

STUDIES IN ~ THE LIFE OF CHRIST ~

INTRODUCTORY CONSIDERATIONS

To study every aspect, every detail, of the life of Christ in one Sunday School class would be impossible. Even attempting a thorough study that would involve all 89 chapters of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, along with the first chapter of Acts...that would be quite an accomplishment! At best, we will only be able to hit the highlights of the life of Christ.

Therefore, the purposes of this class will be...

1. ...to study the main events in the earthly life and ministry of Jesus Christ;
2. ...to master the facts concerning Jesus' life and ministry: persons, places, etc.;
3. ...to follow the movement of His ministry from His birth to His ascension;
4. ...to see how the earthly history of the Son of God provides the material for the theology of the Person and work of Christ.

It is the desire and prayer of your teacher that each student might come into a fresh understanding of, appreciation for, and deeper love for the Lord Jesus Christ, and that the Holy Spirit might create a desire and determination in the heart of each student involved to make the reading of the Gospels and the study of the Life of Christ a consistent, life-time activity (**Philippians 3:7-11**).

Passing along what you learn to others is a great idea too (**Matthew 28:19-20**)!

May Yahweh God bless us as we get to know Him better through the person of His Son, a knowledge which can only come to those with a by-faith-alone relationship with that Son, the Lord, Jesus Christ (John 14:6).

To God be the glory...great things He has done!

REASONS FOR STUDYING THE LIFE OF CHRIST

1. Christ is the _____ figure of all history.
B.C. to A.D. (Before Christ – Anno Domini [*in the year of our Lord*])

2. Christ is the “_____” for the Christian. (1 John 2:6)

“...the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.”

Examining the life of Jesus gives us the ability to understand what the “*new man created in righteousness and holiness of the truth*” (Ephesians 4:24) should look like and behave like.

- The basic _____ of the Christian life is _____ (Romans 1:17)
“For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.’”

The life of Christ is a demonstration of perfect faith and unshakable dependence upon God, the Father.

- The basic _____ of the Christian life is _____...the same kind of love that Jesus displayed (John 13:34-35).
“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”
“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”
- The basic _____ of the Christian life is _____. (Acts 5:29)
“But Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than men.’”

Jesus exemplified perfect obedience to the Father (John 8:29)

“And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.”

- He is now the revelation and pattern of what _____ one day be. (1 John 3:2)
“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.”

3. Christians are commanded to grow in the _____ of Christ. (2 Peter 3:18)
“...but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.”

4. The Bible is “_____”...everything centers on the person and work of Jesus Christ. (Revelation 19:10)

“Then I fell at [the angel’s] feet to worship him. But he said to me, ‘Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. **For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.**”

5. Jesus Christ is the _____ of God. (John 1:14, 18)

14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

18 No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*.

6. Christ is the _____ man, that is, He is the revelation of what God intended _____ man to be. (Genesis 1:27 cf. Hebrews 1:2,3a)

27 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

2 [God] in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.

- This idea has _____ value:

Man was created in the image and likeness of God but he sinned. Jesus Christ became a man in the image and likeness of God and did not sin. He was perfect.

7. Doctrine derives from _____. The historical biblical facts we have of the life of Christ are the data from which the doctrine of Christ is formulated.

WHY FOUR GOSPELS?

The Gospels were written by four individuals, and while narrating many things that are common to all or most of them, there are additions and omissions, which, even from a human viewpoint, mark them out as four distinct and independent narratives. There are differences in style, in language, method of treatment, arrangement of subjects and other features.

This study presupposes a *plenary, verbal* inspiration of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21; Matthew 5:18). The *method* of revelation has nothing to do with the *fact* of inspiration. That is to say, Luke may have carried on a detailed investigation of the life and ministry of Christ; Mark may have gotten much of his information from Peter; Matthew may have written out of his experience in walking with Jesus; John may have written some 50 years after the death of Jesus, reflecting upon his material from the standpoint of a long and careful meditation; *yet all of them were guided by the Holy Spirit in what they wrote, keeping them from error of fact or interpretation.*

We can conclude at least three logical reasons for four Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus Christ:

1. The _____ of the subject:

Four times the coverage makes the intended impression on the reader of Scripture that this is the most important fact in all of the Word of God...the coming of the Son of God in human flesh, into a sinful world, to accomplish sinful man's redemption. SO PAY ATTENTION!!

2. The _____ and _____ of the subject:

Here is such height and depth of content that it can only best be communicated in four separate narratives.

Each Gospel, while distinctive in itself, will complement the others. There will be four viewpoints of the one subject. While the written narration of each viewpoint will differ from the others, it will nevertheless be a narration of the same subject and be true.

Illustration:

Station four artists on each side of a building and have each of them draw what they see. Each artist's rendering of the building will be different, but it will represent an accurate presentation of the same building that the other three are drawing.

Illustration:

Many biographies of Abraham Lincoln have been written, but not all of them have the same approach. One may be a personal biography, another political, another emphasizing his wit and wisdom, another tracing his handling of the Civil War, etc. They will be different, but they will each be true.

3. Each of the Gospels has a different _____.

- **Matthew** presents Jesus as the _____ of the _____, the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises to Israel. The Jewish Christians of the first century were severely persecuted by their own countrymen. They would need encouragement and confirmation of their faith that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the son of Abraham and David, and heir to the throne of Israel. Matthew does this in his well-arranged Gospel.
- **Mark** presents Jesus as the perfect _____. There is strong tradition that he wrote the Gospel at Rome and that he is reflecting the thought of the apostle Peter. Jesus is the busy worker, hurrying from one task to another. The characteristic word of this Gospel is "straightway" (KJV), or "immediately" (NKJV; NASB), a term which appears about 40 times in the book. No genealogy of Jesus is found in *Mark* because the lineage of a servant is of little importance; it is his work that counts.
- **Luke** presents Jesus as the Son of _____, tracing his lineage from Adam thus demonstrating His real connection with the human race. Luke was the companion of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. His document is addressed to a Gentile, whose name, Theophilus, marks him out as a Greek. The King of Israel (Matthew) and the Servant of Jehovah (Mark), is the Redeemer of all men. But a true Redeemer must be a kinsman (Leviticus 25:23-55); no one else can take his place. In Luke's Gospel, we meet for the first time in the New Testament the word "redemption" (1:68). Luke is occupied with Christ as one of "kin" to us in the work of redemption.
- **John** presents Jesus as the _____ of _____, the _____ of all men. His purpose is clearly announced in 20:31... "but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name." There is no genealogy in John because the Son is the eternal Son, having no beginning. His deity is a persistent theme throughout the book. While John does not neglect the Messianic ministry of Jesus (4:26)... Jesus *said to her, "I who speak to you am *He*. [Messiah]", He presents the Son as the Savior of all men. (10:16)... "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock *with* one shepherd."

Taken together, the 4 Gospels combine to give us a _____ portrait of Jesus, the God-Man. He was and is a perfect blend of humanity and deity, qualifying Him alone to be the once-for-all sacrifice for the sins of humanity and the Way, the Truth and the Life... Savior and Lord of all who trust in Him by faith alone.

THE SYNOPTIC PROBLEM

Many scholars today (mostly liberal) are caught up in what is known as the "Synoptic Problem." It is primarily an issue for "specialists" to debate, but the students of the Gospels should at least know what the subject is about.

- What is the Synoptic Problem?
 - The first three books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke) are called "synoptic" because they survey the life of Christ from a _____ (Greek *sun* = with; *opsis* = seeing). In these three Gospels are resemblances and differences.
 - The "Synoptic Problem" consists in harmonizing these resemblances and differences and in so doing, determining the relation of the synoptics to one another. Any solution must account for:
 - What is common to all the Gospels
 - What is common to any two of them.
 - What is unique to each.
- What are the principal solutions that have been proposed?
 - The Oral Tradition theory...each writer wrote independently; his material derived from oral tradition.
 - The Mutual Use theory...each writer used another's writing; but the question remains: Who was the original writer?
 - The Documents theory...there was a common document, now unknown, from which the writers got their material. Many scholars hold this view but there is no agreement as to how many such documents there were. Most scholars are agreed upon two such sources:

- Mark's Gospel
- A document designated "Q" which stands for *quelle*, the German word for "source." The main problem with this theory is that there is no concrete evidence that such a document ever existed.

The conclusion: There is no problem, even if sources were used. All three writers wrote independently as they were inspired by God. What they had in common was that they were all being moved by the _____ (2 Peter 1:20-21).

BACKGROUNDS OF THE LIFE OF CHRIST

[See the map on page 10]

- **GEOGRAPHICAL** – The life of Christ is inseparably bound up with the land in which He lived and worked. (map – p. 9)
 - The **names** of the land: Israel has been known by many different names throughout history...

Canaan, Palestine, Land of Promise, Holy Land, and Israel
 - The **size** of the land (west of the Jordan River): 6500 square miles (about the size of New Jersey). It is approximately 136 miles long and 69 miles wide.
 - The **natural divisions** of the land: There are four that run parallel to each other north and south. They are...
 - Coastal (Maritime) Plain – Extends along the Mediterranean Sea the entire length of Palestine, broken only by Mt. Carmel. North of Carmel, the plain is very narrow. It is made up of low hillocks, sandy soil and is very fertile.

There are four sections (north to south):

- Phoenicia
- Plain of Esdraelon (extending inward)
- Plain of Sharon
- Philistine Plain

- Mountain Region – Lies between the Jordan River Valley and the Coastal Plain. It is the “backbone” of the country and the principal home of the Israelites.

There are five natural sections:

- Upper Galilee (Mountains average 2800 ft.)
- Lower Galilee (Hills about 1800 ft.; includes the Plain of Esdraelon)
- Hill Country (“mountains of Judah”)

- Shephelah (“low hills”) – These are the foothills of the mountain region on the western side of the mountains, between them and the plain. Extends along Samaria and Judea.
- The Negev (“dry” or “south country”) – This is a series of low hills running south from Hebron to the Arabian desert.

- The Jordan Valley – A depression progressively deeper from north to south.
 - Springs of Jordan: 1700 ft. above sea level, between Hermon and Lebanon.
 - Sea of Galilee: 695 ft. below sea level.
 - Ghor (Arab = “hollow”): a 65 mile gorge to the Dead Sea; descends 610 ft. further; cliffs on each side, 2-8 miles apart.
 - Plain of Jordan (or Plain of Jericho), just north of the Dead Sea: 14 miles wide; encompassed by mountains 4000 feet high.

- Eastern Table Land – The high plateau east of the Jordan, stretching to the Syrian Desert. It is fertile pastureland with three sections: Bashan, Gilead, and Moab.

○ The **waters** of the land:

- Sea of Galilee – 14 miles long; 9 miles wide
- Dead Sea – 46 miles long; surface is 1296 ft. below sea level (lowest point on earth); 1300 ft. deep; very rich in minerals; six times saltier than the oceans...no outlet...fish die within minutes of entering from the Jordan.
- Jordan River – 200 miles long (winding distance); falls 3000 ft. from source to Dead Sea...22 ft./mile; width: 80 – 180 ft.; depth: 5 – 12 ft.
- Brook Kidron – flows between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives.

This map can be viewed at:

www.bible.ca

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- **HISTORICAL**

In the 400 years prior to the birth of Christ, Palestine had been under the consecutive rules of the Persians, Greeks, Egyptians, Syrians (Seleucids), Maccabees, and the Romans. (These are discussed more fully in the course: Understanding the New Testament).

For our purposes, we will only point out a few of the outstanding events that left their permanent mark upon the land and the people.

1. **The Persian Period** (ca. 538 – 330 B.C.)

The Samaritans separated from the Jews and built a rival Temple on Mt. Gerizim (see John 4:20).

2. **The Greek Period** (330 – 323 B.C.)

*Most significant time period

Alexander the Great took the Greek language and Hellenistic culture all over the civilized world. He was kind toward the Jews. He built the city of Alexandria in Egypt and invited the Jews to live there.

The widespread use of the Koine Greek can be traced to this period.

*Most significant impacting contribution

3. **The Egyptian Period** (323 – 204 B.C.)

The Septuagint (LXX) Version of the Old Testament was prepared. This was a translation of the Old Testament into the Greek language.

4. **The Syrian (Seleucid) Period** (204 – 165 B.C.)

This was perhaps the most difficult time period for the Jews because of the oppression and violence of the Seleucid rulers, especially Antiochus Ephiphanes. This brought about a severe reaction on the part of some of the Jews which resulted in the stiffening of moral fiber and the determination to cling fast to their religious heritage.

5. The Maccabean Period (165 – 63 B.C.)

The Jews revolted under the leadership of Judas Maccabaeus and his brothers which led to the rise of the Hasmonean dynasty.

It was during this time that the distinctive religious parties (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, etc.) emerged.

6. The Roman Period (63 B.C. --)

This period saw two important developments...

- When Pompey captured Jerusalem, he entered the Holy of Holies in the Temple, thus forever alienating the Romans from the Jews.
- In 43 B.C. the Hasmonean rulers were set aside by the Romans and replaced by Herod the Great (an Edomite). He was a great king but a terrible man. He was king at the time of Jesus' birth.

• POLITICAL

- The Romans divided Palestine into five political provinces:
 1. **Judea** – the largest province.
 2. **Samaria** – the central district...annexed to Judea during the New Testament era...populated by a people that were half Jew, half Gentile...despised by Jews and vice a versa.
 3. **Galilee** – the northern province from Carmel to Lebanon...populated by Jews...most of Christ's ministry took place here.
 4. **Perea** (Reuben and Gad) – name means "beyond" i.e. beyond the Jordan River...populated by both Jews and Gentiles.
 5. **Decapolis** – "land of ten cities"...cities established by the Greeks but Jews lived in the surrounding countryside...the cities in this region were religiously heathen and protected by Rome.

- These provinces of Christ's time were initially a united kingdom under Herod the Great until his death. Then a **tetrarchy** ("rule of 4") was established to replace him...
- 1. **Archelaus** (Mt. 2:22) a son of Herod the Great...was tetrarch of Judea and Samaria...in 6 A.D. he was deposed and the area was annexed directly to the Roman Empire and governed by a series of procurators; Pontius Pilate was the 5th. Jesus' ministry was conducted under this situation.
- 2. Herod **Antipas** (N.T. "Herod the Tetrarch) a son of Herod the Great...was tetrarch of Galilee and Perea...called "that fox" by Jesus (Lk. 13:32)...took his brother's (Philip) wife...murdered John the Baptizer...questioned Jesus during his trials.
- 3. **Philip** was tetrarch of the area east of Galilee (part of Decapolis)...also a son of Herod the Great.
- 4. **Lysanias**...probably not a Herodian...tetrarch of Abilene, a small district between Mt. Hermon and Damascus.

• RELIGIOUS

The religious parties:

- The **Pharisees**...originated during the Maccabean period as the _____, a group earnestly seeking a spiritual renewal in Israel
 - In Jesus time they were orthodox and patriotic.
 - They held firmly to the Old Testament, as they understood it.
 - However, in their effort to apply the Law to every detail of life, they had developed an intricate mass of oral interpretation, which had become more important to them than the Law itself. Their zeal to "guard" the Law had degenerated to a rigorous legalism and an empty formalism.
 - They were "_____" (the meaning of Pharisee). But they had gone to the extreme of despising anyone that was different from them.

- Christ came into _____ with them because of:
 - His emphasis upon spiritual (heart) religion instead of ceremonialism. Because their practice was not in line with their ideals, He charged them with hypocrisy.
 - His violation of their man-made, ill-conceived Sabbath laws.
 - His claims of Deity.
- Caution: There is much in Pharisaism to be admired. We should not assume that every Pharisee was like those denounced so scathingly by Jesus in Matthew 23. There were earnest seekers after truth among them...**Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea**, and others.
- **The Sadducees**
 - They could be classified as “_____” who denied the supernatural, the resurrection and the future life
 - Their concerns were more _____ than religious. They opposed the stern orthodoxy of the Pharisees and were more willing to “go along” with the prevailing political and cultural changes.
 - They were smaller in number than the Pharisees but far more influential with the Romans...they held the presidency of the Sanhedrin (The Jewish Ruling Council).
- **The Scribes**
 - Both Sadducees and Pharisees who were recognized as _____ and authorities in the _____.
 - They challenged Jesus principally on His disobedience to traditional practices.
 - They became, in the period following the N.T. the “rabbis” noted as teachers and composers of legal documents.
- **The Essenes** – These were extreme Jewish separatists not mentioned in the N.T., but existing during the time of Jesus. They preferred to live in secluded villages, dedicating themselves to the study and copying of the Scriptures (i.e. Dead Sea Scrolls) and considered their life and worship as superior to that of the Pharisees. They apparently did not go to the Temple.

- The **Herodians** – A group of Pharisees that so despised the Roman government that they aligned themselves closely with the Herods.
- The **Zealots** – Pharisee “Right-wing extremists” who promoted revolts against the Romans and would assassinate Roman officials and collaborators.

- **Monotheism**

The Jewish conviction that there is only one God provided the background for their resistance to Jesus’ claim to Deity. They equated “one God” with “one Person” in the Godhead.

- **Synagogues**

During the time of the Diaspora (O.T. Exile), Jewish people developed a temple worship replacement center known as a Synagogue. Wherever the Jewish people were scattered these became the center of their lives. Even after the Jews returned and rebuilt their temple, the synagogue system continued primarily as a _____ for Jewish children and as a court of justice in the local communities. Jesus frequented the Synagogues around Judea and Galilee preaching and teaching His message of the Kingdom of God.

- **The Messianic Hope**

The Old Testament clearly foretold a Messiah (Anointed One) who would bring in a new day.

Here is a brief overview...He would be the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15), the seed of Abraham (Gen. 22:18), of the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10), a prophet like Moses (Dt. 18:18), of the kingly line of David (2 Sam. 7:12-16), a suffering Servant (Isa. 53), born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14), in the village of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), preceded by a forerunner (Mal. 3:1; 4:5).

The Jewish conception and hope of Messiah during Jesus’ day was that of an _____ king and deliverer. Many had lost the _____ aspect of Messiah from their thinking.

One thing that never entered their minds was that when their Messiah came, they would reject Him and kill Him...that is why the idea of a _____ Messiah was nearly impossible for them to grasp, even for the O.T. prophets who foretold it.

1 Peter 1:10-12