to imply this. You will note throughout the Gospels that whenever Jesus confronts the devil and evil spirits, He always overcomes them with His mighty word. This indicates that while their power is greater than humans' power, it is limited.

List three functions that the Synoptics attribute to angels.

Humanity

Christ's teachings on humankind show that while they are a creation of God (Matthew 19:4; Mark 10:6), humans are also sinful and have a corrupt nature. Evil thoughts, murder, greed, and malice proceed out of them (Matthew 15:11; Mark 7:20-23). Since people are by nature sinful and spiritually dead, they must be born again or made spiritually alive by believing in the Son of God (John 3:3, 16). Until a person responds to God, he or she stands condemned and subject to God's wrath (John 3:17-18, 36). The verdict for those who reject God's Son as Savior is eternal punishment, which affirms that humans are immortal beings (Mark 9:42-48). From what Christ teaches, as well as what these teachings imply, we learn that humans are also compound beings: People have both a body or physical aspect and a spiritual aspect that can respond to God. Until a person experiences the new birth, he or she stands condemned by God because of his or her sinful nature. Christ placed great value on the soul of humankind (Matthew 16:26) and taught that God paid the ultimate price for their salvation (John 3:16).

List at least three things Christ revealed in His teachings about humanity.

The Holy Spirit

The essential truth Christ revealed about the Holy Spirit is that He is one of the three Persons of the Trinity (Matthew 28:19). He is more than an influence; He possesses all the traits of personality—intellect, feeling, and will. Jesus taught that the Spirit would take His place (John 14:15–18, 26); He can be sinned against (Matthew 12:31); and He sends, reveals, moves, and teaches people (Mark 1:12; Luke 2:26–27; 12:12). He anointed Christ for His ministry, and He will speak through the people of God in the midst of trials and persecution (Matthew 10:19–20; Mark 13:11; Luke 12:12). Only a person can take the place of another person, and only a personal being can recognize people's needs and meet them appropriately. While the Synoptic writers mention the Holy Spirit on numerous occasions, what John says (John 14:15–16:15) complements their accounts, so that together we have a more complete picture of the Holy Spirit's Person and work.

Summarize what Christ's teaching reveals about the Holy Spirit.

The Church

While the New Testament as a whole deals at length with the church or body of Christ, the writers of the Gospels record only two occasions on which Christ referred to the church (Matthew 16:18; 18:17). The first passage suggests two things: (1) the church was future and would withstand the gates of hell, and (2) the foundation of the church would be the rock, Jesus Christ. The second passage indicates that the term *church* does not refer to a building but to "people assembled together."

What did Christ teach about the church in Matthew 16:18 and 18:17?

Future Things

Christ's teaching on future things occupies a significant place in each of the Synoptic Gospels. In fact, the Synoptic writers devote four complete chapters to this

subject (Matthew 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21). This indicates its importance and suggests that we must not ignore future things in our study of the Scriptures. Although Christ did not reveal the precise order of future events or give extensive details about them, He did give a general overview of the future. We will not discuss each event in depth. What we want to stress is that Christ had much to say about future events.

In His teaching, Christ links future events with His coming in glory. In fact, His second coming is the focus of the future; naturally He mentions it often in His teaching (Matthew 16:27-28; Mark 14:62; Luke 12:40). At that time, He will resurrect the dead (Matthew 22:23-33) and judge all people, rewarding those who have done wickedly and those who have done well according to their actions (John 5:28-29; Matthew 25:31-34). The rewards for those who have done well appear to be based on faithfulness in their service to God rather than the amount they have done (Matthew 20:1-16; Luke 14:14). Those who have rejected Christ will go into everlasting punishment regardless of the supposed good deeds they have done (Matthew 7:22-23; 12:36; Mark 9:43-48; Luke 10:14).

While Christ makes clear the facts of His second coming, the resurrection, and judgment, He does not specify the order in which the events in the Olivet Discourse will occur (Matthew 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21). The discourse indicates that other events will attend Christ's coming, including a time of tribulation on earth, judgment, and the establishment of Christ's kingdom. On the basis of other New Testament teaching, it appears Christ will return to catch away the church before tribulation comes on the earth. Then, following the tribulation, Christ will establish His kingdom. Again, the information on the tribulation and kingdom is too limited to make absolute predictions about the order of future events. However, it does give us a general outline of the future.

How might the Synoptics' information about future events best be described?

Chapter 10 The Kingdom of God

You examined the teachings of Christ in the last chapter and marveled at the traits of the Master Teacher. You also examined His methods and goal in teaching, located His teachings in the Synoptic Gospels, and summarized them briefly as you rounded out this particular focus. Now you will look at the kingdom of God and deal with one of the major subjects of Christ's ministry.

In presenting this course, we have adopted a particular plan. We began building with general facts in Unit 1, using the historical and religious background to provide a framework. Then we focused more narrowly on the life of Christ in the Synoptic records themselves in Unit 2 and completed the superstructure and roof. Finally, in Unit 3 we have narrowed the focus still further and examined various aspects of Christ's ministry. The material in this final unit will add the finishing touches.

Because it is complex, we will identify terms related to the Kingdom; study its background; and consider its present, future, and moral aspects before we summarize what the Synoptic Gospels record about it. This approach should help you to better understand this subject about which Christ spoke so much. May it also help you to live by and teach kingdom principles more effectively.

Lesson 10.1 Terms Associated with the Kingdom

Objective

10.1.1 Identify the probable reason for the use of the terms kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven.

Lesson 10.2 The Definition of the Kingdom and Its Aspects

Objectives

10.2.1 Define the kingdom in terms of Christ's teaching on this subject.

10.2.2 Discuss the present aspect of the Kingdom and locate in the Synoptic Gospels the places where Jesus taught it.

10.2.3 Distinguish correct comparisons and contrasts between the present and future aspects of the Kingdom.

10.2.4 Identify the moral aspect of the kingdom of God and contrast it with worldly kingdoms.

Lesson 10.3 The Kingdom in Perspective

Objective

10.3.1 Discuss briefly the view of the Kingdom adopted in this chapter.

Lesson 10.1 The Terms Associated with the Kingdom

Identify the probable reason for the use of the terms kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven.

In the previous chapter, we considered what Christ's purpose or mission was in coming to earth. We concluded that He fulfilled a redemptive purpose in coming to die as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. While this conclusion gave a partial answer, we need to examine Christ's teaching on the kingdom of God to understand the full implication of His purpose. As we turn to the Kingdom, then, we can discern its place among His teachings and His ultimate purpose.

In reading the Synoptic Gospels, we notice that the writers use the terms *kingdom of heaven*, *kingdom of God*, or simply *kingdom* frequently. As one Bible scholar notes, "It is clear that the Kingdom of God is the central theme of Jesus' teaching" (Ladd 1978, 103). Peter Kuzmic echoes this emphasis in the *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*:

The idea of the kingdom of God occupies a place of supreme importance in the teaching and mission of Jesus. This "master-thought" of Jesus, as it has been called, is the central theme of his proclamation and the key to understanding his ministry. (1988, 522)

In support of this statement, Kuzmic notes that the term *kingdom* appears a total of 121 times in the Synoptics. Even if we do not include the parallels, he notes, the Synoptic writers use the term over 60 times. Certainly, this underscores the importance of the Kingdom in Christ's teaching.

Since so many of Christ's parables relate either directly or indirectly to the kingdom of God, we will examine them in depth as we consider His teaching on the Kingdom. To avoid repetition, however, we will focus on the discussion they give on the Kingdom in the next chapter. Thus our study of the Kingdom will involve two chapters. For the present, we will focus on Christ's overall definition of the kingdom of God.

What priority does the kingdom of God have in Jesus' teachings?

We have already noted that the Synoptic writers use several terms in discussing the kingdom of God. For example, Matthew uses the term *kingdom of heaven* thirty-three times and *kingdom of God* only four times. This prompts us to ask why Matthew employs *kingdom of heaven* so extensively while the other writers use only *kingdom of God*. Is there any difference between the two? On the basis of Matthew 19:23-24, it appears we can answer "no" to the latter question. In this setting, Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the *kingdom of heaven*. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the *kingdom of God*" (italics added). Comparing this passage with the parallel passage in Mark 10:23-25 indicates that the change in terminology simply represents a linguistic variation of the same concept. Since Mark, Luke, and other New Testament writers use only *kingdom of God*, and Christ says simply *kingdom* on a number of occasions, we conclude that the terms are synonymous. We will consider what may have prompted Matthew to use *kingdom of heaven*.

According to supporters of one popular view, Matthew's use of *kingdom of heaven* is based on a simple historical fact. Devout Jews, they point out, avoided using the name Yahweh and often substituted an appropriate term for deity. In their view, Matthew respected this feeling and substituted *heaven* for *God*. As Erickson notes, in the Scriptures heaven is a virtual synonym for God (1985, 1226). The fact that Matthew alone of the Synoptic writers uses *kingdom of heaven*, and that he is writing for Jewish readers, lends support to this view. By contrast, Mark and Luke use the Greek idiom, *kingdom of God*, because they are writing primarily to a Gentile audience. In view of the foregoing discussion, we will assume that the terms can be used interchangeably.

Why does Matthew use *kingdom of heaven* rather than *kingdom of God* as used by Mark and Luke?

What exactly did Jesus mean when He spoke of the Kingdom? Did His kingdom then exist, or was it still to come? What were its physical limits? Where was it to be located? Who were its rulers and subjects? What were the conditions for entering it?

These questions are basic to our study of the kingdom of God. We will find that some are easier to answer than others. Our purpose is to find a good overall definition of the kingdom of God that Christ taught about. In view of

this aim, then, we will focus on four broad areas of concern: the definition, present aspect, future aspect, and moral aspect of the Kingdom. As we examine the kingdom of God, we will refer most often to Matthew's Gospel, because he provides more teaching on this subject than the other Synoptic writers do.

Lesson 10.2 The Definition of the Kingdom and Its Aspects

Define the kingdom in terms of Christ's teaching on this subject.

When we use the term *kingdom*, we usually think of an empire or area with physical, visible limits. Within this empire a sovereign rules over subjects who are citizens of his kingdom. He governs his subjects according to rules that must be obeyed if his kingdom is to survive and the subjects are to benefit from its provisions. The ruler exercises control over his territory and defends it from enemies; within its borders citizens should feel confident that their lives and well-being are protected.

This standard definition of *kingdom* no doubt matched the Jewish concept. In this sense, the land of Israel was the empire, God was the ruler, the Jews were the subjects, and the Law was its rules. The coming King (Messiah) would assure His subjects of a life of comfort, free from foreign intervention.

Clearly, Christ did not teach this kind of kingdom—to the discomfort of His Jewish listeners. According to Jesus, the kingdom of God does not come visibly, nor can people say "Here it is" or "There it is" (Luke 17:20-21). By His definition, the kingdom of God is within the person himself or herself—it is spiritual. This passage must also be understood to state that God's kingdom is *among* Jesus' followers (in other words, within the church). A person cannot see its physical aspects (boundaries, limits, or borders), and in this sense there is no geopolitical empire. Christ's teaching thus disappointed His listeners, who thought in terms of both national identity and political isolation.

How did Christ define the Kingdom in His teaching?

The characteristics usually associated with *kingdom* in this case were indeed internal and spiritual. At the same time, the evidence of the Kingdom was clearly present in the physical world. The evidence of the reality and authenticity of God's kingdom were the miracles Jesus performed, including His power over evil spirits. Review these passages in the Synoptic Gospels to see how the Kingdom was associated with visible effects in the physical world: Matthew 10:7-8; 11:2-6; 12:28; Luke 9:1-6; 10:9.

Is there a ruler? Yes. The kingdom of God that Christ teaches is clearly His Father's kingdom (Matthew 6:10; 13:43). The fact that all three Synoptic writers use the term *kingdom of God* indicates whose kingdom it is. Clearly, God is the ruler, but what of His Son, Christ? This point presented the Jews with a problem. They reasoned, "What right does Jesus have to assume the authority of a king?" In their view it was unthinkable for Him to assume even a part of the leadership with His Father in the Kingdom. Nevertheless, throughout His ministry Christ continued to point people to His Father's kingdom and assumed a measure of shared authority with His Father. (Compare the thought of Matthew 12:28 with Matthew 21:23-27.)

What concepts does our study identify with a kingdom?

Obviously, Jesus' teaching on the spiritual nature of the Kingdom and its lack of a physical place, as well as His own part in it, differed from Jewish expectations. But when He discussed the subjects or citizens of the Kingdom, He really strayed from the Jewish concept of *kingdom*. In his Gospel, John records some of Christ's clearest teaching about the subjects of the Kingdom and the conditions by which they will be admitted (3:3, 5). In addition, Matthew defines the nature of the subjects (5:3-10). If you are interested in pursuing this topic, we urge you to list and analyze all that the Synoptics record about the subjects of the Kingdom. We assure you it will be a most rewarding study.

Read John 3:3, 5, and Matthew 5:3-10, 17. Describe the subjects of God's kingdom.

We must also discuss the rules of the Kingdom. Of course, for the Jew the Law represented the rules. Yet Christ indicated that the Law was incomplete, although not invalid, apart from His fulfillment of it (Matthew 5:17). This meant that reliance on the Law apart from Christ's role in it was insufficient. While the

Law was the guide in the past, citizenship in His Father's kingdom required people to obey His teachings.

You can now begin to see why tension mounted as Christ's mission became more apparent. All of the conditions the Jewish hearers thought were definitions of the true kingdom no longer applied. They could no longer identify this new concept with the kingdom of Israel. Nor could they assume Yahweh was its sole ruler, for Christ assumed equality with God in ruling it. Furthermore, its subjects might or might not be Jews, and the old Law *alone* was no longer regarded as the **infallible** guide for living. Since they were unable to fully understand His teaching on the true nature of the Kingdom and accept its implications, the Jews, Christ's kinsmen, ultimately rejected Him.

Why did the Jews reject Christ and His teachings on the Kingdom?

Now we must pull all of this information together and craft a working definition for the kingdom of God. So what do we know concerning this Kingdom? It is God's kingdom where Christ is the ruler. According to Christ, this kingdom operates among His followers (Luke 17:20, 21). There is no geographical location of the kingdom of God. We cannot drive or fly there. However, it is close to all of us. The kingdom of God is best represented as Christ's kingship. Jesus, being God's only begotten Son, inherited the right to rule in His Father's kingdom. Jesus demonstrated His authority as God's Sovereign Ruler through His miracles over nature, His healing of sickness and disease, and His encounters with the kingdom of darkness. However, Jesus' main credential as ruler is the victory He purchased on the cross, defeating death. When we are in the presence of Jesus, we are in the kingdom of God. We experience and participate in the present aspect of God's kingdom breaking into our world when the good news is preached to the poor, freedom is proclaimed to the prisoner, the blind recover sight, and the oppressed are released from their bondage (Luke 4:18). In contrast, we anticipate the future aspect of the kingdom yet to come. There will be a day when Christ will return and set up His kingdom on earth. Therefore, we can view the kingdom of God as already among us but not yet here. As a working definition, we can define the *kingdom of God* as the rightly inherited kingship of Christ seen presently through changed human lives and miracle demonstrations of His divine power and authority while anticipating His future reign as the Sovereign Ruler.

Why is the current reign of Christ not like an empire?

The Present Aspect of the Kingdom

Discuss the present aspect of the Kingdom and locate in the Synoptic Gospels the places where Jesus taught it.

Our discussion to this point has revealed that the Jewish concept of the Kingdom had not changed by the time of Christ. However, His teaching brought the subject into focus and revealed that it had both a *present* and a *future* aspect. While we may not notice the distinction between them in a casual reading, careful study of the Synoptic texts reveals that Christ referred to both aspects of the Kingdom in His teaching. While some Bible scholars tend to link all references to the Kingdom with a future manifestation, others limit them to the present. In this section, we will examine some Scripture passages that refer to the present aspect of the Kingdom, such as these:

Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15—Jesus begins preaching that “the kingdom of God is near.”

Matthew 12:28; Luke 11:20—Jesus states that driving out demons shows “the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

Luke 17:20-21—Jesus declares, “The kingdom of God is within (or among) you.”

Matthew 11:11-13; Luke 16:16—Jesus says the Kingdom is advancing; that is, it is being preached, and people are forcing their way into it.

Matthew 21:31—Jesus testifies that “tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom.”

These verses indicate clearly that the kingdom of God was then in existence. For example, Jesus says it is near, coming upon His hearers, within (and among) people, advancing, and one into which people are entering. In the next chapter, we will discuss some parables that illustrate a beginning, growing, and producing kingdom of the present. These include the parables of the sower, the weeds, the mustard seed, and the yeast (Matthew 13:1-43). The foregoing Scripture verses and illustrations relate clearly to the present, but they do not address the future kingdom for which the Jews longed. A closer look will reveal why this is so.

From the beginning of Christ's ministry, it was obvious He would usher in a kingdom. John the Baptist predicted it (Matthew 3:2), and all Jesus said and did confirmed it (Mark 1:14-15). Clearly, God's time had arrived; the Kingdom had come in the person of Christ. So "Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness" (Matthew 9:35; Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:11). It was also the message He instructed the Twelve and the seventy-two to proclaim when He sent them out to minister (Matthew 10:7; Luke 9:2; 10:9, 11). Jesus not only demonstrated the power of the Kingdom through His miracles and power confrontations with the devil but also illustrated it with parables; yet He never defined it. His followers were understandably confused, then, when He talked about coming in power and glory (Matthew 24:30; 26:64; Mark 8:38; 14:62; Luke 9:26), for they looked for an immediate **consummation**.

Jesus' teaching thus indicated that the Kingdom is both a present reality and a future expectation. In His own person, the kingdom of God is already invading human history (Luke 17:20-21), forcefully advancing among people (Matthew 11:11-12), and overthrowing the kingdom of Satan (Matthew 12:28). So it *is* a present reality; it is already in operation. However, since it also concerns future fulfillment at the end of the age, it has a "not yet" aspect. In other words, there are dimensions and dynamics of God's kingdom that have not yet become a full reality for the creation. As a result, those who follow Christ live "between the times" within these two reference points in history—the present and the future. The first point is inaugural, or those events that first brought God's kingdom close to humans and made it accessible to them. Through His death and resurrection, our Lord completed His act of redemption and initiated His rule in the lives of believers. In His person, then, the Kingdom has already come. The second point is future and is linked with Christ's second coming, which will bring God's plan of redemption to completion. At this future point, the Kingdom will become a full physical, political reality on earth, visible in every sense of the word.

Briefly explain how a kingdom can be "already but not yet."

As the biblical record indicates, Christ fulfilled in His person and work the messianic salvation predicted by the prophets (Luke 4:20-21). Nevertheless, other prophecies—those that deal with His glorious coming and judgment—require a future fulfillment. What Christ has already begun in initiating the

Kingdom must yet be realized in His glorious coming. So the kingdom of God has already begun in the person and works of Jesus, but it will be made fully complete at the end of this age. This leads us to describe the tension between the Kingdom's beginning and final completion as "already but not yet."

In summary, we know that the Kingdom is now with us. We also know from other passages of Scripture, which we will refer to in the next section, that it is not fully realized. It is here in some measure, but it is growing and awaiting final consummation. The Kingdom that has already come is still to come.

Discuss briefly the present aspect of the Kingdom and cite scriptural support for it.

The Future Aspect of the Kingdom

Distinguish correct comparisons and contrasts between the present and future aspects of the Kingdom.

We have seen that while the kingdom of God became a reality in Christ, its future aspect remains a promise to be fulfilled. Even though Christ invaded the realm of the devil, disabled him, and spoiled his goods (Matthew 12:25-29), a future completion and perfection is necessary for our Lord to bring about the devil's final destruction and to triumph over sin and its consequences. Thus, He will come in power and glory (Matthew 24:30). He will separate the wicked from the righteous, judging the former and rewarding the latter (Matthew 25:31-46). Christ describes this future fulfillment of the Kingdom as a wedding banquet (Matthew 22:1-2; Luke 22:29-30), as the gateway into eternal life (Matthew 25:46), as the age to come (Mark 10:30), and as the kingdom of God (Mark 10:24). Therefore, based on the Synoptic record, Christ's coming, which will be accompanied by the resurrection (Luke 20:35-36) and final judgment (Matthew 25:31-46), is the major event of the future consummation.

Read Matthew 22:1-2; 24:30; 25:31-33, and indicate what these verses imply about the future kingdom of God.

Christ's discourse on future events in Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, and Luke 21 (the Olivet Discourse) provides the strongest evidence for this future aspect of

the Kingdom. Others, such as Matthew 16:22-28, Mark 8:34-9:1, and Luke 9:23-27, support this evidence and indicate that Christ will come again in glory with the angels. His kingdom will then be fully realized and manifested in a visible form.

Compare Christ's initiation of the present aspect of the Kingdom with the initiation of the future aspect.

You may have noticed in the preceding passages that personal preparation is closely related to the coming of the Kingdom. If one prepares appropriately, his or her entrance into the Kingdom will be assured.

According to our study, scriptural support for the future aspect of the Kingdom occurs primarily in which of Jesus' discourses?

The Moral Aspect of the Kingdom

Identify the moral aspect of the kingdom of God and contrast it with worldly kingdoms.

The moral or ethical aspect of the Kingdom is perhaps the clearest issue of all, for the rules that apply to it at the present also apply to its future aspect.

The major difference between the **ethics** or rules of the kingdom of God and those of an ordinary worldly kingdom is that one is internal and the other is external. The moral aspect of God's kingdom involves the inner nature of a person. The Gospels often admonish humanity to live rightly. Paul expresses this clearly in Romans 14:17: "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

In many respects, God's kingdom requires more of its citizens than a worldly kingdom requires of its citizens. Notice some of the things God's kingdom requires of its members as listed below:

1. Deny oneself (Matthew 16:24).
2. Watch every word (Matthew 12:36).
3. Consider possible persecution (Matthew 5:10).
4. Be merciful (Matthew 5:7).

5. Be pure in heart (Matthew 5:8).
6. Hate one's own life (Luke 14:26).
7. Carry one's own cross (Luke 14:27).
8. Destroy bodily parts if necessary (Matthew 5:29-30).
9. Watch and pray (Luke 21:36).
10. Go and make disciples (Matthew 28:19).

Again we see that the rules of the kingdom of God contrast sharply with those surrounding the Jewish concept of the Kingdom. For example, Jews linked holiness with external actions—what one did or did not do—but Jesus stressed the purity of the inner person. He emphasized *being* more than *doing*. Thus, entrance into the Kingdom requires faith and prayer to keep one's life in subjection to the requirements of the King. Maintaining citizenship in the Kingdom also requires one to lead a life in which moral or ethical values are supremely important.

Contrast the rules governing God's kingdom with those of a worldly kingdom.

Lesson 10.3 The Kingdom in Perspective

Discuss briefly the view of the Kingdom adopted in this chapter.

Summarizing our study of the Kingdom, Christ's teaching on the kingdom of God stressed internal purity and shifted emphasis away from external actions. To be a member of His kingdom required that the undesirable traits of the inner person—hate, impurity, envy, selfish ambition, and jealousy—give way to the desirable traits—love, joy, peace, patience, and self-control (Galatians 5:19-23). All who accept His lordship and follow His commands therefore qualify for membership in His kingdom.

Our study of the Scriptures has indicated that while the kingdom of God is a present reality, it will be fully consummated in the future. At His first coming, Christ inaugurated the Kingdom—planted the seed—that will grow and develop until His second coming. Then the Kingdom in all of its fullness and glory will be realized.

We have noted that there are different interpretations of the Kingdom. Some teach that all aspects of the Kingdom concern the present, while others assert that everything associated with the Kingdom relates to the future. A few insist that the Kingdom was intended for the present, but because the Jews rejected Christ, it was postponed until the future.

In your opinion, what view of the Kingdom has the most scriptural support?

The teaching on the Kingdom we have adopted in this chapter is one that has received widespread acceptance. We have identified it by the phrase *already but not yet*. According to this view, the Kingdom is now with us in some measure. All those who are born again are part of it. They are growing and maturing spiritually and being changed progressively into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are thus being led toward perfection and completeness, which will be realized in the future when Christ returns, sets up His visible kingdom, and rules among people.

What are the requirements for membership in Christ's kingdom?

The exciting thought for those of us who serve the Lord is that we have the joy of this present age—His indwelling presence, which gives meaning and purpose to life—as well as the promise of greater things to come. We can exult with the apostle Paul, who said, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Chapter 11 The Parables of Jesus

As we began our study of the kingdom of God, we noted the close relationship between the Kingdom and the parables of Jesus. Because of this relationship, we observed that these two themes could almost be studied together in one expanded chapter, since in many ways they concern the same

issue. While a number of the parables do relate to the Kingdom, the rest concern other aspects of Christ's teachings, so we have chosen to consider the parables in a separate chapter. In this chapter, then, we will determine what parables are, give some guidelines for interpreting them, note when and how Christ used them, and classify them.

While a study of Christ's parables is both interesting and enlightening, it is also vital for one's spiritual understanding. This is true because Christ established doctrines in His teaching that He often illustrated by a parable. Since nearly one third of all Jesus' recorded words involved this method of teaching, you must understand His parables if you are to grasp clearly what He taught. Thus in this chapter your objective is to examine the material thoroughly enough to accomplish this goal.

By reading the parables noted, using the guidelines given, and applying the principles of interpretation, you can determine the intended meaning of each one. This will increase your knowledge of some of the main themes of Christ's teachings and enable you to interpret parables according to sound biblical principles.

Lesson 11.1 Defining and Interpreting Parables

Objectives

11.1.1 Define the term parable and explain why parables are so effective in teaching.

11.1.2 Identify some guidelines for interpreting parables with the rationale for their use.

Lesson 11.2 Examining the Parables in the Synoptic Gospels

Objectives

11.2.1 State some of the facts we learn from a careful comparison of the parables in the Synoptic Gospels.

11.2.2 Describe the pattern of Christ's use of parables as His ministry progresses and relate it to His purpose.

Lesson 11.3 classifying Parables

Objective

11.3.1 Using the list of parables provided, classify each parable into its main subject area or areas.

Lesson 11.4 Interpreting Parables

Objective

11.4.1 Apply correctly the principles of interpreting parables according to the guidelines given in this chapter.

Lesson 11.1 Defining and Interpreting Parables

When we speak of the teachings of Jesus, most of us probably think first of His parables, for He used this form of teaching more than any other teacher in history. Even though He made the **parabolic** form popular, He was not the first to use it. In fact, Jews had used this form of instruction for some time before Jesus came. Yet He used it more effectively than any other teacher before or after Him.

Jesus used other teaching methods besides parables. However, He used parables when He wanted to clarify and illustrate the truths and doctrines He taught. This method proved to be quite effective, and to this day we recall many of the main points of Jesus' teaching because of His parables.

As we begin the textual study of the parables, we want to define the term *parable* and list some guidelines that will help us interpret parables properly.

The Definition of a Parable

Define the term parable and explain why parables are so effective in teaching.

Bible scholars note that the word *parable* comes from a Greek word which means "to put things side by side." (*Comparison* and *analogy* are two English words that have a similar meaning.) A parable represents a method of teaching in which the teacher uses familiar concepts or ideas to illustrate unfamiliar concepts in terms the learner understands. In the New Testament context, the unfamiliar concepts are spiritual truths.

Christ's approach in using this method was simple and unique. He took familiar examples from everyday human life and nature and used them to

teach spiritual truth. This has led to the popular but inadequate definition of a *parable* as “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.”

What does the Greek word for *parable* imply, and what two English words have similar meaning?

As we shall see, far from being insignificant little stories for simple-minded people or children, Jesus’ parables put into concrete form the substance of faith. They dealt with all the topics people faced in their search for meaning and purpose, including death, resurrection, the church, evangelism, social concern, forgiveness, justification, and sanctification. Moreover, they had a certain revolutionary quality, for they challenged many of the ideals and values people held. Obviously, Jesus used them deliberately to shock, provoke, and produce a response in His hearers. He did not necessarily seek to explain everything to everyone’s satisfaction; rather, His goal was to point out that His hearers’ previous understandings and explanations were unsatisfactory. His purpose was to direct their thinking and actions into a whole new realm.

As a master teacher, Christ knew that learners get restless and bored with **theoretical** teaching and **abstract** philosophy. He also knew that learners respond well to stories they can understand readily and remember easily. So on many occasions, He probed the depth of life and truth by telling simple stories that portrayed clearly and graphically what He wanted to communicate. He knew people tend to forget abstract teaching, but a story tends to impress itself on their memories for life.

List purposes for which Jesus used parables to teach.

Since parables were but one means Jesus used in His teaching ministry, we may wonder how to distinguish an actual parable from another figure of speech. While the writers of the Gospels often refer to certain things Jesus said as *parables*, His parables occur in a variety of forms and include more than what the Gospel writers specifically call “parables.” For example, Matthew includes some parables that are little more than “one-liners” (The Hidden Treasure, 13:44, and The Pearl, 13:45–46). Elsewhere, he gives us examples of extended parables (The Tenants, 21:33–44, and The Wedding Banquet, 22:1–14). However, he does not refer to The Unmerciful Servant (18:23–35) or The

Workers in the Vineyard (20:1–16) as parables, even though we recognize their parabolic form.

It would be easier to answer “What distinguishes a true parable from another figure of speech?” if all scholars who have researched this topic agreed on exactly the same definition of a parable. But they do not. The number of parables varies from one scholar to another and ranges from thirty to nearly eighty. What one writer calls a parable another says is a proverb, and what one refers to as illustrative writing another defines as a parable. Therefore, we seldom find two textbooks that agree on the number or classification of the parables.

Our research has led us to select forty-seven parables that meet the criteria required of “true parables” by most scholars. We will list them under different headings throughout the chapter. This will help you to become more familiar with them, even though we will not be able to explain each one in detail in this study. You should try to memorize the content and location of each one. Some excellent textbooks on the parables are available if you are interested in a more detailed study of particular parables.

While Bible scholars debate whether or not there are parables in the Gospel of John, such a debate is beyond the scope of this course. Since our focus is on the Synoptics, we will not discuss this issue. However, you should note that the majority of all parables, regardless of how they are defined, are found in the Synoptic Gospels.

Some Guidelines for Interpreting Parables

Identify some guidelines for interpreting parables with the rationale for their use.

Having introduced parables, defined what they are, and reviewed some of the issues one faces as he or she studies them, we need to adopt some guidelines that can help us avoid unnecessary problems in interpreting them.

1. Do not overemphasize individual details within a parable.

As a general rule, each parable has one particular truth to convey. Our goal is to interpret that truth and to let the details support it. Those who fail to observe this rule generally miss the meaning Jesus intended and, moreover, introduce serious problems in the interpretive process.

2. Determine whether Christ himself supplied the meaning of a parable.

The Synoptic writers note that occasionally after Jesus had concluded a parable, He gave a point-by-point explanation of the details as well as the truth of the parable itself. In these cases, the meaning He intended is obvious.

What should be our main effort in interpreting a parable?

3. Avoid using parables as the foundation and source of doctrine.

As we seek to interpret a parable correctly, why is it important to read it fully?

While we can illustrate the doctrines Christ established by His other teachings quite effectively through the truth of a parable, we must not base our doctrines on the strength of a single parable. We cannot overemphasize this point. Since a parable represents a figure of speech that requires careful interpretation, it is subject to abuse. If one fails to use proper guidelines for interpreting parables and does not give them the meanings Christ intended, he or she could accept as doctrine what is not supported by the total teachings of Christ.

What is the relationship between parables and doctrine?

4. Use the truth in a parable in its proper context.

In general a person's faith and God's grace, which are necessary for salvation, are not the main themes of Christ's parables. Yet many of the parables do portray the fruit or outworking of salvation—that is, good works. The point here is that we should use the truth in a parable in its proper context. If we follow this rule, we will not fall into the error of substituting the message of salvation by grace with a message of salvation by human works.

Lesson 11.2 Examining the Parables in the Synoptic Gospels

State some of the facts we learn from a careful comparison of the parables in the Synoptic Gospels.

As noted before, we have chosen forty-seven parables from the Synoptic Gospels that, according to many Bible scholars, meet the criteria for true parables. For your convenience we have listed them consecutively and arranged them according to the place or places where you will find them in the Synoptics:

Matthew Only

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. The Weeds | Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 |
| 2. The Hidden Treasure | Matthew 13:44 |
| 3. The Pearl | Matthew 13:45-46 |
| 4. The Net | Matthew 13:47-50 |
| 5. The House Owner | Matthew 13:52 |
| 6. The Unmerciful Servant | Matthew 18:23-35 |
| 7. The Workers in the Vineyard | Matthew 20:1-16 |
| 8. The Two Sons | Matthew 21:28-32 |
| 9. The Wedding Banquet | Matthew 22:1-14 |
| 10. The Ten Virgins | Matthew 25:1-13 |
| 11. The Talents | Matthew 25:14-30 |
| 12. The Sheep and the Goats | Matthew 25:31-46 |

Mark Only

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|
| 13. The Growing Seed | Mark 4:26-29 |
| 14. The House Owner and His Servants | Mark 13:34-37 |

Luke Only

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| 15. The Two Debtors | Luke 7:41-43 |
| 16. The Good Samaritan | Luke 10:30-37 |
| 17. The Friend at Midnight | Luke 11:5-8 |
| 18. The Rich Fool | Luke 12:13-21 |
| 19. The Waiting and Watching Servants | Luke 12:35-38 |
| 20. The Barren Fig Tree | Luke 13:6-9 |
| 21. The Chief Seats | Luke 14:7-11 |
| 22. The Great Banquet | Luke 14:16-24 |
| 23. The Unfinished Tower | Luke 14:28-30 |
| 24. The Unwaged War | Luke 14:31-32 |
| 25. The Lost Coin | Luke 15:8-10 |
| 26. The Lost Son | Luke 15:11-32 |
| 27. The Shrewd Manager | Luke 16:1-13 |
| 28. The Rich Man and Lazarus | Luke 16:19-31 |

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| 29. The Unprofitable Servants | Luke 17:7-10 |
| 30. The Persistent Widow | Luke 18:1-8 |
| 31. The Pharisee and the Tax Collector | Luke 18:9-14 |
| 32. The Ten Minas | Luke 19:11-27 |

Matthew and Luke

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 33. The Lamp | Matthew 6:22-23; Luke 11:34-36 |
| 34. The Two Builders | Matthew 7:24-27; Luke 6:46-49 |
| 35. The Evil Spirit That Returned | Matthew 12:43-45; Luke 11:24-26 |
| 36. The Yeast | Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20-21 |
| 37. The Lost Sheep | Matthew 18:12-14; Luke 15:3-7 |
| 38. The Master and the Thief | Matthew 24:43-44; Luke 12:39-40 |
| 39. The Faithful and Evil Servants | Matthew 24:45-51; Luke 12:42-46 |

Matthew, Mark, and Luke

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 40. The Guests of the Bridegroom | Matthew 9:14-15; Mark 2:19-20; Luke 5:34-35 |
| 41. The Patch on an Old Garment | Matthew 9:16; Mark 2:21; Luke 5:36 |
| 42. The New Wine in Old Wineskins | Matthew 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37-39 |
| 43. The Sower | Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23; Mark 4:3-9, 13-20; Luke 8:5-8, 11-15 |

44. The Mustard Seed	Matthew 13:31–32; Mark 4:30–32; Luke 13:18–19
45. The Tenants	Matthew 21:33–41; Mark 12:1–9; Luke 20:9–16
46. The Rejected Stone	Matthew 21:42–44; Mark 12:10–11; Luke 20:17–18
47. The Sprouting Fig Tree	Matthew 24:32–35; Mark 13:28–31; Luke 21:29–33

Now that we have examined the selected list of forty-seven parables, we can make some observations. As we do, remember what we said previously about scholars differing on the definition of *parable* and the number of true parables.

List at least three facts we learn from a careful study of the parables.

First, we note that of the forty-seven parables selected, twelve are unique to Matthew, two to Mark, and eighteen to Luke. Second, we find seven parables in both Matthew and Luke. Third, we discover that eight parables appear in all three Synoptics. Fourth, we observe that Luke records the most parables (approximately thirty-three), while Matthew is second (twenty-seven), and Mark gives us the least (ten). Finally, the greater number of parables in Matthew and Luke correlates with the greater emphasis on teaching in these Gospels.

The Early Years and Preparation for Ministry

Describe the pattern of Christ's use of parables as His ministry progresses and relate it to His purpose.

You may recall that the Synoptic writers give us few facts about Christ during this period, and what they do record does not include any of His teaching. The only possible exception might be the responses He gave during

His temptation. In any case, the Gospel writers record no parables during this phase of His ministry.

The Early Judean Ministry

In Chapter 6 we observed that only John reports on this period of Christ's ministry, so it is not, in the strictest sense, part of the Synoptic study. However, since it comprises nearly a year of Christ's ministry, we cannot ignore it. Yet even in this time that probably spanned nearly one-third of Christ's public ministry, John did not record any parables. Make a mental note of this fact, for it represents one of the first clues we uncover as we search for possible reasons to explain Christ's use of parables.

The Early Period of Galilean Ministry

The Synoptic writers associate only four parables (based on our list) with this period of ministry, which lasted for about four months:

1. The Two Builders Matthew 7:24-27; Luke 6:46-49
2. The Guests of the Bridegroom Matthew 9:14-15; Mark 2:19-20; Luke 5:34-35
3. The Patch on an Old Garment Matthew 9:16; Mark 2:21; Luke 5:36
4. The New Wine in Old Wineskins Matthew 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37-39

The Middle Period of Galilean Ministry

This particular time of ministry probably lasted about ten or eleven months. Thus, by the end of the early Galilean period, Christ had been in public ministry for nearly a year and a half. The middle period therefore extends through the second and into His third year of ministry. Twelve parables are recorded for this period:

1. The Weeds Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43
2. The Hidden Treasure Matthew 13:44
3. The Pearl Matthew 13:45-46

4. The Net	Matthew 13:47-50
5. The House Owner	Matthew 13:52
6. The Growing Seed	Mark 4:26-29
7. The Two Debtors	Luke 7:41-43
8. The Lamp	Matthew 6:22-23; Luke 11:34-36
9. The Evil Spirit	Matthew 12:43-45; Luke 11:24-26
10. The Yeast	Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20-21
11. The Sower	Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23; Mark 4:3-9, 13-20; Luke 8:4-8
12. The Mustard Seed	Matthew 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19

The Later Period of Galilean Ministry

This period of Galilean ministry lasted approximately six months. We note that the Synoptic writers record just two parables with this phase:

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. The Unmerciful Servant | Matthew 18:23-35 |
| 2. The Lost Sheep | Matthew 18:12-14; Luke 15:3-7 |

The Later Judean-Perean Ministry

The last phase of Christ's life and ministry perhaps covered some six or seven months. During this period we see the greatest number of recorded parables (twenty-nine):

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. The Workers in the Vineyard | Matthew 20:1-16 |
| 2. The Two Sons | Matthew 21:28-32 |

3. The Wedding Banquet	Matthew 22:1-14
4. The Ten Virgins	Matthew 25:1-13
5. The Talents	Matthew 25:14-30
6. The Sheep and the Goats	Matthew 25:31-46
7. The House Owner and His Servants	Mark 13:34-37
8. The Good Samaritan	Luke 10:30-37
9. The Friend at Midnight	Luke 11:5-8
10. The Rich Fool	Luke 12:13-21
11. The Waiting and Watching Servants	Luke 12:35-38
12. The Barren Fig Tree	Luke 13:6-9
13. The Chief Seats	Luke 14:7-11
14. The Great Banquet	Luke 14:16-24
15. The Unfinished Tower	Luke 14:28-30
16. The Unwaged War	Luke 14:31-32
17. The Lost Coin	Luke 15:8-10
18. The Lost Son	Luke 15:11-32
19. The Shrewd Manager	Luke 16:1-13
20. The Rich Man and Lazarus	Luke 16:19-31
21. The Unprofitable Servants	Luke 17:7-10

22. The Persistent Widow	Luke 18:1-8
23. The Pharisee and the Tax Collector	Luke 18:9-14
24. The Ten Minas	Luke 19:11-27
25. The Master and the Thief	Matthew 24:43-44; Luke 12:39-40
26. The Faithful and Wicked Servants	Matthew 24:45-51; Luke 12:42-46
27. The Tenants	Matthew 21:33-41; Mark 12:1-9; Luke 20:9-16
28. The Rejected Stone	Matthew 21:42-44; Mark 12:10-11; Luke 20:17-18
29. The Sprouting Fig Tree	Matthew 24:32-35; Mark 13:28-31; Luke 21:29-33

Now that we have listed the parables according to the various periods in which Christ gave them, we see an interesting trend. The inspired writers give us no indication of recorded parables during Christ's early ministry. We note that the biblical accounts record an increasing number of parables and that there appears to be a specific direction in their message.

We have observed that, at the beginning of His ministry, Christ was widely accepted, particularly in Galilee. The crowds followed Him everywhere as He taught and performed miracles. However, as He made the intent of His message and the claims of His person clearer to His hearers, His popularity began to decline among some of His kinsmen. As His popularity decreased; criticism, suspicion, and hatred increased. Thus the parables He gave and the truths they reflected indicate that Jesus was responding to the changed attitudes and behavior of the Jews.

Christ's early parables implied that the old religious order was passing away, that there was a "changing of the guard." The former system was being replaced by a new one; it needed more than a patch to meet the requirements

of the new order. The new system would be like the dawning of a new day, and the old laws would not be **compatible** with its requirements.

Christ's teaching about the coming change introduced a completely new concept. Thus we should not be surprised to learn that the Jews struggled to understand it. Even though they were initially confused by it, they at least gave it their passive acceptance. But as time passed and Christ focused His teaching increasingly on the Kingdom, many of His followers felt that the cost He placed on them for entering it was too great. In their view, the break with the past was too severe, and there were too many unknown factors to consider. The parables of the middle and later Galilean period reflect these changes in both Christ's teachings and His hearers' reaction to them.

When we study this transitional period in Christ's ministry, we sense His sorrow, anger, and concern over the changing attitude of His followers. As a result, He used parables increasingly in His teaching. This prompted His disciples to ask, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" In response He said,

The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand."
(Matthew 13:10-13)

Remember that Jesus now faced both opposition to His ministry and **skepticism** about His intentions. Using parables enabled Him not only to conceal truth from critics and mockers but also to reveal it to earnest seekers. Furthermore, because opposition to His teaching was rising, He chose not to use plain language. This made it harder for His enemies to distort His words. Parables are as effective as direct speech, or more so, yet they avoid the harshness and offensiveness of a more direct approach.

Thus, the spirit of unbelief that began to invade the hearts of His hearers brought about a new emphasis in Christ's method of teaching. He now stressed the great value of the Kingdom, and He tried to convince His hearers that it was something to be sought after. But His efforts were in vain. Instead, opposition and unbelief increased.

Describe briefly the trend that emerges in Jesus' use of parables as His teaching ministry progresses.

During His last (approximately) six or seven months of ministry, the synoptic writers record the greatest number of parables and the greatest variety in teaching styles or methods. As we have seen, His teaching began to focus increasingly on future aspects of the Kingdom. The underlying theme of many parables in this final period was that the gift of the Kingdom would be taken from the Jews and given to others. God had offered the Kingdom to His people; they had rejected it because they failed to perceive its value; and therefore they would suffer great loss.

In summarizing this section, we might deduce that Jesus matched the truth of His parables with the changing attitude of His people. We might also note that He changed not only His teaching method but also His emphasis to that of the Kingdom. You will see this more clearly in the next section as we classify the parables according to their subject matter.

Explain how the nature of Jesus' parables progressively changes to match the attitude of the people.

Lesson 11.3 Classifying Parables

Using the list of parables provided, classify each parable into its main subject area or areas.

In the previous section we learned that Jesus used parables more and more as unbelief and opposition increased. He did so both to hide the full implication of the truth from unbelievers and to reveal the truth to believers. Using parables enabled Him to achieve both aims. These facts help us to understand why He used parables increasingly as His ministry progressed.

Understanding the pattern of use is important in that it helps us to discern Christ's purpose and motivation for using parables. However, we also need a basic knowledge of their subject matter. Unfortunately, space will not permit us to give an explanation of each parable, but we will list four major subject areas and identify parables that fit in each one. This classification will help fix them more firmly in our minds.

As we approach the matter of classifying parables, we should note that the truth of a parable may fit more than one subject area. For example, a parable that stresses salvation may also convey some aspect of truth relative to future events. Our purpose here is merely to give you an idea of how the parables were and can be used.

The Kingdom of God

In nearly twenty of the parables, Christ uses the expressions *kingdom of heaven*, *kingdom of God*, or just *kingdom*. Many of these refer directly to the Kingdom itself and discuss its coming, growth, and consummation. For example, The Weeds (Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43), The Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31–32), and The Yeast (Matthew 13:33) illustrate these emphases. In fact, most of Jesus' parables relate in some way to the Kingdom and tell us much about the kingly rule of God.

What do the parables listed under "The Kingdom of God" indicate?

Among other things, the parables indicate that we do not have to wait until the future to experience the Kingdom, for it is a present reality. Since it is already present, all that concerns our lives and this world changes. The Kingdom is *already but not yet*; it is here, yet it will be consummated in the future. Jesus initiated the Kingdom, yet it is still in the process of coming.

Salvation

Another category of parables concerns salvation and the related matters of repentance and forgiveness of sin. The three well-known parables in Luke 15 fit this category: The Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin, and The Lost Son. These parables portray the lost condition of the human family. The desire to seek and find what was lost in these examples illustrates our Lord's desire to seek and to save those who are lost.

What do the parables that focus primarily on salvation deal with?

For a person to be saved, he or she must first realize the need to repent of his or her sin. The parable of The Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9–14) illustrates this well. It contrasts two attitudes: self-righteousness and

repentance. Christ commends the example of the tax collector who recognizes his pitiful condition and seeks forgiveness. The parables of Luke 15 also reveal that God is so concerned about the well-being of every person that He takes the initiative in finding and restoring those who are lost. Jesus portrays this unlimited grace in The Two Debtors (Luke 7:41-43), The Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18:23-35), and The Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16). He also makes clear that those who are forgiven most, love most.

Discipleship

A number of parables deal with some aspect of kingdom living. Jesus taught that receiving the Kingdom brought both privileges and responsibilities. Thus, His parables stated not only the nature of the Kingdom but also the behavior required of its citizens. The Unfinished Tower (Luke 14:28-30) and The Unwaged War (Luke 14:31-32), for example, focus on our readiness to count the cost of being subjects of the Kingdom. Both The Hidden Treasure and The Pearl (Matthew 13:44-46) point to the need to sacrifice all for the sake of the Kingdom.

The Friend at Midnight (Luke 11:5-8) and The Persistent Widow (Luke 18:1-8) portray the importance of persistent faith, and The Unprofitable Servants (Luke 17:7-10) and The Two Sons (Matthew 21:28-32) stress obedient service. The Two Builders (Matthew 7:24-27) further emphasizes the need to both hear and obey Christ's teachings. The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) shows the need for compassion, while The Chief Seats (Luke 14:7-11) reveals improper conduct.

Note briefly what we may learn about discipleship from the parables that deal with kingdom living.

The Talents (Matthew 25:14-30) focuses on stewardship, whereas The Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) shows the importance of being prepared. The Evil Spirit (Matthew 12:43-45) speaks of our need to devote our hearts entirely to God, and The Lamp (Matthew 6:22-23) shows that we must keep our spiritual eyes on God and not be distracted by the world. Finally, The House Owner (Matthew 13:52) implies that as we receive understanding of God's kingdom, we need to impart our knowledge to others.

Future Events

Jesus illustrated various teachings on future events through parables. While it would be difficult to isolate one exclusive theme, the weight of the parables' teaching seems to indicate the need of watchful preparation for the coming King. Jesus tells the parables in such a way that we sense the need to do what is right today during the present aspect of the Kingdom in light of the coming time of judgment and reward. The prospect of judgment adds a futuristic tone to many of these parables.

What theme is especially emphasized in futuristic parables?

As you read the parables listed below, you will note several things. First, they tell of coming judgment and sound a warning. Second, they call people to repentance and indicate the shortness of time before Christ's return. The implication is that people need to act now and not wait.

The Weeds	The Waiting and Watching Servants
The Net	The Rich Man and Lazarus
The Ten Virgins	The Ten Minas
The Talents	The Master and the Thief
The Sheep and the Goats	The Faithful and Evil Servants
The House Owner and His Servants	The Sprouting Fig Tree
The Rich Fool	

Examining a few of the foregoing parables enables us to see why they are futuristic. For example, The Weeds (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43) reveals the nature of the Kingdom as it is presently growing, as well as the process of judgment at the end of the age. The Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21) shows that with eternity in view, the rich man was foolish because he stored up things and pleasures for himself and neglected his spiritual needs. This parable stresses especially that a time is coming when only what is done for God will count. Again, The Master and the Thief (Matthew 24:43-44) focuses on watchfulness. Since no one knows when a thief will come, he or she must be constantly alert

to catch the thief when he comes. In applying the truth of this parable, we must await the coming of our Lord with a sense of anticipation and expectancy. Finally, in The Talents (Matthew 25:14–30) Jesus emphasizes stewardship. In the light of future judgment, we must do what is right, knowing we are accountable for our works (thoughts, actions, and motives).

The preceding four subject areas illustrate the way in which the truth of parables can be used. Whether Christ dealt with opposition to His earthly mission, the attitude of disciples of the Kingdom, or future aspects of the Kingdom, parables enabled Him to **captivate** His audiences with a fascinating method of communicating truth.

The study of parables can be quite involved and seemingly endless. We recommend that you locate and read some good books on the subject. In this chapter we have simply tried to give you some background facts on the parables and to classify them according to some important subject areas. This should help you when you engage in a more concentrated study at a later date.

11.4 Interpreting Parables

Apply correctly the principles of interpreting parables according to the guidelines given in this chapter.

Earlier in this chapter we gave four guidelines that can help us interpret parables properly. Having examined forty-seven parables, listed them according to subject, and discussed Christ's purpose in using them increasingly as His ministry progressed, we are ready to apply these guidelines to an actual example. We will use The Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18:23–35) for this purpose.

Here Jesus tells the story of a rich king who mercifully canceled the large debt of one of his servants. However, this servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a very small debt and refused to have mercy on him. Instead, he had the man thrown into the debtors' prison. When the king heard of his servant's unforgiving attitude, he became angry. Calling in the unmerciful servant, the king **chastised** him and put him in prison, making clear that he could not go free until he paid the large debt he originally owed. Now we will apply the guidelines to this parable.

Consistent with our first rule, which states that in general each parable has one particular truth to convey, this parable stresses mercy and forgiveness. You might ask, “How do we arrive at this conclusion?” We conclude this by looking at the immediate context: The parable immediately follows Peter’s question about forgiveness and the importance God places on it. Although other details occur in the story, we must grasp this central truth. In addition, the second rule tells us to look for the meaning Christ himself supplied. We see this in His summary in verse 35, where He stresses forgiveness and the related matter of showing mercy.

Since figurative language presents certain difficulties to the interpreter, we might ask, “What happens if we place too much emphasis on the specific details or if we try to build a doctrine on them?” To illustrate, the first difficulty concerns the matter of forgiven sins. Can sins that God forgives once be recalled and placed on one’s account a second time? If we focus on the details of this parable (the king’s action in reimposing the unmerciful servant’s debt) instead of the central truth (forgiveness), this appears to be the case. We might also imagine that the degree of the king’s anger equals the amount of the forgiven debt. Finally, does the fact that the first servant fell on his knees and begged for mercy before it was granted set a pattern for us in approaching God?

A person could preach a sermon on almost every detail of a parable, but this would only cause us to miss its central truth. (See Guideline 3.) Since our purpose here is not to establish a doctrine, the fact that the forgiven servant’s debt was reimposed does not clash with the biblical teaching that forgiven sins are forever put away. As we noted before, the main issue here is forgiveness. If we are not willing to forgive as we are forgiven, we risk the just anger of God. Neither the amount of the debts nor the number of servants involved in this parable (the details) is of any real consequence and should not be given undue importance. Remember that God has forgiven us and shown us mercy; because of this we should be willing to forgive and show mercy to others. If we fail to understand this Christian principle, we will incur God’s anger, and this will affect our relationship with Him.

We could use many other examples, but this one is sufficient to demonstrate the proper use of interpretive guidelines. If you remember these rules and apply them faithfully, you will be true to the biblical text and to your own responsibility as a faithful minister of the Word.

Read Luke 10:25-37 carefully and analyze the adjacent interpretation attributed to Augustine for this parable. Then briefly explain the rules that are violated and the danger this poses.

The man who went from Jerusalem to Jericho was Adam and Jerusalem, the heavenly city from where he fell. Jericho represents human mortality, the result of the robbery by the devil and his angels who stripped him of his immortality. The priest and the Levite represent the Law and the prophets, which could not save him, and Christ is the good Samaritan, who poured in the oil and wine (the comfort of hope and encouragement to work hard) into his wounds. The inn is the church, and the innkeeper none other than Paul, who received the two pence, the dual Great commandment to love God and your neighbor.

Chapter 12 The Miracles of Jesus

Examining Christ's parabolic teaching method in Chapter 11 helped us to see another facet of His genius as a communicator. We found that parables permitted Him both to mask truth from skeptics and to reveal it to earnest seekers. Studying and applying guidelines for interpreting parables gave us not only insights into Christ's message but also some practical skills for interpreting Scripture. Now we consider the fact of miracles and their nature, purpose, and effect in the ministry of our Lord.

This will provide one more area of detailed study to our focus on major aspects of Christ's ministry. Understanding the purpose of miracles, as well as His teaching and parables, gives us a fairly complete picture of what He did. While we will not analyze each miracle, we will examine its place and the purpose of miracles as a whole. This will involve us in a part of Christ's ministry that has aroused much discussion throughout church history.

May this chapter provide you with useful insights into God's purpose in revealing the supernatural from time to time. May it also help you to better understand miracles, add balance to your ministry, and give you a greater appreciation for the unusual workings of God.

Lesson 12.1 The Nature of Miracles

Objectives

12.1.1 *Identify true statements about the fact of miracles and what we can imply from scriptural references to miracles.*

12.1.2 *Write a concise definition of miracle and recognize facts related to miracles.*

Lesson 12.2 The Miracles in Each Gospel

Objectives

12.2.1 *Recognize correct statements about the recorded miracles of Jesus in the Gospels.*

12.2.2 *Discuss the harmony of miracles in the Gospels.*

Lesson 12.3 The Purpose of Miracles

Objective

12.3.1 *Discuss the significance of miracles in Jesus' ministry.*

Lesson 12.1 The Nature of Miracles

Identify true statements about the fact of miracles and what we can imply from scriptural references to miracles.

In the first lesson of this chapter, we will consider the fact of miracles and define the term *miracle*. This will establish our position on the extraordinary acts Jesus performed during His ministry and give us a working definition of these acts of power.

Obviously, stressing the *works* of Christ moves us away from His *teachings* or *words*, which have been the prominent theme of this unit. However, as we shall see, His words and works are complementary. As Herbert Lockyer notes, "Christ's miracles were parables in deeds, just as His parables were miracles in words" (1961, 154), which indicates that His miracles had a teaching value. In fact, as you move through this chapter, you should see that miracles were but another aspect of Christ's teaching or message.

The Fact of Miracles

Possibly nothing in the study of the life of Christ creates more debate than His miracles. The range of people's attitudes varies from complete acceptance of His miracles to outright rejection. As you focus attention on the life and ministry of our Lord, you will encounter many varied opinions on the subject.

Our position on the matter is quite clear: We accept the miracles of Christ as historically true. Even Jesus' enemies could not deny the fact of miracles (Mark 2:6-12; 3:1-6; Luke 11:14-20; John 11:47-48); they simply attributed His power and the miraculous works He performed to satanic power. Jesus said these same acts of power (to which He referred in Mark 16:17-18 and John 14:12-14) would accompany the preaching of the gospel. In fact, miracles did accompany the preaching of the good news and were clearly evident in the ministry of the apostles (Acts 3:6-10; 5:12-16; 9:32-42).

Some might ask, "Is there some other evidence besides the Bible that helps to verify the biblical record of Jesus' miracles?" Yes! The Jewish historian Josephus refers to Jesus as a doer of wonderful deeds in his *Antiquities of the Jews* (XVIII, 3, 379), recording what was apparently an accepted fact among his contemporaries. In addition, another Jewish source, the *Babylonian Talmud*, far from denying Jesus' miracles, simply reinforces the judgment of the Pharisees recorded in Matthew 12:22-28, attributing the source of Jesus' power to the prince of demons.

Do historical sources outside the Bible refer to Jesus' miracles?

Even though we have mentioned some external sources of information about Jesus' miracles, it is clear that the writers of the Gospels simply accepted them as a matter of fact. As a result, they mention relatively few of the miracles Christ performed as they pen their respective accounts. From what John mentions (John 21:25), they were quite selective in choosing the miracles they included in their narratives. In summary, then, we do not question the genuineness of the miracles Christ performed, but we do want to pursue their purpose a bit later in the chapter.

The Definition of a Miracle

Write a concise definition of miracle and recognize facts related to miracles.

We commonly use the word *miracle* to translate several Greek words in the New Testament. The first word, *dunamis*, which means "mighty works," emphasizes the power of Christ's supernatural acts. The second word, *terata*, which gives us the idea of "wonders," stresses the effect these miracles produce. The third word, *semeia*, which means "signs," indicates the purpose of miracles. These words help us to see the nature of miracles (what they are), their impact, and their purpose (which we will discuss later in this chapter). For the present, however, we can consider how to define the word *miracle* most accurately.

Defining the word *miracle* precisely is somewhat difficult. For example, we might say a miracle simply refers to "anything that occurs which appears to violate the accepted, unchanging laws of nature." Or we might say still more simply that a miracle is "any unusual event." Yet it is more precise to say the term *miracle* refers to "the occurrence of any event that would not normally happen without the intervention of an outside force or power."

Bible scholars commonly use the word miracle to translate several Greek words. List the meanings of several of these words.

While miracles can occur in relation to any facet of life, we usually associate them with the spiritual realm. Since any study of miracles generally includes as its major focus their purpose or religious significance, we will use *miracle* in its spiritual sense.

On the basis of our study in this section, briefly define the term *miracle*.

The miracles recorded in the Gospels demonstrate the effect of a supernatural power or force on an impossible natural circumstance. The impossible becomes possible when the supernatural external power or force intervenes. A miracle is an impossible situation, event, or need that disregards accepted or expected laws of nature. The supernatural external power or force is Christ.

We can list Jesus' miracles under two general headings: (1) those that involved healing and (2) those that involved nature. In both cases, Christ intervened with supernatural power in circumstances that required the suspension of natural laws to bring about results that would otherwise have been impossible. For instance, Matthew records the case of a man with a

withered hand (12:9-13). Since withered arms and legs do not naturally regenerate or become normal again, Jesus intervened, overruling the natural disability by restoring it completely. In another instance, Jesus walked on water (Mark 6:48-51), using supernatural power to overcome the law of gravity and perform something impossible. These examples reveal Christ's acts as such unusual occurrences that we can readily use terms such as *wonders, mighty works, power, and signs* to describe them.

Now that we have discussed the fact of Jesus' miracles and established a working definition of the term *miracle*, we can list the miracles the Gospel writers recorded. Again, we will include material from the Gospel of John to add more depth and completeness to the subject. In addition, we will, as nearly as possible, list the miracles and note whether one, two, three, or four of the Gospel writers recorded them.

Lesson 12.2 The Miracles in Each Gospel

Recognize correct statements about the recorded miracles of Jesus in the Gospels.

As you consider the following list, please note that we have included thirty-six different miracles. While this number is commonly accepted by many Bible scholars, other scholars include only thirty-five miracles. These latter scholars consider the healing of the blind and mute **demoniac** recorded by Matthew (12:22-23) and that of the mute demoniac described by Luke (11:14) as the same miracle. However, in view of the biblical evidence, it appears that Jesus performed these two miracles on different occasions. For this reason, we have listed them separately as two distinct miracles.

We will find where each miracle occurs in the Gospel accounts and whether it appears in more than one record.

One Gospel

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------|
| 1. Water Changed into Wine | John 2:1-11 |
| 2. An Official's Son Healed | John 4:43-54 |

3. An Invalid at Bethesda Healed John 5:1-15
4. The First Miraculous Catch of Fish Luke 5:1-11
5. A Widow's Son Raised from the Dead Luke 7:11-16
6. A Blind and Mute Man Healed Matthew 12:22
7. Two Blind Men Healed Matthew 9:27-31
8. A Demon-Possessed Mute Healed Matthew 9:32-33
9. A Deaf and Mute Man Healed Mark 7:31-37
10. A Blind Man Healed at Bethsaida Mark 8:22-26
11. The Temple Tax Money Provided Matthew 17:24-27
12. The Healing of a Man Born Blind John 9:1-41
13. A Mute Demon-Possessed Man Healed Luke 11:14
14. A Crippled Woman Healed on the Sabbath Luke 13:10-17
15. A Man Suffering with Dropsy Healed Luke 14:1-6
16. Lazarus Raised from the Dead John 11:1-44
17. Ten Lepers Healed Luke 17:11-19
18. The High Priest's Servant Healed Luke 22:49-51

19. The Second Miraculous Catch of John 21:1-14
Fish

Two Gospels

- | | |
|---|--|
| 20. A Demoniac Healed on the Sabbath | Mark 1:23-28; Luke 4:33-37 |
| 21. A Centurion's Servant Healed | Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10 |
| 22. A Canaanite Woman's Daughter Healed | Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30 |
| 23. Four Thousand Fed | Matthew 15:29-38; Mark 8:1-9 |
| 24. A Fig Tree Cursed | Matthew 21:18-22; Mark 11:12-14, 20-24 |

Three Gospels

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 25. Peter's Mother-in-law Healed | Matthew 8:14-15; Mark 1:29-31; Luke 4:38-39 |
| 26. A Leper Healed | Matthew 8:2-4; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-16 |
| 27. A Paralytic Healed | Matthew 9:2-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:18-26 |
| 28. A Man with a Withered Hand Healed | Matthew 12:9-13; Mark 3:1-5; Luke 6:6-10 |
| 29. A Storm Calmed | Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25 |
| 30. Two Demoniacs Healed | Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39 |

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 31. A Sick Woman Healed | Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48 |
| 32. A Girl Raised from the Dead | Matthew 9:18-19, 23-26; Mark 5:21-24, 35-43; Luke 8:41-42, 49-56 |
| 33. Jesus Walks on the Water | Matthew 14:22-33; Mark 6:45-52; John 6:16-21 |
| 34. An Epileptic Boy Healed | Matthew 17:14-18; Mark 9:14-27; Luke 9:37-42 |
| 35. The Blind Healed at Jericho | Matthew 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43 |

Four Gospels

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| 36. Five Thousand Fed | Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13 |
|-----------------------|---|

Reviewing the foregoing list of miracles enables us to make certain observations. For example, we see that each Synoptic writer lists about the same number of miracles. Matthew records twenty, Mark eighteen, and Luke twenty, giving us a balanced historical account of Christ's miracles. The list also reveals that ten of the miracles appear in all three Synoptic Gospels, and one is found in Matthew, Mark, and John. However, only one (Five Thousand Fed) is common to all four Gospels.

As we noted earlier, we may list the miracles of Christ under two general categories: those that involve healing and those that concern nature. A glance at the list of miracles indicates that Christ performed a far greater number of those in the first category. In fact, while the Gospel writers record twenty-seven miracles of healing, they list only nine miracles that relate to nature.

How many miracles are recorded in the Gospels, and which miracle appears in all four Gospels?

We need to stress that although we list thirty-six specifically named miracles, these are not the only miracles Christ worked. The Gospel writers themselves state clearly that He performed many other miracles they neither mentioned specifically nor explained (Matthew 4:23-24; Mark 6:53-56; Luke 4:40; John 21:25).

In addition to miracles listed under the “general” category, we should mention another class of miracles associated with Christ’s death and the events immediately following His resurrection, including these:

1. The tearing of the temple curtain in two (Luke 23:45)
2. The breaking open of the tombs and the raising of the bodies of many holy people who had died (Matthew 27:52-53)
3. The sudden appearing and disappearing of Christ after His resurrection (Luke 24:31; John 20:19)
4. The ascending of Christ into heaven (Luke 24:51)

Finally, we should remember the miracles of Christ’s virgin birth and His resurrection. Strangely, some scholars willingly accept the fact of Christ’s resurrection but deny His miracles. Their position creates an odd inconsistency. If we accept the fact of either His virgin birth or resurrection—each of which is a miracle in its own right—then we should be able to accept other miracles quite easily.

The Harmony of Miracles in the Gospels

Discuss the harmony of miracles in the Gospels.

We have focused on the number of miracles recorded in the Gospels, their location in the different narratives, and the balance accorded them by the Synoptic writers. Now it is time to consider how each Gospel writer’s account complements those of the other writers when he focuses on the same miracle. This will help us to appreciate more fully how some miracles are verified in almost every detail. It will also reveal that on occasion when the writers seem to deal with the same miracle, they differ in the details they record. We want you to be aware that both similarities and differences occur in the Synoptic Gospels.

One example of the similarity that occurs in the Synoptic accounts concerns the man with the shriveled hand (Matthew 12:9-13; Mark 3:1-5; Luke 6:6-10). While each Synoptic writer does not give the same number of details, the ones he gives in common with the others are almost identical. We will look more closely for greater detail.

All three writers state that Jesus entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and that a man with a withered hand was there. They also note that the Pharisees were present and were looking for a reason to accuse Him. The writers clearly state the reason: They wanted to see whether He would heal on the Sabbath. While the words Christ spoke to the Pharisees when He discerned their intent are not the same in each account, we understand that each writer did not record everything Christ said on this occasion. Each chose the facts he felt were appropriate for his account, but there is no conflict in the facts. The writers then observe that after Jesus responded to those assembled, He commanded the needy man to stretch out his hand. They concur about the outcome: The man obeyed and was completely healed, leading the Pharisees to leave the place determined to find a way to kill Jesus.

Having looked at this miracle in detail, what conclusions can we make? One obvious aspect is the similarity of so many details. The fact that in all three Synoptic records, the details of this miracle are almost identical establishes in our minds that each writer is referring to the same miracle. In turn, this raises our confidence in the reliability of the Word of God. When three different writers at different times and places agree on most of the details of a historic occurrence, even though they direct their records to different audiences, we know it did not “just happen.” On the contrary, this provides strong evidence of the divine Author’s influence on the writers (2 Peter 1:20-21).

Earlier we mentioned that not only similarities but also differences occur in the Synoptic records that seem to deal with the same miracle. An example of these differences concerns the healing of two blind men (Matthew 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43). We will examine this miracle closely; however, before we focus on it, read the scriptural accounts of it in each Gospel.

This miracle has also been called “the healing of blind Bartimaeus,” for Mark gives this specific name to the blind beggar in his account. While most harmonies of the Gospels agree that the healing of Bartimaeus in Mark is the same miracle as that recorded by Matthew and Luke, we find several difficulties in our attempts to correlate the three accounts. Even so, we believe the details that are similar give enough evidence for us to accept the three as one and the same miracle. Still, adopting this position requires us to deal with the details that do not harmonize. Our goal here must be to maintain the accuracy of the

record in a reasonable and acceptable way. We will study the miracle in question.

The writers of the Synoptic Gospels agree that this miracle occurred in Jericho. They also observe that the need of the blind was a cure from blindness. Moreover, the appeal by the blind was nearly identical in all three records: "Lord (Jesus), Son of David, have mercy on me (us)!" Yet other details are not so clear. For example, Matthew notes that not one but two blind men sat by the roadside. Matthew also says Jesus healed the two blind men as He was "leaving" Jericho, and he does not name them. However, Mark mentions only one blind man and gives us his name. Like Matthew, Mark says Jesus healed Bartimaeus as He was "leaving" Jericho. Luke, in common with Mark, mentions only one man, whom he does not name, but Luke says this miracle occurred as Jesus "approached" Jericho.

How do we respond to the differences in the three accounts? Did the writers confuse the facts as they recorded the life of Christ? As you might suppose, many scholars have attempted to explain these apparent discrepancies. While no one has found a perfect answer, there are several solutions. As we consider them, remember what we said earlier about the writing of historical narratives. A writer's omission of certain details or his different emphasis does not detract from the truthfulness of what he says.

What can be said about accounts of the same miracles in different Gospels?

Some scholars suggest that two blind men were present all the time, but Mark mentions only Bartimaeus because he was well known (his father's name is mentioned). Others point out that in Christ's day Jericho was a double city, including both the older Jewish city and the newer Roman city. Thus it is possible Matthew and Mark meant that Christ was leaving the old city and Luke referred to Christ's entering the newer Roman Jericho. If the blind men were sitting beside the road between these two parts of Jericho (which were about a mile apart), this difficulty can be explained. Furthermore, it would not be unusual to mention only one man, especially since an aggressive, well-known person would be inclined to act as a spokesman and to ignore the second man. The fact that Mark and Luke mention only one man does not mean the second man was not there. Naturally, Matthew, who was present at the time of this miracle, would have added more details.

While these ideas may not give us a complete harmony of the details, they suggest a possible and plausible explanation. If we assume the written record

is correct and try to work out and harmonize any apparent problems, we find that the seeming discrepancies give way as our knowledge of Scripture and the background of passages increases. We should also remember that what we have in the Synoptic Gospels is a picture with three dimensions or perspectives. Each writer's personal emphasis adds to our knowledge of the recorded miracles and gives us insights we may have missed had we received only a single perspective or one-dimensional account.

Discuss briefly what we discover when we try to harmonize the Gospel accounts of the miracles.

Lesson 12.3 The Purpose of Miracles

Discuss the significance of miracles in Jesus' ministry.

We now come to the *purpose* of miracles. Why did Christ perform miracles? Did He simply react to the needs of the moment, or did He work miracles to fulfill part of a grand design? At first glance it might appear that these questions would be easy to answer, but the more we analyze the issue of miracles, the more complex it becomes. Luke sheds some light on this as he records Jesus' remarks in the synagogue at Nazareth (4:17-20). He implies that miracles establish the credentials of both the message and the messenger. In a sense this is true, but as we shall see, they serve other purposes as well.

John gives us another perspective on the purpose of miracles in his record of Christ's discussion with the Jews at the Feast of Dedication. On this occasion Jesus says, "Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father" (John 10:37-38). Here the idea of Jesus' authorization to do miracles is strong, but so is the idea that He sometimes performed miracles primarily to teach truth. We will study the role of miracles in accrediting Christ's person and message, and then deal with their value in communicating truth.

Dr. George Wood notes that in presenting the claim of Jesus' right to be recognized as Messiah and Lord, Peter begins his sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-40) with a summary of Christ's life (v. 22), death (v. 23), and resurrection (v. 24). Peter also presents three supernatural qualities that marked Christ's life as one accredited by God: "miracles, wonders and signs" (v. 22). As we stated earlier, *miracles* or *mighty works* (*dunameis*) emphasize the powerful nature of Christ's supernatural activity. *Wonders* (*terata*) stress the effect miracles produce, and *signs* (*semeia*) indicate that the purpose of miracles is to stress Jesus' deity. Dr. Wood points out that in Acts neither *dunameis* nor *terata* ever appears without *semeia*, because the purpose of miracles is not to make people gape in wonder but to lead them to the lordship of Jesus Christ (Wood 1980, 48; 1996, 51). These examples indicate that miracles served to accredit the ministry of our Lord.

Yet miracles also helped to communicate truth. As noted above, on some occasions Jesus used miracles as His primary means of teaching truth. He simply used them as teaching points as He presented His message. The miracle of calming the storm (Matthew 8:23-27) not only illustrates Christ's miraculous power but also reveals the weakness of the disciples' faith. Jesus' healing of a man born blind (John 9) occurred so the work of God might be revealed in the blind man's life.

We can review what we have discussed about the purpose of miracles to this point. First, miracles helped establish the authority and credentials of Jesus as the Messiah. Second, Jesus used them to teach some spiritual truth or lesson. Both purposes show that miracles served to instill belief in the people's hearts for both Christ and His message.

According to our discussion in this section, what can we say is the purpose of miracles?

Demonstrating compassion seems to have been another purpose of miracles. If we analyze a number of Jesus' healing miracles, we see that His intent was simply to meet the urgent needs of the people. Among other examples, we note those the Synoptic writers provide in Matthew 9:36, Mark 1:41, and Luke 7:13. These instances suggest compassion was the motivating factor that produced the miracle.

In addition, it appears that miracles demonstrate a measure of the believer's inheritance in Christ. The Gospels, as well as the other New Testament Scriptures, reveal that God works mightily on behalf of His people as a result of Christ's atoning work. As examples, Mark 16:17-18, Luke 24:49,

Acts 1:8, 5:12, 8:4-7, 19:11-12, and James 5:13-16 provide ample proof of this benefit. Since miracles are a natural part of the present aspect of the Kingdom—Christ’s spiritual reign in believers—we know He can operate through this means as He sovereignly chooses. His supernatural intervention in our lives represents the earnest or down payment of the full inheritance we anticipate at the Kingdom’s consummation, when we will stand glorified and perfected in His presence. Another purpose of miracles, then, is to make us aware of our inheritance in Christ and of our rights as God’s children.

As we conclude our discussion of the purpose of miracles, we note one key feature about the miracles Christ performed: His restraint in using them. He performed miracles on many occasions because of His compassion for the suffering, the oppressed, and the poor; so we might ask why He did not meet the needs of everyone. Certainly it was not His lack of ability, for He could have called twelve legions of angels to prevent His arrest by the chief priests (Matthew 26:53). Jesus undoubtedly provides the best answer to this question during His dialogue with the Jews on a certain Sabbath (John 5:16-30). Here He links His self-restraint to the will of the Father. He says that even though the Father has given Him authority to perform mighty works, He still subjects himself to His Father’s will.

To what can we attribute Christ’s restraint in using miracles in His ministry?

Doing His Father’s will and finishing His mission were Christ’s main goal, and He never strayed from it. While miracles helped establish His authority and credentials as the Son of God, helped convey truth, revealed His compassion for human need, and indicated believers’ inheritance in Him, they represented only one aspect of His total mission. If the Gospels recorded no other miracles than His virgin birth and resurrection, Christ would have accomplished His mission in coming as the ultimate sacrifice for sinful people. Yet He did teach and perform supernatural acts, and His teachings and miracles caused lost people to believe in Him and His message. Miracles thus serve an important purpose in God’s redemptive program and bless His people in the process.

Lesson 13

Conclusions

The first unit, you may recall, concerned background elements that highlighted the world. The second unit dealt with the life of Christ, focusing on the Man. Unit 3 included various aspects of Christ's public ministry and stressed His message. You may note in these emphases the purpose of this course. We aimed to give a brief survey of the setting of the times of Christ and a summary of His life. Thus, we presented the world, the Man, and the message in logical sequence, making it easier for you to review these themes, focus on their essential aspects, and draw some conclusions from your studies.

Reviewing the features of the world into which Christ came "when the time had fully come" represents the first major area of review. Here you should recall the conditions that maximized His purpose and gave the gospel such an impact. Reexamining what the Gospel writers recorded of His life will be your next aim. Then you will review His message and purpose in coming to earth.

As you conclude this study, our prayer is that you will not soon forget what you have learned. May our Lord's example as the Master Teacher become your model. And, most of all, may you be consumed with a passion for the souls of lost people, for this is what He seeks in those who follow in His steps.

Lesson 13.1 Introduction

Objective

13.1.1 Distinguish statements about the structure of this course and recognize the specific focus of each unit.

Lesson 13.2 The World

Objective

13.2.1 Identify factors in the world into which Christ came that enabled the gospel to have the greatest possible impact, as well as other background material from Unit 1.

Lesson 13.3 The Man

Objective

13.3.1 Discuss the approaches taken to achieve the two goals of Unit 2, and identify significant facts related to Christ during His ministry.

Lesson 13.4 The Message

Objective

13.4.1 Identify facts that indicate how completely the three goals of Christ's message were fulfilled.

Lesson 13.1 Introduction

Distinguish statements about the structure of this course and recognize the specific focus of each unit.

Our faith in the living God causes us to believe that nothing related to the life of Christ occurred by chance. God's design is apparent in every aspect of His coming, His life, His ministry, and His death and resurrection. What may appear to be unrelated sets of events that occurred in the course of history or accidents of geography and politics were actually part of God's program. Thus, Christ came at the precise time in history God had decreed. It was "the fullness of the time" (Galatians 4:4, KJV), in Paul's words—the unique period in which God chose to reveal His redemptive program. We who have the privilege of watching from afar can see how God worked through nations and events to bring all these things to pass.

We have designed this course so you can clearly see the unfolding of God's plan of redemption in the life of His Son. The world, the Man, and the message illustrate this design and give us a sense of progressive development in this divine drama. Thus Unit 1 focuses on those aspects of history that set the stage for the coming of Christ. Here we are concerned not only with the historical background of the Middle Eastern nations but also the religious uniqueness of Israel. For it was through this nation and its religious system that God revealed His Son.

While this course stresses the life of Christ, it also emphasizes the Synoptic Gospels. Although we sometimes find it difficult to separate the two, certain aspects of the Synoptic study require other considerations. Questions about authorship and dates and purpose of writing must be answered. Bringing the

events together that each Synoptic writer records demands additional study and critical comparison. These areas of concern became part of the goal and purpose of Unit 1 in what we might term a *broad focus*.

With Unit 2 our focus narrowed somewhat as we considered Christ himself and discussed the events related to His life from the Annunciation to the Ascension. Harmonizing episodes that each Synoptic writer records from his particular perspective and arranging these as logically as possible were part of our aim for this unit. While these aims involve comparison and analysis, our primary purpose was not an in-depth study of the details and difficult passages of the text. Rather, to use a bodily **metaphor**, our concern was more with the "skeleton" than with the "flesh."

A synoptic study deals with what kinds of questions?

Finally, Unit 3 presented the narrowest focus and the most analytical portion of the course. *Christ's teachings* revealed by His words and works became our main focus. At this point, to use the bodily metaphor once again, we began to "put some meat on the skeleton." The historical background; the religious system; the events in Christ's life; and His method, message, and purpose therefore flow together to give us an understanding of Christ that is sufficient for our salvation. With these comments, then, our review of the structure and purpose of this course is complete. We will try to harmonize the main points of each unit in the remainder of this chapter as we seek to grasp the significance and clarity of the whole drama. Our section titles will reflect the three units: "The World," "The Man," and "The Message."

Lesson 11.2 The World

Identify factors in the world into which Christ came that enabled the gospel to have the greatest possible impact, as well as other background material from Unit 1.

While Unit 1 focused initially on the nature of the synoptic study, this focus tended to shift occasionally to the life of Christ. In fact, this occurred throughout our study, for it is difficult to separate the two emphases

completely. Whether one uses an exegetical approach in Bible study (which we do not) or presents more of a historical survey, one usually finds that a study of the background is important. With this in mind, we will turn to a review of the essential background material we studied in the first unit.

Most students recognize the value of a review lesson because it enables them to reflect on what they have learned. At this point, perhaps, it would be good to ask yourself this question: "What do I know now that I did not know when I began this course?"

First, you learned the meaning of the term *synoptic* as it relates to the Gospels. Then you studied each Synoptic writer and facts related to his authorship of the narrative commonly linked with his name, including the date, purpose of writing, and the audience. You noted that while each has a unique perspective and particular emphasis, their combined effort produces a portrait of amazing harmony and unity.

This examination also indicated that no student of the Word should be afraid to engage in an honest, sincere examination of historical facts relating to the truth and reliability of the Scriptures. One must simply approach the Scriptures as God's Word, accept them as completely true, and harmonize the historical facts on this basis. While the facts of history can help verify the Word, they must never become the basis on which we accept it. Our study led us to see that since extrabiblical and secular historians did not share the same focus as the writers of Scripture, obviously they did not verify all that the writers of the Scriptures recorded. Yet a careful analysis of the Gospels reveals that the writers of these narratives were competent recorders and that they were inspired in the selection of their content and in their writing tasks.

Our study led next to the world into which Christ came "in the fullness of time." Since Scripture stresses the time factor, we examined the evidence to see how the hand of God shaped events and created conditions to give the gospel message the greatest impact. In a word, *preparation* tells how God worked, for He prepared both the environment and a people for the coming of Christ.

Before Christ's coming, each successive empire in that area of the world enlarged its territory and absorbed more peoples. As a result, the region was ruled by one empire rather than by many small, isolated nations. This tended to give the peoples of the empire a common worldview and a common bond of understanding. In fact, Greece and Rome did more to bring together the people under their control than all of the preceding empires. Greece, you should recall, provided the language and Rome the political security that made this unity possible. These two elements—a common language and political

security that made communication easy—provided stability throughout the Roman world and created ideal conditions for the gospel to be unveiled and spread.

Some might argue that these conditions were not really necessary since Christ confined himself to Palestine during His entire ministry. However, spreading His message and establishing the church required ease of communicating and traveling to the far reaches of the empire. Thus peace, stability, and a popular, common language characterized the Roman Empire in which Christ lived. It also provided the most ideal conditions for the proclamation of the gospel. Of course, this reveals the sovereign hand of God.

Yet one more element was needed for Christ's message to be birthed and then nurtured to maturity: a religious vehicle through which Christ could operate. The Jewish nation provided this vehicle in the form of Judaism. God, whom Jesus called Father, and the God of the Jews were the same. Jesus absorbed the religious law of the Jews and brought it to its complete and proper fulfillment.

What do our background studies reveal in relation to "the fullness of the time"?

As far back as the fall of humanity, God initiated a plan that would ultimately provide redemption for humankind. He paved the way by creating the right conditions and providing the right system in the right place at the right time. When political stability, ease of travel and communications, and an appropriate religious system existed, God sent His Son. While other elements could be added to these factors, they are the ones in particular you should remember.

Lesson 11.3 The Man

Discuss the approaches taken to achieve the two goals of Unit 2, and identify significant facts related to Christ during His ministry.

Our two goals for Unit 2 were to compare accounts of the events in the Synoptics and to give a brief survey of the life of Christ. Since these were our goals, we did not present a detailed theological analysis.

While we may have been unclear about the chronology of events in the synoptic study, we do not lack data about the forces that affected the person of Christ. The Gospel writers amply record the emergence of a definite pattern as His ministry progresses, contrasting the reaction of the crowds at the beginning of His ministry to that at the end. They also clearly document the various geographical areas of Palestine where Christ carried out the different phases of His ministry. Finally, they note the responses of Christ in His teachings (which we will discuss in the next section) to the varying conditions and reactions of the people, which help us draw some clear conclusions.

Our study revealed that the Synoptic writers record little of the first thirty years of Christ's life. This is true in part because they did not intend to write biographies. Rather, the Holy Spirit moved them to give us guiding knowledge of the man Jesus and His message. As a result, they focus almost exclusively on the three and one-half years of His public ministry.

Because the Synoptic writers' purpose was not biographical, what interesting information is ignored?

We learned that while Christ ministered exclusively in Palestine and directed His message to its people, He devoted the majority of His time to the people of Galilee. This indicates that Christ had a special feeling for the Galileans. For one thing, all of His disciples came from Galilee with the exception of the one who betrayed Him. In addition, He spent His boyhood and early manhood in Galilee. This no doubt increased His natural attraction to and understanding for these people. Finally, in terms of sheer physical presence, Christ accomplished the greatest portion of His public ministry in Galilee.

Although we will not speculate here, it is possible that the open, friendly attitude of Galileans, unlike that of Judeans, explains why Christ preferred to minister in Galilee. Their response to His message and claims may also have influenced His decision to operate from Galilee rather than Judea. Whatever His reasons for choosing Galilee as both His primary headquarters and focus of ministry, the Galileans were fortunate people.

Compare the Judean and Galilean responses to Jesus' ministry.

Unfortunately, it took more than Christ's physical presence and energy to convince the multitudes. In spite of all He did in Galilee, especially in Capernaum, unbelief still abounded. Little wonder that on one occasion He pronounced woes on the unrepentant cities of Galilee (Matthew 11:20-24), for in them He performed works that the others were not privileged to see. Even so, unbelief persisted.

We noted that the Synoptic Gospels do not record the earliest phase of Christ's public ministry. This was His obscure Galilean and early Judean ministry. While we wish it were possible to know what happened, the Synoptic narratives reveal very little. John, however, records a few verses for this period and gives a brief glimpse of Christ in Jerusalem and Samaria.

The most popular method of studying Christ's ministry after the early Judean period is to divide the Galilean phase into three periods: early, middle, and later. He could have spent a total of about twenty months in Galilee during this time. We referred to this period as "the greater Galilean ministry" as opposed to "the early Galilean ministry" that preceded His early Judean ministry. Remember: the Synoptic Gospels do not record the earliest Galilean and early Judean periods, and therefore are obscure.

Following the greater Galilean ministry, the Synoptics record the later Judean-Perean ministry. This period of ministry could have covered about six or seven months and brought Christ to the last week of His life. The concluding chapters of Unit 2 dealt with the Passion Week and Christ's postresurrection appearances. We noted some of the problems one encounters in trying to harmonize these appearances of Christ in the Synoptic Gospels. We took the position that rather than discrepancies between the accounts, the writers simply emphasized different aspects of the various events they recorded in common.

Lesson 13.4 The Message

Identify facts that indicate how completely the three goals of Christ's message were fulfilled.

In Unit 3 we focused on the teachings of Christ, so it was possible to summarize events and ideas and to discuss the purpose of Christ's coming. In general terms Christ intended for His message to do the following:

1. Prove He was both the promised Messiah of Israel and the Son of God.
2. Prepare His hearers to accept the new order (the Kingdom) He was establishing that would be built on the Law.
3. Persuade Jews that God would accept Gentiles into His kingdom.

As Christ's ministry progressed, the truth of the first two aspects of His purpose became obvious, but the third was not so pronounced.

Jesus knew His ultimate purpose but was also aware that before people would accept His plan, they must accept His authority to carry it out. Early in His ministry, when crowds flocked to hear His teachings and to marvel at His miracles, it appeared that people had accepted His authority. This was particularly true in Galilee where the people were open and friendly. However, as His greater Galilean ministry progressed and Jesus' hearers began to listen more closely to His claims, they began to resist Him and His message. Unfortunately, the belief Christ expected to follow His teachings and miracles never really developed. Rather, people became skeptical; questioning led to criticism, criticism to unbelief, and finally, unbelief to rejection. In the end, the power He demonstrated by His miracles did not seem to make a difference.

Opposition came from several different sources. Initially, Christ's greatest critics were the Pharisees, who viewed His claims of authority and divinity as blasphemy. Since they saw themselves as the protectors of the Law, they could not permit Him to intrude into what they believed was their domain. Then as Jesus moved His base of ministry southward from Galilee into Perea and finally Judea, He ran into opposition of a different nature. The Sadducees, with whom He came into contact more and more, strove to maintain the political status quo. Whereas the Pharisees worried about Christ's religious claims, the Sadducees worried about the political implications of these claims. As it turned out, the political concern united the opposition and led Christ's enemies to conspire against Him. It was on political grounds that the chief priests finally convinced Pilate that Jesus should be crucified (Luke 23:1-2).

Explain briefly why the first goal of Christ's message was to prove His identity.

We see, then, that as Christ went from town to town throughout Palestine, His popularity, which at the beginning was great, gradually declined. His claims of authority and equality with His Father were rejected because the people did not accept the Man.

It follows naturally that if the Jews would not accept Christ's claims to authority, neither would they accept His message. When He proclaimed a new kingdom that would be built on the old Law, his hearers, whose senses were dulled by unbelief about His person, would neither understand nor accept this new proposition. Thus, as Jesus set forth the conditions for citizenship in the Kingdom more clearly, His hearers left Him in droves.

What was the second goal of Christ's message?

The Gospels record Christ's sorrow and anger as He saw His kinsmen, the Jewish people, allow the riches of the Kingdom to slip through their fingers. Although they could have been first partakers and then leaders (as a nation) in bringing forth this new Kingdom, they suffered great loss instead.

As a result of people's changing attitude and rejection of the Kingdom He offered, Christ directed His teaching increasingly toward His disciples and spent more private time with them. In fact, toward the end of His ministry, He focused His efforts almost exclusively on them. He also used more parables in His teaching during this time. You may recall that when asked why He used parables, He cited the unbelief of the crowds as the main reason. Moreover, He worked fewer miracles in some areas because of unbelief. On the other hand, the few who believed became the object of His greatest attention. At this point in time, the third goal of Christ's message began to surface.

Explain briefly why the second goal of Christ's message was not fulfilled.

It therefore became apparent that the Jewish nation could not be used as the vehicle for spreading the gospel. Jesus had given the Jewish people the opportunity, but they had rejected it. So He gave His few chosen and loyal disciples the task of spreading the gospel to the ends of the earth. While He knew that His mission to the Jews in a general sense had failed, He also knew that after His death the church would emerge and become the vehicle for world evangelization. It would not fail, because His followers would be filled with and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Equipping them in this way

guaranteed that the gospel would be preached effectively to all nations (Matthew 24:14; Acts 1:8).

Although the disciples were committed to spreading the gospel, they did not know what means God would use to accomplish the task, for God had not revealed this truth. Not knowing about the church and its implications for the Gentiles prevented them from seeing the grafting in of the Gentiles. While the study of the birth and development of the church lies beyond the scope of a course on the Synoptic Gospels, the foundation of this truth is laid in the Gospels. In Matthew 28:16–20, Mark 16:15–20, Luke 24:45–49, and Acts 1:1–9, Jesus indicates that the gospel is for all people. Because of prejudice, the Jews in general and, at least for a while, the disciples failed to grasp the significance of Jesus' words; nevertheless, He had set in motion the idea that the Gentiles would be part of God's kingdom. From our perspective of history, we can clearly see the unfolding of this redemptive plan all through the Synoptics.

Although Christ's primary purpose on earth was to accomplish His redemptive mission, He had an eye to the future. For this reason, He invested much time and effort in the disciples. If the masses would not believe, He would concentrate on the few who would. This has always been the pattern: The many are saved by the faithfulness of a few.

State the third goal of Christ's message.

Christ continued to focus His attention on the disciples after His resurrection, spending most of His time with them. He did not divert His attention from the few who believed, for His ultimate purpose of bringing forth a kingdom both present and eternal was to be fulfilled through them.

We have now concluded our study of *Christ in the Synoptic Gospels*. May this focus on the world into which our Lord came, His person, and His message give you new insights into God's redemptive plan. May it also provide you with content that will enrich your life and ministry. Above all, may it whet your appetite for in-depth study of the Master and motivate you to imitate His example and follow in His steps.

Glossary

			Chapter
abstract	—	expressing or naming a quality or idea rather than a particular object or concrete thing	11
amnesty	—	a general pardon or conditional offer of pardon for past offenses against a government	8
annunciation	—	announcement	5
anthem	—	song of praise, devotion, or patriotism	5
apologetic	—	offered in defense or vindication; systematic argumentative discourse indefense (as of a doctrine)	1
canonical	—	accepted as forming the canon of Scripture; what is authorized or accepted by the laws of the church	2
captivate	—	to hold captive by beauty, talent, or	11

		interest; to fascinate	
chastised	—	to have inflicted punishment or suffering on a person or to have had punishment inflicted on oneself	11
civil	—	of or relating to the general public, its needs or ways, or civic affairs as distinguished from special (as military or religious) affairs	4
compatible	—	able to exist or get on well together; agreeing; in harmony	11
complementary	—	serving to fill out or complete; mutually supplying each other's lack	5
consummation	—	completion; fulfillment; the ultimate end	10
contemporary	—	one who lived at the same time as another (noun); marked by characteristics of the present period (adjective)	1

credential	—	that which gives a title to credit or confidence; testimonials that show a person is entitled to credit or has a right to exercise official power	6
credible	—	worthy of belief; believable; reliable	7
criterion	—	a standard on which a judgment or decision may be based	1
culture	—	the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group	1
demoniac	—	one who is possessed by a demon; devilish; fiendish; raging; frantic	12
didaskalia	—	Greek word: to impart instruction; translated as <i>teaching</i>	9
discourse	—	formal, orderly, and usually extended	1

		expression of thought on a subject	
doctrine	—	a principle or position; the body of principles in a branch of knowledge or system of belief	4
dogmatic	—	of or relating to a point of view or tenet put forth as authoritative without adequate grounds	6
ethics	—	the principles of conduct governing an individual or group	10
evangelical	—	one who emphasizes salvation by faith in the atoning death of Jesus Christ through personal conversion, the authority of Scripture, and the importance of preaching as contrasted with ritual	1

guttural	—	sounds that are articulated in the throat	8
harmonious	—	having the parts agreeably related	9
Hellenism	—	devotion to or imitation of ancient Greek thought, customs, or styles	3
Hellenistic Jews	—	Jews who "hellenized," that is, adopted the Greek language, outlook, culture, values, and ways of life	1
idiom	—	the language peculiar to a people or to a district, community, or class	1
imperialism	—	the policy or practice of extending the power and dominion of a nation, especially by using direct territorial acquisitions or by gaining indirect control over the political or economic life of other areas	3

immutability	—	description of the fact that God cannot change or be changed	9
infallible	—	incapable of error	10
intertestamental period	—	the period of history between the end of the events recorded in the Old Testament and the birth of Christ	3
intrusion	—	the illegal act of entering, seizing, or taking possession of another's property	4
jurisdiction	—	the extent or range of judicial or other authority	8
<i>kerusso</i>	—	Greek word: to announce, to make known by a herald publicly; translated as <i>preaching</i>	9
kinsman redeemer	—	a close relative who was under obligation to reclaim the land sold by his impoverished	9

		<p>family member and to redeem a relative who, due to difficult times, found himself enslaved to someone else. Illustrations of the application of this law of redeeming property of an impoverished relative in Israel's history may be found in Ruth 4 and in Jeremiah 32:7-14.</p>	
litanies	—	<p>prayers that consist of a series of invocations and supplications by the leader with alternate responses by the congregation; repetitive recitals or chants</p>	7
lot(s)	—	<p>object(s) used as counters when deciding something by chance</p>	5
metaphor	—	<p>a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind</p>	13

		of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness between them	
omnipotence	—	description of the fact that God possesses all power; power without limitation	9
omnipresence	—	description of the fact that God is present everywhere at all times	9
omniscience	—	description of God's limitless knowledge; the fact that God knows all things	9
paganism	—	beliefs or practices of those who have little or no religion and who delight in sensual pleasures and material goods	4
parabolic	—	method of communicating in which a story or illustration is used to depict spiritual principles	11

paradox	—	a statement that is seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense yet is perhaps true	2
postapostolic	—	following the time of the apostles	2
proselyte	—	a convert from one religion, belief, or party to another; here specifically a convert to Judaism	5
skepticism	—	doubt or unbelief with regard to religion, especially Christianity	11
solitude	—	seclusion; a lonely, unfrequented place; state of being or living alone	5
synagogue	—	the house of worship and communal center of a Jewish congregation	4
thematically	—	of, relating to, or constituting a theme	6
theoretical	—	planned or worked out in the mind, not	11

		from experience; based on theory, not on fact	
traditional	—	relating to the handing down of information, beliefs, and customs by word of mouth from one generation to another without written instruction	1
venerable	—	worthy of reverence; deserving respect because of age, character, or importance	1
Zealot	—	member of a fanatical sect that arose in Judea during the first century AD and militantly opposed the Roman domination of Palestine	2

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² Mike McClafin, [*Christ in the Synoptic Gospels: An Independent-Study Textbook*](#), 1st Edition. (Springfield, MO: Global University, 2011), 195–199.

