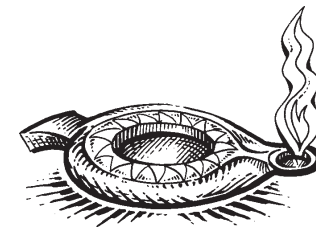


BASIC BIBLE STUDY

An Introductory Guide To Understanding The Scriptures

PART SEVENTEEN

The Gospels Era

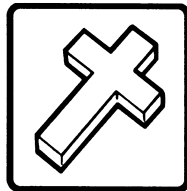


"Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path"
PSALM 119:105

The birth of Jesus split history like a thunderbolt on a hot July evening. Everything before His birth we call B.C., before Christ. Everything after, we call A.D., anno Domini, in the year of our Lord. His story, predicted throughout the Old Testament, is told in the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

While the Gospels are biographical, they are actually thematic portraits of Christ's life that place very little emphasis on His early life and great emphasis on the last week of His life. The Gospels tend to follow the chronology of His life, but not slavishly. Not all the Gospels cover the same events in His life. When all four Gospels are put together and 'harmonised,' only about 50 days of Jesus' active ministry are dealt with.

THE ARC OF BIBLE HISTORY
#10 ... THE GOSPELS ERA
(Matthew-John)



I. Review: (Fill in the blanks to begin the chart for this era).

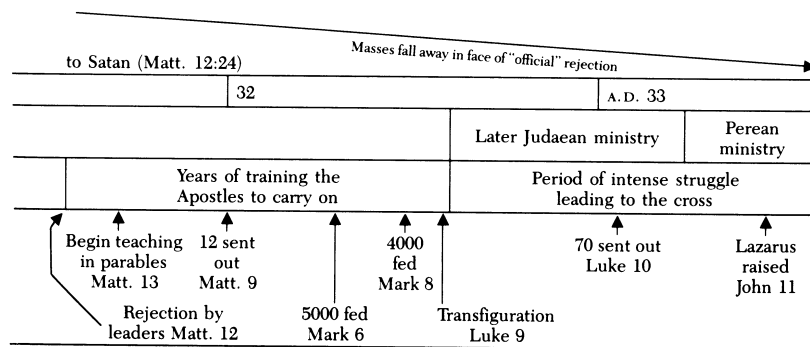
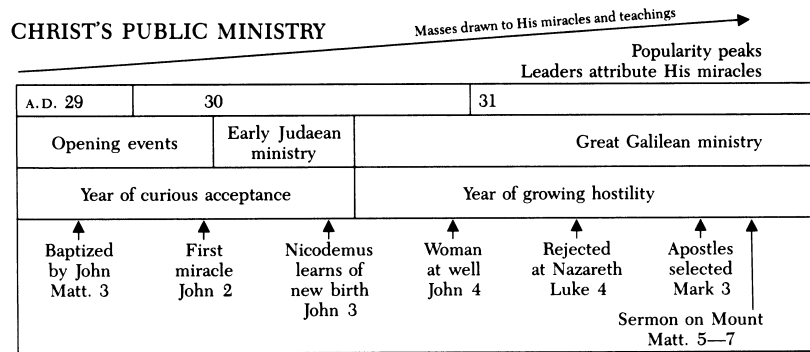
STORY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Era	Figure	Location	Storyline Summary
_____	_____	_____	

II. Story-line Summary:

Jesus comes in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of a Saviour and offers salvation and the true kingdom of God. While some accept Him, most reject Him, and He is crucified, buried, and resurrected.

TABLES OF CHRIST'S MINISTRY



III. Story-line Expansion:

There are four main divisions in the Gospel Era:

1. Early Life
2. Early Ministry
3. Later Ministry
4. Death and Resurrection

**1. EARLY LIFE:
CHILDHOOD TO BAPTISM**

Through a miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit, Jesus is born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem of Judea.

After a brief excursion into Egypt to save Him from Herod's attempt on His life, Jesus travels with Mary and her husband Joseph to live in Nazareth. There He learns the trade of a carpenter and apparently lives a fairly normal life from childhood to the time of His baptism, when He is thirty years old.



His cousin, John the Baptist, is ministering and baptizing people in the Jordan River near the Dead Sea. After Jesus is baptized by John, a remarkable event takes place. God the Father is heard speaking from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," and the Holy Spirit, in the visible form of a dove, descends on Him.

Then He is led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness of Judea, where He is tempted by Satan for forty days. Satan makes every attempt to get Jesus to follow him rather than God. Satan offers Jesus everything God the Father offers Him, but on a different time table and with different requirements. Jesus resists all temptation and validates His readiness to begin making Himself known as the Messiah.

THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF CHRIST

The historic record of the birth of Christ can be found in **Matthew 1:18-25** and **Luke 2:1-20**.

Unlike any other baby, the one born that night in Bethlehem was unique in all of history. He was not created by a human father and mother. He had a heavenly pre-existence (**John 1:1-3, 14**). Jesus is God, the Son—Creator of the universe (**Philippians 2:5-11**).



His becoming man is referred to as "the Incarnation," a word which means "in the flesh." In the birth of Jesus, the eternal, all-powerful and all-knowing Creator came to earth in the flesh (cf. **John 1:14**: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth").

INCARNATION

This was the act of grace whereby Christ took our human nature into union with His Divine Person and became man.

Christ is both God and man. A divine nature was united to a human nature (**Acts 20:28; Romans 8:32; 1 Corinthians 2:8; Hebrews 2:11-14; 1 Timothy 3:16; Galatians 4:4**, etc.).

This union is described as hypostatical, i.e., is personal; the two natures are not mixed or confounded, and it is perpetual.

ANSWERING THE SCEPTICS

The unbelieving stagger at the concept of the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, often dismissing it as 'mythological and scientifically impossible.'

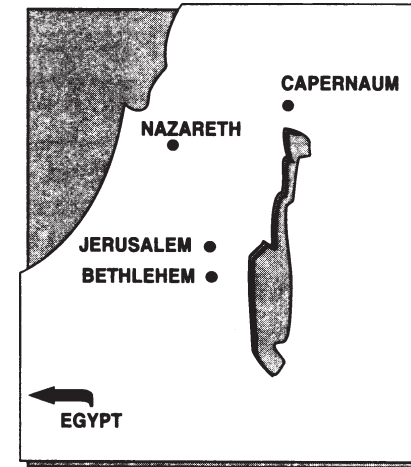
Larry King, the CNN talk show host, was once asked who he would most want to interview if he could choose anyone from all of history. He said, "*Jesus Christ.*"

The questioner said, "*And what would you like to ask Him?*"

King replied, "*I would like to ask Him if He was indeed virgin-born. The answer to that question would define history for me.*"

[Just Thinking, RZIM, Winter 1998].

Test#4: The Geography of the Gospel Era



(Draw an arrow from Bethlehem to Egypt to Nazareth to represent the geographical movement in Jesus' early life, and label it "1." Draw an arrow from Nazareth to Jerusalem to represent His initial acceptance, and label it "2." Draw an arrow from Jerusalem to Capernaum to represent the growing rejection, and label it "3." Draw an arrow from Capernaum to Jerusalem to represent His final rejection, and label it "4.")

I.		II.						III.	
PREPARATION		MINISTRATION						CONSUMMATION	
1		2	3	4			5	6	7
THE 30 YEARS		OPENING EVENTS	JUDEAN	GALILEAN			PEREAN	CLOSING EVENTS	THE 40 DAYS
				FIRST PERIOD	SECOND PERIOD	THIRD PERIOD			
M A R K	—	i. 1-13	—	i. 14— iii. 6	iii. 7— vii. 23	vii. 24— ix. 50	x. 1-52	xi. 1— xv. 47	xvi. 1-20
L U K E	i. 1—ii. 52	iii. 1— iv. 13	—	iv. 14— vi. 11	vi. 12— ix. 17	ix. 18-50	ix. 51— xix. 28	xix. 29— xxiii. 56	xxiii. 56— xxiv. 53
M A T T H E W	i. 1—ii. 23	iii. 1— iv. 11	—	iv. 12— xii. 14	xii. 15— xv. 20	xv. 21— xviii. 35	xix. 1— xx. 34	xxi. 1— xxvii. 66	xxviii. 1-20
J O H N	i. 1-18	i. 19— ii. 12	ii. 13— iv. 42	iv. 43— v. 47	vi. 1-71	vii. 1— viii. 59	ix. 1— xii. 11	xii. 12— xix. 42	xx. 1—xxi. 25

TESTS

Test#1: Four Main Divisions in the Gospel Era

(Write in the correct division from the options at left)

OPTIONS:	DIVISION:	DESCRIPTION:
Early Life		Initial acceptance
Early Ministry		Final rejection
Later Ministry		Childhood to baptism
Death and Resurrection		Growing rejection

Test#2: Story-line Summary (Fill in the blanks from memory)

ERA	SUMMARY
Gospels	<p>Jesus comes in fulfilment of the Old Testament _____ of a Saviour and offers _____ and the true Kingdom of God.</p> <p>While some accept Him, most _____ Him, and He is crucified, buried, and resurrected.</p>

Test#3: Arc of Bible History (Fill in the names of the eras)

1. C _____	7. E _____
2. P _____	8. R _____
3. E _____	9. S _____
4. C _____	10. G _____
5. J _____	11. C _____
6. K _____	12. M _____

**• Critic's Claim #1:
The idea of a virgin birth is SCIENTIFICALLY IMPOSSIBLE.**



Really? Ever since in vitro fertilization and embryonic transfer came on the scene in 1978 (not to mention artificial insemination), it is quite possible for a woman who has never experienced sexual intercourse to give birth.

Of course, the Bible makes it clear that it was Almighty God, not some highly-paid gynaecologist, who worked the details of Jesus' Divine-Human conception: "And the angel answered and said unto [Mary]. The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest

shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

Is this miraculous? Of course (cf. Jeremiah 31:22; Isaiah 7:14). But this is a 'small' issue for the God who created the entire universe!

**• Critic's Claim #2:
The idea of a virgin birth is MYTHOLOGICALLY DERIVED.**

Patrick Campbell, author of 'The Mythical Jesus,' and Anglican Bishop J.S. Spong are two of a number of individuals who have suggested that, "... the virgin birth account [is a] ... clearly recognized mythological element in our faith tradition whose purpose was not to describe a literal event but to capture the transcendent dimensions of God in the earthbound words and concepts of first-century human beings."

Both men, however, overlook a simple fact: No respectable Jew would have ever condescended to buy into a Greek/Babylonian mythological base for an account dealing with the birth of his/her Messiah.

**• Critic's Claim #3:
The idea of a virgin birth is HISTORICALLY UNSUPPORTED.**

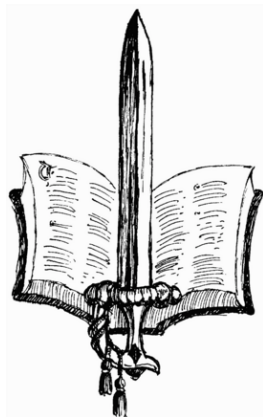
However, historic creeds recognise the veracity of the Virgin Birth of Jesus, including:

- The Apostles' Creed, written in the 4th century;
- the Nicene Creed, adopted at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D.;
- the Athanasian Creed, written about 450 A.D.;
- the Chalcedon Definition, adopted at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D.;
- and the Small Catechism of Martin Luther of 1529 A.D..

Only in more modern times have Bible critics tried to cast doubt on a doctrinal truth that the Church has long since historically endorsed.

**• Critic's Claim #4:
The idea of a virgin birth is BIBLICALLY UNCONVINCING.**

Some critics cite the fact that the Apostle Paul is silent on the subject of the Virgin Birth, and the fact that Mary's virginity is never mentioned in the Gospel According to John, as evidence that Jesus was never born of a virgin.



But this argument from silence, (always a rather weak tactic in making a case), is particularly weak here due to the fact that both Paul and John were alive and quite familiar with the Gospel accounts written by Matthew and Dr. Luke (a physician!) – and yet never either questioned or refuted it!

**• Critic's Claim #5:
The idea of a virgin birth is STATISTICALLY UNWARRANTED.**

While it is true that one very famous poll taken in 1965 (and still being frequently cited today) of 7,441 Protestant clergy showed that many mainline denominational ministers were not convinced of the truthfulness of the Virgin Birth, a more recent Harris poll of a randomly selected group of 1,011 adults found that 91% of U.S. Christians do believe in the Virgin Birth.

- If those disciples had His body hidden away somewhere, they could hardly have been deceived into thinking that Jesus was risen (they would have known He was not! ... they knew where they put Him!).
- And if the body was still in the tomb, or elsewhere in the custody of the scribes and Pharisees, they would have produced the corpse to prove that the disciples who were preaching Jesus and the resurrection were a group of liars and impostors. They did not ... because they could not!

Each of these impossible alternatives underlines the fact of the resurrection.

**Death could not keep its prey,
Jesus, my Saviour!
He tore the bars away,
Jesus, my Lord!**



**Up from the grave He arose,
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes;
He arose a Victor o'er the dark domain,
And He lives for ever with His saints to reign!
He arose! He arose!
Hallelujah! Christ arose!**

NO BODY FOUND!

“And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus.”

That empty tomb baffles every theory and every hypothesis wheeled out by unbelieving, unscrupulous men in their iniquitous attempts to pour cold water on the solid fact of the resurrection.

The only story which explains the empty grave is the story of the gospels - the story that gave the church its birth - the story that sent men forth to meet the sharpened edge of the persecutor's sword - the story that made them face the fire - the story that changed the Christ-hating and Church-persecuting Saul into the great apostle Paul - the story that transforms the face of sorrow and shines the lighthouse of hope into the darkness of the grave - the story that accounts for the rise and spread of true, Biblical Christianity - the story on which rests all our trust for the forgiveness of our sins, all our hope of eternal life after death.

and, somehow escaping from the tomb (past the heavy stone and the Roman soldiers), He made His way back to the city.

This theory cuts across all the facts of the crucifixion. Those Roman soldiers did not give the finishing blow - the breaking of the legs - to Jesus, because He was already dead ... but one of them, just to amuse himself, took a spear and thrust it into the Saviour's side. In His weakened state, even if He had not been dead before, that blow would have proved mortal. Also, Pilate, before he put the guard in place at the tomb, would have obtained a death certificate from the rulers.

Yet suppose (for the sake of argument) Jesus had survived the agony of the cross and the process of embalming: how could He have got out of the tomb? Who would roll the stone away? And even if this had been done, and Jesus had found His way back to the disciples and been nursed back to life, can you picture such a Christ igniting confidence and heroic faith in the hearts of His disciples, spurring them on to burn out for Him?

3. Hallucination.

According to this theory, the disciples did not actually see Jesus risen from the grave, but merely thought they had seen Him. In the uncertain light of the early morning, they were not sure what they had seen. Their wish became the father of their thought - they convinced themselves that He was not dead. Dreams formulated their belief, giving rise to the legend of the resurrection.

THE GARDENER

Mary, for instance, is recorded as having taken Christ to be the gardener: we are told the more likely thing is that she took the gardener to be Christ. An infidel, Renan, concludes his 'Life of Jesus': "Let us say, however, that the strong imagination of Mary Magdalene played an important part in this circumstance. Divine power of love! Sacred moments in which the passion of one possessed gave to the world a resuscitated God!" Renan's imagination is certainly very vivid!

Even if it is supposed it was all a matter of hallucination, this does not address the real problem ... the tomb was empty! Where was the body of Jesus?!

All of which goes to show that when it comes to determining spiritual truth, our authority should be the Bible (**Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:25**), not men - including liberal clergy!

COMMON MISTAKES ABOUT CHRIST'S BIRTH

The typical story we hear repeated runs something like this:

"It's about 2000 years ago, the evening of December 25. Mary rides into Bethlehem on a donkey, urgently needing to deliver her baby. Although it's an emergency, all the innkeepers turn them away. So they deliver baby Jesus in a stable. Then angels sing to the shepherds. Afterwards, they all join three kings with camels in worshipping the quiet, newborn."

The problem is, this story may be **almost entirely wrong**. The events surrounding the birth have been retold so many times and in so many ways - in plays, poetry, books and movies - that most people have a distorted view of the true events. **The only accurate record is found in the Bible.**

- Did Mary ride a donkey to Bethlehem?

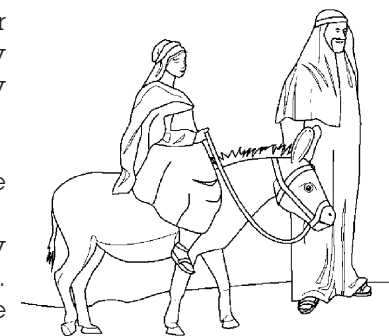
Perhaps, but there are various other possibilities. The Bible does not say how she got to Bethlehem. It only says that she came with Joseph.

- Did Mary arrive in Bethlehem the night she gave birth?

The Bible does not suggest this. They could have arrived weeks earlier. God's Word simply states, "while they were there [in Bethlehem], the days were accomplished that she should be delivered" (**Luke 2:6**). Arriving in town well before she was due to give birth would make more sense.

- Did Joseph or Mary talk to any innkeepers?

Maybe, but there is no solid, biblical reason to believe that they did. Although innkeepers play a prominent part in many Nativity plays, no innkeeper is actually mentioned in the biblical record of Christ's birth.



Also, it is likely that Mary and Joseph actually stayed in a house with relatives, not behind some kind of Bible-times hotel.

- Was Jesus born in a stable?

Or, indeed, a barn? Or a cave? The Bible does not mention any of these three places in connection with Christ's birth – only a manger (**Luke 2:7,12&16**). Scripture simply reports that they laid Jesus in a manger because there was no room for him in the inn (guest room).



ONE OTHER REFERENCE

The Greek word used in Scripture is *kataluma*, and can mean guest chamber, lodging place or inn. The only other time this word was used in the New Testament, it means a furnished, large, upper story room within a private house. It is translated "guest chamber," not inn (**Mark 14:14&15**).

According to our Bible archaeology experts, Jesus was probably born in the house of relatives, but outside (under) the normal living and guest quarters.

- "Away in a manger the baby awakes, but little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes." Although this is part of a traditional Christmas carol, we cannot be sure that Jesus did not cry. The Bible does not report this.

- Did angels sing to the shepherds outside of Bethlehem? Perhaps, but the Bible does not specifically say that the angels sang. It says that first an angel appeared and spoke, and then appeared "a multitude of the heavenly host praising God" (**Luke 2:13**).

- Were angels present at the birth? It seems logical to assume that they were, however, Scripture does not report it, and there is no evidence that angels were visible to Mary and Joseph at this time.

- Did three kings riding camels come to Jesus' birth? The Bible does not say that any kings or camels visited young Jesus. It does report wise men ("magi") came, but it does not say how many.

testimony to the resurrection of Jesus is due to:

4. THE POSTULATIONS OF THE CRITICS.

It is worth considering the various notions that have been forward by men to explain the resurrection. When you line the two sides up ... those who believe in the resurrection, and those who denounce it, the reality of the resurrection is confirmed rather than refuted.

A TRIO OF RIDICULOUS THEORIES

Three leading theories have been pushed through the ages to prove that Christ did not rise from the dead.



1. The disciples stole the body of Jesus.

The disciples stole the body of Jesus from Joseph's tomb while the guards slept - and, having concealed it, they deceived the world. The grave was empty - but only because the disciples had stolen the body and then circulated the rumour that Jesus had risen. This was exactly what the Jewish rulers, in their panic, had bribed the guards at the tomb to say!

However:

- if the guards were sleeping, how did they know it was the disciples who stole the body?
- if they were not sleeping, they would have prevented the crime!
- And what of the disciples? At that time, they were too cowardly to pull off such a daring act - and too honest to try to cheat the whole world by saying Jesus has risen when He had not. No wonder this theory has been described as "a wicked absurdity."

2. Jesus was not dead, but merely in a swoon.

It is pointed out that since crucified men sometimes lived for several days, in the cool tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, Jesus revived

foundation does not exist, how can Christianity possibly survive?

CHURCH BUILT ON A RESURRECTED JESUS!

Dr. Philip Schaff has commented: "The Christian church rests on the resurrection of its Founder. Without this fact the church could never have been born, or if born, it would soon have died a natural death. The miracle of the resurrection and the existence of Christianity are so closely connected that they must stand or fall together. If Christ was raised from the dead, then all his other miracles are sure, and our faith is impregnable; if he was not raised, he died in vain, and our faith is vain. It was only his resurrection that made his death available for our atonement, justification and salvation; without the resurrection, his death would be the grave of our hopes; we should be still unredeemed and under the power of our sins. A gospel of a dead Saviour would be a contradiction and wretched delusion. This is the reasoning of St. Paul, and its force is irresistible."

It is worth noting that the early church sprang up and announced its belief in the resurrection in the one part of the world where that resurrection could have been immediately put to the test. If the resurrection was not an indisputable fact, how dare the disciples come into the very place where it happened - Jerusalem - and announce it? As Dr. Ian Paisley has pointed out in his book, 'Christian Foundations', "The empty tomb was an objective fact open for their investigation. If the tomb had not been emptied of its precious contents by the miracle of resurrection, then the production of Christ's body would soon have exposed the fraud. Is it credible to suppose that if the disciples stole away the body, as the Jews in their dilemma lyingly suggested, that they would have been prepared to be martyred for their deception?"

The whole history of the last 2000 years is the guarantee of the reality that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. The spiritual force of Christianity is inexplicable, if Christ did not rise from the dead!

MULTITUDES OF INDIVIDUAL TESTIMONIES

What of **PERSONAL EXPERIENCE**? Lives have been changed by the million as a result of the resurrection. Mountains of personal testimony cannot be easily bulldozed to the one side. (cf. **Job 19:25-27**).

Another compelling reason why we should acknowledge the Bible's

None of the early Church Fathers, suggested the magi were kings.



• Since the word "magi" used in the Bible is plural, there were apparently at least two, and there could have been more – even several more. The Bible simply mentions three costly gifts they presented: gold, frankincense and myrrh, but this does not necessarily indicate the number of magi. There is also no proof of what country these men came from.

• Before the arrival of the magi in Bethlehem, Jesus travelled to and from Jerusalem for presentation in the Temple (**Luke 2:21&22**).

• Also, the wise men clearly did not visit Jesus when He was still lying in the manger, as is commonly shown on greeting cards and in plays. The magi did not arrive until sometime after Christ's presentation in the Temple in Jerusalem (**Luke 2:22-39**).

At this time, Scripture calls Jesus a "child," not a "baby." It is possible that little Jesus was walking and talking by then. Based on the calculations of King Herod and the magi (**Matthew 2:16**), Jesus could have been two years old or under.

• Was Jesus born on December 25, or in December at all? Although it's not impossible, it seems unlikely. The Bible does not specify a date or month. One problem with December is that it would be unusual for shepherds to be "abiding in the field" at this cold time of year when fields were unproductive. The normal practice was to keep the flocks in the fields from Spring to Autumn. Also, winter would likely be an especially difficult time for pregnant Mary to travel the long distance from Nazareth to Bethlehem (70 miles).

"A more probable time would be late September, the time of the annual Feast of Tabernacles, when such travel was commonly accepted. Thus, it is rather commonly believed (though not certain) that Jesus' birth was around the last of September. The conception of Christ, however, may have taken place in late December of the

previous year. Our Christmas celebration may well be recognized as an honored observation of the incarnation of 'the Word made flesh' (John 1:14)." [Dr. Henry M. Morris, The Defender's Study Bible (notes for **Luke 2:8,13**)].

These various misconceptions about Christ's birth illustrate the need to always test everything we hear against God's Word, no matter what the source. The Bible is the final authority.

THE TRUTH IS AMAZING!

Despite human misconceptions, the actual facts about Jesus are more marvelous than words can express.

- He was indeed born of a virgin in the city of Bethlehem exactly as prophesied many years before.
- Jesus was conceived in Mary, not by man, but by the Holy Spirit of God.
- As the apostle John reveals, Jesus existed before the Creation of the world (**John 1**).
- He is part of the Holy Trinity we know as God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit).
- The Son of God came in human form for a purpose -- to die as a willing sacrifice in payment for the sins of His people. He did this to provide eternal salvation as a free gift to all who will accept it and follow Him.

**2. EARLY MINISTRY:
INITIAL ACCEPTANCE**

It is not until after Jesus' baptism and temptation that He begins His public ministry. His message has a two-fold focus: first, that He is the predicted Messiah (or, as the word is translated in the New Testament, "the Christ"), and people should believe in Him, and second, to challenge the people to repent of their sin and live a life of genuine righteousness, not the external hypocrisy of the religious leaders. He validates His message by performing astounding miracles, and the signs of initial acceptance by the crowds are encouraging. Much of this early activity takes place around Jerusalem.

- In **1 Corinthians 15** Paul sums up the Christian message - how Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures (i.e. in fulfillment of the Scriptures), and was raised the third day, according to the Scriptures.
- Paul lists 6 different appearances of our Lord after the resurrection: to Peter, to the Twelve, to 500 at one time, to James, to all the apostles, and, last of all, to Paul himself, as one who was "born out of due time."

The special appearance that left Paul in no doubt that Jesus had risen from the dead was the stupendous transaction that occurred on that road to Damascus. The encounter which he had on the Damascan highway convinced Paul that Jesus was the Son of God, and that He had risen from the dead.



Multitudes of men and women hate Jesus Christ and all who stand for Him in this world today, but not even the worst of them hate our Lord as bitterly and intensely as Paul hated Him. None has tried to destroy His church with such desperate energy as Paul did. Yet it was this Christ-hater, this Christian-baiter, this church-dismantler, this man who "breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the church of Christ" who suddenly became the greatest and most influential friend that Jesus Christ had, or has had, upon this earth. The man whose writings compose the greater part of the New Testament; the man from whom comes the most powerful statements of Christian theology, the most vibrant and beautiful description of the virtues of the Christian life; the man whose life gives us the grandest example of fellowship with Christ and consecration to the Cross of Christ ... this man saw the resurrected Christ!

The persecuting Saul of Tarsus was changed into Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ ... that is a fact of history. We must account for this. What worked such a change in his life? Paul tells us it was the appearance of the Risen Christ.

Another strong witness to the truth of the resurrection is found in:

3. THE PROGRESS OF THE CHURCH.

If there was no resurrection, then ... why the Church? why Christianity? **The resurrection is the foundation of Christianity - but if this**

thought of adding this. This is obviously a little detail that has been reported by an eyewitness of the event.

- The testimony to Christ's resurrection that was given by **THE LIVES OF THE DISCIPLES** should also be remembered.

What other event accounts for the dramatic change in the spirit of the apostles between their depressed behaviour at the time of Jesus' death on Calvary and their vibrant, power-packed conduct in the Acts of the Apostles? That radical change cannot be satisfactorily explained apart from the resurrection!

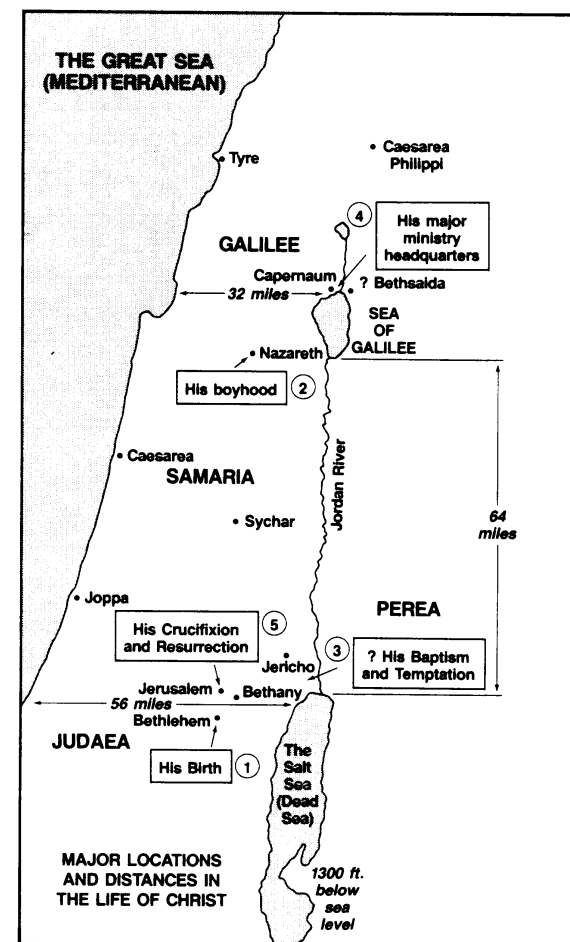
That crucifixion had drained, not only the blood from Christ's body, but the buoyancy from their hopes. How was Jesus going to reign from Jerusalem now? (cf. **Luke 24:21**). When you add it all up - the treachery of Judas; the blasphemous denial of Peter; their own cowardice in the hour of crisis; the sickening victory of the Pharisees, priests and scribes; the wild ferment of the people; the tragic crucifixion and burial of their Master - what could they feel in the light of these events other than a deep feeling of hopelessness and heartlessness?

EXPLAIN THIS CHANGE!

However - after the third day, a unique, breathtaking, incredible transformation takes place. Fearlessness replaces fear; courage, cowardice; victory, vanquishment (cf. **Acts 4:19&20; 5:29-32**). They march out, regardless of persecution and martyrdom, counting it all joy to suffer shame for the cause of their Risen Lord!

Peter stands up with extreme boldness on the Day of Pentecost, emphasising ... the fact of the resurrection! Without the resurrection, he would not have been preaching that day; he would have been out in the middle of the Sea of Galilee, fishing! (cf. **John 21**). Nothing less than a Risen Lord could account for such a change!

- We must include in the witness of the disciples to the resurrection of our Lord **THE TESTIMONY OF PAUL**. As far as the records go, the most carefully arranged testimony to the resurrection of our Lord is found in **the 15th chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians**. He was closer to the time of the death of Jesus than we are today, to WWII, Vietnam, or the commencement of the recent round of 'The Troubles' here in Ulster!



**3. LATER MINISTRY:
GROWING REJECTION**

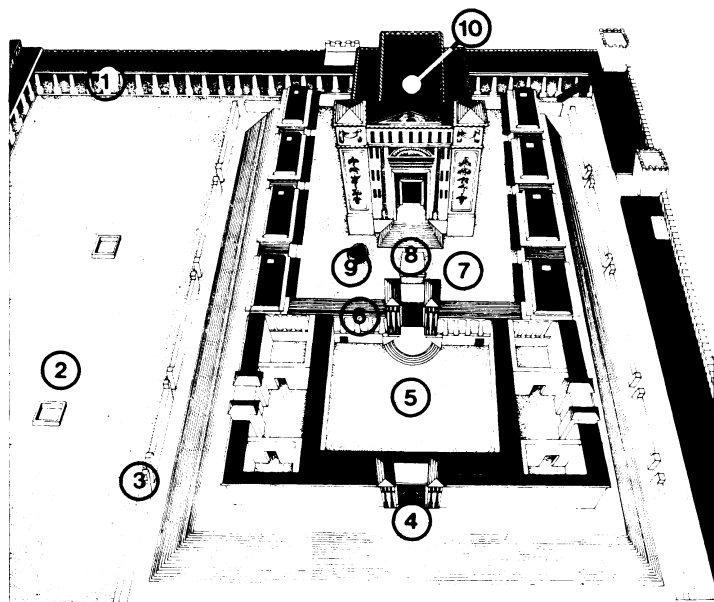
Jesus' initial popularity does not last. The religious leaders are profoundly jealous of Him and begin stirring up animosity toward Him. This growing rejection results in a progression in Jesus' ministry pattern. He begins to focus more attention on the mounting opposition from the religious leaders, warning them of the seriousness of their attitude. At the same time, He begins setting aside more and more time for the twelve disciples whom He has chosen, preparing

them to carry on without Him. Also, He begins challenging the multitude to count the cost of following Him. Though Jesus travels quite a bit during this time, His home base is Capernaum, on the north bank of the Sea of Galilee.

HEROD'S TEMPLE

An artist's drawing, from a reconstruction at the Bible Museum, Amsterdam; style and decoration are guessed.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 Porticos | 4 Beautiful Gate |
| 2 Court of the Gentiles | 5 Court of the women |
| 3 'Wall of Partition', (no non-Jew might go beyond this point) | 6 Court of Israel |
| | 7 Court of the priests |
| | 8 Altar |
| | 9 Bronze laver |
| | 10 The Holy Place (and Holy of Holies) |



**4. DEATH AND RESURRECTION:
FINAL REJECTION**

The Jews become more and more polarized about Jesus, either following Him enthusiastically or resenting Him deeply. In the volatile atmosphere of the festival time of the Passover when Jesus and many other Jews are in Jerusalem the religious leaders are finally able to stir up enthusiasm for Jesus' crucifixion. They subject Him to a series of mock trials on false charges. Then Jesus is crucified on Friday, buried that night, and rises again from the dead on Sunday, after being in the tomb three days.

- **24:33&34:** to Peter.
- **24:36-40:** to the eleven in Jerusalem.
- **24:50:** at the ascension.

John

- **20:16&17:** to Mary Magdalene at the sepulchre.
- **20:19:** to the apostles apart from Thomas.
- **20:26:** after eight days to the apostles.
- **21:1&2:** to seven disciples on the shore of Tiberias.

All of these appearances are proof positive of the resurrection! Paul corroborates these reports - and adds one further appearance; **1 Corinthians 15:3-8:** "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; 4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: 5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: 6 After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. 7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. 8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time."

Read through the Gospel records of the resurrection, and ask yourself the question: do these accounts ring true? Is there the stamp of veracity - truthfulness - about them?

One example is **Mark 16:7:** "But go your way, tell His disciples and Peter that He goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see Him, as He said unto you." The little phrase, "His disciples and Peter," deserves to be underlined. "And Peter"? But surely Peter was one of those disciples ... not a member of another group; not a free-floating individual?

Jesus has Peter's behaviour very firmly in His sights here. He had denied his Lord with oaths and cursing; by this time it appears that Peter no longer reckoned himself a true disciple. A bit like the prodigal son: "I am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of they hired servants." Had this message from the lips of the risen Christ named only the disciples, Peter would have excluded himself. But Jesus remembers Peter ... and in wonderful compassion, He adds these memorable words ... "And Peter." It seems reasonable to conclude that no contriver, no matter how artful, would have

2. THE PRACTICES OF THE CHRISTIANS.

- Think of what **THE DISCIPLES SAID ABOUT CHRIST'S RESURRECTION**. The testimony **OF THEIR LIPS** must be considered.

Introducing the Book of Acts, Luke tells us that after His death, Jesus showed Himself alive to His disciples "by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (**Acts 1:3**). When did these appearances happen? What were these infallible proofs?

It should be borne in mind that Luke is recognised as one of the world's most reliable historians. His two books (Luke's Gospel and the Book of Acts) deal with one of the most difficult periods of human history, when administration was most complex. Yet, although he mentions cities, towns and persons freely, Luke has never been found to be in error.



FOUR GOSPELS IN AGREEMENT

All four Gospels, while they differ in some details of the resurrection (one supplies this truth, another supplies that, each supplementing the other) are in perfect agreement on the crucial question: was the tomb empty? With perfect unison they declare the fact that Jesus is risen from the dead!

The 4 Gospels list at least 11 different appearances that Jesus made after His resurrection. All these events are described in considerable detail.

Matthew

- **28:9**: to the women going from the sepulchre.
- **28:16&17**: upon a mountain in Galilee.

Mark

- **16:9-11**: to Mary Magdalene.
- **16:12&13**: to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus.
- **16:14**: to the eleven as they sat at meat.

Luke

- **24:15**: to the two going to Emmaus.

After being falsely accused, and tried in a series of kangaroo courts, Jesus was subjected to the form of capital punishment reserved for non-Roman citizens. He was flogged, a savage punishment which, itself, killed sixty percent of its victims, and was nailed to a wooden cross where He died. Afterward, He was wrapped in burial clothes, and placed in a sealed tomb where He remained for three days. At the end of that time, a miraculous earthquake moved the stone from the mouth of the tomb to reveal that Jesus had risen from the dead after three days, just as He said He would.

CENTRAL PASSAGE:

"... Who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord" (**Romans 1:4**).

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

Two notable 18th century sceptics, Gilbert West and Lord Lyttleton, decided, after firing off many clever little salvos against the gospel, that if **the two great fundamentals of the gospel** could be overthrown (the resurrection of Christ and the conversion of Paul), Christianity would crumble into ruins.

West undertook to write a treatise on the Resurrection, proving it to be nothing more than a fabrication; Lyttleton determined to produce another treatise demonstrating that Paul had not been miraculously converted on the Damascus road.

Periodically they had meetings together. On one occasion West said to Lyttleton, "I have something very important to relate. You know, Lyttleton, how keen I was to expose as pure fabrication the Resurrection of Christ. I therefore determined to thoroughly sift the evidence and in doing so I had to be honest, I had to be sincere, I had to be honourable and I had to forsake my prejudice and act on strict legal principle. Having pursued this line I have been forced to the conclusion that Jesus Christ really rose from the dead. Now, you may laugh at me if you like, Lyttleton, but I got down on my knees and asked that risen Saviour to save me and He has done it."

Lord Lyttleton replied: "Strange to relate, I have had a similar experience. I, too, sifted the evidence, sincerely, candidly and honestly, and the more I weighed the evidence the more I was forced

to the conclusion that St. Paul was really remarkably converted on the Damascus Road. That being so, West, as an honest person I could do no other but fall on my knees and ask the same Christ to save me and He has done it."

The treatises of West and Lyttleton appeared. West's treatise vindicated the Resurrection; Lyttleton's the conversion of Paul! Sceptics have not been able to answer them. They remain as monuments to the fact that if the evidence for the resurrection of Christ is sifted and weighed with complete impartiality and honesty, it will be found to be convincing and conclusive!

There is no doubt about it; as **Luke 24:3** puts it: "And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus." A tomb without a tenant it was then – and still is now! Jesus, my Saviour, arose!



Consider some compelling reasons why we should believe in the Resurrection of our Lord.

1. THE PREDICTIONS OF THE CHRIST

dictate that we should accept the truth of His resurrection.

Jesus explicitly - and repeatedly - foretold His own resurrection.

- When the scribes and Pharisees asked Him for a sign to support His extraordinary claims, Jesus replied that, "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: 40 For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (**Matthew 12:39&40**).
- **Mark 9:9 and 14:28** reveal Christ prophesying that He would rise again.

- In **John 2:18-22** He spoke of the temple being destroyed and in three days being reconstructed (that temple being His body).
- In **Matthew 20:17-19** (and **Luke 9:22**) Jesus told His disciples that He would be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles to be mocked, scourged and crucified - but on the third day He would rise again.

CHRIST'S ENEMIES LISTENED INTENTLY!

These predictions were known, not only to the friends of Jesus, but to His enemies as well. They (strange to say) paid more attention to them than Christ's disciples did, for when Jesus had been crucified and buried, the scribes and Pharisees asked Pilate to install a special guard at the tomb, earnestly telling him, "... Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' 64 Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. 65 Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. 66 So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch" (**Matthew 27:63-66**). They were sure He had been serious about a resurrection!

PROPHECIES FULFILLED

Every prophecy which Jesus made (when the time has come for them to be fulfilled), has been completely vindicated. For example, Jesus prophesied:

- the destruction of Jerusalem;
- the coming of the Holy Spirit;
- the building of the Church;
- the rise of false prophets;
- the division of households as a result of His Gospel;

... all of these things (and many more) have been fulfilled to the letter! These fulfilled prophecies, witnessing so strongly to the truthfulness of Christ, cannot be muzzled. We insist: if Jesus has been proven so right on every other prophecy He made, how can we so readily dismiss His testimony concerning His own resurrection?

A second reason why we believe Jesus really rose from the dead centres on: